

THE GANDHI-BOSE CONFLICT IN RELATION TO THE INDIAN FREEDOM MOVEMENT

P.R. Pillay
Department of History
University of Durban-Westville
4000 Durban

Gandhi se naam is amper sinoniem met Indië se lang vryheidstryd. Daarteenoor is die rol en bydrae van een van die ander groot voorstanders van Indië se onafhanklikheid, nl. Subhas Chandra Bose, relatief onbekend in die buitewêreld. Veertig jaar na Bose se dood het sy aansien by die Indiërbevolking nie verminder nie. Dit is inderdaad 'n raaisel hoe hierdie dinamiese leier binne so 'n kort periode daarin geslaag het om sodanige invloed op die Indiërdenke uit te oefen.

Die opkoms van Bose as nasionale leier in die 1930's is beide 'n teken en 'n vooruitsig. Hy was nie 'n voorstander van die nie-gebruik van geweld nie en sy geloof in Gandhi se filosofie met betrekking tot die nasionale stryd kan bevraagteken word. Bose se lidmaatskap van die Indiër Nasionale Kongres kan toegeskryf word aan sy oortuiging dat die Kongres die enigste politieke organisasie was met die vermoë om 'n stryd vir onafhanklikheid te loods.

The name of Gandhi is almost synonymous with India's long struggle for freedom. On the other hand, the role and contribution of Subhas Chandra Bose, (bous), one of the other great champions of Indian independence, are to the outside world a relatively unknown chapter in the freedom movement. However, inspite of the fact that more than forty years have passed since the death of Bose, the interest of the Indian people in him has not slackened. It is indeed a mystery how this dynamic leader succeeded within such a short space of time in creating such an impact on the Indian mind.

The emergence of Bose as a national leader in the 1930s was both a portent and a prospect. He was not an advocate of non-violence and his faith in the Gandhian philosophy concerning the nationalist struggle was very tenuous. Bose's membership of the Indian National Congress was sustained by the conviction that the Congress was the only political organisation competent to launch a struggle for independence.

The two outstanding leaders of the Indian struggle for freedom, Bose and Gandhi, represented two different streams of thought and action within the nationalist movement. While there was agreement on the ultimate objective, namely India's freedom, the fundamental differences that existed between them concerning the method of achieving that objective was bound sooner or later to lead to a confrontational situation. The Gandhi-Bose conflict was the outcome of two diametrically opposed political philosophies which met head-on in the Indian drive for independence - on the one hand was Bose's hard core and realistic approach to political action and on the other Gandhi's highly moral and even spiritual programme in which ends and means were made equivalent. Bose's attempts to accelerate the pace of the nationalist movement by ex-

Historia 39(2), November 1994

plotting the tense international situation on the eve of World War II gave Gandhi the opportunity to force the expulsion of Bose from the Congress.

In January 1938 Bose while in England was elected president of the fifty-first session of the Congress which was to be held at Haripur in Gujarat in February 1938.¹ Many were surprised that Gandhi had sponsored the election of a radical who had always been an unsparing critic of him. However, by 1938 it was recognised that Bose's exemplary sacrifices for the Nationalist cause rivalled that of Gandhi himself.

The disagreement between Bose and Gandhi on the methodology of Indian independence that began at their very first meeting in 1921 continued throughout the freedom movement. Bose never gained a clear perception of Gandhi's course of action. He could never reconcile himself to Gandhi's "inner voice" nor fathom his spiritual depths in relation to the nationalist movement which was a political issue.² Bose's faith in Gandhism was tenuous. Bose, like many others, had hoped that once Civil Disobedience began it could be converted into something more radical. The suspension of Civil Disobedience in 1922 convinced Bose that non-violence was a living article of faith with Gandhi. Bose was never a votary of non-violence and could never understand Gandhi's obsession with it.

Bose firmly believed that "soul force" would not awaken the British to the realities of the Indian political situation. He therefore came to believe that a radical and vigorous course of action was indispensable for the liberation of India. This conviction resulted in his support for the revolutionary and terrorist organisations. Bose's attachment to the Congress was only sustained by his conviction that it was the only political organisation competent to fight for independence.³ The issue that confronted Bose was how to transform passive resistance into an active one.

In 1928 Bose saw in the anti-British Parliamentary Commission⁴ demonstrations an opportunity for the revolutionary struggle he envisaged and urged Gandhi to give a decisive lead. Bose declared: "Only our co-operation enables a handful of Englishmen to rule our country."⁵

However, in Bose's view, instead of giving a decisive lead Gandhi was ever ready to compromise with the British. Gandhi's Civil Disobedience movements were to wrest concessions from the British by exercising orderly mass pressure without precipitating a revolutionary upheaval, destructive of the socio-economic order of India. Therefore Gandhi avoided radical or revolutionary alternatives. Bose on the other hand was a revolutionary who followed passive programmes because of the force of the internal circumstances. At the same time Bose hoped to widen their scope and quicken their tempo.

