

**DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**  
**CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY**

**PASADENA, CALIFORNIA 91125**

THE BRITISH PERCEPTION OF NETAJI AND THE I. N. A.

Peter Fay

A talk delivered at the 5th International  
Netaji Seminar, Calcutta January 1985



# **HUMANITIES WORKING PAPER 112**

April 1985

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It is presumptuous of an American who, though old enough to have had direct personal experience of Subhas Chandra Bose and the Azad Hind Fauj, in fact has had none; who, being American, cannot bring to the topic the familiarity, the passion, the commitment which so many of you here display; it is presumptuous of such a one to attempt to say anything to you about Netaji and the Indian National Army. But I have one excuse. Perceptions are everybody's game.

Were I to announce that I possessed, and intended to convey, "the truth" about Netaji, that would be an impertinence, an outrage nearly. For I do not believe that "the truth" about a man, a woman, a movement, is ascertainable -- even, perhaps, exists. We can certainly establish the factuality, the authenticity, of events. We can establish, for example, that Netaji was born eighty-eight years ago this month, was rusticated from Presidency College after the assault on Oaten, and at Fitzwilliam Hall read simultaneously for the Tripos and the I. C. S. examinations. We can establish that he was of such and

such a height, that the probable cause of much of his physical discomfort was his gallbladder, and that in 1944 very few people on this side of the world, perhaps no one at all except Abid Hassan and Lakshmi Swaminadhan, knew that he was married. But having established these things, and many more, what do we have? Surely not "the truth" about Netaji.

For what we mean by the truth is not that we have all the facts straight. What we mean is that, having possessed ourselves of some of these facts, the significant ones, we move on to an appropriate, a just, appreciation of the man and his life. What we mean is that we (to use a common American colloquialism) size him up right. And that is a matter of perception.

Moreover, it is forever an open matter. Perceptions, unlike facts, are not fixed. They cannot be framed and hung on a wall, like those imposing oil portraits of great men (among them Nehru, B. C. Roy, and Subhas himself with no date of death, as if that fact was still not established) -- those oil portraits that I remember seeing some years ago in the Victoria Memorial right here in this city. In England and in the States too it is common for men and women who have given money for the construction of some useful building -- a laboratory, say, at my own California Institute of Technology -- to have their portraits hung in the completed buildings. It rarely works; a portrait is not a perception; the people who use the building forget, or never knew, and rarely care, who the figure is. Only if the person portrayed lives on in memory is the portrait of any effect. And memories differ,

being shaped by who is doing the remembering and in what circumstances. What I propose to do in this short talk is suggest some of the ways in which the British remember, or if you will perceive, Netaji and his movement.

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Let me begin, because it is the most recent specimen, with the famous (or infamous) Granada documentary of a year ago. I should explain that I have not actually seen this piece of work. It is not being shown in the States, though Granada's serialization of Scott's Raj Quartet (which it was meant to introduce) has just now reached our screens. But I have read the script; and I am aware, by word of mouth and from newspaper clippings, what many persons here and elsewhere in India think of it -- or at least thought. Namely, that while it purports to rescue Netaji from the relative obscurity in which he languishes outside India, it actually (in the words ascribed to Dr. Bose by the Sunday Statesman<sup>1</sup>) "denigrates him at every turn." Again with the caveat that I have only the script to go by, allow me to say that I agree that it does denigrate him and his movement. How? By being so constructed that the viewer, the British viewer (for whom after all it is intended), is not given the leisure as it were, the ten or fifteen minutes of viewing time, in which to get to know Netaji and the men and women he led in their own place and context. Long before that viewer discovers who these uncommon people were and exactly what it was that they were doing -- remember that the very existence, during the war years, of a Provisional Government and a National Army is known

today to few Englishmen and even fewer Americans -- Granada pairs their chief with Adolf Hitler; with that somber and malignant figure whose name, after forty years, still speaks so powerfully to the West's consuming anxiety in the Second World War; and by pairing him so, practically guarantees that Englishmen and other Westerners who encounter Subhas only in this television documentary will remember him not with the sympathetic curiosity and incipient respect it was presumably Granada's intention to excite, but with suspicion, perhaps even with loathing. Relentlessly the connection is developed: Bose spending the greater part of his European sojourns in Germany, Bose accepting an engraved cigarette case from Hitler's hands, Bose taking a woman secretly to wife, a German-speaking woman, an Eva Braun no less. Reading the script, you are bound to wonder why Granada did not instead equate Netaji with Cromwell or Garibaldi; why they did not pair him with Castro or Nasser; why they did not measure him against Mustapha Kemal Ataturk -- a figure, by the way, whom Bose explicitly admired?

