

Azad Hind: Radical Indian nationalism in Nazi Germany during World War Two



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¹ Alamy Limited, "Stock Photo - A Sikh Soldier of the Azad Hind Fauj at a Function in Berlin," Alamy, accessed April 13, 2020, <https://www.alamy.com/a-sikh-soldier-of-the-azad-hind-fauj-at-a-function-in-berlin-image213154495.html>.

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A Note On Translation

Except for quotations cited from secondary sources, I translated all primary source material such as official telegraphs, reports, speeches, etc. that were originally published in German, Italian or Hindustani.

Introduction

The widespread protests that engulfed India following the parliamentary approval of a controversial citizenship bill² on 11 December 2019 were sparked by the bill's blatant and “fundamentally discriminatory”³ exclusion of Muslims from a criterion of persecuted minorities legally eligible to receive Indian citizenship. For critics of the BJP, the Hindu nationalist party which leads the Indian government, the bill was yet another step towards the “Hindufication” of the country in a bid to make it a bastion for the Hindu cultural nationalism which lies at the core of the BJP's ideology but stands in contradiction to India's secular constitutional foundations. Popular resentment was directed not just at the ethno-religious homogeneity of the Hindutva vision, but also at the government's appalling treatment of those that did not conform to it. Protestors recognized an “extreme centralization of power”⁴ in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's office and the government's penchant for brutally silencing dissenting voices of those in the media or in institutions as worrying symptoms of an increasingly authoritarian regime. Fittingly, it was only a similarly autocratic policy-decision – the imposition of a draconian nation-wide ‘lockdown’ in light of the COVID pandemic – that eventually brought a halt to the protests. Even in the enforced silence that momentarily replaced the symbolic cries for “*Azadi! Azadi!*” (Freedom! Freedom!) however, the government would still find ways to trumpet its communal

² The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) provides a path to Indian citizenship for illegal migrants of Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi, and Christian religious minorities, who had fled persecution from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan before December 2014. Muslims from these countries are not given such eligibility. The Act, when used with the National Register of Citizens to document legal citizens and deport those who do not meet citizenship requirements, would essentially render Muslim immigrants ineligible for citizenship and thus stateless.

³ Spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Archived 19 December 2019 at the Wayback Machine, Jeremy Laurence, UNHCR, Geneva (13 December 2019)

⁴ “Raghuram Rajan: India in Growth Recession; Extreme Centralisation of Power in PMO Not Good,” National Herald, accessed April 17, 2020, <https://www.nationalheraldindia.com/national/raghuram-rajain-growth-recession-extreme-centralisation-of-power-in-pmo-not-good>.

agenda by divisively spotlighting a Muslim religious gathering for being event while remaining oblivious to similar Hindu congregations.

As defenders of modern India’s secular and liberal constitution demand **azadi from a worryingly fascist political environment**, this essay calls attention to an often forgotten and rather peculiar chapter in Indian history when revolutionaries **instead placed their hopes on fascist states for azadi**, albeit of a different kind, from the hegemonic clutches of British colonialism during the Second World War. Subhas Chandra Bose was one such prominent leader of Indian anticolonialism who, beginning in 1941, cultivated a close relationship with the Nazi regime in Berlin to further his ambitions of breaking India free of its British colonial clutches. Wooed by the financial and military support of a regime that had most of Europe at its mercy in the early periods of war, Bose joined several other “hirsute revolutionaries”⁵ from North Africa and the Middle East in Berlin to create a moment of a bizarre union between authoritarianism and anti-colonialism in the capital of the Third Reich.

Bose, a politician who spent his formative years steeped in an increasingly cosmopolitan and “deterritorial”⁶ trajectory of Indian revolutionary politics, was the “most domineering”⁷ of these leaders in exile in Berlin. Having escaped the conservative shackles of the Indian Congress Party (INC), Bose laid down the foundations of his radical *Azad Hind* (Free India) vision in Nazi Germany by appealing to the pro-India sympathies of high-ranking Nazi officials and expounding the potential strategic value of an Indo-German relationship against a common British imperialist nemesis. With German support, *Azad Hind* took shape in the form of a Free

⁵ David Motadel, “The Global Authoritarian Moment and the Revolt against Empire,” *The American Historical Review* 124, no. 3 (June 1, 2019): 843–77, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/rhy571>.