Before the 1930 Civil Disobedience movement Gandhi was prepared to settle for Dominion Status as against full independence. Bose in 1928 and 1929 believed that the political conditions in India were conducive for the Congress to establish a parallel government, organise the people and then launch a massive Civil Disobedience struggle which he hoped would make normal administration impossible. However, Gandhi launched the Civil Disobedience campaign in 1930 only when the British Government was not forthcoming on the issue of Dominion Status and when he sensed that the radical forces were gaining momentum. Seen in this light then the 1930 campaign was a partial concession to Bose's radical approach.⁶ But Gandhi believed in compromise and in March 1931 suspended the Civil Disobedience movement to participate in the

G.K. Mookerjee, *Subhas Chandra Bose* (Calcutta, 1968), p. 26.

2. N.G. Jog, *In freedom's quest* (New Delhi, 1969), p. 208.

R. Rao, *A short history of the Indian National Congress* (New Delhi, 1972), p. 185.

The commission was only representative of the British political parties.

Selected speeches of S.C. Bose, 30-5-1929 (New Delhi, 1965).

H. Toye, *Subash Chandra Bose* (Bombay, 1959), p. 50.

Second London Round Conference which was held to draft a constitution for India.⁷ Bose saw in Gandhi's participation of the conference a weakening of the Congress resolve for full independence nor did he believe that the government would negotiate Dominion Status let alone independence.⁸

The suspension of the Civil Disobedience movement led to a public criticism of Gandhi by Bose in April 1933 in Vienna. This was the strongest criticism of Gandhi that any Congressman had dared to utter. In his book, *The Indian struggle*, Bose was more explicit:

"The Congress old guard was of low intellectual level; few of its leaders had the capacity to think for themselves. The entire intellect of the Congress has been mortgaged to one man."⁹

Gandhi's "retreat" from the goal of independence convinced Bose that a radical alternative was necessary. During his exile in Europe he prepared the ground for such an alternative. Bose viewed Gandhi and the right wing of the Congress as conservative old men who were afraid of a revolutionary struggle which would disturb the socio-economic structure of India. Bose on the other hand, was a revolutionary nationalist and a socialist who believed that the socio-economic reconstruction of India should not be left in the hands of the vested interests.¹⁰ Bose believed that Gandhi who had a large following in India had failed to dislodge the British because the strength of a leader did not depend on the largeness but on the character of one's following. This explained how other leaders with a smaller following were able to liberate their countries. Bose felt that whilst Gandhi understood the character of a large section of the Indian people he had failed to understand the character of the British. What Bose meant was that Gandhi's "soul force" would not smite the conscience of the British. Bose also believed that Gandhi had failed because he had the habit of informing the authorities in advance of his intention of launching Civil Disobedience movements. Thus Gandhi had dispensed with the art of diplomacy. Added to this Gandhi had ignored the use of international propaganda to win sympathy and support for India. If India wanted to win freedom without an armed struggle then she could ill afford to ignore diplomacy and propaganda. To Bose independence was still a distant dream because Gandhi had combined in his person a dual role, that of a world teacher preaching the doctrine of non-violence and the role of a political leader of a subject people. Bose also felt that Gandhi had brought about a false unity of interests that were inherently opposed to each other. Bose viewed such a unity of interests as a source of weakness.¹¹

Bose's exile in Europe in 1933 almost coincided with Gandhi's withdrawal from active politics. Gandhi, however, occupied a "peculiar" position in the nationalist movement. Since 1934 Gandhi held no office; yet he attended the meetings of the Congress working committee and participated in its deliberations.¹² Gandhi in fact continued to be the "power behind the throne" whilst Bose who was exiled to Europe sought to win the support of the Fascist states.

The Congress Socialist Party which was formed in 1934 moved into the vacuum created by the suspension of the Civil Disobedience movement. The party, however, failed to provide an alternative strategy to wrest power from the right wing of the Congress. It was not the new dis-

7. I.O.R., L/1/1/1315, Speech delivered by H.G. Hallet, Home Secretary in the Indian Legislative Assembly, 23-3-1936 (India Office Records, London).

8. *Selected speeches of S.C. Bose*, Speech at Calcutta, 4-7-1931 (New Delhi, 1965).