The reason is not, I think, that the producers were seriously interested in the question "was Netaji a fascist?" Nor were David Boulton and the others, I believe, dragged in Hitler's direction by Nirad Chaudhuri. It was, I will admit, curious that the one Indian outside the ranks of the I. N. A. or Netaji's own family whom Granada chose to make a part of the documentary should have been that clever old expatriate; and it borders, I will add, on the outrageous that Chaudhuri should try to persuade us that what drove Subhash through most of his life, and particularly in the last weeks before his fatal

flight, was not love of India, or courage in the face of adversity, or anything else constructive, but only hatred of British rule, a hatred so intense and persistent that it threatened to consume him. Surely, however, those of you who accepted Granada's invitation, went to England, and were interviewed, discovered that as always happens in these cases only a fraction of what you said got into the finished piece. Hugh Toye, who knows Chaudhuri well (they live almost side by side), assures me that they filmed Chaudhuri for forty-five minutes, and from those forty-five minutes selected only five. The question really, then, is why those particular five?

To answer that question it will be useful, I think, to remind ourselves how the Second World War appeared to Englishmen when it was being fought. It was in name, of course, a "world war". And unlike its predecessor of 1914 to 1918, it was fought right across the Eurasian land mass, involved the Pacific Ocean more than it did the Atlantic, and finished with an Allied triumph not over a European power but over Japan. Nevertheless to Englishmen, to Frenchmen and Poles and many Italians and every Dutchman and Dane; to Americans too; the critical field of battle was Europe. The war had begun there. It had begun, in 1939, with a deliberate Nazi challenge to the very fabric of civilized life. It had very nearly been lost the following year by a combination of mismanagement and default; had been kept alive only by England's stubborn refusal to capitulate; and would be won when Nazi Germany was at last smashed. In this contest for the possession of civilized society's body and soul what happened in Asia could never be

much more than a distraction, a sort of enormous and disquieting irrelevance. Japan's entry into the fighting, like Italy's earlier but of course on a much larger and more dangerous scale, appeared as an act of the grossest opportunism, a monstrous and unforgivable diversion, for which she would be duly punished when the work of saving civilization was accomplished. The civilization in question was European. It would be saved, if it could be saved at all, in Europe. What happened in the Pacific theatre, in China, on the borders of India, had no significance beyond their effect on the war in Europe -- with the odd consequence that even the most chilling disasters to Allied forces in that part of the world, even the attack on Pearl Harbor and the loss of Singapore, struck "us" (I might as well be frank about the pronoun) as inconclusive. Thrown out of this place or that by the Japanese, "we" knew (with MacArthur) that we would return. When the real business of the war, the European business, was finished, we should come back to Asia. And then everything would be as it had been before. Or if there had to be changes, as for example in India where some sort of dominion status would have to be arranged, it would be seen that the war had had nothing to do with it; Japanese victories had had nothing to do with it. They were an interruption, a damned nuisance of an interruption, which far from initiating or accelerating those changes had actually prevented us from getting on with them.

