'UNCLE SUBHAS'S HABIT OF WORKING TILL VERY LATE WAS KNOWN TO ALL, INCLUDING THE POLICE. WE INCORPORATED THIS INTO OUR PLAN FOR HIS ESCAPE FROM CALCUTTA (AND INDIA) IN JANUARY 1941. HE INSTRUCTED MY COUSIN ILA THAT THE LIGHTS IN HIS FIRST-FLOOR BEDROOM IN THE 38/2, ELGIN ROAD HOUSE SHOULD STAY ON FOR AT LEAST AN HOUR AFTER I DROVE HIM OUT OF THE HOUSE ON 17 JANUARY 1941. THE BEDROOM HAS WINDOWS LOOKING OUT ON TO ELGIN ROAD AND ANY ONLOOKERS WOULD ASSUME THAT HE WAS AS USUAL WORKING THROUGH THE NIGHT. '

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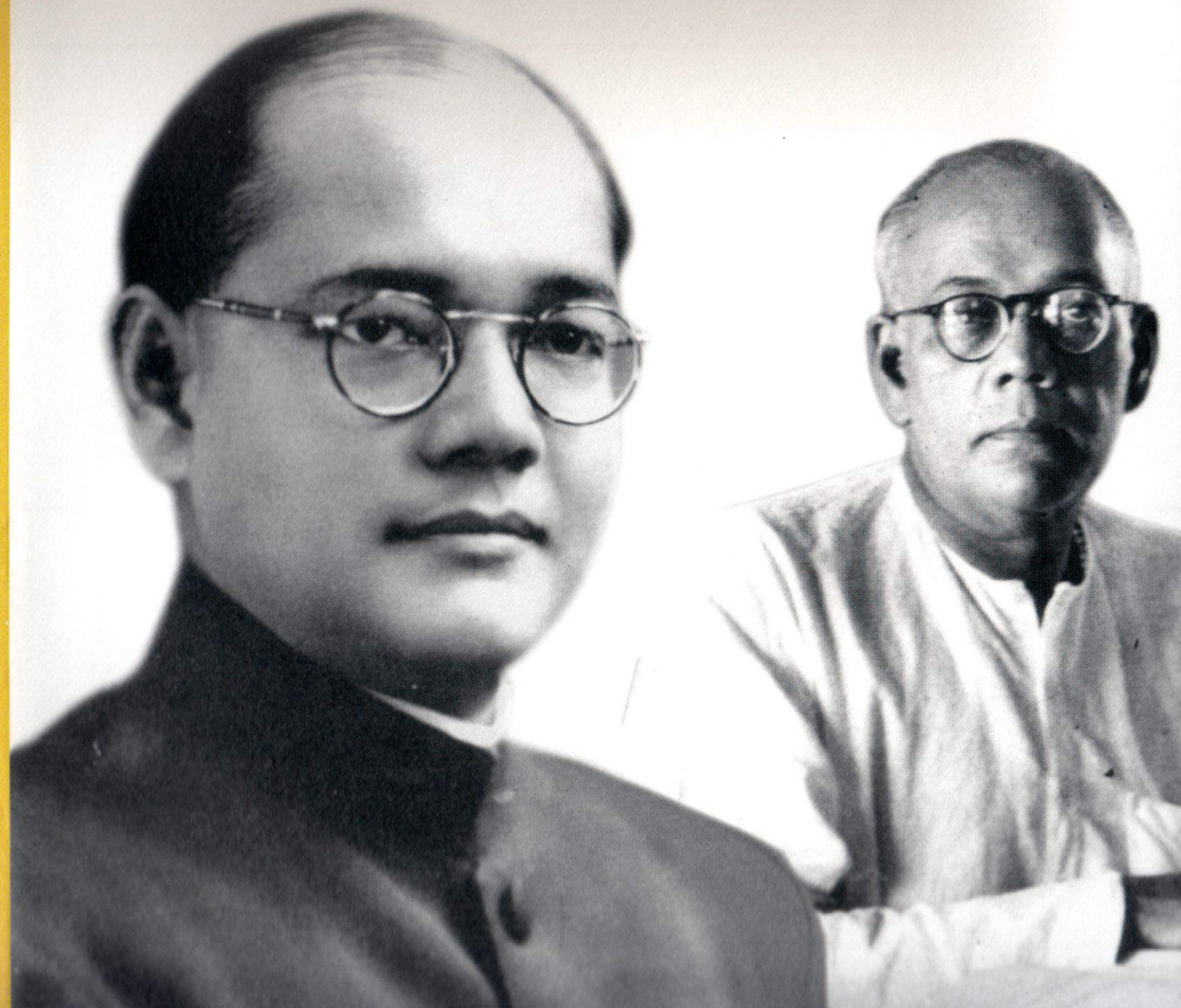
SUBHAS AND SARAT
SISIR KUMAR BOSE
ALEPH

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AN INTIMATE MEMOIR OF THE BOSE BROTHERS

SISIR KUMAR BOSE

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY SUMANTRA BOSE



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To Krishna, my wife and soulmate

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

This book should have been published many years ago. It is a uniquely authentic account of the Bose family of Bengal and India—whose most famous son is Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose—and its role in India's struggle for freedom.

The author, Sisir Kumar Bose (1920-2000), was the son of Netaji's older brother Sarat Chandra Bose and his wife Bivabati Bose. Sarat, perhaps India's most eminent barrister for a quarter-century, from about the mid-1920s till his death in 1950, was also a nationalist leader of standing throughout that time. He was president of the Bengal Congress in the second half of the 1930s, a member of the Congress Working Committee (CWC) in the late 1930s, the leader of the Congress party in the Central Legislative Assembly in Delhi in 1946 and a minister in the interim government of India formed in August 1946. He was also his younger brother Subhas's closest confidant and most resolute supporter.

When Netaji was still a child, Sarat—older by seven years—was virtually the only member of the large Bose family to detect something truly special in the boy. The closeness they developed while growing up became ever deeper and stronger over the subsequent decades, as the two brothers struggled and suffered together in the freedom movement. Their personal bond and political camaraderie defined the Bose family's public role, a roller-coaster journey of triumphs and travails over three decades. Netaji was also extremely close to Sarat's wife Bivabati—she was one of the most important women in his life alongside his mother Prabhabati, his political guru Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das's wife Basanti Devi, and his Austrian wife Emilie Schenkl.

Sisir was born to Sarat and Bivabati just as India's anti-colonial struggle became a mass movement at the beginning of the 1920s. He was one when his uncle resigned from the Indian Civil Service in 1921 and chose the hard life of a full-time freedom fighter. He was four when his uncle was arrested for the second time in late 1924 and taken away to Burma to be imprisoned, and barely twelve when his father was arrested in early 1932 and held in detention until mid-1935. Sisir literally grew up with India's freedom struggle. His clear memories of that struggle and his family's role therein date to 1927, from the time he was seven, although he recalls sketchy memories of episodes from 1924-25.

Sisir offers an extraordinarily intimate account of the extended Bose

family, with its many characters and personalities, in a style often enlivened with wit and humour. But the core of his narrative is extremely serious and sometimes sombre, because this family history is really an eyewitness record of India's long and difficult struggle for freedom, as seen by a young person whose father and uncle devoted their lives, heart and soul, to that struggle. As he writes in the concluding passages of this book: 'Subhas and Sarat were sons of the Bose family only nominally. They were really sons of Mother India. All the people of India, hundreds of millions of men, women and children, were as much their kith and kin as we. The two brothers made the country's sorrow their own and sacrificed their lives for its liberation and redemption.'

This book recounts Sisir's ringside view of the familial-cum-national struggle from the late 1920s to the end-1930s. In 1940, however, his vantage point of the struggle undergoes a tectonic shift, from close observer to active participant. This happened on a quiet Sunday afternoon in early December of 1940, when his Uncle Subhas (whom he addressed as Rangakakababu in Bengali), who had just been released from a spell in prison after going on a fast unto death, called Sisir over to 38/2, Elgin Road, the family mansion built by Netaji's father Janakinath Bose in Calcutta in 1909 (the house was renamed 'Netaji Bhawan' and dedicated to public and national purposes by Sarat Bose in 1946, and since 1957 it has been the home of the Netaji Research Bureau, founded by Sisir).

Lying in bed in his room, the stormy petrel of India's independence movement asked his quiet, shy nephew—whom he affectionately but accurately called 'the silent boy'—a deceptively simple question in Bengali: 'Amar ekta kaj korte parbe? (Can you do something for me?)'. Sisir thought he might have to post a letter or a telegram, or look after a visiting guest. In fact, Subhas Chandra Bose was asking his 20-year-old nephew to help him plan and execute his escape from India, so he could take advantage of World War II to launch India's final battle for liberation from abroad.

Sisir Kumar Bose's life was transformed that winter afternoon. This book includes the thrilling, blow-by-blow account of the planning and execution of the escape, during which Sisir drove his uncle in the dead of night from the Elgin Road house to the Gomoh railway junction in Bihar (now in Jharkhand), where Netaji boarded the Kalka Mail to Peshawar, from where he travelled to Kabul. The last time Sisir saw his uncle was around 1 a.m. on the night of 17-18 January 1941 at the Gomoh station—now Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Gomoh Junction,

320 kilometres from Calcutta.

Netaji was never to return to India but he had transformed his quiet and introverted young nephew into a fearless freedom fighter. The 'silent boy'—my father Sisir Bose—continued to contribute to the freedom struggle as the war progressed and his uncle travelled by submarine for 93 days in the first half of 1943 from Europe to South-east Asia, where he would assume the leadership of the Indian National Army and form the Provisional Government of Free India. It took the British government and its intelligence services quite some time to crack the escape and find out the full extent of my father's role, but eventually they more or less did so.

My father was arrested for the first time from his home—Sarat Bose's house, 1, Woodburn Park, round the corner from the Elgin Road house—in September 1942, after being grievously injured in a clash with the police in central Calcutta during the Quit India demonstrations of August 1942. Lodged in Calcutta's Presidency Jail, he was moved from there to the Calcutta Medical College Hospital—where he was a student—after falling critically ill with typhoid fever. Discharged towards the end of 1942, he was put under a stringent 'home internment' order for a year, until early 1944. Towards the end of this period of home internment, he was contacted by men who had arrived secretly in India from South-east Asia to prepare the 'home front' as the INA readied to advance into India's north-east from Burma. Sisir plunged into the work of coordinating Netaji's underground network in Bengal and that story forms another thrilling part of this book.

In autumn 1944, Sisir was arrested again near his home while on his way one morning to the Calcutta Medical College. This time he was flown straightaway to Delhi—his first plane ride—and lodged in an underground cell at the Red Fort for about ten days. Then he was taken by train to Lahore, and kept in solitary confinement in the notorious Lahore Fort prison for about three-and-a-half months, in sub-human conditions and under interrogation (he did not 'break', and revealed nothing). In February 1945, as the threat to the British Empire on India's north-eastern borders receded, he was transferred from the Lahore Fort to the district jail in Punjab's Lyallpur town (today the city of Faisalabad in Pakistan). He was released from there in September 1945, nearly a month after the end of the war in Asia, at about the same time his father Sarat—who had been taken into custody in December 1941—was released, after nearly four years, from detention in Coonoor,

a town in the Nilgiri hills of south India.

Sisir's account of his experiences as a prisoner at the Red Fort, the Lahore Fort, and the Lyallpur Jail in 1944-45 constitutes another fascinating part of this book.

It is most ironic, as well as extremely unfortunate, that a patriot of Sisir Bose's distinction was spied upon by official agencies in independent India through the 1950s and 1960s and until at least 1971. Intelligence records in formerly classified files of the Government of India and the Government of West Bengal that became public during 2015 clearly reveal this, and suggest that the surveillance was at the behest of high authorities in both New Delhi and Calcutta. The shocking disclosure reveals the perverse continuities in certain practices between colonized and independent India, and says something about the moral character of the people who ran our country during those decades.

◆

The book you are holding in your hands was originally published in Bengali in June 1985 by Ananda Publishers (Calcutta), the leading publisher in the language, under the title *Bosu-bari* ('The House of the Boses'). That book, in turn, had a certain history. In 1982, Nirendranath Chakravarty (b. 1924), an eminent Bengali poet and litterateur, was the editor of *Anandamela*, the Anandabazar Patrika (ABP) Group's popular fortnightly magazine for children and adolescents. He requested my father to write the history of the Bose family and the role of several of its members in the struggle for freedom, drawing on my father's own recollections and experiences, to be serialized in *Anandamela*.

I remember that my father was initially reluctant, for several reasons. First, he was extremely busy in his professional career. It was around that time in the early to middle 1980s that he reached the peak of his fame as a paediatrician. His stature in the medical profession matched what his father Sarat had achieved in the legal profession decades earlier. As a result, the demand for his services was heavy and relentless. His workload increased further when in May 1982 he was elected to the West Bengal Legislative Assembly from Chowringhee, the most prestigious seat in Calcutta. Although not a party politician by nature, he could not turn down a personal request to contest from Indira Gandhi, the then prime minister of India, with whom he had a friendly relationship rooted in generational affinity and shared memories of the freedom struggle.

Then there was the Netaji Research Bureau based in Calcutta's

Netaji Bhawan, which he had to attend to on a daily basis as its general secretary and executive director. Twenty-five years after he founded it in 1957, the Bureau had become the prime and indeed the only serious research and publication centre, museum and archive dedicated to Netaji's life and work. That was entirely due to his unremitting efforts over many years and the help and support he received from my mother, Krishna Bose (*nee* Chaudhuri). But the running of the successful organization was still a heavy responsibility, and demanded daily attention.

I think there were a couple of less obvious reasons for his reluctance. Very modestly but quite incorrectly, he did not, I think, fancy himself as much of a writer. The task of writing the major chronicle asked of him may have seemed a little daunting at first. Moreover, his introverted nature never fully left him. He published his extraordinary account of the making, execution and aftermath of Netaji's 1941 escape from India remarkably belatedly—in the mid-1970s, nearly three decades after Independence. I think that was primarily because he wanted the story of the escape—amazing in itself and historic in its consequences—to be situated in the wider context of serious published work on all of Netaji's life and exploits, and was reluctant to put his own first-hand account forward until a critical mass of such work had accumulated, which it had by the mid-1970s, thanks mainly to the Netaji Research Bureau under his leadership.

But Nirendranath Chakravarty was politely unyielding and eventually my father gave in. Once committed, he followed through with utmost seriousness. From 1982 to 1985, a chapter of *Bosu-bari* was published every fortnight in *Anandamela*—hence the seventy-five short chapters, on average 1,500 words each, that make up this book. The lucidity of style and expression is also partly due to the book's genesis as a chronicle meant for a teenage audience.

The reception to *Bosu-bari* as it was being published in serial form far surpassed my father's expectations. An entire generation of Bengali teenagers learned about Subhas, Sarat, and the Bose family's role in India's freedom struggle from *Bosu-bari*. Because of *Bosu-bari*, the magazine's readership expanded to include the parents and grandparents of these teenagers. *Bosu-bari* was published as a bestselling book within months of the completion of the serialized version in *Anandamela*. Just as then, this book, *Subhas and Sarat: An Intimate Memoir of the Bose Brothers*, is for all ages and generations in twenty-first-century India—from nine to ninety.

I was among the teenagers enthralled by *Bosu-bari*. Because my father

habitually spoke very little, I had until then only picked up fragments of what is in this book. When the serial began to appear in 1982, I was barely into my teens, and when it finished in 1985, I was still a schoolboy of sixteen (I am the youngest child of my parents, born thirteen years after their marriage in December 1955).

However, I had certain advantages over the thousands of other kids—and the grown-ups of their families—who waited impatiently for the new chapter every fortnight. During the years my father wrote *Bosu-bari* (1982-85), Calcutta was plagued by power cuts ('loadshedding') every day for protracted periods. I remember my father writing the required instalment to the deadline by the light of a kerosene-fired lantern in our home: 90, Sarat Bose Road, Calcutta-700 026 (the address is purely coincidental; upon moving out of 1 Woodburn Park, Sarat Bose's house, in 1974 my parents bought a house located just off Sarat Bose Road, formerly Lansdowne Road, a major arterial road of the city that connects south Calcutta to a part of central Calcutta). He would write on the marble dining table that had belonged to Sarat Bose and had come with us from Woodburn Park to Sarat Bose Road.

Despite his hectic schedule, my father would always take out time to compose and send in the fortnightly instalment, handwritten in his neat, rather elegant and very doctor-like writing on sheets of white foolscap paper (the precursor to A4 paper). Sometimes he would give me the chapter to read in handwritten form, and at other times I would simply read it, like everyone else, once it appeared in the magazine. As the months wore on, I could see that he was starting to really enjoy the writing, and after the first few months he became aware of the response the serialization was generating and took the task very seriously.

Ever since the Bengali book was published in 1985, I strongly felt that an English version should appear as soon as possible. In 1988, I left Calcutta for the United States, first for my undergraduate studies at Amherst College in Massachusetts and then for my postgraduate studies and PhD at Columbia University in New York City. Those were busy and challenging years (1988-98), during which I developed most of the interests that have animated my working life.

After I finished at Columbia in 1998, I moved to London to join the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) in 1999 and commenced building my professional career. Another incredibly exciting decade and a half followed: of teaching the LSE's legions of wonderful postgraduate students from all over the world, research, related

travel across India and the subcontinent, the Balkans and the Middle East, and writing and publishing my own books. There were also as many as four campaigns to the Lok Sabha to help my mother with, starting with her entry into politics in 1996.

But *Bosu-bari*, and the need for an English edition, was always at the back of my mind. In June 1999, my father fell critically ill in India. I was still in New York then, preparing for the imminent move to London in the autumn. I feared I would not see him again, and in my studio apartment on Morningside Heights in Manhattan, where the main Columbia campus is situated, I turned to the last pages of *Bosu-bari* to read, once again, how he had coped stoically as an advanced medical student in London with his own father's death in faraway Calcutta in 1950. I deliberately did not take a flight to India because I did not want to see him dying; on the last page of this book, Sisir writes: 'I thanked Providence [on receiving the news of Sarat's death] that I never saw him on a sick-bed.'

When I arrived in Calcutta in August 1999, he was on the road to recovery against all odds. His eyes lit up and his face suffused with serenity when he saw me appear in the large living room of our 90, Sarat Bose Road residence. He smiled gently and said in Bengali: Bhebechhilam hoito tor shonge ar dekha hobe na ('I had feared we might not meet again'). I suspect he knew very well why I had not come earlier.

He lived for another year after that, and witnessed among other things my mother's third consecutive election victory to the Lok Sabha. He died at home in Calcutta on the evening of 30 September 2000 of a sudden and massive cardiac attack, just after he had finished seeing his little patients. I was at Netaji Bhawan on Elgin Road, a couple of kilometres away, when I was informed that he had collapsed at home. I rushed home to find that he had passed away. I thank Providence that I was there to perform his last rites.

My father's last vacation, in June 2000, was with me in London. My mother joined us towards the end but most of the time it was just him and me. Just like his father Sarat, he loved London and greatly enjoyed the stay at my mid-nineteenth century Georgian maisonette in Islington, north London, where we relaxed and stepped out occasionally to enjoy the city.

◆

In 2014, I did my first work of translation. I translated from Bengali into English my mother Krishna Bose's memoir of her childhood, adolescence and early adulthood, which had been published in Bengali by Ananda Publishers, at the beginning of 2014 (the translation has been published from Delhi in 2015 as *Lost Addresses: A Memoir of India, 1934-1955*).

I enjoyed doing this translation so much that I emailed my mother in Calcutta from London in February 2015 that I wanted to translate *Bosu-bari* next. She replied that my father had already completed the English version, based on the Bengali original, by the time of his death. I had been aware that he was working on this during the 1990s, but time had elapsed and I had forgotten about it. But the English book he had prepared was still there, in WordPerfect, the word-processing software of the 1990s.

The book you are about to read is a polished-up version of the English manuscript Dr Sisir Kumar Bose had prepared for publication in the years before his death. The work is his; I have merely edited and revised it to ensure the greatest degree of clarity and readability possible.

In my own work and profession, I frequently come across young, twenty-first-century Indians. I often observe in them a great interest in Netaji and his lifelong struggle for India's freedom. There is no better source than this book to enlighten the young people of India about that. It begins in the mid-1920s and ends in 1950 with Sarat Chandra Bose's death, which brought the most glorious epoch of the Boses of India to a close. As Sisir writes at the end of this book: 'That glory was defined not by wealth or by power, but by selfless service and sacrifice at the altar of Mother India.'

I realized two things while editing this manuscript. First, I understood anew, and with vivid clarity, my father's lifelong obsession with preserving the substantive legacy of Netaji's life and work for transmission to India's post-Independence generations. The story told in riveting style in this book is too precious and too inspiring not to be told to the generations born in independent India, people such as myself and the generations after mine. Second, I realized that in addition to being of wide general interest, this book constitutes a very valuable resource for historians and other scholars across the world of India's journey from colonial servitude to political sovereignty. The delay in its publication is regrettable, but better late than never!

It has been my privilege to edit this book for its long overdue publication. My minor labour is simultaneously a homage to my father's memory and a salute to the countless martyrs whose sacrifices redeemed our dignity as individuals and as a nation, and laid the foundations for India's emergence as a great country on the world stage in the twenty-first century. That dream is yet unfulfilled, but we can dream at all only because of them. Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose is perhaps the first among equals in that storied column of martyrs.

Bande-mataram, Jai Hind.

Sumantra Bose
Kolkata and London, 7 June 2015

CHAPTER 1

The earliest recollection I have of my childhood is not very vivid but at the same time quite extraordinary. I was four, and with my parents and grandparents on vacation in Srinagar, Kashmir. One afternoon my parents, Sarat Chandra Bose and Bivabati Bose, had ventured into the city. We children, free to be naughty, went running up and down the shaky wooden plank connecting our houseboat on the Dal Lake to the bank. All of a sudden I lost my balance and fell into the water. As I struggled helplessly in the swirling waters my older brother and sister watched, equally helplessly. Sensing that something was amiss when he saw my sailor's suit ballooning from the water's surface, Kaloo Singh, the chowkidar of my father's bungalow in Darjeeling who was accompanying us, rushed forward, dived into the lake and pulled me out. A man of the hills, Kaloo Singh was not a swimmer, but he did what he did without a moment's thought. Throughout his life, Kaloo Singh remained a true friend to me. He was practically a member of the Bose family till his death in 1953. More on him later.

That was in 1924. Father had brought his family to Kashmir for an extended holiday. My grandparents, Janakinath Bose and Prabhabati Bose, were with us. We had two other companions—Birendra Nath Dutt and Pravas Chandra Basu. Birendra Nath was one of my grandmother's many brothers, a bachelor who spent most of his life with the Bose family. Pravas Basu was a fellow-barrister of Father's and a close family friend. At thirty-five, Father was already a star barrister of the Calcutta High Court. At that time, there was only one long annual vacation of the High Court, coinciding with Bengal's autumnal Durga Puja festival. The British judges and barristers went on 'home leave' during this vacation. Father was fond of going to the mountains for a rest, and often took my grandparents along with us. In 1923, he purchased a bungalow in Kurseong, a scenic district town near Darjeeling. Perched on a hill called Gidhapahar just outside the town, the bungalow had commanding views of the Teesta and Mahananda valleys as well as of the plains below. We went there most vacations and the Gidhapahar bungalow is a wonderful part of my childhood memories, stretching to my adolescence and youth. Occasionally, Father would decide to travel elsewhere and that gave us the opportunity to see new places, too.

My grandfather, Janakinath Bose, was an exceptionally fine person. It is a pity that not much has been written about him. He died when

I was only fourteen, but impressed and influenced me greatly in those years.

We called Grandfather Janakinath *Dadabhai*. Dadabhai used to live mostly in Cuttack, Orissa. He had built a flourishing legal practice there at the end of the nineteenth century and that was where his most famous child, Subhas Chandra, was born on 23 January 1897. Dadabhai and my grandmother Prabhabati—we called her *Majanani*—visited Calcutta every year at the time of Durga Puja. They also came to Calcutta sometimes for medical treatment or to travel with us on vacations. Their visits to Calcutta, especially during the pujas, were special occasions for the extended Bose family. Their sons and daughters who worked or were settled outside Calcutta, congregated in the city with their families. The family house at 38/2, Elgin Road that Dadabhai built in 1909, overflowed with people. All generations of the family greatly enjoyed these reunions.

On their arrival at Elgin Road, Dadabhai and Majanani sat side by side in their bedroom. A long queue of sons, daughters, daughters-in-law and grandchildren offered pronam to them. Dadabhai caressed his grandchildren and had a special word of greeting or praise for each of us. Majanani was also affectionate but her manner and comments were somewhat different. She would say that a particular child was losing his or her complexion or that another one was too thin or getting too fat, and so on. These comments were generally addressed to our mothers, who stood quietly in line, their heads covered with the ghomta of their saris. Both our grandparents were a big presence in our young lives, but there was a difference. With Dadabhai it was affection unbounded, while with Majanani it was respect tinged with a little fear.

The big family puja was held at Kodalia, our ancestral village about fourteen miles south of Calcutta. In the presence of our grandparents, Durga Puja became a joyous celebration for all the village folk. I often felt a little lost amid the hubbub—the rituals, the feasts, the music. Dadabhai went around, umbrella in hand, greeting everybody with a smile. Majanani presided over everything with her usual air of authority. All members of the extended family were at her command.

On the last day of the puja, Vijaya Dashami, Dadabhai and Majanani returned to Calcutta. Then a grand mingling took place at Elgin Road. Relatives and friends poured in from near and far for what was effectively the annual Bose family congress. Dadabhai and Majanani jointly presided. The sprawling house overflowed with callers. There were pronams,

embraces between the adults, greetings exchanged and good wishes all round. Refreshments and sherbet were served in abundance, the thing we little ones looked forward to the most.

CHAPTER 2

We children had Dadabhai to ourselves when he took us along on his walks. Dadabhai had had a stroke when he was about forty. From then on he led a strictly regulated life and followed his doctors' advice meticulously. He was especially particular about two things—his morning walk and diet control. For thirty years he lived on a salt-free diet. Majanani constantly gave instructions on what the cooking medium should be, which foods were not allowed, and so on. She also regularly lectured Dadabhai on the evils of greed (lobh in Bengali) when it came to food. It was awkward to listen to because we all knew how disciplined our grandfather's lifestyle and habits were.

My mother was never very enthusiastic about cooking. But she would cook for her father-in-law in the way her mother-in-law instructed her to. She used an 'Icmic cooker', an indigenous contraption developed by a Bengali inventor. I remember Dadabhai eating his food seated on a mat on the floor of the south-facing verandah on the first floor of 1 Woodburn Park, the house my father built for his own family in 1927.[1] There was a dining table there, but he preferred to eat sitting on the floor. His koi fish would be fried in butter instead of mustard oil and the luchis, the Bengali equivalent of puris, made from whole-wheat rather than wheat flour in compliance with the advice of the family's kaviraj, a practitioner of traditional medicine.[2]

The family kaviraj was Shyamadas Vachaspati. He held the title of 'Kaviraj Shiromani' (the king of kavirajes) and was a venerable gentleman with an impressive personality. Both allopathy and ayurveda were used in the treatment of Dadabhai. His fifth son, Sunil Chandra, was a highly regarded physician. He sometimes called in the distinguished physician,

[1] 1, Woodburn Park is on Woodburn Road, which adjoins and runs perpendicular to Elgin Road. The two Bose family houses—38/2, Elgin Road and 1, Woodburn Park—are a two-minute walk from each other. Ed.

[2] The Icmic cooker was invented by Indumadhab Mullick in the early twentieth century. Rice, pulses and vegetables could be cooked together and quickly in it. Ed.

Sir Nil Ratan Sircar, for consultations. Sircar was a most attractive person, with perfect manners and a calm, gently radiant face. His winning smile was enough to set many patients on the road to recovery!

I remember walking with Dadabhai in the Eden Gardens in Calcutta, and also, on holidays, by the lake in Shillong and the seashore in Puri. Dadabhai used to fondly call my mother 'Majanani' (the same form of address the rest of my family used for my grandmother, Prabhabati). Before taking us out, he would always ask us to get Mother's permission. On many occasions, even after boarding the car, we would have to go back and take my mother's consent if Dadabhai found out that we had not done so. Mother would feel embarrassed by this.

Walking with Dadabhai was easy for us children. He would walk with slow, measured steps, holding his umbrella over his head. The distance for every walk was the same, and decided in advance. Walking with Father or Uncle Subhas was quite different. Father walked at an average but steady speed with no slackening at any time. As for Uncle Subhas, walking with him was more like running a race.

As children, our relationship with Dadabhai was absolutely loving, with no trace of authority being exercised by him in any form. He behaved in the same way with his large retinue of domestic servants. Once, Dadabhai stayed with us at Woodburn Park during a course of medical treatment, accompanied by Majanani. Two faithful domestics, Sheikh Kalu and Maguni, both from Orissa, looked after him with great care as did our cook, Satyabadi Panda. When the time came to depart Dadabhai broke down and sobbed while holding their hands. My father's chauffeur was Sheikh Ahmed, another trusted employee. I remember that on one occasion he was embarrassed when Dadabhai put a friendly hand on his shoulder and asked in Bengali: 'Ahmed bhai, how are you?' Uncle Subhas has mentioned in his autobiography that domestic staff were always treated as members of the family in Janakinath Bose's household.

In 1933, when Father was transferred from jail to our Kurseong bungalow to be detained there as a high-security prisoner, I accompanied my mother on a trip to Puri. In those days, women did not travel alone. As my father was imprisoned and my two older brothers were not at hand, I think my mother took me along. However, as I was just thirteen this was more a formality than anything else, although Dadabhai had started to treat me as a virtually grown-up member of the family in charge of his mother. He discussed both family matters

and my studies at school with me in all seriousness. I had obtained high marks in Sanskrit at school, mainly by cramming for the test. But he seemed to regard me as a budding scholar of Sanskrit and asked me to start reading the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Majanani would sit on a low cane stool and observe and supervise as I struggled to eat all the huge meals at lunch and dinner cooked by my favourite aunt, Shantilata. There were several different varieties of fish dishes at every meal. I was a slightly built boy with a weak digestive system. Majanani would comment as I struggled with the endless food on my plate about how her own sons would eat much more and with ease at my age. To save face, I ate as much as I could and suffered afterwards.

On the subject of eating, there is a hilarious story about an elderly uncle, an older first cousin of Father's. He would arrive at Elgin Road with a large hilsa, personally supervise the carving and dressing of the fish, count the pieces and then ask our eldest paternal aunt, Pramila, to fry them. He would polish off the fried fish to the last piece and then drink a full pitcher of water. Before departing, he would say: 'Where's the oil, give it to me!' Even the oil in which the fish had been fried was too delicious to be left behind.

My aunt Shantilata, the wife of my fourth paternal uncle, Sudhir Chandra Bose, formed a deep affection for me when I was very small and treated me as her own son. She would look after me during my school vacations at her home in the coal-mining area on the Bengal-Bihar border. I adored her elder daughter, Chhaya. This beautiful cousin of mine, the most elegant girl of my generation of the Bose family, died of typhoid in 1934, when I was fourteen.

Dadabhai gave me a nickname: Jung Bahadur! I wonder why he chose such a swashbuckling nickname for a shy, quiet boy like me.[3] I think the Gorkha name caught his fancy when he was vacationing with us in Darjeeling. Years later, when I was imprisoned in the Punjab, I used Dadabhai's nickname in a secret letter I smuggled to my mother in Calcutta from the Lyallpur District Jail in 1945. My mother would know immediately who the sender was but the police would have no idea of the identity of 'Jung Bahadur' even if the letter got intercepted.

[3]Sisir's family nickname was 'Neru', meaning 'baldy'. Ed.

CHAPTER 3

In the extended Bose family, Majanani's authority was supreme. She was short and stocky, with a complexion as fair as a European's. Despite her diminutive size, she had an extremely strong personality. When World War II broke out, we started hearing about different kinds of battleships used by the rival navies. I used to privately regard Majanani as the human equivalent of a German pocket-battleship.

Majanani's family was very large. She had fourteen children of her own—eight sons and six daughters. Besides, three or four of her brothers were considerably younger than her. They lived in their sister's house, and went to school with their nephews. Moreover, two of her daughters lost their husbands early and the responsibility of looking after them and their children fell to my grandparents. Then there was a large retinue of servants, as well as a significant number and assortment of household pets. Majanani reigned over this family realm in the style of an empress. She had excellent management abilities and ran the household with superb efficiency. Later, I sometimes felt that housewives who lost their bearings coping with much smaller families had much to learn from her.

No one could fool or take liberties with her. When her sons and young brothers sat down to study, she would observe them from an adjoining room. She did not know English and one of her brothers tried to fool her by reciting the same passage over and over when she was around. But Majanani caught him out by just listening carefully! Later, she learned some English from a tutor.

Majanani's Bengali handwriting was beautiful. When we children practised our own, my mother would tell us to emulate Majanani's. But because she was such a perfectionist, Majanani was inordinately slow at everything—bathing, eating, cooking, getting ready to catch a train. Her habitual tardiness sometimes drove others to despair. To catch the Puri Express from Cuttack to Calcutta, she would set out from the house in leisurely fashion only after she heard the train rumbling across the Katjuri bridge on the approach to Cuttack station.

Majanani had one great weakness—for fair skin. It was well-known in the family that she was highly partial to those with a light complexion. In selecting brides for her sons, hers was the last word and it was simply impossible to qualify as a prospective bride, if one's skin was not fair enough. When visiting the houses of families of brides-to-be, she would

sit outside in a stately horse-drawn carriage and the girl would come out and enter the carriage to be inspected by her. According to her, visiting the girl's house before a match was finalized was just not done.

Then the inspection would commence and it always followed a certain format. Majanani would rub the girl's face and skin to remove all the make-up and ascertain her real colour. Among her numerous grandchildren, she discriminated on the basis of skin colour as well. It was an Indian version of apartheid! Not only that, she liked the curries she ate to be of a light colour. If the colour was too dark she would berate the cook for having replicated the colour of his own skin.

On some things Majanani was very liberal and on others extremely conservative. In that era it was considered unacceptable in society for a husband and wife to go out alone together in the evening. But Majanani would go out in the evenings with Dadabhai in an open horse-carriage to enjoy the breeze by the river in Cuttack. On the other hand, she had unbendingly strict views against eating chicken, let alone red meat.

My father loved and indulged in good food, while my mother, because of a delicate constitution, was a rather picky eater. A variety of Indian and Western cuisines would be prepared and served in our Woodburn Park house. When our grandparents came to stay with us, a separate kitchen would have to be set up for them. In the Elgin Road house there were always two kitchens: one vegetarian and one non-vegetarian. Because of my mother's weak digestion, she often ate chicken on doctors' advice, either stewed or roasted. Majanani would say that she had no objection to eating chicken for health reasons, as in fact she, too, had occasionally had chicken soup when ill on the doctor's advice. But she insisted on a change of clothes after eating chicken. I do not know what purpose that served.

Majanani was a stickler for perfection in everything she did. Apart from writing beautifully, she was very good at sewing. And I still remember the taste of a Bengali sweet called chandrapuli that she made with cream and coconut. In matters regarding shopping she was ruthless. Watching her buy mangoes from vendors at the Elgin Road house was an experience. In those days mangoes were sold not by weight but by quantity, say a hundred at a time. Not only did Majanani bargain ruthlessly with the seller, her eagle eye would make sure that not a single mango of poor quality, unripe or rotten, was slipped in among the hundreds she bought.

I should say one other thing about my grandparents, Janakinath and

Prabhabati Bose. Their son Subhas was a source of worry to them from his childhood onwards. He was considered unusual and even wayward. In 1921, Uncle Subhas's decision to resign from the Indian Civil Service and join the freedom movement came as a bombshell to the family. Dadabhai tried to persuade him to take some more time to decide, perhaps after his return from England. Majanani was greatly upset that her son was turning his back on what was regarded as a golden career. But when Uncle Subhas was arrested and jailed later that same year, 1921, their reaction was very different. Dadabhai wrote to his son, Sarat, my father, that he was 'proud of Subhas'. Majanani said that she believed in the doctrine of self-sacrifice being preached by the new leader of the national movement, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, and was confident that the struggle would ultimately bring swaraj (independence) to India.

CHAPTER 4

I was often ill in my infancy and childhood. My parents could not have for me the *anna prasana* or rice-feeding ceremony held for Bengali children around the age of one—'introduction of weaning foods' in pediatric terminology! Mother told me later that the family priest had ordained that I would have it only at my wedding. At every step we had to put up with words of wisdom and various directives from family priests.

A problem arose when I was ready to be admitted to school—I still had no proper name! On the morning of my first day at school, my parents called me into their room. It was winter. My father looked out of the window at the grass wet with dew and named me Sisir Kumar—'Dew Prince'. I did not understand what it meant and did not particularly like it. But I feel pleased that my parents chose my name themselves.

That is because the naming of children in the Bose family was often a complicated affair. In an extended family as large as ours, there were different opinions and preferences. My mother, being very close to her younger brother-in-law Subhas, would sometimes ask his opinion. Uncle Subhas's suggestions were generally not liked by many others in the extended family. When conflicts of opinion arose Uncle Subhas would jokingly say that the child should be given a panel of names, from which he or she could choose one once they were grown up.

In the generation previous to mine the norm had been to give

children names which were phonetically alike and began with the same letter of the alphabet. My grandparents had followed this tradition and so their eight sons were, in order of birth: Satish Chandra, Sarat Chandra, Suresh Chandra, Sudhir Chandra, Sunil Chandra, Subhas Chandra, Sailesh Chandra, and Santosh Chandra. As a result all of them were 'S.C. Bose'! When a letter arrived addressed to S.C. Bose, there was no way of knowing which of the eight it was meant for.

In the joint family household at Elgin Road the daily laundry was massive—comprising personal clothing, bed linen, curtains, and the like. To solve the problem of sorting the items, numerals were sewn onto the clothes. For example, as we were the second son's family, all our things had '2' sewn onto them. Marking ink had not yet come into use.

Sometimes, problems arose with identifying daughters-in-law of the family moving around the house with their faces covered. They were not supposed to expose their faces to the elders of the husband's family. In case of an encounter the ladies would draw their head-covering or ghomta further down to cover their faces and turn away. When her identity had to be established for some reason, a daughter-in-law would stretch out her forearm and indicate by showing the number of fingers on her hand which son's wife she was.

When I was about four, my parents, together with their then five children (of whom I was the second youngest) and Uncle Subhas moved from the joint family residence at 38/2, Elgin Road to the adjoining house at 38/1, Elgin Road. This house was taken on rent in Uncle Subhas's name. We lived there for a few years until we moved in 1928 into Father's own newly built house at 1, Woodburn Park. With the move from 38/2 to 38/1, Elgin Road, my parents achieved independence in family matters. The other gain was that we little ones developed close ties with Uncle Subhas.

Although the second son, my father was considered the leader of his generation of the family by dint of his personality, professional stature and public standing. My eldest uncle Satish and my father were very close to each other as they grew up. Both were enthusiasts of English literature. In the evenings the two brothers would go down to the river in Cuttack and recite their favourite poems and passages from famous literary works in English. They would also practise public speaking and test each other's lung power in the vast open space by the river. Both became barristers. My father rose to the top of the legal profession rapidly and he would often refer to his older brother's deep knowledge

of the law. Father saw great promise in his brother Subhas—who was younger than him by seven years—when the latter was just a schoolboy. As a child and later as an adolescent, Uncle Subhas was widely regarded among family and friends as an oddball and possibly a bit of a nutcase. The majority opinion was that he was going to be a failure in life. Father differed strongly from the very beginning.

My father was the first in the Bose family to go abroad for higher studies. That was just before World War I. He of course found life in England very different from what he was used to. But he adjusted well and accepted whatever he considered to be good and attractive in the foreign culture. It was from the time of his student days in London that he developed his well-known taste for tailored suits from Savile Row. He also developed a liking for European cuisine and a lifelong fondness for Havana cigars of the highest quality. But he never touched alcohol, beef or pork. He often told us a funny story from his student life in London. The budding barristers had to attend a number of formal dinners. The other Indian trainee barristers would fight amongst themselves for a seat at Father's table for the extra portions of meat and alcohol his abstinence afforded them.

Father became involved in India's national movement very early in life. During the protests against the British move to partition Bengal in 1905, he walked the streets of Calcutta with his friends, singing patriotic songs and mobilizing people. He was barely sixteen then. At eighteen, he became a member of the Indian National Congress. Before returning home after qualifying for the Bar in London, he visited Paris with a friend. There he met Madame Maud Gonne MacBride, the legendary English-born heroine of the Irish national struggle, who was then living in exile in Paris. After talking to Father, Madame MacBride remarked to his companion: 'Mark my words, this young man will one day be among India's top leaders.'

As Father was the first in the Bose family to cross the 'kala pani' he had to perform ritual penance on his return to India, as mandated by the Hindu shastras.

By the time I was born in 1920, my father was already a rising luminary of the legal profession. The legal profession is a jealous mistress and demands very hard work for a good return. After court hours, Father worked late into the night, and started again quite early in the morning. So he saw little of his children during the day. Mother told me later that for years he would inspect the sleeping children after finishing his

work as the last thing he did before retiring for the night. We had his company to the full when he took us to Darjeeling during the annual court vacation. There was much walking, eating and all-round fun. He would tell us lots of stories of his childhood and youth.

Uncle Subhas was arrested for the second time in October 1924. The news reached my parents and grandparents when we were returning to Calcutta from our holiday in Kashmir. After a few months the British government packed him off to Burma to be imprisoned there. His detention in Burma ended only in 1927. But he remained ever-present in our lives even when forcibly separated from us because of his special and extremely close relationship with both my parents.

CHAPTER 5

After my parents were formally betrothed, their wedding was delayed for quite some time. There was a particular reason for this. A suitable girl for Father's older brother Satish was proving hard to find, for no fault of his. As per shastric injunctions, his bride had to be from our kulin sub-caste of the Kayastha community. Marriages between kulins and another Kayastha sub-caste, mouliks, were generally not permissible then. My mother, however, came from a moulik background. The reason she was accepted into the family was that some twelve generations earlier, a distinguished ancestor of ours, Gopinath Bose (known by the title Purandar Khan), decreed that the 'kulin only' rule would apply only to the eldest son of each generation and could be relaxed for other sons. But it was obviously difficult for my father to get married while his older brother remained unmarried. Fortunately, a good match in a kulin Kayastha family was eventually found for Uncle Satish, and the two brothers, Satish and Sarat, were married at the same time in December 1909. My mother was barely fourteen, and the other bride even younger. They called each other 'didi' or older sister, as one was senior in family rank and the other in age.

My mother's parents—whom we called Dadamoni and Didimoni—became very restive due to the delay in their only daughter's wedding. Calcutta gossips whispered that there was no point waiting for a provincial lawyer's son. My Dadamoni, Akshay Kumar Dey, said to my paternal grandfather Janakinath Bose, that to dispel the uncertainty, it might be desirable to have a betrothal ritual, known as paka dekha in Bengali.

Dadabhai, my paternal grandfather, replied that his word was more important than any ritual. Ever since Dadabhai took that stand, the paka dekha ritual was dropped in the Bose family.

My mother Bivabati belonged to a bonedi family—meaning, a cultured family of established social status—of north Calcutta. The family name was Dey-Biswas, shortened to Dey. My mother had only one sibling—an older brother, Ajit, who doted on her and whom she ordered around at will when they were growing up. Like the Boses, the Deys too were a large joint family living in a traditional mansion. The mansion was located on College Square in the heart of north Calcutta, opposite the famous Sanskrit College. There was a large square courtyard in the centre of the sprawling quadrangular building. A nearby street, lined with bookshops then and now, was (and is) named after Shyama Charan Dey, a public-spirited uncle of my maternal grandfather. The large reception room on the mansion's ground floor had a traditional rug spread from wall to wall, with lots of comfortable lounging cushions or takias placed on it. During Shyama Charan's time in the late nineteenth century, the regular guests in that room included the social reformer and educationist, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, and the writer Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay. My grandparents' generation of the extended Dey family gained a particularly rich haul of eminent sons-in-law—my father Sarat Chandra Bose, the litterateur Raj Shekhar Basu (better known as 'Parashuram', the name under which he wrote), and the lawyer and liberal politician Narendra Kumar Basu.

Dadamoni was also a lawyer. Always impeccably dressed, he would travel to court in a smart carriage. He was always full of energy, and enjoyed life, in contrast to the deeply conservative and superstition-ridden existence of traditional north Calcutta families. He would regularly visit the best restaurants of Calcutta, Firpo's and Peliti's, to enjoy Western meals. Dadamoni took me to the cinema for the first time in my life, at the Palace of Varieties run by Madan Theatres on Corporation Street in central Calcutta.[4] He was particularly fond of fine teas, as well as of high-quality snuff. When he was over seventy and had lost almost all his teeth, he would effortlessly compete with his grandchildren in gobbling up roast chicken. He was also very fond of English literature. Surendra Nath Banerjea, one of the founders of the Indian National

[4]opened in 1915, the Palace of Varieties was re-named Elite Cinema in 1938 and was one of Calcutta's top movie theatres until the 1980s. Ed.

Congress, was his personal hero. He would recite from memory from Suren Banerjea's famous speeches delivered at Calcutta's Town Hall.

Bivabati, his only daughter, was the apple of his eye. He would drop in frequently at Woodburn Park to see her on his way back home from court. But he was constantly restless and could not sit in one place for long. He would arrive calling out 'Biva, Biva', drink a cup of good tea, and depart as suddenly as he arrived.

Didimoni, my maternal grandmother, was rather disappointed when she saw my father for the first time at my parents' wedding. She had expected a handsomer man with sharper features. But Dadamoni was emphatic that he had picked the right husband for his darling daughter. He declared that his son-in-law was destined to rise high and his daughter would be a rajrani or queen. Later, when Father went to jail for two protracted periods (1932–35 and 1941–45) for his nationalist activities and Mother had to cope with a lot of difficulty in his absence, Dadamoni became emotional and lamented his 'rajrani' prediction. Alas, his beloved princess had become a victim of imperial power because of the activities of her husband Sarat and brother-in-law Subhas.

Dadamoni was my childhood playmate. Later, when I became a student at Calcutta's Medical College in the end-1930s and in the early 1940s, he was the main reason I constantly visited my mother's ancestral house, located close to the college. I visited him almost daily after college hours and we had deep conversations on a variety of topics, especially politics and the freedom struggle. By that time he had got over the liberal politics of Surendra Nath Banerjea, which he had grown up with, and was open to the radical politics of Bengal's revolutionary groups and of Uncle Subhas. In the early 1940s he would tune in to Uncle Subhas's radio broadcasts from Germany. Despite his long-held moderate political inclinations, my grandfather, then in his seventies, would get excited while listening to the broadcasts and pace up and down with his fists clenched.

My Didimoni, my maternal grandmother Subala Dey, was a proud and sensitive woman. She spent a lot of time on religious rituals. In those days, a small family like hers, with only two children, was quite rare. She hardly ever got to see her son-in-law because he was always so busy with his professional life and political activities, or else was in prison. She made up for it by doting on her grandchildren and fussed over me and my siblings. Her last years were truly sad because she survived both my father, who died in 1950, and my mother, who

passed away in 1954.

I cannot write about my childhood and youth without mentioning the loving presence of my maternal uncle, Ajit Kumar Dey. Father was in prison for nearly eight years in two spells between 1932 and 1945. The first time I was a schoolboy, and when he was arrested the second time in December 1941, and taken away to south India, I was a student at the Calcutta Medical College. I was privileged to share in Father's suffering in the cause of India's freedom during World War II, when I was successively held in Calcutta's Presidency Jail (1942), in 'home internment' at 1, Woodburn Park (1943), in an underground cell at Delhi's Red Fort (1944), in solitary confinement in the dungeons of the Lahore Fort (1944-45), and finally, in the Lyallpur District Jail in western Punjab (1945). During both of Father's imprisonments (1932–35 and 1941–45) Mother faced great trouble and hardship, with several small children to care for. Her brother—whom we children called 'Maam'—stood by her like a rock. Maam was apolitical and a very mild person. But during those times of great adversity for our family, he tried to protect and support his sister and her children to the best of his ability.

I think the peace and goodness that prevailed in my maternal uncle's life was in large measure due to his wife, Surama, known as Renu. She was the youngest daughter of Girish Chandra Bose, the founder of one of Calcutta's premier colleges of the time, the Bangabasi College. She not only came from a highly cultured and enlightened family, she personified goodness and concern for the well-being of others. She had a lot of tact and could manage many different types of people within and beyond her own family. During my studies at Calcutta's Medical College, I was a prime beneficiary of her care and hospitality. Our hours as students ran from morning till evening, and I would hop across to her nearby home at lunchtime and enjoy her delicious Bengali cooking. In late 1942, I was transferred to the Calcutta Medical College Hospital as a patient for several weeks after falling critically ill with typhoid while lodged in the city's Presidency Jail. My dear Mamima's nourishing food reached me there as well.

CHAPTER 6

I was born just as Indian nationalism after World War I, the massacre at Jallianwala Bagh, and the advent of Gandhi became a mass movement

and the struggle to free our country from colonial subjugation took off. Gandhiji gave the call for non-violent noncooperation with the colonial power and for self-reliance in 1921. The impact was tremendous throughout India. From primary school to matriculation I grew up steeped in the spirit of swadeshi. Those members of the extended Bose family who lived in Calcutta were generally more affected by the spread of mass rebellion against colonial rule than others who have lived elsewhere. There were three reasons for this. First, Uncle Subhas set a personal example by forsaking his ICS career after his studies at Cambridge and joining the struggle, which was being led in Bengal by eminent barrister and philanthropist Chittaranjan Das, who was given the honorific of 'Deshbandhu'—Friend of the Nation. Second, Father and Uncle Subhas were extraordinarily close and soon Father too became one of Deshbandhu C.R. Das's principal associates. Third, my mother was willing to support Father and Uncle Subhas in whatever they did. The whole-hearted involvement of these family members who were for the most part based in Calcutta influenced the lives of many of us.

Gandhi's strategy of mass mobilization involved popularizing the emblem of the charkha or spinning wheel, and the wearing of handwoven khadi cloth. The Bose family, including us children, took to wearing khadi. Not just men's and women's clothing, even bed linen, pillowcases and curtains came to be made only from khadi. The khadi of the 1920s and 1930s was a relatively rough and thick fabric; the finer and lighter versions came much later. Father wore khadi to court as well. Occasionally, he wore silk in court appearances, but always indigenous Bengal silk made in Murshidabad. Wearing khadi was a statement of patriotism and one's commitment to the freedom struggle. We children obviously needed woollen garments during our vacations in the mountains of Darjeeling and elsewhere. In those days high-quality woollen garments invariably came from England. Mother would seek out woollen garments made in Kashmir or Punjab for us.

Apart from using khadi, quite a few members of the Bose family would spin the charkha to make the thread themselves. This was considered a proud achievement. When I was a slightly older child, I too would make yarn by spinning a takli, a small and handy version of the charkha. Post-independence generations may not understand this obsession, but the fact is that the charkha and khadi were a big part of our national awakening. In nationalist families, buying British goods or wearing clothes made in England was considered disgraceful and those

Indians who did so were looked down upon.

Uncle Subhas was in Burmese prisons from late-1924 to early 1927. He wrote numerous letters to both my father and my mother from Burma. Among many other things, he would enquire about how spinning and weaving khadi were progressing at home. On one occasion, Mother sent him a hand-spun dhoti made by Bose family children. He was very pleased when he received it in Burma. By the second half of the 1930s, the craze for home made khadi had diminished and newly established Indian-owned mills were churning out clothes on a mass scale. In 1937, I went across from Woodburn Park to Elgin Road to meet Uncle Subhas upon his release from another spell of detention. I was wearing a shirt made by an Indian mill. After the exchange of greetings he looked at me sharply and said: 'Have you given up khadi?' He was not joking, he was quite serious. I returned home and told Mother that I wanted to revert to wearing khadi all the time.

When I was old enough to go to kindergarten, no Indian-run school in Calcutta had that facility. So I was admitted by my parents to the kindergarten section of the Diocesan School for Girls, located very close to our home. I did not undergo a gender change—this missionary-run school admitted a small number of boys to kindergarten as well as Class I. The school's Mother Superior was Sister Dorothy Frances, a strict disciplinarian. Most of our teachers were Bengali Christians and they took very good care of us. The children of many prominent Calcutta families—Hindu, Muslim and Christian—were enrolled at the school. The children of anglicized families of Calcutta subservient to the Raj went to a different set of more fashionable schools.

Mother called Uncle Subhas Chhotda—literally 'youngest older brother'. He called her Mejoboudidi, 'second sister-in-law'. Wherever he was, in prison or abroad, Uncle Subhas would write to my mother advising her on her children's education and upbringing. His views were very liberal and progressive. He would lay stress on the total development of the child's mind. The Diocesan School had good arrangements for the kids to learn the basics of handicrafts, music and sports. I was more inclined towards making handicrafts than to the formal part of studying and even won prizes for my handmade items. On Uncle Subhas's advice, my parents appointed a private art teacher for me. My older sister, Mira, subsequently became my fellow-pupil. I did not develop into a great artist but my young teacher, Harendra Nath Sengupta, instilled in me an appreciation of art and a sense of aesthetics that were of great

and lasting value in my life. Our private tutors in schoolwork, art or physical education often became like members of our family. This was above all true of Haren Sengupta, who became a close and trusted associate in Father's public and political work. Later, he served the Netaji Research Bureau with utmost devotion until his death in the 1980s. All the oil paintings exhibited in the museum at Netaji Bhawan are Haren Sengupta's work.

As I've already mentioned, I was frequently ill as a child. Mother endured a lot of anxiety on my account. She kept a handbook on homeopathy and a wooden box with neatly arranged little bottles of homeopathic medicine handy. The tiny globules in those bottles were tasty and I consumed them in abundance, sometimes in excess of the prescribed amounts. I also received kaviraji treatment. Our family kaviraj, Shyamadas Vachaspati, was quite renowned in his field and also a personal friend of Dadabhai. The ayurvedic medicines were not tasty, unlike their homeopathic counterparts, but I could hardly refuse the bitter medicines when Mother arrived at my bedside with them. I also received modern scientific treatment and medicines because one of my paternal uncles, Sunil Chandra Bose, was a leading doctor with qualifications gained in England. I was one of his regular patients as a child, and when necessary he would bring in other specialists to take a look at me.

Uncle Subhas had a particularly scientific bent of mind when it came to health matters, and this extended to the children of the family. When I contracted malaria and was put on large doses of bitter quinine, he wrote Mother that merely prescribing and taking medicines was not enough. He emphasized disease prevention, and urged that steps be taken to eradicate mosquitoes around our house. When my sister Mira came down with typhoid, he wrote that an investigation was needed into the ongoing prevalence of communicable diseases in our family. Because of his hard life and frequent imprisonments, he suffered from a number of ailments himself and I think this drove his interest in the subject. In 1936, while keeping him company when he was detained at our bungalow in Kurseong, I observed him diligently reading books on diseases and health. The previous year, he had had a gall-bladder operation in Vienna, at that time a major surgical procedure. I found that he had picked up considerable knowledge of the physiology of the liver and the gall-bladder and the many diseases of the biliary system. He also suffered from sciatic pain and therefore knew a lot about the sciatic nervous system. He sometimes used his knowledge of disease

symptoms to confuse and fool prison officials and the police.

CHAPTER 7

In 1934, Father was a prisoner in his own holiday home at Gidhapahar near Kurseong. One morning, Kaloo Singh, the bungalow's chowkidar, arrived at our house in Calcutta—1, Woodburn Park. He met Mother privately and handed over some papers Father had sent. Kaloo Singh was very relieved to have successfully carried out his assignment.

Kaloo Singh was a Nepali Brahmin. The New Zealander from whom Father purchased the bungalow in 1923 had been his boss. He lived with his family in a small cottage adjacent to the bungalow. He was unswervingly loyal to Father, who trusted him completely. A little later in 1936, Uncle Subhas was similarly interned at Gidhapahar and a relationship of trust and friendship developed between him and Kaloo Singh, too.

In 1934, Father needed some important papers to be secretly delivered to Mother. Kaloo Singh packed these inside his shoes. Then he came down to the Hill Cart Road, which passed below our bungalow. There was a difficult track running down from Gidhapahar to Gayabari, which lay on the route to Siliguri, the railhead. The security men watching the bungalow saw Kaloo Singh but since he was a local and a familiar face they thought nothing of it. Kaloo Singh ran down the hilly track to Gayabari, travelled by the Darjeeling mountain railway from there to Siliguri and then boarded a mail train to Calcutta. Only Father knew where he had gone.

Whenever Father took us on vacations to other hill stations—Srinagar, Mussoorie, Shillong—Kaloo Singh joined us. He acted as the manager of the trip and was in charge of us children. He was a disciplinarian but also a playmate. When weddings and other big family occasions took place in Calcutta, he was asked to come down to attend them. Father felt secure with him in charge.

When Father was alone in detention in Kurseong, Kaloo Singh spent the evenings with him, chatting and discussing all manner of things. The conversations were not limited to family matters. The employer and the chowkidar discussed various public and national issues. Father told us that he would often accept Kaloo Singh's opinions and advice on various matters, private and public. Later I used to say that with a little bit of

formal education, Kaloo Singh would make a good foreign minister.

Uncle Subhas too would discuss with Kaloo Singh how to make life difficult for the British Government. Kaloo Singh did not know English but he had plenty of intelligence as well as common sense. He developed an understanding of politics from Father and Uncle Subhas. Over the years, he came to know other members of the extended Bose family. He told me that after knowing Father and Uncle Subhas, he did not feel much admiration for anyone else.

Kaloo Singh saved my life when I fell into the Dal Lake in Srinagar as a four-year-old in the autumn of 1924, an episode I recounted at the beginning of this book. That was the start of a special closeness that developed between him and me over the years. During my school and college vacations, I would go up to Kurseong alone, with my parents' permission, and stay there with Kaloo Singh as my companion and minder. He told me that the hill on which our bungalow was situated is called Gidhapahar because its peak resembles the head of a gridha, or vulture; so Gidhapahar means Vulture Hill.[5]

Gidhapahar for me carries memories of many precious moments with my mother and father. Kaloo Singh ran the property superbly. He also taught me the basics of trekking and climbing. The first step was to climb to the top of Gidhapahar, with its panoramic views. The second step was to ascend to the next higher peak, the location of the spring from which we got our water supply. Then he took me along a narrow track through thick forests which led to the Kurseong station of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway. It was thrilling and thereafter I made the excursions on my own.

Kaloo Singh's personal life was tragic. His four sons died one after another. One died while we were present at the property on vacation. Father wanted to build a small house for him on a nearby piece of land, where he could retire in old age. But Father's untimely death in 1950 at the age of just sixty left this wish unfulfilled. Kaloo Singh himself died three years later, in 1953. When he felt his end was coming, he wrote a poignant letter to Mother in Calcutta, in which he conveyed his last salaams to her.

Kaloo Singh's equivalent in Calcutta was Father's chauffeur, Sheikh

[5]the Gidhapahar bungalow still exists in its original condition and is preserved as a museum. It is very well known in the Darjeeling district and the people of the area take great pride in its association with Subhas and Sarat Bose. Ed.

Ahmed. He not only drove Father's car but was like the manager of the household. He did many chores beyond his duties at both the Bose houses—1, Woodburn Park and 38/2, Elgin Road. Sheikh Ahmed hailed from Benares (Varanasi) in U.P. (United Provinces, now Uttar Pradesh). He rarely asked for vacations. He drove so smoothly that Father felt uncomfortable if someone else was at the wheel. Father liked my driving because, he said, I drove in Ahmed's elegant style. Ahmed was a shining example of how household staff in those days identified themselves with the joys and sorrows of the families for which they worked. When Father went to prison from 1932 to 1935, Mother had to cut down drastically on all family expenses. Father's big car had to be sold. Mother told Ahmed that she could no longer afford the salary Father had been paying him. Ahmed had a high reputation both as a driver and as a person and could have easily secured a well-paying job elsewhere. Mother told him to seek other employment since he had a family to sustain and there was no knowing when Father might return. Ahmed went away to reflect. Then he came back and told my mother: 'Pay me whatever you can; do not pay me at all when you cannot. If your family can survive in this situation, mine can too.'

When I was not yet old enough to get a driving licence, Ahmed taught me driving surreptitiously in the mid-1930s. In January 1941 Ahmed's lessons stood me in good stead when I had to secretly drive Uncle Subhas from Calcutta to the Gomoh Junction in Bihar on the first leg of his great escape from India. Even today I think often of Kaloo Singh and Sheikh Ahmed. Both carried me in their arms when I was a small child and both were my teachers when I was a bit older.

I should not fail to mention two other persons who served my paternal grandparents. One was Sudam, Dadabhai Janakinath's personal servant in Cuttack, who accompanied him during his visits to Calcutta. He was an elderly man with a heart of gold. The other was Sarada, Majanani's housemaid. Sarada was especially attached to Uncle Subhas, and she also had her favourites among the good-looking boys of our generation. Sarada lived long, and after Majanani's death at the end of 1943, she spent her last years with us.

Sarada was quite a riot. Her comments about men and her observations of her surroundings would often have us in splits. In her later years she would ramble on and on, especially after she had had her daily dose of opium. When Uncle Subhas became Congress president in 1938, she was greatly disappointed. She said that 'Subi', as she called

him, had much talent and could have easily become a judge or a district magistrate. Instead he was wasting his life getting mixed up in undesirable activities and going to jail ever so often. She dismissed us with a wave of her hand when we told her that Uncle Subhas was being hailed across India as *rashtrapati* (head of state, as the Congress president was known among the nationalist masses).

There was another character among Uncle Subhas's staff. When he was Congress president he had a personal servant, who would travel with him on his tours. His name was Padam and he was from Orissa. Once, Jawaharlal Nehru and Uncle Subhas were travelling together by train, and there was an unscheduled stop somewhere at dawn. Padam took the opportunity to get out of the compartment, run up to the engine and demand hot water for his master's shave. He would not let the driver restart the train until he got what he wanted. Then, he returned to the compartment with a jug of hot water, woke Nehru up and told him to go to the toilet and finish his business there before his master got up. Nehru was highly amused and Uncle Subhas embarrassed by Padam's antics.

CHAPTER 8

I have a hazy recollection of something significant that happened at our Gidhapahar bungalow in early June 1925, when I was five. A tall, dark man was slowly pacing up and down in front of the bungalow. I later saw in Father's and Uncle's papers that Deshbandhu C.R. Das and his wife Basanti Devi visited us in Kurseong for a day at that time. In a letter to Uncle Subhas, who was then imprisoned in Mandalay in Burma, Father regretted that he failed to have photographs taken of the visit. Deshbandhu died a fortnight later.

I also vaguely recall that we visited C.R. Das and Basanti Devi at 'Step Aside' in Darjeeling, the house where Deshbandhu passed the last weeks of his life and where he died on 16 June 1925. The house is preserved as a national heritage site. Whenever Mother took us to see a senior person who was ill, she would ask us to sit down at the foot of the bed and massage the person's legs. I massaged Deshbandhu's legs a few days before he died, aged just fifty-four.

Deshbandhu passed away in Darjeeling shortly after we returned to Calcutta. The funeral procession in Calcutta was of mammoth size. The

whole of Bengal, Hindu and Muslim, felt orphaned. Whenever there was a big public procession or political demonstration in Calcutta, my mother took us children to watch from the rooftop of a house located at the junction of Wellington Square and Dharmatala Street in the city centre. One of Majanani's brothers, Satyendra Nath Dutt, a dental surgeon whom we called Laldadababu, lived in that house. Although I was only five, a scene of the sea of humanity accompanying Deshbandhu on his last journey is fixed in my memory like a portrait.[6]

I remember watching three other historic processions from the same rooftop. One was the impressive parade organized and led by Uncle Subhas to welcome Motilal Nehru, who presided over the Congress's annual convention in Calcutta in 1928. The other two were funeral processions. The first, in 1929, was for the Bengali revolutionary Jatindranath (Jatin) Das, who went on hunger strike in prison in Lahore and died after sixty-two days. The second was for two political prisoners who were killed by prison guards in the early 1930s inside the Hijli jail, near Kharagpur. Uncle Subhas organized and led both these processions as well. The experiences were profoundly moving. Because I was a very quiet boy, shy and tongue-tied, I perhaps suffered greater inner turmoil than others.

Although Deshbandhu was no more, his legacy remained alive in the Bose brothers, Sarat and Subhas. Both Father and Uncle Subhas worshipped Chittaranjan Das. They could not contain their emotions when speaking about him. I have often wondered why Deshbandhu's influence on them was so profound. I think it was because Deshbandhu loved his followers dearly, in a way that's very rare in the world of politics, even revolutionary politics. So it was unconditional love on both sides. Then, of course, there was his example of personal sacrifice in the service of the nation, his far-sighted politics and his razor-sharp intellect. India's freedom struggle threw up a number of remarkable leaders. But even in that august company Deshbandhu C.R. Das stood out for his utter selflessness, which endeared him to his disciples and to the people at large. It is most unfortunate that some misguided Bengali youth of later generations looked to foreign figures for inspiration when they had such an example of leadership in their own land.

Deshbandhu's premature death left us bereft. But he left behind his wife Basanti Devi, who became a senior member of our family.

[6]The funeral procession was led by Mahatma Gandhi. Ed.

Both Father and Uncle Subhas called her 'Ma'. Sometimes there was confusion which 'Ma' they were referring to, Majanani (their mother, Prabhabati Bose) or Basanti Devi. We children called her 'thakuma' or granny. From 1925 until her death some fifty years later, Basanti Devi was my loving grandmother. She knew all of the Bose family well and kept herself apprised of whatever was going on. Deshbandhu had left everything he owned to the nation. So Father and others had to arrange for a house for Basanti Devi and her family in Calcutta. From prison in Burma, Uncle Subhas repeatedly urged both my parents to make sure that Basanti Devi was well looked after. When Father was too busy, Mother would visit her frequently with us children in tow. I lost count of how many times, over the years, I accompanied my mother to see her. Thakuma was a gourmet cook and that was another reason to look forward to these visits. When Uncle Subhas was in the country and not in jail he would often drop in at her house, usually late at night, and demand food. He especially relished her simple rice recipe, bhat-e-bhat. Their conversations would continue deep into the night while the plainclothes police shadowing Uncle Subhas waited outside, sometimes in pouring rain. Eventually, Basanti Devi would tell Uncle Subhas to go home, to give those men relief. Uncle Subhas would reply: 'Let the traitors suffer!'

Basanti Devi too visited us often, usually accompanied by her widowed daughter-in-law Sujata, whom we called kakima (auntie), and sometimes by her daughters Aparna and Kalyani. I remember waking up after my tonsillitis operation as a schoolboy to find two women seated at my bedside. One was my mother, the other my thakuma, Basanti Devi.

When Father was arrested in 1932 and imprisoned, Basanti Devi became very concerned about us. Her visits became more frequent. A strange episode happened around that time. When Uncle Subhas returned from his imprisonment in Burma in 1927, he brought back among a few other items a beautiful marble statuette of the Buddha. The Buddha occupied pride of place in the first-floor hallway of our Woodburn Park house. Basanti Devi opined that it was not a good omen to have the Buddha there, as Buddha was the embodiment of renunciation. Subhas had already taken that path, and now Sarat too was going in the same direction, despite being a family man. Fearing that Sarat's family would be ruined, she took the Burmese Buddha away and installed it in a temple on the campus of Chittaranjan Seva Sadan, a women's hospital established in Deshbandhu's memory in south

Calcutta. After the museum opened at Netaji Bhawan on Elgin Road at the beginning of the 1960s, I requested Thakuma to return it to be displayed in the museum. She did so with great pleasure and it occupies a prominent spot in the museum's main hall on the second floor of 38/2, Elgin Road.

Basanti Devi had high regard for Majanani. She would tell us bursting with pride: 'Do you know what your Majanani says? She says I am Subhas's real mother and that she only brought him into this world. Tell me how many mothers can say that, especially a mother who has a son like Subhas!'

In early 1933, Basanti Devi accompanied us to Jubbulpore in central India to meet Father and Uncle Subhas in prison. Uncle Subhas was about to be sent to Europe for medical treatment. When we were leaving, Uncle Subhas broke down and sobbed uncontrollably. I then understood why Deshbandhu used to tease him by calling him 'the crying captain'. Basanti Devi remained calm; she never broke down in such situations. She gave Uncle one of Deshbandhu's shawls, telling him that her husband's blessings went with the shawl.

Some three decades later, I went to see her after the establishment of the Netaji Research Bureau at Netaji Bhawan in Calcutta. I asked her if she had any letters Uncle Subhas had written her, and requested that she consider giving them to me so that I could arrange for their publication as part of the Bureau's book-publishing programme. She rummaged around and found some letters. She told me I could take them, make copies and return the originals to her. I promised to do just that and left. After some days I went to her house to return the originals. She sat me down and we had a long chat as I ate a lot of her food. As I was leaving she called me back and handed me the boxful of letters, saying: 'You fool, did you really think I wanted the letters back!'

I was speechless with gratitude.

CHAPTER 9

Our visit to Father and Uncle Subhas in Jubbulpore Central Jail in January 1933 was a family occasion of sorts. We were sitting around Father and Uncle in their barracks in the jail's 'segregation block' when Father suddenly started calling out 'Ginni! Ginni!', as if he were calling the mistress of the house to come and meet the guests. We were a

bit puzzled as Mother was sitting right next to Father. Then someone appeared in response to the call—a beautiful white female pigeon strutted in like a queen. She was the pick of a brood of pigeons the Bose brothers were feeding and rearing in their jailyard. Basanti Devi feigned anger and said: 'Sarat, how dare you. Biva is sitting next to you and you are addressing someone else as Ginni!' We all laughed.

Normally, neither Father nor Uncle Subhas had any time for distractions or leisure. In Jubbulpore, however, they had created a large 'household' consisting of both human beings and animals: ordinary convicts and a variety of pets. In his prison in Burma's Mandalay in the mid-1920s, Uncle Subhas kept a large collection of poultry, pigeons and parrots. He wrote from there to Mother describing how the flock of pigeons would drink water from the tank in the jailyard. Uncle Subhas had an aversion to cats, particularly oddly coloured ones. But as commander-in-chief of the Indian National Army, he had a pet monkey in Southeast Asia during World War II. The monkey would sit on his shoulder and perform various tricks.

In Jubbulpore we found the brothers happily presiding over a small zoo. Apart from the pigeons there were parrots and other birds, and there were a number of rabbits. Each pet had its own name and when called dutifully came forward to meet the visitors.

Uncle Subhas left for Europe in early February of 1933. A few months after that the government interned Father in our Kurseong bungalow. A pack of rabbits and a flock of pigeons arrived in our Woodburn Park house in Calcutta. My thirteen-year-old self took charge of them. In Kurseong, Father started collecting Himalayan dogs of various breeds to keep him company. Of course we children had great fun with them. The superintendent of police of Darjeeling district would visit Father from time to time. This British man went red in the face when during one such visit Father called out 'Colson! Colson!' and a small dog appeared wagging its tail. One Mr Colson was then the police commissioner of Calcutta. Then Father called out 'Countess! Countess!' and a very affectionate furry Bhutia bitch appeared. She was named after the Countess of Willingdon, the wife of the British Viceroy of India.

Then one day a woodcutter in the Kurseong forests found an abandoned bear cub and presented him to Father. When he arrived he was very little and drank milk from a bottle just like a human baby. I played with him often. But I remember that even as a cub he would grasp my legs with such strength that I had difficulty extricating myself.

A cage was built for him as he grew bigger. After Father's release in mid-1935 he was brought down to Calcutta. Father wanted to keep him at home as a pet. But by then the sweet cub had become a large and rather aggressive animal. So, after taking the advice of a specialist, Father presented him to the Alipore Zoo in Calcutta. We would visit him in the bear enclosure there.

This was the lighter side of prison life. Otherwise, prison life was anything but a joyride. During his 1924–27 incarceration in Burma, Uncle Subhas fell seriously ill. There was continuous public agitation in India for his release, while at the same time Father carried on negotiations with the British government. Those documents are now available in print.

Uncle Subhas's life in the prisons of the British Empire is a story unto itself. He was imprisoned eleven times between 1921 and 1940. The first stint was in 1921-22, when he and Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das spent a few months in Calcutta's Alipore Central Jail. The last imprisonment was in 1940, when he was held in Calcutta's Presidency Jail. A political prisoner's life was hard, but both Father and Uncle Subhas remained defiant in custody. Uncle Subhas believed that the way to get jail authorities to behave better with political prisoners was to take a hard line with them. He would fight for rights and dignity in jail just as he would outside and, more often than not, he would emerge victorious in his battles. But just as he found the country's enslavement intolerable, he found life in captivity hard and his health often broke down. He went on hunger strike in prison twice. The first time was in Mandalay (Burma) in 1926, on the issue of the right of political prisoners to perform Durga Puja in jail. The second time was in 1940, in protest against the illegality and injustice of his detention. He won both battles. The right to perform Durga Puja was conceded on the first occasion, and on the second occasion the government was forced to release him, only for him to escape from India to wage the final struggle for India's freedom. His record of successful hunger strikes stands in contrast to that of Mahatma Gandhi, who was given to terminating his fasts on the basis of very partial concessions.

When Uncle Subhas's health deteriorated badly in Burma and official and non-official doctors agreed his life was in danger, the British Government proposed his conditional release. For example, he could proceed to Switzerland for medical treatment but without setting foot in India. Alternatively, he could be interned at Almora in the Garhwal hills

of north India if he agreed not to meet anyone and remain completely isolated. Uncle Subhas turned down these condition-laden proposals.

When, in 1927, the government eventually decided to bring him back to India, they kept the family guessing about their intentions. They initially kept him on the Bengal governor's launch in the middle of the Hooghly River near Calcutta. We took a boat from the bank, got on to the launch and managed to get a glimpse of him lying ill in a cabin. After this strange mid-river sojourn of a few days, the governor of Bengal abruptly ordered his release.

He was brought over to the house at 38/1, Elgin Road where we lived with our parents.[7] There, I saw Dr Bidhan Chandra Roy for the first time. Dr Roy's stentorian voice was unmistakable and announced his arrival much before he showed up. Dr Roy and our physician uncle, Sunil Bose, took charge of Uncle Subhas's treatment. From time to time they called in Dr Nil Ratan Sircar and Kaviraj Shyamadas Vachaspati for consultations.[8]

From 1927 onwards I have clear memories of Uncle Subhas. On medical advice he was taken to Shillong. We children had great fun with him in Shillong—playing, singing, climbing. Dadabhai, Majanani and many others of the family joined us there. It was a grand family reunion after a few very hard years. Uncle Subhas was in charge of the kids' brigade. He had views about each of us—a fat boy needed to be put on a diet, a delicate one should be given nutritional supplements, all needed regular exercise. Unfortunately, I fell ill with enteric fever in Shillong and was bedridden for weeks. Dr B.C. Roy who was then in Shillong treated me. Although he was a very tall man with a loud voice, he put children at ease with his friendly talk and wit. When I had recovered enough to have solid food, he offered me a wide choice. Gesturing around the room, he told me that I could eat the bed, the bedside table, the wardrobe, the chairs, whatever I wanted! I felt better immediately.