9. S.C. Bose, *The Indian struggle 1920-34* (London, 1935), p. 86.

10. H. Toye, *Subhash Chandra Bose*, p. 52.

11. S.C. Bose, *The Indian struggle*, pp. 329-330.

12. R.C. Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India, Vol. III* (Calcutta, 1977), p. 478.

ciplined party that Bose had envisaged. J. Nehru along with Bose was an acknowledged left wing leader. Bose had expected him to join and lead the Congress Socialist Party. In 1936 Nehru was elected president of the Congress. In 1937 he was again re-elected Congress president. On both occasions Nehru was supported by the Gandhi wing of the Congress because he had held a somewhat middle position between the Right (Gandhi wing) and the Congress Socialist Party.¹³

Bose never believed that Gandhi's leadership was indispensable. Though Nehru did not accept all the tenets of Gandhism and Gandhi's political strategy, he gave vent to his periodic disillusionment with Gandhi's leadership only in the pages of his autobiography. Quite early in his life Nehru had come under the influence of Gandhi and this bond deepened after the death of his father. Nehru therefore did not have the courage to oppose Gandhi and tried to please both the left and right wings of the Congress without either joining the Gandhi wing or any other radical party.¹⁴ After 1937 Nehru moved closer to the Gandhi wing. Consequently consolidation of the left wing forces which Bose expected of Nehru did not materialize partly because Nehru could not sever his deep emotional attachment to Gandhi.

Whilst the left wing failed to provide an alternative strategy the Congress under the guidance of Sardar Patel began to permeate the social and administrative life of India as Bose had already urged. When the first elections were held in 1936 under the Government of India Act, the Congress emerged as the strongest party in seven out of eleven provinces.¹⁵

Had Bose not been exiled to Europe during the period 1933-36 he would have formed his new disciplined party at the time when the Congress was in the political wilderness because Gandhi was preoccupied with his anti-Untouchability campaign. When Bose was released in 1937 Gandhi was still the Congress "dictator" and he was about to assume power through the Congress machinery which controlled seven provincial governments. Gandhi, however, realized that the emergence of Bose in the 1930s as a radical nationalist leader was both a portent and a phenomenon. Gandhi was astute enough to know that Bose was the only nationalist leader capable of splitting the Congress.

India in 1938 presented a picture of subdued discontent with the conduct of the provincial ministries, their programme of work and their inability to remedy the agrarian and labour situations. The landlords still ruled with all their feudal tyranny. Labour and peasants demonstrations under the leadership of the Socialists were a regular occurrence. Gandhi was alarmed when the terrorist revolutionary movement began to show signs of new life. This was dramatized by an unsuccessful attempt on the life of the Governor of Bengal, Sir John Anderson.¹⁶

In these circumstances the radical left wing leader, Bose, could no longer be ignored by Gandhi. Therefore Gandhi's sponsorship of Bose's nomination as the Congress president for 1938 was a shrewd tactic to consolidate with the Congress right wing the radical elements that were under Bose's influence.¹⁷ After the Congress "victory" in the 1936 elections and its subsequent acceptance of ministerial office, Gandhi felt that it now had a chance of legislating its way to freedom without any mass upheaval or radicalism. Bose did not share Gandhi's optimism. Bose was opposed to the new constitution and the formation of Congress ministries in principle and felt that the Congress would find the little power granted to them in the provinces attractive. Bose believed that the Congress would now be pre-occupied with the details of government thereby side-tracking the goal of independence. However, Bose saw the

13. M. Gopal, *The life and times of S.C. Bose* (New Delhi, 1978), pp. 205-209.

14. N.G. Jog, *In freedom's quest*, pp. 299-311.

15. H. Toye, *Subhash Chandra Bose*, p. 53.

16. S.S. Rao, *India's Freedom Movement* (New Delhi, 1972), p. 151.

17. N.G. Jog, *In freedom's quest*, p. 132.

need for Congress unity in the face of the growing threat of war in Europe and the need to effectively resist the federal part of the new constitution.¹⁸

But Bose was an implacable foe of British rule in India. He could not let slip the opportunity to accelerate the pace of the struggle when he was elected president of the Congress for a one-year term at the age of forty-one. His radical strategy was subsequently opposed by those who in his opinion, were instrumental in retarding India's march to freedom. A conflict with the Gandhian right wing was inevitable. In this conflict which proved to be the second turning point in his career, Bose attained his full political maturity.

The fifty-first session of the Congress held at Haripura on 19 February 1938 was the political coronation of Bose.¹⁹ The magnificent reception accorded to Bose was a tribute to his "youth", his sacrifice for the nationalist cause and his political rapport with Gandhi.²⁰

Bose's presidential address covered the whole spectrum of the Congress policy from both the national and international perspectives. Whilst his speech included a number of practical suggestions it also contained a number of prophetic notes. It would therefore be a useful exercise to refer to some of the significant issues mentioned in his address.

Bose did not doubt that the internal incongruities of the British Empire and external pressures would gradually result in its breakup. Bose's immediate concern was how to prevent it from extending its life in India by constitutional devices like the Act of 1935.

In his speech Bose stated that Britain would attempt to hold onto India by pursuing its well-tested policy of divide and rule in order to split the forces of Indian nationalism. In this connection Bose struck a prophetic note of warning when he referred to the principle of partition which appeared in a subtle form in the new constitution.²¹

Referring to the methodology of independence Bose stressed that the method would be non-violent non-co-operation which would also include Civil Disobedience. Bose also warned the Congress that its acceptance of office in the provinces should be regarded as an experimental measure. The implication was that Congress activity should not be confined to constitutionalism especially when Bose held out the threat of mass Civil Disobedience.