I have just given you, a bit exaggerated of course, a little too pat (in particular, many Americans will object that I have allowed us to be represented exclusively by the east coast liberal elite), how

the war appeared in the west; indeed, how the war appeared to me personally -- for I see no reason to conceal my perception of things. When Colonel Sahgal left Rangoon in January of 1945 to command a regiment in the Mount Popa area of central Burma, I was about to sail (a very young second lieutenant) for Naples with a battalion of 8-inch howitzers. And when Colonel Sahgal surrendered to the British on the banks of the Irrawaddy at the end of April, I was in the Po Valley watching Germans give themselves up -- and with every expectation of being sent next to Okinawa or some other Pacific island. Had someone told me then that Indians were fighting with the Japanese against the English, I would have been surprised and disgusted. In fact no one told me any such thing, it was years before the name "Netaji" or the letters I. N. A. meant anything to me. And name and letters mean nothing to most Americans and Englishmen now. So along comes Granada, with the laudable intention of resurrecting the name and the letters for an audience of Britishers whom it wishes to lure to its television serialization of Paul Scott's novels. And these Britishers, remember, perceive the Second World War and Britain's part in it in the manner I have just sketched.

They perceive something more. They perceive that in the years since, they have lost almost all the tangible fruits of their effort and of their victory; have lost everything beyond their shores except Gibraltar and the Falkland Islands; and have become as poor as the Irish -- much poorer than the French. They perceive, to put it differently, that they are no longer Britishers (I use the Indianism

deliberately, because it is also an Americanism familiar to us from our War of Independence, and therefore helps put me in the proper frame of mind) -- they perceive that they are no longer Britishers compelling the world's attention and respect with their British Empire, they are only Englishmen -- Little Englanders. But they have not forgotten what they once had and once were. And what combines in their memory, á propos the war and the empire, is the Britain of the Battle of Britain, Spitfires against ME 109s above the white cliffs of Dover, and in the North African desert New Zealanders, South Africans, and -- yes -- Indian regiments drawn from the subcontinent's finest and most loyal "martial races". That, and not the stern, unbending Empire of the Gateway, the Viceroy's Palace, and the Jallianwala Bagh, is their image.

Give us if you must this Bengali rebel and his tatterdemalion army, but do not break our nostalgic reverie, says Granada's prospective audience; as audiences all across England (and in the States too) have been saying to the producers of those other film and television spectacles among which The Far Pavilions is said to be the worst and the David Lean production of Passage to India the latest. Just recently I was shown a bitter indictment of this days-of-the-Raj genre by Salman Rushdie, the author of Midnight's Children. "The recrudescence of imperialist ideology and the popularity of Raj fictions," he writes, "puts one in mind of the phantom twitchings of an amputated limb."<sup>2</sup> In the Granada documentary the limb that twitches is gallant little England standing alone against the "Nazees" in the summer of 1940. That, I think, is why the producers picked out of

Chaudhuri's forty-five minutes the bit about Netaji, in August of 1945, dying "out of mere folly, out of mere hatred of British rule which he had created within himself." For hatred, we will probably all agree, is what drove Hitler. It is hatred that distinguished him from the Garibaldis, the Nassers, and the Ataturks of recent memory; who, if they identified enemies and roundly attacked them, also loved and fought for what they loved. Hitler the hater. Bose the hater: the equation relieved Granada of the necessity of exploring Netaji and the I. N. A. outside the context of England and the war. If these Indians were for nothing, only against; if what drove them to ally themselves first with the Germans, later with the Japanese. was not their Indian-ness, not their hopes and ambitions for India, but only their bitter dislike of Britishers and British rule; then they could the easier be treated as just another of England's antagonists, as simply one more among the many enemies of truth and decency -- that truth and decency for which England, by her refusal to give up the fight in Europe, could clearly be seen to speak. Netaji becomes, then, a sort of South Asian Hitler manqué (a parallel which, by the way, Chaudhuri tentatively drew years ago in a journal article<sup>3</sup>). Thus is he denigrated.

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But the British perception of Netaji as a hating person is not confined to the Granada piece. Let us look again for a moment at the incident in Presidency College in Subhas's third year, the Oaten business, to which a portion of the 1st International Netaji Seminar twelve years ago was devoted. It will not be necessary for me to

remind you of the facts of the case: Oaten the Englishman bursting out of his lecture hall on the 10th of January, 1916, because there is noise in the corridor, and giving a student a shove; Oaten bursting out again on the 15th of February and seizing a student by the scruff of the neck; Oaten attacked and knocked to the ground on the staircase before the college notice board later that afternoon; Subhas, neither admitting nor denying a part in the assault, sent down. Netaji himself, in later life, made a good deal of this incident. In 1937, in the course of dictating his truncated autobiography to Emilie Schenk1, he remarked that he had come to realise "the inner significance of the tragic events of 1916. My Principal had expelled me, but he had made my future career. I had established a precedent for myself from which I could not easily depart in future."<sup>4</sup> What that precedent was (it does not appear from the balance of Subhas's words to Emilie, which are uncharacteristically woolly) I will suggest in a moment. My question now is: what did the British think it was?