I did not realize at the age of seven that arrest and imprisonment would be a recurrent part of our family life, not just for Uncle Subhas but my father as well. But of course, Uncle Subhas knew this very well.

[7] This was shortly before Sarat Bose's family moved to their newly built house at 1, Woodburn Park. Ed.

[8] Dr B.C. Roy was a top doctor and also a Congress leader. Later, he was chief minister of West Bengal from 1948 to 1962. Ed.

Even before Mahatma Gandhi gave the call for mass civil disobedience at the beginning of the 1930s, he would ask my mother gently if she would be able to manage the household by herself if Father were to go to prison. He was trying to prepare her for hard times ahead. In 1932, my mother joined the ranks of many thousands of mothers, wives, sisters and daughters of Bengal and India whose menfolk were imprisoned for demanding India's freedom.

CHAPTER 10

Uncle Subhas was elected to the Bengal Legislative Council from the North Calcutta constituency while imprisoned in Burma. There was great excitement during the election campaign and we children too were affected by it. I remember an election poster featuring Uncle's picture behind prison bars. Our good old Willys Knight car toured Calcutta's streets with that poster affixed to its front and back. On the day of the vote, Mother took us around some of the polling centres. Uncle's opponent was a respected and influential liberal politician, Jatindranath Basu. Uncle Subhas won by a massive margin. Calcutta's sky lit up with celebratory fireworks in the evening. One specially designed rocket illuminated the sky upon exploding with a phrase in Bengali: 'Subhas Chandra is victorious!'

After his release, Uncle Subhas was sent to Shillong for rest and recuperation. But the problem was that Uncle could never rest. At Kelsall Lodge in Shillong, the lights in his room were on until the early hours of the morning. This was noticed by Majanani, his mother Prabhabati, who remonstrated with him. She told him that he would not be allowed to keep late nights. Uncle defended himself by saying that he had much reading to do and had to prepare public statements, questions for the Legislative Council and maintain correspondence. He resorted to a clever trick to fool his mother. At night he padded up the chinks in the door and windows of his room so the light wouldn't show.

His habit of working till very late was known to all, including the police who kept him under surveillance. We incorporated this into our plan for his escape from Calcutta (and India) in January 1941. He instructed my cousin Ila that the lights in his first-floor bedroom in the 38/2, Elgin Road house should stay on for at least an hour after I drove him out of the house at 1.35 a.m. on 17 January 1941. The

bedroom has windows looking out on to Elgin Road and any watchers would assume that he was as usual working through the night.

The interplay of light and darkness would literally become a feature of our lives. After Uncle Subhas's 1941 escape, Father would often call me to his bedroom on the first floor of 1, Woodburn Park late at night to discuss secret matters. My room was on the second floor and faced the street. Father and I would sit on his bed, face to face under the mosquito netting, and talk while Mother listened. After these late-night conclaves, Father would always caution me to go up the flight of stairs to my room in darkness and to bed without switching any lights on and off. Father was aware that our house was watched and was extra-careful not to show any signs of unusual nocturnal activity.

Mother returned from Shillong to Calcutta with me and my siblings before Uncle Subhas did. While in prison Uncle had improvised a household of convicts and pets, at home he wanted to be surrounded by the children of the family all the time. Even before I was born, he would play hide-and-seek with the little ones at the Elgin Road house. He would hide on the small roof (chiler chhaad in Bengali) at the highest point of the building by scaling the drainage pipe. In Shillong, he ran up and down the winding paths with us without a care for his poor health. He became sad when Mother and we children left Shillong. He wrote to Mother: 'When all of you left suddenly I felt lost. The empty house gave me an eerie feeling. I felt very sad. It felt as if the daily routine of life was snapped abruptly. It will be no exaggeration to say that I had heartache.'

However, Mother had plenty to do in Calcutta. Our new house, 1 Woodburn Park, was nearing completion. The household had to be wound up at one place—our rented house at 38/1, Elgin Road—and set up in the new location on the next street. It was thrilling for us children to watch our new house coming up. By 1928, it was ready for us to occupy. Father had had the house designed in modern style and made sure that only the best materials were used in its construction, including the fittings. In comparison, the family mansion at 38/2, Elgin Road, though barely twenty years older, looked rather old-fashioned. There was a traditional house-warming ceremony—griha prabesh. Uncle Subhas came over with us from the rented house—which in fact had been rented in his name—to our brand-new home. The east room on the second floor was allotted to him. He had his office on the west side of the ground floor, next to Father's. Food was served on the

beautiful south-facing verandah on the first floor. Many people thought we children would be spoiled rotten living in this rather luxurious mansion. When I was imprisoned in the Lahore Fort in late 1944, my interrogator Nazir Ahmad Razvi said to me in a sarcastic tone: 'You live in that palace called Woodburn Park, don't you? This place [Lahore Fort] is not up to that standard and won't suit you. So why don't you start digging a tunnel to escape? I must tell you though that there are standing orders to shoot any prisoner caught trying to escape.'

The story of the Bose family is linked in different phases with a number of houses. Uncle Subhas and Father conducted their political activities primarily from our two Calcutta houses a stone's throw from one another. Then there is the bungalow at Gidhapahar in Kurseong, which also resonates with historic significance. Some years later Father also purchased a lovely farmhouse (bagan bari) at a place called Rishra just outside Calcutta, overlooking the Hooghly River off the Grand Trunk Road. Important political events occurred there too, especially in 1941, about which I write later in this book. Going back in time, there is Janakinath Bhawan in Cuttack where Dadabhai lived as he built his professional career as a lawyer and raised his growing family, including Uncle Subhas, who was born there.[9] I also recall Dadabhai's fine house in Puri, 'Jagannath Dham'.

Our first year at Woodburn Park is associated with an important event: the annual convention of the Indian National Congress held in Calcutta in 1928. Soon after moving in, both Father and Uncle Subhas became busy with its organizational preparations. Uncle Subhas did something novel in the history of the Congress and the national movement by officiating as the General Officer Commanding (GOC) of the Congress volunteers organized on military lines for the Calcutta convention. Father was the treasurer of the Reception Committee. Mother supported and helped them both. Those children of the family who were musically inclined joined the Congress choir. The choir's trainer and leader was Sarala Devi Chowdhurani. The rehearsals were held in the drawing room of 1, Woodburn Park. The commander of the women volunteers, Latika Ghosh, was also a regular visitor to Woodburn Park.

At the age of eight, I didn't realize the rigour of the training Uncle Subhas gave to the volunteers. As a result, the discipline and

[9]The Boses' ancestral house in Cuttack is now an attractive museum run by the State Government of Orissa. Ed.

efficiency of the 1928 Calcutta Congress was exemplary, unprecedented then and unequalled since. Different groups of volunteers were organized in military style—there were infantry, cavalry and motorized battalions! Some of the finest young men and women of India worked under Uncle Subhas's direction in the volunteer corps. Among them was Jatindranath (Jatin) Das, who was to be martyred just a year later after 62 days on hunger strike in prison in Lahore. We children watched the inaugural procession from the rooftop of our grand-uncle Satyen Dutt's apartment in the city centre. The Congress president, Motilal Nehru, was seated in an open horse-drawn carriage with the reception committee's chairman, Jatindra Mohan (J.M.) Sengupta. Uncle Subhas led the parade standing upright in an Opel car, baton in hand. It was a memorable sight.

The Calcutta Congress's open session was held in the city's Park Circus Maidan. An exhibition of swadeshi crafts and industries was put up at the venue. I was especially impressed by another show—the depiction of important personalities and episodes of our freedom struggle through lifelike moving figures.

We children were taken frequently to the Congress's site, to see the exhibitions and also attend the open session. One day, a cousin and I strayed from the family and got lost in the milling crowds. After some panic, my parents found us safely seated on the presidential dais, where some smart volunteers had deposited us. I vaguely recall Uncle Subhas addressing the open session in English. He moved his famous amendment for purna swaraj (complete independence) to Gandhi's official resolution asking the British to grant India 'Dominion Status' within the Empire. The amendment was defeated, but by a small margin. It was an impressive national debut for the rising thirty-one-year-old leader of the freedom movement, and a harbinger of things to come.

CHAPTER 11

I cannot recall ever being punished or taken harshly to task by my father. The children were Mother's responsibility. She was a hard taskmaster and often lost her temper when they got out of control. This is not to say that Father played no role. But he did so in a subtle, dignified and largely silent manner. After returning from the High Court he freshened up and rested for a while on the first floor's south-facing verandah. Before going down to work in the evening, he would gently

push open the door of our study and give us a smile. That was all. On a day-to-day basis, Mother had the last word as far as we were concerned. For the first ten or so years of my life I was a little afraid of my mother because of her strictness. However, I also recall some moments when she would caress me fondly while praising my looks, when nobody else was around.

In 1932 Father went to prison and all of us had to grow up quickly. I was twelve then but became a little adult almost overnight. Mother's attitude also changed and she started treating us as friends rather than minors.

Our own household was very well run. Father disliked slovenliness. Mother saw to it that everything ran smoothly and there were maintenance staff on standby for any problems. Father combined tradition with modernity in our lifestyle. In contrast, the joint family house on 38/2, Elgin Road was shoddily managed. Uncle Subhas lived in the Elgin Road house from 1937, until his escape in January 1941 (when he was not in prison or abroad in Europe). During that time he always wanted his guests—who included Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru—to be put up at Woodburn Park and important meetings to take place there. He was very fastidious in matters of hospitality. Once he invited a foreign guest to a meal at Woodburn Park, and asked me to take charge of the arrangements. I did so and reported to him that all was in order. He asked me what the menu was and was very disappointed when I could not furnish the details.

Soon after we moved into Woodburn Park, it was time for me to leave the Diocesan School and enrol in a regular boys' school. In those days the children of affluent and so-called aristocratic families of Calcutta normally went to Western-style schools run by European missionaries. I was the son of a leading barrister who had qualified in England. But in my family, nationalist values were paramount and non-negotiable. So, following in the tradition set by my two older brothers, I was admitted to the South Suburban School in south Calcutta, run by a group of Bengali educationists who drew inspiration from Ashutosh Mookerjee, the youngest ever vice-chancellor of Calcutta University.[10]

The change from the intimate and kindly atmosphere of the missionary-run Diocesan School to the chaos of South Suburban School

[10]South Suburban School is located on Sarat Bose Road, formerly Lansdowne Road, a major arterial road that connects south Calcutta to a part of central Calcutta. Ed.

was unsettling. For the first two years, I was quite unhappy there. But in the long run it was good for me to study alongside boys from middle-class Bengali society. The teachers and my fellow-students looked upon boys from the Bose family with a mixture of respect and envy. I found this embarrassing. But things got better as I moved up to the higher classes. The teachers of the senior classes were very serious and able and I built lasting personal relationships with many of them. We also had a private tutor at home, who coached all the boys and girls of the family. His name was Phanindra Nath Dasgupta and he taught at another branch of the same school. His forte was mathematics, my weakest subject. I marvelled at his ability to solve even the most complex mathematical puzzles with ease. My academic record in school was reasonably good. I would usually secure the second or third place in order of merit. Mr Dasgupta did not conceal his unhappiness that I didn't do better. When the school report arrived, Mother sent me to Father to get it signed. He would go over it carefully and sign it with minimal comment.

We addressed our parents with the second-person pronoun apni, the most respectful (and formal) pronoun in Bengali (the equivalent of 'aap' in Hindi). The same applied to all uncles and aunts. Children in the Bose family would even address their older brothers and sisters as 'apni' if the age difference was large. Uncle Subhas addressed my father with the much less formal tumi ('tum' in Hindi), used between equals, but he addressed my mother, to whom he was very close, as 'apni'. The use of the most familiar form of address, tui ('tu' in Hindi) was virtually unheard of in the Bose family.

It was somewhat unfortunate that we did not receive much encouragement to engage in sports. Father disliked the excitement and hullabaloo of competitive sports. He would make sarcastic remarks about the football games in the Calcutta Maidan that he passed by on his way back from the High Court in the late afternoon. He said he could not understand why crowds went crazy watching twenty-two players chasing after a ball on a field. However, at Uncle Subhas's initiative, arrangements were made to impart physical training to us in the proper swadeshi spirit. A physical education instructor was appointed. His name was Digendra Chandra Deb and he would come in the evenings to teach us physical exercise, how to fight with lathis and daggers, and jiu-jitsu, the Japanese martial art. Mr Deb was from East Bengal and an incredibly strong man. His weight-lifting skills were amazing. Uncle Subhas was of the view that this kind of physical education was necessary for national service.

With Digen Deb's assistance he founded a number of associations of physical training in Bengal, which would impart self-defence skills to young men and women. From time to time we would be taken to lathi and dagger competitions and even take part in them. Annual meets were also held on the roof terrace of 1, Woodburn Park—these were attended by parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts and presided over by Uncle Subhas. There were prizes for the top performers. I demonstrated lathi khela, in which I wielded a stout stick ablaze at both ends from kerosene-soaked cotton wads. The concluding item was a 'challenge fight' with lathis between me and my instructor. Digenbabu won, of course!

Digendra Deb was a staunch nationalist. Shortly after the Partition of 1947—which my father opposed and tried his best to prevent at least in the case of Bengal, a largely forgotten episode of history described towards the end of this book—he came to see us before returning to his home in East Bengal, which had become part of Pakistan. He said he would not leave his ancestral home and hearth and the soil on which he had been born and raised, come what may. He said: 'The country has been divided and we have been betrayed, but we will return like Kalapahar to take our revenge!'[11]

Not everyone in our family environment was a diehard nationalist, however. One highly entertaining character was Birendranath Dutt or Rangadadababu, who was with us during our Kashmir vacation in autumn 1924, and later lived with us at Woodburn Park for a number of years, in a room on the second floor. This grand-uncle of mine was a dandy par excellence, fond of foppish attire and imported perfumes. He was disdainful of what he called 'swadeshiana' and was particularly allergic to khadi. In the family he was known by the acronym 'BNGS', standing for bilet na giye saheb, an Englishman without ever having been to England. He would sit down to eat wearing an oversized napkin around his neck to avoid any spillage on his silk suit. He had good management abilities and was made the manager of *Forward*, the nationalist newspaper founded by Deshbandhu and run after his death by Father and Uncle Subhas. He was good at this job. On returning from work he would dress up in a silk dhoti and kurta and appear reeking of French perfume. He was a favourite with us children because

[11] 'Kalapahar', which means 'Black Mountain', was the assumed name of a particularly fearsome military commander in sixteenth-century Bengal and Orissa. According to some accounts he was a Hindu who converted to Islam. Ed.

he regularly brought us cakes, chocolates and candy from Calcutta's best confectionery shops. He would take us to the circus as well, which made him even more popular.

Rangadadababu had one weakness—he would become incredibly cranky whenever he felt unwell. Once he created a complete ruckus in the middle of the night due to a bout of abdominal pain. Our doctor uncle, Sunil, lived round the corner in the joint-family house. Uncle Subhas went to fetch him. After his banging on the gate failed to rouse anyone, Uncle Subhas scaled the boundary wall, jumped inside, climbed up the rear spiral staircase used by the cleaning staff, and woke his doctor brother.

Rangadadababu harboured a robust scepticism of the independence movement. He would tell us: 'Remember to inform me a day or two in advance, so I can pack up and leave the country.'

CHAPTER 12

After we moved to 1, Woodburn Park, it became clear that Uncle Subhas was trying to get my mother more actively involved in public work. The house had a spacious lawn and he prevailed upon Mother to call women's meetings there. There were lectures by well-known people on various subjects, especially the history and goals of our national struggle. I can remember a rousing lecture by Jnananjan Neogy, a famous orator of the Congress party. He used coloured 'magic lantern' slides, and harrowing scenes of British atrocities during the Indigo Revolt were projected on a screen in our garden.[12] At the beginning and end of the meetings, patriotic songs were sung in chorus. Deshbandhu's daughters Aparna and Kalyani took part in the singing. Mother would also go around selling handspun cloth to raise money for the national fund. After the Civil Disobedience Movement and the Salt Satyagraha were launched, she went around selling 'contraband' salt in small phials in defiance of the Salt Laws which forbade the making or consumption of native salt.

Like Father, Uncle Subhas was always pressed for time. He was completely immersed in national and Congress work. We did not see much of him in the mornings, as it was his habit to rise late after

[12] The Indigo Revolt, neel bidroha in Bengali, was an 1859 peasant uprising across large parts of Bengal against predatory British indigo-planters. Ed.

working deep into the night. He would have his daily shave while still more or less asleep. This was expertly done by our family barber, Hari Charan Das. Hari went around the Bhowanipore area of south Calcutta on his bicycle every morning, visiting its leading houses to shave a host of prominent men of various professions. He was very proud of his list of clients. He became known as 'The Royal Barber'. Even on days when the streets were water-logged after heavy rains, Hari The Royal Barber would be on the move on his cycle.

Uncle Subhas took his lunch very late. It would be served on the marble-topped dining table on the first-floor verandah of Woodburn Park, and Mother would keep him company as he ate. His dinnertime was also late and the arrangement the same. It can be said that he was regularly irregular. After lunch he rested for a while in his bedroom on the top (second) floor. We would often see him late in the afternoon when he came down wearing a neatly pressed khaddar dhoti and kurta, a chadar of the same material flung across his shoulder. The simple outfit suited him admirably. For some time he wore nagras on his feet. Later, he used ordinary chappals as well as kabuli-style slippers.

At times he looked grave but at other times he came down cheerfully, humming the tune of a favourite song. We often heard him singing in the bathroom, mostly popular patriotic Bengali songs, but also Rabindra Sangeet.

I assume his mood was influenced by developments on the political scene. With us children, he was simply a fun-loving, affectionate uncle. He would often tell us stories. I remember he would reverse the characters and actions in a well-known Bengali fable and say solemnly: 'Once upon a time, a big bone had a tiger stuck in its throat....' The more his nephews and nieces protested, the more he insisted he was right, and along with us, he rolled around in laughter. At other times he would say that our heads were coconuts and proceed to demonstrate by holding our heads in his hands and shaking them briskly while making a gurgling noise. He had an endless and creative repertoire of jokes and pranks and he laughed easily and often.

His angry moods were also quite impressive, however. He would become withdrawn, his face would turn red and he'd utter just a few words of disapproval in a low voice. But he had a lot of patience, and rarely became angry.

His appearance turned strangely serene and almost angelic when music moved him. The musician Dilip Kumar Roy, a close friend, held

a series of sessions at Woodburn Park during 1937-38. A large number of family friends gathered for these. Father and Uncle Subhas would sit side by side and listen to Roy render patriotic and devotional songs for hours. Both men would seem to be transported to another world as the music soared higher and higher. Tears would roll down their cheeks.

Occasionally, Uncle Subhas would get petulant at very minor matters. Once, Mother was away from home. He went to Basanti Devi, Deshbandhu's widow, and complained to her that the dhopa (washerman) was taking advantage of Mother's absence and returning his kurtas with buttons torn. 'He doesn't dare do this when Mejoboudidi is around,' he grumbled. Basanti Devi was most amused.

I distinctly remember one particular incident from that time. I was only nine but the memory is etched in my mind even today. It was evening and Uncle Subhas came up the first flight of stairs at Woodburn Park unusually slowly and looking extremely grave. He stopped and stood still in the first floor's hallway. He was like a marble statue. Then Mother came out into the hallway. He handed her a small packet wrapped in paper and said in a choked voice in Bengali: 'A little bit of Jatin Das's mortal remains, please preserve them with care'. In the morning we had all gone to the city centre to watch Jatin Das's gigantic funeral procession, which was led by Uncle Subhas. The young freedom fighter's body had arrived in Calcutta after he died following a 62-day hunger strike in prison in Lahore that I have mentioned earlier. This was in September 1929.

We children often went to public events with Mother. Most were sponsored or organized by Uncle Subhas. He was particularly interested in mobilizing women and went around addressing women's meetings. I frequently dozed off during his long speeches. I was much more interested in folk theatre (jatra) shows on patriotic themes, and physical culture shows such as wrestling, lathi and dagger competitions. Once, I had the chance to watch the famous Bengali wrestler known as 'Gobar Babu' at an event in north Calcutta presided over by Uncle Subhas.

Uncle also organized musical soirees to raise funds for the national movement and for humanitarian causes. I recollect one big soiree held at the University Institute Hall opposite College Square in north Calcutta. Uncle Subhas was on the dais with Dilip Kumar Roy and the revolutionary poet (bidrohi kabi) of Bengal, Kazi Nazrul Islam. Nazrul Islam sang his famous song 'Durgama giri kantar moru dustara parabar hey' while using a gong to accompany himself. Dilip Kumar Roy

performed one of his most popular songs, 'Ranga joba ke dilo tor paye'.

We also went to many family and social events with Mother. At weddings, each of us children wore our best outfit. Mother would dress me in a red silk kurta with a matching dhoti, which I had difficulty keeping on without a belt. I found the family and social events rather boring in comparison to the political meetings and public rallies.

Needless to say, Uncle Subhas had a turbulent life. He was frequently in the headlines of the newspapers after a clash with the police or an arrest. Such news was painful to read but I also felt very proud of him. I kept imagining that I too would do something for the country once I grew up. I started reading newspapers quite early, and right from the front page. I pored over national and international news even though I was too young to fully understand their meaning and significance. Unlike many kids of my age, I barely glanced at the sports page. Only nationalist newspapers and periodicals were allowed in 1, Woodburn Park.

The ground floor of our house was always crowded with barristers, attorneys, clients and other people connected to Father's profession. Then there was a continuous flow of political activists and Congressmen for Uncle Subhas. There was a third motley crowd, of people seeking assistance and favours of various kinds. The throngs of visitors were sorted according to those who wanted to see 'Bose Sahib', meaning Father, and others who had come to meet 'Subhas Babu'. It was difficult to secure an appointment with Father. He was fully occupied with professional work in the mornings and evenings. In between he carried out various other duties—managing the *Forward* newspaper, attending meetings of the Calcutta Corporation, and Congress work.

Father's entourage had a most interesting character—Sailendra Nath Bose, whom we children called Khurodadababu. A distant relative, he was the universal 'khuro' (Uncle) for Father's generation. He worked as Father's professional clerk. Apart from assisting Father at the High Court, he spent most of his time in our house and was highly entertaining. He maintained Father's accounts and his desk was piled high with bulky registers. He had much difficulty keeping up with Father's methodical and disciplined ways. Often he would say, 'Oh dear, I forgot again,' and Father would tell him: 'Khuro, memory pills, take memory pills!' That aside, he was a warm-hearted man who was friendly to everyone and always trying to help. As Father got more and more involved in the freedom struggle he had to cut down on his professional commitments. Khurodadababu was mortified when Father declined lucrative briefs on

account of his mounting public duties. He would tell us mournfully: 'Your father is spurning Lakshmi.' On evenings when Congress meetings were held downstairs, he would come upstairs and sit with us, saying: 'There is a football match going on downstairs and undesirable elements are running about.' When Father was arrested in 1932 and went to prison for a protracted period, Khurodadababu was very downcast. But he stood by our family through thick and thin.

CHAPTER 13

It was the mid-1960s. One evening, I was relaxing in my chamber on the ground floor of 1, Woodburn Park after seeing my patients, when an unscheduled visitor sent in his business card. He was a top officer in a large government-owned firm. As soon as he entered he told me that he had not come on any professional business. Our house fell on the route between his home and office and so he passed by our place twice a day. Every day he did a silent namaskar as he passed. I was a bit surprised at his words and stared at him. Then he said: 'Look, Sisir Babu, whatever I have achieved in life is because of your father. I was born into a desperately poor family. He funded my education. His house is like a shrine to me. Please excuse the intrusion.'

My dadabhai, Janakinath Bose, was a self-made man who grew up in poverty. He got through school and then college with great difficulty. Mother told me it was he who asked my father to assist some poor but deserving students once Father was established in his profession. As a child, I watched with curiosity the large gathering of young people downstairs at the beginning of each month. Khurodadababu was in charge of maintaining the records and accounts. He was not very good at it. When Father demanded an up-to-date statement of the disbursements he would fumble and say: 'I am only behind by a month, will catch up soon!' Father would talk to the students individually and check their progress reports.

When Father went to prison for several years in 1932, these students suffered greatly. He mentioned his obligations to needy students in one of his representations to the government from prison. Two young men whom Father helped later stood by our family between 1941 and 1945, when Father was incarcerated for nearly four years at a stretch. One was Satyen Dutt and the other Motilal Sahoo. Satyenda, as I called

him, built a successful career in textile technology in Japan and then returned to India. During the war, he would turn up at home bearing clothes and other gifts for the younger children of the family. I still remember how he risked his safety to come over and see me after I was severely injured in a clash with the police in central Calcutta during the Quit India protests in August 1942. Motilal Sahoo, who qualified as an engineer, supported us as well. My friendship with these two men lasted a lifetime.

Uncle Subhas's close contacts with political workers included leaders and members of the armed revolutionary organizations that emerged in Bengal towards the end of the first decade of the twentieth century. Many of these young fighters regarded him as their inspiration. Father's relationship with them was also close and deep, but in a slightly different way. He would quietly look after their families when they were in jail or on the run. He also made a particular effort to save the lives of young militants who were on trial for grave offences. It is now known that Father offered the money necessary to get the legendary militant Benoy Krishna Bose out of the country to safety. Benoy Bose, who was from East Bengal, was then on the run after assassinating Lowman, the inspector-general of police of Bengal, in Dhaka in August 1930; and grievously injuring Hodson, Dhaka's superintendent of police, in the same incident.[13] A medical student—as I became later—he was a member of the Bengal Volunteers (BV), a revolutionary group that grew out of the volunteers Uncle Subhas recruited for the Congress's Calcutta convention in 1928 (Jatin Das was one such volunteer in 1928). Benoy was such an outstanding person that Father tried very hard to keep him safe.

That didn't work out because in December 1930, Benoy, along with two East Bengal BV comrades, Badal Gupta and Dinesh Gupta, conducted a daring raid on the nerve-centre of British rule in Bengal, the Writers' Buildings secretariat on Dalhousie Square in the heart of central Calcutta. They shot dead Colonel Simpson, Bengal's notoriously brutal inspector-general of prisons, during the raid. After a running gun battle the three BV boys were cornered. Badal consumed potassium cyanide and died instantly, while Benoy and Dinesh shot themselves with their own revolvers and were critically wounded. Benoy died of

[13]In early 1925, Mr Lowman, then Bengal's assistant inspector-general of police, had escorted Subhas Bose from Calcutta to prison in Mandalay, Burma. Ed.

his injuries after a few days, while Dinesh survived and was hanged in July 1931. Badal was eighteen, Dinesh nineteen and Benoy twenty-two.[14]

After Father's arrest in early 1932, a family friend with influential contacts in the government tried to intercede on his behalf with a high British official. The official told him: 'We know that Sarat Bose makes a great deal of money. He pays a lot of income tax. But when we checked his bank balance, we found it to be negligible. We know he does not waste money on unnecessary luxuries, nor does he have any vices. So where has the money been going? We know that he is not only bankrolling the Congress in Bengal but also funding the terrorists.'

◆

The young men and women of Bengal who took to armed struggle exercised a hypnotic influence on my mind as I grew up.[15] The nationalist press published news of their daring deeds and, very often, ultimate sacrifice at the altar of the motherland. The news of the Chittagong Armoury Raid, conducted by 'Masterda' Surya Sen and his group in 1930, electrified the whole of India. In the next few years, there were nearly daily reports of trials of captured revolutionaries, executions of many and deportations of others to the notorious Cellular Jail in the Andaman Islands. It was a difficult but inspiring time to live through. Father and Uncle Subhas were moved to the core of their being by the courage of these youths. On the day of a hanging, an atmosphere of mourning would descend on our house. Later, when I was older, Father told me more than once: 'I have seen and known many of these boys and girls at close quarters. They are made of sterling gold' ('khati shona' in Bengali).

When the trials started in the Chittagong case, Father made a number of trips to Chittagong as defence counsel. During that time Indumati Sinha, the sister of one of the leaders on trial, Ananta Sinha, came and stayed with us for several weeks. She became very friendly with us children and told us many interesting stories.

Uncle Subhas's life had a single direction and purpose—my country

[14]The former Dalhousie Square on which the red-brick Writers' Buildings stand is known as Benoy-Badal-Dinesh Bagh, or BBD Bagh, in honour of the trio. The British judge who sentenced Dinesh was assassinated shortly afterwards by another revolutionary, Kanailal Bhattacharya. Ed.

[15]The peak of revolutionary activity in Bengal was 1930 to 1934. Ed.

above all else. Father's situation was a bit different. He not only had a booming professional career, he had a family to look after. His family responsibilities were not limited to his own wife and children (eight in all, born between 1912 and 1932). He was also the central figure of the extended Bose family. And his public obligations were overwhelming. He rarely had any free time on his hands. Sometimes this caused misunderstandings with people who felt he was aloof and inaccessible.

In such a large immediate and extended family, it was normal for some members to fall sick from time to time. In my generation, I ranked first in this respect. I was repeatedly ill through my childhood with a variety of ailments. Father stayed cool when any family members fell ill. He had great confidence in his doctor brother, Sunil. Whether it was my mother or any of us children who was ill, Uncle Sunil was the first port of call, and if further specialist advice was necessary he would decide whom to consult.

I realized later when I grew up that Father's stoicism in adversity was rooted in his deep spiritual faith. During his two long terms in prison, there were many serious illnesses as well as a number of deaths in the Bose family. During his first incarceration (1932–1935), he lost his father Janakinath in late 1934. During the second (1941–1945), his mother Prabhabati passed away at the end of 1943 while he was imprisoned in distant south India.

◆

A bit about Uncle Sunil here. He was exceptionally good-looking, witty, and was a most engaging conversationalist. He returned to Calcutta in the late 1920s after taking advanced training in cardiology in England and started his private practice at a well-appointed flat on Harrington Street, a walking distance from Elgin Road and Woodburn Park. My mother called him whenever there was a medical problem at home. Uncle Sunil would arrive promptly and come up the stairs, calling out to us loudly by our nicknames. After finishing the professional bit he would entertain us with stories from his personal experiences. He would often drive us across to his flat and feed us delicious confectioneries—cakes, biscuits and chocolates. Thanks to him we got to eat excellent imported British stuff that we could not get at home because of the ban in our household on all British products. His views were not nationalist at all and he made no bones about that. He admired the British and the English way of life, and was highly anglicized in his

dress, manners and lifestyle. But that made no difference to personal and family relations. Uncle Sunil's medical expertise was unreservedly at the disposal of Father and Uncle Subhas, their political colleagues and even Bengal's revolutionary militants.

While writing about Uncle Sunil, another family character came to mind—my youngest maternal grand-uncle Ranendranath Dutt, Majanani's youngest brother. He was the youngest maternal uncle of Father, Uncle Subhas, Uncle Sunil and their brothers, and we kids called him Chhotodadababu, youngest grand-uncle. He shared Uncle Sunil's smart Harrington Street flat in the early 1930s and was a pukka Englishman in appearance, manners and habits. He would make caustic comments when served Bengali food, and was especially hard on our vegetables: 'Oh no, not that wretched potol [painted gourd] again, not that bogus baegun [aubergine]!' He later married an Englishwoman while studying in England.

Despite the differences in personality and political outlook, there was one thing in common between Father, my paternal uncles and their colourful bunch of maternal uncles. They were all, with a few exceptions, extremely fond of good food and liked to eat it in copious quantities, Uncle Subhas included. All of them pitied our generation for being unable to compete at eating huge amounts of food. Both Chhotodadababu Ranendra and another maternal grand-uncle of mine, Satyendra Nath Dutt (Laldadababu) had an affinity for omelettes. After finishing dinner the former would rinse his mouth, lie down on his bed and ask for a piece of omelette to be dropped into his mouth so he could go to sleep with the taste in his mouth and have sweet dreams of omelettes.

Whenever Laldadababu visited us, he was served a large omelette.

He was noted for gourmandizing. Once, when he was young, he took a bet at the Elgin Road house that he could eat all the rice cooked for the large joint family there by himself. He nearly won the bet. He was polishing off the last of the rice when he exceeded his capacity and threw up.

CHAPTER 14

It was February 1932. Father was away on professional work in Dhanbad, in the coal-mining belt of Bihar close to the border with Bengal. One

morning we woke up to find our house surrounded by police. Soon, a large posse of them barged into Woodburn Park. They had a search warrant. We were told that nobody would be allowed to leave the premises during the search. Mother managed to telephone a few close family friends, who arrived a little later. It was a new experience for me, just turned twelve. My siblings and I watched the search with a mixture of curiosity and anxiety.

On the ground floor, three rooms—Father's office, Uncle Subhas's office, and the library—were stacked with books. There were law books and books on history and politics as well as works of literature. The police ransacked Father's office and made a mess of his papers. They examined every letter and document minutely. Then they took the books down from the shelves and examined them one by one, page by page. After finishing on the ground floor they went around the first and second floors, looking and poking at whatever seemed suspicious to them. It was evening before they were finished. They gave us a list of the books and papers they had seized and then took them away. Somehow we lost that list and were unable to recover anything even after Independence. So we lost a big chunk of Father's library. A few years later a large collection of Uncle Subhas's books was also lost. When he returned by ship from Europe to India in 1936, he had sent a large number of books packed in a wooden box separately by freighter. He was arrested immediately upon arrival in Bombay and most of the books were confiscated at Customs.

Whilst our house was being searched in Calcutta, the government put into motion its plan to arrest Father at the bungalow he was staying at in Jharia, a town near Dhanbad. I heard the story from Father later. He and a few friends were relaxing after dinner when the darkness was pierced by headlights of a couple of cars. Father guessed immediately what this was about. He was not brought back to Calcutta after being arrested. Instead he was taken to an obscure place, called Seoni, in the Central Provinces, now Madhya Pradesh, and lodged in a sub-jail there. On arriving in Seoni, Father found his younger brother already there. About a month earlier, while returning from Bombay after meeting Mahatma Gandhi, Uncle Subhas had been arrested at the railway station in Kalyan, near Bombay, and taken to Seoni.[16]

The coal-fields region of Bihar close to the Bengal border has a

[16]The forests around Seoni are the setting of Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book*. Ed.

significant place in the political history of the Bose family. Father's first arrest took place there. In the late 1930s and again in the early 1940s this area was the site of some very significant events pertaining to Uncle Subhas, which I describe in detail later in this book.

I had been visiting this area since my early childhood. My fourth paternal uncle, Sudhir Chandra Bose, worked there. He was a specialist in coal and coal products. His wife, my aunt Shantilata, treated me as her own child ever since I was a baby. I fell quite ill as an infant and my mother put me in the care of this aunt because Mother herself was in poor health. From then on, a deep bond developed between me and Aunt Shantilata. I used to call her Shanti-Ma. She did not have a son of her own. Her elder daughter, a striking-looking girl called Chhaya, was slightly younger than me. She was a lovely person and I treated her like a sister. Chhaya tragically died of illness in the mid-1930s. I spent a number of very enjoyable school vacations with Uncle Sudhir's family. I have rarely come across anyone as open-hearted and affectionate as Uncle Sudhir. The dry, rugged and undulating landscape of the Bihar coal-fields was a contrast to both Calcutta and the lush green of most of the Bengal countryside. In the evenings Uncle Sudhir would take us for drives in his funny little Whippet car, of American make. Thus, since my childhood I knew the coal-fields region and its townships, like Sijua, Jamadoba, Katras and Jharia, quite well.

Uncle Sudhir was typical of the Bose family in his fondness for good and rich food. According to him, the best medicine for a fever was luchis eaten with mutton curry. Indeed, he ate this when he was indisposed himself. He would strongly object to Aunt Shantilata imposing any restrictions on my diet due to my delicate health.

In 1939, Uncle Subhas spent several weeks at Uncle Sudhir's bungalow at Jamadoba to recuperate after the Congress's annual convention in Tripuri (Madhya Pradesh), which he had presided over despite his ill health and in the face of venomous hostility from some of his colleagues. His 'fault' was that he had been re-elected Congress president for a second term in a democratic contest in which he defeated Mahatma Gandhi's preferred candidate. Jawaharlal Nehru and Rajendra Prasad came to meet him in Jamadoba in order to resolve the deadlock; the efforts did not succeed due to Gandhi's obduracy. Then, in January 1941, I drove Uncle Subhas overnight from Calcutta to Bararee, a coal-fields town close to Dhanbad. He spent the day at my eldest brother's bungalow in Bararee and the next night I drove him to the nearby

Gomoh railhead, from where he boarded the train to Peshawar. There is much more on all of that later in this book.

There is a simple yet profound saying in English: a friend in need is a friend indeed. We realized this during Father's two lengthy imprisonments, 1932–35 and 1941–45. Mother was faced with serious problems both times. She had to run a large family on a small fraction of Father's normal income. Father spent freely and never put away money for emergencies. Then, a year after Father's arrest in early 1932, Uncle Subhas, who was also imprisoned, went to Europe for medical treatment, which proved to be expensive. With Father behind bars, the entire responsibility of managing the family's finances fell to my mother.

At that difficult time, a few true friends came forward to assist us. The most notable ones were Pravas Chandra Basu and Nripendra Chandra Mitra. I addressed both of them as Kakababu (uncle). About a year before his arrest, Father had sent my eldest brother Asoke to Germany for higher studies. Soon after the arrest, Uncle Pravas told Mother that my brother's expenses in Europe would be his responsibility. Father could repay him when he returned. We were already quite close to Uncle Pravas and his family. They would often join us for our autumn vacations in the mountains, and Uncle Pravas was with us in Kashmir in 1924. The relationship deepened further in Father's absence. Then there was N.C. Mitra, who would visit our home almost daily in the evenings to check on us children. A close friendship also developed between him and Uncle Subhas, who appointed Mr Mitra as his personal attorney with powers to act on his behalf during his enforced absences in jail and abroad in Europe. Decades later, Nripen Mitra became the chairman of the Netaji Research Bureau for quite some time, even when he was ninety years old he took an active interest in the work of the Bureau. Apart from these two men, during these tough years, the family received moral and practical support from my mother's only brother, Ajit Kumar Dey.

The health of both Father and Uncle Subhas deteriorated in Seoni prison. The government kept moving Uncle Subhas from place to place—Madras, Bhowali, Lucknow, Jubbulpore—ostensibly for medical reasons! After Seoni, Father was kept in the central jail at Jubbulpore. When Uncle Subhas's condition deteriorated, talks were opened by the family with the British government. After meeting Uncle Subhas in hospital in Lucknow, Mother travelled to Delhi to talk to the 'Home Member' of the Government of India, the notoriously tough Sir Maurice Hallett.

Eventually, agreement was reached that the Government would let him go to Europe for medical treatment, but he would be formally released only after he left the shores of India. In February 1933, Uncle Subhas left from Bombay by ship, with Vienna as his final destination.

From Europe Uncle Subhas, still rather thin and weak, sent Mother a profile photograph of himself. Haren Sengupta, my art instructor in Calcutta, asked me to sketch a copy as an exercise in portraiture. I still have that sketch.

CHAPTER 15

Uncle Subhas did not get a chance to see his parents before leaving for Europe. When Mother was negotiating with the Home Member about him, all that she could get the Government to do was to bring him to Jubbulpore Central Jail to spend some time with Father before his departure. I have already described our family reunion with the two brothers there.

For me, just about to turn thirteen, the prison meeting with my father and uncle was quite an experience. The brothers were acutely conscious of the rights of political prisoners. They also wanted to make sure that those who came to see them in prison were treated respectfully. If this did not happen, they kicked up a row. For example, serious trouble ensued if there were orders to carry out body searches of visiting family members. In such cases, especially if women of the family were involved, Father and Uncle would invariably refuse the meeting. This happened later as well when Father was in detention in south India during World War II. As per the rules, police officers were always present when the visits took place, so there was little scope for free conversation. The brothers therefore had to devise various tricks to communicate important information or instructions. In Jubbulpore, they had created a screened-off area for worship and meditation in their barracks. Before we left, they asked Mother and other women in our delegation to go and take a look at that area. Small pieces of paper were tucked under the idols of the deities. Mother and the other ladies duly collected those and took them out of the jail inside their garments.

Uncle Subhas was given to preparing food for family members who came visiting in prison. He would demand extra rations from the jail authorities for this purpose. Ordinary convicts cooked various recipes

while he instructed them. These culinary experiments were not very successful. I remember being served meat that was far too tough due to under-cooking, and stone-hard sandesh.

Arrangements were made in Jubbulpore in January 1933 to get warm clothes, caps and shoes ready for Uncle Subhas's sojourn in Europe, as quickly as possible. A tailor and a shoemaker were brought into the jail to take his measurements. Uncle had very definite views on how he would dress in Europe. He had decided to dress in Indian attire for public meetings and receptions and when he met important people. He was also thinking, I believe, of evolving a standard national dress that might be acceptable to Indians of all regions and communities. For himself he chose a long achkan-style coat worn with European-style trousers, a Kashmiri cap and laced shoes. He is seen in that outfit in many of his photographs in Europe. He did of course make exceptions and would occasionally appear in public in well-cut Western suits.

Uncle Subhas was very particular about personal conduct and manners when in foreign lands. He would say that all Indians were duty-bound to behave properly when abroad because they were unofficial ambassadors of the country. He also told us how he had seen Indians in Europe unwittingly create an embarrassment by coming out in tight-fitting churidars. These would sometimes resemble European undergarments; naturally, people in those countries were shocked to see Indians roaming about in them.

Uncle Subhas was taken to Jubbulpore railway station from the jail in an ambulance under heavy police escort. Upon arriving at the station, he was put on a stretcher and taken to a reserved compartment on the Bombay Mail. The news leaked, however, and a huge crowd gathered at the station. All of us visiting from Calcutta were present to see him off. As per the agreement, the Government did not formally release him from custody until the ship in which he sailed from Bombay had left Indian waters and entered the high seas.

Father was left alone in Jubbulpore Central Jail. His health deteriorated further. Negotiations were initiated with the government on the basis of his health needs and the precarious financial situation of his family. Ajit Dey, Pravas Basu and Nripen Mitra took the lead. Questions were also raised about Father's detention by members of the Congress Opposition in the Central Legislative Assembly in Delhi. In response to one such question the Home Member of the Government of India, Hallett, replied tersely: 'Government have reasons to believe that he is deeply involved

in the terrorist movement.' The government was extremely reluctant to consider bringing him back to Bengal, even as a prisoner. Eventually, when his medical reports became truly alarming they agreed to intern him in his own bungalow at Kurseong under stringent conditions.

Being a prisoner on his own property must have been a strange experience for Father. A couple of years later, in 1936, Uncle Subhas had the same experience when he was similarly detained at the Kurseong bungalow.

After Uncle Subhas's departure for Europe and Father's transfer to Kurseong, Mother took me along on a visit to Dadabhai and Majanani in Puri. Dadabhai had a house in that famous seaside resort-cum-temple town of Orissa. Mother wished to report to my aged grandparents on everything that had transpired. She felt very sorry that she had failed in Delhi to get the government to let Uncle Subhas see his parents once before leaving for Europe. Dadabhai reassured her as much as he could. He said to her in Bengali: 'I have always regarded you as my majanani [daughter], but what you have accomplished now is more what a son is expected to do for an old father.' Uncle Subhas was never to see his father again, because Janakinath died in late 1934, a few days before Uncle Subhas was able to arrive in India from Europe.

After the visit to her parents-in-law in Puri, Mother took us children to Kurseong to stay with Father. The government gave permission for this, provided he abided by all the other conditions they had imposed.

Our bungalow on Gidhapahar hill was two and a half miles outside Kurseong.[17] It overlooks the Hill Cart Road that connects Darjeeling to the plains, perched about 500 feet above the road. Two armed sentries were posted at the bungalow round the clock. We suspected that the police also used some of our neighbours to keep an eye on us. The officer-in-charge of Kurseong police station visited the bungalow often. Besides, the Darjeeling district's superintendent of police, a Briton, made an appearance from time to time. Father's medical care was in the hands of the civil surgeon posted in Darjeeling, Major S.B. Mukherjee. He was a kind and generous man. Although he was assigned by the government, a warm friendship developed between him and Father. We stayed in touch with the Mukherjee family for many years afterwards. Father was deeply grieved by Major Mukherjee's sudden and untimely

[17] Today, as the town of Kurseong has expanded significantly since then, the bungalow is on its outskirts. Ed.

death and did his best to be of some assistance to his family.

On health grounds, Father was permitted to take a daily walk on the Hill Cart Road, but with a strict limit of one mile in either direction from Gidhapahar. We children would trot along with Father and the two armed guards followed us. Embarrassing situations developed during these walks. Lots of people going up to or coming down from Darjeeling town would recognize Father, stop their cars and get down to greet him. Many would start talking to him. Father would put his finger to his lips to indicate that he was not allowed to talk and they would depart with disappointed looks on their faces.

CHAPTER 16

Our house in Gidhapahar and the winding Hill Cart Road brings back many memories of Father and Uncle Subhas. The reason is that I spent a lot of time in their company in that house, and walked with them on that stretch of the Siliguri-Darjeeling road innumerable times. In the matter of studies and on vital questions of life I received so much from the two brothers. I can still hear Father reading from Swami Vivekananda or Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, or from Shelley or Keats, in the living room of our bungalow. I also remember Uncle Subhas reminiscing about his childhood and youth days, or explaining national or international politics in simple language.

When Father was in detention in Kurseong I was in the higher secondary stage of my school career. It appears that adversity brings some good in some form. During the school vacation, Mother took us all to Kurseong to be with Father. Thanks to the British government, I benefited a lot from these visits. Father taught me certain essential things. First, he must have thought that my knowledge of English was not adequate. So he asked me, when he was in detention, to write letters to him in English. He would return my letters after correcting my mistakes in red. I think he believed that the basis of education was a sound knowledge of language and literature. Whatever we learn later is received and assimilated through the medium of language and literature—be it ideological matters or science, history, politics and so on. What Father emphasized very much was that to learn a language well we must memorize good texts as much as possible. Many of Father's friends knew that he could recite at great length from Milton's

Paradise Lost. I heard him so many times doing just that at the dining table at Kurseong.

In the case of Bengali literature, Father first gave us books by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. Apart from getting us to read from those, he selected long passages from his works for us to memorize and recite to him. I can still remember how difficult it was for my sister Mira and me to learn by heart a long passage on the worship of Goddess Durga from one of the novelist's famous books. In regard to English, he gave us the Bible and the works of Swami Vivekananda. As for himself, he also read the Holy Quran. He thought the best way to learn English was to read the Bible regularly. I had to memorize some of the well-known psalms and recite them to him. When we recited anything to our father, our diction and accent had to be perfect.

Swami Vivekananda's collected works were always on his table. Father would pick chapters and passages for us to read. I had to memorize, word for word, the Swami's address at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago (1893) and recite it to him. Father said he had hardly ever read better English by an Indian. He also said that Vivekananda's message had that tremendous impact because he spoke and wrote in a language unsurpassed in its power and quality. I can recall my father reading to us in his golden voice the memorable words of Vivekananda: 'May the bell that tolled this morning in honour of this convention be the death knell of all fanaticism, of all persecution with the sword or with the pen, and of all uncharitable feelings between persons, wending their way to the same goal.'

Some of the English poems he gave us, I had to learn by heart as well. One of his favourites was Shelley's 'The Skylark', another was Coleridge's 'The Ancient Mariner'. Father introduced me to Rabindranath Tagore with his short stories. Among foreign authors, he loved classical Russian novelists and writers, particularly Leo Tolstoy. The first book by Tolstoy that he gave me to read was *Twenty-Three Tales*. Later, he made me read some of Tolstoy's essays. He was of the opinion that Mahatma Gandhi was inspired most by Tolstoy's beliefs. Later, I read many works of Tolstoy, Turgenev and Dostoevsky from Father's library.

Father's health improved somewhat in Kurseong. However, a prisoner is never at peace with himself or the outside world. Besides, my parents were extremely concerned about Uncle Subhas's health and his treatment in Europe. From time to time Uncle informed us about what doctors were saying about a possible diagnosis. Some medical opinions were

optimistic, some not. He was trying out different methods of treatment. After spending some time in Vienna, he went to the health resort of Karlsbad (Karlovy Vary) in Czechoslovakia for treatment. But the gall-bladder problem never left him. Eventually, he had to have a surgical procedure.

Given the family's straitened circumstances at the time, my mother had to scramble to find sources of support to keep Uncle Subhas in reasonably comfortable conditions abroad as well as pay for his treatment. Some of the family friends who provided support at this time included the likes of Kumar Devendra Lal Khan, the zamindar of Narajole in Midnapore district. His father, Raja Narendra Lal Khan, was a father-figure for the revolutionary youths of Midnapore. Devendra Lal Khan offered his support to Uncle Subhas, saying that by doing so he was only fulfilling a national duty. Since that time he was accepted by the Boses as a member of the family and we found another uncle in him. Subsequently, Father would never refuse or neglect any invitation from the Narajole estate. He would say that our debt to Devendra Lal Khan had united the two families.

In his profession, Father was a pupil of Sir Nripendra Nath Sircar, whom he called 'Guruji'. In politics they were poles apart but they held each other in deep affection and respect. Father told us often that he believed in Deshbandhu C.R. Das's saying: 'Life is larger than politics.' The relationship between Father and Sir N.N. Sircar was a shining example of that in practice. I find that nowadays the opposite is true of our social and public life. Many do not know that Sir N. N. Sircar who was then Advocate-General of Bengal and later Law Member, Government of India, gave financial assistance to my mother privately for Uncle Subhas's expenses in Europe. Mother took me with her several times to meet Sir N. N. Sircar at his Elgin Road residence. The veteran lawyer would make affectionate enquiries about Father and Uncle Subhas and then pass an envelope quietly to us.

Apart from guiding us in studies, Father laid down another routine for us while we were with him at Kurseong. The children would sit together in the evening and recite prayers from holy books. I heard from my elders that Uncle Subhas had first introduced this ritual at the 38/2, Elgin Road house. We continued with this practice during our school years, but prayers were more regular at Kurseong. The prayers I remember were an invocation to the Mother Goddess 'Bhabani' and then to Lord Shiva.

CHAPTER 17

The British government played a trick on Uncle Subhas when they allowed him to proceed to Europe for medical treatment in 1933. I discovered this while studying old papers at the India Office Library in London in 1971. On the one hand, they alerted British diplomatic representatives in a number of countries in Europe to the visit of this very dangerous person and impressed upon them the necessity to keep a close watch on him. At the same time, the India Office in London, responsible for the government's India policy in those days, informed them that only two countries, Italy and Austria, were mentioned in his passport as his destinations. It might appear from such entries in the passport that he did not have entry permits to other countries, including England.

The papers admitted confidentially that in reality any subject of British India, holding a British Empire passport, could not be prevented under the law from visiting England. The government added in secret despatches that Subhas Bose was under the wrong impression that he could not lawfully enter England. This impression, they said, should not be dispelled on any account. This is because, the papers say, Bose should be kept away from two places—London and Berlin. At both these places there were a large number of Indian students. The government apprehended that Subhas Bose's influence on them could be dangerous. Although in the 1930s the British government got away with the bluff, in the 1940s Uncle Subhas took his revenge and demonstrated that he could travel to any part of the world in the midst of a World War.

In the middle of 1934, Dadabhai was taken seriously ill when Father was in detention at Kurseong and Uncle Subhas in exile in Europe. He was brought down to Calcutta from Cuttack for treatment. For three or four months doctors fought to save his life.

The last joyous family occasion for Dadabhai was the wedding of our seventh uncle, Sailesh Chandra, in Calcutta in 1931. The youngest uncle, Santosh Chandra, had already died. Uncle Sailesh was therefore the youngest to be married. The entire Bose family assembled in Calcutta for the occasion. After the wedding a group photograph was taken of the large family on the lawn of the Woodburn Park house. There were more than a hundred people of four generations in the photograph. The photographer had a hard time accommodating the large assemblage within the frame of his camera. Fortunately, Uncle Subhas was out of

jail at the time and took part in the festivities.

Since 1931 a series of mishaps in the family, including the arrest of his two sons Subhas and Sarat and the deaths of several near and dear ones, broke Dadabhai mentally and physically. I have poignant memories of his last three months at the Elgin Road house. For the most part he was bedridden. Uncle Sunil took charge of his treatment. Ayurvedic physicians also came and went. Relatives and friends crowded around his sickbed. Particularly in the evenings, the house looked like a railway station. Nowadays doctors rarely allow visitors to a critically ill patient. And more often than not, patients are treated in a hospital or a nursing home. But Dadabhai's bedroom—now known as Netaji's bedroom at Netaji Bhawan—was always full of people. I often wonder, both as a doctor and as a human being, which is better: to remain in one's own home when ill, surrounded by near and dear ones, or to remain confined in a hospital room all alone. Anyway, I felt then that there were too many people jostling around in Dadabhai's sickroom. Many people tried to talk to him even when he was half in coma, and there was far too much noise. Besides, from time to time when he was in a crisis, messages would go out in all directions and friends and relatives would pour in in large numbers. I was bewildered when I found groups chanting prayers in a loud chorus around this grand old man who was about to die.

When the doctors felt there was hardly any chance of recovery, the government was urged to bring my father down from Kurseong and home-intern him in Calcutta to be by his father's bedside. He was interned in the Woodburn Park house but was allowed to visit the one on Elgin Road. Father walked to and from each house, watched and followed closely by plainclothes police. Both Father and Uncle taught us to identify these creatures, whom in Bengali we called tiktiki, or 'lizards'. Later, the early training in recognizing 'lizards' came to be quite useful to me.

At times, when Dadabhai felt better, he would call Father to his side and speak to him softly in a most affectionate manner. One day, when some of us were around, we heard him tell Father: 'You are the "madhyamoni" (central star) of the family. I have no doubt the prestige and traditions of the family will be safe in your hands'. On the eve of Dadabhai's death, Father had to do something extremely painful. When the doctors told him that Dadabhai's life was ebbing away, Father calmly wrote a letter that begged the government for permission in advance to

accompany his father's remains to the cremation ground. He had to do this because when the time came it might not have been possible to obtain the necessary permission at short notice. The government, as a rule, took considerable time in taking such decisions regarding important political prisoners. For some reason, Father let me read that letter.

After Father's arrival in Calcutta, it was decided by the family that arrangements would be made to get Uncle Subhas home from Vienna by plane. As far as I know, that was his first flight. In those days, aeroplanes flew only by day. The speed was also much slower, of course.

It took at least three days to travel from Europe to India. Even with the best arrangements possible, Uncle Subhas failed to reach Calcutta in time. He arrived a day and a half after Dadabhai passed away.

On its part, the government drew up its plans fast. We went to the Dum Dum airport in a big party. The airport itself was quite small but there were extensive grounds around it. Apart from the hangars and the runway there were hardly any built-up areas. We found on our arrival that the police had laid a tight cordon all around the airport. Nobody could get in or out. We played hide-and-seek with the police for a while but failed to enter the airport or get near the plane. As soon as he disembarked, Uncle Subhas was served with a stiff internment order. He would have to remain inside the family house all the time, perform the last rites of his father there, and then leave the country. He was taken in a car under strong police escort and driven to the Elgin Road house.

I still remember the deeply emotional reunion of the two brothers on the porch of the house.

CHAPTER 18

The personality of the head of a large joint family influences everyone, old and young, often in perceptible and sometimes in less obvious ways. Dadabhai Janakinath's character and conduct brought harmony, unity and peace to the entire family. There were inevitably different types in a large family like ours. At one end was the revolutionary, idealistic stream characterized by dedication to a cause and the spirit of sacrifice. At the other end were men and women interested only in the humdrum of worldly existence and pursuit of material happiness, often steeped in dead superstition and dogma. In between were people

of mixed character and ambivalent beliefs.

The revolutionary, idealistic stream was, in fact, rather small—limited to my father and Uncle Subhas. People are totally wrong when they think that the entire Bose family was cast in the mould represented by the two brothers. They could not expect the same standards of personal and public behaviour from the rest of the family. In my view, what is true of a family applies to the larger society and the nation as well.

Janakinath was the symbol of the unity of a large number of people made in different moulds. I am inclined to think that for a country or nation a unifying symbol can also be essential to maintain harmony in diversity.

With Dadabhai's death in December 1934, an era in the history of our family came to a close. In families with great traditions and achievements, the question of carrying the lamp forward becomes important when an era comes to an end and a new one begins. Most people look at the question from the materialistic viewpoint of inheritance of properties and assets. In our family, too, the question of division of Dadabhai's rather extensive estate came up as a matter of course. Mercifully, this question was settled amicably and satisfactorily by arbitration through the good offices of Sir N.N. Sircar.

To me, the larger and much more important question was the maintenance and continuance of the heritage represented by Dadabhai's life of struggle, sacrifice, honesty and selfless service. This mantle fell inevitably on Father and Uncle Subhas in the absence of any other deserving candidates.

Of Dadabhai's three brothers, we encountered only one. Dadabhai was the youngest. His third brother, Debendranath, was a very lovable person. He was an educationist and eventually became principal of a college. After retirement he lived in the Badurbagan area of north Calcutta. Mother took us there often to see his family. He was a very handsome man, like Dadabhai, and evoked respect by his impressive appearance. As a teacher he showed wonderful results in his own family. He lifted his wife and daughter-in-law from the primary level of education to the heights of English literature. My mother told us that this grand-aunt came into the family only formally literate but went on to discuss Milton and Shakespeare with her husband and others with ease. Debendranath died about four years before Dadabhai.

Of the six aunts on my father's side, the fourth one died early. But her husband, Sarojendra Kumar Dutt, and their children always

maintained close relations with our family. The eldest, Pramila, became a widow early in life. Father often invited her to visit and stay with us. During her visits I had to share the room with her. She had insomnia and read a lot at night—mostly English novels or stories. She tried to keep me awake on various pretexts in order to have company. She had a sound knowledge of English and her accent was perfect. She would often correct the English pronunciation of her nephews and nieces. She was very good at cooking vegetarian cuisine and we looked forward to her dishes. I often thought how the lives of such accomplished and talented women were blighted by early widowhood. On the whole, I have very pleasant memories of my paternal aunts because of their affectionate nature. The third, Torubala, and the fifth, Prativa, were extremely gentle. The second, Sarala, and the youngest, Kanaklata, were made of sterner stuff.

In the shadow of the great family tragedy in December 1934, Father and Uncle Subhas had the opportunity to exchange information and views on a whole range of issues of personal, family and public interest. Uncle apprised Father of his experiences in Europe while Father updated him about the political situation in the country. It is my impression that the Bose brothers chalked out their political plans for the future at this time. I observed the brothers as they sat on the floor facing each other in a room on the second floor of the Elgin Road house, and had lengthy discussions. One evening, Uncle Subhas called me up to the second floor and talked to me in the corridor. His serious manner embarrassed me not a little. He asked me if I had made up my mind as to what I would do after matriculation. My plans were still very vague. I only mumbled in reply that I had decided to take up the science stream rather than the humanities. This was a good opportunity to have a discussion with my famous uncle about my future. He asked me pointedly if I wanted to be a lawyer or a doctor or an engineer or if I wanted to 'serve the country' ('Desher kaj korbe?'). I wasted this opportunity due to my shy nature and diffidence.

I had two papers to take in the annual school tests on the day after Dadabhai's death. Father asked me whether I would be in trouble if I did not appear for the exam. Fortunately, even after dropping the two papers I did well overall.

The family observed mourning for a full month after Dadabhai's death. There was a strong stream of orthodoxy and superstition in the family. There were rituals galore during the mourning period and on

the final day of Sradh. Father and Uncle Subhas were both deeply religious, but they never made a public exhibition of their faith. As for the religious sensibilities of other people, they were open-minded and tolerant. They would never think of offending anybody's religious beliefs.

The Sradh ceremony was an elaborate affair. I was most surprised to see the scale of offerings made by the seven sons—bedroom furniture, a whole range of utensils, various kinds of food and so on. What amazed me the most was the presence of a cow and her calf at the entrance to the hall. This was a token offering to the priests who were conducting the service. I later heard that the priests had, even before the ceremony had begun, arranged for the disposal of the furniture and utensils with eager prospective buyers. The cow and the calf was returned to their owner after the latter received a substantial cash payment for his services. I lost whatever faith I had in such rituals after I learned about the petty business deals conducted in the name of religion.

I can never forget what I saw on the day of feeding Brahmins, a ritual to ensure the peace of the departed soul! A riotous crowd of Brahmins literally invaded the Elgin Road house. We wondered how the food that was being served was disappearing so fast. We discovered that only part of the food was being eaten and the greater portion was being thrown into large bags stitched to the long shirts our priestly guests wore.

For their own satisfaction, Father and Uncle Subhas invited a group of intellectual Brahmins to lunch. They included the famous Bengali writer Sarat Chandra Chatterjee, who left a beautiful message in my sister Gita's autograph book.

CHAPTER 19

When Father was in Jubbulpore Central Jail, Mother went to visit him once with my maternal uncle Ajit Dey, leaving us behind with an aunt. We children felt sorry that we could not go with her to see Father. To console us, Father sent a letter for us through Mother, bypassing the censor. The letter was in beautiful English starting with 'My children' and was much too philosophical for us. To cheer us up he wrote that it was not possible for us mortals to always appreciate the inscrutable ways of the 'Divine Mother'. His personal suffering and sacrifice must be serving some 'higher purpose'. He would return to us, he said, once

that purpose was fulfilled.

Both Father and Uncle Subhas often invoked divinity in the form of the Mother Goddess. In Father's letters, there were always references to the Divine Mother. We did not know then that in the 1940s, during the Second World War, a more severe test was waiting for him. His long incarceration during the war in distant south India completely broke his health, although it did not crush his spirit.

I have written about Uncle Subhas's experiences in prison. A letter from Father to Mother, written originally in Bengali, gives a glimpse of Father's life in jail: 'Please do not be too anxious on my account. I am of course alone here, but believe me my spirit is unbroken and I hope by the grace of God it will remain so. It is true that when Subhas was here, we could spend our time discussing various matters. There is no such possibility now. However, I am somehow using my time for studies; I have therefore asked you for more books. Subhas has taken away a number of them. The poor man [Subhas] will suffer more, particularly because he is ill. But since childhood God has made him a sannyasi and he is used to prison life. Subhas will not return for another three weeks. Till then I shall spend my time reading. To say that I do not get anxious on various counts will not be correct, but if you are in good health and muster up mental strength I shall also be free of anxiety. I take good care of my health, make my own arrangements for cooking and from time to time give instructions regarding it. So you see, I can also look after such things when the need arises. When I am not inclined to read, I start chatting with the convicts about their experiences in acts of theft, robbery, and the like.'

Father was released in the middle of 1935. Uncle Subhas was then in Europe. Even though he was in poor health he did a tremendous amount of work for his country in many European countries during his sojourn there between 1933 and 1936. He wrote regularly to Mother and to friends in India. Efforts were made to publish reports of his activities in Indian newspapers and journals. The seventh and eighth volumes of his *Collected Works*, published last year by the Netaji Research Bureau, consists of valuable material on his life and work in Europe in the 1930s. He sent clippings from newspapers and journals in Europe about his activities to Mother from time to time. We looked forward to them.

Most important, he wrote his book, *The Indian Struggle: 1920-1934,* during his exile in Europe. The book is written in clear and simple English. Even undergraduate students can read it without difficulty. He

asked for information and material from home for writing the book. This was sent to him as far as practicable. But in Austria, where he wrote the book, books and papers on India were hardly available. He therefore had to write relying largely on his memory. He brought one copy of the manuscript with him during his hurried trip to India in early December 1934 to see his dying father. But the police seized the manuscript as soon as he landed in Karachi. The book was published from London in January 1935. But the British government immediately banned its entry into India.

Uncle Subhas met Emilie Schenkl (later our aunt) in Vienna when he chose her to be his secretary to assist with writing the book. He also developed deep and abiding friendships with a number of highly cultured families in Vienna and other parts of Europe. Many of them became close friends of the family back in India. Among them were Mrs Naomi Vetter, Rene and Hedy Fulop-Miller, Dr and Mrs Richter of Vienna, Alex and Kitty Kurti of Berlin, Madame Maud Gonne MacBride and Mrs E. Woods of Dublin. All of them contributed valuable archival material to the Netaji Research Bureau. Mrs Kitty Kurti wrote a very interesting book on Uncle Subhas which we published from Calcutta in 1966.

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One of the great misfortunes of being in subjugation for a long time is that a nation develops a slave mentality. We had been a British colony for a century and a half. We were taught to look at the world through 'British eyes'. For us the only foreign country to look up to was England. Of our national leaders, Uncle Subhas was the first to teach us to see and judge the wider world with our own eyes and a free mind. What is more, he campaigned tirelessly in different countries of Europe in the name of India's freedom fighters. At the same time, he reminded his countrymen about the historical links that our country had with Central Europe. Decades after independence, I feel that attaining political independence is comparatively easy, but to acquire free minds as individuals and as a nation is more difficult. The slave mentality is still very much in us. We compete amongst ourselves as to which among foreign ideologies is good or bad for us. Already in the 1930s, Uncle Subhas had declared that India must seek to find for itself its own social and political system for reconstruction based on the values of liberty and justice.

After two years of medical treatment, doctors in Vienna finally decided to operate on Uncle Subhas. They diagnosed that a diseased gall-bladder was the cause of his troubles. A famous Viennese surgeon, Professor Demel, operated on him. Uncle told us a year later in Kurseong, in 1936, about one of his strange experiments during the operation. He wanted the operation performed on local anesthesia so that he could see for himself what was being done to him. But as the operation progressed he complained of severe pain and the doctors had to put him under general anesthesia.

In those days surgical operations performed under general anesthesia were not very safe. Patients were therefore asked to leave a will-like message. When asked to do so, Uncle Subhas wrote only a line on a small piece of paper which was to be sent to his attorney in Calcutta, Nripendra Chandra Mitra. The note Mr Mitra received read: 'Love to my countrymen, my debts to my elder brother.'

CHAPTER 20

While in detention in Kurseong in 1934, Father was elected a member of the Central Legislative Assembly in Delhi as a candidate of the Congress Nationalist Party, a Congress group opposed to the British government's policy of separation of electorates between Hindus, Muslims and Scheduled Castes, and unfair distribution of seats in legislatures among them. The Opposition in the assembly made a lot of noise demanding father's right to participate in the proceedings, but to no avail.

When orders for Father's release came one afternoon in the middle of 1935, I was at school. I asked the headmaster's permission to leave and virtually ran all the way home. Father found the situation in the country completely changed, especially in Bengal. The Bengal Congress needed a leader of stature. One of the two, J.M. Sengupta, had died in detention in 1933. Uncle Subhas's return from Europe was quite uncertain. All the groups and sub-groups in the party wanted Father to fill the void.

The British government had just passed the Government of India Act 1935, offering constitutional changes including provincial autonomy in governance. Nationalists could see that a complex challenge was approaching. The situation was very complicated, particularly in Bengal. The Communal Award that the British imposed on us for the solution

of the communal problem between Hindus and Muslims turned out to be a medicine worse than the disease. Hindu-Muslim relations worsened and Hindu and Muslim communal organizations raised their ugly heads. The Congress needed a strong leader to face the situation.

The news of Father's release also created a stir in the High Court. Clients made their way to our house in large numbers to seek out their favourite counsel. Newspapers reported: 'Mr Bose flooded with briefs'.

In 1935 we had the first wedding at 1, Woodburn Park. There is a strange story to tell about the marriage. After fixing my elder sister Mira's marriage with a very eligible groom of his choice, my father went to Majanani, his mother, with the news. Before Father had a chance to break the news, Majanani told him that she had just had a dream. My grandfather appeared in the dream and was dressing up to go out. When she asked him where he was off to, my grandfather replied he was going out to meet Mira's groom. When Father told Majanani that he had just met the groom, she told him it was a good omen and that he should finalize the match rightaway. Later, many in the family called my brother-in-law, Surendra Nath Roy, the 'son-in-law come out of a dream'.

In the matter of wedding ceremonies, Father wanted to introduce certain modern trends. He wanted to discard the large community dinners of Bengali weddings and have a tea-party instead. Relatives and friends objected to the proposal, fearing that the shastras would be violated. Father, however, stuck to his guns. Eventually, both the community dinner and the tea-party were on the programme, and both were held on a grand scale. Most of the women of the family, however, stayed away from the tea-party.

The pressure of Congress work on Father increased drastically in 1936. In Uncle Subhas's absence he was elected president of the Bengal Congress. The annual session of the party was held that year in Lucknow under the presidency of Jawaharlal Nehru. The Left forces were then gathering strength in the Congress and, generally speaking, Jawaharlal, Uncle Subhas and Father were sailing in the same boat. Uncle Subhas decided to return to India and attend the Lucknow Congress session. When the news leaked out, he received the following letter from the British diplomatic representative in Vienna:

12th March 1936

I have today received instructions from the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to communicate to you a warning that the Government of India have seen in the press statements that you propose to return to India this month and the Government of India desire to make it clear to you that should you do so you cannot expect to remain at liberty.

J.W. Taylor
His Majesty's Consul

Uncle Subhas decided to defy the warning. He was put under arrest as soon as he arrived in Bombay in early April 1936.

After becoming Congress president, Nehru paid a number of visits to Calcutta in 1936 and 1937. At Father's invitation, he used to stay with us at Woodburn Park. The room on the ground floor he occupied came to be known as 'Panditji's room'. He was a charming person. We children were always sneaking around to be near him. He had a simple but smart lifestyle. His amiable secretary, S.D. Upadhyay, would often take me to Panditji's room early in the morning for a special task. I had to light the gas geyser to heat the bath water. I wondered why. Pandit Nehru said: 'That gadget is too complicated, I cannot handle it.' When I went in I often found him doing exercises on a carpet spread out on the floor.

Pandit Nehru was extremely careful and choosy about his food. Both Western and Indian style cuisine was laid out for him in the dining room next to his bedroom. He would pick things with care, eat sparingly and avoid rich food. When he came to the dessert and fruits he would cut an apple or a sandesh in half and offer the other half to one of us, saying: 'Will you have the other half?' After working hard the whole day, he would only have a light dinner, usually scrambled eggs and coffee. However, when other guests were present, rather elaborate meals were prepared. After surveying the table he would look askance at Father and say jokingly: 'Sarat Bose's dinners are a nuisance, they never end!' He smoked but counted his cigarettes, one or two after a meal. I remember buying for him tins of Marcovitch Black and White cigarettes. Father relaxed his Swadeshi injunctions for the honoured guest.

Much later, in 1960, I went to meet Nehru by appointment at

Parliament House. I found him smoking rather heavily. I told him: 'You seem to be smoking too much. You were always a light smoker!'

He replied: 'I heard Subhas was also smoking heavily, chain-smoking in fact, during the war. Isn't that so?' When I said yes, he asked me: 'Do you smoke?'

I said: 'Occasionally'.

He smiled gently and said: 'Is this an occasion?' Then he offered me a cigarette. As we smoked together, he said: 'It's the strain, you know, that's why I smoke. I suppose it was the same with Subhas.'

There were crowds round the clock at home when Pandit Nehru was in residence. There were lots of Congressmen of course but also non-political people of all ages. He could manage crowds well on the whole but also lost his temper on occasion. Two things he disliked heartily: To waste thirty minutes after making an appointment for five, and people offering their respects by touching his feet.

When he went campaigning for the Congress he would address as many as eighteen to twenty meetings a day. I went to a number of meetings in and around Calcutta jointly addressed by Father and Pandit Nehru. Nehru had a weak voice and could not function without a microphone. He was given warm water in a flask when he went out. He sipped from that between speeches.

CHAPTER 21

We were at the dinner table with Uncle Subhas at the Kurseong bungalow. Kaloo Singh, our faithful bearer was serving us Western-style food. The first course was soup. As always we tilted the soup plate away from us to fill up the spoon. Uncle was doing just the opposite, tilting the soup plate towards himself. He looked at us and asked, 'Why do you eat soup in that way?' We did not understand the question. He explained, 'You are doing it the British way, others in Europe do as I am doing.'

Uncle Subhas felt that our blind imitation of British habits, manners, and tastes indicated the absence of a free and healthy mind. Such a mentality whether of individuals or of people at large was the result of long decades of slavery. Citing examples, even if seemingly trivial ones, he tried to impress upon us the need to free ourselves of this imitative tendency in all departments of life.

During his European sojourn from 1933 to 1936 he was greatly

influenced by the lifestyle, culture and traditions of Europe, particularly of Germany. And after mixing closely with highly educated and intellectual circles in Central Europe who were friendly to India, he saw that we could have an equal relationship with them. That was because there was no question of one being the master and the other the slave. Indologists and intellectuals of Germany and Central European countries were drawn to India's civilization, religions, philosophy and culture a long time ago. On the other hand, the British originally came to our country as traders and eventually became our masters. There was a world of difference between the two.

I am writing about the summer of 1936 when Uncle Subhas was in home-detention in our house at Kurseong. My second oldest brother Amiyanath and I were spending our vacation with him by special permission of the government. Our father had been in the same situation a couple of years earlier. The restrictions on Uncle Subhas and Father were similar. Uncle could not meet or talk to anybody without special permission. There was a strong police guard. He could walk one mile either way on the Hill Cart Road with two armed guards following him. We had a good and fruitful time: we talked, ate, and went for walks with him. Till then and for a long time thereafter I talked very little. I, the 'silent boy', only listened and observed him and his ways.

To be a 'silent' person has advantages as well as disadvantages. A reticent person, as I am, may feel lonely in family and society. On the other hand, if one's eyes and ears are kept open and one is serious and observant, one can gain a lot. For a long time, I could not carry on a proper conversation with Father or with Uncle Subhas. But eventually, I became so free and open with them that I myself was surprised at the transformation. The other advantage of talking less is having time to think, and think deeply. Even after he attained a preeminent position in our public life, Mahatma Gandhi kept silent one day in the week. I remember Gandhiji answering questions by scribbling on small pieces of paper on his 'silent days', regardless of the visitor's importance.

One afternoon, when I was a schoolboy, there was a furious discussion on my future career at the tea-table. Father was there. Most people present thought that I could never become a successful barrister like him, as I hardly talked. Father said that was not necessarily true. His professional guru, Sir N.N. Sircar, was also a 'silent boy' but grew up to be a leading barrister.