Bose's speech also revealed his feelings towards Britain and in this connection his attitude was similar to that of Gandhi and Nehru:

"We have no enmity towards the British people ... But once we have real self-determination, there is no reason why we should not enter into the most cordial relations with the British people."²²

Bose was one of the few Indian national leaders with foresight to realize the pressing need for National Planning on socialist lines to alleviate the poverty-stricken existence of the masses. He therefore called for the establishment of a commission to draft a comprehensive plan for the socio-economic reconstruction of India. Bose stated publicly that the eradication of poverty which was India's main problem could only be achieved through agricultural regeneration. By this he meant a radical reform of the land system which included the abolition of landlordism and agricultural indebtedness and provision for cheap credit for the rural population.²³

Bose was one of the few front rank nationalist leaders who challenged the traditional Indian

18. H. Toye, *Subhash Chandra Bose*, p. 54.

19. G.H. Corr, *The War of the Springing Tigers* (London, 1975), p. 85.

20. N.G. Jog, "An Alternative Leadership 1936-41", in S.K. Bose, A. Werth, S.A. Ayer (eds.), *A beacon across Asia* (New Delhi, 1973), p. 173.

21. *Selected speeches of S.C. Bose*, Presidential address at the Haripura Congress, 19-2-1938 (New Delhi, 1965).

22. *Ibid.*

23. *Ibid.*

vested interests. In this Bose was at variance with the conservative wing of the Congress which was determined to maintain the status quo.

Bose was the first nationalist leader to acknowledge publicly the compelling need for Family Planning in relation to the post-independence reconstruction programme. The post independence leaders of India appeared to heed Bose's warning on the dangers of over-population only in the late 1970's.

A considerable part of his address was devoted to the federal provisions of the new constitution with their many safeguards and reserved powers. Bose unequivocally declared a constitution for India could only be framed by the people themselves by means of a constituent assembly without the interference of any foreign authority.²⁴

Bose also touched on the need to mobilise India's manpower on disciplined lines. He stated that there was a need to create a well-disciplined volunteer corps, a cadre of officers for national service and the provision of facilities for the training of those with leadership potential.²⁵ As a result of his experiences and observations in Europe he urged that such institutions like, the British Summer Schools and the Nazi Labour Service Corps should be introduced into India in order to develop her manpower potential.

He paid particular attention to the need for international propaganda which could further the cause of freedom abroad. Bose told the delegates that they should not be inhibited by any ideological prejudice and exploit the tense international situation to India's advantage.²⁶ Bose's pragmatic attitude led to a crisis within the Congress in 1939.

Bose's address came as a surprise to many who regarded him as a Bengali terrorist and agitator. It revealed the maturity of a statesman and the broad vision of a political thinker. The influence of European political ideas could be discerned in his address though his references to socialist development were of a "mild" nature when compared to some of his earlier pronouncements and writings. No mention was made of the necessity for the creation of a radical party. Bose's theme was unity and co-operation between the various groups within and without the Congress. Few Congress presidential addresses have proved as prescient as Bose's. He anticipated many of the problems of present day India. India is yet to come to grips with many of the issues that Bose warned of.

Bose's term of Congress president was marked with dynamism and vigour. He toured the country propagating the nationalist message and expatiating on his policy pronouncements at Haripura. During the National Week²⁷ celebrations Bose called upon his audience to prepare for the impending struggle against the British. He also took a strong stand against the practice of Untouchability. He called upon the Congress to seek the active co-operation of the peasant and labour organisations.²⁸ Bose hoped to create a broad political front to exert pressure on Britain which was politically "retreating" before Germany.

As the Congress president Bose paid particular attention to the appointment of a committee for National Planning. In this connection he convened a Chief Ministers and Industries Ministers Conference in Delhi in October. The theme was that India could not escape an industrial revolution: it would not be an evolutionary process as in Britain but a forced march as in Communist Russia. Bose's call for the industrialization of India alarmed Gandhi and the conservative wing of the Congress who were opposed to modernization. To allay their fears on 17 December 1938 Bose stated that any planning for the future reconstruction of India would be

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ibid.*

27. From about 1918 National Week was celebrated by the Congress from 6-13 April.

28. *Selected speeches of S.C. Bose*, Press statement 6-4-1938 (New Delhi, 1965).

an interdependence between cottage,²⁹ medium and large scale industries. He referred to the successful mutual interdependence between cottage and medium industries in Japan and Germany. Not much was achieved in this field because of Gandhi's opposition and the outbreak of the War.³⁰ It was left to Nehru thirteen years later to appoint a National Planning Commission.

Bose also attempted to find a solution to the Hindu-Muslim question and began a correspondence with Jinnah, the leader of the Muslim League. The correspondence between them did not arrive at any settlement.³¹ Bose unlike Gandhi understood that Hindu-Muslim tensions had their origins in socio-economic causes. Therefore Bose believed that no amount of fasting and prayer would improve the situation. Bose hoped that the radical reconstruction of India would remove the causes of the divisive elements in Indian society.