We have one answer from the Englishman whose enthusiasm for and close study of Netaji led to the publication, thirty years ago, of the first biography by a non-Indian. I refer to Hugh Toye's The Springing Tiger, long now out of print in England but still to be found on Indian bookstalls under the Jaico imprint. According to Colonel Toye, Subhas came out of the Oaten affair believing himself "a victim of racial prejudice, struck down for protesting against an insult to his Motherland." He did not forget the injury, continues Toye. "He brooded over it with all the vehemence of his 19 years," adding to it

other examples of racial prejudice, until at last "racial hatred ate into his soul." And it is Toye's view that although this "racial complex" moderated as Bose grew older, it never went away. "To show himself superior to the white-faced foreigner," to so manage things that India as a whole should show itself superior, became the object of his life, his mission, his -- and here Toye borrows a phrase from Dilip Roy - "one-pointed aim."<sup>5</sup>

Now one may agree with Toye, and Dilip too, that Subhas was unusually single-minded. Dilip himself has him announce at one point in his Cambridge stay that Indian students up at the varsity must "prove it home" to the English "that we are their superiors."<sup>6</sup> But that is a conversational remark reconstructed, like the others in Dilip's memoir, long after it was uttered; and one that seems to me of little importance; any high-spirited young man set down in a foreign place might say such a thing. There is, by the way, another remark from Netaji's Cambridge days that is often made much of -- in my opinion equally mistakenly. In a letter to his friend Hementa Sarkar enumerating some of the good qualities of the English (they are precise, energetic, optimistic, and understand the value of time) Subhas observes that "nothing makes me happier than to be served by the whites and to watch them clean my shoes."<sup>7</sup> He refers no doubt to the college servants, middle-aged men of a certain class who made the beds, swept the rooms, and emptied the chamber pots of Oxford and Cambridge undergraduates right through the Second World War and beyond. The mental picture bothers most Americans. I remember very well how

upset I was my first few days at Balliol when my scout, a man of fifty who dressed as carefully as my own father and might have passed for him so far as I could see, insisted that I leave my shoes outside my door each night so he could have them shined and ready for me when I woke up in the morning. But I do not believe it bothered Subhas, or any other Indian of status; for him, I think, there was nothing in the least interesting, and certainly nothing degrading to the doer, in a servant cleaning shoes; he did not sit and watch the man, pleased that a firangi would thus abase himself before an Indian. He was simply glad that in England, so unlike what he had experienced in Calcutta, Englishmen were prepared to treat him as the gentleman he knew himself to be -- he found this to be so in the bookshops, and on the trains.

Let me return to the Oaten business. Subhas met the first offense by organizing a student strike. He met the second by leading, or being present at, or at the very least refusing to denounce -- the evidence is conflicting, Netaji himself so far as I know would never say -- the assault before the notice board. And what is one to think of the assault? I know what I myself first thought: how unsporting to outnumber a man, knock him down, and run! (Probably no Englishman failed to notice that what poor Oaten had gone down to the board to post was a cricket notice.) But I have thought a bit about it since. These young Presidency students had been subjected, as Indians in general had been subjected since Macaulay's Education Minute of almost a century before, to a steady drumfire of cultural disparagement. The Committee of Enquiry set up after the affair was over, three Englishmen

and two Indians, agrees that this was the case. So does Tagore, in an otherwise mild and patient piece that appeared in April. The disparagement had embittered them. The shoving and grabbing by the scruff of the neck had been the last straw. What were they to do? How were they to recover their self-respect?