After surgery on the gall-bladder, there is usually digestive insufficiency for some time. I had the same experience after my own gall-bladder operation later in life. Uncle Subhas therefore had to be very careful about his diet in 1936. Kaloo Singh gave him very simple, bland food. I had the feeling that he did not like this food very much but he had no option but to put up with it. He was very fond of sumptuous food and would often over-eat. After over-eating he would complain, usually in jest, of the food sitting solidly in his stomach. Fried Bengali delicacies like singara and kochuri, as well as chicken patties and cutlets, would make him immensely happy.

In 1937, my parents, Uncle Subhas and all of us children spent the Durga Puja vacation together at Kurseong. The two brothers competed with each other at the dinner table, much to our merriment. Father was barred from eating sweets but he was much too tempted to comply. Uncle Subhas was still banned from eating rich (especially fried) food but he too flouted dietary restrictions. About the same time I remember him at the Elgin Road house, buying hot chicken patties from the street vendor out of the window of his room overlooking the side lane. He thus evaded the observant eyes of his old mother who lived in the next room. He heartily enjoyed the contraband food in the company of his nephews and nieces.

While in detention in Kurseong in 1936, Uncle Subhas insisted on long walks every morning and evening. The rains had already started when my brother and I arrived. Rains in the Himalayas defy umbrellas and raincoats. As we walked, rainwater poured down Hill Cart Road in rivulets. But nothing could stop Uncle; walk we must. And he talked and talked—about his childhood and youth, about the strange characters he had to work with in public life, national questions, international politics, and much else.

He would often say, clearly with a lump in his throat: 'Do you know, when I was a kid, so many people would say "That boy is nuts, he will achieve nothing in life!"' I listened and thought that the unkind comment was not entirely off the mark. I could see much that was not strictly 'normal' or 'sane' in my uncle. What ordinary mortals regard as achievement, Uncle Subhas did not achieve. There is, possibly, a fine line between insanity and greatness.

CHAPTER 22

Uncle Subhas was greatly interested in experimental psychology in his younger days and had even thought of taking it up as his vocation. During our time at Kurseong in 1936, the problems, habits and behaviour of various family members, and the educational and career prospects of the children in the family, came up for discussion. Uncle analysed and studied the personalities and behavioural patterns of people from a scientific and psycho-analytical standpoint. From time to time he would provide his assessment of the character and prospects of the boys and girls of our generation in the family. He had clear ideas about the strengths and weaknesses of many of us.

He would talk less about the people of his own generation. But I had no doubt he had analysed most of them in his own mind quite thoroughly. He had kept himself out of the limitations imposed by family life. When family problems or unpleasant situations came up for discussion, he took a dispassionate view and told us repeatedly that to manage family relationships one has to acquire liberality of mind and a generous character. He tried to impress upon us that to overcome the little sillinesses and petty squabbles of family life there was no way other than to be tolerant and generous.

After touring many countries and meeting various people in Europe, Uncle Subhas had acquired a keen grasp of international affairs. He felt sorry that most of our political leaders were hardly interested in the subject. At the time, most countries in Asia and Africa, except Japan, were under colonial rule. The United States was still largely uninvolved in world affairs and the Soviet Union showed little interest in the fate of subject countries, except to promote its own stooges. He thought therefore that a good understanding of European affairs was essential to follow the march of events in world politics.

Our struggle was against British imperialism. Which powers, old or new, could challenge or weaken the British and in so doing, help our fight for freedom, directly or indirectly? That was his major concern.

Uncle Subhas's childhood was not particularly happy or peaceful. There was, of course, the usual routine of going to school, passing examinations, winning scholarships, and the rest of it. But he grew up through a continuous and intense struggle with himself, his own conscience, and his family, friends and society. Many other leaders, such as Pandit Nehru, came into public life after attaining maturity by an

accident of circumstance or under the influence of another great person. But in the case of Uncle Subhas, the inner struggle started at the primary school stage. All this I understood for the first time in 1936 at Kurseong as we walked—and talked—up and down the Hill Cart Road with him.

Towards the end of 1936 he was not keeping well. The winter climate in the mountains was not suitable for him. The British government brought him down from Kurseong to Calcutta and admitted him to the Calcutta Medical College Hospital where numerous political activists and revolutionaries had been interned and treated during the decades of our freedom struggle. It was in the same hospital that I studied a few years later.

In end-1936 and early 1937, we would go and see Uncle in the hospital in groups. Father was extremely busy preparing for the 1937 India-wide provincial elections. We could see that Uncle was very restless because of his inability to play a role in an important event. He had to be content with helping Father with suggestions and advice from his small hospital room.

Majanani, my widowed paternal grandmother Prabhabati Bose, was not keeping well either. It was not possible for her to visit Uncle Subhas regularly in hospital. The government agreed to bring Uncle down to the Elgin Road house for a couple of hours in the evening under police escort. A crowd of relatives and friends gathered in the house to see him.

We had a guest from Europe at the end of 1936 at Woodburn Park at Uncle Subhas's invitation—Frau Hedy Fulop-Miller from Vienna. She had looked after Uncle in Vienna. She was drawn instinctively to Indian philosophy, music and culture. She was Hungarian in origin and had been a top-class opera singer in her younger days. She gave a recital one evening for the Calcutta station of All-India Radio. The station director, Mr Majumdar, and music critics said that European music of such high quality had rarely been broadcast from AIR Calcutta.

As a result of her stay with us for some weeks, this Viennese lady became almost a member of the family and grew particularly close to all of us children. Hedy Fulop-Miller remained in contact with us for many years afterwards. I had an interesting correspondence with her after the establishment of the Netaji Research Bureau in Calcutta in 1957; prior to that, I met her several times in Vienna after World War II.

Uncle Subhas was released in April 1937. He was given a big public

reception in Calcutta. His health, however, was far from satisfactory. He went up to Dalhousie, the well-known hill resort (in present-day Himachal Pradesh), to recuperate and spent a couple of months there. His hosts there were Dr and Mrs N.R. Dharamvir. Uncle Subhas had come to know the couple when he was a student in England in 1920-21, and they became very close friends. Victoria Dharamvir was English, of Russian origin. Her affection, sophistication and cultured tastes greatly influenced Uncle; he called her 'Didi' (older sister in Bengali).

Dilip Kumar Roy, Uncle Subhas's friend from childhood, told us that Uncle's friendship with Victoria Dharamvir totally changed his view of European women. About a year before the sojourn in Dalhousie, one of the Dharamavirs' daughters, Sita Dharamvir, stayed with us for some time while she was doing a post-graduate medical course in Calcutta. We had the chance to meet her mother at that time and were completely charmed.

After his return from Dalhousie, Uncle Subhas threw himself into public work. The All India Congress Committee (AICC) was due to assemble in Calcutta in October. Uncle came up to Kurseong during the Durga Puja vacation to join Father and draw up plans for this important political gathering. We watched and were intrigued by their intense confabulations at the Gidhapahar bungalow.

CHAPTER 23

When two people hold each other in deep mutual affection and respect, there is likely to be heartache and a sense of loss on either side when a third person comes between them. Some time before Uncle Subhas's release in April 1937, Majanani asked my mother to let Uncle stay with her at the Elgin Road house instead of Woodburn Park. Majanani wanted Uncle to be with her in her widowhood, a very natural desire on the part of a mother. My mother carried this message to Uncle Subhas, probably without taking care to explain the situation fully. The result was that both were deeply hurt. My mother thought she was being deprived of her ward, whom she had looked after for many years. On the other hand, Uncle Subhas complained in a poignant letter that my mother was shaking him off and was putting an end to a very happy chapter in his life. In Bengali parlance, it was a case of abhimaan (emotional hurt) on both sides. Both my mother and Uncle Subhas were sensitive

people. Mother tore up Uncle's letter after a while.

Let me come back to October 1937, when Uncle Subhas spent some time with us at Kurseong. Arrangements were going on for the impending high-level Congress meeting in Calcutta. Being the Congress president, Pandit Nehru would of course be in attendance, as would Mahatma Gandhi. Both accepted Father's invitation to stay with us at Woodburn Park.

The two brothers had to ensure that all preparations for the meeting were made in good time. Letters went out in all directions. Visitors from Kurseong and Darjeeling made a beeline for Gidhapahar when the news got around that the two Boses were camping there in the family bungalow. Often, these visitors wasted precious time and held up important work. When a not-so-welcome guest showed up, the brothers became playful and each tried to pass the unwanted visitor on to the other. Father would say: 'This is a friend of yours, Subhas, you take care of him!' Uncle would say: 'The man is so much friendlier with you, Mejdada, you entertain him!' Such exchanges amused us kids greatly. In most cases Father 'won' and poor Uncle Subhas had to take charge of welcoming the undesirables hospitably.

Uncle Subhas's health had recovered by then. Soon after his arrival, he threw a challenge to everyone to join him for early-morning walks. It was already quite cold in the Kurseong autumn and accepting the challenge meant getting up before sunrise. In 1936, I had heard him categorize a number of members of our generation of the family as 'weak-minded'. I was reluctant to be placed among them. I accepted the challenge. The clever slept under their warm blankets while I had to get up and walk to save my honour. He called me or tapped on the door every morning and made sure that I was properly dressed. The walk was a hard contest between unequals. By that time, his pace of walking had increased considerably. Who knew that I was competing with the future Commander-in-Chief of the Indian National Army! I fell behind repeatedly, despite a desperate attempt to keep up with him. Frequently, I had to make short sprints to catch up. He would take me to Mahanadi from Gidhapahar, a distance of three miles, at the same fast and steady pace. I longed for a break before the return journey. But he just made a right-about-turn and resumed the walk in military style.

Pandit Nehru had stayed with us more than once already. So we were familiar with his lifestyle and habits. But we knew nothing of Gandhiji's daily routine, habits, likes and dislikes. My parents and Uncle

Subhas were rather anxious on this account. I did not know then that Mahatma Gandhi knew my grandparents. Majanani mentioned in a letter to Uncle Subhas that Gandhiji visited them in their house in Cuttack in 1925 and enquired after Uncle, who was then imprisoned in Burma. I have also heard that at that time, Gandhiji held a meeting in our ancestral house in Cuttack.

In 1937, Mahatma Gandhi was the undisputed leader of the nation. His entourage would consist of about six people. It was decided that the entire second floor of our house would be placed at his disposal. There was a large terrace where he could walk and where his prayer meetings could be held. A part of the outhouse was also set aside to serve as his kitchen and bakery.

The elders came down to Calcutta a few days ahead of us to look after the final arrangements for the big occasion. To avoid crowds, Mahatmaji was taken off the train at a wayside station before Howrah and driven straight to 1, Woodburn Park. Pandit Nehru and his sister Vijaylakshmi Pandit were already in our house when we youngsters arrived from Kurseong. A room on the first floor was specially furnished and decorated for Mrs Pandit. Panditji's daughter Indira was also in Calcutta but she stayed elsewhere. She was a very delicately built, shy and reticent young woman at that time.

I had never seen Mahatma Gandhi until then, and prepared myself to go up and see him. In the hall in front of his room I found Uncle Subhas. He said: 'Come, let me introduce you to Mahatmaji.' As I entered the room, he asked me to offer pranam to Gandhiji. I found a man of rather small size, sitting on his improvised bed on the floor. He was wearing old-fashioned gold-rimmed glasses, and writing. After I did my pranams and Uncle told him who I was, he looked up at me for a moment with a slight smile and made a gentle nod. On the whole he did not seem to care who I was. I wondered how this 'Mickey Mouse', as Sarojini Naidu once called him (his ears stuck out), could be the unchallenged leader of a large country. I must confess I was rather disappointed when I saw him that first time. He was evidently engrossed in some important work, and was not inclined to take notice of a youngster like me (I was seventeen). But as the days passed and I saw him again and again in different situations and varying moods, I was increasingly influenced by his singular personality. Eventually, I had no doubt in my mind that in him we had a most extraordinary leader.

He stayed with us on a number of occasions in 1937 and 1938. I

had the chance to see many people from all walks of life—men, women and children, coming over to seek his *darshan*. Of the Congress leaders, apart from Pandit Nehru, I remember Rajendra Prasad, Vallabhbhai Patel, Sarojini Naidu and Abul Kalam Azad quite well. In Rajendra Prasad I found an amiable and very modest person, a devoted follower of Gandhiji. He suffered from asthma and had difficulty climbing up to Gandhiji's room on the second floor. Vallabhbhai looked very grim and had a forbidding presence which kept us away from him. Maulana Azad was Gandhiji's regular companion during his evening walks on the terrace. He had a very handsome and attractive personality and looked every inch the learned man that he was. Sarojini Naidu kept all of us in high spirits with her ready wit and brilliant conversation. Her English was like music. She made friends easily. She ate with relish and as she ate she reminded herself loudly and repeatedly that her doctors had forbidden such gastronomic indulgence.

CHAPTER 24

In the late 1950s I was coming home to Woodburn Park in a taxi. The elderly Sikh driver talked with me on the way on all manner of subjects. When we reached the portico of our home he said to me: 'Why did you not tell me that you wanted to come to Sarat Babu's house? This place is very well known to me. I have brought so many visitors here.' Then he remembered an incident from the late 1930s. He said: 'Gandhiji was staying here then. We came in a large party [of Sikhs] to attend his prayer meeting. The terrace was full and we were jostling and arguing in front of that front door. Eventually, the glass on that door shattered into pieces under our pressure.'

As he recounted the episode, a memory suddenly came back to me. We had a hard time controlling crowds during Gandhi's prayer meetings. One evening I was at the front door holding tightly on to the collapsible iron gate. The terrace was full and there was already a large crowd of people struggling to move up the staircase. I was trying my best to persuade the waiting crowd at the portico to not insist on entering the house. I argued with them with folded hands that after all this was a residential house, not the maidan, and space was limited. I asked them to come another day. One fierce gentleman shot back at me: 'I do not accept your argument. Gandhiji is a public man, so

wherever he stays becomes a public place. You have no right to deprive us of our rights.'

At prayer-time our terrace overflowed with people. A large number waited in the hall and more fought on the stairs to come up. On the road in front of the house, large crowds collected and raised slogans: 'Gandhi Maharaj ki jai!' Before sitting down for the prayer meeting, Gandhiji would from time to time offer a glimpse of himself to the crowd below. When they sighted him they became exultant and shouted slogans loudly and repeatedly. The music at these prayer meetings was not limited to 'Ramdhun'; patriotic and other devotional songs were sung too, most stirring when Dilip Kumar Roy sang them. He also sang prayers in English. One evening he sang Henry Francis Lyte's *Abide with Me* and Gandhiji was deeply moved. The serene atmosphere he created by his music can hardly be described. He brought with him a young talented singer and disciple, Uma Basu. After listening to her Gandhiji called her 'The Nightingale of India'.

Dilip Kumar Roy was a person one can never forget. Before Gandhiji's arrival, Mr Roy stayed with us for some time during one of his rare visits to Calcutta from Sri Aurobindo's ashram in Pondicherry. Apart from his elevating music, he kept the entire family spellbound with his wit, humour and lively conversation. At lunchtime we would sit down with our mother and us around him in the south verandah of our house. He would regale us with all kinds of stories and challenge us to compete with him in reciting popular Bengali rhymes in the correct accent and without faltering. We would invariably lose to him in such contests.

Dilip Kumar Roy wore saffron robes. I wondered how a sadhu in saffron could be so sociable and full of laughter. His deep friendship with Uncle Subhas was well-known. We did not see much of him for some years after the war. I got in touch with him some time after the foundation (1957) of the Netaji Research Bureau. I also visited him once in his own ashram in Poona (now Pune). He very generously made a gift of all of Uncle Subhas's letters to him to the archives of the Bureau. He also continued to take a lively interest in our work and encouraged me to go forward with it. He was the guest of honour at two large gatherings at Netaji Bhawan. He would tell me repeatedly: 'This is very great work, Sisir, let nothing stop you. If the country forgets Subhas, that would be the saddest thing of all.' I felt very flattered when he accepted my plea that he write about Uncle Subhas. He titled his

book on his friend *Netaji the Man*.

One evening, there was the famous tribal *Chhau* dance of Seraikella, Orissa, after Gandhiji's prayer meeting. It looked as if our terrace might collapse under the impact of so many dancing feet! Then one evening there was Bratachari dance led and directed by the founder of the Bratachari Movement, Gurusaday Dutt. The movement worked towards social and spiritual improvement. What a noise they made with music, drums and sticks!

Gandhiji had regular and brisk walks morning and evening with his long stick in one hand, resting the other on somebody's shoulder. In warmer days he would also sleep on the terrace on a simple bed with mosquito curtains. He rose around 4 a.m., which was much too early for me. So I never witnessed his morning prayers or walks. He retired around 8 p.m. Even now I wonder how he could do so much without keeping late hours. His punctuality was absolute without any relaxation and no exceptions. His dinner time was 6 p.m., not a minute this way or that. If any important visitor called at dinnertime, he was to have the interview while Gandhiji ate.

Gandhiji had around him a group of devoted and competent staff. Of them the most important and able was his principal secretary, Mahadev Desai. Desai maintained strict discipline and order in the midst of so much activity. He worked very hard, never showed any irritation and always wore a smile. He knew Bengali well. He would from time to time write things in Bengali and show his work to us. Gandhiji was also learning Bengali at this time.

Mahadev Desai's assistant was Pyarelal, who was a rather serious person and not as sociable. The others in the party were Sushila Nayar, Kanu and Abha Gandhi. Gandhiji's wife Kasturba also came for a few days. She was a charming old lady with a dignified bearing.

Early in the morning goats arrived, the bells dangling around their necks tinkling melodiously. They were carefully inspected before some were milked for Gandhiji's meals. It was common knowledge that Gandhiji drank goat's milk. But his eating habits appeared to us to be quite odd. In a large wooden bowl, he mixed boiled vegetables with homemade bread, curd and plenty of garlic and ate the mixture with relish. We wondered how this strange mix tasted. He had fruits to follow. He had his own views, strongly held, about health and diet. He claimed to have worked out this plan of eating after long and careful experimentation and observation. He dismissed doctors with disdain,

even a physician of Dr Bidhan Roy's stature. Pyarelal baked his bread in a locally improvised contraption. We did not like this Gandhi brand of brown bread. In those days, Calcutta's Great Eastern Hotel made very good brown bread. He was persuaded to taste it for a change. He agreed that their bread was superior to the homemade variety.

CHAPTER 25

Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru were the two most important guests at 1 Woodburn Park in the middle and late 1930s. Besides them, so many others, and not only political leaders, came to our house during that time. They were from various professions; some were artists and writers. Young people, particularly students, were excited to watch two of their idols, Pandit Nehru and Uncle Subhas, in action together. At the Calcutta meeting of the All India Congress Committee in October 1937, the two youthful leaders were the principal attraction. Autograph-hunters were after them all the time. If properly approached at the right moment, it was not difficult to get autographs out of them.

With Gandhiji the rule regarding autographs was totally different. Heaps of autograph books would be waiting in one corner of his room every day. With each book a five-rupee currency note had to be tendered. Gandhiji collected money for his 'Harijan Fund' in this way. Many women who came for his darshan often took off some of their ornaments and made a gift of them to the Fund. Many autograph-seekers wanted his signature in English rather than Hindi. Special appeals were necessary for autographs in English. Once I made a plea to him personally, on behalf of an autograph-seeker, to kindly write in English instead of the Devnagari script. The five-rupee fee was lying inside the autograph book. Gandhiji eyed me for a while in his inimitable way, then gave me a mischievous smile and said: 'Look, I am doing this favour for your friend for now. But if anybody else again asks for an autograph in English, please tell him that the charge is ten rupees and not five.'

Gandhiji did not have any qualms about making demands of his countrymen and -women in the national cause. Later, Uncle Subhas, I think, emulated this, and more, when he asked his countrymen and -women in Southeast Asia to renounce everything, including life itself, for the country's freedom.

The more I saw Gandhiji the more impressed I was by his exceptional

personality. Some of his ways were not just unusual but novel. In private or public life he was not prepared to accept anything without experimenting with it in his own way. He told Dr Bidhan Roy and my doctor uncle Sunil Bose that he did not care for the Western system of medicine. If anyone objected to his habit of eating garlic in more than reasonable quantities, he would say that he had found after trial that garlic kept his blood pressure under control. He would get mud from the banks of the Hooghly River and lie down for hours with mudpacks on his forehead and abdomen.

In some other matters, he was scientific. For instance, he had his fruits and vegetables soaked in potassium permanganate solution to free them of germs. He mixed glucose from the well-known German producer, Merck in some of the beverages he drank. He was more than fastidious about cleanliness and personal hygiene. Father arranged for special fixtures and facilities in the toilet attached to his bedroom. But when it came to cleaning the toilet, he insisted on doing it himself, just as he washed his own clothes.

My mother and my sister Gita served him food and they had to do so according to his instructions. Going to the market for Gandhiji's needs was the responsibility of a cousin, Rabindra Kumar Ghosh. He collected items of the highest quality from Calcutta markets. If there was any criticism of the purchases, my cousin was deeply hurt. In such situations, Gandhiji invariably took his side. He would loudly declare: 'Rabi Babu always gets the best things for me.' At this, our dantida as we called him, was overwhelmed with gratitude and tears rolled down his cheeks. I have rarely seen a man of such transparent sincerity as Dantida. He was always prepared to go out of his way to do good and help others. He was close to my parents. Since Gandhiji's visits, his attachment to our family further deepened and lasted till his death decades later. He would visit us almost daily. He would appoint himself manager of every family event and keep us entertained with his lively talk. Father affectionately called him '*Danti Maharaj*'! When I planned to smuggle a letter to my mother in Calcutta from a prison in distant Punjab in 1945, I gave his address to the messenger. I knew I could trust Dantida fully.

During his visit to Calcutta in 1937-38, Gandhiji gave himself a very special assignment in regard to political prisoners in Bengal. The British government always took a very unbending attitude towards Bengali prisoners. Even after a truce was declared between the government

and the Congress under Gandhiji's leadership, they would offer amnesty only to prisoners across the country who were votaries of non-violent 'passive resistance'. The Government considered Bengali prisoners to be revolutionary and refused to grant amnesty to them. Uncle Subhas was of the opinion that whenever there was a truce between warring parties, all political prisoners must be released without raising issues like non-violence and violence. He sought Gandhiji's support in the matter. Gandhiji was talking on the one hand to the British Governor of Bengal and on the other to political prisoners in Bengal jails. Although Gandhiji's and Uncle Subhas's approaches to the issue were different, their aim was the same. After a period of stiff negotiations between the parties, most of the prisoners were released. They all joined the Congress and identified themselves with the popular mass movement.

India's two great men, Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore, met at our house twice. I was present at one of these meetings. On the first occasion, Tagore rushed down from Santiniketan to see Gandhiji when the latter became very ill with high blood pressure in 1937. The meeting in 1938, which I saw, was very touching. Suddenly, one evening, news was received that Rabindranath was about to visit Woodburn Park to meet Gandhiji. He arrived soon thereafter. As he could not climb upstairs, he was received in what was known as 'Panditji's room' on the ground floor. Gandhiji came down briskly and there was a cordial meeting. When Tagore left, Gandhiji bent down to bring his slippers to his feet and helped him put them on. The press was not informed of the visit. Even so, the media got wind of it and rushed to Woodburn Park with their cameras. By the time they arrived, Tagore had left.

On the other occasion, when Gandhiji was very ill, Rabindranath's visit took place in a tense and anxious atmosphere. Dr Bidhan Roy and my doctor uncle Sunil were trying desperately to stabilize his condition. Pandit Nehru, Father and Uncle Subhas were in a state of great anxiety. Gandhiji was then staying in Father's bedroom on the first floor and was in bed. Tagore was taken upstairs in a chair carried by Father, Jawaharlal Nehru, Uncle Subhas and Mahadev Desai.

CHAPTER 26

By the middle of 1937, rumours were circulating that Uncle Subhas would be the next president of the Indian National Congress. After

the Calcutta AICC meeting in October under the presidency of Pandit Nehru, and Gandhiji's visit to Calcutta, the rumours gained more currency.

Uncle Subhas himself was hinting about it in some of his letters to friends in India and abroad. The importance and prestige of the Congress presidentship was far higher in those days than after Independence. The Congress president was then known as 'Rashtrapati', or Head of State, to all freedom-loving Indians. The holder of the post was the embodiment of our nationalism and aspirations. To Indians abroad and friends of India in other countries, the Congress's president represented the united will of all patriotic Indians. I can see from old letters that Uncle's friends all over the world heartily welcomed the possibility. It is also significant, in light of this development, that Uncle Subhas was in Europe towards the end of 1937 and beginning of 1938 on a short visit.

This European visit was important for a number of reasons. First, he stayed for several weeks in his favourite health resort, Badgastein in Austria's Salzburg province, where he started writing his autobiography. Second, we now know that he married Aunt Emilie during this sojourn, in December 1937. Third, he took the opportunity of studying the fast-developing European situation at close quarters. Fourth, he renewed personal contacts with political leaders of a number of countries, including England.

He named his unfinished autobiography *An Indian Pilgrim*. I have seen the text of an agreement which he signed with a leading publishing company of England. The publishers wanted the entire manuscript by November 1937. It is clear that Uncle was not able to fulfil the terms of the agreement because of his numerous political responsibilities. In Badgastein, the Austrian spa resort, he wrote the story of his life only up to his resignation from the Indian Civil Service in April 1921.

Those who have a hectic and stormy political life, as Uncle Subhas did, tend to write books when they are in jail or in exile. It is doubtful that he would have completed *The Indian Struggle*, published in early 1935, the book Aunt Emilie typed up as his secretary in 1934, had he not been in enforced exile in Europe from 1933 onwards. I have seen in what haste and under what pressure he wrote important papers when he was at home and immersed in political work. I watched him write the Congress president's address in 1938, sitting in his bedroom at the Elgin Road house. He finished the job in two days. I still vividly remember the scene. He was writing on loose sheets of paper. As soon

as he completed a few sheets, somebody rushed them to 1 Woodburn Park round the corner. One of father's assistants, Mr Kali Charan Ghosh, typed them out. Father's secretary, Mr Nirad C. Chaudhuri, revised the text quickly and passed the copy on to another messenger to rush to the printing press. Uncle Subhas continued to write till about an hour before his departure for the Haripura session of the Indian National Congress. He did not have time to revise the script himself or make any changes. After working through the night and the better part of the next day the press was able to dispatch the printed address by a night train to Haripura, which is near the city of Surat in Gujarat.

S.A. Ayer, one of Netaji's closest associates in Southeast Asia during World War II, told us personally, and has also written in his book *Unto Him a Witness,* how Uncle Subhas wrote the 'Proclamation of the Provisional Government of Free India' ('*Arzi-Hukumat-e-Azad-Hind*' in Hindustani) by working through the previous night. The date fixed for the proclamation, made in Singapore, was 21 October 1943. Till 19 October not a line had been written. He started writing at nearly midnight on 20 October and finished at 6 a.m. on 21 October, sipping black coffee as he wrote. As two or three sheets got written, his close comrade Abid Hasan—who had accompanied him on his epic three-month submarine voyage from Europe to East Asia earlier that year—or N.G. Swami brought them over to the next room, where Ayer sat with a typewriter. Not a comma had to be changed in the final version. Thus, two of the most important documents of our Freedom Movement were written at great speed, at the last minute and in one sitting.

An autobiography can't be written in the same way. In December 1937, on his short European trip, his first stop was Badgastein, a scenic village near Salzburg. There, with the help of Aunt Emilie, he wrote ten chapters in about ten days. He put down an account of his life from birth to 1921 in three notebooks. As in the case of many of his other important writings, he wrote in pencil. This creates problems for us now in the preservation of some important documents at Netaji Research Bureau.

In his unfinished autobiography, *An Indian Pilgrim*, Uncle Subhas gives us a brief history of twenty-seven generations of the Bose family. Before reading his account, I had not taken much interest in the story of our ancestors, their lives and achievements. My knowledge was thus very limited.

The founder of the clan was Dasarath Bose. Four generations

later, Mukti Bose settled at Mahinagar village, fourteen miles to the south of Calcutta. Ever since then we have been known as the Boses of Mahinagar. Eleven generations after Dasarath, the family attained a respectable position in public life. Mahipati Bose was appointed as the minister of finance of Bengal. Mahipati's grandson Gopinath advanced further and was appointed both finance minister and naval commander of Sultan Hussain Shah, the ruler of Bengal from 1494 to 1518. The Sultan gave him the title of 'Purandar Khan'. Purandarpur, a village next to Mahinagar, was his fief. Purandar's garden was later called 'Malancha'. Dadabhai, Netaji's father Janakinath Bose, created a large attractive garden in Malancha. When we visited our village during the Durga Pujas with our grandparents and others of the family, I saw Uncle Subhas swimming in the pond in Malancha.

Until two hundred years ago, the river Hooghly flowed close to Mahinagar but then changed its course. After the river shifted, epidemics broke out in Mahinagar and adjoining villages. As a result the villagers dispersed in different directions. Purandar's descendants settled in the nearby village of Kodalia. We have always known Kodalia, which is today on the southern fringes of the city of Calcutta, as our ancestral village. Kodalia has an interesting history of its own. Gopinath Bose, a.k.a. Purandar Khan, was a progressive person. He convened a conference to reform the prevailing rules of caste, sect and other subdivisions governing social relationships. It is said that around one hundred thousand people participated in the convention. To ensure adequate water supply to the congregation, he employed a large number of workers to dig a large reservoir. After the day's work, the workers would deposit their spades, called *kodal* in Bengali, in an open space nearby. That's how the village of Kodalia got its name.

Uncle Subhas did not have the time to complete his autobiography at Badgastein. So the plan to publish the book from London did not materialize. He arrived in London in January 1938. It was in London that news reached of his unanimous election as Congress president. In London he met a large number of people, both Indians and foreigners. He addressed a number of meetings. At one such meeting some friendly people belonging to the Labour Party were present. He told them plainly that in our struggle for freedom he did not expect any support from any political party in England. We would have to fight for our freedom ourselves—and win it. The Irish leader Eamon de Valera was then in London for political talks with the British Government. Uncle had a

meeting with him. During his voyage home, he also met Mussolini in Rome.

Almost the entire family had seen him off at Dum Dum airport when he left for Europe. A large crowd, too, welcomed him back at the end of January as president-elect of the Indian National Congress. He looked much healthier after the short European trip, fresh and radiant.

CHAPTER 27

When a member of a family attains a high and honoured public position, varied reactions are seen among relatives as well as friends and co-workers. The reactions reveal the temperament and character of the people concerned. I did not fail to observe this phenomenon.

Very naturally, Uncle Subhas's election as Congress president added to the prestige of the family as a whole and everybody felt elevated. I think that until he became president of the Congress, Uncle Subhas was not the centre of attraction in the Bose family. People watched him from a distance and most chose to keep their distance from him. There were many in the family who took no interest in his activities. But now he had become the person around whom the entire family revolved. People from all directions flocked to him to have a share of the glory.

As I mentioned earlier, he had started living in 1937 in the Elgin Road house at his mother Majanani's express wishes. Dadabhai Janakinath's bedroom was assigned to him. A new set-up was created for him in 1938. The president had to have a good office as a large number of people could be expected to call on him daily. A spacious room at the rear of the main building, long used as the family dining room, was re-furnished as his office. Two waiting rooms, one on the ground floor and other on the first, were also set up. His bedroom and office are now preserved museum rooms at Netaji Bhawan.

For many years, nobody had been elected as Congress president from Bengal. It was in 1922 that Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das presided over the Congress's Gaya session. Later, during the Civil Disobedience Movement, when the party was illegal, a short-lived session was held at the Esplanade in Calcutta, which was broken up by the police. Nellie Sengupta, the English wife of J.M. Sengupta, formally presided over that session and was promptly arrested. Uncle's election as president after such a long time had a far-reaching and special significance, which

many people in Bengal have now forgotten.

First, in the Bengali mind, new hope for the future was generated by his election. Second, the chaotic situation in Bengal's political life was ended. Third, Bengal's heroic revolutionary groups gained recognition and representation in national politics. Fourth, Uncle's presidency was an experiment in cooperation between Mahatma Gandhi and himself, one which had immense consequences for the remaining, climactic period of our struggle for freedom.

The question was whether it was possible to synthesize the Gandhian stream of mass awakening and people's power with the revolutionary anti-imperialist struggle and modern scientific ideas of national reconstruction represented by Uncle Subhas. The effort at unity began well but eventually did not work.

I should mention one unpalatable fact briefly, though it only pertains to a small number of people. Some of Uncle's contemporaries, both political colleagues and personal friends, became inordinately jealous of his becoming Congress president. This human failing—jealousy—is often seen in family and public life. Truly great individuals tend to overlook it.

Majanani, my parents and a number of other members of the family accompanied Uncle Subhas to Haripura. He very much wanted Basanti Devi, his and my father's political guru Chittaranjan Das's widow, to join him and wrote a touching letter to her asking her to do so. But she could not make it.

The Haripura Congress, the 51st national convention of the party, was a grand affair. The president was taken in a decorated carriage drawn by fifty-one pairs of bullocks in a long procession to the venue. There is footage of this scene. Uncle Subhas read a part of his speech in Hindi (and the rest in English). Those in the know say that his Hindi was until then rather halting. He started learning Hindi from a teacher some time before the Congress session. The amiable soft-spoken Hindi teacher, whom we called 'Panditji', came to the house daily and also accompanied Uncle on his tours so that the Hindi lessons could go on without interruption. In a few months Uncle became quite fluent in the language. A little later he started mixing Urdu words freely with Hindi. I have heard that when other speakers spoke in Hindi or Urdu he would listen very carefully and pick up new words and phrases from them. At the next meeting he would use what he had learned at the previous one.

His presidential address at Haripura should be read with care by all

who wish to grasp his fundamental ideas. He placed India's Independence struggle in the proper historical perspective and outlined its possible course, direction and ultimate goals. His approach was realistic and scientific. He was not influenced by social, economic or political dogmas. For example, we may refer to his proposals in regard to our national language. He said that a hybrid of Hindi and Urdu ('Hindustani'), which is understood in large areas of the country, should be made the national or the link language. Moreover, he proposed that in the interest of wider acceptability and national integration, we should adopt the Roman script for Hindustani.

Those of the family who went with Uncle to Haripura were very well looked after. The lifestyle of Gujarat is far removed from that in Bengal, particularly in regard to food. Even so, nobody felt awkward or alien in the Gujarati environment. In accordance with Gandhiji's wishes, the Congress had been holding its annual sessions in rural locations since 1936. The lack of basic amenities like housing, lighting, water supply, sanitation, catering, etc. was an eye-opener for many among the hundreds of thousands from all over India who attended this session.

I heard that our grandmother charmed everybody at Haripura and subsequently in Bombay by her modesty and unassuming behaviour. The freedom struggle demanded from all selfless service and sacrifice. Relatives of even top leaders of the movement were expected to be humble and shun vanity and arrogance.

In Bombay, the Boses were guests of Nathalal Parikh, a diamond merchant whom Uncle Subhas had met in Belgium in the mid-1930s. Since February 1938, Parikh and his wife became very close friends of the family. Subsequently, my parents and we children always stayed with the Parikhs whenever we went to Bombay.

Towards the end of 1938, Uncle Subhas took a major step when he set up the National Planning Committee, the predecessor of the post-Independence Planning Commission. In this task he had very active assistance from the great Bengali scientist Dr Meghnad Saha, whom I saw coming frequently to the Elgin Road house for discussions.

CHAPTER 28

Uncle Subhas had to function as Congress president under many constraints. The party's headquarters were in Allahabad. To cope with

the pressure of work, he needed at least two very competent secretaries in Calcutta. He arranged for two men to help him. But the quality of support was inadequate. I had the feeling that his correspondence and papers were in a poor state of organization. Even now, decades later, we have a hard task getting his papers into some sort of order at Netaji Research Bureau.

The excessive strain under which he functioned had another side to it. Since 1921, when he entered public life, he had been closely associated with a number of non-political social welfare organizations in Calcutta and elsewhere. These were public welfare bodies, student and youth organizations, educational institutions, libraries and gymnasiums. Then there was the Calcutta Corporation, where he had been chief executive officer and then mayor.

Uncle Subhas interested himself, as a rule, in the details of the work of any organization with which he was associated. He was not content with merely advising, instructing or lecturing to its members. I often wondered why, after becoming Congress president, he was not freeing himself from the details of local and provincial affairs. For instance, during his tenure as Congress president, he agreed to become an alderman of the Calcutta Corporation. He also had to devote considerable time to the Bengal Provincial Congress. The number of people he met every day was legion. There were also many 'car appointments', where he would dispose of various problems while travelling by car from one place to another, or even while driving to the railway station to catch a train. He would sometimes even ask people to join him for part of a long train journey, say, up to Burdwan or Asansol, to discuss urgent matters on the way.

For a person like Uncle Subhas, a good chauffeur was a must. While he was staying with us at Kurseong in 1937, Kaloo Singh hired a Nepali driver who had been to England with his former boss. Uncle brought this Nepali young man, Bahadur, down to Calcutta and appointed him as his chauffeur. Bahadur took Uncle around in his sturdy German DKW car, or the Adler which he used later. Often, he had to take Uncle to Howrah station at the last moment. He would cover the distance from Elgin Road to Howrah in twelve minutes flat.

He violated traffic rules and signals with impunity. The traffic police were indulgent to the 'Rashtrapati'. Sometimes, in spite of Bahadur's 'creative driving', Uncle failed to reach Howrah station in time. Occasionally trains were delayed on his account, as the guard would

not give the whistle to depart until the Rashtrapati arrived.

He spoke continuously at large public meetings. Most of them were held at Sraddhananda Park in central Calcutta. The park was near the Medical College. I often walked down there and listened to his speeches. I kept away from him and preferred to mix with the crowd and enjoy their reactions. Uncle was usually late for his meetings, sometimes by as much as two or three hours. But the people waited in patience for him without a murmur and not a soul budged until he finished speaking.

Around this time Uncle Subhas changed his style of public speaking completely. He stopped delivering long philosophical speeches in chaste Bengali. He used simple, even colloquial language, and connected directly with the audience. He often laced his speeches with humour and satire. The massive crowds roared with laughter and hearty appreciation.

For example, he once directly asked his listeners: 'If the British are defeated in the (World) War, will you be sorry?' There was silence. He then said: 'Oh, I know, you are afraid! So I shall speak for all of you. We shall not be sorry at all if they are defeated.' Once, he went further: 'You must have heard the Germans are dropping things on London—are you sorry?' Silence again. He said: 'Let me speak what is in your minds but which you cannot express. We are not sorry at all!' After he gave the answers, there was tumultuous clapping of hands. One last question before the speech ended was quite common. 'Are you all prepared for the coming final struggle for freedom?' A mass of hands went up spontaneously.

I cannot but write a few lines about Ila, my dear cousin, who cared for Uncle Subhas during the three years he lived in the Elgin Road house before he left India to wage that final struggle for freedom. The sincerity, affection and devotion with which Ila looked after him I have rarely seen in anyone. In his daily routine, in sickness and trouble, big or small, Uncle could rely on Ila. I can hardly think of Uncle Subhas's last years at home without thinking of Ila. It was of course true that all Uncle's nephews and nieces would do everything possible to be of help to him. When the Congress Working Committee met at the Elgin Road house in 1938, or when the Left Consolidation Committee or the Forward Bloc held meetings a little later, all the young people of the family rallied to his side.

From the historical point of view, the relationship that developed during 1938 to 1940 between India's two greatest men of the time and Uncle Subhas is fascinating. One was Rabindranath Tagore and the

other, Mahatma Gandhi. Tagore himself said that for quite some time he was sceptical about Uncle's leadership qualities. I get the impression from their correspondence of the 1930s that Uncle Subhas too nursed a sense of grievance about the poet's attitude. But by 1938 all doubts in the poet's mind about Uncle Subhas were dispelled. As he said himself, Tagore saw him 'in the clear light of the midday sun' and invited him to take his due place as *Deshnayak*—leader of the nation. Moreover, Tagore saw in him the indispensable leader of the last great battle for freedom that was yet to come.

When, in early 1939, Uncle Subhas decided to run for Congress president for the second time, the reactions of Tagore and Gandhi were very different. Tagore usually kept himself away from the nitty-gritty of politics. But in this case, he communicated his views very clearly to Gandhi. In his opinion, in the national interest, the two 'modernists' Jawaharlal and Subhas should be given charge of leading the country. Uncle Subhas had already made Pandit Nehru the chairman of the National Planning Committee he established in late 1938. So, Tagore said, Subhas should continue as president for a second term.

Gandhi, however, would not agree. A year earlier, Gandhi had welcomed Uncle Subhas as president but, I think, with some mental reservations. I do not therefore share the bewilderment of some historians and researchers as to why Gandhi 'changed' his stance. Pandit Nehru did make weak attempts at a compromise but without success. By then, Gandhiji and his ideologically conservative followers in the party leadership had made up their minds. On the other hand, Uncle Subhas was emphatically of the view that to foil the possibility of an unholy compromise between the British Government and Congress's right-wingers as the World War approached, he should continue to be president. A bitter contest became inevitable.

CHAPTER 29

The 1939 election for the Congress presidency was held at the end of January. At the same time, my eldest brother's wedding was to take place. As he was also the eldest of our generation, relatives from near and far had assembled in Calcutta for the festivities.

On the day that polling was taking place all over India in the presidential contest, Father was throwing a large tea party for the newlywed couple at the Calcutta South Club, adjacent to 1 Woodburn Park. Uncle Subhas was also present, of course. Results of the voting were coming in from different provinces across India by telephone, telegram and through the press. People were rushing about carrying messages. Quick calculations were being made to keep track of the tally. What excitement! In the early stages, the contest seemed like a neck-and-neck affair.

Uncle Subhas was sipping tea and softly making comments on the trend of the results. As the counting progressed, it became clear that the scales were tilting in Uncle Subhas's favour. After the tea party, Uncle returned to his office in the Elgin Road house. Everyone, young and old, was anxiously waiting for the final result. Uncle Subhas was on the telephone almost non-stop. I can remember how he reacted to favourable news during the counting. He would say: 'Yes, we are winning' or 'Yes, if the results from the Punjab are in our favour, we expect to win.' I never heard him say: 'I am winning' or 'I shall win'. He was rather particular about how we perceived the victory. He tried to convey by his comments that it was a collective and not a personal win, a victory for certain political principles rather than of an individual.

I can remember something else. After the historic victory, some excited relatives and friends were talking in provincial terms. A few even hinted that it was a victory for Bengal against an all-India conspiracy.

Uncle Subhas snubbed these people roundly and told them that the fight was on principles and was not a contest between personalities, regions or provinces. Indeed, the Bengal provincialist view was plain wrong. While Uncle Subhas did have a huge win in Bengal, he also won in numerous provinces across the length and breadth of India. The overall result in the AICC electoral college was decisive: 1580 votes for Uncle Subhas to 1375 for Gandhiji's nominee Pattabhi Sitaramayya.

Uncle Subhas responded with great dignity to Gandhiji's most unfortunate and unkind remarks on the result of the election. Uncle Subhas viewed the result as a vindication of his political line of 'no compromise with imperialism' and tried his level best to restore unity in the party. But sulking in defeat, Gandhiji and his supporters were simply not interested.

Two weeks later, Uncle Subhas went to meet Gandhiji at Wardha. During his return journey to Calcutta he was taken ill on the train. Evidently, he did not realize the seriousness of his illness in the beginning. He tried to resume his normal activities in Calcutta. He was scheduled

to go on tour in a couple of days. But events took a different course. He became so ill that he was confined to his bed. All programmes and the tour were cancelled. I never saw our doctor uncle Sunil so worried about his health as at that time. Consultants like Sir Nil Ratan Sircar and Professor M.N. De of Calcutta Medical College visited frequently. Uncle Subhas was insistent that he must attend the Tripuri session of the Congress in the middle of March. The doctors told him that if he did not obey their orders he would have to give up the idea of going to Tripuri at all.

Meanwhile, the Congress Working Committee was scheduled to meet at Wardha in the third week of February. There was no question of his going to Wardha, the doctors said. Uncle Subhas therefore postponed the meeting of the Working Committee. Members of the Committee, most of whom were against his re-election, responded to the postponement by resigning *en bloc* from the committee. Adversity was closing upon Uncle Subhas from all sides. The entire family was on tenterhooks as the doctors fought a hectic battle for Uncle Subhas's life.

Uncle Subhas himself wrote later that of all the suffering he had endured over a lifetime, what he underwent for over a month before, during and after the Tripuri Congress was the most bitter and hardest experience. The doctors had difficulty in coming to a definite diagnosis in the early stages because the symptoms were unusual. His fever could not be controlled even with the most modern medicines. I heard from Uncle Sunil later that both Uncle Subhas's lungs were badly affected by pneumonia and doctors weren't sure if he would survive.

However, Uncle Subhas was determined to go to Tripuri. So it was decided that Uncle Sunil, along with two assistants and a number of others from the family, would accompany him. I was not at Tripuri (which is a village in present-day Madhya Pradesh, then known as the Central Provinces). I heard the story of the Congress session from my parents and others in the family. Uncle was taken to Howrah station in an ambulance. When he reached the president's camp at Tripuri he was running a temperature of 103F. The doctors there were extremely worried. They suggested that he be removed to a good hospital in nearby Jubbulpore, as treating such a seriously ill patient in a makeshift rural camp was very risky. The patient rejected the proposal.

Uncle Subhas chaired and conducted the proceedings of the Subjects Committee while lying on the dais with a high fever. That led to a further deterioration of his health. He was not allowed to attend the

open session. Father read out his address. Lying in bed, Uncle Subhas heard Father read the address and also oppose the weak resolution on the developing World War situation moved by Pandit Nehru. Whenever he heard Father's voice coming through on the public address system he got excited and told the doctors, nurses and family members: 'Listen, Mejdada is speaking!'

At the Tripuri Congress, a resolution was forced through by which the democratically elected president was asked to appoint his Working Committee 'in consultation with and according to the wishes of Mahatma Gandhi'. The resolution is known as the Pant Resolution as it was moved by Govind Ballabh Pant, Congress premier of the United Provinces and a diehard Gandhi-ite. To my mind, and according to many others, the resolution was clearly ultra vires of the Congress Constitution. But Uncle Subhas allowed it to be moved and chose not to rule it out of order. Many of Uncle's supporters, including Congress socialists and others, developed cold feet at this juncture and either crossed over to the other side or remained neutral. The infamous Pant Resolution was thus adopted.

Events at Tripuri, particularly the spiteful attitude and vindictive mentality of leaders of the highest rank, caused Uncle Subhas deep hurt. At one point he felt so frustrated that he thought of renouncing politics and retiring to his first love—the Himalayas. But soon he recovered his faith in man, and in India's future. The innumerable messages of goodwill, love and support that he received from all parts of the country helped him to regain his normal mental equilibrium. He realized that Tripuri did not represent the real India.

Doctors and family members were of the opinion that Uncle Subhas should not be brought back to Calcutta directly from Tripuri, but instead be taken to a quiet place for some weeks. He was taken off the train at Dhanbad and driven to nearby Jamadoba to stay with my fourth paternal uncle Sudhir, who lived there in a comfortable bungalow.

CHAPTER 30

The respite between the Tripuri Congress in March and the AICC meeting in Calcutta in May 1939 was a crucial period for India. During these couple of months, the events that would shape our country in the coming decade were more or less decided. The entire family was

greatly concerned about Uncle Subhas's health and for his political future. Fortunately, rest and care at Uncle Sudhir's place at Jamadoba gradually restored his health.

As Gandhiji would not come to Jamadoba, Uncle Subhas started a long and reasoned correspondence with him to find a solution to the crisis in the party and the national movement. That correspondence has been the subject of much deliberation and discussion among historians and political scientists. Most researchers are of the view that Uncle Subhas comes out in a much better light than Gandhiji in the correspondence. Personally, I feel sure that the Tripuri episode and its aftermath constitute the darkest chapter in the Mahatma's political life.

In spite of Uncle Subhas's best efforts and readiness to accept the most unfavourable terms for himself in order to reach a rapprochement, Gandhiji went into classic non-cooperation mode and stalled the process. It is absolutely clear from the correspondence that Gandhiji was bent on driving Uncle Subhas to the wall and destroying him politically. Pandit Nehru did visit Uncle at Jamadoba and they talked, but no progress could be made given Gandhiji's extraordinary obduracy.

It was decided that Gandhiji would come to Bengal a few days ahead of the AICC meeting and stay at Sodepur, a little town north of Calcutta. The two would meet face to face at that time. Other important leaders of the Gandhi camp would also be available for consultations. When Uncle Subhas arrived in Calcutta we found him to be in good health. He was seriously ill many times in life, but had wonderful powers of recuperation.

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Father had come back to Calcutta after Tripuri, leaving Uncle Subhas at Jamadoba. Father was deeply hurt by the naked antagonism and vengeful malice of some of his Congress colleagues. He wrote a stinging letter to Gandhiji about his experiences at Tripuri.

The nature of Father's relationship with his younger brother is of relevance here. Father himself had to take hard knocks in his personal, professional and political life. He experienced downright bad behaviour, hostility and jealousy from relatives and political colleagues but always took everything in his stride. He would dismiss these irritants as of 'no consequence' with a wave of his hand when he was the target. But he just couldn't stand anything he regarded as mistreatment or an insult directed at Uncle Subhas. He would react to such behaviour with

uncharacteristic vehemence.

Whenever Father felt that someone was being unfair to Uncle Subhas, he lost his cool and counter-attacked fiercely. Those who knew Father felt that he regarded Subhas as his eldest son—although the age gap between them was only seven years—and people sometimes openly said that he loved Subhas more than he did his own sons. I felt proud rather than jealous whenever I heard this said.

Later, during the World War, many harsh things were said about Uncle Subhas. Calumny was indeed the order of the day then. Father could never forgive those responsible. Father did not see any equal to his younger brother when it came to patriotism, courage and self-sacrifice. An older brother unreservedly accepting the younger brother as his leader is very rare in the annals of history.

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As arranged, Gandhiji arrived in Sodepur a few days prior to the fateful meeting of the AICC. Uncle Subhas had long conferences with him to resolve the conflict between them. He would come early in the morning from Elgin Road to Woodburn Park, pick up Pandit Nehru who, as usual, was staying with us, and drive together to Sodepur in our German-made Wanderer car. The Wanderer, which was registered in my name, was the car in which I drove Uncle Subhas from Calcutta to the Gomoh railhead in Bihar (now Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Gomoh Junction in Jharkhand) during his great escape from India in January 1941. The car is now a major attraction as a museum piece displayed in the driveway of Netaji Bhawan.

Even after protracted negotiations with Gandhiji, no settlement was possible. One afternoon, I saw Uncle Subhas and Pandit Nehru standing together in the hallway of our house, grim and silent. Evidently they had just returned from another round of fruitless talks at Sodepur. Uncle Subhas broke the silence after some time and said to Pandit Nehru: 'You should freshen up and have lunch. After all, man must live!'

Jawaharlal replied: 'Yes, man must live!' The two men then parted.

When the AICC assembled at Wellington Square in central Calcutta, there was great excitement. Uncle Subhas was the elected president of the Indian National Congress, but he proposed that Sarojini Naidu chair the meeting. I cannot forget the emotionally charged speech in beautiful English that Mrs Naidu delivered. She made an impassioned plea to Uncle Subhas to remain the Congress president, but without

spelling out what the compromise solution should be and without making a similar appeal to Gandhi to relent. As she spoke, I wondered what kind of reaction she might evoke from Uncle Subhas.

Uncle Subhas remained totally calm and read his statement in a clear and dignified manner. He said he had failed to fulfil the terms laid down by the Pant Resolution at Tripuri and therefore the only recourse for him was to resign as Congress president. There was an emotional outburst from large sections of the audience when he made this announcement.

After Rajendra Prasad announced the meeting closed, angry protests broke out around Wellington Square. In that volatile atmosphere, bringing the leaders out of the pandal and taking them to safety became imperative. Uncle Subhas took charge of the rescue operation. He asked the volunteers to set up security cordons around the leaders and used the public address system to ask the enraged crowds to not soil Bengal's reputation for hospitality to visitors. Then, he personally escorted the leaders one by one to their cars.

Some of us youngsters—I was nineteen at the time—got pushed around in the melee. Together with a cousin, I somehow got out of the park by a side gate and jumped into a car. We reached home quite late. We had heard rumours that Pandit Nehru had been hurt while coming out of the meeting and I entered our home with trepidation. He was our guest. But then, Panditji's amiable secretary, Mr Upadhyay, greeted us with a broad smile and assured us that nothing untoward had happened. I was immensely relieved.

In May 1939 the national movement was rent into two. Gandhiji regained his absolute control of the Congress. For Uncle Subhas, the search for an alternative path to India's liberation began.

CHAPTER 31

Let me flashback to 1937. Some time after Uncle Subhas's release, a meeting was held at 38/2, Elgin Road between Congressmen and leading public figures of Bengal. It was resolved at this meeting that a public fund, to be called the Subhas Congress Fund, would be launched. After a sizeable amount was collected, the money would be presented to Uncle Subhas to be spent by him on any public cause, at his discretion. There was a growing feeling that there should be a Congress House in

Calcutta and that leadership in this matter should rest with Uncle Subhas. This was the beginning of the story of Calcutta's Mahajati Sadan. The collection of funds progressed slowly. In 1938, when Uncle Subhas was Congress president and also an alderman of the Calcutta Corporation, the corporation leased out a fairly large plot of land on Chittaranjan Avenue in central Calcutta to Uncle Subhas by unanimous resolution.

After receiving this land, Uncle Subhas started planning the 'National House' of his dreams. He wanted to have a sprawling building constructed along modern lines where, he thought, all aspects of our public life and culture would find expression. In fact, he conceived of a national institution where there would be facilities and opportunities for the coming generation to build themselves up as able citizens of a modern, forward-looking country. As the construction was planned in the shadow of an impending war, Uncle Subhas even wanted an air-raid shelter to be constructed under the building!

Uncle Subhas had submitted the project to Rabindranath Tagore and sought his support and blessings. He had also asked the poet to give a name to the building. In January 1939, Uncle Subhas had visited Santiniketan and Tagore had given him a warm and traditional reception in the mango grove (amra kunja) of Visva-Bharati. The Tripuri presidential election was still to come. After the contest, and particularly after Uncle was re-elected against Gandhiji's wishes, we had been wondering what Tagore's reaction to the new situation would be. The poet had already made up his mind. He wrote to Uncle Subhas that he would like to give him a public reception in a large auditorium in Calcutta to anoint him as Deshnayak. The reception did not materialize, but the poet wrote a memorable piece titled 'Deshnayak' addressed to Uncle Subhas. The piece was published only after World War II. Thus, Uncle Subhas never knew how strongly Tagore had come out on his side at a critical moment of India's history.

Despite failing health, Rabindranath Tagore agreed to come down to Calcutta in August 1939 to lay the foundation of Mahajati Sadan—the name the poet gave the new building—at the invitation of Uncle Subhas. By this time, Uncle was no longer Congress president and was organizing and consolidating progressive forces in opposition to the party's high command. That did not deter Tagore one bit.

A large group of Bose family members attended the foundation-laying ceremony of Mahajati Sadan with Father and Uncle Subhas. The crowd overflowed onto the streets, as the pandal on the site was packed

to capacity. People wanted to see Rabindranath and Subhas together on the same platform. Volunteers had a hard time controlling the crowd. I was particularly keen to take photographs of the historic occasion. But the enclosure was rather dark and I did not have a flash on my camera. So I asked Birendra Nath Sinha, the photographer of the Bengali daily *Anandabazar Patrika*, to signal to me before using his flashgun. As he did so, I used my camera and obtained a number of excellent pictures of Tagore, Father and Uncle Subhas together on the dais.

Tagore and Uncle Subhas delivered memorable speeches on that occasion. It is a pity that subsequently Mahajati Sadan did not take the shape envisaged by the poet and his Deshnayak and exists only as a building without soul or substance.

In June 1939, an important political conference was held at Woodburn Park. Uncle Subhas invited leading political personalities who disapproved of the behaviour of the Congress right-wing to meet and chalk out a united course of action. The meeting was held on the terrace of the new annexe to our main residence. Uncle Subhas's proposal was to build a left alternative to the right-wing in the Congress. A number of important people from different parts of India participated. I particularly remember Srinivas Iyengar, the veteran leader from Madras and himself a former Congress president, Dr Satyapal from the Punjab, and Kamini Kumar Dutta of Comilla district in East Bengal. Srinivas Iyengar had years earlier joined hands with Deshbandhu C.R. Das for a similar purpose; now he came forward to support Uncle Subhas. Soon after this conference, Uncle Subhas announced the formation of the Forward Bloc.

War broke out in Europe in September 1939. That completely changed the political situation. It's one thing to have endless political arguments in peacetime, hold demonstrations in the streets, shout slogans, and pass long-winded resolutions at party conferences. It's a quite different challenge to take strategic decisions about one's role and tasks in a global crisis and act on those decisions. For two years, Uncle Subhas had been continuously telling the people of India that a World War was approaching and we must prepare to adapt to the situation and launch the final struggle for freedom. He said at the Tripuri Congress in March 1939 that war would break out in Europe in six months. The forecast came true. He also said that for a subject nation, war was not an unmixed evil and that we must take advantage of Britain's involvement in the World War to launch our final struggle for independence.

I could see clearly that many of our political leaders who were talking big before September 1939 were now hedging and playing safe behind high-sounding words. Uncle Subhas stuck to his guns and kept talking of the final struggle. He toured India after founding the Forward Bloc. The popular response everywhere was tremendous, sometimes beyond his own expectations. As a result, he became even more convinced that the time was ripe to begin the final battle for India's freedom.

Many years later, in 1966, I came to know about a significant episode that had occurred in 1939. I read in the newspapers about the arrival in Calcutta of a Chinese gentleman who had been the Chinese consul-general in Calcutta in 1939. His name was Hua Chao Chin. The name sounded familiar to me; I may have come across it in an archival document at the Netaji Research Bureau. I telephoned him at his hotel and then drove him down to Netaji Bhawan. He was pleased to visit Netaji Bhawan. As soon as he entered the museum room that had been Uncle's office, he said that he had met him in that room in 1939. Uncle Subhas had wanted him to find out from his government in Chungking (now Chongqing) whether they would give him political asylum in China. He had also told the Chinese consul that it would not be possible for him to conduct the independence movement from inside the country because he was certain that the British government would lock him up as soon as war broke out and keep him in prison for the duration. The consul referred the enquiry to his government. He came back to Uncle Subhas after a few days to say that a goodwill visit by Uncle to China was very welcome, but his government could not extend facilities for political activity due to its treaty of friendship with Britain.

I learned two important lessons from Hua Chao Chin's account of his 1939 encounter with Uncle Subhas. First, that Uncle had been looking over a period of time for allies who could facilitate a campaign from abroad for India's Independence. Second, he was open-minded regarding potential allies because a nation's foreign policy choices are determined not by ideological considerations or altruistic motives, but strictly by the national interest. The British Government, on its part, refused Uncle Subhas a passport to visit China.

CHAPTER 32

My parents did not generally approve of our going to political meetings and demonstrations if that meant playing truant from school or neglecting studies. The disciplined environment of our home was not compatible with such behaviour. However, there were exceptions to the rule.

During my school years in the first half of the 1930s, I had been out on the streets during the Civil Disobedience Movement, in demonstrations organized and led by fellow-students of upper classes. Father was then in prison. He heard about this and neither overtly encouraged nor forbade me from attending. In 1939, while I was a student at St Xavier's College, I got involved in a big movement for the repatriation of revolutionary prisoners from the Andaman Islands, where the notorious Cellular Jail was located. I also took part in closed meetings of the All-India Students' Federation, of which I became one of the very first members.

Father was then Leader of the Opposition in the Bengal Legislative Assembly. A citizens' meeting was called at the Town Hall, opposite the Assembly building, with Father as the chair. A general strike was declared for the day and students of all schools and colleges were asked to join to demand the repatriation of the Andaman prisoners. There were two colleges in Calcutta packed with loyalists of the Raj, Presidency College and St Xavier's. The authorities of the two colleges were against the participation of their students in politics, albeit for different reasons. Presidency was a government institution, and St Xavier's was run by European Jesuits. Most students of these two colleges were inclined to stay away from nationalist politics. We formed a core group at St Xavier's and organized students for the rally. The Bengal Provincial Students' Federation, the Bengal branch of the national body, was the single united body of students in Bengal at that time. Although there were different political ideologies amongst its members, there was unity of purpose on major national issues.

The strike at St Xavier's was successful. We marched towards College Street where the Presidency campus is located, picking up more and more groups of students on the way. When we reached Presidency College, we were pleasantly surprised to see students there waiting to receive us. They joined the demonstration in large numbers. By the time our procession reached Harrison Road, en route to the Strand, it had grown massive. From the Strand, we were to make a left turn

towards the Assembly and the Town Hall.

A large contingent of police, including mounted police on horseback, blocked our way. The mounted police charged us ferociously, wielding their batons in all directions. Those of us who were at the front saved ourselves by retreating from the centre of the road and clinging to the high iron railings of Strand Road on its western side. Those who were caught in the middle of the road were badly hurt. Several were also arrested and thrown into police vans. After the attack was over, some of us sneaked into the Town Hall in small groups. From a distance, I saw Father briskly enter the hall and heard him speak. All public transport was by then off the roads. I returned home very late on foot. I reported the day's events to Father. He simply smiled and asked me to go to bed.

At the Calcutta Medical College, the general attitude of the students was one of non-involvement in nationalist political activity. After I joined the Medical College as a student, I found that communal politics had already made inroads among students there. The college was directly controlled by the government. And the Bengal government being in the hands of the Muslim League, Muslim communalist politics had infected some students, to our great disadvantage. Even in the students' union, the principle of seat reservation for Hindus, Muslims and others was introduced. There was also a distinct student group called 'Military Medicals' who were nominated by the British-Indian Army; most of these students were Anglo-Indians. Thus, nationalist students were at a severe disadvantage.

Personally, however, I was in a relatively strong position. In the late 1930s, Congress politics in Bengal was totally dominated by Father and Uncle Subhas. Their non-communal political image and the respect they enjoyed from people of all communities helped me to earn goodwill and support among the medical college's student body, cutting across the political and communal divides. In the student union's politics, I tried in my own small way to function in accordance with the principles the Bose brothers preached, namely the safeguarding of the rights and interests of all communities, particularly the under-privileged sections. Thus, I was elected general secretary of the Medical College Students' Union in 1943 and its president in 1944.

Uncle Subhas's political influence on me essentially dates to 1936, when I had the chance to spend a few weeks with him in Kurseong. Like many other young men of those times, I was already familiar with various political texts and ideologies. I closely followed the activities

of different political leaders and parties. I remember that for a while I was greatly influenced by the fashionably radical M.N. Roy's writings. It takes time to mature politically even if one is born and bred in a political environment. Some do not mature at all even then. I saw this in a number of young people in the Bose family.

For quite some time and on many occasions, I had doubts about Uncle Subhas's political beliefs and prescriptions. Ultimately, however, after much introspection and analysis, the doubts disappeared. It surprises me that even today, some Indians—and they include many Bengalis—fail to comprehend Uncle Subhas's political significance and contributions and are reluctant to give him due recognition. In 1936, I had just passed my Matriculation examinations. A relative told Uncle Subhas that I was a 'Royist' (a follower of M.N. Roy). He smiled and said that was perfectly fine and that I would shape up nicely in due course.

After returning from the Haripura Congress in 1938, Uncle Subhas called me over to Elgin Road and asked me to regularly listen to Moscow Radio. He wanted me to report back to him if they commented on the Indian political situation and particularly on his own political activities. We had a powerful radio at home. I continued to listen to Moscow Radio for some time. Often, I listened late into the night and dozed off resting my head on the radio receiver. Father usually came upstairs quite late, after finishing all his work and often found me sleeping with the radio on. He would wake me up and joke to my mother: 'The boy has fallen into Subhas's clutches!' Despite my efforts, I could not give Uncle Subhas much useful briefing about the Moscow Radio broadcasts. Its programmes focused on achievements of the Soviet state and profuse eulogies of Stalin. I do not know exactly why Uncle Subhas gave me this assignment, but I benefited from it in that it helped develop my interest in contemporary international affairs.

After resigning as Congress president, Uncle Subhas campaigned tirelessly against any compromise with the British government on the issue of independence. He decided to hold an All-India Anti-Compromise Conference in March 1940 at Ramgarh in Bihar, where the annual session of the Congress was scheduled to be held. Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, the noted peasant leader of Bihar, took charge of organizing the Anti-Compromise Conference. I was very keen to attend the conference at least for a day. I was then quite busy at the medical college, dissecting cadavers for the practical course in anatomy. I managed a day off, quietly obtained the rail fare from Mother and set out for Ramgarh by the night train from Calcutta.

Upon my arrival, I found that torrential rains had completely disrupted all the arrangements for the conference. The entire campus for the delegates was water-logged, and the temporary structures had either been blown down or were standing precariously. I trudged through mud and slush to reach Uncle Subhas's camp. He was looking at conference papers after having gone around the area and making arrangements for the delegates. He looked at me gravely and asked: 'Well, do you propose to stay overnight?' I excused myself saying that as my college was open I would return to Calcutta by the night train. He said 'Huh' and told me where to get some food. I could see that he was happy that I had come to Ramgarh but was disappointed that I would stay only for the day.

The Congress session was being held nearby. I went over to see how things were going there. The low ground earmarked and decorated lavishly for the open session was inundated with water. The open session was therefore shifted and held on higher ground. I heard Maulana Azad and Pandit Nehru speak from a platform under a tree. Due to the inclement weather, the session was wound up in haste so that the delegates could return to their homes safely. But by the time the open session of the Anti-Compromise Conference happened late in the afternoon, the weather had cleared up and there was sunshine! As the proceedings went on and I listened to the speeches, I took a number of photographs. Those pictures have now become a prized collection in the photographic archives of the Netaji Research Bureau.

According to the programme announced at the Anti-Compromise Conference, a nationwide anti-war campaign was launched. The campaign was to start in the 'National Week' in April commemorating the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 1919 in Amritsar. The government immediately cracked down and made large-scale arrests of Uncle Subhas's followers. I wondered what lay in store for him.

CHAPTER 33

The year 1940 was an upsetting time for all of us. Both Father and Uncle Subhas had to contend with serious political problems, which had repercussions on the family too. In 1939, the Congress leadership had virtually expelled Uncle from the party on 'disciplinary' grounds. Father

was then Leader of the (Congress) Opposition in the Bengal Legislative Assembly. As time passed, differences between the Congress leadership and Father increased on various issues. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad played a very negative role in this regard. Although he was in charge of Bengal affairs on behalf of the high command, he hardly had any relationship with the party in Bengal nor any political standing in the province to speak of. His handling of Congress affairs in Bengal was completely inept. Towards the end of 1940, the Congress Working Committee, at Maulana Azad's instance, removed Father from the leadership of the party in the Bengal Assembly, on 'disciplinary' grounds.

Regardless of the fiat from the Congress bosses, the majority in the Bengal party stayed with Father and continued to function under his leadership as the 'Bose group'. This was in keeping with the situation in the Bengal Congress organization, where an overwhelming majority continued to accept Uncle Subhas's leadership. As a result of Father's purging, the Congress Legislative Party split into two. The official Congress faction functioned under the leadership of Kiran Sankar Roy.

The mishandling of Bengal Congress affairs by the Congress high command in 1939-40 resulted from a total ignorance of, or disregard for, the ground realities of Bengal politics. The destruction of the Bengal Congress at that critical time explains the emasculation of the party in the province in the crucial run-up to 1947 and its long-term frailty in West Bengal for decades after Independence. What started then and continued for decades thereafter was a puppet show run by an unrepresentative minority faction of the Bengal Congress.

We had extremely cordial relations with Kiran Sankar Roy and his family over a long period of time. Even as small children we saw him often at our home. In the 1930s, when Uncle Subhas was still president of the Bengal Congress, Kiran Babu was its secretary. He had a very distinguished, aristocratic presence in keeping with his zamindar family background. Even though he appeared to be very serious-minded, he had a keen sense of humour and a good heart. I have heard that because of his keen intelligence he was often called the 'Chanakya' of the Bose group in the Congress. Although in later years Father and Kiran Sankar Roy drifted away from each other politically, they remained close and friendly. Before Roy's untimely death in 1949, Father often went to see him on his sickbed and returned with a heavy heart.

Father had two other close associates who visited our home often. One was Tulsi Chandra Goswami and the other was Santosh Kumar

Basu. I have rarely seen a more handsome man than Goswami. What I remember most about him are his perfect manners. In personal behaviour and conversation, one could immediately see the stamp of education and refined breeding. When I went to his house with urgent letters from Father, he would come out of his study and wait at the door until I walked in first. It seemed as if this young man was doing him a favour by calling on him. Conversely, when he called at our home, and I received him at the door, he would wait for me to lead the way inside. His oratory was outstanding. A speech I heard at the Bengal Assembly demanding the release of political prisoners still rings in my ears.

Santosh Kumar Basu became a family friend. He was also a good speaker and had a powerful voice. At the reception to Uncle Subhas in 1937, the public address system failed. Santosh Kumar Basu was called upon to address the large gathering without the microphone and keep them quiet. I later received valuable assistance from him in the work for Netaji Research Bureau and he donated a collection of Uncle's letters to him to our archives.

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In our school years we saw our eldest uncle, Satish Chandra Bose, rather rarely. He practised law at Patna. In the late 1930s, he shifted to Calcutta and started practising at the Calcutta High Court. From then on we saw him almost daily. He came home often and sat in the garden-facing verandah of the house's ground floor, next to Father's desk. He read newspapers closely and was very well-informed about events. He was extremely friendly and chatty with the little children of the family. He would give funny names to children and recite humorous rhymes in Oriya—he had grown up in Cuttack—for their entertainment. He called a pretty little girl 'Tiger' and a large fat boy 'Mouse'. Little girls in our house were normally called 'Buri' (old lady). Uncle Satish would have hilarious conversations with them as to whether they were two hundred or three hundred or four hundred years old. Friends of the family were not spared his humour either. For instance, one friend was called Abani. Uncle Satish called him Lord Albany.

When Uncle Subhas resigned from the Indian Civil Service in 1921, Uncle Satish was studying law in London. British officials asked Uncle Satish to try to persuade Uncle Subhas to change his mind. In the late 1930s, Uncle Satish became a councillor of the Calcutta Corporation at Uncle Subhas's instance. Later, he also became a member of the Bengal

Legislative Assembly.

During World War II, there were a number of deaths in the Bose family, including several of our generation. Uncle Satish suffered a terrible blow when he lost his eldest son Dhirendranath, who was better known by his nickname Ganesh. In the middle of 1943, we lost my favourite cousin Ila; she died in childbirth. It is said that adversity comes in torrents. Our cup of sorrow was indeed full during those years.

As 1940 rolled on, Uncle Subhas got more and more isolated politically. Right-wingers and fence-sitters were of course opposed to him. Even many who claimed then and later to be thorough-bred leftists deserted him. But his struggle continued.

We were expecting him to be arrested any day after the Anti-Compromise Conference at Ramgarh. But he was allowed to remain free for about three months even as most of his associates and followers were picked up and jailed. Uncle Subhas seized the opportunity and called for a novel kind of movement. At the initiative of Lord Curzon, the infamous architect of the 1905 Bengal Partition plan, the British had erected a monument to the victims of the so-called 'Black Hole of Calcutta' incident of 1756—a major event in colonialist mythology and propaganda—to denigrate the last independent ruler of Bengal, Nawab Siraj-ud-Daula. It was called the Holwell Monument and was situated at the south-west corner of Dalhousie Square in the heart of central Calcutta. Uncle Subhas launched a campaign for its removal to restore the honour of Siraj-ud-Daula and the nation. Hindu and Muslim young men heartily responded to his call. He announced that he would personally lead the first batch of satyagrahis, in a march on the Holwell Monument on 3 July 1940. He was arrested that day as a preventive measure.

From July to December he was imprisoned at the Presidency Jail, Calcutta. I went to see him in jail several times with other members of the family. He was quite cheerful. He would crack jokes with the jail officers and ask them: 'How long do you think the British Empire will last?' He would add immediately: 'Don't be afraid, you will stay just where you are. Only we who are prisoners today will be let out, and a different set of prisoners will take our place'. There was no inkling at first that he was about to take the most difficult decision of his life.

As they had done in Mandalay prison in Burma in 1926, Uncle Subhas and other prisoners decided to perform Durga Puja inside the jail. The Government had to agree. All necessary arrangements for the

Puja were of course made outside and an idol of the deity sent in. On the immersion day, Vijaya Dashami, we were at the jail gate in strength. The idol was brought out on a truck. We saw Uncle Subhas and the other prisoners standing in a body behind the iron bars. A band of young men took charge of the immersion.

Ever since his arrest, Uncle Subhas had been contesting the grounds of his detention without trial. During this time he was elected to the Central Legislative Assembly in Delhi from a constituency in Dacca (Dhaka). After the Pujas, he wrote long letters to the Government about the illegality of his detention. Finally, he told the Government that if he was not released he would as a last resort go on a fast unto death. After writing his last letter to the Government he asked that his letters be preserved in government archives. He called one of the letters his 'Political Testament'.

CHAPTER 34

There are indications in certain documents and also from personal accounts of various people that Uncle Subhas was exploring possibilities of going out of the country since early 1940. In the Punjab there was a political outfit called the Kirti Kisan Party, a breakaway Communist group, that wanted to develop relations with the Soviet Union. Across north-west India, Uncle Subhas had a large number of adherents. He tried to get some of these people to help him develop his plans. But these early efforts did not yield results. It also became clear that efforts to establish contacts with Russia had not been successful.

There was another side to the fluid situation of 1940. After the Anti-Compromise Conference in March, leading members and supporters of his party were arrested. Then Uncle Subhas launched the agitation for the removal of the Holwell Monument, and was arrested in the first week of July.

The question arises why he launched the Holwell movement when he was thinking of leaving the country. There may be two explanations. One, he might have deliberately launched a diversionary movement to mislead the government. Two, he may have thought that the government would not arrest him or keep him in detention for long. There were some grounds for such a presumption. As soon as the Second World War began (September 1939), the Bengal Government banned all public

political activity such as meetings and processions. Uncle Subhas however continued to hold meetings and make anti-war speeches in defiance of the ban. The Government watched closely but did not take any action. Later, in May and June of 1940, he arranged and addressed large meetings, including two political conferences in Dacca and Nagpur where he called for struggle against the Raj. Again, the Government watched closely but did not act. Finally, the Holwell agitation was supported by many Muslims, especially students and youth. Uncle Subhas had good friends in the Bengal Muslim League, which was in power in the province.

Whatever his calculations may have been, he was arrested. He was not prepared to waste his time in prison while the British Empire faced an unprecedented crisis. I believe he was convinced that it was his duty to do something decisive for the country's freedom by exploiting that crisis. The Government arrested him under the Defence of India Rules and also launched two court cases against him, one on account of a 'seditious' speech and the other for an 'objectionable' editorial in his weekly paper, *Forward Bloc*.