The first ten months of his presidentship was spent in constant activity. On the surface his relations with Gandhi and the right wing seemed to be cordial. However the latter part of 1938 saw the widening of the gulf between the two wings of the Congress. As the Congress president, Bose did his best to stiffen the opposition of the Congress Party against any compromise with the British. This caused "alarm" in Gandhian circles who were then looking forward to an understanding with Britain. Bose's open propaganda throughout India to prepare the Indian people for a national struggle which should synchronize with the coming war in Europe was opposed by the right wing which was not prepared to launch a struggle in 1938.

Congress unity as represented by Bose and Gandhi remained precarious and as 1938 came to an end the strain increased as a result of internal and external pressures. A tense international situation was averted by the Munich Pact. India could not be out of a war in which Britain would be a participant. What policy should nationalist India adopt in the event of war? Should Indian nationalism exploit Britain's pre-occupation in Europe? At a meeting of the Congress working committee in September 1938 Gandhi stated that in the event of war, India should not exploit Britain's involvement to further its political objectives.³²

Bose saw that 1939 was going to be a critical year. War in Europe, England's pre-occupation, the supreme opportunity of the Congress, was at hand. Bose believed that Gandhi, Nehru and the right wing would not exploit this opportunity. The Congress ministries had enjoyed the taste of power in the provinces. Bose also believed that there was a tendency on the part of the right wing to whittle down the Congress resolution on uncompromising hostility to the federation scheme.³³ In the light of these circumstances in January 1939 Bose decided to stand as a candidate for a second term as president of the Congress. Gandhi and the right wing were unprepared for this and what followed thereafter proved to be the gravest crisis in the history of the Congress. It would be relevant here to refer to the ideas, emphasis and personalities involved.

In 1930 the Congress was divided into two bodies of opinion, the right and left wings who held different views on the methodology of independence and the nature of the post independence socio-economic reconstruction of India. The conservatives and the "old guard", the Gandhians, fell into the category of the right wing.³⁴ The right wing approach to independence was cautious and could not visualize the overthrow of the British or the forcible seizure of pow-

29. Gandhi favoured cottage or village related industries, for instance the spinning of cotton.

30. *Selected speeches of S.C. Bose*, Speech while inaugurating the National Planning Committee, Bombay, 17-12-1938 (New Delhi, 1965).

31. Netaji Research Bureau, Crossroads, Bose-Jinnah Correspondence, May-December, 1938 (London, 1962).

32. R. Rao, *A short history of the Indian National Congress*, p. 188.

33. Netaji Research Bureau, Crossroads, Statement issued from Bombay, 17-1-1939 (London, 1962).

34. M. Brecher, *Nehru, a political biography* (London, 1959), p. 245.

er. They visualized gradual transfer of power through non-violent means and if necessary the use of Civil Disobedience.

The spheres of the left wing were broadly divided into two, the several left parties such as the socialists and the left wing of the Congress. The lines of demarcation were often obscured because British rule demanded a common nationalist front against imperialism and also the fact that leftism had emerged from the Congress itself. While the leaders of the left parties especially the Communists attempted from time to time to capture the Congress by peaceful penetration, the leaders of the left held out hopes to those operating outside the Congress. Nehru, the leader of the left wing in the Congress, was the best example of this type of political behaviour.³⁵

The emergence of Bose in the thirties as an extreme radical left wing nationalist leader who advocated both a revolutionary struggle and reconstruction programme for India resulted in a certain amount of rivalry. However, Bose acknowledged Nehru as the leader of the left wing. This was apparent when Bose wrote to Nehru from Austria in 1936 stating that "You are the only one we can look up to for leading the Congress in a progressive direction."³⁶ However it was becoming apparent to Bose that Nehru was Gandhi's man and heir apparent and was being used as a leash on the left wing.

At the turn of 1939 the Congress was confronted with an impending war and the Congress response to this situation created a crisis between Bose and Gandhi. This crisis drove a wedge between Bose and Nehru who were the leaders of the left wing in the Congress. It would be difficult to describe the conflict as a western type ideological conflict because of the peculiar position that Gandhism held in the nationalist movement. It might therefore be described as a difference of policy and programme or a clash of ideas that involved a considerable measure of personal rivalry.

In 1939, however, it was apparent the disillusionment with the cautious approach of the Gandhi wing on the issue of independence was not only confined to the Bengal group led by Bose. There was a growing support for the policy of Bose who wanted to exploit the international situation by launching a mass Civil Disobedience movement.³⁷ Gandhi on the other hand felt that the conditions were not ripe for the launching of Civil Disobedience. Bose's militant approach alarmed Gandhi who as subsequent events revealed wanted an "honourable compromise" with the British and therefore he did not want to launch any mass movement in 1939.³⁸ Gandhi was the acknowledged "kingmaker" of the Congress and the policy acknowledged by Bose could not be reconciled with the view of Gandhi. Gandhi's opposition to Bose might therefore be charitably interpreted as opposition to his militant programme in spite of the considerable volume of public opinion behind Bose who gave a lead to that opinion which endorsed his views.

