CHAPTER - 1

INTRODUCTION

The course of Indian politics and culture for almost three decades preceding independence in 1947 was influenced by one man above all others: Mahatma Gandhi. Superficially mild and friendly to devotee and foe alike, Gandhi was tough and determined beneath his homely mien. He rejected the use of violence, learning to use what he said was a force born of truth and love, the force of non-violent resistance or satyagraha. He believed this to be a mighty weapon, having perfected its use during his residence in South Africa (1893 to 1915). Gandhi was born in Gujarat, western India, in 1869 and had been called to the bar like Sarat Bose, Jawaharlal Nehru, and many other talented, ambitious Indians. But he had failed as a barrister in India and accepted a law position in South Africa, and gradually became public advocate for the minority Indian community there. He came to the attention of leaders in the Indian National Congress during the early twentieth century and he and they saw to the passing of resolutions supporting his work. In 1915, he returned to India, and within a few years took up his greater work, the revivification and independence of India. Since he combined within himself both moralist and politician, and since he set in motion dramatic confrontation between a powerful empire and an unarmed mass, in a very short time he became a world-historical figure and he influenced numerous men and women in India as well as abroad.

Subhas Chandra Bose, 'the stormy petrel of Indian Renaissance' younger to Gandhi by 28 years who had resigned his brilliant career in the
much coveted heaven-born Indian Civil Service with the resolute aim and determination to devote himself entirely to the fight for India’s freedom. So it was only natural that a young and impatient Subhas Bose should hurry off his boat from Britain and seek out the leader of the national movement which he had joined in lieu of service to the Raj. This meeting was the beginning of a complex and troubled twenty-five-year relationship which spanned sunshine and shadow. Bose described the opening moments in an account written years later:

“I reached Bombay ... and obtained an interview with Mahatma Gandhi. My object ... was ... a clear conception of his plan of action .... I began to heap question upon question.... There were three points which needed elucidation how were the different activities ... going to culminate in the last stage of the campaign ... how could mere non-payment of taxes or civil disobedience force the Government to retire from the field ... how could the Mahatma promise 'Swaraj' within one year.... His reply to the first question satisfied me ... his reply to the second question was disappointing and his reply to the third was no better ... though I tried to persuade myself ... that there must have been a lack of understanding on my part, my reason told me clearly ... that there was a deplorable lack of clarity in the plan which the Mahatma had formulated and that he himself did not have a clear idea of the successive stages of the campaign which would bring India to her cherished goal of freedom.”

The saga of relationship between Subhas and Gandhi starts with this meeting on the very day (16th July, 1921) of his landing at Bombay. Their first meeting set the contours of the relationship over the coming quarter of a century between these two foremost leaders of India’s

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1 Bose, Subhas Chandra, The Indian Struggle 1920-1942 (Bombay: Asia Publishing House), 1964, pp. 54-55.
freedom struggle.

During the following years, Bose never approached Gandhi with a reverential attitude. The young Bengali had been nourished by Congress Extremists like Aurobindo Ghose, who believed that all means were permissible in driving an alien power from the Motherland. Neither Bose's religious orientation, nor his political background committed him to non-violence. He was determined to join Gandhi's movement since it was the mainstream of nationalist India, but he never accepted Gandhi's belief about the centrality of non-violence in political life, or Gandhi's conception of the tactics of the struggle. Gandhi, however, sent Bose on to the leader of the Congress and Indian nationalism in Bengal, C.R. Das, and in him Bose found the leader whom he sought.

There were glaring differences between Gandhi and Subhas and in political life both were posed against each other. Young Netaji was a firebrand nationalist who believed in the tradition of Tilak and Aurobindo. Gandhiji, on the contrary, was a reluctant nationalist who belonged to the tradition of his mentor Gokhale and Tagore. Bose's strong revolutionary urge for the emancipation of his motherland made him critical of many of Gandhiji's techniques.