The authorities used to bring him out of jail and produce him at Alipore Court for hearings under strong police escort. I joined other young members of the family to watch the court proceedings. It was great fun when Uncle's lawyers cross-examined police reporters on his allegedly seditious speech and cornered them. At the end of one hearing, the magistrate granted him bail on sound legal grounds but added immediately that he was very doubtful if Uncle Subhas would be allowed to avail of it. Because the Government was holding him in jail without trial under different draconian laws, Uncle Subhas started challenging the two-faced government policy. He also demanded his release as an elected member of the Central Legislative Assembly. But the Government would not budge. They made it clear that they intended to be very tough with him.

Father was not keeping well in 1940. Uncle Subhas had the habit of falling ill in jail but recovering quickly after release. Father's health was damaged by his detention from 1932 to 1935. In spite of medical treatment, and rest during vacations, he never fully recovered. But he continued with his professional work and his political activities at an intense pace. He had diabetes from an early age and the ailment got worse in prison. When he was released there was no respite as he was overworked. Even during vacations he did not have complete rest.

During the 1940 Durga Puja vacation my parents decided to take

a break in Dehra Dun. Before leaving Calcutta, Father used to visit Uncle Subhas in Presidency Jail from time to time. Mother told me that Uncle Subhas repeatedly asked Father during these meetings to invite Mian Akbar Shah, a Bose loyalist of the North-West Frontier Province, to Dehra Dun and urge him to proceed to the Soviet Union. Mian Akbar Shah was a trusted lieutenant of Uncle Subhas and a leader of the Forward Bloc in the NWFP. It is clear from this that Uncle Subhas wanted to open channels with certain foreign powers through trusted emissaries.

Narendra Narayan Chakrabarti was his fellow-prisoner in Presidency Jail. There was a possibility of Chakrabarti being released soon, at the end of his jail term. Mr Chakrabarti told me later that Uncle asked him to try to escape from India. He also told me that Uncle gave him letters of introduction to the heads of a number of foreign governments and also gave him instructions on how to conceal the letters during his travels. Moreover, Mr Chakrabarti told me that during these conversations Uncle Subhas mentioned me and discussed my reliability.

It is difficult to say when he definitely made up his mind to go abroad. It is clear that he was gradually coming to that decision and figuring out how to execute it. It may be presumed that by the day in the latter half of November 1940 when he resolved to go on hunger-strike, he must have finally decided.

After returning from Dehra Dun, Father resumed his visits to Uncle Subhas in jail. One evening we found Father in a very worried mood. Friends in and close to the Government had pressed Father to persuade his brother to desist from the extreme step of a fast unto death. They told Father that the Government's attitude was extremely rigid and Uncle would not be released under any circumstances. On the other hand, Father knew that once made, Uncle Subhas's resolve was unalterable. Until his demand was conceded, no power on earth could make him relent. Eventually he began his fast unto death after telling the Government: 'Release me, or I will refuse to live.' Anxiety gripped everybody at home.

After a week, news suddenly came one afternoon that the Government had released Uncle Subhas unconditionally. I have seen the correspondence between the India and Bengal Governments of that period. One very good friend, Nripendra Nath Ghosh of the Associated Press, kept Father and Uncle Subhas informed of what went on in official circles, about their policy decisions and their attitude to the Bose

brothers. The Associated Press was a pro-government news agency and unlike others had some access to official circles. After Uncle Subhas had been on fast for about a week, the Government developed cold feet. The jail superintendent gave a rather grim report on his health which indicated that death from fasting was a distinct possibility. But the India Government was still not keen to release him. They wrote disapprovingly to the Bengal Government when the latter decided to release him. The Bengal Governor, John Herbert, replied to Viceroy Linlithgow saying that they were just playing 'cat and mouse' with Subhas Bose and would put him back in jail as soon as his health improved.

The jail superintendent was a sympathetic person. He came again and again to Uncle Subhas in his cell to plead with him to give up the fast. He would say: 'Why don't you understand, even a living donkey is better than a dead lion.' When the order of release arrived, Uncle broke his fast with a glass of fruit juice offered by this jail superintendent.

As soon as the news arrived, we rushed to see him at the Elgin Road house. An ambulance was still parked in the portico. I went up to his room and found him lying in bed looking pale and weak. But his eyes were bright and shining. I had noticed his moustache during the last visit in jail. It had since grown further. He now also had a shaggy beard.

As usual, I was silently standing at the door and watching as things were being re-arranged in the room. He gestured to me to come to him. I went to his bedside. He looked up at me and grasped my hand in a long, warm handshake.

CHAPTER 35

What happened to me and my life in December 1940 was beyond my wildest imagination. I never imagined that I would get deeply involved in the inauguration of a new chapter in India's history. History is sometimes said to take its destined course. Even insignificant beings like myself can be caught up in its cascading current and carried along as history is made.

A revolutionary leader does not always judge the world through an analytical lens. He or she often acts on intuition. Uncle Subhas once wrote an editorial in the *Forward Bloc* weekly on intuition and its role in history. He tried to show that world leaders throughout the

ages have often taken fateful decisions on intuition alone and not on the basis of reasoned analysis. And on many occasions, he argued, these decisions have turned out to be right. I think Uncle Subhas arrived at many important decisions in his life by intuition and instinct rather than cold analysis.

Many people have asked me why he called me of all people to assist him in his daring undertaking in January 1941. It is difficult to answer this. Who knows why he selected a person for a particular purpose? By carefully assessing his suitability or by intuition? Or both? It could be that he deliberated over this for quite some time. That I was able to respond to him positively and then help him with his plans was certainly due to his tactful approach to me and his wise guidance thereafter. Of course, I was just a cog in the wheel of a very ambitious operation.

It cannot be said that the children of the Bose family had a particularly normal life—for obvious reasons. A great movement was in progress in the country and the storms it generated hit us often. The two outstanding sons of the family, Sarat and Subhas, were both major players in the struggle. We children were therefore all affected by what was going on to a greater or lesser degree. Before 1940, some of us were involved in student, youth or popular mass movements. We watched with admiration how millions of people threw themselves unreservedly into the national struggle. So many young people were ruthlessly persecuted by the police. So many went to jail. We saw with our own eyes young people sacrificing their lives with complete abandon for the cause. All this was bound to affect us, although young people reacted differently according to their character and temperament. I have also seen many students and youth of my generation keeping themselves aloof from the national movement on one pretext or another.

Though I was mentally deeply influenced by events around me and also had some extraordinary experiences as an observer of events and personalities while growing up, nothing that important had happened to me until December 1940. In and from December 1940, my life changed forever. What happened to me changed the entire course of my life and made my everyday existence insignificant and ordinary. Uncle Subhas, by assigning me a role in his escape from India, gave a revolutionary twist to my life.

Let me describe how it started. One afternoon, Uncle Subhas's personal servant, Karuna, came to my room at Woodburn Park and said: 'Uncle wants you to come over after lunch.' He could have telephoned

me or asked a member of the family to carry the message. He did not. My mother had been visiting him almost daily since his release. He could have asked her to send me over, but he didn't. She had told me that Uncle had been asking her about my daily routine in some detail. He wanted to know about my college hours, whether they were very long and if I was hard-pressed with my medical studies. He had also asked her if I felt tired after long days at the Medical College and when might be a convenient day and time for him to have a chat with me. After discussing all this with my mother, he might as well have asked her to send me along, but chose Karuna to do it.

It was the first Sunday after his release. I went across to the Elgin Road house around 3 p.m. I was not particularly curious as to why he had called me, and was not expecting anything unusual. But as soon as I entered his room I realized that this was not casual, that he was expecting me. There was nobody else in the room. He was looking fresh and clean after a bath although he still appeared somewhat pale and weak. Till then, I had felt diffident and nervous whenever I came face to face with Father or Uncle Subhas. I hesitated to have a proper conversation with either of them. That is why Uncle Subhas gave me my moniker—'the silent boy'. With senior members of the family, and particularly with Father and Uncle Subhas, I could barely manage an exchange of smiles and some monosyllabic responses.

He was on his simple bed, reclining on the pillows. Next to his bed was the large antique bedstead used by his father Janakinath Bose, my 'Dadabhai'. As usual, I sat down on Dadabhai's ornate bed facing him. He made a movement with his hand and asked me to come around and sit on his bed to his right: 'Come, sit down here!' The tone was very friendly and intimate and did not sound like an order at all. Nonetheless, my pulse rate went up. For a moment I wondered if I had done something wrong and might be taken to task.

He looked at me for a while with a calm and affectionate gaze. That was enough to put me at ease. I have since heard so much about the magnetic quality of his eyes and his handsome face. So many responded by sacrificing everything to join the freedom struggle, so many gave up their riches to become paupers, and so many left the worldly life to become fighters and often, martyrs.

Then he asked me in Bengali: 'Can you do a job for me?' (*'Amar ekta kaj korte parbe?'*) For more than fifty years now I have repeated that deceptively simple question to myself over and over again. I hardly

realized its import at that moment. What job? I hoped at that instant that he would not ask for something that I was unable to carry out! I later felt that there was actually an element of appeal in his voice. It was, indeed, a call from the heart. He had never in the past talked to me in this friendly, intimate manner.

I remember that, years earlier, when he was living with us at Woodburn Park, he asked me to do something very simple—arrange to send the car to fetch a visitor. I forgot about it as I was playing with my sisters. After a while he came back to check if I had done the job. When he found that I had not, he became angry and flushed and told me in a stern voice: 'Good heavens, you could not even do this little thing for me!'

The day after his release, he had asked me to draft a telegram to my older brother in England. I was always very conscious of my limited knowledge of English, and was not sure I could put in words what he wanted to convey to my brother. So I was taking my time. After a while he told me rather brusquely, not concealing his irritation: 'Why can't you manage to even draft a telegram!' I had felt very small then.

The job he asked me to do on that fateful Sunday afternoon in early December of 1940 was of an entirely different order. He had a mission to fulfil. The job (*'kaj'*) was very much his own. He chose a few of us ordinary mortals to help him with his mission.

In late 1944, when I was a prisoner in the Lahore Fort, Richard Tottenham, the additional secretary of the Home Department of the Government of India, asked me: 'I suppose your relations with your uncle before he left India were rather close?' I told him in reply: 'In an Indian family, the relations between an uncle and a nephew are normally rather close.' My answer was not wholly honest, nor was the British official convinced by it. In fact, I think that in the decisive final phase of Uncle Subhas's life that began in November 1940, the typical relationship between an uncle and a nephew became irrelevant. A new relationship based on revolutionary purpose took its place. He gave me the call in the simplest possible way to join him and help him.

CHAPTER 36

I could have answered his question in a number of different ways. I could have said: 'Of course. I will certainly do it. Just tell me what I

have to do.' Or I could have said: 'I'll try'. Or I might have said: 'Why don't you tell me first what I have to do?'

I did none of these. I only nodded slightly and made an indistinct noise. He watched my reaction closely.

Then he asked a second question: 'How well can you drive?' It was difficult for a diffident young man like myself to give a clear answer, even though it was well-known in the family that I was fond of driving and a good driver. I often drove my parents as well as other family members and friends around. Driving to me was a hobby and also an art. However, I had limited knowledge of the intricate mechanism of automobiles and was not inclined to fiddle with car engines and parts. Because of my love of driving, my father had registered his second car in my name in 1937. As I have said earlier, the car was of a German make called 'Wanderer'—an appropriate name as it turned out! I loved the car, which had a gearbox different from other cars of the time. So drivers used to British or American cars often felt uncomfortable with the Wanderer. Likewise, my enthusiasm for photography had led Father to buy me a camera. Even though I lost one camera after another because of my forgetful nature, Father continued to indulge me. There was some jealousy among other young people in the family on this account and I was sometimes snidely referred to as the 'favourite son' of Sarat Chandra Bose.

Later during the war, when Father was in prison, Mother had to sell the Wanderer to raise money for the family's sustenance. Fortunately, a friend of ours had purchased it. After Father's (and my) release from prison in September 1945, I asked him to buy the car back for obvious historical reasons. The Wanderer (registration number: BLA 7169) then returned to my custody.

When Uncle Subhas asked me how well I could drive, I replied to him in Bengali: 'I can drive, more or less well' (Bengali: '*Ei ekrokom bhaloi pari*'). Then he asked: 'Have you ever done long-distance driving?' I told him honestly that I had not (I was just twenty years old). I did not get the impression that he was disappointed or put off by my answer.

Then he told me what was on his mind. He said: 'Look, you will have to take me by car to a certain destination without a soul knowing about it. Can you do it?'

You may think that the question sent a thrill down my spine. My reaction was different. Temperamentally, I deal stoically with surprises and shocks, whether of a welcome or unwelcome kind. Initially, I usually

don't react at all. I do not get either unduly excited or depressed. I take things in. Only after some time do I show a visible reaction, if at all. So I stayed perfectly calm when he asked me if I could carry out the 'job'.

It may be that I did not in the beginning comprehend the enormity of what he was asking of me. I fixed my gaze on him, trying to understand what he had just said to me. Then he added: 'In this house, only Ila [my favourite cousin] will know. I have tested her. She can be trusted'.

A few days later, Ila told me that Uncle Subhas had asked her about me and that she had supported his idea to assign the task to me. Of all my cousins in the Elgin Road house, my relationship with Ila was the closest and it was easy for me to work with her. Both of us were very happy about the arrangement.

Uncle Subhas then told me that we must work out a 'foolproof' plan of escape that would remain absolutely secret. Back in my room at 1 Woodburn Park, my head reeling, I analysed the meeting. It was not very clear to me at that time what exactly he was up to. But I could understand that it was not going to be an ordinary political game of hide-and-seek. He had told me I should think about the matter in depth, chalk out a plan of escape in my own mind, and come and see him again the next evening.

Thus started our long and detailed conversations every evening, sometimes late into the night. But that first meeting on a winter afternoon in wartime Calcutta changed me forever. It dispelled my inborn shyness and diffidence and gave me a sense of self-confidence which was entirely new to me. I know that he similarly instilled a sense of purpose and direction in so many ordinary persons like myself and gave them the courage to undertake big tasks.

I amazed myself at how freely I talked with him every time thereafter. Along with the transformation of my relationship with Uncle Subhas, I also became very free and open with my father and began to discuss various subjects and exchange views with him without a trace of nervousness. The work that was entrusted to me in the winter of 1940-1941 could not have been carried out without this fundamental change in my relationship with both of them.

Apart from working out a practical plan of escape from the Elgin Road house, other thoughts did come into my mind. I thought: Why did Uncle Subhas call on me? There were others in the family who were also good drivers and in fact knew more about cars than I did. I wondered also whether it might have been better, in the interest of

secrecy and safety, to select a young man from outside the family to do the job, particularly when he wanted to keep the rest of the family in the dark. Then I wondered if I would have to do the job without the knowledge of my parents. I brooded over these questions till the early hours of the morning.

Eventually, I told myself to not bother about these issues and leave them to Uncle to decide upon. I concentrated on how to disappear from the house with him without anyone knowing about it. From then on my studies at the Calcutta Medical College—studying anatomy and physiology, dissecting human cadavers and identifying blood cells and germs—took a back seat to planning the future Netaji's great escape from India.

CHAPTER 37

In the initial stages of planning the escape, the first consideration was to find a safe and sure exit, to avoid being noticed at all at the time of leaving. Disguise may work in general but with relatives it is not of much use. We knew that if any member of the family became suspicious, the plan would fail. Most people cannot restrain themselves when curiosity or suspicion is aroused. They talk to others. Uncle Subhas told me that in such an eventuality, it might become necessary to change the plan altogether, or to take one or two additional persons into confidence in order to stop them from whispering. There was another way as well, to send the suspicious person away from the scene on some pretext. Uncle Subhas discussed these delicate issues with me in detail.

The house at 38/2, Elgin Road—now Netaji Bhawan—is a long narrow structure from north to south, much like a barrack. There are a series of rooms with corridors on both sides along the entire length of the building. One can go from one end of the house to the other along the open corridors without entering any room or hall. There were altogether four staircases. In the middle of the house there was an old-style wooden staircase from the ground to the second floor, which visitors take today to see the preserved rooms on the first floor and the museum display on the second floor. The second staircase was on the east side of the rear two-storeyed annexe. The annexe, which had the toilets, was also provided with a wrought-iron spiral staircase used by cleaning personnel for direct access to the toilets from outside

and the ground floor. At the southern end of the main building and annexe, there was a small two-storeyed structure which we called 'the school-house', facing the end of the driveway. This structure, which also had stairs, does not exist any more.

One could walk down the corridor from the main entrance in the north, on Elgin Road, and reach any of the stairwells without disturbing anyone in any of the rooms opening off the corridor. The house had three exits. One was the main gate on the Elgin Road, providing access to the driveway. There was a smaller side entrance on the west side, also accessed from Elgin Road. There was a third possible exit. Right at the rear of the building there was an open yard where our third paternal uncle, Suresh, ran a machine-tools workshop. A rear exit from the yard could possibly be made.

Due to the possibilities of slipping out by the small side entrance or sneaking out from the rear, who would think of the large main gate at the front of the building as the exit? I did not. I toyed with an exit plan that involved Uncle Subhas going down the length of the building from his bedroom on the first floor by the corridor on the east, down the open staircase of the annexe, then taking the western corridor of the ground floor to return to the front of the building and exiting to the street through the small side entrance. Alternatively, Uncle could use the south-facing stairs of the 'school house' to the backyard and leave by an improvised exit on the south boundary wall to the narrow alley called Elgin Lane which runs alongside the building. I presumed that his disguise would make his short walk up the alley to Elgin Road safe late in the evening. I would wait on the road with the car near the Elgin Road post office, a couple of minutes' walk to the west, or at the spot where Elgin Lane opens on to Elgin Road.

'Have you thought of something? Any good plan in your head?' he greeted me when I next met him and reported my ideas. I wondered how he would react.

He listened to me quietly and patiently. When I paused from time to time, he looked at me or at the wall pensively, with the tip of his left index finger raised to his lips, as was his habit. Then he said: 'Think more, think hard. We are in a hurry. We may have to set out around Christmas.' He said he was expecting a signal from the other end (wherever that was). As soon as it arrived he would tell me.

About that signal from the other end, I came to know the details from Mian Akbar Shah much later—in 1983! During a visit to England

in the summer of that year, I met Mian Akbar Shah at Walsall, near Birmingham. We met after nearly 43 years. Uncle Subhas had introduced me to Mian Sahib, his loyal follower in the North-West Frontier Province, in December 1940. Akbar Shah told me in 1983 that it was settled between him and Uncle Subhas that the latter would arrive in Peshawar on 19 January 1941. He would therefore have to leave Calcutta by 16 January. It is clear that Uncle Subhas did not find it necessary to tell me about the exact date of departure in advance. He just wanted me to be prepared to be in full readiness for the journey at all times. This was an example of his modus operandi. He found no need to tell individuals about every specific.

My frequent visits and closed-door conversations with Uncle Subhas naturally made some people in the Elgin Road house curious and even suspicious. Ila, my cousin, reported on this to him. Uncle used to listen to the radio and particularly to foreign broadcasts every evening to keep himself informed of the progress of the war. Throughout 1940, the Germans were getting the better of Britain and her allies. Uncle felt happy about this and so did we. Even in prison, he had compelled the government to give him a radio in his cell. Thanks to his influence, I had also developed a craze for listening to the radio. People in the Elgin Road house who were curious or suspicious about my visits were told that I was very good at tuning in to foreign radio stations, hence my frequent visits to Uncle's room.

But then, there were people who were incorrigibly inquisitive. One such person was my Uncle Palan, a resident of 38/2, Elgin Road. I noticed that he would often gently push open the door of Uncle's bedroom and peep in when we were talking and planning. Uncle Palan was quite a character. He was the only son of Dadabhai's only sister. She was married into a good family who lived in Rajpur, a village (now a town) next to our ancestral village, Kodalia, just south of Calcutta. I often saw Uncle Palan's father visiting the Elgin Road house when Dadabhai was alive. The old man would sit in the open corridor on the ground floor in the sun and enjoy smoking from an impressive-looking hookah. He felt very anxious about his restless and somewhat wayward son Palan. As he enjoyed the hookah he would doze off and say loudly in Bengali: 'Palan has bolted! Haran is lost again!' (In Bengali, that was '*Palan paliye galo, Haran hariye galo*'). Uncle Palan's full name was Haran Chandra Mitra. He grew up with the Bose family. He spent his early life in Cuttack and later life at 38/2, Elgin Road or 1, Woodburn Park.

He was strongly built and played good football. Besides, he was a good masseur. He would often massage Uncle Subhas and others too. When he needed to be friendly to us children he would say: 'It appears you have a headache, why don't I give you a massage?'

Uncle Palan told Ila that the daily closed-door meetings I was having with Uncle Subhas were very intriguing. When this was reported to Uncle Subhas, he decided to somehow send Uncle Palan away. Uncle Palan was at that time unemployed, and had been pestering Uncle Subhas to get him a job. Uncle Subhas gave him a letter of introduction to the boss of Tata Steel in Jamshedpur, Mr J. Ghandy. He told Uncle Palan that there was no greater shame than being unemployed. He should go meet the Tata Steel boss and not budge from Jamshedpur until he secured a job. Uncle Palan was safely away in Jamshedpur when the escape took place in January 1941.

Later, taking advantage of his simple nature, the police tried to use Uncle Palan. He once approached Ila and told her that the police had offered him money if he could get them some information about Uncle Subhas's escape. He told Ila that since she must be knowing the facts, he would much appreciate it if she could oblige him with the information.

A large number of people lived in the Elgin Road house—a typical Indian joint-family establishment—and a large number of visitors came there daily. In this sprawling residence, different people had different routines, hours and lifestyles. Moreover, there were quite a few domestic servants all over the place. To make matters even more complicated, Uncle Sunil, my doctor uncle, had a ferocious Alsatian dog called 'Sunny Boy' who pounced upon visitors whenever he got a chance, especially at night. While I was exploring ways of making a safe exit from the house at night, Uncle Subhas suddenly changed the line of thinking. He said: 'It will be difficult for us to do this from this large, complex establishment. Why don't I leave this house openly? It is well known that my health is in bad shape. I may as well move somewhere easier to escape from, citing health grounds, and then disappear from there.'

Our discussions then took an entirely new turn.

CHAPTER 38

To move out of the Elgin Road house and organize the escape from elsewhere was possible by two methods. Uncle Subhas told me of the

two alternatives. The first was to move to 1, Woodburn Park, my father's house on the street running perpendicular to Elgin Road. The second was to move to Father's farmhouse (bagan bari) at Rishra, about sixteen miles up the Hooghly river from Calcutta.

Uncle said it was widely known that he had been released after going on hunger-strike and that his health was far from satisfactory. A medical bulletin issued by Dr. M.N. De, professor of medicine at Calcutta Medical College, could be published in the newspapers. It could be announced that for his recovery he badly needed fresh air and sunshine and also more space to move around than available in the large but crowded Elgin Road residence. This could be followed by his moving across the road to the Woodburn Park house, where he would have a nice room and the terrace all to himself on the second floor. From the 'health' point of view, the Rishra house was even better. The house was on the river and had a garden. Both the possibilities were attractive for a case made on medical grounds. But did they have their own share of problems?

Uncle Subhas told me it would be easier for me to make the necessary arrangements at Woodburn Park. As for the Rishra house, only one caretaker lived there and he would have to be taken care of somehow. I thought over both the proposals very carefully and critically. I had the feeling after having talked with Uncle Subhas so freely for a while that my opinions mattered and were welcome to him. I came to the conclusion that it would be very unwise to move out of the Elgin Road house openly and then carry out the escape from either of the two places. I told Uncle bluntly: 'You are known to be ill, confined to one room and you have not been seen to move out of your room even once. Plainclothes police agents stationed around the house have that impression. Watching them daily, I think that they have become complacent and lazy as a result. In these circumstances, if you move to another place everybody concerned will sit up and take notice. There would immediately be new and special police arrangements for the other place, to our disadvantage. Besides, order and discipline at 1, Woodburn Park is strict. Those who live on the ground floor, namely the gate-keeper, the office attendants and the two drivers, are all old employees, very reliable and very alert. They would raise a ruckus at anything unusual. It is true that we have to deal with only one person in Rishra. But once you move to a place outside the city, special police arrangements would be made by the authorities there, too.'

Having said all this, I thought I might have spoken out of turn, and turned apologetic. But Uncle Subhas immediately said: 'You are right, that is not the way to do it. Regardless of all the problems and difficulties, we have to plan on the basis that the escape will take place from 38/2, Elgin Road.'

One day, Uncle Subhas drew me close and asked a difficult question: 'Can you do this job without telling your parents?' I did not gave a confident reply. I looked at him for a while in silence and then mumbled: 'All right (*Thik achhe*)'.

As the planning was going on, I thought it would be a good idea to inform myself about some of the great escapes in history. The escape of Shivaji took place too long ago and under very different conditions. There were also stories about Lenin and some of our own revolutionaries such as Rashbehari Bose and others. But to my mind the famous escape closest to our emerging plan was that of the Irish leader Eamon de Valera from Lincoln prison in England and eventually to America. Although the circumstances were different, the enemy was the same. It was good that I knew de Valera's escape story in detail because Uncle Subhas asked me about it during the drive from Calcutta on the night of 16-17 January 1941.

That escape took place in 1919. The jail where de Valera, called 'Dev' by his comrades, was detained had a small gate at the rear. The chaplain of the jail came and left by that gate and would often leave the inner key carelessly here and there. De Valera managed to take a wax impression of the key. One of his comrades in prison then sketched the outline of the key on a Christmas card and sent the card with a coded message to friends outside. A duplicate inner key was sent in, skilfully buried in a Christmas cake for the prisoners. Twice, the key did not work. The third time a prisoner worked on it to make it fit. Among the group who waited in the forest outside to rescue de Valera was the legendary Michael Collins, commander-in-chief of the Irish Republican Army. After an exchange of signals, de Valera opened the inner side of the gate with the smuggled key. Collins then put in the key to open the outer side of the gate and as he turned it the key broke in the lock. Collins was mortified and said in despair: 'Dev, I have broken the key.' De Valera was startled but as he fiddled through the keyhole with the key in his hand, the broken key fell to the ground. De Valera came out and walked with his comrades to the city of Lincoln. There were some sentries on the way—as we also found during our nocturnal drive—but

the rebels coolly exchanged greetings with them and moved on. While the night was still dark, a taxi sped away from Lincoln with the freed prisoner, the future leader of independent Ireland.

Reading about Eamon de Valera's escape made me anxious. Seasoned revolutionaries had organized his escape. Even then, there had been so many impediments and loopholes. I wondered whether Uncle Subhas would be able to carry out his operation with an inexperienced youngster like me as an assistant. Michael Collins and Sisir Kumar Bose were not quite in the same league! I asked myself if I had the requisite sense of responsibility. Then I told myself that I had been given a job to do and whatever happened, I must do my level best to pull it off.

I visited Dublin with my parents and two sisters at the end of 1948. I was greatly excited, for I would be meeting Eamon de Valera in person. Perhaps I would have a chance to talk to him as well. De Valera received Father at the Dail, the Irish parliament building. Father had a long conversation with him. In the 1930s, Uncle Subhas had met de Valera a few times in Dublin and London. As a result of this meeting with Father, Mother and us children, a new bond of friendship developed between the Irish leader and the Bose family. I told him that Uncle Subhas had in a wartime broadcast from Rangoon (Yangon) thanked de Valera, then Taoiseach (Prime Minister) of Ireland, for the assistance he sent through the Irish Red Cross to the famine-stricken people of Bengal in 1943. De Valera was very excited to hear about this. He asked me to try to obtain the text of the broadcast and send a copy to him. I had my camera with me. In spite of insufficient light, I took a number of photographs. Later I sent the photographs to him from London and requested him to return one photograph of himself to me with his autograph.

Father was not keeping well throughout 1940. Soon after Uncle Subhas's release in early December, Father left for Kalimpong in the Darjeeling hills for health reasons. He spent about three weeks there as the guest of one of his favourite pupils, Sudhi Ranjan Das. Uncle Subhas wrote two or three letters to him and had them posted directly into the mailbox of the Darjeeling Mail at Calcutta's Sealdah station. He wanted to avoid the letters being ripped open and read at the post office. A few days after Father's departure from Calcutta, Mother, with the rest of the family, went over to Bararee, near Dhanbad, to spend the winter vacation with my eldest brother Asoke Nath Bose, who was working as a chemical engineer at the coal-tar plant there. As a result,

when I started preparations for Uncle Subhas's escape from Elgin Road, I was quite alone at 1, Woodburn Park.

CHAPTER 39

When we agreed that the escape was to be from the Elgin Road house after all, Uncle Subhas started thinking and planning afresh. But he did not indicate very clearly how he planned to depart unnoticed from the house. Meanwhile, there were other arrangements to be made and we got busy with them.

First, he needed a disguise. He wanted to have a look at his warm clothing. Most of his warm clothes, which he had used during his European sojourns in the 1930s, were with my mother at 1, Woodburn Park. He let it be known that he was expecting to be in jail for a long time and wanted to sort out his things. I conveyed his message to my mother and arranged to have his warm clothing brought across to the Elgin Road house by his personal servant Karuna. Some of the clothing he returned, some he asked me to keep for the journey. After his escape, I heard whispers about the 'operation clothing' conducted between the two houses. The person who expressed his suspicions to me personally after the escape was my cousin Ganesh.

A very important episode in connection with the escape plan took place in December. Uncle Subhas called a party executive meeting to which members from all parts of the country were invited. I think the meeting was largely a cover, apart from his desire to meet close comrades once before leaving the country. The real business was with Mian Akbar Shah, Forward Bloc leader of the North-West Frontier Province. One evening, on my arrival in Uncle's room, I found a handsome Pathan gentleman talking to him. His secretary, Amulya Mukherjee, was also in the room. Uncle introduced me to Mian Akbar Shah and told me that the latter was leaving Calcutta by the night train from Howrah. He told me further that he was sending his secretary directly to the railway station to purchase the guest's ticket and ensure a berth for him on the train. He wanted me to take Mian Sahib to the station in my car. On the way Mian Sahib would pick up his baggage from his hotel on Mirzapur Street and also visit a department store on Dharmatala Street to make some purchases. I noticed that a measuring tape was lying on the bed.

The Wanderer was driven by the chauffeur, and Mian Akbar Shah and I were in the rear seat. After a little while, Mian Sahib started speaking in English. He said that Uncle had told him that I was going to assist him with the escape at this end and that he was taking charge of arrangements at the other. It was good, he said, that we had got a chance to meet. When I met him in England in 1983, he cleared up my impression about the signal from the other end that Uncle Subhas had talked about. Now I know that was merely a means to keep the date of Uncle's departure top-secret.

We first drove to the hotel on Mirzapur Street in central Calcutta, from where he picked up his bags. Then he asked me to take him to the well-known Wachhel Molla department store on Dharmatala Street, where he wanted to buy some articles of clothing for Uncle's journey. We agreed that he would wilfully 'forget' the packet in the car when alighting at Howrah station.

We went into the store together. I showed him the counter for men's clothing and then waited at a distance, looking away in another direction. Out of the corner of my eye I saw Mian Sahib checking the size of his intended purchases against his own body, as if he was buying for himself. He bought a pair of loose pyjama-style trousers and a black Astrakhan type of cap for Uncle.

He returned to the car with me holding the packet in his hands and duly placed it on the seat. At Howrah station, we found Amulya Mukherjee waiting at the front porch. Uncle had advised me to not alight at the station. I quickly passed the baggage to a porter, bade goodbye to Mian Sahib and asked the chauffeur to drive home. But as fate would have it, even before we had left the station premises the chauffeur noticed the packet lying on the rear seat. He offered to run back and give the packet to Mian Sahib. I pretended to be irritated and said: 'I cannot be responsible if people are so forgetful. We shall send him his things by parcel post. I am in a hurry, please drive home fast.' Back at Woodburn Park, I threw the packet into my wardrobe.

After the encounter with Mian Akbar Shah, the nature of what Uncle Subhas was planning became clearer to me. Soon thereafter, Uncle told me that I would have to make some purchases for him. I got for him from the Stuart Hogg Market ('New Market') in central Calcutta a pair of flannel shirts as well as a comb, toothbrush and paste and soap, all of British make. I had some difficulty finding the 'Kabuli' chappals that he wanted. Eventually, I obtained a pair from a Chinese

shop on Bentinck Street. From a shop on Harrison Road, I bought a suitcase of medium size, an attache case, and a bedroll. I got the letters 'M.Z.' inscribed on the suitcase and the attache case. I bought pillows, a quilt and sheets from Dharmatala Street. Bringing things into the Woodburn Park house, taking them up to the second floor and storing them in my room aroused no attention as the rest of the family were all away. I did all these errands during the afternoons, when the domestic servants and the chauffeur of my Wanderer car were off-duty. I had great fun tip-toeing past Father's office-boy, who slept soundly in the portico in the afternoons, with the purchases under my arm. Most of the things including the bedroll went into the wardrobe. The suitcase I kept under my bed.

I then had to print a fake visiting card for Uncle Subhas. He gave me the text written in block letters on a small piece of paper. He told me that I should go to an obscure shop and be so dressed and behave as if I was ordering the cards for myself. One evening as I was about to leave home, dressed formally in Western style, I ran into my cousin Rabindra Kumar Ghosh (Dantida). He was rather surprised to see me dressed like that and said: 'Oh, you have a dinner invitation?' I fumbled for a moment and said awkwardly: 'Yes, yes, a dinner invitation, of course!' I took a taxi to Radhabazar behind the Writers' Buildings. There I went into a shop and placed an order for the visiting card in a very serious manner and superior tone. It read:

MOHD. ZIAUDDIN B.A., LL.B.
Travelling Inspector
The Empire of India Life Insurance Co. Ltd.

Permanent address:
Civil Lines
Jubbulpore

After a couple of days I handed the printed card to Uncle Subhas. He seemed to like it.

There were two cars in our house. One was a Studebaker President, a convertible limousine Father used. The other was the Wanderer, which Mother and others in the family used, and I drove most of the time. The Studebaker was a powerful car, ran very well and was very comfortable to ride in. The Wanderer was also a strong, reliable car. We wondered which car would be more suitable for the long drive. Uncle Subhas

seemed initially in favour of the Studebaker. But when we discussed the matter, we decided that the big car was much too well-known. When it passed through Calcutta's streets, people would remark: 'There goes Sarat Bose's car! There goes Sarat Bose!' So we picked the Wanderer for the journey.

One day Uncle Subhas gave me an endurance test. He asked me to drive the Wanderer non-stop to Burdwan, a little over seventy miles from Calcutta up the Grand Trunk Road, have lunch at the railway station there and immediately drive back to Calcutta. I was to report to him on the car's performance and also how tired I felt after the drive. I took this test-drive on Christmas Day.

The drive went well and I did not feel too tired. He then wanted me to drive one evening to Father's Rishra farmhouse just outside Calcutta and spend a night there. He wanted the caretaker-cum-gardener at Rishra to be prepared to receive me without notice and also people at Woodburn Park to get used to seeing me spending nights away from home. I drove out to Rishra late one evening. On arrival, I told the gardener that I had been delayed on the way and would stay there overnight instead of returning to Calcutta. I asked him to get me some food and also prepare a bed for me. Uncle Subhas said that it might become necessary for me to spend a night at Rishra after taking him up to a railway station much further from Calcutta. That would also give me a pretext to say that I had been taking a snap getaway at the Rishra farmhouse.

CHAPTER 40

As December 1940 drew to a close, Uncle Subhas seemed to me to be getting increasingly restless. He had once mentioned to me that we might set out around Christmas. At the time, I thought he was getting restless because of a delay in receiving the 'signal' from Mian Akbar Shah. But now I know that there was no signal as such and the date of departure was already fixed between the two of them.

Meanwhile, two guests from Bombay arrived. They were Mr and Mrs Nathalal D. Parikh, who were, as I've said earlier, close friends of the Bose family. Uncle Subhas had met Nathalal in the 1930s in Belgium, where the Parikh family were in the diamond business. Their hospitality had charmed Uncle Subhas. On his return to India, Mr Parikh became

his close friend and political comrade.

Uncle Subhas asked me to make arrangements to put Mr and Mrs Parikh up at Woodburn Park. I was the only resident in an otherwise empty house. They walked over to the Elgin Road house for their meals. At the end of December, they went on a visit to Santiniketan before leaving for Bombay early in January.

I had thought that Uncle Subhas would ask me to take him upto Burdwan, as he had mentioned an overnight stay for me at Rishra on the way back to Calcutta. But as our talks progressed, I realized that he was thinking of a much longer road-trip. He mentioned Asansol, right on Bengal's border with Bihar, or some nearby railway station. The plan that was more or less settled was that I would drop him at a dak bungalow somewhere in that area by early in the morning after driving during the night from Calcutta. He would stay in the dak bungalow for the day. I would drive on to my elder brother Asoke's place after dropping Uncle Subhas off. My brother lived in Bararee, near Dhanbad, the next station after Asansol on the East Indian Railway. The next evening I would drive Uncle to the railway station of his choice. There would be no need for an excuse for my visit to my brother and sister-in-law in Bararee. In any event, I had planned to visit Bararee in the first week of January to bring my mother, sisters and youngest brother back to Calcutta. I got on the Bombay Mail with Mr and Mrs Parikh. I took leave of them at Dhanbad and was driven by my brother to Bararee.

As per Uncle Subhas's instructions, I casually told my brother Asoke before leaving Bararee that I would be coming again soon to the area on an assignment from Uncle.

I took this opportunity to familiarize myself with the roads between Dhanbad and Bararee. In the beginning I felt rather confused. But then I sketched in my mind the turns, crossings, culverts, and the like, between Bararee and Dhanbad. The Bararee Coal Works, where my brother worked, had a couple of tall chimneys which served as good landmarks. On the Grand Trunk Road there was a hamlet called Gobindapur before the turn to the left to Dhanbad. There was a checkpost there for passing cars. As we passed that point on our way back from Bararee, a bamboo barrier was raised by the man in charge and our car number was noted.

We set out from Bararee in Father's Studebaker President. But there was a major breakdown between Asansol and Burdwan and we were told that the repairs required would take a couple of days. We left the

car in charge of our chauffeur Shamsuddin and travelled on to Calcutta with Mother in a ramshackle taxi. The incident gave me a real scare. I was greatly perturbed by the thought of a similar breakdown with the Wanderer during my imminent journey with Uncle Subhas.

After my return to Calcutta, my regular conferences with Uncle Subhas resumed. Father returned from Kalimpong on 7 January. Uncle Subhas had already asked me to tell my mother that she should see to it that Father met him immediately upon reaching Calcutta.

Father went across to Elgin Road in the evening of his arrival. The brothers then had a lengthy, closed-door meeting. I kept away. The next evening Mother told me with a smile: 'He [my father] was asking me if 'your son' was going into a risky adventure without telling his parents!' I felt relieved that the delicate question of taking my parents into confidence had been resolved. However, Father did not speak to me about the matter until the evening of 16 January. He would only smile at me gently when we passed each other. Mother told me repeatedly that if she had known earlier that Uncle Subhas was about to go away she would have made sure to see him more frequently and might even have dropped the trip to Bararee. For the last few days before the escape, Mother visited Uncle Subhas daily.

In the early stage of our discussions in December, Uncle Subhas had expressed deep anxiety about Father's health. He thought Father was in a delicate nervous condition. He said he had received advice and support from Father at all the critical moments of his life. His apprehension was that if Father advised him to desist from the dangerous undertaking in view of his own weak health, he would be in a real dilemma. However, when I met Uncle the next day (8 January 1941), I did not get the impression that Father had raised any objection to his going ahead with his plans. To the contrary, I got the distinct impression that the brothers had discussed and analysed the plan in great detail. In fact, Father had suggested some major changes.

For instance, Father was of the opinion that it would be unwise to leave the entire responsibility of keeping the secret and maintaining the bluff after Uncle Subhas's departure on a young woman like Ila. In that case, Ila would be fully exposed to police harassment. Uncle Subhas asked me who among the other young men in the house could be taken into confidence and asked to assist in carrying on with the deception for a few days. I suggested my cousin Dwijendranath, the younger son of Uncle Satish. Uncle Subhas accepted my suggestion and

co-opted Dwijen into the plan.

Uncle Subhas revealed his plan of deception to me during the next couple of days. I was amazed. I expressed my reservations and had doubts if the plan would work. He said he would announce to the family that he had decided to go into complete seclusion for a few days. He would not stir out of his bedroom, meet anybody or talk on the telephone during this time. There would not be any public or press announcement, however. Visitors or telephone callers would be told that he was in seclusion and could not meet or talk to anybody. The news should be allowed to percolate slowly. His mother Majanani's cook Sarbeshwar would serve him food from behind a curtain. He wanted people to believe he was self-isolated in his room, engaged in a religious and spiritual exercise. He would assign the task of eating the food and switching the lights on and off at appropriate times to Ila and Dwijen. Besides, he wrote out a number of messages in his own hand on small pieces of paper, to be given to visitors. The messages read: 'Please see Ashrafuddin Sahib in Congress office about this', 'Please ask one of our councillors in the Corporation to deal with this', and so on. He also wrote a number of post-dated letters, particularly to comrades in prison, to be mailed after his departure on different dates. Letters passing through police censors would convince the interceptors that Uncle Subhas was safely in his house in Calcutta.

It was now the second week of January and I had a feeling that the big day was fast approaching. Uncle asked me repeatedly during that last week if I was ready and all arrangements were in place. Now I paid special attention to the car. I spoke to Father and arranged a new spare tyre and a new battery. I spoke to International Tyres and Motors, our regular car-servicing firm, for a servicing appointment. But the problem was how to get rid of the chauffeur of the Wanderer car for a few days. Then there was a stroke of luck. A telegram arrived that the chauffeur's mother was ill and he must go home at once. Mother granted him leave. I reported to Uncle Subhas that there was some good news. He looked surprised and asked me what it was. I told him that the chauffeur's mother had been taken ill. At first he looked at me gravely, then broke into laughter.

CHAPTER 41

A few days before departure, Uncle Subhas asked me to take Ila in my car to the famous Kali temple at Dakshineswar, just north of Calcutta. I was not overly curious, as I realized this was part of his mental preparation for the journey he was about to undertake. There was plenty of talk and speculation about his religious beliefs. I have no doubt in my mind that he believed in God and was deeply religious. He proved through his life that true faith brings limitless strength to a human being, makes him selfless and prepares him for sacrifice. This kind of faith has nothing to do with superstition and meaningless rituals. In family and social matters, Uncle Subhas was always very liberal and progressive. I have seen plenty of blind superstition, pseudo-devotion and excessive attachment to showy rituals in many members of our family. Uncle Subhas was free of this. On particular social or family occasions, I did see him participate in rituals which held no appeal to me. I think he did so to maintain family and social relations and keep people happy. I also heard him say that whatever one's own beliefs might be, one should never unnecessarily wound others in regard to theirs.

I drove Ila in my Wanderer car one beautiful moonlit evening to Dakshineswar. I waited on the steps as she went into the temple with a small copper bowl. She returned after a while with some flowers and holy water in the bowl. I did not ask her what she did inside. On the way back, we had a pleasant chat about the common task that lay ahead of us. She told me that Uncle Subhas had once asked her what sort of impression she had of me as a person. She told me with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes that she gave me a good character certificate.

I am reminded here of two other events. Uncle Subhas launched his fast unto death in Calcutta's Presidency Jail on the day of Kali Puja in November 1940. And, in December 1943, I received in Calcutta a secret message from him written in his own hand in Bengali. At the top of the letterhead he had written: 'Sri Sri Kali Puja, 29 October 1943'. There must be a deep spiritual significance, which I do not fully understand, to invoking total devotion to one's God—Divine Mother, in this case—before embarking on noble missions in the service of the country and of humanity.

It became necessary to take precautions and preemptive steps to avoid any difficulties during the actual exit from the house. It was essential to study the habits of all the residents and domestic servants.

Most of the elders retired early to their respective bedrooms on the second (top) floor. The servants fortunately were all deep sleepers. We noted that Uncle's personal servant Karuna was in charge of closing the front door to the central wooden staircase on the ground floor before retiring. He had only to be asked to close the door and go to bed. Uncle had decided that he would walk down the length of the house, along the internal corridor from his north-facing first-floor room with windows overlooking Elgin Road, to the southern end, and then come down to the ground level by the open staircase of the two-storeyed annexe at the rear of the building. There was no door at the ground floor end of that staircase, and I would park the car at the rear end of the house's driveway, just where he would exit from that staircase. At the front end of the longish driveway, the main gate of the house, opening out on Elgin Road, was always closed at night but, crucially, never locked. It only had to be pulled open when we were ready to drive out of the house.

Uncle Sunil's Alsatian dog Sunny Boy was a problem. As I said, he was in the habit of pouncing on people moving about in the building at night. A serious situation arose when one night he jumped on Uncle Subhas's close associate Satya Ranjan Bakshi, a small and frail man, when he was leaving the house late after meeting Uncle Subhas. Ila was asked to speak to Uncle Sunil about restraining Sunny Boy at night 'until Uncle Subhas goes back to prison.' Uncle Sunil agreed to keep the dog on a leash at night for the time being.

One evening, I arrived to find Uncle Subhas in a particularly cheerful mood. I expected some good news. But it turned out that the reason was that he had tried on his Mohd. Ziauddin the travelling insurance salesman disguise the previous night. He thought it was jolly good and that nobody would recognize him. I was not so sure and said: 'It is extremely difficult to disguise your appearance, however much you may try.' He did not appreciate my comment.

Towards the end I was making more than one visit daily to the Elgin Road house just in case there was some news. On 14 January 1941, Uncle Subhas told me that the 'signal' had come, and we would have to leave on the evening of 16 January. I rushed for an early appointment for servicing the car. There was no booking available before the 16th but I was assured by the garage that the serviced car would be returned by early evening. Uncle asked for the bedroll I had bought to be sent to the Elgin Road house so he could do some last-minute

packing. Getting the bedroll from Woodburn Park to Elgin Road was a difficult operation but we managed it somehow through Karuna, on the pretext of sorting Uncle's clothing.

On the evening of 15 January I shut myself in my room on the second floor of 1, Woodburn Park and started packing. As I was packing Uncle's suitcase it suddenly struck me that the height of the suitcase might be a little too much for the boot of the Wanderer car. I measured the suitcase and then quickly went down to our garage to measure the inside of the boot. Alas, I was right, the suitcase would not go in! Should I buy another suitcase? Was there time to get the initials 'M.Z.'—for the fictitious Mohd. Ziauddin—painted on the cover? What would Uncle think? Just outside my room, all the suitcases belonging to the family were stored on one side of the hallway. I took out a suitcase belonging to Father that was of the appropriate size but it was marked 'S.C.B.'! I rushed to get a bottle of Chinese ink, and some spirit. I scratched off 'S.C.B.' and inscribed 'M.Z.' in its place in bold capitals. I had to work also on the suitcase I had bought for Uncle. I removed the 'M.Z.' with some difficulty, rather clumsily inscribed 'S.C.B.' on it and put it with the other suitcases in the hall.

Then I repacked the things I had purchased for Uncle in the replacement suitcase and in the attache case I had bought for him. He had given me two copies of the Quran to put in the attache case. Ila had given me two bottles of Ayurvedic medicines with labels written neatly in her own hand. I removed the labels. I spent the night in some anxiety as all sorts of problematic scenarios regarding the escape plan filled my mind.

The next day, 16 January, was a Thursday. Thinking that it would be a good idea to be seen in college, I spent some time in the anatomy dissection room and also attended a lecture. I was secretly living a surreal existence while people all around me were happily going about their daily routines. I had the feeling that I was about to leave that ordinary world for a long time and enter into an unknown, dangerous one. I sat through the lecture without listening, my mind completely distracted. At the dissection table, my partner was Prabhat Kumar Bose, a fellow-student known for his simple nature. He would believe whatever I said. Our teacher was Dr Subodh Kumar Sur Roy, a very competent demonstrator in anatomy and a man with a generally keen and observant eye. I did not take leave from him formally. I just told Prabhat casually that there were a few things to attend to at home so I might not be able to come to college for the next two days, Friday and Saturday.

In the late afternoon I peeped into Uncle's room. There were too many people around, so we could not have a conversation. We just looked at each other, our eyes briefly locked. I think we were able to assure each other through that silent look that everything was all right, we were ready to go. He had told me the previous day that I should arrive with the car around 9 p.m., as he would like to leave as early as possible.

CHAPTER 42

In the Calcutta winter, dusk fell early. I got anxious as the car had not returned from the service centre. I had sent Father's chauffeur Shamsuddin, who drove the Studebaker, to fetch it. I kept looking out of the street-side window of my room again and again. What if the servicing mechanics failed to finish their work the same day, as they had promised they would, and wanted to keep the car overnight? I heaved a sigh of relief when I heard the droning noise of the Wanderer's engine and then saw Shamsuddin driving it into the driveway of 1 Woodburn Park. By then Uncle's baggage was ready.

I was going down to the first floor from time to time and looking this way and that. I saw Father resting on the divan in the south verandah after returning from the High Court. I had to see him and talk to him, but there were other people around. As I deliberated what to do, I heard Father coming up the stairs at a slow pace. He asked me to switch on the light of the terrace and took me out there. I had never before in my life had a conversation with my father in such a sombre and charged situation. Father looked really worried but he smiled gently to put me at ease and asked: 'Well, will you be able to do it? (*Ki, thik parbe to?*)' Then he asked me if I anticipated any problems with driving a long distance and if there was much risk of mechanical trouble. I told him very confidently: 'I shall have no difficulty driving a long distance and the Wanderer is a very reliable car.'

It appeared to me that Father was surveying the entire journey in his mind and trying to think where and how problems might arise. Then he told me that he was not as confident as Uncle Subhas about our prospects. It was wartime and we would have to pass through areas where there was very strict police or military watch. He particularly apprehended

that we might be challenged while driving through Chandernagore, a French enclave in British India. We knew that the French police there stopped passing vehicles frequently to combat smuggling. Father told me that a private car driving through Chandernagore in the dead of night was bound to arouse suspicion, and advised me to be extra careful while going through there.

He also told me that he had discussed with Uncle Subhas a reasonable alibi for me to account for my sudden trip to Bararee. If necessary, we would tell people that Father had sent me there upon receiving news of the sudden illness of my sister-in-law. The plan was that I would send a telegram to Father after my arrival there to say that my sister-in-law was better and there was no cause for anxiety. As he talked to me, while we strolled on the open terrace that winter evening, Father also said that secret conversations should always be held in public view—in his words, 'conspiracy under the lamppost' was the best way to avoid suspicion! Then he looked at me for a while with a philosophical sort of gaze, gave me an affectionate smile, said 'All right', and slowly went down the stairs. I could sense his great anxiety.

Mother told me later that Father stayed awake until 2 a.m. that night and anxiously waited for the sound of the Wanderer passing in front of the house. He repeatedly came out of his bedroom and looked out from the small streetside verandah. He had evidently thought that we would go north along Woodburn Road, which we did not.

The clock was ticking. How was I to load Uncle's luggage into the car without being observed? If someone caught me in the act, what would I say? First, I went down as if to check how the car had been serviced. Shamsuddin had put the Wanderer in the garage. I took it out and parked it close to the side door of the small kitchen on the ground floor. I avoided going out by the front door as servants were sitting there. Then I took the luggage down in three stages.

First, I quickly took the cases down from my second-floor room to the first floor and put them in the darkened drawing-room by the hallway. Apart from the servants on that floor, I had to dodge my younger sister Gita, who usually kept a close watch on whatever was going on in the house. We were close in age and she monitored me quite a lot. Then I went down to the ground floor to see if anybody was around. When I found the coast clear, I quickly took the cases down to the dining room. Fortunately, there was nobody there and the room was dark. Finally, I went out by the side door of the kitchen on tiptoe and

opened the left rear door of the car. Then, after taking a quick look in all directions, I swiftly took the two cases out of the dining room and put them inside the boot.

Nobody saw the operation. But I had an eerie feeling, then and later, that our tall grandfather clock standing in the ground-floor hallway with its gleaming face had seen it all!

I wanted an early dinner. Our cook Satyabadi Panda had been with the family for a long time and had worked for my grandmother in the past. He was very affectionate but could be quite domineering as well. The younger children of the house had not yet been served their dinner, so he could have turned me away. In Mother's presence, I told him I was feeling tired and wanted to retire early after a quick dinner. As I ate, Mother sat quietly and pensively by my side.

Father's chauffeur Shamsuddin was also an impressive and intelligent person. He lived on the premises but had his meals elsewhere. As I have said, the driver of the Wanderer had left for his home to see his ailing mother. But I had to get rid of Shamsuddin. I asked Mother to send Shamsuddin off to have his dinner.

After dinner, I went into my parents' room. I asked Mother for some cash for expenses on the road. She opened her wardrobe for the money and said in Bengali: 'God knows what you all are up to!'

Uncle Subhas had asked me not to change my normal dress. After all, many people in both the houses would see me that evening. So I put on a shirt, dhoti, a warm jacket and kabuli chappals. Uncle had given me a Kashmiri cap of his own while sorting his things. He asked me to wear it while driving in the daytime to change my appearance and project a non-Bengali look. This cap Uncle had used very often in Europe and there are many pictures of him wearing it.

I took only a small handbag for the journey. The Kashmiri cap I donated to the museum at Netaji Bhawan on the fiftieth anniversary of the escape (1991).

It was now past 8 p.m. I went downstairs in a leisurely fashion. Father's office attendant Dhonu was sitting in the portico. I told him I was going towards Rishra and if I was delayed for any reason I would spend the night at our farmhouse there. I asked him to close the front door if I was not back by 11 p.m.

I rolled out of our driveway and turned right, got onto the Lower Circular Road and then turned left, driving west until I reached the petrol station at the junction of Lower Circular Road and Lee Road. There

I filled the tank, took an extra two gallons in a can for emergencies and checked the pressure of the tyres.

I entered Elgin Road from the Chowringhee side on the west and drove into the driveway of 38/2. Then, I turned the car around and parked it by the open staircase of the annexe at the rear of the house.

It was now nearly 9 p.m. In his room, I found Uncle Subhas wearing a silk dhoti and chaddar, as if dressed for a ceremony. He was about to take his seat on the floor for a specially prepared vegetarian dinner before starting his purported meditation exercise in seclusion. His mother, two of my aunts and three or four youngsters were seated around him. This was the drama being enacted to fool people before the escape. I sat down on my grandfather's large bed and watched the proceedings impassively.

CHAPTER 43

After the special dinner, senior members of the family retired to their rooms one by one. My grandmother Prabhabati went to her room next to Uncle's and closed the door. This door between the two rooms remained closed until 26 January. I moved to the next room, where Ila lived, and started a hilarious conversation about movie stars with my older cousin Ganesh, whom we called 'Mejda'. Uncle's radio had been removed to this room. We listened to the radio and chatted. Mejda was a jovial person and we all liked him.

After the elders had left, the re-arrangement of Uncle's room began. Ila, Dwijen and Aurobindo, another cousin, helped in the process. I guessed that Aurobindo had been taken into confidence about Uncle's departure at the last moment. Large bedsheets were used as curtains to divide the room into three compartments. The northern half, looking on to Elgin Road, was kept separate, ostensibly for Uncle's seclusion. The southern half was divided into two parts. The larger portion included my grandfather's large bed, and then a small area was created near the door. It was announced that nobody should venture beyond this area. My grandmother Prabhabati's cook Sarbeshwar was instructed to pass the food gently inside under the curtain and leave it on a small teapoy. He would also remove the plates in reverse order. Ila and Aurobindo then removed the number '6' sewed into Uncle's pillow cases, bedsheets and undergarments.[18] The linen was then packed into the bedroll.

The cook Sarbeshwar played a crucial role in the subterfuge, of course without his knowledge. Ten days later, in the morning, he was the person who discovered when he went to collect the plates that Uncle's dinner was untouched. Naturally, he raised the alarm.

That story comes a little later. Sarbeshwar was a very nice man and a good cook. He was handsome and well-built, and walked so gracefully that he was jokingly called 'Uday Shankar' (a famous dance exponent of India) in the Bose family.

Uncle Subhas had told me he would like to set out as quickly as possible because he wanted to reach Dhanbad before dawn. But as it turned out, we had to wait for another four hours before the coast was clear for us to leave! Uncle was getting very restless during that time. Ganesh used to go to bed early. After listening to the radio for a while and chatting with me, he started yawning. I started yawning too. He said he should go to bed. I said I was also feeling sleepy and wanted to go home. Meanwhile, Dwijen came once to tell me that Uncle wanted me to turn to the right twice after getting out of the house, first on to Elgin Road and then take the first right turn on to Allenby Road.[19]

Mejda left for his room, yawning. But the trouble was with another cousin, Ranjit (also known as Kartik), the eldest son of Uncle Suresh. I felt sure that he suspected something fishy was afoot. He even asked me why I was staying so late and why I had the car with me! He paced up and down the long corridor in front of Uncle's first-floor room for quite a while.

After some time, I saw him moving away towards the central staircase of the house. Encouraged, I said loudly 'I must go home now!' and went downstairs stamping my feet on the wooden stairs. After a few minutes I sneaked back upstairs on tiptoe. To my horror I saw Kartik coming down the stairs from the second floor. I mumbled to him that I had left something behind in Ila's room and moved away. Karuna, Uncle's servant, had already been told to shut the ground-level door

[18] This was because Subhas was the sixth son of Janakinath and Prabhabati Bose, and in the Elgin Road house numerals were used to identify the laundry of the many sons. Ed.

[19] After Sisir's death in the autumn of 2000, Allenby Road was re-named Dr Sisir Kumar Bose Sarani in his honour. Ed.

of the central staircase and retire. Ila made sure that the rest of the servants had all gone to bed. But Kartik stuck around.

When it was past 1 a.m., Uncle Subhas asked Dwijen to take Kartik with him upstairs to their second-floor bedroom and somehow keep him there. Should Kartik express suspicions about what was going on, Dwijen was to ask him to control himself so that no harm came to Uncle Subhas. Dwijen was also asked to clear his throat loudly once his cousin was under control, and after he checked the road in front of the house from the upper floor to see that it was clear of any loiterers. When we got this signal, we would move.

The night was quiet and still. The old wall-clock in Uncle's room chimed half-past-one. I could hear my own heartbeat. The tension we all felt for fifteen or twenty minutes is hard to describe. Then we heard Dwijen's throat-clearing signal. Uncle Subhas came out of his enclosure into the area just in front of the door to his room. I was really struck then by his impressive disguise. I observed with amazement Subhas Chandra Bose's transformation into Mohd. Ziauddin, a north Indian Muslim! Ila and Aurobindo shared that experience with me.

Uncle Subhas kissed Ila tenderly on the forehead, whispered 'God bless you' to her in English and moved out of the room, gesturing to us to proceed down the long corridor leading to the staircase at the rear of the building. Aurobindo carried the bedroll and walked in front, followed by Uncle. I brought up the rear. The late moon was shining by then. Uncle had already instructed us to keep close to the wall so that there were no shadows. We all walked on tiptoe. I had already noticed that Uncle was wearing the tough laced shoes he had brought from Europe and not the kabuli chappals I had bought for him. He had told me that he might have to walk a lot and he was not used to kabuli footwear. The spectacles he normally wore he left behind. Instead he wore the gold-rimmed oval glasses he had used as a student and in the 1920s. He said he would wear them only whilst walking and when absolutely essential, and otherwise he would go without them.

The three of us went down the entire length of the long corridor to the south, passed through the dark passage of the annexe and reached the top of the open staircase. There was not a sound to be heard. We came down the stairs. Aurobindo quietly put the bedroll on the front seat by the driver. He then opened the left rear door for Uncle and moved away swiftly along the driveway towards the main gate to open it. Uncle got in and took the rear seat on the left and held on to the

door without closing it. I went around in the normal manner and climbed into the driver's seat, slamming my door with a bang. The crows on the neem tree just behind us in the rear yard responded loudly in chorus to the noise. I switched on the ignition and there was—I felt—a noisy start. I drove down the driveway, out of the house by the open gate and turned right. I immediately turned right a second time and entered Allenby Road, as Uncle had instructed. Until we turned Uncle held on to the door firmly and shut it only after we had gone some distance along Allenby Road. The reason was that in case someone was awake in the Elgin Road house and heard the noise of a car leaving, he or she would recall one car door being slammed shut, not two. It was 1.35 a.m. on the night of 16-17 January, 1941.

Uncle had told me already that he would be sitting in the back and not by my side. I think one reason was that he could conceal himself better. The arrangement was that in case we were challenged on the way, I would pose as the master and remain in my seat. Uncle Subhas would pretend to be my chauffeur. If necessary he would smartly come out of the car, do 'salaam' and start a conversation in Hindustani. I had had the courage to ask him how anyone could, after looking at both of us, believe that I was the master and he the chauffeur! He told me not to worry, remain behind the wheel with a dignified posture and stay in my seat without uttering a word. He would do the talking.

I had an eerie feeling about our secret departure for a long time afterwards. I often felt there were two silent witnesses. One, Father's majestically tall grandfather clock standing in the hall of 1, Woodburn Park, the other, the huge neem tree at the rear of 38/2, Elgin Road. Every time I looked at them, they seemed to tell me without speaking: We saw everything.

The greatest escape in the history of modern India was underway. My uncle's journey from Subhasbabu to Netaji had begun.

CHAPTER 44

From Allenby Road I turned left on Justice Chandra Madhab Road to reach Lansdowne Road. The purpose of going in a southerly direction at first, rather than on our real north-bound route, was to throw any watchers off-track. In case any plainclothes police agents saw the car leaving the house, they would report that the car went south, perhaps

to drop a late-night visitor home.

I kept looking back through the rear window for some time. Uncle asked me why. I was trying to see if we were being followed. For a while on Lansdowne Road,[20] I saw the lights of a car behind us. Then that car turned into a side road and I felt relieved.

Uncle Subhas's first words during the nocturnal drive were about the unforeseen delay in our departure. We had been delayed by at least three hours beyond the intended time of departure. I was startled when he said that he had contemplated giving up the plan for that night. He also said that in such a hazardous undertaking one sometimes had to take relatives or friends into confidence, but only if that became absolutely unavoidable, in order to keep things secret. But generally, the fewer people involved, the better. It was not a question of trust or lack of trust, he said. He told me that at the last moment he had thought it wise to take Aurobindo into confidence and ask him to assist in the escape from the house when he came to know that Aurobindo had been ventilating his suspicions openly and loudly. Despite the seriousness of Uncle Subhas's words, I still felt positive about the journey that lay ahead.

A week or so before the escape, Uncle Subhas had told me that the fact that I had driven the escape vehicle would not remain secret for long. The Elgin Road house had so many residents as well as visitors that a leak was more than likely. In late 1945, after my release from prison, my maternal grand-uncle Satyendra Nath Dutt, whom we called 'Laldadababu', told me that he came to know from people in the Elgin Road house about my role in the escape. Ila told me in early 1942 that when she was visiting my paternal uncle Sudhir in Jamshedpur, both he and his wife, my aunt Shantilata, asked her repeatedly if it was not true that I knew everything. When he told me frankly about the risk I was running, Uncle Subhas also told me in a matter-of-fact tone that the worst that could happen to me was an extended spell of imprisonment. After all, he added, so many revolutionaries in our country had suffered lengthy jail terms and continued to do so. About himself, he was confident. He told me if we could keep his departure under wraps for about four days, that would give him sufficient time to make good his escape from British India.

When I was a prisoner in the Calcutta Medical College Hospital,

[20]A long arterial road of inner south Calcutta named after Lord Lansdowne, Viceroy of India from 1888 to 1894 and re-named Sarat Bose Road after Independence. Ed.

and down with typhoid fever, towards the end of 1942, I read a secret message from Father, who was then interned as a high-security prisoner in south India. In that message, Father said he had come to know from a reliable source that the Government of India knew about my role in Uncle Subhas's escape. He also said in the message that Mian Akbar Shah had been arrested and taken to the Lahore Fort (an extremely notorious and punitive detention centre for high-value political prisoners, and where I would be kept in solitary confinement in late 1944). In March or April of 1942, my cousin Ranjit (Kartik) came over to Woodburn Park from Elgin Road to talk to me confidentially. He told me that Father's arrest in December 1941 had been inevitable. That was because, he said, he had been informed by a leading member of the Forward Bloc, Sheel Bhadra Yajee, that the Government of India knew that a man called Bhagat Ram had met Father in Calcutta after the escape with a message from Uncle Subhas. I, of course, said nothing to Ranjit but felt most concerned that the name of Bhagat Ram had become known to all sorts of people. On that man, Bhagat Ram Talwar, more later.

From Lansdowne Road I took the Lower Circular Road in the direction of the Sealdah railway station (Calcutta's second railway station after Howrah). Near the station I came across a number of phaetons and hackney carriages, so I slowed down a bit. There were hardly any pedestrians on the street, though. Two questions revolved in my head. First, whether we were being followed. Second, whether we had been delayed too long for a safe arrival at the other end. The light on the car's dashboard clock was not working. So I used a hand-torch to repeatedly check the time on the clock. Uncle Subhas asked me not to do this, because the light from the torch was reflecting right on his face as he sat in the back.

When we entered Harrison Road and drove towards Burrabazar, I was struck by how empty Calcutta's streets were at the dead of night. We passed a couple of taxis at the entrance to Howrah Bridge. I felt my car made far too much noise on the cobbled street and on the wooden planks of the bridge. The steamers and country-boats on the Hooghly river were all in deep slumber. I suddenly remembered that as Congress president, Uncle Subhas had been taken in a massive procession down this bridge on his return from the Haripura Congress in 1938. What a change this journey was! We found the city of Howrah completely silent as we passed through at high speed. There was bright moonlight by this time and I was starting to enjoy the drive. As I got on the

Grand Trunk Road, I felt a surge of freedom and speeded up further.

Uncle Subhas now revealed his plans for the next stage of the journey. He said it would not be a good idea for me to send a telegram home from Bararee as he and Father had planned. Why should I unnecessarily leave a record of my trip with the postal service? Before the day of departure, Uncle told me that he had decided to spend the day of 17 January at my brother's house in Bararee rather than in a dak bungalow in disguise. He explained that rather than run the risk of being recognized by strangers, it was preferable to be with members of the family who could then be asked to keep their mouths shut. He was confident that the plan he had devised for the halt at Bararee would work out well.

As we passed by Rishra, I indicated to him the way that led to our farmhouse. I passed the industrial complexes located off the Grand Trunk Road at fairly high speed and saw armed police stationed at a number of points. They looked at us with some curiosity but nobody attempted to stop us. It was at this point of the journey that Uncle referred to de Valera's escape and I told him that I knew that story. He was pleased.

To keep track of the distance covered and my own speed I was shining my torchlight on the passing milestones from time to time. I did not want to take any risks by driving too fast. I kept the speed moderate on the whole. About halfway to Burdwan I had to pull up at a closed railway level-crossing. Ila had given me a flask of hot coffee and I thought I would have a sip as we waited. Uncle Subhas intervened and said (in Bengali): 'I should pour you coffee from time to time as you drive.' It was as if I was on an important mission and he was there to assist and support me. He spoke with such affection and humility that I felt embarrassed. He kept pouring me coffee from then on.

I tried to return the courtesy and asked: 'Why don't you take a nap?' He replied: 'The only passenger in a car must not sleep, that makes the driver lonely. He may then also get drowsy.' He added that he had been on so many long tours by car across the country that he was used to keeping awake during long drives, including at night. He also described a few such tours.

The train passed the level-crossing, but the guard at the gate seemed to have dozed off. I sounded the horn but there was no response. I switched off the engine, got out and called out loudly. The man came out of his little kiosk and opened the gate. But then the car would not start! I sensed there was an overflow of petrol into the carburettor.

Uncle became anxious. I assured him that there was nothing seriously wrong. Sure enough, after a few tries, the self-starter worked and the Wanderer sped forward.

We reached Burdwan around 4.30 a.m., a time when most people are sound asleep, so there were no problems. I took the road to Asansol. From Howrah to Burdwan, the road zigzagged a lot. Between Burdwan and Asansol, it was straight on long stretches but there were gradients along the way. We passed Durgapur, a town which became an important industrial centre in post-independence India, but which at that time was completely different. I drove along a road of red soil winding through thick forests. It was known that dacoits sometimes pounced on travellers on this road. I now got a real sense of adventure as we drove along.

There was no sign of dacoits but we encountered another hazard. Suddenly, the headlights illuminated a pack of buffaloes as they appeared on the road, followed by two lathi-wielding men. I hit the brakes as quickly as I could and the car screeched to a halt just short of the animals. The buffaloes swarmed around the car and bumped against it from all sides before being herded onwards by their owners. I had a bit of a fright then.

As we approached Asansol, dawn was breaking. We had wanted to avoid driving in daylight but there was nothing to be done given our delayed departure from Calcutta. I thought I should re-fill the tank, but Uncle did not like the idea. 'Can't you do without it?' he asked. 'I don't want to take any chances,' I replied.

I pulled up at a petrol station just before Asansol town. I parked the car as far ahead as possible so that the attendant would not be able to see the passenger in the back seat easily. I got out with the Kashmiri cap on. I paid the man at some distance behind the car. As he returned to the shed I started the engine and drove off quickly.

Between Asansol and Dhanbad we passed several cars coming from the other direction. Whenever I saw a car, or people on the roadside, I accelerated a bit. As we approached the check-post at Gobindapur I saw the bamboo barrier slowly come down across the road. I slowed down. A man came out from the shed and noted the number of the car (BLA 7169). But the barrier went up again before I had brought the car to a complete stop. I drove on. A little later I turned left in the direction of Dhanbad. Uncle Subhas asked twice: 'Are you sure he took down the number?' I briefly replied 'Yes' each time.

CHAPTER 45

As I passed by Dhanbad town, there was clear morning light. I felt insecure and drove as fast as I could. But perhaps because of the bright daylight, I had no difficulty locating the road to Bararee. I felt immensely relieved when I spotted my elder brother's bungalow from a distance. The tall chimneys of the Bararee Coal Works provided a good landmark. It was now nearly 8.30 a.m. on 17 January 1941.

Uncle Subhas had coached me in detail about the bizarre drama we were to enact at Bararee and my role therein. I would drop him a short distance from the bungalow and proceed there alone. I would tell my brother, Asoke, that I had brought Uncle in disguise in my car and he would arrive after some time on foot. He would ask to see my brother on arrival. My brother would come out upon being informed by his servant of the visitor. Uncle would then ask for a discussion on behalf of the insurance company he represented as Mohd. Ziauddin. My brother would reply that he was in a hurry to go to the factory and did not have time for a meeting. Uncle would then say that he had come a long way and there was no train before evening. Therefore he would appreciate being kindly allowed to stay the day in the guest-room so he could have a talk in the evening and then leave. All conversation would be in English and within earshot of my brother's servants.

My brother would then instruct the servants to make arrangements for the visitor's stay in the guest-room. Uncle would be brought into the living room and introduced to me in English, in the presence of the servants. After being served tea, the visitor would be taken to his room. After my brother returned from work, we would discuss plans for the evening and the onward journey.

When I pulled in in front of my brother's house, I found two persons outside. One was his driver, who was cleaning his car. They saw me arrive alone and I felt happy. I walked into the house with my little bag and the empty coffee-flask without wasting any time. I asked the driver to put my car in the garage. Uncle's luggage was inside the boot. Later in the day the driver asked me if he should bring the things inside. I was a little worried that he had noticed, but managed to brush off the query.

On entering the living room, I found my brother's bedroom door closed. I banged on the door. I became impatient as there was a delay in his opening the door. I did not want Uncle to arrive before I had

explained the situation to him. As soon as my brother opened the door I blurted out the instructions I had to convey to him. He turned pale.

After a few minutes, the bearer came in to say that a Muslim gentleman wanted to see my brother. My brother went out into the verandah and talked to Uncle in English according to the script I had conveyed to him. I heard the conversation from the living room.

My brother asked the visitor to come in for a cup of tea after he had asked for shelter for the day. He asked the bearer to serve some tea and introduced me to Uncle in English. I felt highly amused but managed not to break into laughter. After a while I retired to the back of the house and started chatting with my sister-in-law Mira.

The bearer was asked to serve breakfast to the guest in his room. We did not have any direct contact with Uncle for the rest of the morning. The bearer reported to my sister-in-law that the visitor appeared to be a khandaani (aristocratic) Muslim gentleman from the United Provinces. I was gratified to hear this. My brother came home for lunch. After lunch he talked to Uncle in the front verandah and plans for the evening were drawn up.

Uncle thought that it would not be wise to catch the train for his onward journey from either Asansol or Dhanbad. These were big stations and always crowded. He picked Gomoh, the next station after Dhanbad. This was a smaller station and would not be crowded, especially late at night.

There were two routes to Gomoh from Bararee. One option was to go along the Grand Trunk Road and then take a connecting road to Gomoh town and its railway station. The other route went through coal-mining areas, rice-fields and forests along poorly lit kuccha roads. Uncle preferred the latter because he wanted to avoid the Grand Trunk Road. The problem was that I was not too familiar with the second route. I suggested that my brother come along with us as a guide. This led to another problem; my brother said that he could not, in those parts, leave my sister-in-law alone in the house late at night. So Uncle decided that my sister-in-law should also come with us. My brother was to tutor her accordingly.

While the three of us were having lunch, Uncle Subhas stayed in the guest-room and was served food there. I kept well away from him so nobody would suspect that I had anything to do with him. After lunch, Uncle slept soundly for quite some time. We could hear his heavy breathing as he slept. I went out with the car in the afternoon,

filled the tank with petrol again in the nearby town of Jharia and had the tyres checked there. Then I also took some rest.

It was winter and when my brother returned from work it was already dark. Uncle had a final talk with him in the verandah. The servants were told that my brother and sister-in-law would go out after an early dinner to visit friends, with me driving them. The guest was given dinner in his room. After dinner, Uncle Subhas—or rather Mohd. Ziauddin—came out on to the verandah. He bade goodbye to my brother and me in English in a rather demonstrative manner in the presence of the servants, and walked off into the evening.

Soon afterwards I drove out in the Wanderer with my brother and sister-in-law. Uncle Subhas was waiting for us by the road. We picked him up. All three sat in the rear seat. I had the bedroll by my side in front. I drove on with my brother giving me directions. We had plenty of time to get to our destination. The Delhi-Kalka Mail from Howrah was due at Gomoh station after 1 a.m. The distance we had to cover was around thirty miles. We drove through forests and rice-fields after getting out of the colliery area, the headlights of the Wanderer illuminating the pitch-dark route.