The English demanded -- it is implicit in Toye's treatment, and in my own first reaction to the story -- a sporting reply. But if one side of the sporting coin tells a man not to hit his enemy from behind, the other tells him to offer a challenge face to face, then fight with fists or other manly weapons -- and how on earth was an Indian student to manage that? Was he to take lessons in boxing (which Principal James, rather a decent man, sometimes gave lessons in, Hemendranath Das Gupta says); lessons in boxing, the épée, or the quarterstaff, then confront Oaten outside his blessed lecture hall and have the matter out? Let any student actually attempt such a thing and he would not simply be humiliated all over again, by Oaten laughing and turning away (as Oaten surely would); that student would, if he persisted and actually struck a blow, be instantly charged with assault and battery, and pursued with the full force of the law. No, if you wanted physical satisfaction, and these young men did, there was only one way to obtain it on a Britisher: the way of surprise and speed and anonymity. You had to gang up and jump him, not because that guaranteed you victory, but because only in that way could he neither refuse to fight, nor single you out and ruin you after the fight was over.

Refuse to fight, decline to accept you as an adversary, laugh you away, or if you persist isolate and destroy you -- the predicament, perhaps, not just of schoolboys under the Raj but of entire independence movements, of ethnic minorities, of women at all times almost everywhere. As Colonel Sahgal and his wife Dr. Lakshmi Sahgal have often told me, perhaps the greatest problem the Indian National Army faced was how to compel others to take it seriously. To recognize it for what it was, the armed force of a provisional government of free India. To treat its members as custom and the laws of war required. This Subhas Chandra Bose managed to accomplish with the Japanese. And the "precedent" that he had established for himself as a consequence of the Oaten business was, I suggest, what enabled him to do it. What others might consider undue sensitivity, touchiness even, Subhas from 1916 on was determined to make a constant of his behavior. Henceforth he would insist that the British, and therefore in due course the Japanese, in all matters big and small treat him and his with dignity and respect. No matter how promising the opportunity, no matter how high the cost, in future he would not touch his cap to them.

But I suspect that the British of the time read something different into Subhas's behavior as a third-year Presidency student, and I am confirmed in my suspicion by what Hugh Toye has to say. You will remember that I have quoted him as writing that Subhas was gradually consumed by racial hatred, and that it was this that drove him down the path he took. Now I know Colonel Toye well. He has taught us all a great deal about the British in India during the war;

like his older compatriot Philip Mason, he was there himself. But I think (and this is important to the whole question of how the British perceive Netaji and the I. N. A.) that Colonel Toye has inverted what actually passed between the Presidency College students and Professor Oaten, and between Subhas and the British on any number of occasions.

For it was the Englishman of that day who felt race, thought race, used the word often and publicly. It was the Englishman who, encountering an Indian or an Egyptian or a Zulu, and observing that he differed, attributed the difference not to circumstance but to blood, not to culture or community but to race. It was race Sir John Strachey had in mind when, addressing himself to the question should Indians be admitted by competitive examination to the higher levels of the public service (already they filled the lower levels. Bengalis predominating) -- it was race Strachey had in mind when he announced, in the Cambridge lectures of 1884 that became for so many years the intellectual pillar of the Raj, that the most important part of the competitive examination of a young Englishman had in fact been sat and passed for him "by his forefathers, who, as we have a right to assume, have transmitted to him not only their physical courage, but the powers of independent judgment, the decision of character, the habits of thought, and generally those qualities that are necessary for the government of men, and which have given us our empire. The stock-in-trade with which Englishmen start in life is not that of the Bengalis."<sup>7</sup> The one were born with imperial talents and instincts. The other were not.