In 1920, at the age of 23, Subhas joined the Non-cooperation Movement which was going on with all its fury in Bengal under the leadership of Deshabandhu Chittaranjan Das. He took prominent part in the agitation against the Prince of Wales's visit. In protest against the decision of Gandhi in calling off the Non-cooperation Movement as a sequence to the Chauri Chaura incident in 1922, Bose felt highly dejected. In 1927, Subhas was elected as one of the General Secretaries of the Indian National Congress. A British Parliamentary Commission, known
as Simon Commission was appointed, to fix up the exact status of India's Constitutional development. Indian leaders had long been thinking in terms of early Dominion Status. For Subhas, the demand of Dominion Status appeared to be too short of his dream of full freedom. To the utter astonishment of everybody he roared before the Commission. 'India shall be free, the only question is when'?

The year 1927 brought Subhas closer to Jawaharlal Nehru at the annual session of the Indian National Congress, which was held at Madras. They formed the Independence of Indian League and under their joint effort, resolution for 'Complete Independence' was passed. In the next year due to the opposition of Gandhi the resolution to reiterate the demand for Complete Independence could not be approved. Thus Bose's proposal was defeated.

In 1929, Gandhiji nominated Jawahar as the President of Indian National Congress. There was a feeling in the Congress that Bose would be ineffective without support from Jawaharlal. But Subhas a different stuff altogether, despite opposition both from Nehru and Gandhi declared 1929 to be the year of preparation for a massive civil disobedience movement. In the subsequent events that immediately followed the same sort of ambivalence in the relationship between these two leaders are clearly discernible. Subhas praised Gandhiji for Dandi March and Salt Satyagraha (1930).

He wrote nostalgically 'The march of Dandi an event of historical importance which will rank on the same level with Napoleon's march to Paris'. He particularly admired Gandhiji success in involving women into the freedom movement. At the same time Subhas severely criticized Gandhiji's participation in the Second Round Table Conference in
London. Bose was much perturbed by the way Gandhiji played his cards at the Round Table Conference.

Gandhiji should have spoken, he felt, at the Round Table Conference, with a firm voice. In his treatise 'The Indian Struggle' which was published in November 1934 Subhas wrote, 'If the Mahatma had spoken in the language of dictator Stalin, Duce Mussolini or Fuhrer Hitler, John Bull would have understood and bowed his head in respect'.

In 1937, Gandhiji felt that Bose was a force to be reckoned with and hence he should no longer be neglected. He was further convinced that Subhas alone could be an instrument in the split of the Congress. Hence he decided to elect Subhas as the president of the Indian National Congress even when Subhas was not a member of that party. In the 51st session of the Congress held at Haripura in 1938, Subhas was unanimously elected as the President. Unfortunately both for the Congress and the country, the alliance between Bose and Gandhi remained precarious. Subhas not only condemned Gandhi's favourite Charakha but gave a call to modernise India. He called upon the people to get united for an armed struggle against the Britishers.

At the presidential election in January 1939, Subhas was vigorously opposed both by Gandhi and Nehru. Nevertheless, he has achieved a decisive victory over his opponent Dr. Pattabhi Sittaramayya, Gandhi's nominee by 1580 to 1375 votes. Gandhiji openly declared that Sittaramayya's defeat was his defeat. He said that Subhas's references to his colleagues were unjustified and unworthy. He remarked that since Subhas had criticized his colleagues as 'rightists', it would be most

2 Ibid., p. 229.
appropriate on his part to choose a homogeneous cabinet and enforce his action.

At the Tripuri Congress, Bose as the president made a clear proposal that the Indian National Congress should immediately send an ultimatum to the British Government demanding independence within six months. It was opposed by the Gandhian wing and Nehru.

In the midst of the hostile situation Subhas resigned the Presidentship of the Congress on 29th April, 1939, and immediately proceeded to form a radical party bringing the entire left wing under one banner. In this connection, it would be most appropriate to mention that - Bose's innate devotion and respect for Gandhiji remained as firm even though his path was diverging. He clearly stated that 'it will always be my aim and object to try and win his confidence for the simple reason that it will be tragic for me if I succeed in winning the confidence of other people but fail to win the confidence of India's greatest man'.