Uncle repeatedly told us in the car that all concerned must 'keep their mouths shut'. He specifically asked me to remind Ila, Dwijen and Aurobindo, who knew about his departure, of the need for absolute secrecy on my return to Calcutta.

We made two stops on the drive to Gomoh, once in a forest lined with tall trees, and once among rice-fields bathed in moonlight. During the stop in the forest, a long line of bullock-carts with twinkling lights and bells jingling around the necks of the animals passed us. It was a fantastic and romantic moment. During the second stop, the rice-fields on either side gleaming in the moonlight made for an equally enchanting atmosphere. I felt strangely moved. I remember wondering whether this tranquillity in the heart of nature was the prelude to a storm in our country.

When we reached the station at Gomoh, there was still some time before the train's arrival. I parked the car outside the station and took Uncle's luggage out of the car. The station was very quiet and my brother and I were able to find a sleepy porter after some difficulty. He picked up the luggage. Uncle and we looked at each other in silence for a few moments. Then he said: 'I am leaving; you go back (Ami chollam, tomra phire jao)'. Then he walked with calm, deliberate steps



Sarat, Bivabati, Prabhabati and Janakinath Bose seated L to R. Sisir, age 4, standing behind Sarat's left shoulder Srinagar, Kashmir, Autumn 1924



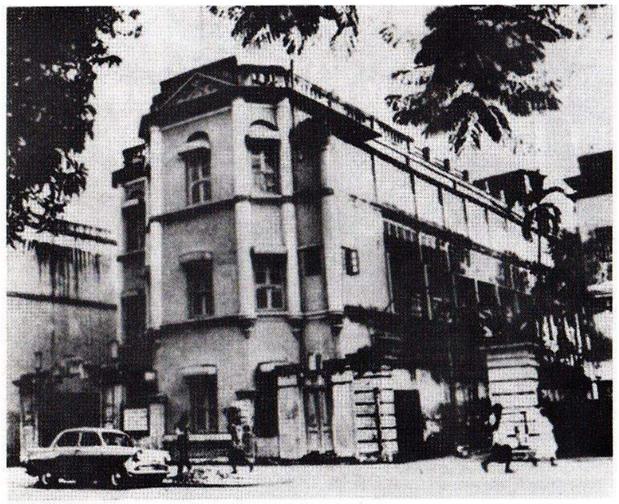
Janakinath Bose, the pater familias



Prabhabati Bose, the matriarch



The Bose family house on Elgin Road, Calcutta, late 1940s



The Bose family house on Elgin Road (Netaji Bhawan), early 1970s



1 Woodburn Park, Calcutta (Sarat Bose's house)



Deshbandhu Chitta Ranjan Das and his wife, Basanti Devi



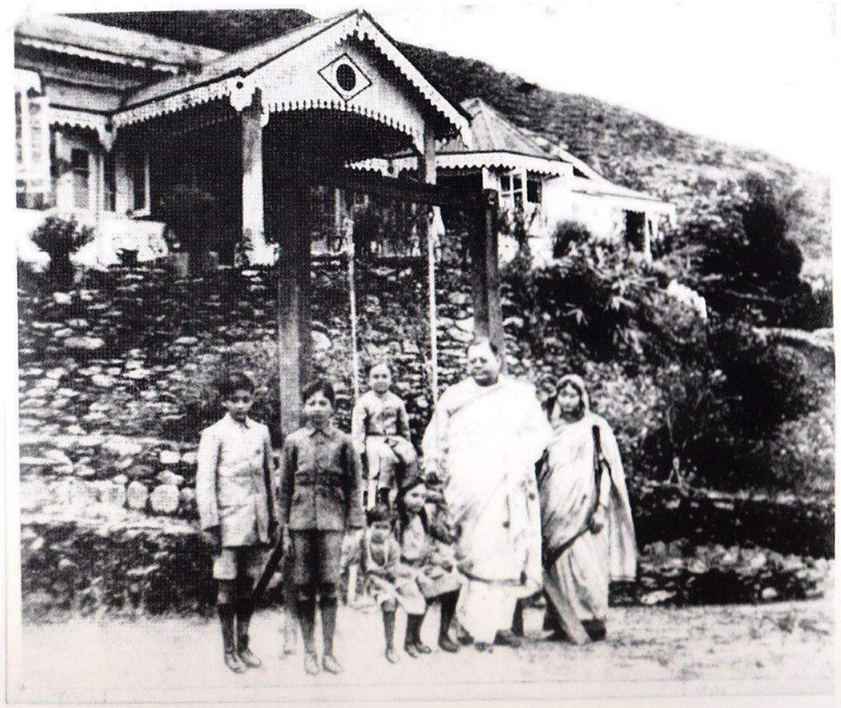
Prabhabati Bose with her sons and daughters-in-law (Subhas centre of back row)



Sarat Bose with Bivabati and her parents and brother

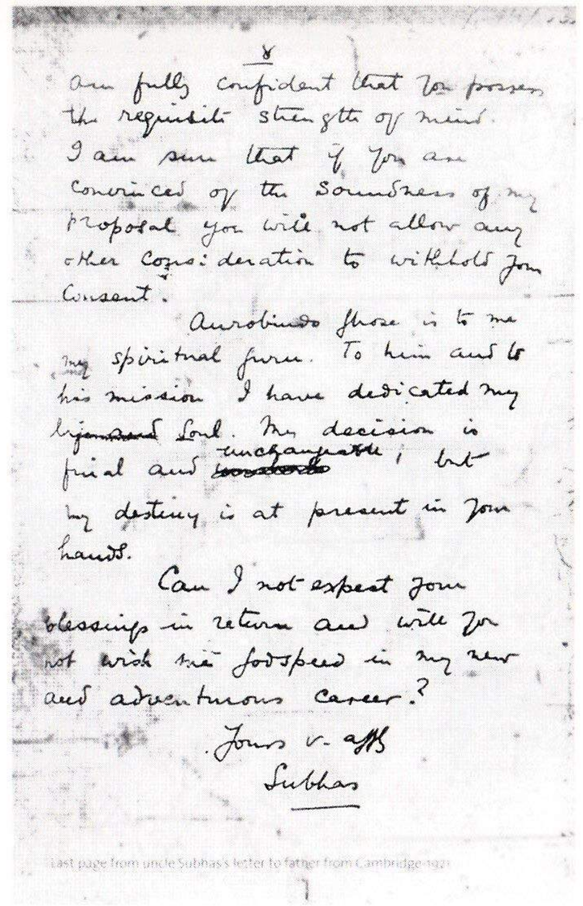


Bivabati Bose



Sarat and Bivabati with their children at the family's bungalow at Kurseong in the Darjeeling Hills, mid-1920s (Sisir seated on top of the swing)

The final page of a long letter Subhas wrote to Sarat from Cambridge, England prior to resigning from the Indian Civil Service in 1921



8

am fully confident that You possess the requisite strength of mind. I am sure that if You are convinced of the soundness of my proposal you will not allow any other Consideration to withhold Your Consent.

Aurobindo Ghose is to me my spiritual guru. To him and to his mission I have dedicated my ~~life and~~ Soul. His decision is final and ~~irrevocable~~ unchangeable, but my destiny is at present in Your hands.

Can I not expect Your blessings in return and will You not wish me godspeed in my new and adventurous career?

Yours affly
Subhas

Last page from uncle Subhas's letter to father from Cambridge 1921

Censored and

Mss 273/20
Ford. I. G.
I. Br, C. I. D.
Bengal.

Mandalay Jail
1. 2. 26.

My dear brother,

I do not know whether you have received my last few letters. I purposely refrained from mentioning anything about the strike because I was afraid that my letters would be withheld and you would be put to anxiety. But now that has happened I was not wrong in anticipating that my letters would be withheld if they contained any news about the strike.

On 27. 2. 26 I received your long telegram ~~yesterday~~ at about 5 P.M. and sent the reply by express at once. I do not know when it reached you.

I am weak — but am otherwise well and there is no cause for anxiety as far as I am concerned. I had headache and giddiness (slight-) for the first few days but I seem to be gradually becoming accustomed to the fast. I am keeping body and soul as much together as I can, in order to conserve my energy. The strike still continues and will do so for some time to come. Until you hear from me that I have broken my fast you can take it for granted that the strike is continuing.

Hot water with a pinch of salt is a great sustainer. I do get headache and dizziness

A letter Subhas wrote to Sarat from Mandalay Jail in Burma, 1926



Janakinath, Bivabati, Subhas and Sarat in Shillong, 1927

1, Woodburn Park.

OFFICE OF THE GENERAL SECRETARY
RECEPTION COMMITTEE
36, WELLINGTON STREET.

REF. NO. 501 Calcutta, the 3rd December, 1928

S n-13307 368

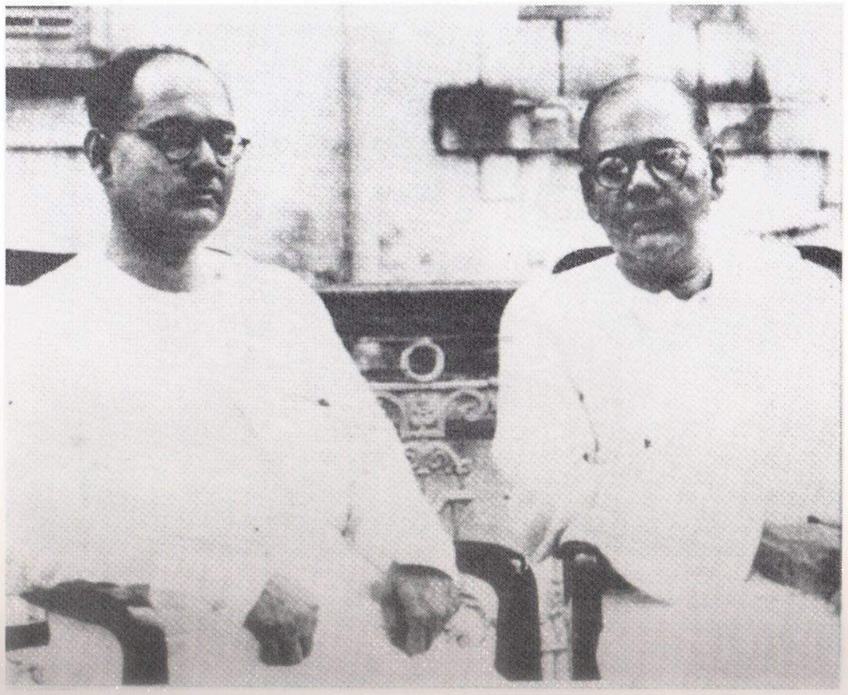
My dear Mahatmaji,

I am forwarding to you a letter from a young friend who is anxious to attend on you during your stay in Calcutta. I do not know if you still remember him but he attended on you on several occasions. I desire to have your instructions as to what I should tell him in reply.

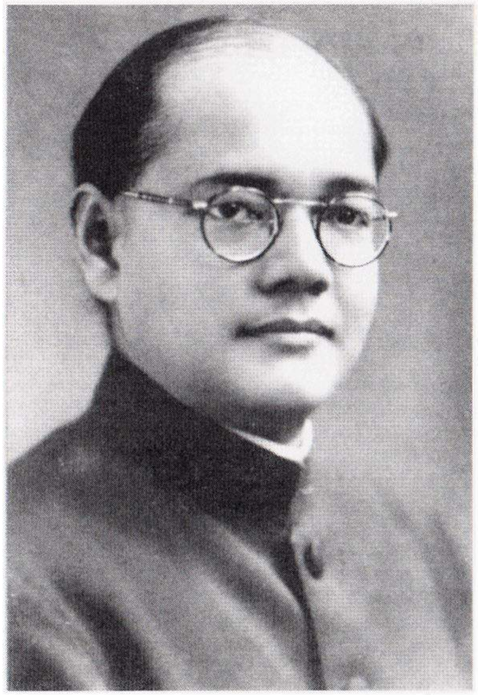
I shall be greatly obliged if you will kindly let me know how many Volunteers you would require for your camp together with their qualifications. It would also help us if you could inform us as to how many members there will be in your party. With profound regards

I am,
Yours respectfully,
Subhas Chandra Bose

A letter from Subhas to Gandhi, 1928



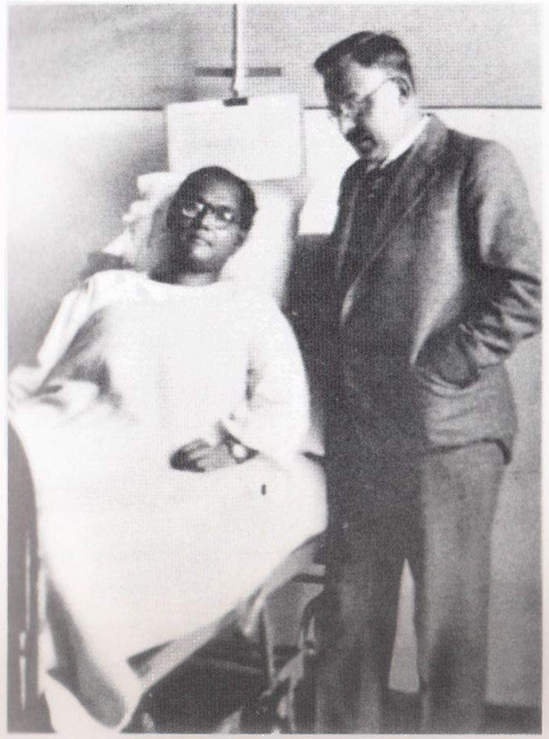
The Bose brothers, Subhas and Sarat



Subhas Chandra Bose, a portrait taken in Vienna, 1934



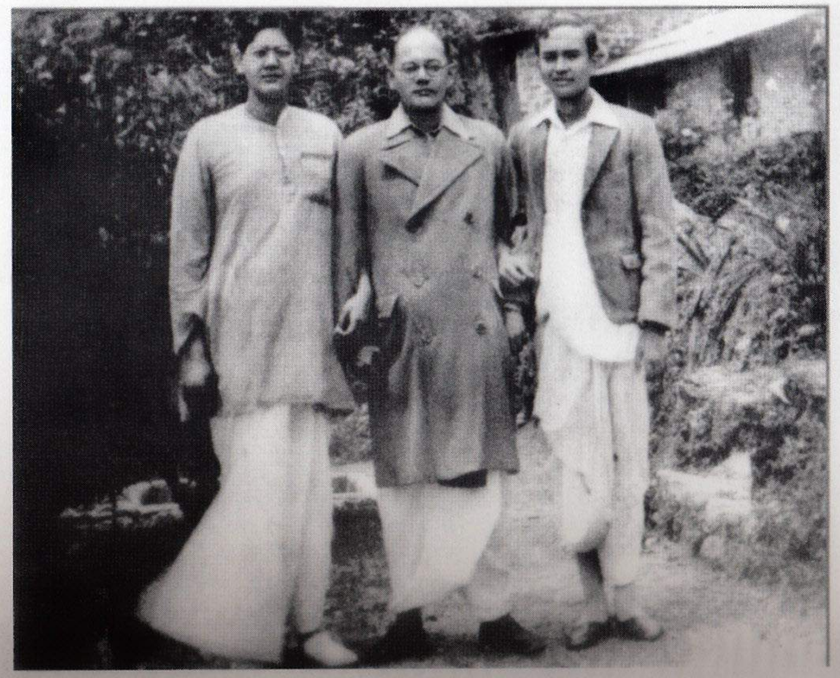
A sketch made by Sisir of his uncle from a photograph Subhas sent Bivabati from Europe, 1934



Subhas with his surgeon after his gall-bladder operation in Vienna, 1935



Sarat Bose interned in his own bungalow at Kurseong, 1934



Subhas with his nephews Amiya and Sisir (to Subhas's left) while interned in Sarat's bungalow in Kurseong, 1936



Jawaharlal and Subhas



Jawaharlal and Subhas



Sarat Bose and Pandit Nehru on the Congress election campaign, 1937



Subhas Chandra Bose as Congress President at Haripura, Gujarat. Gandhi, Nehru, Patel and Rajendra Prasad are also seen, 1938



The Congress Working Committee at the Elgin Road house. Sarat is 2nd from left, Subhas 5th from left, Nehru 6th from left, Azad 8th from left and Kripalani 9th from left, 1938



Sarat Bose with Gandhi and Mahadev Desai, Gandhi's secretary



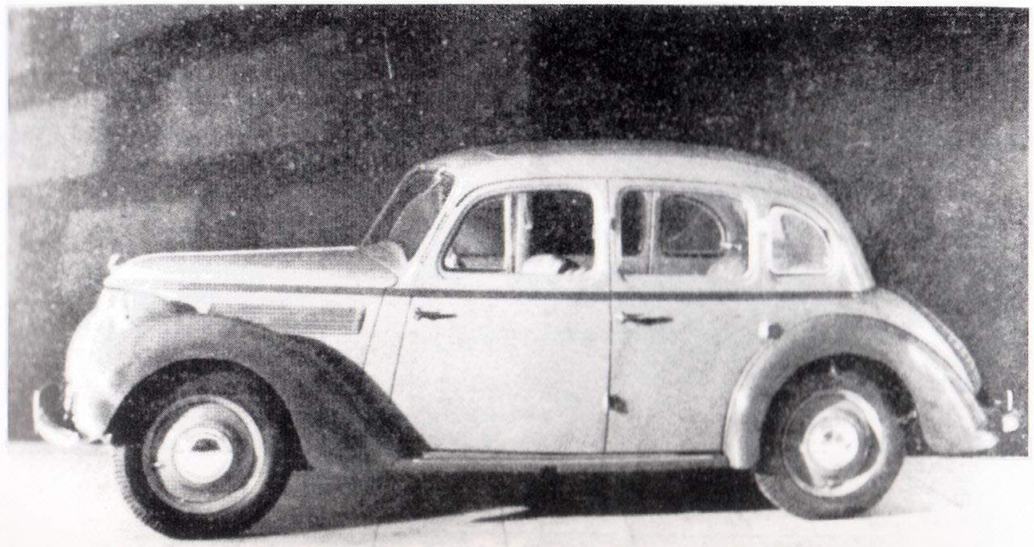
Subhas Chandra Bose with his wife Emilie Schenkl in Badgastein, Austria, December 1937



Rabindranath Tagore, Sarat and Subhas in Calcutta, August 1939



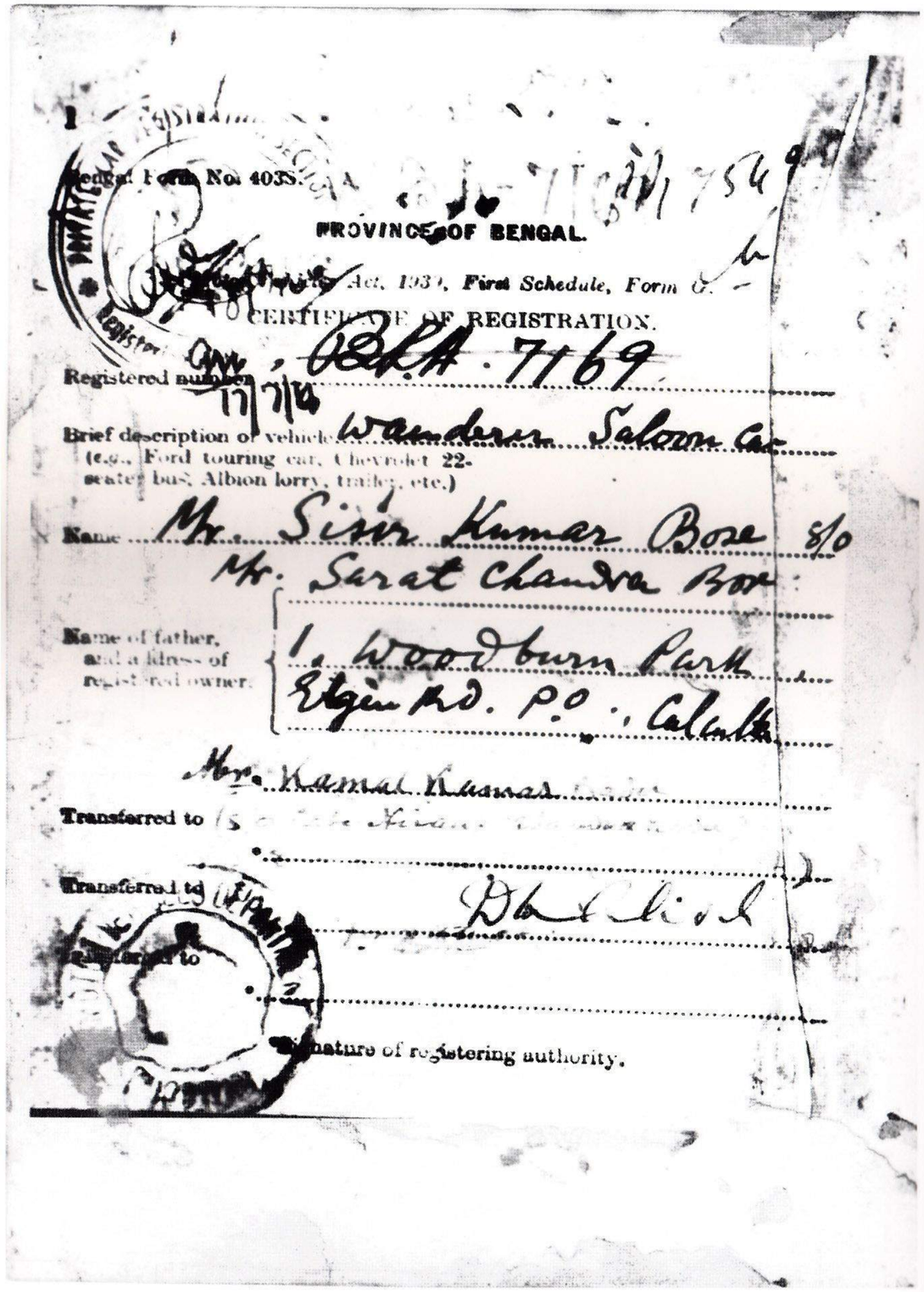
Subhas in the bedroom of the Elgin Road house after his release from prison, December 1940



The Wanderer in which Sisir drove Subhas from Calcutta to Gomoh during Subhas's January 1941 escape from India



The Wanderer as displayed today in the driveway of Netaji Bhawan, from where the escape happened



Bengal Form No. 403S.

PROVINCE OF BENGAL.

Motor Vehicles Act, 1939, First Schedule, Form C.

CERTIFICATE OF REGISTRATION.

Registered number: CWN 6BLA. 7169

Brief description of vehicle: Wanderer Saloon Car
(e.g., Ford touring car, Chevrolet 22-seater bus, Albion lorry, trailer, etc.)

Name: Mr. Sisir Kumar Bose S/o Mr. Sarat Chandra Bose

Name of father, and address of registered owner: 1, Woodburn Park, Elgin Rd. P.O., Calcutta

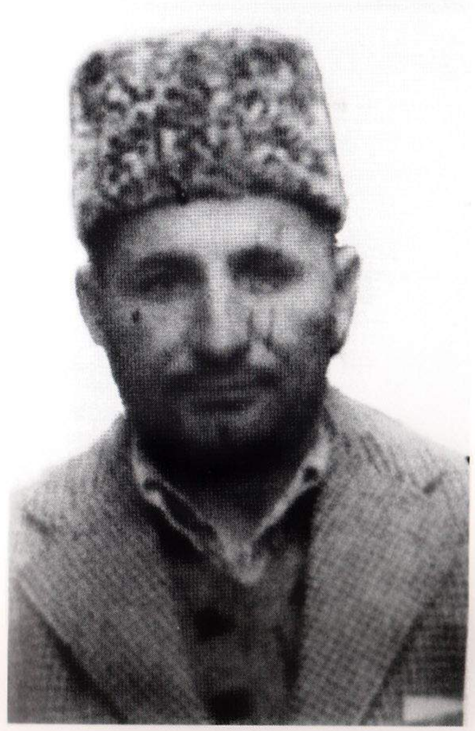
Mrs. Kamal Kasmas

Transferred to

Transferred to

Signature of registering authority.

The Wanderer's registration document in Sisir's name. The car was manufactured in Germany in 1937



Mian Akbar Shah of the Frontier Province, a key player in the escape



Bhagat Ram Talwar, who escorted Netaji from Peshawar to Kabul during the escape



Ila Bose, Sisir's favourite cousin, who played an important role in the escape. The photo is from 1941, she died in 1943



Sisir Bose in 1941

WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO S.J. SUBHAS CH. BOSE?

Unexpected Exit From Home

Great anxiety prevails amongst the relatives and friends of Sj. Subhas Bose since yesterday afternoon when it was noticed that he was not in his room where he was confined since his release from jail in the 1st week of December last. It is generally known that from the last few days he was observing strict silence and had not been seeing anybody not even the members of his family but has been spending his time in religious practices. Anxiety is all the more acute on account of his present state of health.

Enquiries have been made at various places about him but up to the time of going to the Press we understand he has not returned home.

The headline news in the Hindustan Standard *after the escape, January 1941*



Sarat Chandra Bose in 1941

To

His Excellency The Most Honourable

Victor Alexander Hope, Marquess of Linlithgow,

P.C., Kt., G.M.S.I., G.M.I.E., O.B.E., D.L., T.D.,

the Governor General of India in Council.

Through

The Hon'ble Sir Reginald Maxwell,

Kt., K.C.S.I., C.I.E.,

Home Member, Government of India,

New Delhi.

The humble memorial of Bibhabati Bose, wife of Mr. Sarat Chandra Bose of No. 1, Woodburn Park, Bhowanipur, Calcutta, at present temporarily residing at Kusunda, P.O. Kusunda, in the district of Manbhum in the province of Behar

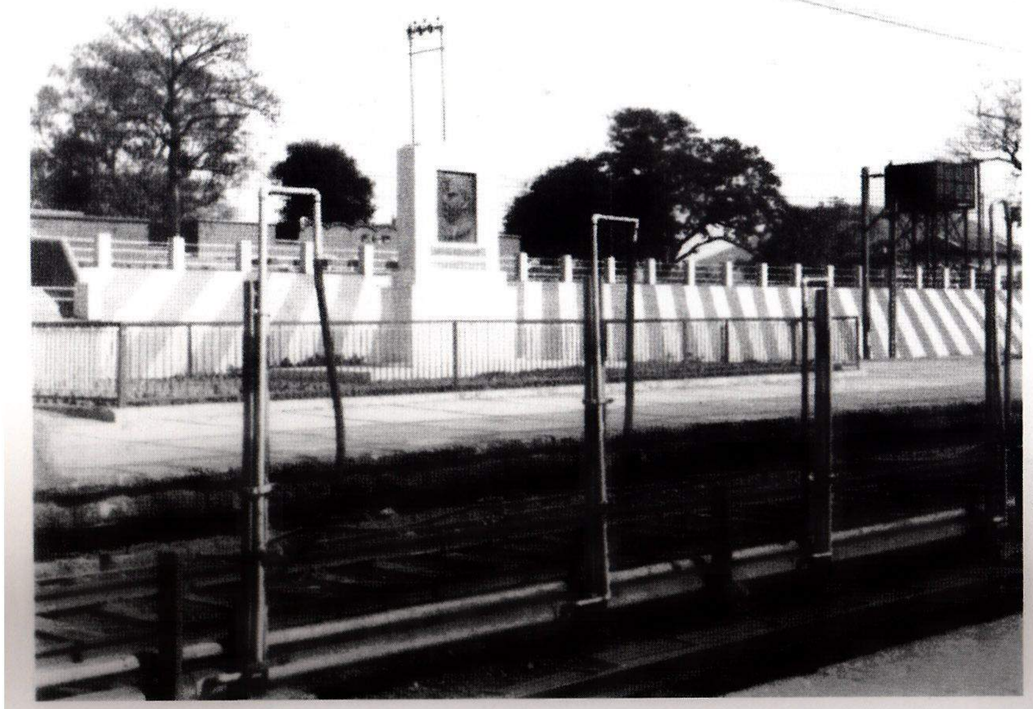
RESPECTFULLY SHEWETH :—

1. That Mr. Sarat Chandra Bose, the husband of your memorialist, is an eminent Barrister-at-Law and was practising in the Hon'ble High Court of Calcutta and had an extensive practice in his profession. He is also a very prominent member of the Bengal Legislative Assembly and before the formation of the present Ministry in the province of Bengal was the Leader of the Opposition in the Bengal Legislative Assembly.

2. That by an order, dated the 11th December, 1941, His Excellency the Governor of Bengal directed his detention in the Presidency Jail of Calcutta until further orders and Mr. Sarat Chandra Bose was put under arrest on the 11th day of December, 1941, in the evening at his residence at No. 1, Woodburn Park, Bhowanipur, Calcutta and after being allowed by His Excellency the Governor of Bengal to stay for the few hours of that night at his house, was removed to the said Jail early in the morning of the 12th day of December, 1941.

3. That beyond the vague wording of the communiqué issued by the Government of India on the 11th December, 1941, stating that "the Government of India are satisfied that there have been contact of such nature between Mr. Sarat Chandra Bose and the Japanese as to render his immediate apprehension necessary", the nature or details of the

Bivabati Bose's representation to Viceroy Linlithgow after Sarat's arrest in December 1941



The Gomoh Railway Station (then in Bihar, now in Jharkhand) where Sisir saw Subhas off in January 1941. The plaque commemorating the escape is visible



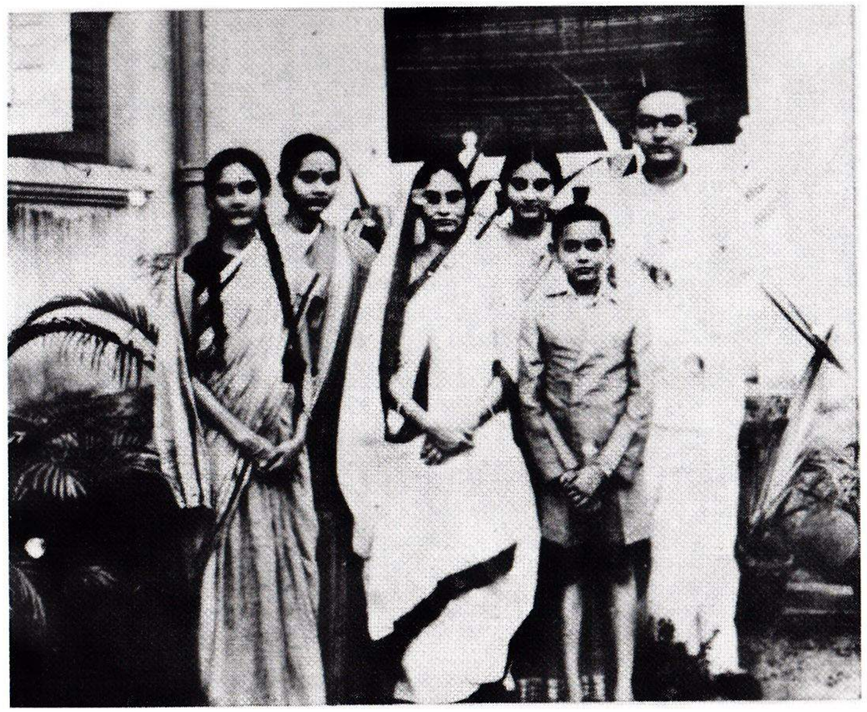
The bungalow in Bararee, near Dhanbad, where Subhas and Sisir stayed for a day before driving on to Gomoh



Subhas Chandra Bose as Orlando Mazzotta, a fictitious Italian. This was the identity under which Netaji travelled from Kabul to Berlin via the Soviet Union



Subhas Chandra Bose in Berlin, 1942



Sisir (far right) with his mother and siblings at 1 Woodburn Park during his home-internment, 1943

ARZI HUKUMATE AZAD HIND

(THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT OF FREE INDIA)

MEMO.

SECRET MESSAGE SENT TO INDIA THROUGH ONE OF HIS AGENTS.

A handwritten Bengali message from Netaji with the address 'India-Burma Frontier' (1944). It asks his supporters in India to help the bearer of the letter. A similar letter was received by Sisir in end-1943 in Calcutta

C/o The Additional Secretary
to the Government of India
(Home Department)
23rd November, 1944.

My dear mother,

You have to excuse my writing to you in English as that is the best thing to do under the present circumstances.

I just want to tell you that I am keeping well and that there is no cause for anxiety. There has not been any digestive trouble and so please do not worry.

I hope to hear from you soon.

Sisir's postcard to his mother Bivabati from solitary confinement in the Lahore Fort, November 1944

No.IV/4/43-M.S.
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA.
HOME DEPARTMENT.

New Delhi, the 7th November, 1944.

Notice under section 7 of the Restriction and Detention Ordinance, 1944 (III of 1944).

In pursuance of Section 7 of Ordinance No.III of 1944, you Sisir Bose are informed that the grounds for your detention are that you were acting in a manner prejudicial to the defence of British India inasmuch as in collaboration with members of the Bengal Volunteer Group and others, you were actively engaged in a manner calculated to assist Subhas Chandra Bose and the Japanese.

2. You are informed that you have a right to make a representation in writing against the order under which you are detained. If you wish to make such a representation you should address it to the undersigned and forward it through the officer-in-charge in whose custody you have been placed as soon as possible.

Sd/ R.Tottenham.
Additional Secretary to the Government of India.

The chargesheet served on Sisir Bose at the Lahore Fort, November 1944

To The Superintendent,
"_____ District Jail"
Lyallpur, Punjab.

My dear mother.

I am now in the District Jail, Lyallpur. I am keeping well. I hope the letters I wrote on the 20th and the 27th of last month have all reached their destination./ It is too early to say whether this place will suit me or not; but it seems to me that the climate of this place is good and healthy. I hope you are not worrying too much about me and all of you are keeping well there./ The last letter that I received from home was one from Gita dated the 17th Jan. I am expecting to hear from you again in the course of the next few days./ Please send my news to father informing him that I am well and that there is no cause for anxiety. Please convey to him my pronams./ I am informed that I can now receive books and newspapers. I am also writing to Gita today. I shall mention to her some of the books that I like to have now./ Please give me all news of home and of how all are getting on. I am all right. Pronams. Yours affectionately,
Sisir.

Signature of censoring officer	Date	Name of sender
Passed by Supdt. of Police C.I.D.	3.2.45	Sisir Kumar Bose

Sisir's letter to his mother Bivabati from the Lyallpur (Faisalabad) prison in the Punjab, February 1945

AUGUST SATURDAY 25 1945

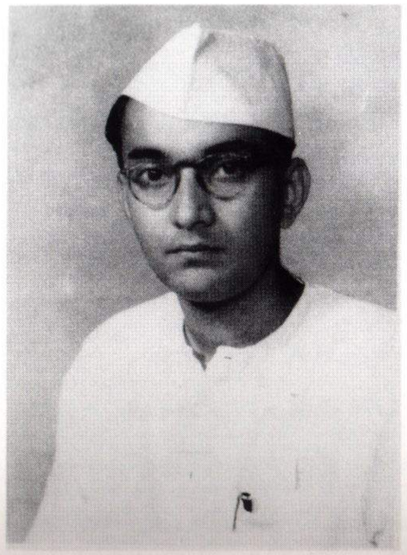
Samvat.—2 Bhadoon (Badi), 2002. *Bengali.*—8 Bhadra, 1352.
Faslee.—2 Bhadoon, 1352. *Hijri.*—16 Ramzan, 1364.

Today's "Indian Express" and "Hindu" brought the heart-rending news of Subhas's death as the result of an aeroplane crash. Divine Mother, how many sacrifices have we to offer at your altar! Terrible Mother your blows are too hard to bear! Your last blow was the heaviest and cruellest of all. What divine purpose you are serving thereby, You alone know. Inscrutable are your ways!

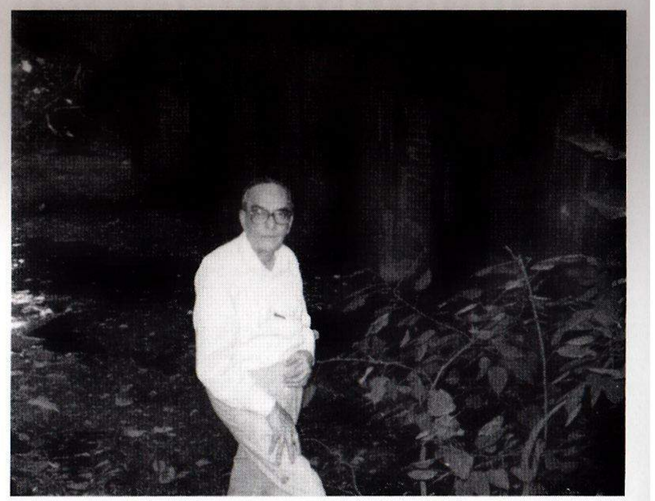
Four or five nights back dreamt that Subhas had come to see me. He was standing on the verandah of this bungalow and appeared to have become very tall in stature. I jumped up to see his face. Almost immediately thereafter, he disappeared. I did not attach any meaning to the dream then and that is why I did not record it in this diary the day after. But, now?

1.30 PM – 98.9
9 PM – 98.5

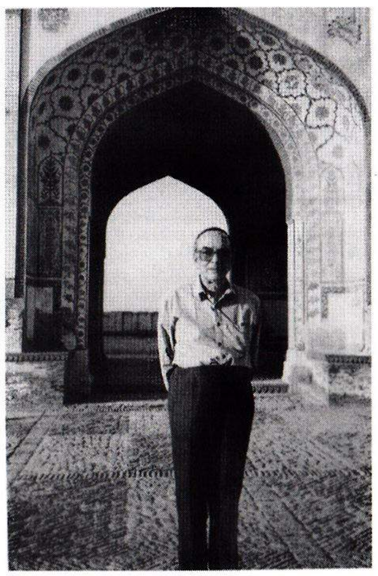
Sarat's prison diary on learning about Subhas's air crash in Taipei, August 1945



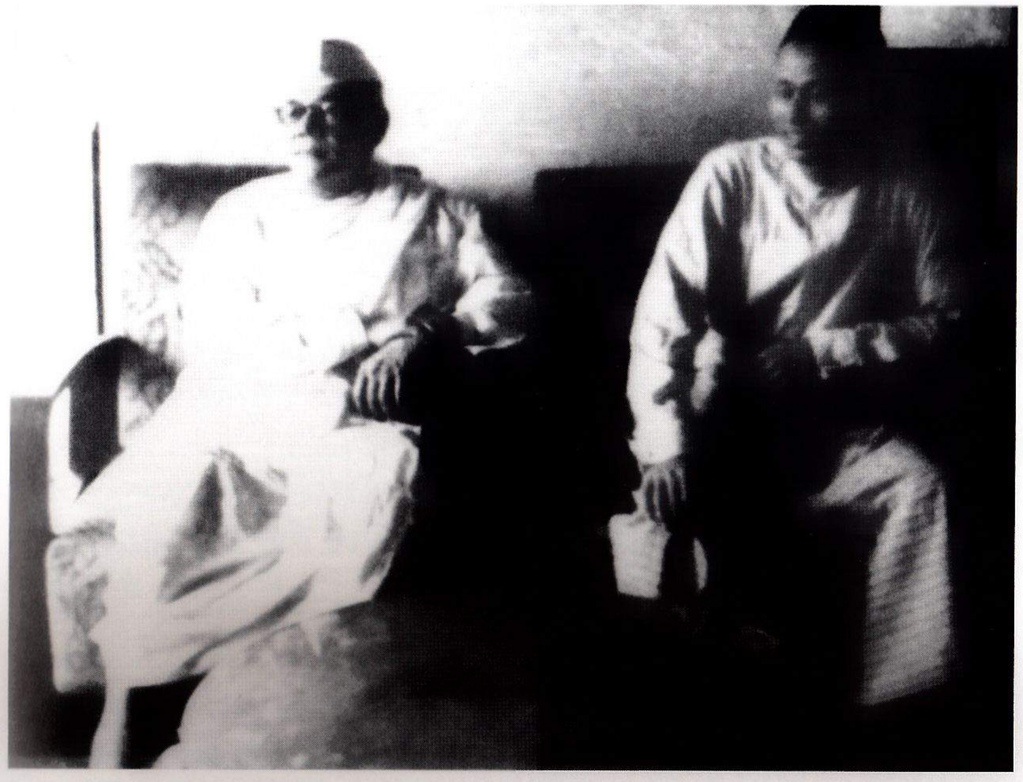
Sisir Kumar Bose after his release from prison, September 1945



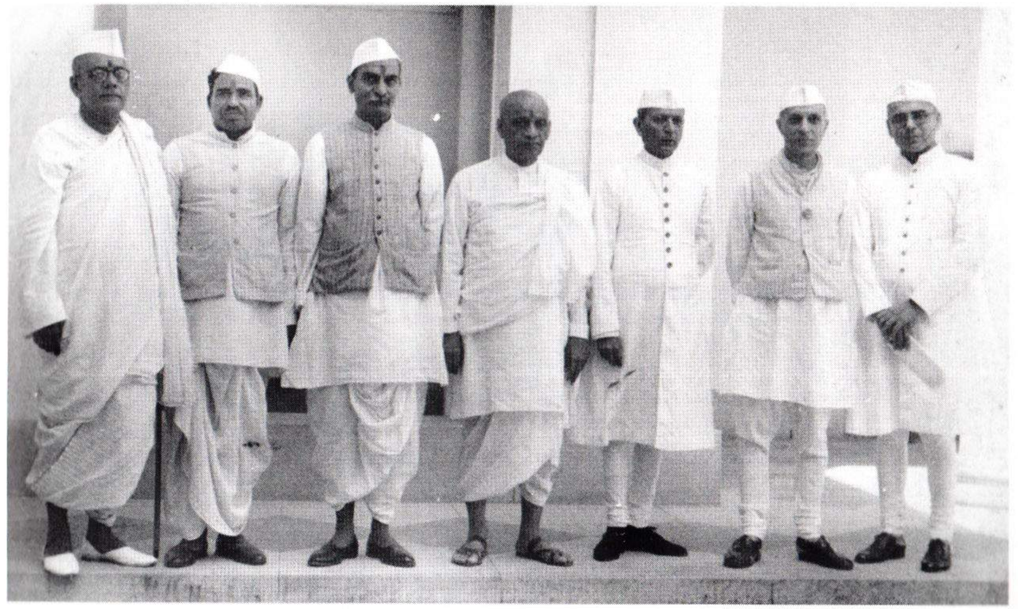
Sisir Bose in front of the dungeon cell at Delhi's Red Fort where he was held in October 1944, mid-1990s



Sisir Bose revisiting the Lahore Fort, 1994



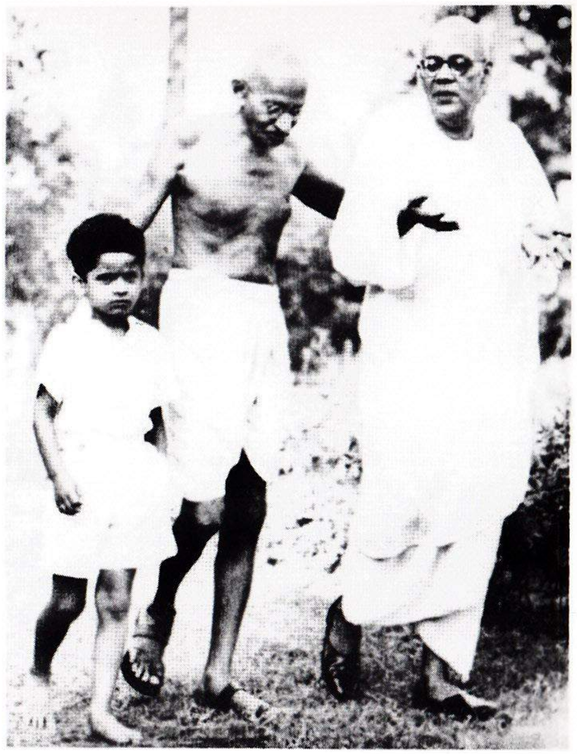
Sarat Bose with Aung San of Burma in Rangoon, July 1946 (photographed by Sisir)



The Congress ministers of the Interim Government of India, August 1946. Sarat Bose (far left), Nehru (second from right)



Sarat Bose with Gandhi in East Bengal's Noakhali district during communal carnage there, October 1946



Sarat Bose with Gandhi in Sodepur, near Calcutta, May 1947

I

Viceroy's Conference Paper V.C.P. 58

Mountbatten Papers

TOP SECRET THE VICEROY'S HOUSE, NEW DELHI, *31 May 1947*

THE VICEROY'S BROADCAST

1. Attached are copies of two alternative broadcast statements which His Excellency the Viceroy recorded in London on 28th May.

2. One or other of these broadcasts will be played from London and made by the Viceroy from Delhi on 3rd June.

3. Broadcast 'A' will be used if it appears probable that Bengal will be partitioned: Broadcast 'B' if it appears probable that Bengal will remain unified.[1]

V. F. ERSKINE CRUM
Conference Secretary

[1] Alternative 'A' was the same, except for minor amendments, as the Broadcast as made (No. 44). Alternative 'B' was the same as 'A' except that an additional para. on Bengal was included after the one on the Sikhs (No. 44, p. 87) which read as follows:

'Bengal was one of the Provinces for whom partition was demanded, but the newly formed Coalition Government of Bengal have asked for their case to be reconsidered; and this is reviewed in the statement which is shortly to be read out.'

Also, the reference to 'Bengal and part of Assam' was deleted from the previous para. but one.

2

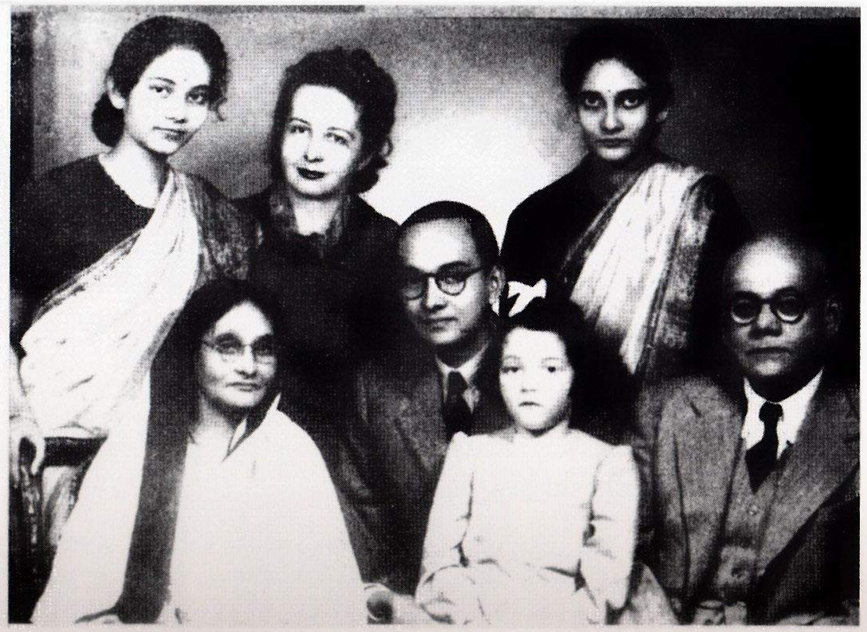
Minutes of Viceroy's Thirty Fourth Staff Meeting, Items 1–7

Mountbatten Papers

TOP SECRET

Those present at this Meeting held at The Viceroy's House, New Delhi, on 31 May 1947 at 11 am were: Rear-Admiral Viscount Mountbatten of Burma, Sir J. Colville, Lord Ismay, Sir E. Mieville, Mr Abell, Rao Bahadur V. P. Menon, Captain Brockman Mr I. D. Scott, Mr Campbell-Johnson, Lieutenant-Colonel Erskine Crum.

A page from the 'Mountbatten Papers', mentioning the possibility that the partition of Bengal might not take place. This possibility was due to Sarat Bose's 'United Bengal' plan.



Sarat and Bivabati with Netaji's wife Emilie and daughter Anita in Vienna. Anita is sitting on Sisir's lap, November 1948



Bivabati and Emilie in Vienna, November 1948



Sarat Bose with the Irish leader Eamon de Valera in India, 1948

1 Woodburn Park,
10th October 1949,
Monday 8 am

My dear Sisir,

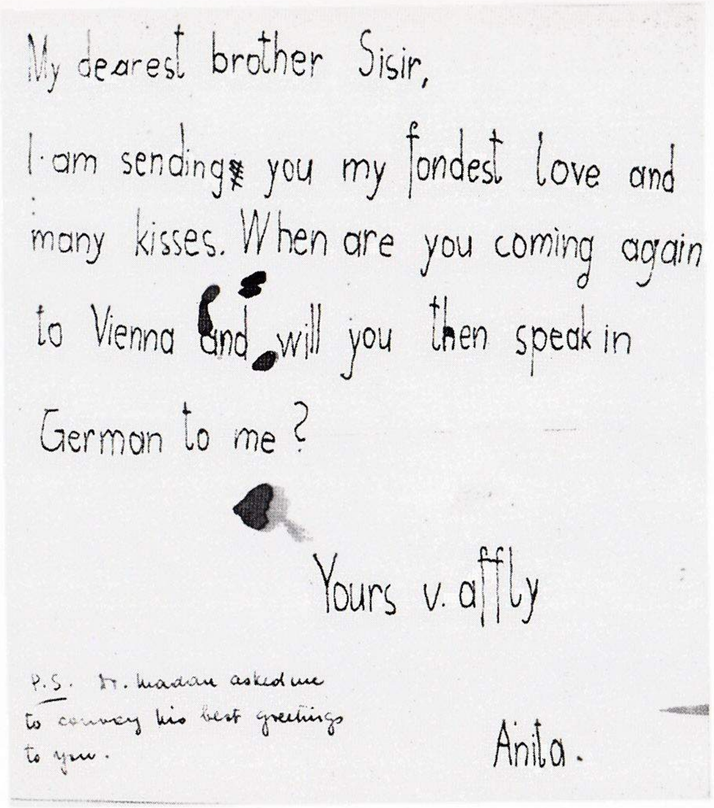
Your letter of the 2nd visit was to the day before yesterday. I send you my love and Bijoy ashirbad. May the Divine Mother make you the pride of your family and the glory of your country!

I am sorry I have not written to you for nearly three weeks. It was due to sheer laziness. I have the physical and mental capacity to write also to do three journalistic work things in bed. I gave an interview to the United Press of America on Thursday the 6th last and was told by them the next day that they had cabled it outside India. Did it appear in any of the British papers?

Sarat Bose's last Bijoya (Vijaya Dashami) letter to Sisir in London, October 1949



Sisir and Anita in Vienna, 1950



A letter from Anita to Sisir, 1950

towards the overbridge leading to the train platform.

We watched as Uncle Subhas crossed the overbridge with his usual purposeful stride, behind the porter carrying his luggage. Then he disappeared into the darkness. I suddenly remembered, too late, that I had forgotten to touch his feet as per the traditions of the Bose family.

We waited for a while outside the station for the train to arrive. The train pulled in. We still waited. Then we heard the puff-puff sound of the steam engine and the rattle of the carriages as the train pulled out of Gomoh station. The Delhi-Kalka Mail moved out and we saw a chain of lights moving further and further away from us, dancing to the rhythm of the clattering wheels, until it was swallowed up by the night.

That was the last time I saw Uncle Subhas—at a lonely railway station in Bihar at about 1 a.m. on 18 January 1941. My tryst of destiny with him was far from over. It would not only dominate the next few years of my life. It defined the rest of my life.

It was around 3 a.m. when we returned to Bararee. I fell asleep immediately in the guest room that Uncle Subhas had occupied earlier.

In the morning, I started off for Calcutta at about 9 a.m. with a packed lunch provided by my sister-in-law. I drove in an absolutely carefree mood. A great weight was off my mind. I am not a musical type and hardly ever sang. But now I sang popular songs of Kazi Nazrul Islam and Dwijendralal Roy loudly as I drove the Wanderer back to Calcutta.

As I drove down the Grand Trunk Road I drank in the beauty of Bengal's lush, green countryside. Village folk worked in the fields and children played. As I entered the town of Chinsurah, in the Hooghly district, I was taken aback to see a sizeable posse of policemen. For a moment I thought they were lying in wait to intercept me. But they took no notice as I passed. Without any hitch the sturdy Wanderer brought me safely home to 1, Woodburn Park around 4 p.m. As I alighted, Father's chauffeur Shamsuddin came forward. I left the car in his hands and ran upstairs.

CHAPTER 46

I wanted to talk to Father as soon as possible. I peeped this way and that from the first-floor hall to catch his or Mother's attention. It being a Saturday, the High Court was closed and I expected Father to be at home at that hour. Finally, I encountered Mother and exchanged glances

with her in the large living-room. Father was informed immediately that I had returned. I went into the drawing-room—not the same as the large living-room—and waited for him.

Father arrived in a few minutes. He asked me with evident anxiety if things had gone according to plan. I quickly gave him a summary of events from the time we left Calcutta till we bade Uncle farewell at Gomoh railway station. He was reassured. Then Father told me, somewhat to my surprise, that he had not been expecting a telegram from me from Bararee. On reflection, he had also realized after we left that sending a telegram would be unwise, and he had felt we would come to the same conclusion.

He then asked if I was tired. I had not thought about that until that moment. But as soon as Father asked, I realized that my legs were leaden and aching and I started feeling drowsy. That evening Minu, Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das's grand-daughter, was getting married. Father told me that I should make an appearance at the wedding. The whole family was invited. My absence would not go unnoticed, people would comment and ask questions. The rest of the family would depart soon for the wedding; Father had some professional work to finish and would go later. He said I could rest for a while and then go with him. I went and lay down in my room for some time. Despite being exhausted, I could not sleep as worries about Uncle Subhas and his safety filled my head. Then I got up, had a bath and dressed to go to the wedding.

Father called me once he was ready. I drove to the wedding with him in his Studebaker. Attending the wedding, I felt I had returned to Earth from another planet. A friend of mine present there asked me how Uncle Subhas was doing. I solemnly replied that he was not well, was confined to his room and waiting for the order to return to prison. I had a good dinner at the wedding and went straight to bed on coming home. As I fell asleep, I reminded myself to ask Mother for a report the next day on the goings-on at home during the two days that I had been away.

Much later, I was looking through Father's appointment diary of that time. The pages from 15 to 17 January 1941 were blank; he had made no entries at all. For 18 January he had noted a professional appointment in the morning and at the bottom of the page he had noted the wedding invitation in the evening.

On Sunday, I asked Mother if anyone had asked any questions about my absence from home. I was worried about my sister Gita, two years

younger than I. She kept a watchful eye on everything in the house and particularly my whereabouts. Mother told me that Gita had noticed nothing on 16 January and the better part of the 17th. She thought I might have happened to leave for the Medical College earlier than usual. But on the evening of the 17th, she kept asking insistently why I was so late returning from college. Mother knew I would not be back for nearly another twenty-four hours. So Mother told her that Uncle Subhas had sent me on some work outside Calcutta. I asked Mother with some anxiety why she had mentioned Uncle Subhas's name at all; she didn't reply. I realized later that mentioning his name was the best way of shutting Gita up.

I had apprehensions about two other persons. One was 'Dantida', my maternal cousin Rabindra Kumar Ghosh; the other was 'Mejda', my paternal cousin Ganesh (Dhirendra Nath Bose) who lived in the Elgin Road house. Both these affable gentlemen visited our house almost daily. The three of us listened to news of the war on the radio and had excited discussions about its progress. The Germans were then conducting their dreadful submarine (U-Boat) attacks and sinking British ships on a daily basis. They were also bombing London and other English cities from the air in the 'Blitz'. We felt elated at the magnitude of Britain's problems. The Germans would sound gongs on their radio indicating the number of British ships they had sunk on the day. Dantida and Mejda would be thrilled no end when the gongs sounded. When any news came in of a German reverse both of them would leave with long faces, just as they would whenever their favourite football team Mohun Bagan was defeated. I felt relieved when Mother told me that neither of the duo had turned up at Woodburn Park on 17 January.

Father instructed me to continue my visits to the Elgin Road house just as before. On Sunday I went there and sought Ila out. Then I took her, Dwijen and Aurobindo up to the terrace on the top of the house and told them that everything had gone according to plan, and that Uncle had particularly asked me to remind them to 'keep their mouths shut.' Over the next few days I usually met Ila in the evenings. She smuggled me into Uncle's empty bedroom where I ate large amounts of delicious sweets and fruits placed there for his consumption. One evening, Ila and I were chatting on the small first-floor terrace, from where the lights of Uncle's bedroom were visible. My cousin Ranjit (Kartik), Ila's eldest brother, joined us and commented: 'I just can't understand how a human being can lock himself up like that in one

room.' I was startled by the comment. I could not make out if he was merely expressing an innocent opinion or was doing so with a motive in my hearing.

The legal case against Uncle Subhas lodged by the Government was to come up in court on Monday, 20 January. He was supposed to appear in person for the hearing. He had told me that he needed a minimum of four days to make his escape from British India before the news got out, but had asked us to try to get the court hearing adjourned by at least a week.

We did not have a fresh medical certificate in hand to produce before the magistrate. Uncle Subhas had been having difficulty repeatedly obtaining medical certificates. Uncle Sunil, the doctor in the family, was being perfectly honest when he said that going to jail was normal for Subhas and he could not understand why Subhas tried to avoid imprisonment by furnishing medical certificates. Uncle Sunil thought that the tactic did not look good. Professor M.N. De of Calcutta Medical College was Uncle Subhas's regular physician but he usually brought along Uncle Sunil, as a consultant physician and professional colleague, when he came to examine Uncle Subhas. He also wrote out certificates in consultation with Uncle Sunil. Therefore, on the last occasion before he left India, Uncle Subhas decided to call in a leading surgeon, Panchanan Chatterjee, with whom he had very good personal relations. Uncle Subhas arranged for Dr Chatterjee to be brought up to his room without informing Uncle Sunil. Uncle Subhas was a long-time sufferer of sciatica, so there was nothing suspicious about his calling in a surgeon separately.

But Dr Panchanan Chatterjee had given a medical certificate before the previous court hearing. So, that certificate had already been used once. We therefore decided, on 20 January, to rush to Dr Chatterjee and implore him to write out a fresh certificate without going to the trouble of seeing Uncle again, as the sciatica had not improved. Although I was a junior student at the Medical College and not in his class, Dr Chatterjee knew me. On Monday morning, Mejda (Ganesh), Dwijen and I drove in the Wanderer to Dr Chatterjee's residence on Beadon Street in north Calcutta. But he had already gone out. So we came to the Medical College and I looked for him in his department. He was not there either.

The time for the court hearing was approaching. So we decided to drive straight to Uncle's legal counsel Debabrata Mukherjee's house

in Kalighat in south Calcutta. I sat in the car outside his house just as my two cousins had waited in the car at Medical College. Thus, Mr Mukherjee never saw me. Ganesh and Dwijen spoke to him and explained how Uncle could not make a personal appearance as he was in complete seclusion. Mr Mukherjee assured them that he would do his best to persuade the magistrate to adjourn the hearing by a week, for the very last time, on health grounds. He succeeded and we were informed in the afternoon that the prayer for postponement had been granted. I felt greatly relieved.

I came to know later that Uncle's departure for Kabul from Peshawar had in fact been delayed by a few days. When we 'discovered' his disappearance on Sunday, 26 January, he was still in Peshawar. We had to exercise maximum caution during the next few days. First, the bluff about the seclusion had to go on without any hitch. Next, we had to decide how the news of his disappearance would be disseminated to the outside world. We were lucky that nobody outside the family showed curiosity or expressed doubts about his self-imposed seclusion. We did not notice any unusual police activity either.

Father had decided the manner in which he would disclose the news of his brother's disappearance. To reveal his plan and give us necessary instructions he called Dwijen, Aurobindo and me to his bedroom at 1 Woodburn Park one afternoon. The plan was this: On Saturday, 25 January, the dinner served for the night would be left untouched (rather than being eaten by one or more of us cousins who were in the know). The cook, Sarbeshwar, was bound to raise a ruckus on discovering it the next morning when he went to clear the plates. Then Aurobindo, Dwijen and others would call out to Uncle Subhas from outside the curtains. On getting no answer, they would go inside and 'discover' that Uncle was not there. A frantic search and hullabaloo would follow. Father would be spending the weekend with his family in his farmhouse at Rishra outside Calcutta, a usual occurrence. After the discovery, one group would rush in a car to Rishra to inform Father that his brother had vanished. Father would take over from that point.

CHAPTER 47

Sunday, 26 January 1941. I, along with several of my siblings, was with my parents at the Rishra farmhouse. My parents and I were anxiously

waiting for the news of Uncle Subhas's 'disappearance' to arrive. The rest of the family knew nothing. They were told we would return to Calcutta on Monday morning.

As morning passed into afternoon, our anxiety increased. Father was pacing up and down the verandah on the first floor of the house. He looked out pensively at the gently flowing Hooghly river below and said to me from time to time: 'I hope things have gone all right. Why this delay?!' I did not say anything. My mind was occupied with thoughts of whether Uncle Subhas had successfully crossed the northwestern frontier of British India.

We had our lunch and there was still nothing. We retired to our rooms for a siesta. Father continued to come out into the verandah, his ears pricked for the sound of wheels. I was also getting restive by this point and looking out for any signs of a car.

Around 2 p.m., we heard a car drawing up. Then we saw Mejda (Ganesh) and Aurobindo alighting from it and rushing towards the house. As soon as I saw them, I lay down in my room and pretended to be asleep. Aurobindo urgently asked for Father, announcing loudly that something very serious had happened. Father called Aurobindo into his bedroom and duly heard him out.

Mejda came into my room and tried to wake me from my 'siesta'. He said: 'Get up, get up, there is terrible news, Uncle Subhas is missing!' I mumbled in my 'half-asleep' state: 'Why are you talking nonsense at this unearthly hour, what do you mean Uncle Subhas is missing!' I turned over and pretended to go to sleep again. He persisted: 'I am telling the truth, he can't be found! We looked everywhere in the house and have rushed here to inform Uncle Sarat'. I rubbed my eyes in disbelief and still refused to get up.

Father asked my two cousins to go back to Calcutta. He would pack his things and follow. Everyone was told that something serious had happened and we must all go back to Calcutta immediately. It was decided that I would drive Father back to Calcutta first. We would take our cook Satyabadi with us so he could prepare dinner for the family on time. Mother, with the rest of the children, would follow.

I drove Father in the Wanderer to Calcutta. He sat beside me and Satyabadi was in the back. We conversed in English. I dropped Satyabadi off at Woodburn Park and took Father to Elgin Road. The place was in an uproar. Relatives and friends were arriving in droves. They all heard the same story. The cook, Sarbeshwar, had raised the alarm in the

morning after finding Uncle's dinner of the previous night untouched, when he went to collect the plates as usual. The young people of the family had then called out to him from outside his room and on getting no answer, entered to find the room empty. They had then searched the house from top to bottom to locate him, even scouring the small terrace on the roof. After all, Uncle Subhas was known to be a bit odd! Then one car had raced post-haste to Rishra to inform Father, while another went to Dakshineswar north of Calcutta in case Uncle Subhas had gone to the Kali temple there.

Father sat in Uncle Subhas's study and patiently listened to the tale over and over again. He put simple questions to my cousins, servants and others. Gradually, the gathering grew in size. Everyone seemed to have an opinion on the matter, or a suggestion to contribute. Father tried to keep all comers happy. Apart from relatives, a number of friends of the family arrived and took part in the discussions. They included Suresh Chandra Majumdar of *Anandabazar Patrika*, Nripendra Chandra Mitra, Pandit Asoke Nath Shastri and Nripendra Nath Ghosh of the Associated Press of India.

After a while, Father decided to move across the road to his own house. He sat down at the large secretariat table in his office and resumed the discussions. He sent off a number of enquiry telegrams to known spiritual havens: to the Aurobindo ashram at Pondicherry, the ashram of Anandamoyee Ma, and others. Someone suggested that Uncle Subhas could perhaps be at Goddess Chhinnamasta's temple near Hazaribagh. Someone else suggested that a vigorous search be made of all the major pilgrim centres of northern India. I watched the scene in silence from a respectable distance.

Then Father called me forward and, keeping a straight face, said: 'Some of our friends are suggesting we look around the Keoratala cremation ground and the Kali temple at Kalighat. Why don't you take somebody with you in the Wanderer and check?' Accordingly, I took Mejda and his maternal uncle Gopal Mitra with me and drove out to that part of south Calcutta. At Keoratala we circled Deshbandhu C.R. Das's mausoleum. All we spotted were a number of odd-looking persons in a catatonic state, evidently from smoking pot. From there we went to the Kalighat temple and checked out the yard. At that point my patience ran out and I wanted to go home.

Uncle Gopal said he knew of a holy man who lived in the neighbourhood and worshipped his personal goddess. Perhaps he would

be able to provide some clue to Uncle Subhas's whereabouts. The three of us walked up a dark narrow lane to the sadhu's abode, where we found an impressive idol of Goddess Kali. The sadhu came out and asked us the purpose of our visit. Uncle Gopal spoke to him in a faltering voice about Uncle Subhas. The sadhu responded in a disdainful tone: 'Didn't I tell you? Didn't I tell you Subhas would break away from family bonds and abjure politics? Now see what has happened! He has finally left you!' To Uncle Gopal's earnest appeals for help he finally said: 'It appears to me that he is in a temple somewhere just to the north of Calcutta, possibly in Chandernagore. I will know more after I perform my puja tonight'. I muttered to myself: 'You are a charlatan.' We came home and gave a report of our foray.

As evening passed into night, the visitors left one by one. After everybody else had left, Father sat down with Suresh Majumdar in our south verandah. They discussed the draft of the press release for the next morning and finalized the text. Suresh Majumdar telephoned the *Anandabazar Patrika* office to say that he was coming in with important news for the next day's paper. Sureshbabu asked Father to see to it that members of the family were more restrained. He felt that some of the youngsters were talking too much while describing the sequence of events. I was waiting for Father to come upstairs. He looked rather tired when he came up. Both of us, however, felt that the day had gone off well for us. But we were curious, and somewhat concerned, about the reaction of the police the next day, once news of the disappearance appeared in the newspapers.

On Monday, 27 January 1941, the *Hindusthan Standard* and *Anandabazar Patrika*—both staunchly nationalist dailies, published in English and Bengali respectively—front-paged the news. We had been very restrained in spreading the news on Sunday. There was no attempt to inform the media as a whole, so only people who were in regular contact with the two nearly adjoining Bose family residences came to know.

The telephone rang continuously on Monday. By evening, a large number of people had gathered at both houses. I went to college as usual during the day. A couple of my classmates had noticed my absence at the end of the previous week. I gave polite and credible replies to their questions. My teacher in the anatomy dissection room, Dr Subodh Sur Roy, asked me why I had been absent that Friday and Saturday. I replied that I had had to go out of Calcutta on family

business. He commented: 'I do not suppose there is a police record of that!' His words sent a chill down my spine. Then he marked 'Present' on my attendance card for those two days and left. A classmate, Kalyani Prasad Gupta, then said to me: 'After I read the news in this morning's papers, I thought that the publication of Subhas Babu's picture with the [jailbird] moustache in newspapers after his release last month was not a good idea after all!' I was struck by his perceptive comment but remained silent.

After college, I returned home and then went across to the Elgin Road house. The police woke up to the news by late afternoon. A group of officers arrived and listened to Aurobindo recount the scripted tale. I watched quietly as they went around the building. I noticed that they were interested in the rear exit and the small side-door opening on to Elgin Road on the west side. They didn't even look at the front gate.

On returning to Woodburn Park, I heard that All-India Radio had broadcast in its evening news bulletin that Subhas Chandra Bose had been arrested near Jharia, in the vicinity of Dhanbad. Father was greatly concerned by this. He rang up my older brother Asoke at Bararee and asked him to drive down to Dhanbad and make enquiries of the superintendent of police there. My brother called back after some time to say that the police officer would neither confirm nor contradict the report. Father then took me aside and said uncertainly: 'Could it be that his plans have all gone wrong and he has been arrested on the way back home?' I tried my best to assure him that that was not likely and he must not worry. Late in the evening, our family friend, Nripen Ghosh of the Associated Press, informed Father that the report of the arrest had been confirmed as false.

Father then asked me to go over again next door and inform Majanani (Netaji's mother) that the news of the arrest was incorrect. She listened to me without a word. However, I found Ila very distressed and in tears after hearing news of the arrest. I had a hard time convincing her that the report was not true. While I was talking to Ila I heard—on Uncle Subhas's radio—Radio Berlin broadcast in its news bulletin that the Indian nationalist leader Subhas Bose had gone missing from his home in Calcutta.

CHAPTER 48

The news of Uncle Subhas's disappearance was circulated exactly as we had planned. I believe our deception was effective and the government and the police were completely at sea. We heard that the authorities tracked a Japanese ship which sailed from Calcutta on 19 January and had it diverted to a Chinese port to have it searched!

We also heard, however, that the bosses of the Central Intelligence Bureau in Delhi did not believe the circulated rumours that Uncle Subhas had renounced the worldly life and gone off to become a hermit somewhere. An SOS was sent to all frontiers and ports to watch out for and apprehend Subhas Bose. But by the time the police got to know about the disappearance, Uncle had already crossed the north-western frontier of India into the tribal territories en route to Kabul. After some time, Suresh Majumdar of *Anandabazar Patrika* informed Father of a piece of information he had heard from a source in Delhi. Apparently, some days after the sensational disclosure in the newspapers, it occurred to a ticket-checker on the East Indian Railway that he had seen someone who looked like Subhas Chandra Bose. The police had questioned him. And according to Mr Majumdar's information, the description the man gave of the passenger's dress and appearance was very close to Uncle's Mohd. Ziauddin disguise. Father called me one evening, told me what Mr Majumdar had conveyed and said the description being so close to the reality, the ticket-checker probably had come across Uncle Subhas. I agreed and felt worried.

Meanwhile, there was no limit to the speculation about Uncle Subhas's disappearance at home and outside. Many members of the family kept quiet, particularly those who felt that Uncle was pursuing some political objective. I could never read Majanani's mind. I think she was deeply worried but remained outwardly collected. Our doctor uncle Sunil thought practically. He feared that having been completely isolated politically, Subhas might have done something desperate out of sheer frustration. How could he possibly conceal himself in India? Even little children knew him. If he were to go to even a roadside shop to buy some food he would be recognized. He told us that he had asked his chauffeur, Jaffar, to take him around the nearby tanks to check if any corpse was floating in any of them.

Some people, on the other hand, accepted the theory of renunciation. My maternal grandmother was a very religious person. She told us with great conviction that Subhas would one day return as a sadhu with his head shaven and sacred beads in his hands. It is true that as a sensitive adolescent, Uncle Subhas had once run away from home in search of a spiritual guru. By staging a bluff of religious seclusion in his room and thereby suggesting that he was considering renunciation again, Uncle himself and those of us who assisted him unwittingly contributed to perpetuating a myth about the man that bore little if any relation to the reality. For decades after Independence, spurious rumours kept popping up of Uncle Subhas being spotted in the guise of various godmen.

A number of very funny stories were also going around. Our family friend Nripendra Chandra Mitra heard that one evening two Sikh gentlemen came to see Uncle Subhas and later three turbaned men left the Elgin Road house. My cousin Ganesh told us an even more colourful story he had heard. Late one night, a tall and handsome man came to the bank of the Ganga and asked a boatman to take him to the middle of the river. The boatman was offered a fat tip and agreed. As the boat reached deep waters a rumbling sound was heard and a submarine surfaced. The tall man handed the boatman the tip and jumped onto the submarine. The machine made another series of loud noises and then disappeared under the water.

Much later, after the Elgin Road house was converted into a museum and people from all over India started visiting it as a rite of pilgrimage, I overheard grandmothers telling their grandchildren various outlandish stories about his mysterious escape. Once, I heard an old lady explain to her little companion how Uncle Subhas transformed himself into a bodyless being, passed through the room's windows fitted with iron bars, and descended weightlessly on the road to escape. One upshot of Uncle Subhas's derring-do and remarkable adventures was that he, a realist leader and committed revolutionary, became the subject of numerous fairy-tales.

Father was passing his days in great anxiety in the absence of any definite news of Uncle's safe exit from the country. After the day's work and dinner he would often call me into his bedroom, where we sat facing each other under the mosquito curtain over his bed, and talked. Both of us felt a little less tense after these conversations. Once he heard in the High Court Bar Library that a lot of speculation was going on about the escape at the Calcutta Club, a hangout of British bureaucrats and loyalist natives. The city's British commissioner of police had declared there: 'We know Sarat Bose knows!' An important Muslim

League politician, and friend of the Bose brothers, M.A.H. Ispahani, had commented at the club that it was believed Subhas was with the Fakir of Ipi (a Pathan leader from today's North Waziristan on Pakistan's border with Afghanistan who waged guerrilla war against the British). An astrologer friend of Father's, Satyen Ray, who used to visit Woodburn Park, gave Father the result of his calculations. He said Uncle Subhas was passing by a big lake. I fetched a large map of the Soviet Union and sat down with Father under the mosquito net to locate the lake. We found Lake Baikal in southern Siberia. The astrologer told Father that one young man of the family knew all about the escape and was hiding behind the scenes. This worried Father. This astrologer was also close to the sprawling joint family living in the Elgin Road house and visited there often.

My sister Gita became intrigued when I started talking to my parents in their bedroom at night and also became somewhat jealous. Father was very concerned about my safety. Lest plainclothes men watching us from outside the house suspect anything conspiratorial going on, he asked me to retire after these late-night discussions to my room on the second floor in darkness and go to bed without switching any lights on or off.

We had to wait for over two months before the news arrived. On the evening of 31 March 1941, I was chatting with my mother and Gita in the first-floor verandah. Father's office-attendant Dhonu came up and passed a visitor's slip to me. I read it aloud: 'Bhagat Ram, I come from frontier.' Dhonu said the visitor had asked for me. I suddenly realized its import. I exchanged a quick glance with Mother and realized my momentary indiscretion. Gita might ask questions. I tried a creative diversion: 'Oh what a bother, that Kashmiri carpet-wallah has come again. I'll go down and see him off.'

I went downstairs to find two men. One was a slim, fair young man of north Indian appearance dressed in jacket and trousers and the other a stout, darker and somewhat older man in full Western-style dress, including tie, who looked Punjabi. I asked what they wanted. The younger one said they wanted to talk to me and that they had brought news of 'Subhasbabu'. I asked him what he knew about me. He said he knew the nickname by which Subhasbabu called me. He also knew I was a third-year medical student. Uncle had told them to see me if they could not meet Father straightaway.

I took them to the office room on the west side, which was empty.