It is inconceivable that Oaten, James, and their sort did not

share this attitude. If they had not read Strachey they had certainly read Kipling; or had heard Curzon, the viceroy who defied Bengal by splitting it in two, the imperial proconsul ("Grand Moghul" Netaji contemptuously calls him) from whose lips issued on every possible occasion the message of his countrymen's special and God-given capacity for the evenhanded administration of distant places. What is more, not being themselves members of the Indian Civil Service, to which Strachey and Curzon specifically referred, and which Lloyd George would style the "steel frame" of the Raj just when it was ceasing to be; not being themselves prospective proconsuls or even military men, but only middleclass English schoolmasters brought out to play an imperial part; the Oatens and the Jameses had almost certainly discovered that to their sense of racial separateness were joined other feelings, disturbing feelings, feelings of irritation and anxiety, of resentment that their obvious superiority, the superiority of their race, was not conceded by the people among whom they moved. Liking Indians was not a simple business. As Tagore gently puts it in the piece I have already mentioned, "our complexion, religion, language, and habits, are most annoyingly different from theirs."<sup>8</sup> It was easy for Englishmen, in periods of loneliness or general malaise, when India's foreignness had grown unbearable and the heat was at its worst, to dislike "the natives" (that was the term they used); and quite possible in moments of extreme exasperation to pass beyond dislike. We cannot of course be certain. Tagore himself was anxious to spare his students sour and contemptuous British schoolmasters lest they "enter

upon life with their hearts filled with the poison of hatred against the English."<sup>9</sup> But when Oaten burst shouting out of his Presidency College lecture hall and confronted the students, among whom we may suppose was Subhas, surely it was the Englishman more than the Indian who was moved by the fury of "racial hatred."

That Bose did not hate the British of and for themselves is further suggested by the kind words he has for the "rough Scotsman" with a heart of gold who taught him infantry drill; for two successive superintendents of Mandalay prison (Findlay was "an exceedingly nice and straightforward man," Smith much the same); for Sir Stanley Jackson. Governor of Bengal; for Irwin (no viceroy since Ripon "had adopted such a friendly attitude towards the Indian people"); even for Principal James ("I must say in fairness to him that he was very popular with the students for protecting them against police persecution on several occasions").<sup>10</sup> There are no kind words for Oaten. But I do not think Subhas hated him, not in the sense that Chaudhuri intends and Hugh Toye plays with. Oaten simply made Netaji angry. From that anger came the determination I have mentioned, the determination to be treated by any and all Britishers with dignity and respect. In that determination he set his course.

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There was another element, I think, in the British perception of Netaji.

Subhas was clever, no doubt. He was a gentleman, though an Englishman might qualify the attribute by saying "a gentleman of

sorts". (Nothing in the Granada documentary, by the way, seems to me more snide than the comment that the Indian National Army fought "a war of sorts" for India's independence.) But was he a man? Could any educated Bengali be more than the Hurree Babu of Kipling's Kim, which every Englishman read; Hurree Babu of the patent leather shoes, the blue and white umbrella, and the persistent fearfulness. English readers knew nothing of the real Bengali secret service agent Sarat Chandra Das, who had reached Lhasa in remote Tibet twenty years before Kim was published. Weren't all babus weaklings and cowards?

Netaji was aware of the charge. Partly he blamed Macaulay for it, "the trouble began with Macaulay" he wrote<sup>11</sup> -- not with the Education Minute but with the essay on Warren Hastings, with its famous passage about "the Bengalee feeble even to effeminacy" for whom "smooth excuses, elaborate tissue of circumstantial falsehood, chicanery, perjury, forgery" take the place of more manly weapons.<sup>12</sup> Partly, however, Subhas blamed himself. Babu. The word alone carried for him a painful freight of implied timidity. "God has given us a pair of legs, but we are unable to walk 40/45 miles because we are Babus," he complained in an early letter to his mother. We cannot bear the heat, we are frightened of the cold, we neglect our bodies and surrender physical labor to our servants -- "because we are Babus."<sup>13</sup> Other figures in the independence movement suffered, it has been argued, from this "fear of cowardice".<sup>14</sup> Gandhi felt it, and escaped not by imitating the Englishman's courage (which begins with self-assertion and proceeds to physical mastery over an opponent) but by employing and

teaching courage which begins with self-control and proceeds to the non-violent affirmation of truth. But truth force, satyagraha, applied to the pacific yet by no means passive pursuit of swaraj, did not suit Subhas, *intellectually or emotionally*. Neither did the path Aurobindo Ghosh followed: revolutionary politics first, meditation and the practice of yoga later -- Dilip, who supposed Netaji to be "a mystic in essence of his being",<sup>15</sup> was nevertheless quite unable to entice his friend down to Pondicherry. As for Nirad Chaudhuri, his boast that he "picked up the gauntlet thrown down by the English" by mastering their language and then compelling their attention through the sheer force of his prose,<sup>16</sup> would have -- the boast was made after Netaji's death -- would have made Subhas smile. Subhas took the route of armed strength, the route Englishmen may have supposed was their route but was actually, I believe, in the Bengali martial tradition -- provided, of course, that that tradition could be revived while the Raj existed.