Subhas had his 'last long and hearty talk with the Mahatma on 20th June, 1940.' He had pressed Gandhi to launch the struggle taking advantage of the critical position of the British in the Second World War. He told that it was the most opportune time and it was impossible to think of any other situation in which India could start the struggle. Mahatma replied, 'why do you think that we cannot get better opportunities later on? I am sure we will have many such opportunities. Whether England wins or loses the war, she will be weakened by it; she will have no strength to shoulder the responsibilities of administering the country, and

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3 The Statesman, Calcutta, 4-2-1939
with slight effort on our part she will have no alternative but recognise India's independence'.

The whole nation was aroused when Subhas Bose made his spectacular escape on 17th January, 1941 (it was the day fixed for his trial for sedition) while under house detention at Calcutta and finally reached Germany in order to lead struggle for freedom from outside. Gandhi, on his part, could never endorse Subhas Bose joining with the Axis powers.

Mahatma Gandhi and Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose represent two alternate approaches to the freedom movement. While the role of Mahatma Gandhi and his unique strategy has been widely commented upon the contribution of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose to the cause of Indian struggle for independence has not received the attention it deserves. Subhas had also a complete programme for freedom struggle as well as for the reconstruction of the country after attaining independence. There are certain similarities as well as difference between the approaches of Mahatma Gandhi and Netaji which can be an object for a proper understanding of the two outstanding leaders as well as the movement.

Subhas Bose was 24 years old when he resigned from the Indian Civil Service. Even at that time he was well aware of the shortcomings of the Congress organisation and in his letter to C.R. Das dated 16th February, 1921 he had referred to them. He wrote: "I have quite a few ideas in my mind regarding the Congress. I think there must be a permanent meeting place for the Congress. We must have a house for this purpose. There will be a group of research students there who will be carrying on research on various national problems. As far as I am aware,

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our Congress has no definite policy relating to Indian currency and exchange and then it has probably not been decided what sort of attitude the Congress should adopt towards the Native States. It is perhaps not known what the stand of the Congress is in regard to franchise (for men and women). And further, the Congress has not probably made up its mind as to what we should do about the Depressed Classes. Because of lack of effort in this regard (that is, about the Depressed Classes) all non-Brahmins of Madras have become pro-Government and anti-nationalist. My personal view is that the Congress has to maintain a permanent staff. They will do research on individual problems. Each one will collect up-to-date facts and figures when these have been collected, the Congress Committee will formulate a policy vis-à-vis every individual problem. Today the Congress has no definite policy with regard to many national problems. That is why I think the Congress must have permanent quarters and a permanent staff of research students.

Besides, the Congress should open an Intelligence Department. It has to be so arranged that all up-to-date news and facts and figures about our country are available in the Intelligence Department. Booklets will be published in every provincial language by "the Propaganda Department and will be distributed free among the general public. Apart from, that, a book will be published by the Propaganda Department on each and every question in our national life. In such a book the policy of the Congress will be explained and the grounds on which such a policy has been formulated will also be given. I have written so much. These questions are not new to you. I could not help writing about them as to me they appear to be quite new. I feel that tremendous work lies ahead of us in connection with the Congress. If you so wish, I shall probably be able
to make some contribution in this respect."5

In the earlier stage the differences between Subhas Bose and Mahatma Gandhi were confined to the strategy of the freedom movement. Later on both the leaders had different approaches for the reconstruction of Indian society and polity after attaining independence. It is unfortunate that none of them lived to give a practical shape to this ideas for the making of a new India of their dreams.

Gandhi was critical of the radical ideas and programmes of Subhas Bose. He severely castigated Subhas's cooperation with the Axis powers. The prominent disciples of Mahatma Gandhi including Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru were upset with Subhas Bose. These leaders did not doubt the bonafides of Subhas Bose. But they thought that the path Subhas Bose had chosen was utterly wrong. It was bad thing psychologically for the Indian masses to think in terms of being liberated by an outside agency. Nehru said that Hitler and Japan represented the reactionary forces and their victory meant the victory of the reactionary forces. The criticism of Subhas Bose continued so long as he was alive. But his tragic death and the heroic saga of the INA changed the whole perspective. Subhas Bose was looked upon as a far seeing statesman, a born realist, a strategist of outstanding calibre who had staked everything for his country. True, Subhas did not succeed in his mission during his life time. He could not hold a parade in the Red Fort. But Subhas was able to convince his countrymen that freedom was not far off. His activities hastened the dawn of freedom.