⁶ Kris Manjapra, *M. N. Roy: Marxism and Colonial Cosmopolitanism*, 2016.

⁷ Milan Hauner, *India in Axis Strategy: Germany, Japan, and Indian Nationalists in the Second World War*, Publications of the German Historical Institute London (Klett-Cotta; 1. Aufl edition (1981), 1981).

India Center (FIC) established in Berlin to serve as an organizational and propaganda hub for its other activities, which included the formation of the Azad Hind Legion, a German army division consisting mainly of ex Indian POWs. The Germans were less accommodative of Bose's more ambitious plans of setting up a provisional government and launching an armed invasion of India, especially in the context of changing military priorities and a deteriorating war-time situation that soon rendered Azad Hind an unsupportable luxury. Eventually, a dissatisfied Bose took his revolution to the Far East in 1943 where he hoped to continue plotting closer to home and with the support of the Japanese. Azad Hind and its members, both FIC intellectuals and ordinary-rank and file soldiers of the Legion, remained in Germany to witness the disintegration of Hitler's Thousand Year Reich by 1945.

As Adolf Hitler – besieged in his bunker in Berlin – reflected on the strategic errors that had pushed his 'thousand-year' Reich to the verge of destruction, he lamented to his secretary Martin Bormann that the regime had missed a trick by failing to co-operate more successfully with anti-colonial movements. He criticized Nazi diplomats who "preferred to maintain cordial relations with distinguished Frenchmen, rather than with a lot of hirsute revolutionaries."⁸ Hitler's remorseful reflection fails to account for the fundamental incompatibility between **anti-imperialism as an advocate of political rights for subjects under political domination** and **Third Reich fascism that drew its lifeblood from the subjugation of other 'subhuman' races**. This ideological discord at the base of Nazi Germany's relationships with revolutionaries like Bose meant that collaborative plans were cudged into an expediency that they would struggle to achieve in rapidly shifting war-time scenarios.

⁸ Motadel, "The Global Authoritarian Moment and the Revolt against Empire."

Literature that focuses specifically on Bose's time in Nazi Germany by using archival material in both Germany and England remains sparse and relatively recent, partly because these archives have only recently been declassified. Prior to the 1980s, historians adopted a simplistic and partisan approach to Bose's activities in Germany. One school of thought⁹ is extremely hostile and judges Bose to be a pro-Nazi collaborator, whereas the opposing view¹⁰ portrays Bose as a progressive figure in spite of his Nazi-tinged activities.

The 1980s saw the emergence of a historiography based on previously inaccessible primary source material, which maintains Bose's image as a progressive figure but analyses his activities in Germany and with the Axis Powers more critically. However, even within this nuanced approach, the later studies tend not to focus exclusively on Bose's time in Germany. The two newer works that do concentrate on the Nazi-Bose relationship are Roman Hayes' *Subhas Chandra Bose in Nazi Germany* and Milan Hauner's *India in Axis Strategy*, both of which this essay will engage with.

Hayes presents a relationship littered with checks and balances, allowing neither Bose nor Nazi Germany to completely achieve their intended goals. He insinuates that the Germans never had concrete designs to fulfill Bose's vision of them being Indian liberators but that Bose was respectfully treated as an equal in the relationship. Hayes absolves Bose of any responsibility for the failure of the relationship and even justifies his collaboration with a genocidal state as calculative *realpolitik* in which Bose's ambitious ends justified his dubious means.

⁹ See Christopher Sykes, *Troubled Loyalty* and Gerhard L. Weinberg, *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II*

¹⁰ See Hugh Toye, *The Springing Tiger*.