Now that was not an easy thing to do. Indeed, it seems to me quite extraordinary that Subhas, on returning to Calcutta from his rustication over the Oaten business, with his family's injunction to get on with his degree fresh in his ears, should have joined the university's Territorial unit. What a marvelous symbol, too, of what was to come, that he and the others should march one day into Fort William (which of course was otherwise closed to Indians) feeling as they marched "as if we were taking possession of something to which we had an inherent right but of which we had been unjustly deprived."<sup>17</sup> What was to come was a long time coming. A decade later, at the

Calcutta session of the Congress, Netaji had to make do with drilling Congress Volunteers, a thing Chaudhuri pokes fun at in the documentary, a thing Lakshmi's mother Ammu disapproved of (Lakshmi remembers) at the time; a thing Lakshmi herself, then a girl of fourteen, found so exciting that she stole out early each morning -- they were in Calcutta for a concurrent meeting of the All-India Women's Conference -- to watch. Fifteen years later still Subhas was again in uniform. And this time he and the men and women with him were seriously prepared, at last and on behalf of all Indians, to -- I repeat the phrase -- "to take possession of something to which we had an inherent right but of which we had been unjustly deprived." To repossess India. And to do so not by truth-force but by force of arms.

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So I have hurried us clear up to 1943. What was the British perception of Subhas in that year? A mixture, I think. Anxiety over what he might accomplish: a secret intelligence memorandum of 14 July acknowledged his "drive and political acumen, his prestige in Indian revolutionary circles, his understanding of both Indian and English character."<sup>18</sup> Relief that he had not reached Malaya while Quit India still threatened. Behind these, I suspect, distaste, reluctance to believe that the I. N. A. was a serious business, and a grudging suspicion that it might prove to be just that.

The British had always taken Subhas's revolutionary ambitions seriously, too seriously, scenting terrorist connections in his every move (as Mihir Bose in his excellent biography has most recently

shown), and therefore throwing him into prison more readily and in more distant places than other Indian leaders of his rank. But what were they to make of this army of his? If there was any reality, any substance, to it, it offended reason and the senses in two ways. By merely existing, it destroyed the myth of the Indian Army. And by following Bose it destroyed the myth of the babu.

Let me say something only about the first. Philip Mason has written a marvelous, nostalgic, disarming history of the Indian Army -- I mean, of course, the previous British Indian Army -- which he entitles A Matter of Honour. Why does he call it that? Because the army he chronicles was not "Indian" in the sense that the Japanese army was Japanese; nor could the King-Emperor for whom it fought, being so distant and foreign, command its direct and active allegiance; nor was it held together (though here Mason may be looking through rose-tinted glasses) simply by the mercenary bonds of pay and loot. The cement was regimental loyalty, loyalty passing from the men (Indian) through the officers (English) to the colors. What held it together was "honour" in that sense.

Let us suppose that for many years this was actually the case. Then came the Malayan campaign, the fall of Singapore, and Farrer Park. There, on the 17th of February, 1942, the Indians of Percival's command, previously separated from their British officers (who were marched off to Changi), were handed over to the Japanese by a Colonel Hunt, addressed by Mohan Singh, and summoned to join a truly Indian army -- the Indian National Army; which many, by word and gesture, did