Subhas Bose had become a myth after his death. He has been

linked to the mythology of India. His name has become a legend. The people of India remember him as one of the greatest sons of their country whose contribution to the cause of his freedom was of the noblest order. Hatred of foreign rule was the dominant trait of his character. Some Western writers denounced him as a quisling. But the charge was slanderous. He refuted the charge that the I.N.A. was a puppet army. As for himself he once said, "If British politicians have failed to coax or coerce me, no other politician can succeed in doing so." Subhas Bose believed sincerely in the need of foreign aid for winning the battle of Indian independence like extremist leaders before him he thought the end justified the means.

Subhas was not without his defects. He was unable to adjust himself to his environment. He had a burning desire for supremacy. He was never happier than when fighting alone. He had serious difference with Mahatma Gandhi and fought constantly against what he described the totalitarianism of the Congress High Command. Subhas was himself suspected of fascist tendencies. But the heroic end of Subhas Bose has obliterated the memory of his shortcomings. He lives in the heart of his countrymen as one of the most redoubtable of India’s freedom fighters who staked his all for Indian freedom.

Background of Differences

Mahatma Gandhi and Subhas Bose were brought up and nurtured in different milieu. They underwent different experiences and influences which shaped their life and outlook towards contemporary issues. Subhas was born and brought up in Bengal. He was in his teen age

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influenced by Swami Vivekanand and Aurobindo Ghosh. He shared
the extremist leaders a deep rooted mistrust towards the British rulers
who would not leave India voluntarily but had to be driven out by force.
The revolutionary activity in Bengal envisaged the political freedom
of India. These were two broad divisions among the revolutionaries. One
believed in the armed conflict against the British with the help of Indian
soldiers. If possible these revolutionaries also wanted to seek the help of
the other nations which were inimical to the British. The other group
held that the stray incidents of violence could serve their purpose. The
Anushilan Samiti, under the leadership of Barindra Kumar Ghosh, the
younger brother of Shri Aurobindo Ghosh carried out its revolutionary
activities with fervour. Although Subhas Bose never took direct part in
the revolutionary activities but he had sympathy with the movement.
He had studied the history of major revolutionary movements of the
world and had concluded that no nation could achieve freedom without
armed revolt. He was much influenced with the freedom movement of
Ireland and identified a number of situations of Indian freedom
movement with those of Irish revolution. High point of Bose's European
exile was his visit to Ireland in February 1936 during which he held
three meetings with Eamonn De Valera. He also met other ministers and
leaders. All the Irish parties were sympathetic towards India and his desire
for freedom. The two revolutionary leaders of Italy Mazzini and Garibaldi
had a fascination for Subhas Bose. He often compared Mazzini's dreams
for a united and republican Italy to his dreams of India, Garibaldi raised
an army to bring about a popular government and unity to his country.

Gandhiji was a seasoned politician. When Subhas met him for the
first time in 1922, Gandhiji was fifty two years of age and had been in
active politics for more than twenty five years. He had studied Vedas,
Upnishads, Gita, Bible, Kuran, Ramayana, Mahabharta, Dhammapada, Ruskin, Thoreau, and Tolstoy. Out of the half century of active political life he had spent twenty years in South Africa where he had developed his technique of Satyagrah and successfully challenged the South African Government. By the time he came to India in 1915, his ideas had matured and he was convinced that the disarmed Indian people could not fight the British Empire through violent means. But India had a vast population. Once it could stand erect and be fearless, no power on earth could keep it under subjugation. Gandhiji thought that the mainstay of a government was the active co-operation of the people. If the people withdrew their cooperation from the government, it means the end of the political system. As soon as the subjects ceased to fear the governments, howsoever despotic it might be its power was gone. This was a novel method of resisting evil. History did not offer any parallel.