In line with Hayes analysis' of Bose being an equal in the relationship, Hauner hypothesizes that if Bose had been "imposed by the Axis as India's dictator, one could assume that he would certainly not have behaved as one of their stooges but rather as the proud Indian nationalist he always was."¹¹ Unlike Hayes however, Hauner examines the broader study of Axis strategy with regards to India during the Second World War. His perspective leads him to make the argument that the failure of the Bose-Nazi relationship was a result of the inherent flaws in the military-strategic, diplomatic and ideological aspects of the Axis coalition. The essence of Hauner's argument is that "Berlin and Tokyo were happy to exploit the revolutionary situation ... in the Third World for their own immediate military aims – not for the sake of political emancipation of what they regarded as racially inferior peoples."¹²

This essay's historiographical intervention lays in drawing out Hauner's argument of a fundamental ideological dissonance not by examining Axis high politics and strategy but by reconstructing a history of the Azad Hind – its ideas, leaders and soldiers – that is often relegated to an afterthought in the immense literature about Bose, just as Azad Hind itself was similarly sidelined in a Nazi Germany which prioritized other agendas. This history is primarily based on unheard micro-historical voices of FIC members and ordinary rank-and-file soldiers of whom Bose's conceptualization of a free Indian state in Germany came to consist. The motivations and behaviors of the men who came to be involved in this nation-building project paint a vivid picture of Azad Hind's ideological tenets. Only through this understanding of Azad Hind can we then attribute its failure to the deep ideological divide with Nazi Germany that both this renegade free Indian state and its leader, Bose, would struggle to bridge.

¹¹ Hauner. 736

¹² Ibid. 739

Chapter 1

Bose before Berlin: Indian anticolonialism and the roots of an Indo-German alliance

In the current Indian political climate in which prominent political figures from both past and present rarely escape being morphed into strictly black or white caricatures, often depending on their ability to blend in with the saffron of the ruling party, Subhas Chandra Bose still retains his “near-mythic”¹³ grey aura. Testament to his inability to be pigeonholed into a moral or political absolute is how millions of Indians continue to fondly remember him as ‘Netaji’ (“Respected Leader” in Hindustani), even if this moniker was first born in Nazi Germany as “the renegade leader”¹⁴ betrayed the leadership and principles of his political contemporaries and his status as a British subject by unscrupulously plotting to wrestle India from British colonial control with the help of Britain’s fascist wartime nemesis. In a usually polemic public discourse that divides public and political opinion between Gandhi and Savarkar, right and left, and Hindu and Muslim, Bose stands as a muddled but oddly unifying anachronism against the very same historical tide that condemned his political career and vision to a premature end. This mystic collective memory of Bose that dominates the Indian psyche is indicative of a man who often single-handedly pushed the boundaries of Indian anticolonialism into uncharted territories, geographically and ideologically.

Bose’s stature as a maverick however, relied as much on embracing the social, political and historical currents that swirled around him as it did on boldly swimming against the tide. Born in 1897 in the Province of Bengal to a family that was well-connected to the small but

¹³ Barbara Daly Metcalf and Thomas R Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 2012. 210

¹⁴ Śekhara Bandyopādhyāya, *From Plassey to Partition: A History of Modern India* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2004). 54

interrelated Bengali elite¹⁵, Bose's early years were spent being witness to world-historical moments that were not only transforming the politics of anticolonialism India but also shaking the foundations of the Anglocentric global balance of power. The turn of the century saw the consolidation of a more united and radical revolutionary front in India, which began to exported to cosmopolitan intellectual hubs such as London and Berlin where it could actively engage with thoughts and actors that desired a similar destruction of British colonial hegemony. The radicalization of Indian resistance against British rule was thus no insular phenomenon and, aided by its diasporic component, interacted with other contemporary events such as the Russo-Japanese War of 1905 and the rise of a unified imperial Germany in Europe, both of which threatened to challenge the status quo balance of power in different ways. It was in this historical context that Bose developed his own politics of anticolonialism. In this way, Bose's incognito escape to Berlin in April 1941, was made possible only by the tumultuous tides of history in which Bose and Indian anticolonialism had already found themselves swimming. To demystify the aura enveloping Bose and the alliance he was able to cultivate with Nazi Germany during the Second World War, we must see Bose as both an extraordinary and an exemplary historical actor; a man who was willing and able to ride the historical waves of change.