The events preceding the election gradually tore off the democratic mask of the Congress. When Nehru had returned from Europe in 1938 he was asked by Gandhi to resume the presidency of the Congress, but Nehru declined. In January 1939 the working committee meeting of the Congress which included Gandhi, Nehru, V. Patel and Azad discussed the question of the selection of the next Congress president. These Congress leaders did not do so when Bose was present. Nehru's letter to Bose on 3 April admitted this. It stated that Gandhi himself pressed Azad to stand for election but the latter declined when it became apparent that it was going to be a contested election and only then V. Patel suggested the name of Dr. P. Sitara-

35. B.B. Misra, *The Indian political parties* (Delhi, 1978), pp. 478-479.

36. J. Nehru, *A bunch of old letters* (Bombay, 1960), pp. 478-479.

37. R. Rao, *A short history of the Indian National Congress*, p. 183.

38. K.C. Ghosh, "Conflict with Gandhi" in S.R. Sharma (ed.), *"Netaji", his life and work* (Agra, 1948), pp. 76-77.

mayya.³⁹ This was a clear indication that Gandhi, Nehru and the right wing did not "trust" Bose who was determined to sharpen the conflict and move the Congress to the left wing. Nehru intellectualized his opposition to Bose on the ground that Bose's re-election would hinder an anti-imperialist front and therefore he had to yield his principles to the "shifting" politics of Gandhi.⁴⁰ However, it is difficult to escape the contention that Nehru co-operated with the right wing with the motive of out-maneuvring his rival, Bose, who had not only replaced him as leader of the left wing but was about to challenge Gandhi.

Bose who had been nominated by a number of provincial congress committees decided to contest the election on the ground that new ideas and problems had emerged. Bose also felt that the general feeling in India was that the election should be fought on the basis of definite programmes so that the "contest" might give an indication of the working of the public mind.

The right wing led by V. Patel issued a statement which claimed that previous elections had been unanimous and that while Bose had the right to contest it, party unity would be impaired. They doubted the wisdom of the same person seeking re-election except under exceptional circumstances and added that in the Congress organisation the president's position was that of first among equals. They therefore called upon Bose to withdraw.⁴¹ However the circumstances were exceptional on account of the impending war and Patel later revealed to Nehru that the statement had been drafted at Gandhi's insistence.⁴² The press statement of the working committee was tantamount to moral coercion. Bose stated that Congress presidents had been re-elected in the past and that since the adoption of the new constitution of the Congress in 1934 the position of the president could be likened to that of a prime minister rather than that of a constitutional monarch. Bose stated that the attempt to set up a right wing candidate was not without significance because there was the prospect of a compromise between the right wing and the British Government.

Bose issued a press statement on 18 January 1939 which stated that delegates should have a free and unfettered choice and should not be morally coerced by the right wing to vote in accordance with the wishes of Gandhi.⁴³

Gandhi took no direct part in the crisis in its early phase. However on the eve of the election Gandhi published an article in his newspaper, *The Harijan*, in which he stated: "Congressmen still expect me to give the call when, in my opinion, the time for action has come ... Out of the present conditions of the Congress, I see nothing but anarchy and red ruin in front of the country."⁴⁴ The advice was clear: vote for Sitaramayya.

The election of the president by the delegates of the fifty-second session of the Congress was held all over India on 29 January. Bose defeated Sitaramayya by a little over two hundred votes. Nothing like this had ever happened before in the history of the Congress. It was not Sitaramayya whom Bose had defeated but Gandhi. After this defeat Gandhi declared: "The defeat is more mine than his ... Therefore, it is plain to me that the delegates do not approve of the principles and policy for which I stand."⁴⁵

The message was clear. Gandhi virtually asked Bose to run the Congress without his support. Gandhi called upon the minority to abstain when they could not co-operate and to come

39. Dr. Sitaramayya belonged to the Congress right wing and he was the historian of the national movement.

40. B.B. Misra, *The Indian political parties*, pp. 474-480.

41. Netaji Research Bureau, Crossroads, Telegram from V. Patel and the Working Committee to Sarat Bose, 24-1-1939; Press statement issued by V. Patel and the Right Wing, 24-1-1939 (London, 1962).

42. M. Breecher, *Nehru, a political biography*, p. 247.

43. Netaji Research Bureau, Crossroads, Press statement of S.C. Bose, 28-1-1939 (London, 1962).

44. N.G. Jog, *In freedom's quest*, p. 145.

45. Netaji Research Bureau, Crossroads, 31-1-1939 (London, 1962).

out of the Congress. Democracy presupposes that the verdict of an election is unquestioningly accepted both by the majority and minority in the working of a programme. However Gandhi was going to topple Bose in his own shrewd manner.