Mahatma Gandhi and Subhas Chandra Bose were two legendary personalities, gigantic in their political moral and ethical stature. Both were men with iron grit and determination. Each respected the other for his patriotism; yet each felt that other was pursuing the wrong path to achieve freedom. The relationship between Gandhi and Bose despite their temperamental differences and conflicting attitudes, retained its sheen because of its conviction in their hearts that each, in his own way, serve the cause of nation.

Unable to adjust to the changing scenario, convinced that the time was ripe for Indian fighters to exploit the situation which had developed after the outbreak of the Second World War and the continuous reverses that Britain and the Allied powers suffered, he decided to align with Germany and Japan on the prior condition that after cessation of hostilities, India would be accepted by the Axis powers as a free and
independent nation. This quest took him out of India. His dramatic escape and the trail of glory which he blazed during the short but impressive days of the Indian National Army inspires us even today. His reported tragic death in an air crash ended the saga. But the nation remembers him with love and respect.

Broadcast on Gandhiji's birthday on 2nd October, 1943. 'The service which Mahatma Gandhi has rendered to India is so unique and unparalleled that his name will be written in letters of gold in our national history for all time'.

Even Gandhiji, while differing from the extreme methods of Subhas Bose, had utmost admiration for his unique effort for India's freedom. On one occasion Gandhiji wrote to Subhas, 'regarding your love for the country and determination to achieve freedom, you are second to none. Your sincerity is transparent. Your spirit of self-sacrifice and suffering cannot be surpassed by anybody'. On another occasion in a conversation with an American journalist, on the eve of launching the Quit India Movement, Gandhiji defended Bose as 'a patriot of patriots'. Netaji's last broadcast on 6th July, 1944 addressed to Gandhiji through Azad Hind Radio, was like a brilliant report in which he described how 'the high esteem in which you are held by patriotic Indians outside India and by foreign friends of India's freedom, was increased a hundred fold when you bravely sponsored the Quit India Movement in August 1942'. Concluding his speech he fervently sought the blessings of Gandhi,

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7 Ibid.
9 Ibid., pp. 328-29.
'Father of Our Nation, in this holy war of India's liberation we ask you for your blessings and good wishes.'

During 1945 and 1946, Gandhiji came to know a lot about the exploits of Subhas and his Indian National Army. While addressing the INA prisoners he paid unreserved tributes in hailing Bose as 'Netaji'. He also paid unqualified tribute to the INA. 'The greatest among its achievements was to gather together, under one banner, men from all religions and races of India, and to infuse in them the spirit of solidarity and oneness, to the utter exclusion of all communal and parochial sentiments. It is an example which we should all emulate.'

It is thus clear from the above that both Gandhiji and Subhas discussed all the problems that confronted them, honestly realised their differences. Their relationship was based on truthfulness, transparency, sacrifice and suffering. No wonder, they had the deepest concern for each other till the end.

To Subhas Bose, Gandhi always remained 'India's greatest man'. His appreciation of the unique contribution of Gandhi was unequivocal. He recognised and admitted Gandhi as the undisputable, unrivalled leader of the masses. Subhas had all praise for Gandhi's unflinching patriotism, firmness in character, love for truth etc. Infact, Bose bowed before Gandhi's 'single hearted devotion, his relentless will, and his indefatigable labour'. To Gandhi, Bose was like a son whose 'self sacrifice and suffering, drive integrity and commitment to the national cause and the

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10 Address to Mahatma Gandhi over the Rangoon radio on 6 July 1944, Selected Speeches of Subhas Chandra Bose (Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India), 1962.

capacity to bind all Indians into one people were unsurpassed.’

Both Gandhi and Bose were totally honest men. They were internationalists and humanists. They were secular in approach and anti-racial in outlook. In whatever situations they were and whatever they were doing, their minds were always diverted towards the liberation of their motherland. The whole life of both the leaders was an epic struggle for India's independence. In fact, the life long "Tapasya" of both, ended with the ultimate sacrifice of their very lives.