There, Bhagat Ram—the younger man—told me that he had written his real name on the slip, which I must destroy. He then said that Uncle Subhas was expected to arrive in Moscow that very day. He had seen him off on 17 March at the German Consulate in Kabul, from where he was headed in a car to the Soviet frontier. He had brought three documents with him: A one-page letter in Bengali from Uncle to Father, a message to his countrymen written in English, and a long political article. I quickly glanced over the documents. Then I asked them to wait in the room and rushed to inform Father, who was already on his way downstairs. I whispered to him that news had arrived from Uncle and he should come to the west room. Bhagat Ram told Father that all was well with Uncle Subhas. Father wanted me to take charge of the documents, retire to my room and read and examine them carefully. He asked Bhagat Ram to meet him during his early morning walks in the Victoria Memorial's gardens.

I can hardly express in words the excitement I felt when I looked at Uncle Subhas's handwritten messages. He had written to Father in Bengali, and in pencil, 'Message To My Countrymen' in English and in ink, and a long article of more than fifty small pages also in pencil. Late that night, Father called me. He looked over the papers and asked me if I was sure beyond any shadow of doubt that they were from Uncle Subhas. I replied in the affirmative.

In his personal letter, Uncle wrote that he was about to embark on another hazardous journey. His regret was that he had been inordinately delayed. The bearer of the letter had looked after him very well and he would appreciate it if Father helped him. At the bottom of his letter he had written a couple of lines for his 'daughter'. He evidently meant Ila. She was not in Calcutta then. I showed her the letter when she came to Calcutta a few months later.

Father gave the original 'Message To My Countrymen' to Satya Ranjan Bakshi, a close political associate of the Bose brothers. It was printed and clandestinely circulated. Friends and relatives who read the printed version came to Father and asked him if he thought it was authentic. The message was signed and dated: 'From somewhere in Europe, 17 March 1941.' In it Uncle Subhas explained why he had left the country in the midst of the World War to promote the cause of India's freedom. He thanked his friends in 'Burma and China' for their help and support during his journey—clearly to confuse and mislead British intelligence. The long article was titled 'Forward Bloc: Its Justification'.

It was published much later by the Netaji Research Bureau and the original is preserved in the archives of Netaji Bhawan. In September 1942, my mother had to destroy the Bengali letter written to my father, when the police raided our house and arrested me. The man who accompanied Bhagat Ram, I learned later, was Sodhi Mahinder Singh.

CHAPTER 49

A few weeks after Bhagat Ram's visit, Father called me downstairs. I found him in the hall with a stout Bengali gentleman wearing a rather odd black cap. He was, I came to know later, Asit Mukherjee, who worked at the Japanese Consulate in Calcutta. Father told me that the Japanese consul-general in Calcutta wanted to meet him in secret. Arrangements should be made to meet at the Rishra farmhouse. Mr Mukherjee would bring the consul-general to a spot agreed upon, on Calcutta's Strand (river-front) in the evening. I would pick him up from there in my car and drive him to Rishra.

Father at first said that his chauffeur Shamsuddin would drive the car. I objected that we should not have a third person along at such a sensitive rendezvous. At the appointed time I arrived at the roundabout near the Prinsep Ghat. A Japanese gentleman alighted from a limousine. Mr Mukherjee was there to identify us to each other. I picked up the gentleman and, seating him beside me in my car, drove off in the direction of Rishra. We had a pleasant conversation during the drive. His name was Katsuo Okazaki. Much later, in 1959, when I was in the United States on a fellowship, I corresponded from there with Mr Okazaki in Tokyo.[21]

As soon as we arrived at Rishra, I made the guest comfortable in Father's office and ran upstairs to inform him. A long conversation took place between them. I waited upstairs. Uncle Subhas had sent a radio message from Berlin via Tokyo for Father. Okazaki had decoded the message and brought it to Father. Father and Okazaki also discussed plans for cooperation between Japan and Indian freedom fighters in the imminent future. In later meetings, Satya Ranjan Bakshi took part in the talks. Father obtained good maps of Bengal and the north-eastern

[21]Okazaki became the Cabinet Secretary of the post-war government of Japan in 1951 and from 1952 to 1954 he was Japan's foreign minister. Ed.

frontier of India for the discussions. I later heard from Mother that plans for smuggling arms from Burma for Bengal's revolutionary groups were discussed during these talks.

Okazaki left Calcutta after some time. After him another gentleman called Ota from the Japanese Consulate kept the channel open and delivered messages from Uncle sent from Berlin. Mr Ota was a younger person and visited Rishra with his wife, who dressed in a sari. The idea was to give the impression of social visits.[22]

Father told me after the first meeting with Okazaki that he had sent a message to Uncle Subhas which said: 'The medical student is all right.'

Around this time Father received a message from Sardar Sardul Singh Kavishar, Forward Bloc leader of Punjab and the party's acting national president. He told Father he had been advised that 'Babuji' (Uncle Subhas) would henceforth send all important messages to Father in Bengali. This information was highly relevant to me, as I was to find out later.

It might appear to readers that the Rishra farmhouse was used solely for secret meetings and other clandestine purposes. That was not the case. Father used it as his weekend retreat, and spent a couple of days there almost every week with Mother and the children in peace and quiet. Of course, he also did professional and political work during the weekend sojourns. Visitors to Rishra were treated to fried hilsa and the famous sweet of Rishra known as *goja*. Father would join his guests in eating numerous pieces of the fried hilsa with relish, sometimes consuming an entire fish! The property is now in the hands of a large industrial establishment and is still known locally as the 'Bose House'.

Soon after we received news of Uncle Subhas's safe arrival in Berlin, Rabindranath Tagore invited Father to Santiniketan. Tagore, then in the last months of his life, wanted Father to take an active interest in Visva-Bharati, the university at Santiniketan. He was concerned about its future after his passing and wanted responsible and competent people to be involved in its affairs. We know that he also asked the Bengali litterateur Rajsekhar Bose to participate. My parents had a very pleasant

[22]This diplomat's full name was Shintaro Ota. His sari-wearing wife had been one of Japan's most sought-after geishas or courtesans prior to their marriage. She moved to New York in the 1950s and died there at the age of ninety in 2004. Under the name Kiharu Nakamura, she wrote bestselling memoirs in Japanese of her geisha career. Ed.

though short stay as Tagore's guests in Santiniketan. Tagore appeared to be extremely concerned about Uncle Subhas and said to Father: 'You can tell me.' Father quickly made up his mind and told the poet that Uncle had reached Berlin safely and was well. Father told me that the poet was not averse to a final revolutionary struggle for the achievement of Independence and expressed himself in favour of an understanding with the Soviet Union in this regard. In 1984, during a visit to Santiniketan, I asked Rani Chanda, widow of Tagore's secretary Anil Kumar Chanda, if she knew about a private meeting between the poet and my father in 1941. Mrs Chanda told me that one evening the poet wanted to talk confidentially with Father. Others present in the room were asked to leave and Anil Kumar Chanda stood guard at the door. Father told me that the poet asked about Uncle Subhas with such sincerity and affection that he could not but tell him the truth.

After Uncle Subhas's departure, Father's role in Bengal politics both expanded and became more difficult. The Bengal Congress was already divided in two, the faction loyal to the 'High Command' and that loyal to the 'Bose Group'. In following and popularity the Bose Congress was far ahead of the official faction, and was the real Congress party in Bengal. At that time Khwaja Nazimuddin, who led the reactionary and communalist wing of the Bengal Muslim League, was the home minister of Bengal. As a result of the Muslim League government's policies, Hindu-Muslim differences were on the rise. For many years Father and Uncle Subhas had worked for communal unity and all-round progress of Bengal. In 1939, Uncle Subhas was able to work out an understanding with the progressive wing of the Muslim League in the Calcutta Corporation. This became known as the 'Bose-League Pact'.

Later, Father tried to effect a rapprochement between nationalist Hindus and progressive, patriotic Muslims in Bengal politics. Due to the wrong policies of the Congress high command since 1937, A.K. Fazlul Huq, a liberal and progressive Muslim leader with a considerable following in the province, was driven to join hands with Nazimuddin to form a government. But differences continued to deepen between the two. Fazlul Huq—known among his followers as Sher-e-Bangla, the Tiger of Bengal—was the leader of the Krishak Praja Party or KPP. Father succeeded in the latter half of 1941 in striking an alliance with him. Nazimuddin lost his majority in the legislature after his break with Fazlul Huq and the government fell. The legislature's 'European group' consisting of nominated members representing British commercial and

business interests, who pulled strings from behind the scenes through the British Governor, failed to prevent this. Father and Fazlul Huq brought together the Krishak Praja Party, the Bose Congress, the progressive wing of the Muslim League, the independent scheduled-caste group, Anglo-Indians, Indian Christians and others to form the Progressive Coalition Party. The pro-British elements as well as the official Congress group were totally isolated. The Congress high command now lost control of Bengal's politics.

In the first week of December 1941, our home at Woodburn Park became the nerve-centre of Bengal politics. The house was full of people at all hours and there was hope of a new, healthy turn in the political life of the province. Father, who was the prime mover of the political re-alignment, had made it clear that A.K. Fazlul Huq would be the premier in the progressive coalition government. It was generally expected that Father would become the home minister. This generated concern and fear in British officialdom and the police department. Father came to know on the eve of government formation that arrangements were being made to arrest him. The British Governor deliberately dragged his feet over inviting the leader of the majority coalition to form the government. Eventually, however, the Governor had to call A.K. Fazlul Huq to form the ministry. Fazlul Huq and other friends wanted Father's name to figure in the first list of ministers. But having come to know about the government's intent to arrest him, Father asked Fazlul Huq to form the government without delay with Fazlul Huq as premier and two other ministers. Thus it happened that the formation of the new Bengal government and Father's arrest took place almost simultaneously. Two ministers were eventually taken into the ministry from the Bose Congress.

When Father becoming a minister looked likely, friends and relatives were concerned about how he would run his establishment and maintain his family on the meagre salary of a minister. Father himself appeared unconcerned. He would throw his hands upwards in a gesture of resignation, smile gently and ask people to leave things in God's hands. Mother also seemed indifferent, and would just smile. After all, she was no stranger to stringent times when Father was in jail from 1932 to 1935. Some years later, in a letter to the Governor of Bengal from his detention facility in south India, Father wrote that he was happy that he had succeeded in dousing the fires of communalism for a time, although his own hands had got burnt in the process.

In the afternoon of 11 December 1941, the chief of the Special

Branch of the Calcutta Police, Deputy Commissioner J.V.G. Janvrin, called at home and told Father that he had orders for his arrest. He would return the next morning to take Father to Presidency Jail. Mother was told immediately. My two older brothers being away, Gita and I were informed. My elder sister Mira was then expecting a baby. Father called in Dr M.N. Sarkar, Professor of Obstetrics at Calcutta Medical College, told him about the situation and asked him to take care of her.

That evening the ground floor of our house was packed with people. A new government of Bengal was being formed! Members of the legislature were eagerly awaiting the first list of ministers. When Father announced his impending arrest, a shock wave of anger and grief went through the crowd. Father shook hands with everybody with a smile on his face. Nobody else smiled. The visitors left one by one, sullen and downcast. Father was allowed to spend his last night at home. In the morning, our rulers took him away. A very dark chapter in the history of the Bose family began.

CHAPTER 50

My father was, to my mind, too careless in regard to his own affairs and took unnecessary risks when engaging in secret revolutionary activity. On the other hand, he was extra careful when it came to Uncle Subhas or indeed myself.

The case of Bhagat Ram is quite instructive. On the way to Calcutta from Kabul with news of Uncle Subhas, Bhagat Ram met Sardul Singh Kavishar in Lahore. Kavishar saw Uncle's message in his own handwriting but pretended not to recognize it. Bhagat Ram told me in 1961 when he stayed with me for two weeks in Calcutta that he thought the Sardar was eager to get rid of him. Bhagat Ram was very angry at the treatment he received from Sardul Singh, Uncle Subhas's top associate in the Punjab. But perhaps Sardul Singh was in a way right in behaving like that, and not revealing secrets to a stranger who turned up at his door.

Bhagat Ram received a very different reception from Father, who helped him in whatever way he could. Father did not hesitate to meet and talk to Bhagat Ram in a public place like the Victoria Memorial Gardens. If the police had caught on they could have apprehended both Father and Bhagat Ram. When it came to meeting with the Japanese,

too, I think Father was not sufficiently cautious. I often thought Father should have met them at different places on different occasions rather than in his own farmhouse every time. I felt sure that the police's detective department kept close watch on the Rishra farmhouse, as they did on our town houses. I knew of course that Father believed that suspicion was less likely to be roused if secret meetings and work were carried out in an everyday, normal environment.

From what I could gather from different sources, the police did not obtain information about Father's secret activities from the family circuit or his close friends. Shortly after Father's arrest, my cousin Ranjit (Kartik) told me in early 1942 that he had heard from Sheel Bhadra Yajee, a Forward Bloc leader, that the Government knew that a man called Bhagat Ram had met Father with a letter from Uncle Subhas.

I got a shock when I heard this. Neither Ranjit nor Sheel Bhadra Yajee should have known the name of Bhagat Ram and his visit to Calcutta to meet Father.

I concluded that the leak must have occurred at the other end. I came to know much later that the Punjab-based Kirti Kisan Party, with which Bhagat Ram was actively associated, merged with the Communist Party of India in early 1942. From then on the wartime political line of the Communists, which was rabidly opposed to that of Uncle Subhas, influenced the members of the Kirti Kisan Party. Santimoy Ganguli, an important member of the Bengal Volunteer group (BV), a revolutionary organization of Bengal, went to Kabul with Bhagat Ram in May-June 1941 to organize underground work there in support of Uncle Subhas's efforts. But Santimoy Ganguli failed to meet Bhagat Ram in Lahore even after repeated attempts during subsequent visits to Lahore in 1942.[23]

When I heard about Bhagat Ram from my cousin Ranjit I could immediately sense that a very serious leak, and possibly a major betrayal, had taken place. I presumed that the authorities must therefore also know about my role in Uncle Subhas's escape from India. After the war, Satya Ranjan Bakshi told me that his interrogators in the Red Fort in Delhi had shown him the text of a message they had recovered after a search of the Japanese consulate in Calcutta. The message was about Father's discussions with the Japanese.

Uncle Subhas had informed Father in his missives from Berlin via

[23]The Communist line shifted after Hitler's Germany invaded the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941. Ed.

Tokyo that his primary task in Germany was to 'educate' the German foreign office about Indian and Asian affairs. The German foreign minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop, reportedly asked Uncle Subhas to undertake this educational mission. The sole item on Uncle's agenda was to ensure that Indian freedom fighters took advantage of the World War to strike the decisive blow for India's freedom.

The entire period of Father's imprisonment from December 1941 to September 1945 was again a period of great suffering for the family, including in terms of financial hardship. All the insurance policies Father had taken out for his family had to be surrendered one by one. My beloved Wanderer car had to be sold! Mother cut down domestic expenses to the barest minimum. Even so, it was very difficult to meet even the least of them due to the spiralling prices in wartime. My second older brother was then in England as a student. How was Mother to meet his fees and other expenses? During the first half of the 1930s as we know, a family friend, Pravas Chandra Basu, had come forward to help Mother when her eldest son was in Germany as a student. This time a former pupil of Father's, Sudhi Ranjan Das, offered similar assistance. Every month, Sudhi Ranjan Das would visit our house on his way back from court to hand over money. I was then the oldest among the children at home. When Mother was not in, this barrister would quietly hand an envelope to me, to be passed on to Mother.

The entire family was under close police surveillance. Plainclothes agents kept round-the-clock vigil on the two Bose houses. Many of us were diligently followed by spooks. At this dangerous time, most relatives and friends chose to keep away. They were not to blame. I heard some friends felt scared when Father wrote to them from prison. When people called at either of the Bose houses, they worried that their car numbers had been noted down by the men posted near the entrances.

We were constantly anxious for Father. He was kept in Presidency Jail in Calcutta for a short time, before being shifted to south India. There are sometimes friendly people in the enemy camp. One such person sent us a message that Father was about to be taken out of Calcutta by the Madras Mail. We all rushed to Howrah station, after picking up my maternal uncle Ajit Dey and his wife on the way. On arrival at the station, we found none other than Fazlul Huq, the premier of Bengal, waiting on the platform. At the very last moment, Father was brought to the station under heavy police escort, taken to the train and put in a reserved compartment. He was not allowed to speak to anyone, not

even Fazlul Huq, and and the door and windows of the compartment were slammed shut. We looked on as the train steamed away.

Father was taken first to Trichinopoly in Madras Presidency and lodged in the Central Jail there. He was in a solitary cell and had to cook his own food. After some time he was shifted to Mercara in Coorg and kept in a ramshackle bungalow converted into a detention centre with barbed wire fencing. Then, in 1943, he was moved to Coonoor in the Nilgiris. The incarceration of nearly four years under punitive conditions broke Father's health. I have no doubt that this caused his premature death, at the age of just sixty, in February 1950.

During this terrible period there were serious illnesses and bereavements in the family. My mother, Bivabati Bose, was desperately ill at least twice. On one of the two occasions, when things looked almost hopeless, the doctors advised that a request be made to the Government to bring Father to Calcutta to see her. The request was made and rejected. My cousin Mejda died at the end of 1941. Ila, my cousin who played a crucial and heroic role in Uncle Subhas's escape in the winter of 1940-1941, died in 1943. My grandmother Majanani also passed away in 1943. In late 1942, I fell seriously ill with typhoid fever in Presidency Jail, from where I was shifted to Calcutta Medical College when my condition became critical. Efforts were made to bring Father to Calcutta on parole when Majanani was dying. The Government refused. During his first prolonged jail term in the 1930s, Father had lost his father Janakinath, my Dadabhai. During the second prolonged incarceration from 1941 to 1945, he suffered the loss of his mother Prabhabati.

Storm clouds began to gather on the political horizon of our country from early 1942. As Uncle Subhas began his radio broadcasts from Europe, Mahatma Gandhi, disillusioned by continuous British prevarication and deceit, moved step by step in the direction of launching a mass struggle for Independence. As a result of wartime conditions, life became harder and harder for the common people.

I had by now moved up to the senior level in the Calcutta Medical College and was attending hospital wards with my newly acquired stethoscope in my hands. We were instructed in small batches by our teachers at the bedside of patients. This practical training was a great experience. There was no slackness in our teachers, discipline was strict and students had to be punctual and diligent. Despite the wartime environment and amid rising political tension in the country, my medical

studies went on reasonably well. But my mind was burdened all the time with anxiety and portents of danger. Some of my teachers and fellow-students discussed the course of the war from time to time. I listened and could see that while for them the discussions were academic, for me it was entirely different.

Since the capture of Singapore by the Japanese in February 1942, Uncle Subhas's radio broadcasts from Germany on the Azad Hind Radio could be heard regularly in India. Many people asked me about him and his activities. With most of them, I avoided any discussion. I was more forthcoming with only a handful of close friends and fellow-students. Among my fellow-students, Kalidas Bose and Sachin Chowdhury were genuinely interested in the freedom struggle. Through them, I came in touch with a few other like-minded students and young men. But I did not anticipate that in the latter half of 1942, my life would be engulfed in a storm.

CHAPTER 51

At the end of March 1942, I was returning home in a bus early in the morning after night duty in the emergency department of Calcutta Medical College. I was rather surprised to notice Uncle Subhas's picture on the front page of *The Statesman*, which a fellow-passenger was reading. I moved close to him and managed to read the headline. It said that Uncle Subhas had been killed in an air crash off the coast of Japan. I was quite puzzled for a moment, but decided that the news had to be false. He was actually broadcasting over the Azad Hind Radio from Europe almost daily at that time. I knew very well that he was in Germany and that suddenly travelling to Japan by air or otherwise from Europe was nearly impossible in the midst of a global war. Alighting from the bus, I walked straight home. I found my mother waiting in her bedroom and there were tears in her eyes. I tried my best to assure her that the news could not be true.

Mother and I sat down to deliberate whether or not to break the news to Majanani. One of the early callers was Leela Roy, one of Uncle's close followers, who was greatly upset. I tried to convince her on the basis of the facts of the war situation and the information available with us that the report could not be true. We thought it would be better not to divulge the report of the crash to Majanani. After it

was proved to be wrong, we would tell her. But on going across to the Elgin Road house later in the morning I was told that Majanani's cook Sarbeshwar had heard about the newspaper report in the market and told Majanani about it. I was surprised and most relieved to learn that Majanani had dismissed the report as untrue. Even so, I thought it would be a good idea to bring Majanani over to Woodburn Park and have her hear Uncle broadcast on the radio. I arranged to bring Majanani and our youngest aunt Kanaklata to our house in the evening. I had Majanani, my mother and my aunt sit down in the drawing-room and turned on the radio. Reception was not good but the voice came through over Azad Hind Radio. All of them were more or less happy although Majanani was not quite satisfied due to the static. Meanwhile, Mahatma Gandhi and some other leaders sent messages of condolence. Later, Gandhiji sent a second cable with greetings to Majanani.

I heard that Azad Hind Radio started broadcasting in November 1941. But somehow I could not catch the transmissions clearly. The 'invincible' British fortress of Singapore fell to the Japanese on 15 February 1942. Uncle Subhas started broadcasting regularly after that. But Azad Hind Radio was not a powerful station. Atmospheric disturbances often drowned the broadcasts or made reception indistinct and feeble.

After the fall of Singapore, Berlin Radio made special arrangements to broadcast Uncle Subhas's speech made on the occasion. Berlin Radio put out a story that Subhas Chandra Bose had broadcast from an unknown radio station. In view of the great importance of the broadcast at that historic moment, they had recorded it for re-broadcast. As a result we were able to listen to that famous speech of his very clearly by tuning into Berlin Radio.

In those days radio sets with short-wave receivers were not common. After it became known that Uncle Subhas had started broadcasting from Europe, people gathered in the evenings at houses which had such radios. Some people were nervous about listening to his speeches from 'enemy' countries and behaved furtively. They would close their doors and windows tightly and then listen. At home, though, we listened to him with all the windows open and at full volume. We could not care less what spies might report.

Soon after the beginning of the war in Asia, the military authorities in Calcutta turned their attention to 1, Woodburn Park. They served us a notice requisitioning our home for opening a military hospital. The intent clearly was to render us homeless! Mother was in a fix. In

the newly formed progressive coalition government of Bengal, Santosh Kumar Basu was a minister as one of Father's nominees. Mr Basu took up the matter with the military headquarters at Fort William and managed to prevent our eviction.

As the year rolled on, the political situation in the country grew increasingly explosive. The year 1942 turned out to be a critical one in our struggle for freedom. Mahatma Gandhi got disillusioned with British intentions, gave up efforts towards a compromise and advanced step by step in the direction of confrontation with the colonial power. It is more than possible that Uncle Subhas's successful escape from India and his stirring broadcasts from Germany influenced Gandhiji. In April, Gandhiji submitted his new plan of action in the form of a draft resolution to the Congress Working Committee. This draft of what became the Quit India Resolution of August 1942 was consistent with Uncle Subhas's political line.

We heard reports and rumours from various quarters that Mahatma Gandhi would call for a mass struggle on the widest possible scale later in the year. At the Medical College, some of us got together and discussed what we could do in the coming movement. We hoped that the struggle within the country would be supplemented by a military thrust from outside. Among fellow-students with whom I discussed the matter were Kalidas Bose and Sachin Chowdhury; I was also in touch with a few other young men with links to a leftist revolutionary group. A mimeographed pamphlet in the name of 'League of Revolutionary Youth' was circulated. I was asked to write in that clandestinely circulated pamphlet on the coming final struggle combining the mass upsurge within with an armed assault from across the frontier. We held a secret meeting at the Ezra Hospital, located at the northern end of our college campus.

On 8 August 1942, Mahatma Gandhi got his Quit India Resolution passed at the meeting of the All-India Congress Committee in Bombay. The Bombay resolution, moved by Nehru, was a modified version of Gandhiji's original draft and was loaded with high-sounding phrases about freedom and democracy. But the main thrust was Gandhiji's demand that the British 'quit India' and the call for mass action. Uncle Subhas reacted immediately. He broadcast a short address on the evening of 9 August over Azad Hind Radio calling upon the people of India to throw themselves wholeheartedly into the struggle. I wrote his broadcast down with the intention of circulating it clandestinely.

The British Government responded to the 'Quit India' movement in a ruthless manner, and unleashed a reign of terror and brutality. Mahatma Gandhi gave his famous message before his arrest: 'Karenge ya Marenge, Do or Die!'. Almost all the senior Congress leaders were immediately arrested. Some evaded arrest by going underground. The Congress was declared an unlawful organization. There was a tremendous mass upsurge in Bombay following the Congress meeting and the arrests. As the days passed, the fire of revolt spread to other parts of the country.

When I arrived at the Medical College on the morning of 13 August, there was mounting tension in the air both inside the campus and in the area. I went for lunch as usual to my maternal uncle Ajit Dey's nearby residence. I found on my return that fellow-students were in excited discussion in front of the administrative block of the college. There were rumours of mass uprisings in Bihar and of government atrocities. A message was received that Calcutta's students would converge from different directions on Wellington Square in central Calcutta and hold a massive demonstration. My fellow-students were of the view that we should also organize at least a token demonstration of solidarity. It was decided that, in the first instance, we would take out a procession only in the neighbourhood. We would come out of the Medical College by the College Street gate, proceed north to Harrison Road, turn left and enter Chittaranjan Avenue, then move south and return to the College by the western gate.

The procession turned out to be a large and impressive one as we were joined by medical students of other colleges and members of the public. When the procession reached the College's western gate on Chittaranjan Avenue, there was a hurried discussion amongst ourselves as to whether we should stick to our original plan or attempt to reach Wellington Square, the venue of the big rally. I ventured to suggest to those who were at the front that having come out, we should attempt to reach Wellington Square. This was accepted and the procession moved down Chittaranjan Avenue and then turned left to enter Mission Row. About halfway to Wellington Square, on Mission Row, we found our way barred by a large force of police with lathis, led by sergeants wielding revolvers. Behind them, on trucks, were Gurkha soldiers with rifles. We could hear gunfire from the direction of Wellington Square.

The police officer in command advanced towards us and told us that all demonstrations and meetings were illegal. He gave us three minutes to disperse, or else they would take action. Those of us who

were in the lead spent the three minutes talking amongst ourselves, pretending to be discussing the situation. I must admit that I and some others wanted the police to use force to disperse us. We wanted a new chapter to be added to the history of the Calcutta Medical College and the medical student community of Calcutta.

With me at the front of the procession were Rabindra Kumar Ray, Kalidas Bose, Ismail Ibrahim, Samir Sen, Atulendu Sen, Kulbhushan Sengupta and others. As soon as the officer in command shouted 'Charge!' there was a massive assault on us led by the sergeants, using stout lathis made of bamboo. The red-turbaned Bihari police tried to avoid hitting us. They stamped with their lathis on the ground and kept imploring us to disperse, warning us that firing by the Gurkhas was next. They kept saying in Hindi: 'Babulog, why don't you go away? Please go away!' On the other hand, the helmeted sergeants attacked us with unbridled ferocity.

After the procession had been dispersed some of us moved into a side lane to lick our wounds and re-group. All of a sudden, a man who I suspect was an agent provocateur approached us and threw a stone at the police. Immediately, three sergeants rushed towards me, surrounded me and started beating me savagely. The last blow was on my head. Things went dark and I passed out for a few minutes. When I came to I found my classmate Narayan Kumar Chandra, who lived on that lane, holding me in his arms. With the help of one of his friends, he somehow dragged me back to the emergency department of the College. The casualty officer on duty, Dr Ibrahim, took charge of me and quickly took me inside the students' duty room, where I lay down. I started vomiting and could barely raise my head. Soon thereafter, some police arrived at the emergency department looking for injured demonstrators. Dr Ibrahim sent them away and shifted me further inside to his own room.

At about 9 p.m. I arranged to send a message to our family friend Pravas Chandra Basu, who lived close by on Dharmatala Street. He sent his car and his son escorted me home. As I climbed up the stairs of our house with difficulty, limping and supported by Mr Basu's son, I saw my mother, sister-in-law and others of the family gathered at the top of the staircase. Rumours of my death had already gone around the city and anxious enquiries were being made by friends and relatives. Father read about the brutal police attack on a medical students' procession in central Calcutta in *The Hindu* newspaper while sitting in his detention

centre in south India. He remarked in one of his letters that he was certain his son was involved because he was sure I would not shy away from the danger.

CHAPTER 52

I lay in bed for several days like a wounded soldier. Anxious enquiries continued to arrive about me from far and near on the telephone, because of a rumour that I had succumbed to injuries sustained in the police attack. A classmate from Burdwan told me that a condolence meeting had been held for me there! Friends who came to see me told me of the heroic fight common people across the country were putting up in the face of brutal repression. My doctor uncle Sunil, who immediately took charge of my treatment, tried to raise my spirits by telling me that I would have stronger bones in the future as a result of the beating.

When I went to meet my father in his detention centre in Coonoor in February 1944, he told me that on receiving news of the police assault on the medical students' procession in Calcutta he had immediately told his fellow-prisoner, Lala Shankarlal, that he felt sure his son had been involved in the confrontation. Father's words greatly raised my morale.

Uncle Subhas made a short and spirited radio broadcast immediately on learning about the arrest of Mahatma Gandhi and other national leaders after the adoption of the August Resolution at the Bombay session of the All-India Congress Committee demanding that the British 'quit India'. He called upon the people to plunge into the movement. As I have said, I managed to write down the text of his broadcast but was unable to circulate it because of my arrest soon thereafter. In a subsequent broadcast, Uncle Subhas said that when he heard about Gandhiji's decision to launch the final struggle for freedom he felt that the honour of Indian freedom fighters had been restored.

Earlier, in an important radio broadcast commenting on the fall of Singapore, he had urged his countrymen and women to fulfil their national duty in the context of the favourable international situation. The main point of his speeches was that the final phase of our long struggle for emancipation had begun. A golden opportunity had arrived to wrest our freedom from the British and take our rightful place in the comity of nations. In the international context, the enemies of British imperialism were our natural allies and the friends of British

imperialism our natural enemies.

He also pointed out that in this hour of crisis, and opportunity, a handful of people in India sought to conceal their opportunism and cowardice by allying themselves with British imperialism in the name of friendship and cooperation with China and Russia. But they were not representative of the nation. The common people of the country wanted to fight for their freedom and were determined to fight to the bitter end. He gave a rousing call to break the shackles of slavery once and for all. India's freedom, he said, would pave the way to the liberation of all of humanity from the curse of colonialism.

Uncle Subhas's speeches brought us great encouragement and strength. We would eagerly wait for his broadcasts over Azad Hind Radio. He gave detailed instructions about how the fight was to be conducted and the methods to be employed to disrupt and destroy the British administration of India. At the same time, freedom-loving Indians in Japan and east Asia started broadcasting from Tokyo, Saigon, Bangkok, Singapore, Rangoon and other centres. I remember hearing the veteran revolutionary Rashbehari Bose broadcast on a number of occasions from Tokyo and Singapore. It was evident that Indian communities across east Asia were organizing themselves to play an active role in the final struggle for freedom.

After recovering at home for about two weeks, I resumed my studies and work at the Medical College in the last week of August. There was an undercurrent of tension and excitement everywhere. Among the students, there were constant discussions about how the spirit of resistance could be kept alive. There was major friction at this time between the students and the British superintendent of the Medical College, Colonel Linton. There was a big row over the attempt by students to hoist the national tricolour on the main building of the Medical College. There was also a marked increase in the presence and activity of police agents on the college campus. I am sorry to say that there were a number of so-called 'good boys' who worked for Colonel Linton and the police against the nationalist students.

Some of us met in the evenings after the day's routine in the Ezra Hospital to the north of the main building. I reported on war news and the activities of Uncle Subhas and freedom fighters abroad, which I gathered by listening to the radio. We had discussions on how government communications could be disrupted and destroyed. A few resourceful friends managed to obtain chemicals and explosive substances,

and experiments were conducted here and there, with rather limited results. We had big dreams. After all, I was still just 22 years old! We even discussed blowing up the Writers' Buildings at the opportune time with dynamite.

In the second week of September, I started feeling unwell. I was feverish for days and had a persistent headache. One day I was tossing about in my bed just before dawn when I heard shuffling sounds of people moving about outside the house. My mother also picked up the unusual noise. I looked out of the window as soon as daylight broke and saw that a large posse of red-turbaned police had surrounded Woodburn Park. I rushed to Mother's room and informed her. It was obvious that the house was going to be searched.

Mother had in her possession Uncle Subhas's handwritten letter to Father from Kabul of March 1941, which Bhagat Ram had brought to Calcutta, as well as some other confidential papers. She went into the bathroom and quickly burned the letter and the other documents. Soon thereafter our gatekeeper came up to say that the police were demanding to come in. In 1932, when Father was arrested for the first time, the search had been largely limited to the ground floor. This time, they wanted to come upstairs straightway. It was clear that this time I was the target. They ransacked my books and papers. They seized Dr Sunderland's *India in Bondage*, *Subhas Bose 1939-40* by Mukundalal Sircar and some other items including issues of the *Forward Bloc* weekly. My typed copy of Uncle Subhas's radio broadcast of 9 August 1942 was lying on my desk. Somehow, they overlooked it!

Once the search was over, the officer in charge of the operation showed me a warrant of arrest. I was mentally prepared for arrest for quite some time and was not particularly worried. But my mother was extremely so, and that disturbed me, although I knew that she had tremendous strength of character and would carry on. I looked at her for a while as I was taken away, and gave her a smile. She also tried to smile but could not, her lips just tightened. Her eyes were wet, I could see, but the tears did not fall. I had seen my mother a number of times over the years in that state.

They first took me to the police intelligence headquarters on Lord Sinha Road, a short distance from our house, and kept me waiting there for some time. One officer asked me some trivial questions. In the afternoon, they transferred me to Presidency Jail. I found myself in what was known as 'Bara Hajat' (Big Gaol), a long barracks. A number

of people I knew were there and came forward to greet me. Among them was Suresh Chandra Majumdar of *Anandabazar Patrika*, a family friend. He expressed surprise: 'What, you too!'

Immediately, a conference was held among the elders about where and how I should be accommodated. I was served tea and snacks. Soon, Sureshbabu noticed that I looked ill, and discovered that I was running a high temperature. My fellow-detainees kicked up a commotion and demanded that I should be moved to the hospital ward of the jail. The jailer was summoned. He was one Mr Moitra, a rather friendly person whom I had met when Uncle Subhas was in the jail in 1940. The jail authorities agreed to shift me to the hospital ward. I was given a bed at one end of the large dormitory on the first floor.

I vividly remember my experience of Presidency Jail. I could move around a little during the first few days. After a couple of days, Mother came to see me and we met at the office of the jail superintendent. I told her that my fever was steadily going up and the headache was also getting worse. In the future, I told her, I doubted that I would be able to walk all the way from the hospital ward to the superintendent's office to meet her. I asked her to inform Father's nominees in Mr Fazlul Huq's coalition ministry about my condition and get them to intervene.

In the hospital ward, there were a number of young, friendly and resourceful fellow-prisoners. Despite my severe headache, I carried on political discussions with them. The jail doctor made casual rounds and did not do much. The man in actual charge of the ward was a senior convict who thought he knew a lot about disease and doled out medicines as he pleased. My illness went from bad to worse and eventually I became entirely bed-ridden.

Father became extremely concerned about me in his own prison in south India. My parents knew everything I had been up to since late 1940 and so were naturally very anxious about me and how the Government would behave with me. Under the rules, prisoners could not correspond with one another. So Father would send me his good wishes and blessings in letters addressed to others at home. In one letter he wrote: 'I have no doubt that Sisir will be able to bear his uninvited incarceration with calmness and fortitude. I say so not because he is my son but because I know his frame of mind.'

CHAPTER 53

When faced with death, a human being can develop a strange kind of mental detachment. In my terrible second week afflicted with typhoid fever in the hospital ward of Presidency Jail, I became detached in that way. By that time I had diagnosed myself correctly. But the jail doctor was useless. Meanwhile, the overly confident convict in charge of the hospital ward gave me drugs according to his whims and I took them without protest. The high fever and headache knocked me out completely and I could barely move. A very friendly fellow-prisoner, a member of the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP), sat by my side and tried to cheer me up. Every evening before lock-up, the guards carried out what was known as 'bar-testing' by hitting the iron bars with an iron rod to ensure they were secure. The operation was oppressively noisy and I felt I was being hit on the head with the same instrument. I weakly asked if the horrendous routine could be avoided. I was told it could not be stopped as those were the rules.

Uncle Subhas used to tell me that a half-engineer could be somewhat useful to society but a half-doctor is very dangerous. The quack in charge of the hospital ward thought I should be given Seidlitz powder, a strong purgative. We had just been taught in the Medical College that in typhoid fever cases purgatives must never be administered. But I took it, with disastrous consequences. I felt even weaker and my mind became clouded. I asked the jailer and deputy jailer, who visited me from time to time, to convey a message to Santosh Kumar Basu, the minister of health and local self-government in Fazlul Huq's cabinet as Father's nominee, to arrange for my transfer to Calcutta Medical College. The family at home were also trying for my transfer. I felt I would not survive if I continued to be in jail.

Eventually, I was informed that the government would send the principal of Calcutta Medical College, Dr. U.P. Basu, to see me and report on my condition. My fellow-prisoners said the government wanted to be certain that I was in fact critically ill. Dr Basu, an eminent physician, visited me in the jail's hospital ward and examined me thoroughly. I tried to tell him that my symptoms, including the rash in the second week, indicated that I had typhoid fever. He gave me a sharp rebuke as a teacher would to an uppity student and said that the diagnosis was none of my business; he would report to the authorities as appropriate. He prescribed certain medicines and left.

After three days, the jailer told me that orders had been received for my transfer to Medical College Hospital. I was taken out on a stretcher and put in an ambulance with two armed guards on either side of me. I felt amused by all the security arrangements.

I was left lying in the emergency ward of my college for quite a while. I tried to tell the admitting officer a number of times to get me admitted under the supervision of Dr M.N. De, professor and head of the department of medicine. Dr De was a family friend as well as a celebrated physician. But I was told that under government orders I was to be treated by Dr. A.K. Wahed, another senior physician. Dr Wahed was also one of our teachers, but I did not know him very well. I remain eternally grateful to Dr Wahed for the care and sympathy I received from him during my treatment. In order to give me and the family more confidence he went out of his way to call in Professor M.N. De for consultations. For a number of weeks in the hospital, I lay in a stupor. My mother and others of the family were permitted to visit once a day. A police constable sat in front of my cabin day and night and peeped in from time to time.

Even with the high fever and mental confusion, I asked Mother and my sister Gita about the course of the war and news of Uncle Subhas. Towards the end of 1942 the battle of Stalingrad was in progress and the opposing armies were fighting for every district, block and street of the city with unimaginable ferocity. I was later told that during that time there were two or three occasions when my condition deteriorated so much that the family was told to be prepared for the worst. My mother sat quietly by my side during the visiting hour. My maternal aunt Renu slipped in holy flowers under my pillow without my realizing it. To be nearer me, Mother had moved to my maternal uncle Ajit Dey's place on College Square with my younger siblings.

From time to time Mother received secret messages from Father. The messages were either typed or handwritten in capital letters and arrived either through a messenger or by mail from different locations. Both Father and Uncle Subhas were adept at smuggling letters from prisons and detention centres. Mother would, when she got the chance, tell me about the messages. Once she passed me a full-page, typed, unsigned letter. I kept it under my pillow and read it at night when nobody was around.

Father conveyed most intriguing information in that letter written in November 1942. He wrote how the British Government was securing

information about Uncle Subhas and his activities, how they had taken a number of his associates to the Red Fort in Delhi and to the Lahore Fort to extract information, and how they were gradually finding out the details of the escape and subsequent developments. One source of information for Father was Lala Shankarlal of Delhi, who was sent down to Coonoor to be Father's prison-mate after a spell at Punjab's Campbellpur Jail. In Campbellpur Jail, Lala Shankarlal had stayed for some time with my two cousins, Dwijen and Aurobindo. Dwijen had been taken for three weeks to the Lahore Fort for interrogation. One of the persons Father mentioned in the secret letter was Mian Akbar Shah who, he said, had been arrested and taken to the Lahore Fort.

Shankarlal was a veteran Congress leader of Delhi. Later, he accepted Uncle Subhas's leadership and joined the Forward Bloc. In 1940, he had visited Japan secretly under a false name and with a false passport. The Japanese he met there were not particularly open or forthcoming, though. Father said in that letter that the government knew about my role in Uncle's escape from Calcutta. He thought therefore that my serious illness had come as 'a blessing in disguise.' Otherwise, he said, I would most probably have been transferred to the Lahore Fort.

When the doctors finally said I was out of danger, I felt like I had had a rebirth. When I first sat up in bed, I wobbled like an infant. When I was well enough to leave hospital, the government passed an order of 'home internment' which lasted from early 1943 to early 1944. I lived at home but like a prisoner, and was visited regularly by a police officer from the special branch of the criminal investigation department located at Lord Sinha Road. I was not permitted to go out of the house without prior police permission. For some time, I was, in any case, not strong enough to move around. Later, I sought permission to start attending my classes at the Medical College.

The Japanese forces were then poised at the Burma-India border. In 1942, there were stray air attacks on Calcutta and a few other places in eastern India and Ceylon. Towards the end of December, on Christmas Day to be exact, the Japanese dropped a few bombs on Calcutta. Orders had been given soon after the outbreak of the war in Asia to earmark a room on the ground floor of every house as an air-raid shelter. Civil defence officials went around and selected a room in each house for the purpose. The exposed sides of the room were protected by building so-called 'baffle walls' with brick and mortar. Besides, we had to stack up sandbags as the second line of protection. We also stored buckets of

water and some dry food. Window panes were plastered with strips of cloth to prevent injuries from flying glass. Room lights were given special shades made of black paper. Trenches were dug in parks and open spaces where pedestrians could take shelter in the event of sudden air attacks.

On the evening of Christmas Day, 1942, the air-raid siren sounded. I had only just come home from hospital and was still physically unstable. Tottering on my legs, I joined the rest of the family on the way down to the ground-floor room meant to be our shelter. The Calcutta South Club, the premier tennis club of Calcutta,[24] was next door to our house. Employees of the club—waiters, cooks and gardeners—came over for protection. Suddenly, a loud explosion was heard and a streak of light lit up the horizon. Some of the club staff clapped their hands in joy. They said the Japanese knew that Englishmen and women would be dancing at the Firpo's restaurant on Chowringhee and they must have bombed Firpo's! In reality, no bomb was dropped anywhere near Firpo's. But the reaction of these humble people showed that the people of India, apart from some pathetic hangers-on and collaborators, rejoiced in the predicament of mighty Great Britain.

Uncle Subhas said in his broadcasts from Berlin that he felt sorry when he heard of the air attacks on Calcutta. He spoke movingly about his love for Calcutta and its citizens. He talked about his long public life, the greater part of which had been based in Calcutta. He said that even the lanes of Calcutta were familiar and dear to him. Now that our enemies, meaning the British and the Americans, had made Calcutta their wartime base, the city had naturally become a target for *their* enemies.

The reality, however, was that the Japanese bombed Calcutta very rarely, and extremely lightly when they did so. Frankly, we wanted them to bomb military assets in Calcutta and other parts of eastern India heavily and thoroughly. The intensification of war and war-psychosis was helpful to revolutionary activity. I heard later that Uncle Subhas himself had asked the Japanese to spare Calcutta on humanitarian grounds. Whatever the reason, India only experienced stray and light Japanese bombing. Nonetheless, the fear was real and in 1943 thousands of panicked Calcuttans—mostly affluent people—'evacuated' the city and fled westwards.

[24] and still is as of 2015, Ed.

CHAPTER 54

It was March 1943. A radio broadcast from Berlin by Uncle Subhas struck a rather odd and artificial note to me. I felt I was listening to a pre-recorded address. Uncle Subhas had a set pattern and style in his radio broadcasts to India. He would first review the absolutely current war situation, then comment on the equally current political situation in India and finally give an update on his own activities at the time. The broadcast I heard was lacking in these attributes and there was no reference to any events after January. Suddenly, it dawned on me that he must have left Europe and was on his way to the Far East! The same evening, I told Mother and Gita about my hunch. However, I thought then that Uncle Subhas must be travelling to East Asia via Turkey and across Soviet Siberia. There were no formal hostilities then between the Soviet Union and Japan. I could not have imagined that he was undertaking the journey from Europe to East Asia by submarine over 93 days!

On 26 January 1943, a date nationalists observed as Independence Day, Uncle Subhas delivered his last public address in Europe at a large ceremony in Berlin. Berlin Radio broadcast his entire speech. Home-interned, I listened to the address. He spoke in German and the English version was transmitted simultaneously. European diplomats and political rebels and freedom fighters from the Middle East, including the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, attended the meeting. The Berlin Radio Orchestra played Tagore's *Jana Gana Mana Adhinayaka* and the entire assembly rose in honour of what was already accepted as India's national anthem. I cannot remember ever hearing a better rendition of our national anthem, even in India.

As 1943 advanced, the situation in the country became more and more critical. The British, thoroughly defeated in the battles in Southeast Asia with the Japanese, were engaged in brutal suppression of unarmed freedom fighters in India. On the one hand, there was ruthless exploitation of the Indian people for the British war effort, and on the other, almost all the Congress leaders and hundreds of thousands of patriots were in prison. Some of Uncle Subhas's followers on the nationalist Left and some activists of the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) were carrying on underground revolutionary activity against great odds. In Bengal, most leaders and cadres of revolutionary groups—including the Bengal Volunteers, totally loyal to Uncle Subhas—were in custody. The British

secret police kept close watch on the remnants of these groups. We, as a family, too were under intense surveillance.

At this time, a great tragedy hit Bengal. To feed their war industries situated in Calcutta's hinterland and to provide fully for their troops in eastern India, the British Government deprived millions of people of rural Bengal of the barest means of subsistence. The British also carried out a preemptive policy of denial to their enemy by removing food stocks and destroying transportation facilities, in anticipation of a Japanese and INA advance towards Bengal. A devastating British-made famine hit Bengal in the second half of 1943. I still have painful memories of it: of heart-rending scenes of starving men, women and children from Bengal's villages drifting into the city, crying out for some gruel and dying in droves on the streets of Calcutta. Reduced almost to skeletons, these people roamed Calcutta's streets all day begging for morsels of food. Their haunting cries pierced the silence of even the night. There was no count of the emaciated corpses of starvation victims on Calcutta's streets. All patriotic and fighting elements in the country were either in jail or underground, hunted by the police.

Cooped up at home, I shivered in rage. What about those elements that were free? Could they not do anything beyond opening a few gruel kitchens? There were the paper revolutionaries championing the cause of freedom and democracy in Russia and China and fulminating against fascism and Japanese militarism. They never gave any call to the hungry millions of Bengal to rise in revolt against the satanic scourge of British imperialism. In fact, these cowardly elements never even called for a day's strike action to protest the mass slaughter unfolding in Bengal! I wondered how the Bengal of Swami Vivekananda, Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das and Subhas Bose could produce such cowardly scum, of various political shades—some white, some green and some red.

The only thing that kept us going in those desperate times was the hope of the return of Uncle Subhas. He said time and again from abroad that he would return to his homeland. I was sure that once that happened, the land crawling with collaborators and opportunists would be redeemed.

For the Bose family, as I've said, 1942 and 1943 brought a series of bereavements. In mid-1943 my dear cousin Ila passed away, after an adverse reaction to a new sulfonamide drug, MB693, which we were told had been tried successfully on Winston Churchill for his pneumonia in North Africa. Early in 1942, we had already lost my cousin Ganesh

following an attack of cerebral apoplexy. His younger brother Dwijen was then a prisoner in Alipore Central Jail. I still vividly remember the heartbreaking sight of Uncle Satish sitting speechless and motionless by his son's body. Not many senior family members were in Calcutta then. We had endless trouble trying to get Dwijen out on parole to perform the last rites of his older brother. I ran around meeting and talking to ministers to get something done. As the progressive coalition ministry in Bengal was Father's handiwork, I tried to get ministers who owed their position to him to help. Of the two ministers nominated by Father, Santosh Kumar Basu had gone down to south India to visit him in Trichinopoly Jail. I first went to the other minister, Pramatha Nath Banerjee. He shrugged me off. Then I met the prime minister, A.K. Fazlul Huq. He asked the police chief to let Dwijen out on parole to perform the last rites. They would not agree, saying that they needed clearance from the Government of India. Mr Fazlul Huq said he would get in touch with Delhi and do his best.

I then telephoned the finance minister, Syama Prasad Mookerjee, who asked me to come to his chamber at Writers' Buildings. That was my first-ever visit to the Writers' Buildings. There were instructions left at the gate and I had no trouble getting in. In my presence Syama Prasad spoke on the telephone to the additional home secretary of the Government of India, Richard Tottenham. I could sense that the British official was very unwilling to help. But Mr Mookerjee would not give up and persisted, saying repeatedly: 'This has to be done! This has to be done!' Eventually Tottenham relented and half-agreed. Syama Prasad asked me to go home. After a tug-of-war that lasted the entire afternoon, orders arrived for Dwijen to be taken from the jail under heavy police escort directly to the cremation ground—and returned to jail as soon as the cremation was over. Father and Uncle Subhas had fundamental political differences with Syama Prasad Mookerjee; they followed different ideologies. But I was greatly impressed by how Syama Prasad stood up to the British authorities in the context of this family tragedy of ours.

I have already mentioned that for us as a family and for countless Indians, the only ray of hope and good cheer came from hearing Uncle Subhas's messages of resistance and fortitude over the airwaves. All of a sudden, in the third week of June 1943, Tokyo Radio announced the arrival of Subhas Chandra Bose in Japan! We were thrilled. Throughout that night, in every transmission from Tokyo and other radio stations in

Southeast Asia, his arrival in Asia was the lead news. There were detailed descriptions of his appearance, his manner, his dress and his personality, along with his biographical details and the story of his lifelong struggle to free India.

After a couple of days, Uncle Subhas broadcast from Tokyo Radio in Bengali, Hindi, English and German. He called upon all Indians in Southeast Asia to rally to his banner and actively participate in the final battle for freedom. We now had hope that the final struggle would begin towards the end of the year. In the following days we had more news of his activities from various radio stations—Tokyo, Singapore, Bangkok, Saigon, Rangoon, Batavia, and others. The rousing address he delivered while reviewing the first parade of the Indian National Army in Singapore on 5 July 1943 still rings in my ears. I felt he had evolved to a different place, far ahead of his demoralized compatriots at home.

I do not know if he got the news of Ila's death. But I know news of his mother's death reached him through a secret radio message from Calcutta in December 1943. On returning to India after the war, Debnath Das, one of his most important associates in Southeast Asia, confirmed this. One night, after a long day's work, Das had found him sitting by himself, lost in thought. Das told him that he was looking very tired and should go to bed. Ordinarily, Uncle Subhas would perhaps have kept his sorrow to himself. On being told he looked tired, he told Mr Das: 'No, I am not tired, I received news today that my mother has passed away.'

Towards the end of 1943, Majanani's health had begun to deteriorate rapidly. When Uncle Sunil, the doctor in the family, told us that her days were coming to an end, efforts were made to get Father to Calcutta on parole to be at her bedside. Majanani herself was pining to have one last look at her son Sarat. To carry conviction with the government, a medical report on Majanani's condition prepared by Colonel Denham White, an English physician of repute, was sent to Delhi. But the home department would still not agree to let Father come to Calcutta. My mother Bivabati was also taken critically ill in 1944. Father wrote in one of his letters from Coonoor that he had the feeling that 'Biva's life is slowly coming to a close'. But the government would not relent and let him visit her. Mother, fortunately, survived but Majanani left us in December 1943.

Father wrote a few deeply emotional letters from prison on being informed of Majanani's death. He wrote about his mother using the

style of his favourite English poet Shelley:

'I wish I had the spiritual strength that my revered mother had.
She had in her lifetime
To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite
To forgive wrongs darker than death or night
To defy Power which seems omnipotent
To love and bear
And she did it till the end with gentleness, virtue, wisdom and endurance.

The only request she ever made to the authorities was to permit me to come to her bedside, so that she might have one long, lingering look. But even that was turned down! No wonder that it broke a mother's heart.

I read Sisir's, Dada's, your and Gita's letters with tears, and the tears relieved the oppression on my mind to some extent.'

CHAPTER 55

It was December 1943. We were still in mourning for Majanani. One quiet evening a non-Bengali gentleman called at Woodburn Park and asked to see me. He was a youngish person, of medium height and fair complexion, with curly hair. He told me he had arrived secretly from East Asia with a letter of introduction from Uncle Subhas. Uncle Subhas, he said, had asked him to see me. He took the letter out of his pocket and handed it to me. It was written in Bengali. I was very excited.

I had no doubt that the letter was genuine. It was written on the letterhead of the Indian Independence League, Singapore. On the top was printed 'Unity, Faith, Sacrifice' (the motto of the INA) and the address under it was 3, Chancery Lane, the Singapore headquarters of the League. The date, written in Uncle's own hand, read: 'Sri Sri Kali Puja, 29th October 1943'. The brief text in Bengali in Uncle's handwriting was as follows: 'The bearer of this letter is going to our country on a very urgent mission. I shall be most obliged and happy if my friends, co-workers and supporters help him'. His full Bengali signature ('Sincerely, Subhas Chandra Bose') followed.

After reading the letter several times I asked the visitor what he wanted of me. He said he wanted contacts for collecting vital and sensitive information, and for organizing secret hideouts for underground

activity. He said his name was 'T.K. Rao' and said he hailed from Madras. He was one of a group of four that had landed from a submarine on the Kathiawar coast of western India. The men had gone in four different directions. After establishing necessary contacts and completing preliminary arrangements, they were to meet up in Benares on an appointed date. About himself, he said he had been in the British-Indian Army and was captured by the famous German commander Erwin Rommel's Afrika Korps forces after the battle of Tobruk in North Africa (Libya). At Netaji's call he had joined the Indian Legion in Germany. He had received special training in underground revolutionary operations, particularly in radio communications.

In 1943, after Netaji's departure from Germany to east Asia by submarine, a group of specially trained personnel under the leadership of Major N.G. Swami also travelled to Southeast Asia in a German blockade-runner ship. They breached the Allied blockade of the seas and after surviving several attacks by Allied ships and planes, they reached their destination safely. N.G. Swami built up a special secret group for espionage and other underground work which was to function under Netaji's direct instructions. My visitor also told me that he had brought to India a state-of-the-art radio transmitter of German make, to establish and maintain regular radio contact with Major Swami and Netaji.

'Rao' told me with evident enthusiasm about the dramatic events that had begun to take place after Uncle Subhas's arrival in Southeast Asia. He said there had been a big spurt in patriotic activity among Indian communities throughout the region upon the declaration of the Provisional Government of Free India in Singapore on 21 October 1943. He said that people of Indian origin had been roused to an all-consuming sense of mission by Netaji. Wherever he went, people in the hundreds and thousands ran after him. He told me that 'Jai Hind' had become the common form of greeting among Indians across Southeast Asia. I was, of course, already quite well-informed about these developments as I had been following events very closely over the radio. But the first-hand account by an eyewitness was still worthwhile.

During the Durga Puja holidays in 1943 I had obtained permission from the authorities to visit my eldest brother Asoke at Bararee for rest and a change. There, sitting in the same room where we had entertained Uncle Subhas as the insurance salesman Mohd. Ziauddin on 17 January 1941, we heard him read the Proclamation of the Provisional Government of Azad Hind over Singapore Radio. That was a tremendous experience.

Now an eye-witness had told me about the happenings there.

Regarding contacts, Rao mentioned a number of names: Satya Ranjan Bakshi, Suresh Chandra Majumdar, Sudhir Roy Choudhury and Atul Chandra Kumar. The first three were in jail and the last was living in Malda in north Bengal. I could not therefore tell Rao anything definitive about possible contacts. I asked him to meet me after two days at the Metro cinema in central Calcutta for the evening show, as it would be very unsafe to have further meetings at my home. I was still under home-internment orders and our house was under police surveillance.

I showed the letter to Mother the same evening. She did not doubt its authenticity. I also discussed with Mother what I could do to arrange helpful contacts for the visitor.

We knew that Uncle Subhas relied a lot on Satya Ranjan Bakshi for secret work. We children of the family regarded him as a very close friend, almost as a member of the family. After Father's arrest in December 1941, during the first half of 1942, Mr Bakshi would meet Mother from time to time with news of Uncle Subhas. A young member of the Bengal Volunteer group, Santimoy Ganguli, had been sent to Kabul with Bhagat Ram, Uncle Subhas's escort from Peshawar to Kabul, soon after Uncle's arrival in Germany. A radio link-up via Kabul was established for the exchange of information and instructions. I remember being present at one of Satya Ranjan Bakshi's meetings with Mother, when he passed on news about Uncle Subhas's trip to Rome. But Satya Ranjan being in jail, I decided to meet his younger brother Sudhir Ranjan Bakshi and seek his help.

I should say at this point that 'T.K. Rao' was not the real name of the visitor from Southeast Asia. I came to know soon after the war from N.G. Swami that his real name was Bhagawan Lu.

The next evening, I met Sudhir Ranjan Bakshi at their family residence at 16B, Priyanath Mallick Road in the Bhowanipore neighbourhood of south Calcutta, and told him what had happened. His response was enthusiastic. Some members of the Bengal Volunteer group were still at large. Sudhir Bakshi told me that with their support he would be able to make arrangements for Rao. Sudhir Bakshi was an employee of the Calcutta Corporation. We arranged that I would ask Rao to meet Sudhir Bakshi at the Calcutta Corporation during office hours, ostensibly about some tax matter. We arranged that he would use the pseudonym 'Prasad' to introduce himself to Sudhirbabu.

The following evening we had the 'annual social' at the Medical College. I was the general secretary of the students' union and had to give the welcome speech. I planned to keep my pre-arranged appointment with Rao at the Metro cinema on the way to the Medical College.

As soon as I reached the front lobby of the cinema I noticed Rao. I bought two tickets and signalled Rao very discreetly. We went inside the theatre. In the few minutes before the movie started, I explained to Rao the arrangement with Sudhir Bakshi and their rendezvous at the Calcutta Corporation. After the newsreel preceding the movie was shown, I got up and left. I arrived at the Medical College in time to give my welcome address.

The next afternoon I had a telephone call from the Corporation. 'Prasad' was on the line. He simply said that he had met the officer, who had offered to look into his requirements.

I kept that precious letter from Uncle Subhas in my wallet for eight or nine months. Whenever I opened my wallet to pay the tram fare on my way to Medical College the letter was visible. I do not think I did the right thing by carrying the secret communication about in this manner. But I felt so happy to have the letter close to me that I disregarded the obvious danger. I felt grateful that Uncle Subhas had remembered me and thought of entrusting me, once again, with a sensitive task. I thought, what more could I hope for!

In January 1944, my home-internment order expired. For reasons unknown, the Government did not extend it. Thereafter I went down to Coonoor with Mother and one of my younger sisters to meet Father. I took Uncle's letter with me. I wanted to show the letter to Father, somehow eluding the police officer supervising the interview. The police officer, A. Mitra, was a distant relative of ours and lived in the same house in which father was detained. He kept a close watch on Father and censored his letters. When we had the interview with Father, he was alertly watching and listening to us. Fortunately, Mr Mitra had diabetes and had to visit the toilet frequently. I took that opportunity to show Uncle Subhas's letter to Father and quickly brief him on the formation of the Provisional Government of Azad Hind and the ongoing preparations for the attack on India's northeastern frontier. I brought the letter back home safely.

Around August 1944, Sudhir Bakshi and I both realized that the police were closing the net around us. So, one evening, I handed the letter over to Narendra Narayan Chakrabarti, a prominent member

of the Forward Bloc who had been taken into confidence about our contacts and cooperation with Uncle's agents from Southeast Asia. Mr Chakrabarti told me after the end of the war that he had had to destroy the letter. After the war, I came into possession of an identical letter from a Bengali gentleman, P.K. Roy, who had attempted to enter India through the Burma border on foot on Uncle Subhas's instructions. But he had to turn back due to the war situation turning adverse. Mr Roy handed over the letter to me, he said, in order to honour Uncle Subhas's instructions that he should meet me in Calcutta with the letter. This letter has exactly the same text in Bengali in Uncle's handwriting as the one Rao gave me. Only the letterhead is different—Arzi Hukumate Azad Hind (The Provisional Government of Free India)—and the address, in Uncle's own Bengali handwriting, is 'India-Burma Frontier'. The original of this letter is preserved in the archives of the Netaji Research Bureau.

CHAPTER 56

When Uncle Subhas had gone to Europe in early 1941, the war situation had not fully evolved. Germany was then fighting Britain on the Western Front. The Soviet Union was neutral. The United States and Japan were not yet part of the conflict. Germany, with the support of Italy, planned to attack British interests and outposts in the Mediterranean. It was in that context that Uncle Subhas put certain proposals to the German Government. He wanted, in the interest of the freedom struggle in India, to somehow bring the war close to the northwestern frontier of India. He told the Germans that three or four routes could be used to approach the India-Afghanistan border from Europe. The task would be easier with some support, direct or indirect, from the Soviet Union or Turkey or both. Uncle Subhas had planned to use the Indian armed force he had organized in Europe, from POWs captured by the Germans, to enter India with the support of armed tribal militants of the northwest frontier. The invasion would then be joined by Pathan and Punjabi revolutionaries in large numbers.

That blueprint became defunct once Germany attacked the Soviet Union in June 1941. So Uncle Subhas had to think and plan afresh. I can see from documents that since early 1942 he had been pressing the Germans for arrangements to travel to East Asia. The journey only materialized a year later. By the time he reached Singapore, it was early

July of 1943. Despite the delay, Uncle Subhas did not give up. In a matter of months he re-organized the INA and by early 1944 it was ready to go into battle. Simultaneously, he set up secret revolutionary groups to enter India ahead of the INA offensive to gather and transmit valuable military information and otherwise facilitate the INA's advance into India. The man who called himself 'T.K. Rao' belonged to one such group.

The contacts I arranged for Rao with the Bengal Volunteer group yielded positive results. As we know, Rao and another comrade who joined him later in Calcutta wanted to collect sensitive information about British and American military capabilities such as numbers, deployments, weapons and air power, to be transmitted by radio to Uncle Subhas. Secondly, guerrilla units inside Bengal had to be readied to swing into action with the entry of the INA into India to carry out sabotage and otherwise hinder the British war effort. Thirdly, Uncle Subhas's plans should be conveyed to his followers across India, especially those languishing in prison, to raise their morale.

Sudhir Bakshi got in touch with Ratul Roy Choudhury and Dhiren Saha Roy, two young members of of the Bengal Volunteers, who had evaded arrest. Dhiren Saha Roy was already in Calcutta, living in a rented house on Balaram Bose Street with two of his comrades, Niren Roy and Chanchal Majumdar. Sudhir Bakshi kept in contact with these comrades as he held preliminary talks with T.K. Rao. I visited Sudhirbabu's house from time to time in the evening after college hours to keep myself informed. I do not think the police got any scent of our activities for about four months.

The three BV comrades were of the view that arrangements for bringing in arms for guerrilla action at the appropriate time should be made in advance. They selected two places, Sandeshkhali and Raimangal in the riverine Sunderbans forest tracts south of Calcutta, as entry points for consignments of weapons. They made contact with boatmen of those areas for this purpose. Arrangements were also made to shelter fighters arriving secretly from across the India-Burma border.

Sudhir Bakshi would meet Rao and his associate at different places in the city. After some time he introduced them to the local cadres at 15, Balaram Bose Street. Rao and his comrade used to change their place of residence frequently. From time to time they would come and collect information from the hideout of the BV comrades to transmit by radio to Uncle Subhas, as well as drop off messages received from Uncle

Subhas in Rangoon. In gathering vital military information, a courageous young woman, Santisudha Roy Choudhury, played a very important role. She worked as a secretary at the American military headquarters. She collected much useful information at great personal risk, which was duly transmitted to Rangoon. Besides, the BV trio—Dhiren Saha Roy, Chanchal Majumdar and Niren Roy—visited various places in Bengal, collected intelligence and arranged hideouts for guerrilla fighters.

A number of messages from Uncle Subhas in Rangoon reached Calcutta via the secret radio transmitter. Sudhir Bakshi showed me two decoded messages. In one Uncle sent his greetings to the Bengal Volunteers and warned them not to take precipitate action without clear instructions from him. He asked specific questions about suitable areas in Jessore, Khulna and Chittagong where submarines could land men and supplies.

When the Japanese forces and the INA finally launched their offensive in northeast India in March 1944, our joy knew no bounds. We heard that propaganda leaflets were being dropped at the front by planes on behalf of the INA, calling on Indian troops serving the British to desert and join the freedom struggle. After Japanese and INA forces entered Manipur, the centre for the underground group was shifted to the second floor of a house on Shib Thakur Lane in the Chitpore area of north Calcutta. Rao and his comrade came to this place often. As the fighting on the Imphal and Kohima fronts intensified, activity at the secret centre also increased. At this time, Uncle Subhas wanted contact to be established with some political prisoners who were particularly close and loyal to him. Acting on his instructions, Niren Roy was sent to the Buxa detention camp in north Bengal in disguise. There contact was established with Satya Gupta, Jyotish Joardar and other revolutionary prisoners. It was planned that the prisoners would break out and link up with the advance units of the Indian National Army at the opportune time. Horses were arranged for their escape.

We heard over the radio in due course that the Japanese and INA forces had reached Kohima and encircled Imphal. Further to the south, Japanese and INA units entered India from Burma via Tamu. There was total panic among the British and their Indian collaborators at this time. It was widely rumoured that the British military command was planning to abandon not just the northeast, but also Bengal, and retreat to a new defence line in central Bihar. But then misfortune struck. Before Imphal could be captured the monsoon broke in northeast India

in all its fury. In July 1944, Uncle Subhas issued orders to the INA to start withdrawing from the liberated Indian territories. In a secret message delivered to us by Rao, he told us that the offensive would be resumed in the autumn.

A few days after this, Rao and his comrade came to Shib Thakur Lane and took Dhiren Saha Roy and Chanchal Majumdar to a room on the third floor of a hotel located in a lane opposite the Hindustan Building on Chittaranjan Avenue in central Calcutta. They sent some very urgent messages from there to Uncle Subhas via the radio transmitter.

When Dhiren and Chanchal returned to Shib Thakur Lane, they saw that the house had been surrounded by police. At the same time, they received word that Niren Roy had been arrested and that a fourth BV comrade, Gopal Sen, had fallen to the pavement from the second-floor hideout after resisting and scuffling with the police who had broken in. Dhiren and Chanchal left the area immediately and also informed Sudhir Bakshi and other comrades. Sudhir Bakshi telephoned me at the Medical College—which is located in close proximity to both Shib Thakur Lane and the C.R. Avenue hotel—for news of Gopal Sen, who had been brought there.

I was able to gather some information about the police raid on the Shib Thakur Lane hideout. When the police arrived, Niren Roy and Gopal Sen had been there. The duo had started burning confidential documents, and had prevented the police from entering as long as they could by holding their bodies against the door. Eventually, the police fought their way in. Niren Roy was overpowered and apprehended. Gopal Sen continued to fight with the police and in the process fell to the pavement from the second floor. He had had strict orders that no papers should fall into the hands of the enemy. Gopal's last words before he died were: 'As long as I was alive, I did not let them take anything (Jibon thakte ami oder kichhu nite dei nai).'

CHAPTER 57

During the monsoon season of 1944, the military reverses suffered by the INA at the front and the police raid on the secret centre at Shib Thakur Lane in Calcutta occurred more or less at the same time. Sudhir Bakshi informed me that after the raid, Rao and his associate had been advised to disappear and hide outside Bengal. After the end

of the war I obtained information that seemed to indicate that they were not arrested at least till the closing months of the war. What really happened to Rao and the others, however, I do not know.

The question remains how and from what source(s) the British secret police came to know of our activities. They grew increasingly watchful and from June 1944 I was being shadowed ever more closely. I have read reports of the 'Rao' group's arrival in India and their link-up with us in German Foreign Office documents. In a secret cable from Kabul in May 1944, the German diplomat Pilger informs Berlin that a group sent to India by Subhas Bose has made contact with 'Sarat Bose's son Sisir' carrying a handwritten letter from Bose. The German despatches indicate that one of the group reached the North-West Frontier Province and looked for our old comrades.

However, our network in northwest India had been disrupted since early 1942. The Kirti Kisan Party of the Punjab, which assisted Uncle Subhas in 1940-41 and of which Bhagat Ram was a member, merged with the Communist Party of India and adopted its wartime policy of collaboration with the British. As I have said earlier, Father informed me in a secret message from his detention centre in south India in autumn 1942 that the details of Uncle Subhas's escape from Calcutta had become known to the Government's home department. Father also mentioned in the message that Mian Akbar Shah had been arrested and taken to the Lahore Fort. As a prisoner in the Lahore Fort in late 1944, I came to know from a very unlikely source that a meeting of intelligence officers was held in the Lahore Fort in February 1942 at which Uncle Subhas's escape from India was described in some detail, particularly for the enlightenment of operatives being sent to Europe via Turkey in pursuit of Uncle Subhas. This source also told me that while my role in the escape was not discussed at the meeting, my closeness to Uncle Subhas was mentioned and a description of me provided. My informant was Nazir Ahmad Razvi, special superintendent of police posted at the Lahore Fort, who interrogated me ruthlessly during my time there.

Whilst we were working with the Rao group in 1944, I read a Communist publication in the Medical College's common room which stated that agents of Subhas Bose were entering India and people should hand them over to the police. I was seriously concerned when I read that.

In July and August 1944, plainclothes police agents would follow me as I went to the Medical College, when I visited relatives and even during my evening strolls which often led to Sudhir Bakshi's home.

Increasingly, I noted that not one but two agents were following me at any given time. The surveillance became more and more intense and blatant as days passed. When I set out from the house, the pairs would follow me right from the gate of our house. When I was assigned to round-the-clock 'labour duty' in the Eden Hospital, the obstetrics wing of our college, they would check with the gatekeeper if I was really inside. In the circumstances, I should perhaps have taken more care. But by then I was in a reckless state of mind. I was so confident of our final victory that I had ceased to care about myself. When I went about, shadowed by the spooks, I often had Uncle Subhas's secret letter delivered to me by Rao in my wallet!

I could gauge that the government had got wind of what we were up to from another development—the imposition of new, more restrictive, orders governing Father's detention. There was a tightening up of the procedure of censoring Father's letters. Instead of being left to the Bengali officer stationed in the detention centre in Coonoor, all letters were sent to the Lord Sinha Road headquarters of the Special Branch in Calcutta to be censored by a senior intelligence officer, Sasadhar Majumdar. When I went to meet Father with Mother in Coonoor in February 1944, there was no body search of visiting family members. But subsequently, when my eldest brother went down to Coonoor with his wife and child to see Father, a body search was required of all, including my brother's wife and daughter. The result was that Father refused the meeting and my brother, sister-in-law and little niece had to come back without meeting him.

When I realized that my arrest was inevitable, I reluctantly gave Uncle Subhas's letter to a trusted political associate. As I described a few pages earlier, I was not able to recover it after the war, although I did acquire an almost identical letter which had also been intended for me. I also toyed with the idea of going underground to avoid arrest, and mentioned it to a close college friend who was also politically active. But I dropped the idea because my going underground would undoubtedly cause more police harassment and trouble for my family, especially my mother.

By now it was October 1944. One day, I set out as usual for the Medical College from home. My normal routine was to walk up Lee Road to Chowringhee, from where I would catch the tram to the Medical College. As soon as I entered Lee Road, I felt the two men walking behind me coming closer and closer. For a moment I thought

of turning back and going home. But then I had the feeling that these men would not allow me to do so. So I continued on my way. When I had gone another fifty yards or so I saw one of the familiar cars used by police intelligence, a grey Ford V8, waiting on the right side of the street. A man dressed in dhoti and kurta slowly crossed over to the side on which I was walking. When we were almost face to face, he said to me in a calm tone in Bengali: 'Sisir Babu, you will have to come with us to Lord Sinha Road.' After I got into the car, he added: 'I think you were going to college. It won't take long at our place, you will just be a bit late.'

At 14, Lord Sinha Road, the Special Branch headquarters, there are a number of small rooms on the north side. I was kept waiting in one of them. Then they took me to a large room in the main building where an officer asked a series of fairly trivial questions about me and my family in rather boring detail. Around mid-day, they served me an order of arrest under the Defence of India Rules. Then I was taken home in a procession of police vehicles. They surrounded and sealed the house from all sides and began an extensive and aggressive search. It appeared they were looking for something in particular. Our radio ran on alternating current (AC) and so we had a converter for it. They seemed to think that this might be a transmitter. I explained what it was but they would not believe me. Finally, they got a radio engineer, a white man, over from their headquarters to examine it. Then they had to be content with seizing some of my books and papers. I had my lunch in the downstairs dining room of 1, Woodburn Park, flanked on one side by my mother and younger brother and sisters and on the other by my captors. I said goodbye to Mother and boarded the waiting police car.

They took me back to their headquarters, and I was put in the same small, ill-ventilated room where I had been kept on arrival in the morning. In the afternoon they took me out once and took mug shots of me from different sides. In the evening an officer came to serve a fresh order, this one of my transfer to the custody of the Punjab Government! I realized I was going to be taken to one of the jails in the Punjab. I expected them to come and fetch me in time for one of the evening trains to northwest India. But the evening passed and nobody came. I was given some inedible food to eat. Then someone came to tell me that I could lie down on the table in the room to sleep if I wanted to. I wondered what was going on.

I dozed off. Around 4 a.m. I was woken up by the noise of the door being unlocked. I was asked to get ready to leave. I had nothing on me except the clothes I was wearing. As I came out of the dingy room, I found a car waiting in the darkness. My escort consisted of a uniformed Anglo-Indian police officer, two armed constables and a Bengali officer in mufti. I wondered why they were taking me out at that unearthly hour. I thought that maybe they wanted to avoid the Howrah station so were taking me to a station on the route to northwest India like Burdwan or Asansol, from where they would put me on a train to the Punjab in the evening.

The car did not go in the direction of Howrah station from Chowringhee but took Chittaranjan Avenue instead. As I passed the Medical College in the darkness, I said a silent goodbye. I thought they would take me by car up the Grand Trunk Road. We passed the five-point junction at Shyambazar and took the Dum Dum road. When I saw signs for Dum Dum airport,[25] I finally understood their intentions.

I wondered why they were in such a tearing hurry. I thought that perhaps they wanted to give me a summary trial and pass sentence quickly. In that event, I thought, execution for wartime treason might be on the cards. I had read about Sudhir Bakshi's arrest in the newspapers some days earlier. I felt apprehensive that our entire group might have been captured.

As I waited in the car near the tarmac, my escorting officers went to an office in the airport building, evidently to make arrangements. After a while I was put on a military Dakota plane. The Bengali officer clad in coat and trousers, who gave his name as Jyoti Ray, came with me. All the other passengers were British military officers. They occupied all the seats in front. I and my escort sat on bucket seats in the rear of the plane.