Bose had hoped to win Gandhi's confidence. On 15 February he met Gandhi at his ashram in Wardha, but no decisions were reached. Having fallen ill with broncho-pneumonia Bose was in no condition to attend the Congress working committee session at Wardha on 22 February. He sent a telegram which the committee interpreted to mean that there could be no transaction of any business.⁴⁶ Taking this as a vote of no confidence and as an ideal pretext to nullify Bose's election victory, twelve of the fifteen members of the committee resigned, with the knowledge and concurrence of Gandhi. Nehru did not resign officially, but issued a separate statement that he would not serve on the new working committee.⁴⁷ Nehru by his action had aligned himself with the right wing.

Gandhi's decision to begin a fast "unto death" a few days before the Tripuri Congress over a trivial issue in the princely state of Rajkot in a remote corner of India precluded all chances of reconciliation between Bose and himself. When the Congress met at Tripuri, Bose was already outflanked by the right wing who had marshalled their forces in the All India Congress Committee for a showdown with the "upstart" Bose who had dared challenge Gandhi's leadership. Even those who had voted for him in the presidential election began to have second thoughts about continuing their support because of Gandhi's hostile attitude.

Bose himself handicapped by illness, appeared at the Congress session on a stretcher. If his health had not broken down, he might have survived what followed. He was too sick to guide the deliberations. Pandit G. Pant tabled a resolution which called for adherence to the fundamental policies of the old working committee and most importantly urged the president to nominate the new committee according to Gandhi's wishes. Bose's supporters claimed that it was a vote of censure but the resolution was carried by a majority. The Congress constitution laid down that the president himself had the power to appoint the working committee. The results of the free election by the delegates of the provincial Congress was nullified by this resolution because the right wing feared that Bose would attempt to form a working committee of his own choice.

On 11 March Bose was carried to the open session where his presidential address was read by his brother, Sarat Bose. In his address Bose proposed an ultimatum to the Government with a specific time limit and if this was rejected the Congress should launch a massive Civil Disobedience campaign in co-operation with the labour and peasant organisations.⁴⁸ In this line of approach to the issue of freedom Bose was consistent. But his radicalism made the Assembly nervous.

Bose was too ill to appear on the second day of the open session. A more moderate demand was put forward by J. Narayan, the leader of the Congress Socialists. It reaffirmed the Congress goals but without an ultimatum. This resolution was carried in the open Assembly. Not only was Gandhi's policy accepted but the censure resolution of Pandit Pant was passed.⁴⁹ The victory of the right wing was complete and by implication conveyed a lack of confidence in Bose's leadership. The key to Bose's defeat was the division in the ranks of the left wing and vacillation on the part of the Congress Socialist Party which remained neutral.

Owing to the "morally sickening" atmosphere of Tripuri, Bose left with such a loathing and disgust for politics as he had never felt before. After his recovery from his illness he realized that the pettiness and vindictiveness of Tripuri was not the real India. He was bound by

46. M. Breecher, *Nehru, a political biography*, p. 248.

47. B.B. Misra, *The Indian political parties*, p. 483.

48. Netaji Research Bureau, Crossroads, Presidential address of S.C. Bose at Tripuri, 11-3-1939 (London, 1962).

49. M. Breecher, *Nehru, a political biography*, p. 250.

the Pant resolution and could not do anything without the agreement of Gandhi who was still preoccupied with Rajkot. The Bose-Gandhi correspondence revealed that Gandhi wanted a homogeneous working committee whereas Bose advised a committee which should be drawn from different groups within the Congress so that the committee might represent the composition of the general body of the Congress.⁵⁰

The charge that Bose had split national unity was brought into serious question when on 20 April he wrote to Gandhi stating that in view of the approaching international crisis it was imperative that the Congressmen should sink their differences and restore unity and discipline within their ranks. Bose indicated that this could only be achieved if Gandhi came forward and took the lead.⁵¹ Though it was apparent to everyone that Congress affairs were far more important than the Rajkot "struggle" Gandhi refused to meet Bose to end the deadlock. It appeared that the right wing wanted the political elimination of Bose. This was evident when on 17 April Maulana Azad wrote to Nehru stating that there was no hope that Bose would improve the situation by acting in a conciliatory manner and therefore the right wing leaders had to "chalk out a future line of action".⁵² This was an indication of what was going on behind the scenes.

At the repeated requests of Bose, Gandhi attended the meeting of the All India Congress committee at Calcutta of 29 April. However Gandhi refused to suggest any names to the working committee in terms of the Pant resolution and advised Bose to discuss with the ex-members the possibility of a mutual settlement.⁵³

On 1 May Bose announced his resignation. He stated that Gandhi wanted him to form a working committee of his own choice but this was advice to which he could not give effect because it was contrary to Pant's resolution which provided "inter alia" that the committee should be formed in accordance with Gandhi's wishes that should command his implicit confidence. If he formed a committee of his own choice then he could not report that he had Gandhi's implicit confidence. Bose also stated that having taken Gandhi's advice to reach an agreement with the old working committee did not resolve the deadlock and therefore he had no option but to hand in his resignation.