on the spot. That broke the myth. That shattered the "honour". And the subsequent tortured efforts of New Delhi to demonstrate that the joiners had been lured to their "betrayal" by money and comforts, or forced to it by (among other things) torture in the literal sense of the word, attest to the impact upon British opinion and feelings of the break. I do not need to belabor that. What I should like to point out, because it did not at first dawn upon me, and because it illustrates again how easily the British saw things backward, as with who was consumed with racial hatred for whom -- but this kind of thing we all of us, surely, do from time to time -- what I want to point out is that at Farrer Park the betrayal, the breach of honour, was in fact committed not by the Indians at all, but by the British. For it was they who abandoned the jawans. "I had a feeling of being completely helpless," Shah Nawaz later testified, "of being handed over like cattle...;" Dhillon too felt "like one deserted;"<sup>19</sup> Prem Sahgal would echo the sentiment had not circumstances put him elsewhere on the island at that moment. Yet not once, not even at the Red Fort Trials, was an Englishman heard to suggest that Percival should have refused to let himself and the rest of the British be separated from their Indian brothers-in-arms; or that Hunt, on coming to the microphone, should have refused to announce what he announced. As it was, what these Indian soldiers, whose discipline and loyalty Malaya Command had no reason to doubt, and who had fought for their regiments and their King-Emperor some of them (like Prem) the full length of the peninsula -- what these soldiers perceived was the deliberate, formal, one might

almost say ceremonial abdication of a responsibility. In good times, in victorious times, the two races (to use the British term) of the Indian Army were bound to each other in "a matter of honour." Now, however, the times were bad. So the Britisher was backing out.

And so, abruptly, and leaving things much in the air, I come to the end of the argument. What is the British perception of Netaji and the I. N. A.? Cloudy, I would suggest. Inverted. which is a variety of being wrong. Finally and most obviously, incomplete. It is an incompleteness that comes in part from just refusing to look. Do you know what happened to Netaji in British publications during the war? He disappeared. There is an entry, a fairly long entry. for him in the 1940-41 edition of the Indian Year Book and Who's Who. There is an entry for 1941-42, ending with "mysteriously disappeared from his house in 1940, present whereabouts not known." The next edition contains the same entry, without elaboration; the next after that, and the next after that still, have no entry at all. It is as if, like Trotsky -- and we must give Granada Television credit for drawing the analogy -- it is as if Subhas, like Trotsky, had been quite "painted out of the picture." How is one to take that, particularly when it still goes on?

Perhaps as a backhanded acknowledgement of his importance and intractability. In the end it may be this that is most revealing about the British and Netaji. They could not and cannot manage him. Even Sir Richard Attenborough, I see, does not know what to do with him; and not knowing, leaves him out of his magnificent film.

## NOTES

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2. Salman Rushdie, "Outside the Whale," American Film, December, 1984.
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4. Subhas Chandra Bose, An Indian Pilgrim: An Unfinished Autobiography 1897-1921 (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1965), pp. 70-71.
5. Hugh Toye, Subhash Chandra Bose: The Springing Tiger (Bombay: Jaico Publishing House, 1959), pp. 20-21.
6. Dilip Kumar Roy, The Subhash I Knew (Bombay: Nalanda Publications, 1946), p. 53.
7. Sir John Strachey, India: Its Administration & Progress (London: Macmillan. 4th ed. revised, 1911), pp. 544-545.
8. Rabindranath Tagore, "Indian Students and Western Teachers," The Modern Review (Calcutta), April, 1916, p. 418.
9. Ibid., p. 421.
10. Subhas Chandra Bose, The Indian Struggle 1920-1942 (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1964), pp. 132, 134, 141. 216; Indian Pilgrim, p. 69 note 1.
11. Bose, Indian Struggle, p. 301.
12. Thomas Babington Macaulay, "Warren Hastings", first publ. 1841; in G. M. Young, ed., Macaulay: Prose and Poetry (Cambridge: Harvard

- Univ. Press, 1967), p. 386.
13. From a letter to his mother, in Indian Pilgrim, p. 120.
  14. "The Fear of Cowardice" serves as chapter heading for an entire section of Lloyd I. and Susanne Hoerber Rudolph's The Modernity of Tradition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967).
  15. Roy, The Subhash I Knew, p. 171.
  16. Nirad C. Chaudhuri. The Continent of Circe (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 89.
  17. Bose. Indian Pilgrim, p. 82.
  18. Item 37 in vol. 3 of The Transfer of Power.
  19. Moti Ram, ed.. Two Historic Trials in Red Fort (New Delhi: published by himself, 1946), pp. 105, 118.