That was the first flight of my life, and that too at government expense! I felt quite uncomfortable and nervous when the plane lost height from time to time due to air pockets. The first stop was at Allahabad. When descending to Allahabad I was struck by the impressive aerial view of the confluence of the Ganga and Jamuna rivers. At the airport I was looking around me when my escort approached. He took out a pair of handcuffs from his pocket and said politely: 'I have orders to use these at the slightest suspicion or provocation.'

When I went to the toilet I found only a small window high up on the wall. I smiled to myself and thought any chance of escape was indeed remote.

On landing at Delhi's military airport, I saw a prison van waiting. Another journey with an armed police escort began. As the van approached the Red Fort and slowly went past the imposing gates and the passages lined with illuminated shops I had, for the first time in my life, a strange sense of being a participant in the making of history. I thought of Uncle Subhas and even felt a tinge of glory. I was taken into the 'protected area' of the fort, led down broad stone stairs to a typical Mughal-style courtyard below and finally to one of the underground cells of brick, mortar and strong iron bars created by dividing the dark, cold corridors. I was locked up in a cell and my escorts left. I became the guest of Emperor Shah Jahan.

CHAPTER 58

The first thing I noticed after being thrown into the underground cell at the Red Fort were four lines etched on one of its walls with charcoal, evidently by a previous inmate:

Stone walls do not a prison make
Nor iron bars a cage,
The mind is its own place
And can make a heaven of hell.

The defiant message adapted from a poem by Richard Lovelace, and left by the prisoner, cheered me up immensely.

The cell was of moderate size. It was enclosed on three sides by stone walls. The fourth had two window-like openings and a gate, all with thick, solid iron bars. The cell was very dirty. Cobwebs festooned the ceiling, soot blackened the walls and there was a thick layer of dust on the floor. It was dimly lit. The only furniture was a rickety charpoy, or khatia. There was a corridor in front where an armed guard paced up and down. I passed another cell as I was brought in. But that cell and mine opened in different directions.

The man in charge of the cells called. He introduced himself as Mohammad Nazir. He did not look like a police officer or a warder. He wore a lungi and a half-sleeved shirt and behaved rather informally.

[25]Now Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International Airport. Ed.

He informed me that he would take me out twice a day, morning and evening, to what turned out to be a medieval toilet some steps up in the other direction. Food would be served in the cell. He did not mention if there were other prisoners around me. Neither did I see any signs of fellow-prisoners in the beginning. There was a cheerful young Jat sentry on day-duty in front of my cell. He would talk to me in a friendly way about his village, his home and his newlywed wife. I could not follow everything because of his dialect and accent, but his conversation was refreshing in the dismal surroundings.

Mohammad Nazir met my father in Delhi in 1946, when Father was a minister in the Interim Government of India. He told Father that he had 'looked after' me at the Red Fort and had tried in his own way to lighten my difficult situation.

I had had nothing to eat the whole day during the journey from Calcutta to Delhi and was very hungry. So when some food was placed before me in the evening I gobbled it up. The aloo-mattar mix, saturated with chillies, lit a fire inside me as it went down. I hiccuped the whole night. I told myself not to be so greedy again.

Delhi in October was already quite cool for a person used to Calcutta weather. I was wearing only a khaddar dhoti-kurta and a light chadar. I covered myself during the night with the blanket lying in the cell. I have never seen blankets of such rough texture as in the Red Fort and a little later in the Lahore Fort. When I woke up in the morning, I had an itchy red rash all over my body.

I was in the Red Fort for about ten days. Nobody came to interrogate me. Since orders had already been passed in Calcutta for my transfer to the custody of the Punjab Government, I guessed I was in the Red Fort in transit to a Punjab jail. There was the same daily routine. I was taken out twice a day to the toilet by Mohammad Nazir and ate atrocious food served through the iron bars. All that one could do in that grim and dark underground environment was, in the poet's words, 'to listen to the music of one's soul'. I thought of my suffering mother, my imprisoned father pining away in south India, of Uncle Subhas, of my revolutionary comrades, and their fate. Destiny was taking its course.

Being from a nationalist family and having grown up with India's struggle for freedom, I knew well that even a prisoner has rights. The right to write letters home, to have at least the minimum personal necessities like a change of clothing, a towel, soap, toothpaste and other basic requirements. I had absolutely nothing. When I mentioned this to

Mohammad Nazir, he was evasive. The higher-ups gave orders regarding treatment of prisoners and he had not received any except to guard me carefully.

One day I discovered a few lines scribbled in pencil on the wooden window-frame by a former prisoner. He had belonged to a battalion of the British army stationed in Hong Kong, and had even written his serial number. He was kept in that cell awaiting court-martial after being charged with mutiny. I wondered what became of him.

The prisoner in the cell on the other side was taken past my cell to the toilet up the corridor. We exchanged glances but I did not try to speak to him. He looked like a Bengali. I could see that he wanted to talk to me. One evening, Mohammad Nazir took both of us out at the same time and allowed us to sit together for some time in the open. We sat in a low area where perhaps there was once a well. Mohammad Nazir said: 'You are in solitary confinement all the time. Why don't you two chat for a while, nobody will know!'

To begin the conversation, we introduced ourselves. His name was Tuhin Mukherjee. He was visibly taken aback when I told him who I was. He asked me why they had brought me to the Red Fort, whether I was involved in secret revolutionary activity. I replied cautiously that I had some involvement with student politics in Calcutta.

About himself, he said that he had landed by submarine in India from Southeast Asia with a group. Uncle Subhas had met them before their departure and given them certain instructions. They were eventually captured. He was being interrogated in a room above our cells. He gave the name of the interrogating officer as one Bakshi Sahib. I felt worried.

Some time after T.K. Rao (Bhagawan Lu) contacted me in December 1943 at Woodburn Park, my cousin Kartik (Ranjit Kumar Bose) told me that people belonging to an underground group sent by Uncle Subhas had come to the Elgin Road house. They were being helped with their activities. I got the impression that too many persons in the other house, including children, knew about the affair. My apprehension was that as a result, British intelligence would get wind of it very soon. I did not say anything at all to Kartik. I did however speak to my comrade Sudhir Bakshi about the arrival of the other group, and asked him to make careful enquiries. He informed me that he had acquired information about the other group, their contacts and activities. We decided that particular care should be taken to keep ourselves totally separate from the other group so that secrecy could be maintained.

After my release in September 1945, I came to know that Tuhin Mukherjee, whom I had met in the Red Fort in October 1944, had turned approver in a secret trial in Calcutta of the members of this other group, which included Pabitra Mohan Roy and Amrik Singh. Their principal Calcutta contact was my cousin-in-law Haridas Mitra, the husband of Bela, eldest daughter of my uncle Suresh Chandra Bose. In the trial, the accused were defended by a leading Calcutta barrister, Jasho Prokash (J.P.) Mitter. Pabitra Mohan Roy, Amrik Singh and their local contacts Haridas Mitra and Jyotish Bose were sentenced to death. When I was released, they were awaiting execution in jail. The death sentence was commuted at the personal intervention of Mahatma Gandhi, who put the request to Lord Wavell, the Viceroy of India.

One evening I was pacing up and down my cell when two police officers arrived with two armed guards. One officer was a heavily built and rather aggressive Sikh and the other a short dark man in Western clothes. They had come to take me away. The Sikh officer asked one of the armed constables to put handcuffs on me. That was my first experience of wearing handcuffs. They were very heavy. The wrists were joined together and the cuffs locked with a key, with one of my captors holding on tightly to the attached chain. We walked up the broad stone stairs. A prison van was waiting. They took me to the Delhi Junction railway station.

It was already dark and the station was very crowded. As I was taken through the hall and then along the platform in handcuffs I looked around in the vain hope of spotting a known face so that the news might reach home. In the rush of strangers all around me, I felt sorry that not a single person seemed to be in the least concerned about a young man being dragged in handcuffs along the crowded platform. I felt even more sorry when I thought of Uncle Subhas fighting in the hills and forests of northeast India at the head of the Provisional Government of Free India, while his countrymen were occupied with routine chores. At that moment, I felt very alone.

They put me in a reserved coupe on the Punjab Mail and locked the doors. I expected them now to take off the handcuffs. The officer in whose charge I was seemed to read my mind and said there were orders not to take the handcuffs off under any circumstances during the journey. He said: 'What can we do? Revolutionary prisoners lose no opportunity to run away.' He mentioned Jaya Prakash Narayan and others in this connection. They would not free my hands even when I

went to the toilet. One constable sat just outside the toilet door with the end of the chain firmly in his grasp while the other kept his rifle ready.

Fortunately, I am a good sleeper. I slept fairly well even in that situation. There was peace in sleep; the nightmare returned as soon as I woke up. The train reached Lahore early in the morning. I was kept waiting inside the train for a while and then a Sikh officer arrived. As I alighted he stared at me and then said in English: 'So this is the man!'

This time I was put not in a prison van but a horse-driven tonga. I was asked to sit in front next to the coachman and the sardarji sat behind me, firmly holding the chain of my handcuffs. I wondered about my destination. As the tonga sped along the dusty roads of Lahore, the officer directed the driver to take us to the 'Qila'. I think we were driven into the fort by a special entry point. I recognized this to be the Shah Burj Gate when I revisited the Lahore Fort in 1994. I was kept waiting for a while in front of a two-storeyed building inside the fort while the escorting officer went in.

After a while, he came back and led me into the building. I passed through a hall with wooden floors with rooms on one side and came out on a terrace. Then I had to go down a few steps to reach my cell. By this time a ferocious-looking man—I learned later that his name was Khan Sahib—had taken charge of me. He opened the iron gate of cell number 12 with a large key. He took my handcuffs off after I was inside the cell. The gate closed noisily and I was locked securely from the outside. I was now the guest of Emperor Akbar!

CHAPTER 59

Cell number 12, which was to be my abode for the next three and half months, was much smaller than the underground cell in the Red Fort. It was around ten by twelve feet. There was no flooring as such; exposed bricks made it rough and uneven and I stumbled often. The walls on two sides were unfinished and in a poor state of repair—there was only a thin coating of limewash over the bricks. The northeast side was entirely exposed to the elements, with strong iron bars. The prisoner could be watched both from that open side and through the gate.

The only furniture was a ramshackle charpoy that was so small that it looked as if it was meant for a child. It was not possible for me to stretch out on it. There were a couple of rough blankets riddled with

holes. In one corner stood an earthen pitcher of water and a brass tumbler broken at the rim. A low brick partition in another corner enclosed an ancient toilet, which could be cleaned from outside. I realized that Father's fears regarding me since 1942 had come true. I had landed up in the notorious Lahore Fort.

I deliberated in my mind what lay in store. The dramatic manner of my arrest in Calcutta, the transfer by aeroplane to Delhi and then in handcuffs to Lahore after a stay at the Red Fort indicated that things were very serious and a grim outcome was probable. It seemed likely that most of our group were in custody. A secret trial, ending in severe punishment, was on the cards. Capital punishment could not be ruled out for some of us. I tried to visualize the trial scene and the faces of my co-accused. I even thought about what I would say from the dock if those were to be my last words in life.

My first visitor after I was locked up was a black cat. A large raised terrace faced the gate of my cell. The cat came and sat on the edge of the terrace and observed me with a steady gaze. We usually take the appearance of a black cat to be a bad omen, but the English believe the opposite. I tried to persuade myself that since we were under British rule, the English view should prevail. A little later a handsome deer appeared outside my cell and looked at me with much curiosity. I started feeling amused—this place was a zoo in reverse! The deer came to the yard quite often during the next three and a half months and stood in front of my cell. I looked forward to its visits.

The sentry guarding my cell paced up and down the yard in front of me in military style, making his turns, clicking his heels and positioning his rifle in the correct manner. Once I tried to start a conversation with him. He shot back grimly: 'Baat karna mana hai (Talking is forbidden).' During the three and a half months, he never exchanged a single word with me. The man was very conscious of his appearance and demeanour and clearly proud of his uniform, rifle and the shine on his bayonet. From time to time he would take a handkerchief out from one trouser pocket and wipe his face, then he would take another out from the other pocket and rub his shoes. I enjoyed his antics. I felt he must be mixing up the handkerchiefs sometimes!

The nights were particularly difficult. A bright light was focussed on me from the ceiling of my cell all night. The surroundings were pitch dark. So I had the chilling feeling I was being watched all the time while I, myself, could see nothing.

Occasionally I would hear approaching footsteps. The sentry would then shout: 'Halt!' The unseen person would mumble something barely audible in response and then silence would descend again. I tried to sleep by protecting my eyes from the overhead light with my palm or by covering my face with the blanket. It was not easy.

Meanwhile, as I learned later, there was great concern about me at home and frantic but fruitless efforts to get some information about my whereabouts. Father appears to have guessed correctly where I was, judging by his letters during this time from his detention centre in south India. Mother was in a state of despair. In reply to one of her letters, the home department of the Government of India told her that they would not disclose where I was and that any meetings were out of the question. The only concession made was to allow the family to send some clothes and personal effects of mine packed in a suitcase to Delhi. These were duly sent on but not given to me at Lahore Fort. I therefore lived in the same clothes for three and a half months. I never had a bath throughout my solitary incarceration at Lahore Fort, nor did I shave or brush my teeth. My appearance must have been that of a lunatic or a wretched beggar.

Days passed but nobody came to see or speak to me. Water was poured into the pitcher from outside the cell and a plate of food pushed in under the iron bars, as animals in a zoo are fed. But nobody would speak a word to me. In the mornings, I had some tough dry bread and tepid tea poured from a kettle into my half-broken tumbler. I felt so cold in the mornings that I rushed to warm my hands by clasping the tumbler as soon as the watery tea was poured into it from outside. The less said about the food, the better. I looked forward only to the couple of chappatis. The vegetables and meat were of poor quality, and half-frozen from the cold.

After some time I realized I was starting to lose track of the days. So I started to scratch lines on the wall with my nails, one scratch for each day that passed.

All of a sudden one morning, an officer in smart Western attire appeared in front of my cell with an entourage, including the sardarji who had received me at the Lahore railway station. The smartly dressed man asked me in a tone of affected bewilderment: 'Why have you come here?' I replied: 'I did not come on my own, I was brought here.' 'Well, that's all the same,' he responded. He continued: 'You look like an educated gentleman. Did you get mixed up in revolutionary

activity? This is no place for gentlemen; only very dangerous characters are brought here. People who take part in satyagraha and so on are sent to ordinary jails or detention camps—they have company and are comfortable. The Lahore Fort is a very bad place. Once you come here, the world forgets you. And once you come here, there is no certainty when you will leave, if ever. A very long time may pass.'

After this cheerful opening lecture, he asked me what I did, where my home was and so on, pretending all the while that he did not know anything about me. When I told him I came from Bengal he told me that my English accent was not like that of other Bengalis. He had met other prisoners from Bengal at the Lahore Fort who had MA and MSc degrees, but their English accent was different. It suddenly occurred to me that Sudhir Bakshi was an MSc. I told him that he clearly did not know much about Bengalis. There were many Bengalis who spoke English better than him or me. The little English I knew I had learnt from my father.

At the end of this peculiar conversation, he said that all he had to say to me for the time being was: 'Good luck.' I later became reasonably well-acquainted with this man during my imprisonment at Lahore Fort. He was Nazir Ahmad Razvi, special superintendent of police in charge of the Lahore Fort.[26]

When there was no news of me for nearly two months my mother feared the worst: that I was no longer alive. She would tell my brothers and sisters that the government might as well tell her the truth. In the fourth week of November, I was told I could write a postcard home but in English. The postcard and a pen were brought to my cell. I had to write in the presence of the man who brought them, who waited as I wrote. I wrote a few lines to Mother, giving my address as Lahore Fort. After two days I was told that the address I had written was not acceptable. I had to write 'C/O The Additional Secretary to the Government of India (Home Department)'! This postcard reached my mother in Calcutta but did not allay her anxiety.

[26]In 1961, Razvi published a book in Lahore titled *Our Police Heritage: Saga of the Police Forces of Pakistan and India*. Ed.

CHAPTER 60

I still cannot figure out how I survived those three and a half months at the Lahore Fort in the winter of 1944–45.

I woke up repeatedly during the nights. There was the harsh light from above shining on me constantly. Then there were the sentry's frequent cries of 'Halt, who goes there?' breaking the silence. Also, the cold of the Punjab winter was oppressive and I shivered continuously. Thankfully, my dreams were mostly of my school days at Calcutta's South Suburban School. They gave me some relief. Only dream analysts can tell why I had such dreams. Around daybreak I usually sensed some activity but rarely saw anyone. A little later, my tough bread and lukewarm tea would arrive.

As the temperature went down with the advance of winter my longing for the tea increased, not so much for the drink but, as I've said, earlier, for the warmth the brass tumbler gave to my hands. Thereafter I started on my 'exercise', pacing up and down my cell. I could sometimes hear the drums of a police or military band practising. Through the iron bars I occasionally saw the aerobatics of small, yellow planes. Razvi told me later that they were Chinese planes on a training mission in India. Afternoons were rather dull. I sang to myself, usually patriotic songs of Kazi Nazrul Islam or Dwijendra Lal Roy. Off and on I heard, I think, screams of prisoners being tortured in underground cells under the terrace in front of my cell. One day I clearly heard shrieks of 'More gelam, more gelam (I am dying, I am dying)' in Bengali, perhaps from one of our comrades. Once or twice I also heard, at some distance, muffled sounds of beating and the wailing of a prisoner.

Evening came early. I kept looking at the sky. I had never before seen such changes of colour in the clouds before and after sunset. As darkness fell, the strange and frightening stillness of the Lahore Fort took over. In my cell, it felt as if I was living on an island of light in an expanse of darkness.

Nearly a month after his first visit, Razvi appeared suddenly one afternoon. He did not pretend this time not to know anything about me. He said: 'Your father is in detention in south India, your mother is ill at home and you are in the Punjab. You people are in great trouble, I can see.' Thereafter, he would repeatedly mention my mother's poor health. But when I asked him about letters from home, he would always say there was nothing.

One day, Razvi said to me in a petulant tone: 'We have kept you in such a state. Why on earth don't you complain? You are a strange fellow! Everybody complains, quarrels with us and loses their balance.' I understood he was trying to provoke me. I realized that they wanted to break me mentally.

He would also raise the issue of the hazard to my physical health. He said that living in such conditions was dangerous: 'Your uncle [Netaji] got tuberculosis during his time in prison in Burma [in the mid-1920s].' After Razvi put the thought of tuberculosis in my head, I often slapped my own chest, as a doctor would, to see if there was a difference in the sound.

As time passed I met some of the characters of the Lahore Fort. Razvi was the man in command, well-educated, very intelligent and evidently a trusted henchman of his British masters. I had heard, already in 1942, that having failed to anticipate, prevent or speedily crack Uncle Subhas's escape, the Bengal police lost their credibility with Central Intelligence in Delhi. During the war, the Punjab police earned their confidence and the Central Government relied largely on them. Razvi's father had also been a trusted police officer of the British and had been posted in Delhi. One day, during a difficult round of interrogation, Razvi told me: 'Remember, I have been visiting Lahore Fort since I was a small child! I learned my ABC from India's greatest revolutionaries! Bhagat Singh, Raj Guru and Sukhdev were imprisoned here. A number of revolutionaries have also been hanged here.' Another day he said: 'Why don't you start digging a tunnel from your cell? You can get to the other side of the wall if you can dig long enough. But I should tell you that the guards have standing orders to shoot any prisoner trying to escape.'

Two men moved around with Razvi. One was Mirza Sahib, who behaved like a little prince but who did not appear to me to be doing much. The other was Sardar Daswant Singh, who had received me at Lahore railway station. He gave himself airs and had a high opinion of his own intelligence. One day he told me in a superior tone: 'Well, you think you are very smart. Do you think we don't understand that you are withholding the real information?' A third man was Khan Sahib, who appeared to be the fort prison's in-house torturer. He was let loose on me on a few occasions. I had the impression that he was sadistic and found real pleasure in his work. He boasted to me that they had obtained incriminating information about me by 'working' on other prisoners.

I have always had a rather delicate digestive system. Eventually, I fell ill at Lahore Fort with dysentery. They brought a doctor to my cell to examine me. When medicines arrived I found that the name of the patient noted on the label was 'Sansar Chand'. I did not risk taking the medicine. I thought I would rather fast for two or three days and cure myself. When the affable warder who had delivered the medicines came to enquire the next day about my condition, I told him about the wrong name on the label. He said there was no mistake. My name in Lahore Fort was in fact Sansar Chand. 'The real names of those who are held here are never written in the records,' he said. So Sisir Bose had become Sansar Chand, courtesy of the British Raj!

Two days later, when it was already dark, the same warder came back to see me. He asked in a low voice: 'How are you, Your Honour?' I was taken aback and asked him why he was addressing me with such a grand honorific. He replied in a subdued tone: 'You are the really honourable people, suffering so much for the country. We are slaves, we just do as they ask.'

I can remember another interesting character. His name was Fakruddin and he supervised catering arrangements at the Lahore Fort. He visited me to say that there had been many complaints about the quality of the food and so he had come personally to check. 'Is it all right now?' he asked, apparently in all seriousness. I told him I had no idea what was all right and what was not all right at the Lahore Fort. Finally, he said with a philosopher's wisdom: 'I just can't understand why you are wasting the best years of your youth like this, in prison!'

It was the second week of December 1944. One day I felt an unusual flutter of activity around me. The jail staff were scuttling about. I felt something was going to happen. In the afternoon, the redoubtable Khan Sahib arrived in front of my cell with a heavy pair of handcuffs. He took me out, holding on firmly to the locked handcuffs on my wrists, and led me up the stairs, on to the wide terrace and finally into the building which I had come through during my arrival in October. In the hall, I found Nazir Ahmad Razvi waiting to receive me. He took charge of me and my handcuffs and led me inside a room. There was a large table in the room, and three chairs. I was asked to sit down and Razvi stood behind me, holding tightly on to the chain of my handcuffs.

Directly facing me across the table was an Englishman. Another Englishman kept staring at me from one side. Razvi told me later that he had to hold me chained like that as a precautionary measure. There

had been instances of prisoners lunging at high British officials during such interviews.

The man facing me conducted the conversation. The other one to the side kept completely silent, his eyes fixed on me. My interviewer's first question was: 'You are Sisir Bose?' I answered: 'Sisir Kumar Bose'. He retorted dismissively: 'That's the same thing.' Then he said: 'Before your uncle left the country, you were rather close to him, isn't that so?' I replied: 'In an Indian joint family, relations between an uncle and a nephew are normally close.' He was visibly angered by my reply and let out a low growl. Then he said in a rather challenging tone: 'Tell me, why do you help the Japanese?' I said: 'I have hardly met any Japanese in my life—the question of helping them doesn't arise.' He persisted: 'Do you help the Japanese because your uncle is helping the Japanese?' I replied: 'I have no reason to believe my uncle is helping the Japanese. As far as I know his only interest is working for our country's freedom.' At this he shouted in anger: 'Take my word for it, he is a great helper of the Japanese!' The man seemed obsessed with the Japanese. He continued: 'Do you want the Japanese to win the war? We know very many people in this country want the Japanese to win the war.' I answered: 'Whether or not the Japanese win the war is not my concern. We want our country to be free.'

Then he said, in a threatening tone: 'You have landed yourself in a great deal of trouble by helping the Japanese. Your father is in prison. One of your older brothers is in England, I am told. When he returns, will he also help the Japanese?' I said: 'There is no reason to think so. In my case, I think there has been a mistake somewhere.' The official raised his voice: 'There is no mistake! The Government of India does not bring anyone to the Lahore Fort by mistake! You are in great trouble. Remember, there is a war going on. I am sure you know what the punishment is for helping the enemy in wartime!'

When I described this meeting in the Lahore Fort and the man who had conducted it to Satya Ranjan Bakshi after my release, he told me that the man was none other than Richard Tottenham, additional secretary (home department) to the Government of India.[27]

[27]There are three portraits of Sir Richard Tottenham, 'colonial administrator' born in 1890, in the collections of the National Portrait Gallery in London. All three were made during 'sittings' in late 1946. The year of Tottenham's death is given in some sources as 1958 and in others as 1977. Ed.

After the encounter, Khan Sahib took charge of me again and took me back to my cell. The same evening, however, they brought me back to the same room. The seating arrangement in the room was unchanged, but now Razvi was sitting at the head of the table. He handed me my chargesheet, signed by Tottenham and dated 7 November 1944, New Delhi. He handed me both the original, which had Tottenham's signature, and a duplicate copy. He took the original back with my acknowledgement and signature, and gave me the copy to keep. He told me that if I wanted to submit a representation against the chargesheet, I would be provided with pen and paper.

That night the weather took a nasty turn. A thunderstorm hit, followed by a heavy downpour. Rainwater poured through the leaky roof of my cell. I shivered in the biting cold all night and the morning was freezing.

CHAPTER 61

This detention order and chargesheet were made under the new Restriction and Detention Ordinance (III) of 1944, replacing the previous one served on me at the Special Branch headquarters in Calcutta under Section 129 of the Defence of India Rules. Father had also received his chargesheet under the same ordinance earlier in the year. I knew therefore that there was provision for making a representation against the charges and the order of detention. His own representation was a weighty document, a copy of which he smuggled out from his detention centre at Coonoor. I had mailed copies of the document to various people throughout the country, as per his instructions. In my own case, he thought that not being familiar with legal issues I would not be able to write out a proper representation without legal assistance. He advised family and friends in Calcutta to arrange for a lawyer for me. I do not know what was done in the matter or whether the government was at all responsive to any such request.

I had no doubt that I would have to write my own representation. Having read the chargesheet carefully, the words that bothered me most were 'and others' added after 'the Bengal Volunteer group'. The chargesheet read:

> 'You, Sisir Bose, are informed that the grounds for your detention are that you were acting in a manner prejudicial to the defence

of British India inasmuch as in collaboration with members of the Bengal Volunteer group and others, you were actively engaged in a manner calculated to assist Subhas Chandra Bose and the Japanese.'

The reference to my association with the BV was understandable and the reference to my involvement in activity calculated to assist Uncle Subhas and the Japanese was also understandable. But the reference to my collusion with 'others' appeared to suggest that my links with Uncle Subhas's agents sent from Southeast Asia also formed part of the charges. I considered that if any of those men had been caught, there was the possibility of a secret trial in which I would be included.

Back in Calcutta, efforts were made by the family and friends to get news of me and also arrange for such assistance as I might need, legally or otherwise. A member of the Central Assembly, Mrs Renuka Ray, was requested to try and obtain information about me from the home department. On the basis of information given to her, she was under the impression that the government intended to put me up for trial along with my associates. Our family friend Nripendra Chandra Mitra and my maternal uncle Ajit Kumar Dey approached Sir Nripendra Nath Sircar, who had recently retired as Law Member, Government of India, to take up my case with the viceroy, Lord Wavell.

Mr Mitra and my maternal uncle made the plea in good faith, that I was a harmless and peaceable medical student who had most probably been mistakenly implicated in some conspiracy. The Viceroy wrote to Sir N.N. Sircar (my father's professional 'Guruji') to say that he was not in the habit of interfering with the work of the home department but would ask for the files in this case to honour Mr Sircar's request. After some days, Wavell wrote again to Sircar to say that he had seen my files and the charges against me were so grave that he was unable to do anything in the matter.

When I expressed my desire to write a representation, I was provided with pen and ink and a few sheets of paper. I started drafting on the blank spaces of the chargesheet. I was no lawyer but knew that I must put forward reasonable arguments in my defence. I had read very carefully Father's two representations against charges made against him, the first time in the 1930s and then in 1944. I could see that the charges against me were substantially correct although my motivation was not as alleged. The reference to the Japanese was, from my point of view, not relevant. I learned later that in the chargesheet served on my

father, the government had also alleged 'contact with Subhas Chandra Bose and the Japanese.'

I tried to emulate the tone and arguments of Father's two representations—to be robust in self-defence *and* to defiantly articulate my ideals and principles. I tried to contest the accusations by introducing contrary reasoning and arguments. I wrote that I had never properly known a Japanese in my life, the existence of the so-called Bengal Volunteer group was unknown to me, and words in that vein. I wrote that if the government had evidence, they could very well try me under the law and punish me instead of detaining me without trial. Of course, detention without trial was, under British rule, the usual fate of many freedom fighters.

A few days later I was again taken securely handcuffed to Razvi. He told me that I would have to be interrogated. He added that he felt that 'you are a person who should be treated with respect' but interrogation at the Lahore Fort was not a pleasant affair.

Remarkably, he told me at the very outset that to the government and the intelligence services I was a very familiar person, that they knew everything about my doings, from 'driving him out that night in 1941 [from 38/2, Elgin Road, Calcutta] and helping him to escape from India to the last walk out of your home [1, Woodburn Park] ending with your arrest' two months earlier. He said that they had collected information about me and my work with, and later on behalf of, Uncle Subhas, with much effort and great care. He also referred to 'Dwijen and Aurobindo', my cousins, and their trip to the Lahore Fort. The fact however was that Aurobindo was never taken to the Lahore Fort. About Dwijen's detention in the Fort for three weeks I already knew from Father's secret message from Coonoor. Lala Shankarlal, a Congress leader of standing in Delhi, who joined Uncle Subhas and the Forward Bloc, was sent to be Father's prison-mate at Coonoor. He had earlier spent some time with Dwijen and Aurobindo at Campbellpur Jail in the Punjab. It was interesting that in the charges against me, no reference was made to my role in Uncle Subhas's escape from Calcutta although Father had informed me that the British were aware of the main facts. The omission was clearly deliberate. On this, more later.

My interrogation went on for a full month and a half, for hours on end, day after day. It seemed as if they were writing my biography! It was essentially a battle of wits between Razvi and myself. I had more or less worked out in my mind how I would face the ordeal,

taking care not to be provoked unnecessarily. One important tactic was to exaggerate the importance of relatively minor events while glossing over the major ones. So I spoke at great length about my role in the Calcutta Medical College Students' Union and my participation in the Quit India Movement. Another important tactic was to take personal responsibility for events in which other members of the family or close comrades were sought to be implicated. Yet another tactic was to pretend to forget names, dates or places or to give wrong or mutilated names.

For instance, once Razvi asked me the names of a large number of my aunts. When I fumbled, he recited all their names faultlessly. On another occasion, he told me the detailed layout of 1, Woodburn Park. Interrogators often try to give the impression to the detainee that they know everything of interest, when actually that may not be the case. On one occasion I gave one name quite incorrectly. I could see Razvi was puzzled; he was not sure if I was deliberately misleading him or if I really did not know the correct name. Once, he asked me about Santimoy Ganguli of the Bengal Volunteers, referring to him as 'Santi Ganguli'. Santi being a common Bengali female name, I responded: 'Who is she?' Razvi lost his patience and exclaimed that I was a real ignoramus.

I tried my best to keep my parents out of the picture during the interrogations. I think I was largely successful in doing so. However, I never tried to conceal or minimize my deep admiration for Uncle Subhas and my enthusiasm for his activities.

I could guess that my close associate Sudhir Bakshi had been brought to Lahore Fort. Who else had that misfortune among our comrades I could not guess at that time. I came to know later that Jaya Prakash Narayan was also being held at the Lahore Fort at the same time I was there. One day, during my stay there, I got the distinct impression that a prisoner had died as a result of torture. I suspect he was a captured soldier of the INA.

Although I did have my apprehensions in the beginning, I gradually gathered that the Government was not going to put us on trial along with our contacts among Uncle Subhas's agents from Southeast Asia, as had happened with the other group of agents who developed contacts in the Elgin Road house. The reasons were not clear to me then, nor are they clear to me now.

I also figured out that they were not interested in prosecuting me for my role in Uncle Subhas's escape in January 1941. This I can understand

very well, in retrospect. It was very much in the interest of the British Government to protect the sources that had leaked information to them about Uncle Subhas's escape, and about his subsequent clandestine contacts with us in Calcutta. Britain's secret wartime deals with political parties and individuals in India had to be closely protected and kept from becoming known as long as possible.

Though the prolonged interrogation was a great strain on me physically and mentally, it also happens that the person being interrogated comes to exercise a certain influence on the interrogator(s). Thus, in the course of the battle of wits, my interrogators slipped up sometimes and inadvertently revealed information about certain members of our family, friends and political associates. It did confirm Uncle Subhas's misgivings and suspicions about some people.

Lahore was having a bitterly cold winter. I had no warm clothing at all. My feet were totally exposed and I developed blood clots on them. It was painful to walk. One afternoon, they took me to a room with a glowing log-fire. At lunchtime Razvi asked somebody to get my thali from my cell and offered to warm up my cold food on the fire. But I was unable to eat the hot meal, so used had I become to eating stone-cold, half-frozen food over the preceding months. Razvi remarked: 'Look what happens to a man, such is the power of habit!' The only thing that provided me with a whiff of physical warmth was my growing beard. I looked at my shadowy reflection from time to time in the water in the earthen pitcher in my cell to gauge how it looked. They had told me at the beginning of my solitary confinement that I would not be allowed to shave because a razor was often a prisoner's aid to suicide.

One day, I was in a bad mood during what turned out to be the closing stages of the relentless interrogation, and told Razvi: 'You people have ruined my career!' To my surprise, he replied in a very serious tone: 'No, careers are not ruined at the Lahore Fort, careers are made here!' He added: 'I started my life at this fort and I will end it here. Your life begins here. You will be a big man some day.'

Some time towards the end of January 1945, I was told that I would be transferred somewhere else from the Lahore Fort. It was only now that I discovered that my captors were in possession of a trunk full of clothes and other personal effects sent for me from home to Delhi more than three months earlier. They now gave me some clothes from the trunk. As I put the warm coat on I found that the entire inner lining

had been cut open to see if anything was concealed inside.

Before saying goodbye, Nazir Ahmad Razvi expressed his regrets at the way I had been treated at the Lahore Fort. He said: 'There was no other way. We are on opposing sides at present. Our job is to carry out the orders of whoever is in power. But a national government will definitely be formed one day. If I can be of any service to your lot then, let me know.'

Razvi also expressed his views about Uncle Subhas's immediate future. He said Uncle Subhas would face a great dilemma about his next steps.[28] Razvi told me that the Russians would not accept him, so where would he go? I remember him saying: 'Great things often burn themselves up in their own fire!'

Early in February 1945, on a cold winter morning, they put handcuffs securely on my wrists and led me out of the Lahore Fort.[29]

Sardar Daswant Singh, who had received me at Lahore's railway station in October, saw me off. I and my escorts boarded a crowded train heading further west.

CHAPTER 62

I had not been told where I was being transferred. Just before evening, the train reached Lyallpur. Lyallpur—now Faisalabad in Pakistan—was then a rather pretty, planned city in the Multan sub-division of the Punjab.[30]

Summers in the Multan area were known to be very hot. I thought that after freezing in Lahore, maybe I was going to be roasted in Lyallpur. I was taken in a tonga from the railway station to the Lyallpur District Jail. The small door built into the main gate of the prison was opened. The jail superintendent had clearly been awaiting my arrival. After I was ushered into his room, he asked my escort in an authoritarian tone to take off my handcuffs. The superintendent, Syed Amir Shah, was obviously very conscious of his own importance. He solemnly expressed the hope

[28]By this time, it was clear that Japan was losing the war in Asia and the Pacific. Ed.
[29]Freedom from Lahore Fort more or less coincided with Sisir's twenty-fifth birthday. Ed.
[30]Founded in the late nineteenth century, Lyallpur was named after Sir James Broadwood Lyall, a British colonial bureaucrat. As Faisalabad, it is Pakistan's third-largest city after Karachi and Lahore. Ed.

that we would get on well and live happily together. He then called the jailer, a very tall and fair man sporting an impressive turban, and asked him to take me to my quarters. As I was taken up a long passage towards the central tower, I passed rows of convicts making salaams to the imposing jailer. The convicts were waiting for their evening meal. Massive rotis were being baked in large tandoor ovens and distributed among them.

Except for the central tower, the Lyallpur District Jail was not built of brick and mortar. There were tall and robust mud walls criss-crossing the jail and on the perimeters. Turning right at the head of the long central pathway, I was led into a spacious yard with a cluster of four cells in a row at the centre. The cells were empty. An amiable elderly guard was standing by. The jailer assigned one of the four cells to me.

There were a number of political prisoners being held in Lyallpur jail. I soon found out that there was great excitement among them at my arrival. Political prisoners from Bengal had long been common in Punjab's jails and they enjoyed a high reputation in Punjab's prison system. And on top of that, a member of the Bose family!

Soon tea and some food arrived for me, sent by political prisoners lodged in another ward of the jail. For that evening, there were no arrangements in my otherwise empty yard. I was told that a convict would be assigned to me from the next morning to help me with cooking, washing and other chores.

As the evening progressed, I was told to go inside my cell, and they locked me up. The news spread like wildfire and the other political prisoners kicked up a row. They demanded that since there was no night lock-up for other political prisoners I should not be treated like this. The jail authorities informed them there were certain special instructions regarding me. I was to be completely segregated, locked in my cell at night, no writing materials were to be provided to me, and so on. My yard had until very recently been used to keep 'condemned' prisoners—convicts sentenced to death. The other political prisoners raised objections on these grounds as well.

My cell was small, had no window and was poorly ventilated. The charpoy took up almost all the space. There was a dim kerosene lantern provided for the night. Even so, I felt relieved to be out of the terrifying environment of Lahore Fort.

It was early February and bitterly cold. Prior to my departure from the Lahore Fort, I had at last been given the warm clothes sent

from home, including an overcoat. I put it on and kept myself warm by briskly walking up and down the yard during the day. I found that Mother had included Uncle Subhas's woollen dressing-gown, which he had used in Europe in the 1930s. I used it and felt happy.

In the morning, a warder arrived with a very young convict, eighteen to twenty years old. His name was Ibrahim. He would stay in the yard, cook for me and help me with housekeeping. I felt relieved that I would have someone to talk to. Besides, I had never cooked in my life, so Ibrahim would be useful.

The boy was simple and very well-behaved. But how could I converse with him? He knew no Hindi and spoke only Punjabi, that too in his local dialect. Never mind, I managed to ask him what he would cook for me. He told me that he had never cooked in his life. Why should he? He had his mother, young wife and other women in the family at home. He worked in the fields, and he knew how to make country liquor. He had been jailed for making and peddling the illicit brew.

I tried to remember my chemistry lessons in order to apply it to cooking and suitably instruct Ibrahim. How much water to use to boil rice, what spices to put in vegetable curries, which ingredients went in first and which later in the cooking process, and so on. Our experimental cooking was on the whole successful.

Towards the end of my days at the Lahore Fort, I had been given some printed letter-forms on which to write home. I was told, however, that letters written in Bengali would take very long to reach their destination. The same arrangement continued at Lyallpur. A warder came with pen, ink and paper and stood guard as I wrote. He collected everything once I finished and took it to the jailer.

I was told I would be allowed newspapers and books which had been approved by the higher authorities. Pending the arrival of my own books from home, the jail superintendent agreed to give me a few books of literature from the prison library. I read Charles Dickens's *The Pickwick Papers* with much pleasure in Lyallpur jail.

During my solitary confinement of three and a half months at the Lahore Fort, I had turned into a Rip Van Winkle, with no knowledge of goings-on in the world outside. I had no means of knowing what was happening in India or elsewhere. During interrogation I would be occasionally told of the advance of British forces into Burma. For example, they told me one day: 'There is bad news for you, we have captured Akyab'.[31]

Some time later they told me: 'There is more bad news for you: British forces have reached the Irrawaddy [river].' I remember asking Razvi towards the end of January 1945 about the result of the American presidential election. He laughed and said: 'Just see in what kind of world you are living! The election got over more than two months ago.'

After coming to Lyallpur, I tried to gather news about what was going on in the country and the progress of the war. I first asked for two Calcutta papers, *Anandabazar Patrika* and *Hindusthan Standard*. The government rejected my request. Instead, I was given *The Statesman*, the then British-owned daily of Calcutta. Later, they reluctantly agreed to let me read *The Tribune*, published from Lahore. I asked for particular books—medical, scientific, literary and historical—to be sent from home. But it took a long time for any book sent from Calcutta to reach me and many were withheld by the censors. I remember that they withheld, among others, a book on learning Russian.

As one political prisoner was not allowed to correspond with another, copies of my letters to my mother or sisters were sent on by them to my father in south India. Father read them carefully and often picked up subtle hints between the lines which eluded others.

I passed my days in Lyallpur with Ibrahim for company. I soon picked up some Punjabi from him and from the sweeper who came by every morning. Two ex-army personnel who guarded me inside the yard would tell me stories about their homes and families and also some of their war experiences. The jail superintendent, Amir Shah, visited me in truly royal style every morning at the head of a procession of jail officials and warders, one of them holding a large umbrella over his head. I did not talk much to him; we exchanged courtesies and discussed the weather. Then one day I asked him for something. I had heard that there was a teacher attached to the jail for the purpose of removing illiteracy among the inmates: could I meet him? Shah agreed to let him visit me for some time in the morning to teach me Urdu. I first learned the alphabets, then the construction and eventually I could read popular tales like *Heer Ranjha*.

One evening I was pacing up and down in front of my cell when I heard something very unexpected. A female voice was singing an emotion-laden song of Rabindranath Tagore over the radio, which was

[31] now known as Sittwe.

being broadcast from the jail tower. A wave of emotion swept through me. The lyrics (in translation) were:

I shall not light a lamp at my window
I shall sit and listen to the profound
message in darkness;
Let my body and mind merge with the dark
night,
The bouquet of flowers that has secretly
blossomed in my heart
May the fragrance of my anguish lie hidden.

I learned on enquiry that the broadcast was of a musical programme of Lucknow Radio, which sometimes included Bengali songs.

CHAPTER 63

The first four months of 1945 marked the final phase of the war in Europe. Germany fell to the combined onslaught of the United States and its allies including Britain from the west and the Soviet Union from the east. Though details of the war were not available in prison, I could tell that Hitler's desperate measures were doomed and his boastful declarations hollow. Whenever I was allowed a copy of *The Tribune* I would read it minutely to gather as much information as possible both about the national scene in India and the war. At that point I thought that even after the defeat of Germany, it would take the Allies a long time to subdue Japan. I therefore presumed that I would remain in jail for quite some time to come.

As my understanding of Punjabi and Urdu improved, I could converse more and more freely with Ibrahim, the warders and the guards. I learned about life in Punjabi society and particularly rural Punjab. Before my second arrest in autumn 1944, I had witnessed horrible scenes in Calcutta of the victims of the Bengal Famine of 1943-44. I got the impression that conditions in rural Punjab were better and wondered how such a difference was possible under the same regime.

My view of the ordinary convicts gradually changed. While imprisoned in Burma in the mid-1920s, Uncle Subhas wrote a lot about the necessity for reform of prison regulations and the need to treat convicts differently, after closely studying his fellow-inmates. I could

now fully appreciate what he had said about the matter. Even in Lyallpur Jail, I was more or less in solitary confinement as per instructions from high levels of the British Government. The convicts who came to my yard to do assigned tasks, as well as the warders and guards responsible for me, did whatever they could to cheer me up. An old man serving a long sentence visited me every morning; his task was cleaning the yard. He would dance and sing to entertain me. Punjabis have a habit of reciting self-composed poems (shairi). Often convicts dropped by on some pretext or other and recited their own compositions. Gradually, I lost all fear and doubt about these men. I found them to be simple and straightforward folk. They had been caught up in some wrong-doing under the pressure of family or social circumstances and were paying the price under man-made laws which were not necessarily sound or just.

The censor authorities were passing some books to me one by one. Some were medical books and others were English or Bengali literary works. One day, a *Bhagavad Gita* used by Father in Jubbulpore Jail in the 1930s arrived. I noticed some entries here and there in Uncle Subhas's handwriting. There were obviously some coded messages which I could not decipher and which the censors must have overlooked.

Although I read some of the medical volumes, I felt pessimistic about the future of my medical studies. Who knows how long I would have to be in prison, I thought. I wrote home asking them to check with Calcutta University if I might be permitted to study for the Bachelor of Arts degree from jail as a private student. I knew that many political prisoners had studied for and earned BA and MA degrees from jail as private students. My family did not approve of the idea of my precipitately giving up on my medical studies at that advanced stage.

I had always been sensitive to cold weather. Even in the rather mild Calcutta winter I wore woollen sweaters, socks and warm undergarments and always had to have hot water for my bath. I suffered a lot at the Lahore Fort from the cold although I did not want to reveal that to my captors. At Lyallpur, my first two months there—February and March 1945—were very cold. While I shivered, Ibrahim had the bright idea of bathing me in the open in cold water. There was, of course, no bathroom. He stored some water in the sun and prevailed on me to bathe. At first I recoiled but eventually summoned up courage and went ahead. Once initiated, I bathed in the open sun in cold water in temperatures hovering around zero celsius. I did not get pneumonia—on the contrary my health improved.

Keeping a detainee in solitary confinement indefinitely was not permitted under prison rules. I knew a prisoner could be given solitary confinement for two weeks as punishment for violating jail discipline. The British Government constantly committed many illegal acts in regard to political prisoners. One illegality was to keep prisoners in solitary confinement for months on end. In those times, there were hardly any people inside or outside the country to create a row over such practices. Even so, the British kept such illegalities under wraps. In the case of members of the Bose family, who were considered really dangerous elements, the powers-that-were carefully considered what company we could be allowed in detention, if any. It was only after a lot of delay and foot-dragging that the government sent Lala Shankarlal to Coonoor to keep Father company in detention. In my case, I got a companion after spending nearly nine months in solitary detention, the Lahore Fort and Lyallpur Jail combined. I think certain efforts by my family in Calcutta eventually paid off in this regard.

After about three months in the former condemned prisoners' yard, I was shifted to another yard, this one next to the gallows. This yard was smaller than the previous one. My view included the upper portion of the frame of the scaffold, from where the noose hung. One advantage of the new yard was that I was now closer to other political prisoners. With some discreet help from jail warders, I could occasionally talk to two prisoners of the Congress Socialist Party who were in the next yard. Tara Chand Gupta and Pandit Vatsyayana tried to help me in whatever way they could and passed me books and papers which I could not get in the normal way. A veteran freedom fighter, Baba Gurdit Singh, was then serving a life sentence in Lyallpur Jail. He was allowed to take walks along the perimeter walls of the jail morning and evening. Towards the end of my stay at Lyallpur, he walked up to my cell once or twice and exchanged a few words with me. I remember this very elderly Sikh revolutionary's venerable appearance and dignified manner.

One summer day, a handsome elderly Bengali gentleman arrived at my yard with the jailer. He was to be my companion. Early in 1944, I had seen him at Satya Ranjan Bakshi's house in Calcutta. I found that he too remembered the chance meeting. When I saw him in Lyallpur Jail, I immediately realized that a lot of our people had fallen into the net. His name was Arun Chandra Sen, and he was a professor at Calcutta's Scottish Church College. He had been detained for several months at a place called Jhang, also in the Punjab, and like Lahore and Lyallpur/

Faisalabad, part of Pakistan after mid-August 1947, and then sent to Lyallpur to keep me company. Professor Sen was a senior person with grey hair. I could sense that he was used to a comfortable life and had already suffered a lot in prison. Despite being of different generations, Professor Sen and I quickly became very good friends and he shared details of his life with me freely and candidly.

Lyallpur became hotter and hotter as the summer progressed. The temperature in the shade reached 48°C (118°F)! It was just impossible to sleep inside the cell at night. So special permission was given to us to sleep in the yard, under the open sky. We asked for heat-repelling 'khus' curtains for the day. In the evenings, there were often dust-storms known as 'aandhi'. A mountain of dust descended upon us and we rushed to take cover inside the cells. Professor Sen suffered a lot in this climate but there was nothing to be done.

Professor Arun Sen had earlier been a communist. Once he happened to visit Uncle Subhas in the company of Bankim Mukherjee, a senior communist leader. He was so impressed with that first meeting that he continued with his visits. Gradually he turned into an ardent follower of Uncle Subhas and shed his communist affiliation and friends. He told me repeatedly that he found Uncle Subhas to be a great revolutionary and fearless patriot, compared to whom his erstwhile party comrades were pygmies.

He would observe me and my daily routine closely. He heartily disliked bathing daily, even in that hot weather. His father, the famous Bengali litterateur Dinesh Chandra Sen, had told him that the human body resembled a rope, which kept well if dry and got weak if repeatedly soaked. When I read the *Bhagavad Gita* or learned Urdu he was happy. My socialist fellow-prisoners smuggled Stalin's *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* to me. When he found me reading that, Professor Sen turned sour and walked away puffing at his cigarette. He said it was a sin to read communist literature. In his opinion, no other ideology had done so much harm to our national movement. He spoke bitterly of his son Samar Sen, a rising and gifted poet, because of the latter's communist leanings.

Arunbabu gave me much valuable advice from his accumulated life experience. He cautioned me against getting involved in politics impulsively and prematurely in India after Independence. Despite the age difference, a deep bond of friendship developed between us in prison.

When I was transferred to my new yard, I had to bid goodbye

to Ibrahim after more than three months together. He had completed his sentence for peddling country liquor. He broke down and sobbed uncontrollably when we parted. I embraced him and wished him well in life. He was replaced by a convict called Ram Narain, who cooked well but was not as warm-hearted as Ibrahim.

As we were next to the new condemned prisoners' yard and the gallows, I had a partial view of three hangings which took place across the high wall separating my yard from theirs. We always came to know when a date of execution was fixed. The condemned prisoner's relatives came for the last meeting the day before. I heard that the prisoners remained calm and collected even when their relatives broke down and wept bitterly. After the hanging, there was usually some commotion at the jail-gate when a crowd gathered to collect the body; we could hear the noise.

The condemned prisoners often asked for cigarettes from the other side of the wall. I would light a cigarette, give it a puff or two and then toss it over the wall. They were incredibly grateful for this little act of kindness. The courage with which murder convicts mounted the gallows was almost unbelievable. When the hangings took place I tried to take the position in our yard which gave me the fullest possible view. I would hear a full-throated shout of 'Ya Allah!' and almost immediately the sound of the hangman releasing the lever of the gallows. Then total silence. I could see the shivering of the rope hanging from the top of the scaffold.

After the execution, the jail superintendent would do a round of our yard, along with the civil surgeon and the rest of his entourage. There was no visible reaction to the hangings on their faces. I wondered why certain human beings were empowered to take the lives of others.

CHAPTER 64

From March to August 1945, the Axis powers were being rolled back by the Allies in great battles in the heart of Europe and the plains of Burma. I could gather from newspaper reports that bitter fighting was taking place along the Chindwin and Irrawaddy rivers in Burma. The British forces were continuously advancing with vital American aerial support, and the Japanese were making a fighting retreat. One could not tell from the reports available that members of the INA had fought

valiant rearguard actions in the course of these battles and that several thousands of them had laid down their lives. A large number were also captured and some were brought over to India. The British Government was able to keep the story of the Indian National Army and the Indian Independence Movement in Southeast Asia led by Uncle Subhas from the common people of India throughout the war. I also think that the propaganda efforts of the Free India Movement in Southeast Asia were inadequate and not very effective.

That does not mean that political circles in India and people close to the British-Indian Army did not know what was going on. The Congress's leadership, consisting of conservative as well as centrist elements, was far removed from the revolutionary armed struggle spearheaded by Uncle Subhas. Members of the nationalist left, represented by the Socialists and the Forward Bloc, were ready to fight and die but were badly mauled during the fierce British repression of the Quit India Movement. The Communists, a very small force, were actively collaborating with the British Government.

I was quite surprised to hear a reasonably accurate account of the INA from a well-informed convict in the Lyallpur District Jail. He told me how the INA was first formed by Mohan Singh, then kept in suspended animation and re-built as a fighting force after Uncle Subhas's arrival in Southeast Asia. He even told me the names of a number of former officers of the British-Indian Army who had joined the INA.

To my surprise, one morning I read in *The Tribune* a quotation from an 'Order of the Day' issued by Uncle Subhas. It originated with the Reuters news agency. I could see that it had been published in order to inform Indians that Uncle Subhas had accepted defeat. But in fact his words were full of defiance:

> Comrades: At this critical hour I have only one word of command to give you, and that is, if you have to go down temporarily, then go down fighting with the National Tricolour held aloft; go down as heroes; go down upholding the highest code of honour and discipline...

Another piece of news created a stir among the public. After his release from detention, Jawaharlal Nehru said that Indians in Southeast Asia had organized an army under the leadership of Subhas Chandra Bose and that army had fought alongside the Japanese. A large number of officers and men of this army had been taken prisoner by the British.

Nehru further said that he had information that these men were being maltreated. He declared that such mistreatment would not be tolerated.

We spent July and August 1945 in great anxiety. Professor Arun Sen and I constantly discussed the situation and its great uncertainties. We were very concerned about Uncle Subhas and wondered what his next course of action would be. At the same time, we were confident that Uncle Subhas would manage to find a way out of his very difficult situation.

Then early August brought catastrophic news: that the United States had dropped atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Both Arunbabu and I felt immediately that a threshold in the history of warfare had been crossed, and that no act as cruel and inhuman had been committed in all the annals of modern war. Within a week came the news of Japan's unconditional surrender. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union had declared war on Japan on 8 August, two days after the attack on Hiroshima and the day before the attack on Nagasaki.

On the evening of the day Japan's surrender was announced, 15 August, I found the veteran revolutionary Baba Gurdit Singh standing sombrely in front of our yard, across the iron gate, his serene figure framed by a glowing sunset in the background. He looked very concerned. He asked me softly what I thought Uncle Subhas would do now.

On the afternoon of Friday, 24 August, I was informed, when I emerged from my bath, that the jail superintendent had called with the *The Tribune* in his hands. He had left word that he would return in a short while. Arun Sen looked at me blankly without saying anything. Then the superintendent appeared. He said he had decided not to send me the newspaper that morning. He wanted to come himself and do what he thought was his duty. He said: 'I am really very, very sorry, Mr Bose, there is very bad news about your uncle. All of us offer our condolences to you in this hour of terrible grief.'

The Tribune had printed on its front page a report of the air crash in Formosa and Uncle Subhas's death on 18 August, along with a picture of him taken in India when he was Congress president.

The world seemed to stop for a few minutes. Then I clutched the newspaper in my hands and retired to my cell. Professor Sen followed me after a while and sat down opposite me. He stared wordlessly at me for a few minutes. Then he said in English: 'But this is not true!' I was startled. Then it occurred to me that the report might indeed not be true.

I had already finished my quota of letters for that week. And what would I write home anyway? I finally wrote to Mother on Monday 27 August.

I was in prison for nearly another month after this. There were rumours circulating that we would be released now that the war had ended. But one day my fellow-prisoner and friend Tara Chand Gupta came to our yard's gate and whispered to me: 'Your case is very bad, they may not release you. I managed to read a report on you by the Intelligence Branch in Bengal which arrived at the jail office here by mistake instead of being delivered at Lahore Fort. It describes you as a dangerous character, that you keep your secret activities from even your parents. They have recommended your continued detention for an indefinite period.'

Professor Arun Sen and I continually debated on whether the death report was true or not. I thought very often of Father at this time. The death of a child is perhaps the greatest tragedy for a human being. I knew that Uncle Subhas's death meant for my father a greater tragedy than even the loss of a son. Uncle Subhas was the apple of his eye all his life. Father used to say openly, and also wrote in one of his letters soon after the tragic news arrived, that the baby called 'Kuka', seven years younger to him, whom he had once carried about in his arms, had fulfilled all his hopes and grown up to be a 'Karmayogi'. I thought of Father's tragic loneliness in his detention centre in the distant Nilgiris. Much later I read the poignant words he wrote in his diary on 25 August 1945. He wrote: 'Divine Mother, how many sacrifices have we to offer at your altar! Terrible Mother, your blows are too hard to bear! Your last blow was the heaviest and cruellest of all. What divine purpose you are serving thereby, you alone know. Inscrutable are your ways!'

He also wrote: 'Four or five nights back, I dreamt that Subhas had come to see me. He was standing on the verandah of this bungalow and appeared to have become very tall in stature. I jumped up to see his face; almost immediately thereafter he disappeared. I did not attach any meaning to the dream then and that is why I did not record it in this diary the day after. But now?'

On 13 September 1945, the Government of India made the following announcement:

> With the effective surrender of the Japanese in Singapore, it has become unnecessary to keep any longer in custody a number of persons, including Mr Sarat Chandra Bose and certain members

of his family, who had been detained by order of the Central Government to prevent them from acting in a manner prejudicial to the defence of British India and the efficient prosecution of the war.

I now expected to be set free. I read in the papers of Father's release and his arrival in Madras from Coonoor. My two cousins Dwijen and Aurobindo were also let out from Campbellpur Jail in the Punjab. My release order reached Lyallpur from Delhi a couple of days later. Then I was released, as was Arun Sen. A most eventful chapter of my life came to a close.

CHAPTER 65

As I packed my possessions, I pondered how the people of the country would receive us. At least temporarily, Uncle Subhas's heroic struggle had been thwarted. The British were on the winning side of the war and then there was this terrible news about Uncle Subhas himself. How would the people of India judge us?

As I came out of Lyallpur District Jail, I was dumbstruck by the sight in front of me. A huge, heaving crowd stood waiting. I drowned in flowers as I emerged, amid deafening slogans. I was put on a tonga gaily decorated with flowers. As we moved along, hundreds of people ran on both sides, amid a hail of flowers. They were shouting: 'Subhas Chander Bose zindabad! 'Bose khandaan zindabad! (Long Live Subhas Chandra Bose, Long Live the Bose family).' I have never felt so embarrassed in my life. I was taken to the residence of an eminent citizen of Lyallpur. The house too was flooded with people and more people. Youngsters swamped me with their autograph books. I was reluctant to give autographs but they would not listen. They got even more excited when I started signing their books in Urdu.

I was told that a felicitation meeting had been planned for the evening and I would have to make a speech there. Wearing garlands and giving public speeches was new to me. With someone's help, I wrote out a short speech in Urdu in the Roman script. I read it over and over again and almost committed it to memory. There was a very large gathering in an open space in the centre of Lyallpur town. Professor Sen and I were presented with a formal address of felicitations on behalf

of the citizens of Lyallpur.

The next morning, our friends in Lyallpur put us on a long-distance bus to Lahore. I and two other young men of the Bose family were to meet in Lahore and proceed to Calcutta together. Dwijen was already in Lahore, undergoing treatment at the Medical College there. Aurobindo was to arrive from Campbellpur. A Punjabi family, whose relatives were good friends of the family in Calcutta, put us up and looked after us. We were delayed in Lahore for three or four days as train reservations to Calcutta were difficult to secure at short notice. Besides, clearance from Dwijen's doctors had to be obtained.

Meanwhile, I read in the papers that Father had already reached Calcutta.

The train journey from Lahore to Calcutta was a mind-boggling experience. At every station, big and small, there were swarms of people waiting to greet us, even at night. As soon as our train, the Calcutta Mail, steamed into a station, there were deafening slogans: 'Subhas Chander Bose zindabad, Bose khandaan zindabad', and 'Azaad Hindustan zindabad (Long Live Free India).' Relatives and friends of the family who lived on the route also met us during stops with food and gifts. After two sleepless nights of excitement and exuberance, Bengal's green countryside greeted us.

As we approached Calcutta I wondered how, so soon after the defeat of the struggle in southeast Asia and northeast India, people across the subcontinent were reacting in this dramatic manner to Uncle Subhas and the emerging story of the Indian National Army. Uncle Subhas used to declare in his wartime radio broadcasts that everything he had done since his departure from India in January 1941 was 'in accordance with the will of the Indian people.' I now saw with my own eyes how true this claim was, and that his stature among the masses of the subcontinent had attained dizzying, sky-high proportions.

At the Howrah station, there was an enormous crowd to meet us. The family were, of course, overjoyed to see us. In addition, a large contingent of medical students were waiting to receive me and gave me a rather grand welcome.

Our house was once again bustling with activity and overflowing with people. But Father was not at home when I arrived at 1, Woodburn Park. He had left for Bombay at the special invitation of the Congress leadership to attend a session of the All-India Congress Committee. The rupture of 1939-40 between the Bose brothers and the Congress

leadership was apparently forgotten. They told Father that forgetting past differences, he should join them to present a united front to the British Government in the final bid for Independence. Father responded. The reception he received in Bombay was spectacular. A photograph of Sardar Patel and Father locked in embrace on the dais of the plenary session of the AICC was featured in all the national newspapers.

I heard of the tumultuous reception Father received on arrival in Calcutta. To avoid a mad stampede at the Howrah terminus, he was taken off the train from Madras at Santragachhi, a station a short distance before Howrah. From Santragachhi to Howrah there were milling crowds and it took his convoy several hours to cover the few miles to Howrah. Then a mammoth rally was held at the Howrah Maidan to welcome him.

Immediately upon his release from Coonoor, Father had given a stern warning to the British Government about the INA prisoners. He warned the colonial power: 'Not a hair on their heads must be touched!' He followed it up at the Howrah public meeting with a renewed call to struggle. In his address, he recalled the Bengali song he sang while marching in the streets as a youth of sixteen during the 1905 movement against the imperialists' plan to partition Bengal:

Forward and forward, brothers,
To the battle of life,
War trumpets will sound there,
Bringing strength to our souls.

He told his audience that the trumpet had been silenced only temporarily. The call to battle would come again, and soon.

After Father returned to Calcutta from Bombay, he advised me repeatedly to make a concerted effort to recover both physically and mentally from my ordeals. He also told me, directly and via my mother, to write up in detail both the story of Uncle Subhas's 1941 escape from India and my own prison experiences between 1942 and 1945.

We three young Boses—my cousins Dwijen and Aurobindo and myself—became 'famous' overnight. We were constantly invited by all sorts of people and organizations to take part in public events. One Congress leader of Burdwan was particularly persistent and persuaded Father to let me attend the birthday celebrations of Mahatma Gandhi in that large town north-west of Calcutta on 2 October 1945. Father agreed to let me attend the programme but at the same time he gave

me some sound advice. He told me plainly that we must not forget that the unusual public attention we were receiving was nothing but 'Subhas's reflected glory.' The adulation being showered on us was simply an expression of the people's love and reverence for Uncle Subhas. The bouquets being thrown at us, literally and figuratively, were in fact meant for him. I must not let my head get swollen with self-importance. In fact, he advised me to keep a low profile in public and concentrate on finishing my medical studies.

I spent the Durga Puja vacation in October with my parents at our bungalow in Kurseong. It was a welcome change from my three previous Puja seasons—I was almost dying of typhoid fever while imprisoned in Calcutta's Presidency Jail in autumn 1942, was home-interned in autumn 1943, and was enjoying the five-star hospitality of the Raj in the Red Fort and the Lahore Fort in autumn 1944. The bungalow and the area carried so many memories of the time I had spent there with Uncle Subhas almost a decade earlier! Given the sylvan surroundings, there was no better place for me to rest and recuperate.

During that holiday, Father and I talked constantly on a wide range of subjects, above all the aftermath of the great struggle waged by the INA under Uncle Subhas's leadership with the support of the Indian communities across Southeast Asia. I found that despite the four years of punishing detention he had suffered from December 1941 to September 1945, Father was unbroken and unbowed. He was convinced that although Britain was on the winning side of the war, British power had drastically weakened as a result of World War II. We needed to be steadfast and resolute, and not cede any ground on our principles.

I think he thought about Uncle Subhas all the time, but he did not express his thoughts fully. It was emotionally and psychologically not possible for him to acknowledge that his beloved younger brother was no more. He would say things such as: 'I must go on working and work hard, and once Subhas comes back I can retire.' I tried to keep Father's hoping against hope alive. Whenever the air crash in Taiwan came up, I would say it was all bogus, a hoax or a deception.

When the trial of the three Indian National Army officers—Shah Nawaz Khan, Prem Kumar Sahgal and Gurbaksh Singh Dhillon—began at the Red Fort in Delhi in November 1945, the entire country rose up in an unprecedented patriotic upsurge. I had seen a number of significant mass movements since my childhood. But this was unlike anything I had seen before: people of all regions, all classes, all ages,

all religions and all political faiths throughout the subcontinent rose as one in solidarity with the three men on trial who symbolized Netaji's INA. Even those cowardly and misguided elements who betrayed the national cause during the war and collaborated shamelessly with British imperialism, became champions of the INA! The national movement, which had been at a low ebb for three years since the crushing of the Quit India uprisings, came to life again. Freedom was, finally, on the horizon.

Even before my release from prison in September 1945, a group of young doctors and medical students of Calcutta, inspired by Netaji and the INA, had founded an organisation called the Indian National Ambulance Corps (INAC). After Father and I were released, they made him its chief patron and appointed me as its treasurer. In just a few months the INAC developed into a formidable body, and its young cadres rendered exceptional service first during floods in east Bengal and then during the terrible communal violence that overtook Bengal from August 1946.

The Congress party established an 'INA Relief Committee' as an all-India organization. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was its national chair and Father headed the Bengal unit. The office of the Bengal Committee in Guinea House on Bowbazar Street became a hive of activity, working round the clock for the rehabilitation of INA personnel being released from detention camps or returning from Southeast Asia. A number of camps to house INA soldiers were opened in and around Calcutta. It was thrilling to hear the first-hand accounts of the INA's struggle and of Uncle Subhas's courage and resolve from these officers and men of the INA, as well as from civilians who had been involved with the Provisional Government of Azad Hind in Southeast Asia. But we all deeply missed one person—the helmsman of this glorious chapter of India's struggle for freedom.

CHAPTER 66

Once the trial of the 'INA Three' began at the Red Fort, more and more details of the movement in Southeast Asia under Uncle Subhas's leadership were published in the press across the country. In virtually every Indian home, Netaji and the exploits of the INA became the principal topic of discussion. Young people were particularly inspired.

In schools and colleges, boys and girls started parading and marching in INA uniforms and style. Volunteer groups sprang up all over India to provide various forms of public service in the INA spirit. 'Jai Hind' and 'Netaji zindabad' became national slogans. The songs of the INA—the INA had a particularly rich musical repertoire—were being sung everywhere. A mass movement developed very rapidly across India in solidarity with the INA and for the immediate, unconditional release of all INA prisoners, including the Red Fort trio. Our house became the centre of the popular movement in Bengal.

Early in November 1945, I accompanied Father to Bombay where he was invited to be the principal speaker on 'INA Day'. This gave us the opportunity to meet many friends and comrades in Bombay. We discovered there that an enterprising journalist of Bombay, Amrit Lal Seth, who visited Southeast Asia after the fall of Rangoon to the British, had collected and brought over a large volume of important documentary material about the movement and Netaji. Arrangements were made to publish a book based on the material in the form of a diary.

The next big event was the meeting of the Congress Working Committee (CWC) in Calcutta in early December. As during the 1930s, Father invited Jawaharlal Nehru to be our guest at Woodburn Park and he readily accepted. A family event, the wedding of my sister Gita, was to be held at the same time. Thus, our house became a hub of activity on several fronts.

In the first week of December, a public meeting was held by the Bengal INA Relief Committee at Deshapriya Park in south Calcutta to demand the release of the INA prisoners. The gathering was massive. Father presided, and the principal speakers were Jawaharlal Nehru and Vallabhbhai Patel. A huge picture of Uncle Subhas dominated the assembly from the dais. Nehru said in his speech that the colossus, Netaji, who now dominated the nation without being present, was on a different level from the Subhas he had known as a colleague. Patel's speech was even more generous, clearly compensating for the animosities of the past.

On Uncle Subhas's forty-ninth birthday, 23 January 1946, the Bengal INA Relief Committee led a mammoth demonstration in Calcutta. The procession, headed by the INA hero Shah Nawaz Khan, traversed the city from Deshapriya Park in the south to Deshbandhu Park in the north. Thousands of boys and girls in uniform marched through the city and it seemed as if the whole of Calcutta was out on the streets

to observe the absent leader's birthday. I joined the throngs and walked the entire distance.

After the end of the war, the British made two major errors. The first was to put Shah Nawaz, Sahgal and Dhillon on trial, and that too at the Red Fort where Netaji had promised to raise the national tricolour after liberation. The second was to hold general elections in the country.

The INA trial not only kindled a new awakening in the people of India. It had a major effect on the officers and men of the British-Indian Army who had been to Southeast Asia and had first-hand knowledge of the scale and impact of the movement Uncle Subhas had led. As the trial progressed, the 'defeated' Indian National Army became the darling of the masses while the 'victorious' British-Indian Army became demoralized and rebellious.

In early 1946 there was a major revolt against British rule in the Royal Indian Navy; it began in Bombay and spread to Karachi and Calcutta. The air force was also affected. General Claude Auchinleck, commander-in-chief of the British-Indian Army, sought intelligence regarding the loyalty of the Indian armed forces and received alarming feedback. I remember well that one evening, some weeks after my release in September 1945, I was asked by Father to receive a senior Indian officer of the British-Indian Army at the front door of Woodburn Park and escort him upstairs for a closed-door meeting with Father. The officer was Lieutenant-Colonel (later Field Marshal) K.M. Cariappa, who had recently fought for the British in Burma and later was to be appointed the first Indian commander-in-chief of the post-independence Indian Army in 1949. Mother told me that Cariappa continued to keep in touch with Father.

The Congress strategy of coming out in support of the INA paid off and in the 1946 general elections the party won a big victory. Father conducted the elections in Bengal on behalf of the Congress and was himself elected to the Central Legislative Assembly from Calcutta. Father was then elected Leader of the Congress Legislature Party and became Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly in Delhi. Famous for his oratory, Father gave a few memorable speeches in the Central Legislative Assembly, the forerunner of the Parliament of the Republic of India.

In May 1946, Father took a very important step to ensure the preservation of the public history of the Bose family and its contributions to India's struggle for freedom. He received information that the ancestral house at 38/2, Elgin Road, built by his father Janakinath in 1909, was

about to be sold off by three of his brothers, who were co-owners of the property. Father was of the view that the house should be preserved for posterity as a public institution and a living monument to his brother Subhas. The latter was, in fact, the fourth owner of the property. His one-fourth share had been attached by the government after his escape from India—which began of course from that very house, with me as his driver—in 1941. By the time Father received information of the sale, the value of Uncle Subhas's share had been paid by the other three owners to the Government in return for its release from attachment, and the rear portion of the property had already been sold. Father managed to intervene in the nick of time to save the house. But he was short of the funds required. He therefore sought the help of two friends, Suresh Chandra Majumdar and Asoke Kumar Sarkar, and purchased the entire property for public purposes. He named the house 'Netaji Bhawan' and announced that the historic rooms and areas such as Uncle Subhas's bedroom and office would be preserved, and the other portions would be used for various activities of benefit to the public. That is exactly how the house is functioning today. Initially, most of Netaji Bhawan was used to temporarily house INA personnel.

That Netaji Bhawan, the home of the Netaji Research Bureau, exists today as a world-class museum showcasing Uncle Subhas's life and work and as a public institution in his memory, has its roots in Father's intervention in 1946.

In the middle of 1946, a message came from Burma. The British Government was prosecuting a number of INA officers there on various charges. Father was requested to come to Burma to bolster their defence. I and a family friend, Manubhai Bhimani, accompanied Father to Rangoon in July. That was my first exposure to any of the places in Southeast Asia where Uncle Subhas had lived and worked during the war.

We took off for Rangoon in a large seaplane early one morning from the Hooghly river, from a spot just north of Calcutta close to the temple town of Dakshineswar. It was a very enjoyable flight. On arrival in Rangoon, we were received at the riverbank there by Dina Nath, Johra Singh and many others of the Azad Hind movement based there. We were taken around the city of Rangoon to see the various centres of the Indian Independence League, the Provisional Government of Free India and the Indian National Army.

We met a large number of people actively associated with the movement and also leading figures of the Burmese independence

movement. Dr Ba Maw, the wartime head of state, was then not in Burma; he was still in American custody in Japan. His wife, Daw Kinmama Maw, invited us to dinner at their residence where their son-in-law Bo Yan Naing, a prominent leader of the Burmese independence movement, and U Maung, the wartime Burmese ambassador in Japan, were present. The conversation over dinner was most interesting.

The new leader of post-war Burma was Aung San. He received Father ceremonially at the headquarters of his party, the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL). Father was introduced to the leading members of the AFPFL in a large conference room, and a lively discussion took place. Father was particularly interested in how they were going to solve the problem of ethnic minorities in Burma, an issue that bedevils Myanmar to this day. This was followed by a closed-door meeting between Father and Aung San in the latter's private office. I took photographs of the two before they started their talks. Finally, Aung San gave Father a grand public reception in Rangoon's Town Hall. Uniformed Burmese national volunteers gave Father an impressive guard of honour. In his address, Aung San spoke about Uncle Subhas and the INA:

> I knew him [Netaji] as a sincere friend of Burma and Burmese people... Between him and myself there was complete mutual trust... We did have an understanding in those [wartime] days that, in any event, and whatever happened, the INA and the BNA [Burmese National Army] should never fight each other. And I am glad to tell you today that both sides did observe that understanding scrupulously.

Whilst Father was engaged in legal work in connection with the defence of the INA men or in conferences with the top Burmese leaders, I took the opportunity to make friends with younger Burmese politicians. Among them was Aung Than, Aung San's personal secretary. Aung Than had been active in the student movement in Burma along with Aung San and was well informed about the student movement in India. During the war, Aung Than had served as military attache at the Burmese Embassy in Tokyo. He came into contact with Uncle Subhas while in Tokyo. Aung Than told me that in 1944, Uncle Subhas gave him a sealed letter and asked him to deliver it secretly to the Soviet ambassador in Japan. Aung Than managed to briefly stop the Soviet ambassador's car on a Tokyo street and tossed the envelope into the car.

I was fortunate that, along with Father, I had an opportunity to meet

Aung San. Exactly a year later, in July 1947, Aung San was assassinated. He was only thirty-two years old.

In Rangoon, we also spent a very pleasant evening with Dr S. Sen and his family. The Sens were very active in the Free India Movement. They told us intimate anecdotes of Uncle Subhas's public and personal life in Rangoon during the war and handed over to Father a number of items, including personal effects, he had left behind. The items are among the exhibits in the Netaji Bhawan Museum in Calcutta.

Soon after our return from Burma, we heard that talks were in progress about the formation of an Interim Government in Delhi to pave the way for a transfer of power. This would be, in effect, a reconfigured version of the Viceroy's executive council, with Lord Wavell to continue as its head and Pandit Nehru as his deputy. The Congress leadership was in favour of taking part in such a government. On the other hand, the Muslim League, led by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, would not budge from the demand for Pakistan. The Muslim League leader in Bengal, H.S. Suhrawardy, was becoming more and more strident and threatening to launch a struggle to achieve the creation of Pakistan. He pronounced 16 August 1946 'Direct Action Day'. We received reports in the late afternoon of that day that, following a League rally at the Calcutta Maidan, large-scale violence had broken out in central Calcutta. For weeks thereafter, first Calcutta and then some districts of Bengal were convulsed by communal violence on an unprecedented scale. I still shudder when I think of the gruesome scenes I witnessed during the 'Great Calcutta Killings' of August 1946.