Throughout the controversy Bose proved himself worthy of admiration and respect. It is appropriate here to quote the message of Tagore: "The dignity and forbearance which you have shown in the midst of a most aggravating situation had won my admiration and confidence in your leadership."⁵⁴

Bose had been democratically elected in preference to Gandhi's candidate. He was leader by the will of the majority of people in spite of the will of Gandhi. The Congress delegates who had elected him were aware of his radical views. His popular mandate had been denied by "non-violent liquidation" at its smoothest. The right wing intrigue of his political comrades was not only directed against him but also at the very democracy which elected him. Bose on the eve of the war had come close to replacing Gandhi as the leader of the freedom movement. Gandhi's sole clear-cut objective was to break the power of Bose in the Congress. The crisis made Gandhi a dictator *de jure* though he had long been *one de facto*.

Bose believed that when a political movement stagnates because of conservative leadership then the left wing should consolidate itself and reactivate the movement. Hence, within three days of his resignation he formed a radical new party called the 'Forward Bloc' within the Con-

50. Netaji Research Bureau, Crossroads, Bose-Gandhi correspondence, 25-3-1939 - 15-4-1939 (London, 1962).

51. *Ibid.*, Letter from S. C. Bose to Gandhi, 20-4-1939.

52. J. Nehru, *A bunch of old letters*, p. 381.

53. B.B. Misra, *The Indian political parties*, p. 381.

54. Netaji Research Bureau, Crossroads, Tagore's message to Bose on his resignation (London, 1962).

gress.⁵⁵ Bose hoped that the 'Bloc' would halt the Congress drift towards constitutionalism by infusing a revolutionary impulse into it and preparing India for a massive Civil Disobedience campaign.

To stifle the growing challenge posed by the 'Bloc' the All India Congress committee passed a resolution to the effect that Civil Disobedience should not be resorted to without the sanction of the committee. The 'Bloc' demonstrations against the proposal on 9 July gave Gandhi the opportunity to destroy the last vestiges of Bose's power in the Congress. On 12 August, Bose was removed as president of the Bengal Congress for indiscipline and was disqualified from any elective office in the Congress for three years.⁵⁶

The left wing "rebellion" was crushed. Bose's expulsion was a logical sequence to the right wing consolidation. The birth of the 'Bloc' had sharpened the conflict within the Congress. It was a continued challenge to Gandhi's leadership. Since Gandhi and the right wing were adverse to exploiting the international situation by launching a mass Civil Disobedience movement they sought to stifle the radical approach of Bose to the issue of independence on the eve of the war. The differences between Bose and Gandhi were of a fundamental nature and this explains the different roles that they were called upon to play in the drama of Indian liberation.

The political trend in India, the international situation, and the need for a dynamic leader on the eve of World War II pointed to Bose being elected as the Congress president. His militant nationalism did not admit of any compromise. His political realism made him discard the usual norms of ethics. His philosophy of power and action was a result of his conviction that an overdose of Gandhian non-violence and the compromises resulting from it were responsible for Britain's indifference to the legitimate aspirations of the Indian people. To exploit the international situation in 1939 he stood for re-election as the Congress president in spite of the opposition of Gandhi. In this his political strategy was consistent with his militant nationalism. His re-election was a vindication of the militant mood of the Indian people.

One of the great turning points in the history of India was the achievement of independence from Britain in 1947. Literature dealing with the nationalist movement reveals the general opinion that Indian independence is almost synonymous with the politico-cultural activities of the charismatic Mahatma figure of Gandhi. There is a vast amount of uniformed criticism on Bose's political activities during World War II which centres around the controversy whether it was morally wrong to have co-operated with the Axis Powers. Some credibility is attached to this point of view due to the general impression created by the official interpretation of the nationalist movement which implied that no armed struggle was necessary to attain independence. In the light of new political and socio-economic forces that have emerged in India recently, the political philosophies and actions of the two most outstanding leaders of the struggle are being viewed in their proper perspective. The election of Bose as Congress president on the eve of the war was an indication that the Indian people wanted change. An end of an epoch had been reached. Bose's election was seen as an opportunity to break the political stalemate into which the nationalist movement had drifted into as a result of Gandhi's strict adherence to non-violence and his sympathy for Britain.

While the interest in Gandhi had generated a voluminous mass of writings, the interest of the Indian people in Bose has not slackened. Even today Indians regard Bose not as an old statesman or a politician of the kind of which India has so many, but as a fresh young national hero.

55. *Selected speeches of S.C. Bose*, Speech at Calcutta, 3-5-1939 (New Delhi, 1965).

56. M. Breecher, *Nehru, a political biography*, p. 254.