CHAPTER 67

Father returned from Burma in July 1946 in an optimistic mood after his talks with Aung San. The period from autumn 1945 to mid-1946 was a golden period in the long history of our struggle for freedom. The patriotic upsurge that swept the subcontinent due to Netaji and the INA was inspiring and a game-changing development. The British-Indian Army, for decades a vital pillar of the British Empire, ceased to be a pliable instrument of imperialist power. Besides, it was clear that other countries in Asia were in the throes of anti-colonial revolution, led by such figures as Aung San in Burma, and Sukarno and Hatta in Indonesia, the leaders of the struggle against the Dutch occupiers of that

country. The heroic fight against French colonialism that the people of Vietnam were waging under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh evoked widespread sympathy in India. Father called for a volunteer brigade to go from India to assist the Vietnamese freedom fighters, on the lines of the International Brigades in Spain in the late 1930s. It was clear that across Asia, the era of Western imperialism was nearing an end.

Our opponents, the British, were however very skilled in their political and diplomatic manoeuvres. In early 1946, a 'Cabinet Mission' was sent to India to hold talks on behalf of the British Government in London. It was next to impossible for the Congress leadership to cope with the diplomacy of the British without setting down the non-negotiable parameters of any talks: complete Independence and a united, federal India. This was not done by the Congress leaders like Nehru, Azad and Patel. By mid-1946, it was evident that we were becoming bogged down in interminable talks. Father's differences with the Congress leadership began to grow from this time and became more and more acute over the subsequent months. He felt that both the British and Jinnah were getting the better of us in the negotiations. He repeatedly warned the Congress leaders not to yield on fundamentals, and would reiterate that Independence had to be complete and undefiled, and national unity was not negotiable. He said we should not compromise with vested interests, whether indigenous or foreign. And our foreign policy, he asserted, should be totally autonomous; we should not be satellites of any power(s) or bloc but operate on the world stage in concert with the newly independent states of south and southeast Asia.

In August 1946, it was announced that Lord Wavell would constitute the Interim Government with members nominated by the Congress party and that Nehru would lead the Congress team. The Congress Working Committee proposed that Father be included in the Interim Government. It was heard in Delhi—the reports turned out to be true—that Wavell was very reluctant to accept Father, even though Father was the Leader of the Opposition in the Central Legislative Assembly. But the Congress stayed firm in its demand and Father was included in the interim central cabinet. He became the minister of works, mines and power. He had already been elected to the Constituent Assembly formed through indirect election by the Central and Provincial Assemblies. Jinnah strengthened his position for the future by declining to participate in the interim cabinet and keeping his options open.

When Father was a minister in the Interim Government, I spent

some time with him in Delhi in September 1946. High hopes were aroused in nationalist circles by the formation of the Interim Government. It was expected, wrongly as it turned out, that this was the first step towards the Congress coming to power in a united India. In keeping with his nature, Father devoted himself to the work of his ministry. He quickly discovered many illegal and corrupt practices in his department. He could not clean up the mess because his ministerial tenure lasted only about six weeks.

Father was greatly disturbed by the communal polarization and violence that gripped Calcutta and Bengal from 16 August 1946 onwards. He made frequent trips to Calcutta from Delhi. Rather than simply lament the terrible happenings, he focused on planning and executing counter-measures. The problem was enormous. Fanatics and bigots were out to destroy the very fabric of our society. In areas of Calcutta where one community was numerically stronger, citizens of the other were hounded out of their homes amid killings, looting and arson. The stricken people had to be evacuated en masse to areas where their own community dominated in order to save their lives. Markets and business establishments were looted and burned. Transportation, electricity and water supply were all seriously disrupted. In large areas of Calcutta, there was day-and-night curfew for days at a stretch. And to our shame, the British military patrolled the streets, trying to separate the marauders of the different communities and restore a semblance of order.

Father wanted disciplined measures on two fronts. First, to bring succour and relief to the injured and the sick, evacuate the homeless to safe areas, and arrange emergency food supplies. Second, to get young men of character and resolve trained to confront the thugs of both communities. He appealed for funds and received a good response.

Our home, 1, Woodburn Park, became the headquarters of the Indian National Ambulance Corps, which had been set up a year earlier. A chain of INAC centres was opened in disturbed areas, including a number of field hospitals run by young doctors and medical students. We obtained a fleet of American vehicles left over from the war—jeeps, trucks, weapons carriers and command cars—which were used to lift and carry the injured from the streets, evacuate distressed people, and carry and deliver medical and food supplies to disturbed areas. I recall with horror driving INAC vehicles through Calcutta streets littered with dead bodies, picking up bleeding, injured people and terrified men, women and children gathered around burning houses and slums.

Young people banded together in different areas of the city to defend neighbourhoods under siege or attack. Father discreetly facilitated the procurement of small arms for this purpose. Both military vehicles and small arms were then easily available in and around Calcutta for a price.

When the violence subsided somewhat, Father invited H.S. Suhrawardy, the League premier of Bengal, to jointly tour the worst-affected areas with him. I drove a vehicle in the peace convoy and saw with my own eyes uncountable numbers of corpses piled up along the sidewalks of many Calcutta streets.

The fires of communal hate ignited by the Great Calcutta Killings spread in due course from Calcutta to Bengal districts. Widespread disturbances broke out, particularly in east Bengal's Noakhali district and its adjacent areas in the autumn. Then large-scale communal violence broke out in our neighbouring province, Bihar. Mahatma Gandhi visited riot-torn Calcutta and also toured Noakhali. Father joined him in Noakhali to help him stem the orgy of violence in rural Bengal.

Towards the end of 1946, things quietened down somewhat but fear and rancour had taken root in people's hearts on both sides of the divide. I saw many people, including political associates and members of our family, become trapped in a communal mindset. My father kept calm and steadfast in his secularist convictions. He repeatedly stressed, even in that difficult environment, that communalism should not be responded to with communalism. The answer to communal politics lay in an alternative politics of social change and progress.

The Muslim League was the immediate beneficiary of the politics of violence. Jinnah was invited by Wavell to join the Interim Government, which he now did on his own terms. The Congress leadership could cope neither with British ingenuity nor the deadly political game being played by Jinnah. To accommodate the nominees of the Muslim League in the Interim Government, Father and a nationalist Muslim, Ali Zaheer, were asked to leave the ministry. It is surprising that Nehru agreed to this, given his professed commitment to secularism and socialism. Father gave up his six-week stint as a minister and returned to Calcutta. Many political colleagues were of the view that he should have refused to resign. Father said that he had no alternative because Mahatma Gandhi made the request to him to withdraw, evidently at the instance of Nehru.

Father saw the dangers of the evolving situation clearly. He told us that the British Viceroy was presiding over a divided Executive Council—with one faction led by Nehru and the other by Jinnah's associate Liaquat

Ali Khan—and that this was a crucial step towards India's Partition. In fact, one part of the so-called interim cabinet met in one room with Nehru in the chair and the other in another room with Liaquat Ali Khan presiding. After returning to Bengal, Father concentrated on his efforts to combat the virus of communalism afflicting the province. He started a vociferous campaign against the idea of Partition, arguing that it would ruin Bengal and deeply damage India.

Jinnah again won a very important round when the Congress Working Committee accepted in principle the partition of the Punjab on a religious basis at the beginning of 1947. Father felt greatly disturbed by this development. He saw the decision as contrary to Congress ideals and policies articulated over the preceding twenty-five years. He opposed the Congress leadership openly on this and campaigned against it through speeches and articles. By this time, Hindu communal organizations in Bengal and elsewhere in the country were rapidly gaining strength and loudly advocating the Partition of India. Many Congressmen and nationalists capitulated to the prevailing mood and made common cause with them. Father remained resolute. Eventually, in the first few months of 1947, he devoted all his talents and energies to finding a way of keeping Bengal united even if India was otherwise partitioned. In early 1947, he started negotiations with certain leaders of the Bengal Muslim League to this end, with the involvement of several senior leaders of the Bengal Congress as well.

CHAPTER 68

There are, very occasionally, people in this world who cannot be deflected by temptation or pressure from their ideals and principles.

My father was such a person. He would say: 'One who is morally wrong cannot be politically right.' As India's defiled Independence approached, the price he paid for adhering to what he believed to be right was loneliness, which he bore with equanimity, and abuse, which he stoically ignored.

Father's proposal to keep Bengal united—the United Bengal Plan—needed to be considered calmly and with an open mind on its merits. That was not possible for most people because of the communal frenzy then sweeping the subcontinent and the ugly situation in Bengal. Father became completely isolated politically because of his alternative stance.

Most of his friends became enemies, most of his former political allies deserted him, and most of his relatives opposed him either openly or covertly.

The proposal sought to counter the notion that the Hindus and Muslims of the subcontinent comprised two separate and incompatible 'nations' and could not live side by side in the same state. Father would not accept this concept of state-building in post-colonial India. He was firmly of the belief that the ideas, principles and policies of the Indian National Congress ever since its birth were entirely contrary to the nation's carve-up on communal lines. He was emphatic that Partition was no solution to the subcontinent's communal question, that it would merely create hostile armed camps in permanent conflict with one another. Father was an advocate of a federal union to keep India one and whole.

The United Bengal Plan proposed to make Bengal a 'Free State' on the basis of equality between the province's majority and minority communities, and power-sharing in government between their representatives.[32]

A broad-based transitional government would be formed, with equal representation for Muslims and Hindus, to replace the communal Muslim League government. In this new government of Bengal, the chief minister would be a Muslim and the home minister (in charge of police and internal security) would be a Hindu. A 'Bengal Constituent Assembly' to frame the constitution of the Free State would be elected by the existing Bengal legislature and would consist of 30 persons, 16 Muslims and 14 non-Muslims. Muslims and Hindus would have an equal (50/50) share of posts in the Free State's administration and police as well as in any military forces. The elections to constitute the Free State's legislature would be held on the basis of adult franchise and a joint electorate—dispensing with the separate communal electorates put in place by the British—and the seats would be distributed on the basis of existing population proportions. A constituency system would be devised to ensure that winning candidates needed to get at least some support from voters of the community other than their own. The question of joining either India or Pakistan would 'be decided by the Legislature of the Free State of Bengal by a two-thirds majority',

[32]In 1947, Bengal's population was approximately 54 per cent Muslim and 43 per cent Hindu. Ed.

which meant that neither the Muslim nor the Hindu members could take a decision on their own.

Father told us in private conversation that he expected Bengal to remain outside the Indian Union for a decade at most. Thereafter, in her own interests and for very natural reasons of geography among others, Bengal would revert to the Indian Union. Father believed that the United Bengal formula could serve as a template for co-existence in the Punjab and the North-West Frontier Province as well.[33]

Father kept Mahatma Gandhi fully informed about his negotiations with certain Bengal Muslim League leaders. The negotiations took place mostly in our house, 1, Woodburn Park, between January and May 1947. Gandhi made a few constructive suggestions which were duly incorporated into the final version of the United Bengal Plan. Father had a talk with Jinnah as well in May 1947. The latter seemingly agreed to keep Bengal out of Pakistan if Hindu and Muslim leaders of the province could come to a settlement among themselves. Father told Gandhi that he would like to place his proposals personally to a full meeting of the Congress Working Committee and explain its implications. Gandhi assured Father that he would take care of the Congress leaders himself and would send a wire to Father to come to Delhi to meet them, if that was necessary. No such message from Gandhi ever came.

At that critical moment, George Catlin, a British Member of Parliament belonging to the Labour Party[34] was staying with us at Woodburn Park. In February 1947, Lord Mountbatten had become Viceroy of India, replacing Wavell. Father sent the United Bengal Plan signed by himself and Abul Hashim, secretary of the Bengal Muslim League and the other side's chief negotiator, to Mountbatten through George Catlin. Father requested the Viceroy not to give effect to the partition of Bengal even if India was partitioned in the northwest. Mountbatten told Catlin that he was prepared to wait till the last moment and amend the partition plan if the Congress and Muslim

[33]A full account of the United Bengal Plan is in Sisir Bose's biography of Sarat, *Sarat Chandra Bose: Remembering My Father*. The biography was published in 1988 to mark Sarat Bose's birth centenary and released in a second edition in 2014 to coincide with his 125th birthday. The approach and solution proposed by the United Bengal Plan has been deployed in many 'divided societies' across the world in the past several decades, with varying degrees of effectiveness. Ed.

[34]He was also a prominent academic specializing in political theory and political science. Ed.

League leaderships accepted the United Bengal Plan.

At that time we thought Mountbatten was just being diplomatic if not disingenuous. But later, I found among the 'Mountbatten Papers' included in the 'Transfer of Power' documents *two* versions recorded by Mountbatten in London on 28 May for his radio broadcast on the evening of 3 June 1947 announcing the Partition of India. One version ('Broadcast A') was on the basis of the partition agreed on by the Congress and the Muslim League, which included the partition of Bengal. The other version ('Broadcast B') would 'be used... if it appears probable that Bengal will remain unified', according to a despatch marked 'top secret' sent to London from the Viceroy's House, New Delhi, on 31 May 1947. The despatch says: 'One or other of these broadcasts will be played from London and made by the Viceroy from Delhi on 3 June. Broadcast A will be used if it appears probable that Bengal will be partitioned, Broadcast B if it appears probable that Bengal will remain unified.'

Jinnah had apparently agreed to let Bengal remain united provided the Congress also agreed. But the Congress leadership flatly turned down the United Bengal Plan. Nehru, Patel and Rajendra Prasad would not even look at it. When we heard Mountbatten broadcast what we now know to be the first of the two recorded versions on the radio on 3 June, it became clear that the Bose-Hashim blueprint to save Bengal from being divided had failed. We were very surprised that Mahatma Gandhi, after having encouraged Father to proceed with the negotiations with leaders of the Bengal Muslim League, advised the All-India Congress Committee to accept India's partition plan as earlier agreed to by the Congress leadership. It should be mentioned that important Congress leaders of Bengal like Kiran Sankar Roy, Prafulla Chandra Ghosh, Satya Ranjan Bakshi and Kamini Kumar Dutta took part in the negotiations that produced the United Bengal Plan. But once the Congress 'high command' totally opposed it, the Plan was doomed.

Regardless of the consequent political adversity, Father continued with various constructive activities. Due to political differences related to the partition of Bengal, the Indian National Ambulance Corps, which had done such great work in aiding riot victims in 1946, disintegrated at the beginning of 1947. But a determined and dedicated group continued its mission under the banner of 'Azad Hind Ambulance Service' with Father's blessings and support. The Azad Hind Ambulance Service, which was in my charge for many years, did pioneering work in the field of child health and care in Calcutta.

Netaji Bhawan was being used at the time as a rehabilitation camp for INA returnees from Southeast Asia and also as a hostel for some former members of the 'Tokyo Cadets'—a group of 45 boys in their late teens sent by Netaji to Tokyo in 1944 to train as air force pilots. These boys were admitted to various educational and training courses in Calcutta with Father's help.[35]

Father established another institute in the field of education and culture, the Subhas Institute of Culture. He rented a large house on Lower Circular Road for this purpose. The Institute became an important centre of language studies and academic and intellectual activity on a wide range of national and international questions. A section called Netaji Subhas College also functioned there for a short period. Unfortunately, both the institute and the college closed down soon after Father's death in 1950.

However, it is a matter of great satisfaction that the Netaji Research Bureau, conceived and developed since 1957 in accordance with Father's ideas, has over time emerged as an institution of international repute. Father used to warn us repeatedly about 'beginning with a flash and ending in smoke'. Therefore, no ceremonial inauguration was held for the Bureau when it was formed at Netaji Bhawan in 1957 with a mission of serious and sustained study, research and documentation of Netaji's life and work. I feel very satisfied that after four decades of work, the Netaji Research Bureau has shaped up in just the way my father would have wanted.

Father was mortified when the transfer of power took place to partitioned India on the basis of two 'Dominions', India and Pakistan, with a British Governor-General for the Indian Dominion. He was of the view that the Congress leadership sacrificed the ideals, aims and principles of the national movement proclaimed for more than a quarter-century. He said in sorrow that the Congress 'will rue the day when it accepted Dominion Status, conceded Pakistan and demanded partition of provinces.'

[35]Some members of the Tokyo Cadets later served with distinction in the Indian Air Force, and others as senior civilian pilots. One Tokyo Cadet who served in the IAF was Ramesh Sakharam Benegal, uncle of the film director Shyam Benegal. R.S. Benegal was highly decorated for his services during the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War. Ed.

As 15 August 1947 approached, the Congress and the Muslim League prepared to take power in their respective Dominions under the tutelage of the British. Father felt that he had no alternative but to sever his virtually lifelong affiliation with the Congress. He decided to organize an alternative political force for independent India.

For Father, 15 August 1947 was a day of mourning. I have never seen him so downcast as on that day. In the evening, he was sitting as usual at his desk in our south-facing verandah. He was still and pensive. Satya Ranjan Bakshi kept him company for a while. There were noisy celebrations outside. All-India Radio was broadcasting speeches and music to herald the advent of Independence. There were raucous crowds on the streets. I did not turn on the radio in consideration of Father's mental state. Instead, I went out to get a feel of what was going on. As I strolled down the Lower Circular Road, I found truckloads of people going around waving tricolour flags and shouting slogans like 'Hindu-Muslim bhai bhai!' When I returned I found Father still sitting quietly at his desk. I know that one other person behaved very similarly on India's Independence Day—Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi.

CHAPTER 69

The Independence celebrations were short-lived. The rousing speeches and the dancing and singing had barely stopped when a human catastrophe overtook Punjab and Bengal, the two partitioned provinces. It was nothing short of genocide. Millions of people left their homes and hearths on both sides of the new India-Pakistan border in search of safety, or just to survive. Hindus and Sikhs fled towards India and Muslims in the direction of Pakistan. After the holocaust, one Punjab—including my former sites of imprisonment in 1944-1945, Lahore and Lyallpur (Faisalabad)—became almost exclusively Muslim, and the other part which remained in India became almost wholly Sikh and Hindu.[36]

Millions of refugees moved in both directions across the border on foot, on carts or by train. Hundreds of thousands perished during those desperate journeys, slaughtered by marauding bands of fanatics, or dead from exhaustion, hunger and disease. In Bengal, a total forced

[36]In 1947, prior to Partition, the population of undivided Punjab was about 56 per cent Muslim, 29 per cent Hindu and 13 per cent Sikh. Ed.

transfer of populations did not take place as in the Punjab. Even so, hundreds of thousands of homeless and destitute refugees entered West Bengal from East Bengal, generating a social crisis of grave proportions. The repercussions were felt in West Bengal for not years but decades.[37]

At this time, Father gathered together his loyal followers and formed the Socialist Republican Party. He declared that although we had been compelled to accept Partition, as well as Dominion Status, the ideals and aims of our long Independence Movement had to be kept alive. He also warned that many people used Uncle Subhas's name only for opportunistic purposes.

At the beginning of 1947, Father had brought together in Calcutta a convention of former members of the Indian National Army. He wanted them to enter the political life of the country and work unitedly. He had initially wanted the INA veterans to join with Uncle Subhas's pre-war and wartime followers inside India to build a secular, socialist and progressive political movement under the banner of a new party to be called the Azad Hind Party. But sectarianism and opportunism among elements of both the ex-INA personnel and the nationalist Left prevented the emergence of this party. So he was not able to launch a big party immediately after Independence. The former members of the Bengal Volunteer group, led by Satya Ranjan Bakshi and Jyotish Joardar, stood loyally with Father and formed the core of the Socialist Republican Party.

Father was deeply disappointed that Mahatma Gandhi, in spite of his oft-repeated opposition to India's Partition, eventually failed to take a stand. Instead, he meekly submitted to the partition plan worked out by Nehru, Patel, Rajendra Prasad and Jinnah with Mountbatten acting as the go-between. On the eve of the announcement of the partition plan in June 1947, Mahatma Gandhi again spent some time in Bengal. Father would then often discuss the political crisis in the country with him. Father told Gandhiji during one of their last meetings: 'Even at this late hour, if you raise your little finger and say there will be no partition of India, there will be no partition.' Father added that the Congress leaders were after all Gandhiji's followers and they would abide by his wishes. Gandhiji responded: 'No, Sarat, you are wrong. Sardar [Patel]

[37]1.1 million Hindu refugees from East Bengal entered West Bengal in 1947-48. Another one million came in 1950, after the eruption of severe communal violence in East Bengal. Ed.

used to be my yes-man, he is now my no-man! Rajendra Babu [Prasad] has kicked the ladder very well! And as for Jawaharlal, the less said the better!' Father returned downcast from this meeting with Gandhi and narrated the entire conversation to us.

In 1948, Father made important statements on independent India's foreign policy. He was against aligning with either of the two emerging superpower blocs. Ours, he said, must be an independent foreign policy. So we must maintain equidistance from both. Second, in order to bring a spirit of peace and cooperation across borders to the subcontinent and increase the region's weight on the international stage, he advocated the formation of a bloc called the 'United Nations of South Asia' consisting of India, Pakistan, Burma, Nepal and Ceylon. This might include a regional customs union as well as military pacts. He called for a Monroe Doctrine for the Indian Ocean to prevent outside powers from setting up military bases and making military alliances with regional states. In his public speeches both before and after Independence, Father used to advocate a period of national military service for students and youth, not necessarily to make them soldiers but to instil discipline and patriotism.

I was not at home when the news of Mahatma Gandhi's assassination flew across the country on the evening of 30 January 1948. On coming home I found Father trying to get a plane ticket to Delhi to be present at the last rites. He was outwardly calm as usual but I could see that he was deeply distressed. He was saying repeatedly that he must attend the funeral. Asked by press correspondents for his reaction, he replied in the words of Shakespeare: 'When comes such another?'

Since the beginning of 1947, Father was charting an independent line and giving expression to his views frankly and forthrightly. Sardar Patel requested Father, in private correspondence, to return to the Congress, re-join its national leadership and cooperate with his old colleagues in tackling the many difficult problems facing the country. But Father did not agree. He told Patel that since there were differences on fundamentals, he would rather travel alone.

Around this time, Father felt the need for a newspaper in order to reach the public. He had plenty of previous experience in running newspapers. He had been managing director of *Forward*, the paper founded by Deshbandhu C.R. Das. After the latter's death, Father ran the paper until his arrest in 1932. When punitive government action forced the closure of *Forward*, Father and Uncle Subhas issued a new newspaper, *Liberty*, almost overnight. *Forward* and *Liberty* both made a

major contribution to the national movement in Bengal, and in India at large.

However, in 1948, publishing a newspaper was not an easy task for my father. In the 1920s and early 1930s, Father was young and carried the financial burden almost effortlessly. Now he was middle-aged and could not possibly do the same. But he was determined to bring out the newspaper. He first asked for funds from some of his close friends, but the response was not good. He then mortgaged some of his properties, added what he could save from his professional earnings and bought a press in central Calcutta. Work started in right earnest. Despite the relative paucity of finances, Father was able to attract and put together a dedicated and hardworking team. *The Nation* was launched on 1 September 1948. Father was the chairman of the editorial board and the first issue carried his signed editorial. Satya Ranjan Bakshi was the editor, Jitendra Nath Ghosh the managing director and Mohit Kumar Moitra the news editor. *The Nation* created quite a sensation in the newspaper world and the management had trouble meeting the public demand. Father felt very encouraged. In 1949, when I was in England for advanced medical studies, he appointed me as the paper's foreign correspondent and I was initiated into the world of journalism. In 1949, I attended an international editors' conference in Paris representing *The Nation*, and also joined the Indian Journalists' Association in London.

Soon after the end of the war and his release from prison, Father had received a letter from Vienna. A photocopy of a letter from Uncle Subhas to Father, written in Bengali, was enclosed with it. Uncle Subhas had written that letter on 8 February 1943, just before embarking on his three-month journey by submarine from Europe (the port of Kiel in Germany) to East Asia. In the letter, he informed Father about his Austrian wife Emilie and infant daughter Anita, whom he was leaving behind in Europe. My parents had been thinking for quite some time about making a trip to Europe to meet Aunt Emilie and little Anita. Early in 1948, they decided to go on an extended tour of Europe towards the end of the year. I was due to finish my internship of one and a half years, following the completion of my medical degree, around that time. It was decided that I would travel from India with them and then continue with my advanced studies and training in pediatrics in Europe. My two youngest sisters were also taken along.

Father had not been back in Europe since his student days in England from 1911 to 1913. He had long nursed a desire to travel at length and leisure in Europe but had never got the chance to do so. We set out for Europe in autumn 1948. The expense was considerable but we could manage from Father's professional earnings over the previous year.

Jet aircraft had not yet come into use then. So travelling by air to Europe took nearly double the time it does now. The first stop was in Bombay to change planes. Then an American airliner flew us to Rome, with a stop en route in Cairo. We arrived in Rome in the early hours. It was still dark but there was a crowd of reporters and photographers waiting for us at Rome airport. In post-war Europe, Uncle Subhas was a well-known and controversial figure. The trip to Europe by his elder brother Sarat Bose, also a major Indian political leader, was big news. Father welcomed this contact with journalists because he was very keen both to understand the post-war political situation in Europe and to ventilate his own views on India to European audiences. The camera bulbs went off as soon as we landed in Rome and from that point onwards the press chased Father everywhere we went.

We stayed at the Hotel Excelsior in Rome, where Uncle Subhas had stayed during his trips to Rome during the war. Father was quite Europeanized in his lifestyle and especially loved good food, including European cuisine. But he also had certain rules and restrictions. On entering the dining room of all our hotels, he would instruct the staff that beef and pork must not be served to us. Alcohol was also not allowed, and only the finest mineral water was to be served at our table.

Italy is of course a stunning country, packed with historical monuments and museums and dazzling towns and cities. From Rome we went down to Naples and to the beautiful island of Capri. Then we visited Florence, Venice and Milan. Everywhere we went, Father quickly arranged a sightseeing itinerary after speaking to a reputable local travel agency. Italy bowled us over completely. We were charmed by the liveliness of the Italian people and the laughter and gaiety of their everyday life.

The press pursued Father throughout our tour of Italy. A number of interviews were published in Italian newspapers and magazines about India, its politics and its future, in which he candidly expressed his views.

Apart from sightseeing and giving interviews, Father searched for

people who had come into contact with Uncle Subhas in the 1930s and during the war. He searched above all for Pietro Quaroni, who had been the Italian ambassador in Kabul when Uncle Subhas passed through Afghanistan in 1941 on his way to Europe. It was Quaroni who helped secure his arrangements to travel to Germany via the Soviet Union, disguised as an Italian with the fake name of 'Orlando Mazzotta'. Quaroni had sent to Rome a detailed report on his discussions with Uncle Subhas in Kabul in early 1941. When we visited Italy, he was in Paris as the Italian ambassador to France, so we missed meeting him. We met two or three other Italian foreign ministry officials, one of whom was also in Kabul in 1941.[38]

In 1933, Uncle Subhas, quite ill, had arrived in Europe on an Italian ship and had disembarked in Italy. Although he suffered some harassment by the Italian police at the instance of the British secret service, the Italian Government was on the whole not inimical towards India's Independence Movement. Under Mussolini in the 1920s and 1930s, Italy was trying to extend its influence in the Mediterranean region and Africa. The Mediterranean and North Africa were areas of vital interest to Britain, the Mediterranean Sea being the essential maritime corridor to the Middle East and onward to India, the 'jewel in the crown' of the British Empire. A conflict was therefore inevitable between Mussolini's Italy and imperial Britain. Uncle Subhas wanted to take advantage of this clash of interests between the two rival imperialists. During his sojourns in Europe in the 1930s, Uncle Subhas met Mussolini more than once and had discussions with him. Later, when he was stranded in Kabul in February-March 1941 after escaping from India, his old contacts with the Italian foreign office turned out to be most useful. In the 1930s, there were also contacts of a cultural nature between India and Italy. Mussolini gave Rabindranath Tagore a grand reception during the latter's visit to Italy. There was also a big conference in Rome of Indian students based in Europe, which Mussolini inaugurated. During the war, an Italian edition of Uncle Subhas's book, *The Indian Struggle*, was published in 1942, due to the efforts of India's well-wishers in Italian academia.

Our next stop after Italy was Switzerland. We travelled there by train

[38]In 2009, sixty years after Sisir's visit to Italy in 1948, Pietro Quaroni's son Alessandro Quaroni, also a career diplomat, graced the Netaji birthday commemorations at Netaji Bhawan in Calcutta with his wife. Ed.

from Milan. Train travel in Europe was delightful, the distances so much shorter than long-distance journeys in India. At every frontier, two sets of border police checked our papers. Their uniforms were different and so were their languages and manners. They were quite curious about us, especially the women in colourful saris. The trip from Milan to Zurich was through scenic country—mountains and lakes dotted the route, interspersed by long tunnels. The Swiss villages and towns we passed through were incredibly picturesque.

A.C.N. Nambiar, Uncle Subhas's close associate in Germany during the war, was waiting for us at the railway station in Zurich. We stayed in a hotel opposite the station. Nambiar had spent the greater part of his life in Europe. Back in the mid-1920s, when Father was managing director of *Forward*, he sought out Nambiar and appointed him the Europe correspondent of the newspaper. Ever since then, he had written about European affairs in various Indian newspapers. Later, when Uncle Subhas and Pandit Nehru visited Europe, Nambiar became very close and friendly with both of them. He was fluent in German, a most engaging conversationalist, and we were charmed by him. He was Uncle Subhas's deputy in the Indian Independence Movement in Europe during the war. He narrated to us interesting stories of Uncle Subhas's difficult negotiations with the German and Italian governments regarding the Free India Centre and the Indian Legion in wartime Europe.

Father had a great weakness for students. In every European country we visited, he sought out the Indian students, invited them to meals and entertained them. There were a number of Indians studying science and technology in Zurich at that time. Among them were P.N. Dutt, Ambuj Mukherjee and Pramod Banerjee. All of them joined us and in their company we had a great time in Zurich.

Switzerland is a fascinating country made up of different linguistic groups. Zurich is the principal city in northeastern Switzerland, and its people speak German. Berne, which we visited later, is also German-speaking. The picturesque city of Geneva in the west of the country has a different cultural character and the language there is French. On our journey from northern Italy, we had passed through Italian-speaking parts of southern Switzerland. There is also a fourth language, Romansh, which is spoken in the southeastern part of the country. So the Swiss learn to speak two or three languages in their childhood. All official work is carried out in three languages: German, French and Italian.[39] The Indian students we met in Switzerland all spoke either German or French fluently.

We had another unusual experience in Zurich. An Indian gentleman took us to a glider demonstration. The champion Swiss glider pilot, Maurer, gave the demonstration. A number of engine-less lightweight glider planes were lined up in a large open field. We enjoyed watching the glider planes being pulled across the field briskly with a rope and then taking to the air gracefully. The pilot performed various aerobatics and then came down equally gracefully. Then Maurer invited Father to fly with him in a glider! We were rather nervous but Father readily agreed.

The flight went off well, and safely, to our relief. The show had been arranged to invite Father's support to the introduction of glider-flying in India. Gliding, we were told, was very useful in training pilots. Besides, it could become a new sport for our youth.

After Zurich, we went to Berne. There we came to know the entire staff of the Indian Embassy in Switzerland. Nambiar was the counsellor.[40] The ambassador was Dhirubhai Desai, son of Bhulabhai Desai, the chief defence counsel at the Red Fort trial of the three INA officers. The others were Balkrishna Sharma, who had worked for the Azad Hind Radio during the war, his Austrian wife Hella, Soli Batliwala, and Pandit K.A. Bhatta, who had edited the *Azad Hind* journal during the war. While speaking to Mr Sharma, I recalled that I had listened in Calcutta to his broadcasts over Azad Hind Radio from Berlin. Nambiar was his usual ebullient self, narrating many events and anecdotes of the Azad Hind movement in Germany. Balkrishna Sharma, quiet and soft-spoken, added his own recollections. On top of all that, we received first-hand accounts from them of our Aunt Emilie and my little cousin Anita, whom we were soon to meet for the first time in Vienna.

From Berne we took an interesting trip into the heart of the Swiss Alps. We went to the town of Interlaken and then by the mountain railway to the snow-covered Alpine peak of Jungfrau. The view of the mountains and glaciers from Jungfrau was captivating. Father was thrilled.

Our visit to Geneva was interesting from a different point of view. Apart from the usual sightseeing, we went to see the offices of the

[39]Since 1996 Romansh has also been an official language of Switzerland. Ed.
[40]In 1951, he was appointed as the first ambassador of India to the Federal Republic of Germany. Ed.

recently formed United Nations, an impressive palace from where the interwar League of Nations had functioned before World War II. In the 1930s, Uncle Subhas had knocked from door to door at the League of Nations pleading the cause of India's freedom, to no avail. The great powers were only interested in protecting their own interests and settling scores with one another.

At the end of our memorable tour of Switzerland, we came back to Zurich. From there we were to fly to Prague, the capital of Czechoslovakia.

CHAPTER 71

During the 1930s, Uncle Subhas had visited Czechoslovakia a number of times. He established very friendly relationships with intellectuals and political leaders of that country. He visited the Czech spa resort of Karlovy Vary (Karlsbad in German) on a few occasions for medical treatment at its famous hot springs. He met Edvard Benes, foreign minister of Czechoslavakia until 1935 and President from 1935 to 1938, several times and a good rapport was established between them.[41] Uncle Subhas was among the founders of the Indo-Czech Friendship Society formed in Prague in 1934. Professor Vincent Lesny, a prominent Indologist and the director of the Oriental Institute in Prague, became a personal friend. We had come to know that Professor Lesny was still the Oriental Institute's director. Father was very keen to meet him.

When we arrived in Prague from Zurich, there was quite a stir among the airport officials. They took a long time to examine our passports and our luggage. They were particularly perplexed by the large number of saris carried by my mother and sisters. They kept asking us in bewilderment why we had brought such a quantity of dress material.

We were booked into one of Prague's best hotels, the Alcron, located in the centre of the city. On the way from the airport to the hotel, we were struck by the public display of huge pictures of Communist leaders and red flags and slogans. The Communists had seized total power in Czechoslovakia earlier that year, in February 1948. What we were seeing

[41]Dr Benes headed the Czechoslovak government-in-exile in London from 1940 to 1945. He was again President from October 1945 till his death in September 1948. Ed.

in Prague was, we were told, normal in the newly Communist countries of Eastern and Central Europe. We were greatly disappointed by the poor quality of food served at the hotel after our culinary experiences in Italy and Switzerland. The behaviour of the people in general was also quite a contrast. They hardly ever smiled and spoke very little and in a guarded manner. It was already very cold in Prague in November. The attitude of the hotel staff and the people matched the weather. When we went sightseeing we noticed that the government guides too seemed distant and uninterested. The contrast with the bubbly, friendly guides we had encountered in Italy was absolute.[42]

The affection Uncle Subhas had developed for Czechoslovakia during his stays in Europe in the 1930s had several reasons. First, the leaders of the country were sympathetic to the Indian cause. Second, its intellectuals were deeply interested in and respectful of Indian history and culture. Third, the country's achievements in science and technology were really impressive. Fourth, the nature-cure centres such as Karlovy Vary/Karlsbad were very useful in providing relief from his health problems.

During World War II, Uncle Subhas visited Czechoslovakia discreetly, without letting too many people know. He told his associate, A.C.N. Nambiar, that being fully acquainted with the vicious face of British imperialism in India, he wanted to see how the Germans were behaving in an occupied country. He was very disturbed and angered by what he saw during his visit. He said that the German official in charge of Bohemia and Moravia (the Czech lands) struck him as a twentieth-century version of Robert Clive, the man who led the English East India Company's predatory colonization of Bengal in the eighteenth century.[43]

By prior arrangement, Father and all of us visited the Oriental Institute. Professor Lesny received us. By then elderly, he had a learned visage and personality that naturally commanded respect. He had spent quite some time with Tagore in Santiniketan and became the poet's friend. Lesny was one of a number of gifted teachers and intellectuals from various countries whom Tagore assembled at Santiniketan to give

[42]The Alcron Hotel in central Prague was built in art-deco style and opened in 1932. In 1948, the hotel was taken over by the new Communist government, which explains the poor food and service. Today it is a five-star hotel owned by the Radisson chain. Ed.

[43]The official was Reinhard Heydrich, a favourite of Hitler's. In mid-1942 Heydrich was assassinated in Prague by Czech resistance fighters who had been parachuted into occupied Czechoslovakia. Ed.

Visva-Bharati the character he wanted—a truly globally oriented centre of learning. Professor Lesny fired a volley of questions at Father on various historical and archaeological matters regarding India. He asked about the newer excavations at Mohenjo-daro and if it had been possible to decipher and interpret the alphabets and characters discovered there. Father did not know the answers to all the questions. So he made notes and told the professor that he would make enquiries and send him the information.

We could feel instinctively that Professor Lesny held Uncle Subhas in great affection. There was a special reason for this. The Germans arrested the professor after occupying Czechoslovakia. His family felt that if he was not freed he would not survive. When the family came to know that Uncle Subhas was in Berlin, Lesny's son wrote to him requesting him to take up the case with the German authorities. Uncle Subhas intervened and Professor Lesny was released soon after. The Lesny family remembered this with gratitude. Twenty-three years later, in 1971, I visited Prague again during a tour of Europe with my wife, Krishna. On that visit we met Professor Lesny's son, who spoke about the episode with great emotion.

When we were having dinner at the hotel one evening, an Indian gentleman approached us and spoke to Father. He introduced himself as Harin Shah and said he was a journalist, currently press attache at the Indian Embassy in Prague. He had had the chance to visit Formosa (Taiwan) in 1946. Mr Shah wanted to speak to Father and relate to him what he had gathered there about Uncle Subhas. He added that Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel had asked him to make searching enquiries about the reported air crash at Taihoku (Taipei) and submit a report to him. After receiving the report, Patel had asked him to meet Father when possible and brief Father fully.[44]

Father asked the gentleman to see him in his room after dinner and asked me to be present. Shah narrated in great detail what he had been able to gather about the air crash on 18 August 1945. It was clear that the gentleman fully believed, on the basis of his enquiries, that the air crash had taken place and that Uncle Subhas had died from burn injuries sustained in the crash. I could see that Father was suffering intensely as Harin Shah went over the details. He looked grim and his

[44]At the time of this meeting in Prague, Sardar Patel was India's home minister and deputy prime minister. Ed.

face became flushed. However, he did not ask Mr Shah any questions, and neither did I. After the visitor had taken his leave, Father just looked at me quietly. I did not know what to say. Finally, to give him some comfort, I said it was all rubbish and lies and requested him to retire for the night. I don't know if Father was able to sleep that night. I lay awake with a throbbing headache for the greater part of it.

After Prague, our next destination was Vienna. Father and the family's first meeting with Aunt Emilie and little Anita was to take place there. It was an extraordinarily emotional experience. When the plane landed at Vienna airport, it was evening and darkness had fallen. The airport was quite a distance from the city, and it had already been agreed that our aunt would not come there. She would meet us instead at the city air terminal, where arriving air passengers were transported by bus. When we touched down in Vienna I could see that all of us were in a distracted state of mind. I forgot my new camera, which Father had bought for me in Zurich, in the plane. The drive through dark and deserted streets from the airport to the city terminal seemed to take a long time.

As we entered the hall of the terminal, a very dignified European lady, of short stature, walked towards us with slow, steady steps. She exuded calm and grace. There was no need for introductions, we knew each other from photographs. With a gentle smile, she handed an envelope to Father with great politeness. This contained the original of the letter Uncle Subhas had written in Bengali to Father about his wife and daughter in February 1943, just before embarking on his submarine voyage from Europe to the Far East.[45] Father glanced at the letter for just a moment and put it away in his breast-pocket. He had already seen it, and there was no need to read it again. Father and Aunt Emilie just looked at each other for a few moments; neither said anything. Then our aunt welcomed us to Vienna—she spoke fluent English, of course—and Father asked about Anita and the rest of her family. My mother and Aunt Emilie just held each other's hands without saying a word.

Father had been greatly looking forward to seeing Anita that very day. But it was a bit too late for that. Aunt Emilie told us that Anita was in a state of great excitement over the visit of her faraway family. She then came over and spoke to me and my sisters as if we had known each other all our lives. Indicating Father, she said to me: 'It is he [Subhas] plus ten years!' I realized then that I had left my camera

[45]Sarat Bose had received a copy of this letter in India after the war. Ed.

behind in the plane. A telephone call was made to the airport, but it could not be traced.

We drove to our hotel in the centre of Vienna. Aunt Emilie was closeted with my parents in their hotel room for about two hours. Mother presented Aunt Emilie with one of her own Benarasi saris and gold bangles she took off from her own hands to welcome our Austrian aunt into the Bose family.

Father arranged the next day's plans in consultation with Aunt Emilie. It was decided that we would rest in the morning. Our hotel, the Astoria, was in the centre of Vienna. Aunt Emilie lived in a modest flat on the north side of the city with her elderly mother and Anita, who was about to turn six. We would drive there in the afternoon.

Father was worried that Aunt Emilie had to return home across the city alone and late at night. Although over three years had passed since the end of the war, Vienna was not safe for ordinary citizens, especially women. The city was divided into four zones of occupation: American, British, French, and Soviet. But this quiet, strong-willed woman had dealt with all manner of uncertainty and hardship all alone for nearly six years! Father need not have worried so much.

CHAPTER 72

It was quite a long drive from the Hotel Astoria on fashionable Karntnerstrasse to Aunt Emilie's flat in the eighteenth district of Vienna. Aunt Emilie took some time in the morning to clean and arrange her apartment for our visit. She sent Anita away to a neighbour's place. When we arrived in the afternoon, Anita was not there. Aunt Emilie's mother broke down after meeting Father. She did not speak English. Aunt Emilie told us later that she was carried away by Father's striking resemblance to Uncle Subhas. After a while, Anita came bouncing into the apartment. She wore a shy smile as she was introduced to us one by one. She stared at Father for a while and then hugged him closely. She appeared very happy to have finally found a doting 'Onkel'. My parents had difficulty holding back their tears.

All of us were immediately struck by the striking resemblance Anita's face and smile bore to Uncle Subhas's. She did not yet speak any English and kept asking questions in German. Aunt Emilie acted as the interpreter as we chatted away with Anita.

Anita's grandmother, whom she called 'Omama', was just like an Indian grandmother. She kept pressing coffee and cakes on us. Omama was a wonderful cook and prepared various Viennese specialties for us during our visit. She also talked non-stop in German.

Aunt Emilie was our companion and guide when we went sightseeing in Vienna. We went to cafes, restaurants and concerts, and we talked and talked. Vienna was Uncle Subhas's favourite city. He spent much time in Vienna in the 1930s, and underwent major surgery there in 1935. His most important activity in Vienna was the writing of his book, *The Indian Struggle*. And, of course, it was in Vienna that he found his life-partner Emilie Schenkl in 1934. In the preface of his book, only she was acknowledged by name. He also came to Vienna during the war; the last time was in December 1942, just after Anita was born. When Anita was growing up, she would often ask her mother why her father went away. In due course, she found the answer.

Father was very keen to have a family photograph taken on Anita's sixth birthday, 29 November 1948. It was decided we would go to the same studio where Uncle had his photograph taken for his book in 1934. The studio was duly located with Aunt Emilie's help and the photo taken.

During our Vienna sojourn, Father was constantly deliberating about Aunt Emilie and Anita's future. He tried to find out Aunt Emilie's thoughts in this regard. It was tentatively agreed that Father would complete the necessary arrangements and then bring them over to India. Father took the first steps on his return to India. He decided that an apartment would be set aside for Aunt Emilie in the building he was planning to construct on the plot of land behind Netaji Bhawan. He told me that although the proposed building was meant for public purposes, he would make this one exception for Subhas's family. He said that as a European woman, Aunt Emilie would prefer to have her own autonomous establishment.

The plans did not fructify because of my father's untimely death in February 1950. After Father's passing, Aunt Emilie gave up the idea of coming to live in India. She instead decided to continue to earn her livelihood in Vienna and bring up Anita on her own.[46]

[46]Emilie Schenkl-Bose never visited India (she died in 1996), but she remained in constant touch all her life with some members of the Bose family, particularly Sisir and his wife Krishna, and closely followed developments in India. Anita first visited India in 1960-61 and has been back many times since. Ed.

An old family friend of ours, Frau Hedy Fulop-Miller, was also a resident of Vienna. In 1936, she had visited India and stayed with us. All of us went over one afternoon to meet her at her flat in the Soviet zone of the city. One side of her large living-room was set up and decorated in Indian style. Mrs Fulop-Miller was deeply interested in Indian philosophy and music. She was herself a very accomplished singer and in her youth had been an opera singer in Budapest.

We sought out the famous Viennese surgeon, Professor Demel, who had operated on Uncle Subhas's gall-bladder in 1935. The professor was also a violinist and entertained us with his own music at his home. He proudly showed us an autographed copy of *The Indian Struggle* presented to him by Uncle Subhas.

Another kindred spirit we found in Vienna was Dr R. Madan, an eye specialist, who had taken part in the Free India movement in Germany during the war. He arranged for Father to have his eyes examined by his teacher Professor Pillat, a famous ophthalmologist of Vienna.

In the 1930s, Uncle Subhas had taken the initiative in the formation of the Austria-India Association, intended to promote trade relations between the two countries. An old Austrian friend of his from that time, Otto Faltis, got in touch with Father in Vienna. During the war, Faltis assisted Uncle Subhas in his negotiations with the German Government. Father obtained from Faltis some inside information about the Germans. Later, Mr Faltis donated some original correspondence with Uncle Subhas and a collection of photographs to the National Archives of India in Delhi.

One morning, my two sisters and I were strolling in the city centre of Vienna. All of a sudden, a tall and hefty young European gentleman approached us and started speaking in fluent Hindustani. After he came to know who we were, he insisted on coming with us to the hotel to meet our parents. The gentleman was an Austrian by the name of Leopold Fischer. During the war, he had declared he was Indian and adopted an Indian name, Ramchandra Sharma. He was a most interesting character. He was a linguist and could speak a number of languages fluently. He was greatly interested in Indian philosophy and the Hindu religion and had studied in the Department of Oriental Studies at the University of Vienna. From that point on, he latched on to us in Vienna and was quite useful because he knew everything worth seeing and doing in the city. He came over to India a bit later and decided to become a monk in the Ramakrishna order. Before adopting the

ascetic life he spent a few days with us, and ate his last meal before his renunciation of the worldly life with my mother. His wartime activities were intriguing. A.C.N. Nambiar told us how he insisted on being taken into the Indian Legion despite not (really) being Indian and argued at length with Uncle Subhas till he got accepted. He was arrested with other members of the Legion in France by the British late in the war. His captors were baffled to find a European in the Indian Legion and were thoroughly confused about his identity.

After a joyous stay in Vienna, the time for our departure arrived. But the new family relationship established during that visit in late 1948 was to last the rest of our lives. My little cousin Anita had captured our hearts. We all wanted her to remain close to us as she grew up. With this wish in our hearts, we left one morning for Paris by the Orient Express.

In addition to our usual luggage, we were loaded with numerous packages containing top-class Viennese crockery that Father had purchased. Father had this habit of collecting high-quality furniture, clothing, crockery and mementos on his travels. He also had a suit made at a top Viennese tailoring establishment.

Vienna has over a long period of time been a great centre of medicine. Uncle Subhas had talked about this often. He would say that Indian students going to the West for higher studies were often under the impression that England was Europe, which was very far from the case. He wanted Indian students to go to the countries of continental Europe, not merely for studies and training, but to learn about the diversity of European cultures. I had already decided that I would do at least one-half of my advanced training in pediatrics in Europe. When I saw that I had family in Vienna, I made up my mind to spend six months to a year at the world-famous University Children's Clinic of Vienna.

My parents left me in London in January 1949 when they went back to India and I received the first phase of my training in England, in teaching hospitals in London and Sheffield. But my desire to study in Vienna as well was fulfilled when I was admitted to the Vienna Academy of Medicine in the latter half of 1950. I made a pact with Anita that I would learn German before coming to Vienna while she would pick up some English. I did manage to acquire a working knowledge of German but lost the race to Anita. Within a few months, she started writing letters to me in English.

CHAPTER 73

Paris was twenty-four hours by train from Vienna. The famous Orient Express, in which we travelled, ran before the war from Paris to Istanbul. But now it terminated at Vienna. After a most interesting journey through the heart of Europe, we arrived in Paris. In Paris, arrangements were made to get the precious china bought in Vienna packed properly and shipped safely to India.

Paris, of course, is not just a famed European city, but a world centre of arts and culture. It was after seeing the wonderful museums showcasing history in Vienna and Paris in late 1948 that I started dreaming of establishing a similar museum in Calcutta. I was especially influenced by the display of Napoleon's life, rule and era in the Palace of Versailles near Paris. The idea that led to the establishment a decade later of Netaji Bhawan's museum presenting Uncle Subhas's life was born in my head at this time.

Sightseeing in Paris was like taking a rich lesson in Europe's history and culture. Beyond that, we looked out for Indian links. We met two elderly gentlemen who participated in the revolutionary movement for Indian Independence during World War I. One was Madhav Rao.

In 1935, Uncle Subhas had met the French writer and savant Romain Rolland in Switzerland and written a very interesting article about the meeting. Rolland had profound knowledge of Indian history and philosophy. His works include a biography of Ramakrishna Paramahansa.

Rolland was among the greatest European thinkers of his time. Uncle Subhas admired him immensely. Father was also very fond of Rolland's writings and quoted from them often. He asked me to read two books by Rolland at the time he was in detention in our bungalow at Kurseong in the mid-1930s: the novel *Jean-Christophe* and *I Will Not Rest*, an engaging collection of articles.

Romain Rolland had passed away at the end of 1944, but we came to know that his widow was in Paris. One morning we went to her flat. She told us that Rolland's diaries would be published after necessary editing. A few years later, when his diaries of the 1930s were published, I found that Rolland had written a very sympathetic account of his meeting with Uncle Subhas. It was very interesting how this sage-like European intellectual perceived the stormy petrel of India's Independence Movement. He thought that the youthful Indian leader was a deep thinker and exceptionally intelligent. This opinion became even stronger once Rolland read Uncle Subhas's book, *The Indian Struggle*. Rolland felt that the book carried the imprint of a statesman. Uncle Subhas told Rolland frankly that he was prepared to take recourse to armed struggle, if that was necessary for India's liberation. He said that for a subject-country like India, war between the great powers was not an unmixed evil and such a war might provide a golden opportunity to strike for India's freedom.

We had never been to the opera before. So we went to the world-famous National Academy of Music in Paris to have our first taste of it. We were late and had to wait for an intermission. In Europe one cannot enter the theatre while a performance is in progress. There was pin-drop silence till the end, followed by resounding applause and cries of 'Encore!' from the audience.

When we were in Paris, the General Assembly of the United Nations was in session there. The chief of the Soviet delegation, Andrey Vyshinsky, was dominating the proceedings. He was a lawyer and a powerful speaker. Guest tickets were arranged and all of us sat through a session. Vyshinsky was speaking in Russian but there was simultaneous translation into English, which we heard through earphones. Father really enjoyed the experience.[47]

After Paris, our next destination was Dublin. As Bengalis and Indians, we felt a very special kinship with Ireland. We had a common enemy, the British Empire. The Irish, colonized and oppressed for centuries, achieved freedom after a long and bitter struggle against Britain that climaxed in guerrilla war between 1919 and 1921 following the famous 'Easter Rising' of 1916. As I have said earlier in the book, Uncle Subhas visited Ireland in early 1936 and was able to forge a special relationship between the freedom fighters of the two countries. He often regretted that so many Indians visited London but did not go to Dublin. If they went, they could see and even meet men and women who had successfully challenged the world's most powerful imperialist nation.

In 1936, Uncle Subhas had gone from France to Ireland. We took the same route, the difference being that we travelled by plane. Uncle

[47] Andrey Vyshinsky was then the Soviet Union's deputy foreign minister. He became foreign minister in March 1949 and held that post until March 1953. A close associate of Stalin, he was the notorious legal mastermind of Stalin's bloody purges in the second half of the 1930s. Ed.

Subhas on arrival had gone first to the city of Cork in southern Ireland. The Irish nationalist mayor of Cork, Terence MacSwiney, went on hunger strike in a London prison in 1920 and died there after 74 days without food. His sacrifice was emulated in 1929 by the Bengali revolutionary Jatindra Nath (Jatin) Das, who died in prison in Lahore after 62 days on hunger strike, at the age of twenty-four. Uncle Subhas had started his visit to Ireland by offering flowers at MacSwiney's grave and meeting his family.[48]

Uncle Subhas had met Eamon de Valera, the tallest leader of Ireland, twice in Dublin and later once in London. De Valera had already read Uncle Subhas's book, *The Indian Struggle*, when the two leaders met. Uncle Subhas, on his part, was very well-versed in Irish history, particularly the history of the Irish struggle for freedom. The two men were thus close to each other in spirit even before they met.

The Indian-Irish Independence League had arranged a big reception in Dublin for Uncle Subhas. Madame Maud Gonne MacBride, the legendary Irish freedom fighter, chaired the meeting. The gentleman who moved the vote of thanks brought the house down when he said that he was looking forward to the day when the mayor of Dublin would be barred from entering England. This was a reference to Uncle Subhas, a former Mayor of Calcutta, not being allowed to enter England by the British Government.

We arrived in Dublin in the biting cold of December. The buildings in Dublin appeared to be somewhat dilapidated compared to those in other European cities and the shops too looked rather ordinary. But the people were generally friendly.

Father met Éamon de Valera, Ireland's tallest leader, at the *Dail*, the Parliament House. We all went with him. De Valera remembered and spoke about Uncle Subhas with great warmth and affection. When I mentioned to him that Uncle Subhas had thanked him and the Irish Red Cross in a wartime radio broadcast for offering humanitarian assistance during the Bengal Famine of 1943-44, he was very excited and touched. He specifically asked me to send him the text of that broadcast.[49] I took

[48]MacSwiney, 1879-1920, was a poet and playwright in addition to being a political activist. In 1929, Jatin Das's funeral procession in Calcutta was led by Subhas Chandra Bose. Hundreds of thousands participated in the procession. Ed.

[49]The Irish Famine of the mid-nineteenth century was very important to the subsequent development of the freedom movement of Ireland. Ed.

photographs of Eamon de Valera with my family and also one of him separately. Later, I sent him the latter photograph from London which he graciously returned with his autograph.

Madame Maud Gonne MacBride invited us to her home. We were greatly looking forward to meeting this famous heroine of the Irish national movement. In 1913, Father had met her in Paris, where she was then living in exile. We were completely charmed by her. She was quite elderly[50] but she spoke with great clarity. Her eyes were bright and a warm smile never left her face. I felt that ours was a reunion of two distinguished families of freedom fighters. Her son Sean MacBride was then the foreign minister of Ireland. I remember one comment Madame MacBride made during our conversation. She said that the peoples of India and Ireland simply wanted to live in freedom with dignity, and neither craved wealth or power.

Ireland's president, Sean O'Kelly, invited Father and the family to the presidential residence. Father had invited Indian students in Dublin to a get-together at our hotel at the same time that evening. I stayed behind at the hotel to receive the guests and thus missed the presidential invitation. President O'Kelly was also a veteran freedom fighter and an admirer of Uncle Subhas. He took my parents and sisters around the presidential mansion himself. He lived in two rooms in one corner of the mansion. The greater part of the mansion was a museum of the Irish freedom struggle where large portraits of Irish revolutionaries and martyrs were on display. At the end of the visit, President O'Kelly told Father that the doors of the Irish presidential residence were always wide open for the Bose family of India.

We had a very pleasant evening with the Indian students in Dublin. Father made enquiries individually about their studies and future careers.

When we took off from Dublin airport for our next destination, the weather was mostly clear. But when we arrived over our destination, the city was enveloped in thick fog and the plane kept circling, unable to land. When we finally landed, it was dark and there was a constant drizzle. It was grey and gloomy as we drove from the airport to our hotel. This was London.

[50]Once the 'muse' of the poet W.B. Yeats, she was 82 years old in 1948 and died in 1953. Ed.

CHAPTER 74

Father perked up on arriving in London. He had returned to a favourite place of his youth! He was very excited to see how things had changed since he had come to London as a student thirty-five years earlier. He had lived in the Hampstead area of north-west London while studying for the Bar. He wrote to my mother in Calcutta very regularly and in great detail about his life in London. Mother had two fat albums of picture-postcards sent by Father from London between 1911 and 1913. One morning we set out for Hampstead to locate the house where he had lived. We searched thoroughly but could not find the address: 86, South Hill Park. Eventually, a resident of the neighbourhood came to our aid. When we told him the address, he said that the house had been obliterated during the London 'Blitz', the German air force's sustained bombing campaign of 1940-41.

In our hotel in London we were constantly surrounded by crowds of Indians—long-term residents, students, journalists. There were doctors and lawyers and businessmen. London had a much larger Indian community than any of our previous stops. A number of Indian organizations had been working there since the years of our freedom struggle—the India League, Swaraj House, Indian Workers' Association, the Indian Majlis and others. There was also an Indian Journalists' Association.

A series of public meetings was held, big and small. A large public meeting was held at Caxton Hall in central London. It was presided over by Lord Fenner Brockway, the famous pacifist, anti-fascist and anti-colonialist leader and Labour Party parliamentarian. Fenner Brockway campaigned all his life against imperialism in India and other parts of Asia and Africa. Father made a long and eloquent speech at the Caxton Hall meeting chaired by Brockway on Indian and global politics.[51]

The Indian Journalists' Association organized a luncheon meeting. Meetings were also arranged by Swaraj House and the Indian Workers' Association. The thrust in Father's speeches and interviews in England was his programme of building up a united opposition platform in India.

In regard to independent India's foreign policy, he reiterated his call for a South Asia regional bloc to be called the United Nations of South Asia. There was a large press conference attended by media from all over the world in our hotel at which Father spoke and answered questions for over two hours. Indian students surrounded Father all the time and he entertained them lavishly.

The Indian high commissioner in London at the time was V.K. Krishna Menon. During his European tour, Father had sharply criticized the working of Indian diplomatic missions abroad, particularly India House in London. He had received information, often supported by documents, of irregularities and corruption in our missions abroad, especially in London. *The Nation* had published some of these disclosures. Father had demanded that our Government make searching enquiries into the reports and allegations and take action. Krishna Menon invited us to lunch at India House.[52] It was a somewhat awkward lunch because of Father's outspoken campaign against Krishna Menon.

Father wanted to select and appoint foreign correspondents for *The Nation* during his European tour. In Switzerland he arranged that A.C.N. Nambiar, Netaji's associate and a veteran journalist, would write a regular column. He appointed a young woman, Shirley Catlin, as the paper's London correspondent. He also selected a correspondent to report from Washington, DC, the capital of the United States.[53]

Upon returning to India, Father appointed me as the London-based foreign correspondent of *The Nation*. I think he wanted me to have an apprenticeship in journalism and writing in addition to my medical studies. I had a curious experience during a journalistic mission. In November 1949 Father asked me to attend an editors' conference in Paris on behalf of *The Nation*. I was accompanied by Tarapada Basu, London correspondent of the Bengali daily *Anandabazar Patrika*. We went by boat across the English Channel. We had just boarded the steamer at Dover for Calais when two men accosted me, amiably enough, introduced themselves as officers from Scotland Yard by reversing the lapels of their jackets and asked about my travel plans. Tarapada Basu was greatly disturbed by this intrusion. I had thought that I was not under police surveillance in England. I realized I was wrong.

[51]Fenner Brockway was born in Calcutta in 1888. He died in 1988, a few months short of his centenary. Ed.

[52]The building on London's Aldwych, close to the London School of Economics, that houses the Indian high commission in London. Ed.

[53]Shirley Catlin, aged eighteen at the time, was the daughter of George Catlin and Vera Brittain. George Catlin, a political scientist and MP, was the man who carried Sarat Bose's 'United Bengal Plan' to Mountbatten in May 1947. Vera Brittain was a famous pacifist and feminist writer. Later, their daughter, by then Shirley Williams, became a prominent British politician. Ed.

When the time came for Father to return to India, he became concerned about arranging good lodgings for me in London. I felt I could do this myself with the help of friends in London. But Father insisted on making the arrangements himself and we started looking for a place for me to stay while studying in London. Indian and particularly Bengali students would cluster together in a certain area in London and try to live exactly as they did at home. But Father held a different view: 'When in Rome, do as the Romans do,' he would say. He told me there was no point in coming to a foreign country only to remain self-isolated in our own little ghetto. Father insisted that I live away from the 'Indian colony' and preferably as a boarder in an English house. He eventually found a place for me on Frognal, in the Hampstead area of northwest London where he had lived as a student.

I became a lodger in a house owned by a strong-willed but affectionate elderly English lady. I thought that the place was expensive and also at some distance from the children's hospital on Great Ormond Street, where I would take my training. But Father would not budge. Lucy Whyman, my landlady, was *very* English but she looked after me just like an Indian grandmother. I learned much about middle-class English society from her and her Irish housekeeper, Elisabeth Sales.[54]

After settling me in, my parents accompanied by my two sisters left for India via Paris, Rome and Cairo in January 1949. I remained in London for advanced training in pediatrics.

During the return stopover in Paris, Father managed to meet Pietro Quaroni. Quaroni, now Italy's ambassador to France, had preserved in his personal files a secret message for Father that Uncle Subhas had sent from Berlin to Kabul in May 1941. Quaroni gave a copy of the message to Father, which had contained very important and urgent information. Father never received this message in Calcutta. Father could not ascertain if those who had received that top-secret communication from Uncle Subhas acted in accordance with the instructions in the message.

[54]Hampstead is one of the best residential neighbourhoods of London. Frognal is a long, winding street that runs between Finchley Road and Hampstead High Street. A half-century later, Sisir's son Sumantra, the editor of this volume, also lived on Frognal in Hampstead for a year in 2002-03, though not at the same address as Sisir. So by a remarkable coincidence three generations of Boses—Sarat, Sisir and Sumantra—lived in Hampstead, Sarat and Sisir as students in 1911–13 and 1949-50, respectively and Sumantra as a young academic at the London School of Economics in 2002-03. Ed.

Father wrote to me regularly in England despite his busy schedule. Apart from discussing my studies, he wrote about his political work at home and gave me various tasks to do in England. These assignments were quite interesting. I had to meet various people on his instructions—Members of Parliament like Richard Crossman, lawyers like D.N. Pritt, foreign journalists and businessmen. Father was also greatly interested in the Chinese Revolution. The Chinese Red Army under Mao Zedong was then advancing on all fronts and about to seize state power in China.

But the information reaching India directly from China about this was meagre. On Father's instructions, I went down to the office of the New China News Agency in East London and arranged for the despatch of news on a regular basis to *The Nation* in Calcutta.[55]

After completing a three-month course in advanced medicine in London I moved to Sheffield, where I got the opportunity to work under R.S. Illingworth, a young and brilliant professor of pediatrics. I feel I learned the fundamentals of pediatrics from Professor Illingworth. However, in Sheffield, a provincial city in the middle of England, I felt rather isolated (compared to how I felt living in London), especially from events at home in India. Fortunately, I did have three Indian colleagues working with me in the children's hospital there: Sudhindranath Majumdar, a former fellow-student at the Calcutta Medical College, Birendranath Dasgupta, a brilliant young doctor from Darbhanga in Bihar, and M.V. Phadke, a very friendly colleague from Pune. We studied together, shared our joys and sorrows and also mingled with a small group of Indians studying engineering and technology in Sheffield. Together, we made trips to the beautiful countryside of the English Midlands and kept each other's spirits up.

All of a sudden, I received news one day that Father had suffered a heart attack. My first impulse was to pack up and go home. But Father wrote to me to say that I must not think of returning home without completing my training. He said repeatedly that there was

[55]Richard Crossman was an MP and leading member of the left-wing of the Labour Party. In the 1960s he first became chairman of the Labour Party and then a cabinet minister. Dennis Nowell Pritt was a prominent barrister and Labour Party politician. He defended Ho Chi Minh in the early 1930s against a French request to extradite the Vietnamese leader from Hong Kong, and in the early 1950s he represented top Kenyan nationalist leaders being prosecuted by the British Government. The New China News Agency is better-known as Xinhua, the official press agency of the People's Republic of China. Ed.

no cause for anxiety or panic. My intention was to spend four years in Europe—two in England and two on the Continent. I had started taking lessons in German in London, which I continued in Sheffield. I remembered what Uncle Subhas used to say: England was not Europe and it was important for us Indians to forge strong links with the nations of continental Europe. However, on receipt of news of Father's illness I decided to cut down my intended four-year stay. Father was as positive as ever. He wrote to me from India: 'I have many more years to live and work.'

CHAPTER 75

Eight years in prison—1932 to 1935, and 1941 to 1945—did great damage to my father's health. I was worried because I was not sure that he could cope with this latest attack. I felt somewhat relieved that he was in the hands of my doctor uncle Sunil, who was one of the top cardiologists in the country. So I knew that the medical treatment would be top-notch. But I knew also that rest, physical as well as mental, was essential for patients of heart disease. We could perhaps impose a degree of physical rest on Father. But what about mental ease? Father was deeply concerned about the state of the country and the way it was being led and managed. That aside, he had been totally reckless about his personal finances. He had happily added to his personal liabilities by launching *The Nation* newspaper. All these thoughts kept revolving in my head. I asked myself again and again what I should do. I knew that Father would not listen to anyone in the family when it came to his public duties. He insisted he would get well. In his letters he sent me his medical reports regularly—both favourable and unfavourable—along with instructions about various other things.

My sojourn in Sheffield was very worthwhile from the professional point of view. This six-month training was necessary before I could be admitted to an even more advanced course at the Great Ormond Street children's hospital in London. In Professor R.S. Illingworth, who had just returned from a stint in the United States, I found the ideal teacher.[56]

Living in a small city like Sheffield had other advantages of its

[56]Dr Illingworth is the author of numerous pioneering volumes on child medicine, many of which are required reading for trainees even today. Ed.

own. I could get close to English people and share their thoughts and experiences. London, while historic and cosmopolitan, was just too large and impersonal for that. In October 1949, I returned to London from Sheffield and joined the course at the 'Hospital for Sick Children' on Great Ormond Street. Among our teachers were Professor Alan Moncrieff, Martin Bodian, a great pathologist, and Denis Browne, an outstanding pediatric surgeon. My fellow-students were of many nationalities: Irish, German, Italian, Swiss and Scandinavian, among others, and it was a great cross-cultural experience to train alongside them. I enjoyed my course at Great Ormond Street and I could see that I was rapidly gaining real insight into the subject which was to be my professional specialization as a doctor.[57]

Well before I finished in London, I started making enquiries about training in one or two of the leading centres of pediatric medicine on the Continent. I was offered the position of guest assistant to Professor Eduard Glanzmann at the Children's Hospital in Berne, Switzerland. Dr Glanzmann was a leading figure in European pediatrics, having made original contributions to the study and diagnosis of blood diseases in children. I moved to Switzerland in April 1950. I had of course visited Switzerland in late 1948 with my parents. It was a different order of experience to live and work there. The country had a population more or less equal to Calcutta's. It was really admirable how the Swiss built up a reasonably prosperous country by utilizing all resources at their disposal and through hard work.

After Father's death in Calcutta in February 1950, I cut down my planned stay in continental Europe from two years to one. Vienna of course had a special attraction for me, for obvious reasons. In the saddest time of my life, I found some solace in the company of Aunt Emilie and her family. But secondly, Vienna had a great tradition in pediatrics. I sought training at the University Children's Hospital there, associated with Clemens von Pirquet, a great name in pediatrics, and

[57]Professor Sir Alan Moncrieff, who was English, was appointed the first Nuffield Chair in Child Health at the University of London in 1946 and was knighted for his services to child medicine in 1964. Martin Bodian was born and grew up in Vienna and qualified in pediatric medicine there. He left Vienna as a young man when the Nazis took over Austria in 1938 and spent the rest of his life and professional career in London. Sir Denis Browne was Australian by origin. In addition to his knighthood, he was also awarded the Legion D'Honneur by the government of France for his professional contributions. Ed.

at the Vienna Academy of Medicine. I received a positive response, and from Berne I moved to Vienna.

In Vienna, I became the sole male member of a family consisting of three generations of women. To the elder Mrs Schenkl (Omama) I was the Indian grandson who gorged on her cooking: goulash, schnitzel, apfelstrudel. To Aunt Emilie, I was simultaneously nephew and daily companion. To cute little Anita, I was a prized playmate whom she would—quite literally—beat up during our games.

When I had been still in Sheffield, Father informed me that Uncle Sunil wanted to send him to a leading Swiss clinic for treatment and rest. A clinic was selected in a lovely village called Glion, near Lausanne. I felt happy when I received this news. I knew it was not possible for Father to have the rest he needed in Calcutta. I was even happier when Father informed me that he would visit London with Mother before returning home to India from Switzerland. He asked me to fix up an appointment with a good cardiologist in London and take a short break from my work so I could be with them in London.

At the same time in mid-1949 that Father decided to come to Europe again, he also took another very important decision. The South Calcutta seat in the West Bengal Legislative Assembly was lying vacant and a by-election was due. He decided to run for the seat. As we know, since 1948, he had been working on building an alliance of progressive nationalist forces to take on the Congress. In contesting the by-election, Father threw down a direct challenge to the ruling party on his home turf. But the election was notified to be held during the time he would be away in Europe for medical treatment. He nonetheless decided to fight the election in absentia. He issued an appeal to the electorate identifying the main issues before the country and asking for their support.

In Sheffield, I continued to receive letters from Father in Switzerland, with news of his health as well as preparations for the election in Calcutta. After his arrival at Glion, Father arranged to have Aunt Emilie and Anita over from Vienna to spend some time together in Switzerland. My parents were very happy to have this opportunity to see them again so soon after the first meeting in Vienna in late 1948. There appeared to be significant improvement in Father's health in Switzerland and I became hopeful that he was on the road to recovery.

I received *The Nation* by airmail regularly but the news was invariably a bit outdated. Father's close associates—Jitendra Nath Ghosh, Moni Mohan Chakrabarty, Harendra Nath Sengupta, Satya Ranjan Bakshi,

Mohit Kumar Moitra and others—conducted an effective election campaign in his absence. *The Nation* played a key role in the campaign. Within hours of the completion of the count I received a telegram in Sheffield from Calcutta: Father had won a massive victory.[58]

My parents arrived in London a few days later. I met them at London airport. Father seemed to be in fine fettle, but Mother looked somewhat tired and pensive. Father had got a room booked for me in their hotel in central London. His programme in London was packed with meetings with dignitaries, press interviews, and discussions with Indian community organizations. It was almost impossible for me to get hold of him in private. But Mother and I often sat quietly in their hotel suite and talked about a range of topics—family and personal matters and, of course, politics. I had never talked with my mother as frankly and freely before. I think she spoke in large part on Father's behalf. She told me that I should make a very careful, considered decision regarding my eventual marriage, without any rush or hurry, as the choice of a life-partner was extraordinarily important. My parents also seemed to have taken it for granted that I would enter public life sooner or later and they advised me to prepare myself meticulously for that.

When I bade goodbye to my parents at London airport, Father looked quite fresh and cheerful. I heard that soon after their arrival in Bombay, Father had rushed into a tour of south India. Mother wrote to me that Father was again over-exerting himself. The cardiologist to whom I took Father in London was, I think, a bit too liberal with him. After examining Father carefully, he more or less advised Father to continue with his normal activity. It could be that the specialist did not quite realize what normal activity in India meant for a public figure of Father's standing. Whenever I wrote to him to slow down and be careful, he wrote back: 'I have many more years to live and work.' Another favourite phrase was: 'I am a racing horse, I shall die galloping!'

In August 1949, while addressing a public meeting on the Calcutta Maidan under the Ochterlony Monument,[59] Father had another major

[58] Sarat Bose polled 19,300 votes, almost 80 per cent of the total. His Congress rival got 5,570 votes. Prime Minister Nehru came to Calcutta to personally campaign for the Congress in this election. In 1952, Sisir's widowed mother Bivabati won the South Calcutta seat and became one of three elected women members of the 238-member West Bengal Legislative Assembly. Ed.

[59] built 1828, renamed Shaheed Minar in 1969 in honour of the martyrs of India's freedom struggle. Ed.

heart attack. I was informed in England that the attack was a mild one, probably to spare me anxiety. After some time, Father gave me the news himself. This time Uncle Sunil was very strict and insisted that Father obey medical orders. In late 1949 the United Socialist Conference was held at Netaji Bhawan. Father presided but could not personally deliver his address. Hundreds of delegates from all over India participated in the conference, representing various parties and organizations. The United Socialist Organization of India was formed at the conference and Father elected its national president. Back in London from Sheffield in early October 1949, I continued to receive his letters regularly. He always sounded positive and confident.

At the start of 1950, communal riots again broke out in East Bengal. Father was mortified. Having failed in 1947 to prevent the partition of Bengal, he spent the last weeks of his life deliberating on what to do about the post-Partition fratricide.

I continued with my daily work at the Hospital for Sick Children on Great Ormond Street in central London. On 21 February 1950, I was getting ready to leave for the hospital from my Hampstead lodgings after breakfast when, almost simultaneously, a telegram arrived and the telephone rang. The telegram from my older brother read: 'Father passed away after an hour's illness. May God give you strength'. The phone call was from Tarapada Basu, London correspondent of *Anandabazar Patrika*. He asked me to be calm and then said in Bengali: 'Sisir, our Saratbabu has left us.' Then I saw that *The Times* of London, lying on the doorstep, had an obituary of my father.

I was calm but went numb. Tarapada Basu and his wife kept me that day at their flat, which was nearby. I tried to imagine what was happening at home in Calcutta. I sent a cable inquiring after my mother's health and asking what I should do. I thanked Providence that I never saw my father on a sick-bed. When his call from the Divine Mother came, he departed like the hero he had always been.

How many families have been as blessed as the Boses of India, to have Subhas and Sarat born into the same family? With my father's death in 1950, the most glorious chapter in the history of the Boses of India came to a close. That glory was defined not by wealth or by power, but by selfless service and sacrifice at the altar of Mother India.

That is because Subhas and Sarat were sons of the Bose family only nominally. They were really sons of Mother India. All of India's people, hundreds of millions of men, women and children, were as much their kith and kin as we. The two brothers made the country's sorrow their own and sacrificed their lives for its liberation and redemption. In the process, they attained immortality.

Still, a mere mortal like me was left with something not insubstantial, even after losing my uncle when I was twenty-five and my father when I was thirty. In the words of the English poet G.K. Chesterton:

It is something to have wept as we have wept,
It is something to have done as we have done,
It is something to have watched when all men slept
And seen the stars which never see the sun.

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