In its early years, resistance to British colonial expansion in India which remained under the guise of the joint-stock East India Company¹⁶ (EIC) was characterized by disjointed and sporadic attempts by different sections of Indian society to violently overthrow their British

¹⁵ Leonard A. Gordon, *Brothers against the Raj: A Biography of Indian Nationalists Sarat and Subhas Chandra Bose* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990). 55

¹⁶ A British trading company established by royal charter for the exploitation of trade with Southeast Asia and the Indian subcontinent. It started as a joint-stock, monopolistic trading body but became involved in politics and acted as an agent of British imperialism in India from the early 18th century.

usurpers.¹⁷ This particular strain of resistance reached its climax in the rebellion of 1857, in which a mutiny of EIC sepoys in the garrison town of Meerut exploded into other similar civilian and military rebellions across other Indian territories that the Company controlled. The early historiographical takes on the 1857 rebellion tended to either see it as “the birth-pangs of a freedom movement in India”¹⁸ or conversely as a reactionary insurgency; “the dying groans of an obsolete aristocracy”¹⁹ and “a revolt of the old against the new, of Indian conservatism against aggressive European innovation”²⁰. The more nuanced approach advocated by scholars like Adas and Sareen maintains that the Rebellion was characteristic of an anticolonial movement that lacked a national consciousness as its aims and actions often varied profusely from region to region²¹.

The period after 1857 saw the development of the more intellectual and organized Indian nationalism in which Bose was eventually to take part. This was made possible by the tremendous changes in the intellectual, economic and social conditions of the Indian people as the British colonial state formalized its presence and extended its influence in India. The modernization of railways and communications as well as the growth of an educated class able to speak in English and aware of the Western ideals of liberalism fed into the formation of an organized political life that was aimed at the economic, social and political inequalities imposed by the colonial government. By 1885, the Indian National Congress had been established as a

¹⁷ Tilak Raj Sareen, *Indian Revolutionary Movement Abroad(1905-1921)*, 1979, <http://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.98776>.

¹⁸ R. C. Majumdar, *The Sepoy Mutiny and the Revolt of 1857 / by R. C. Majumdar.*, xxiv, 503 p. (Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1963), //catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001251736. 425-427

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Vincent Arthur Smith and Percival Spear, *The Oxford History of India*, 4th ed (Delhi ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1981). 725

²¹ MICHAEL ADAS, “TWENTIETH CENTURY APPROACHES TO THE INDIAN MUTINY OF 1857—58,” *Journal of Asian History* 5, no. 1 (1971): 1–19.

body representing mainly the interests of this new class of technocratic, elite Indians to obtain a greater share in government.

The turn of the century saw the emergence of increasingly radical, organized and also ‘deterritorialized’²² form of resistance movements against the British that emerged with the *svadeshi*²³ movement beginning in 1905. Calcutta, the capital city of Bengal in which Bose spent his formative years, was at the forefront of this changing nationalist thought. The nineteenth century had afforded Bengalis across the class strata the chance to have foreign experiences, whether as indentured laborers, for which Calcutta was a hub port out of India, or as wealthy tourists and students. Especially in the latter half of the century, Bengal was home to a “circulatory travel of Bengali elites,”²⁴ with an increasing number of Indians in the colonial administration and or professionals in the legal and higher education systems seeking to gain accreditation in the imperial metropolis. The intermingling of ideas that was made possible by foreign travel led to the formation of a new specific anti-colonial nationalism that lived “through the political missions and interpretive actions of globally dispersed actors as they travelled.”²⁵

Benoy Roy Sarkar, a prominent member of this *svadeshi* avant-garde, proclaimed 1905 as the year in which “Young India announced itself born.”²⁶ The eruption of the *svadeshi* movement which was already informed by the transnational experiences of Bengali intellectuals came to be

²²In his biography of M.N Roy, one of India’s foremost Marxist intellectuals and Bose’s Bengali contemporary, Manjapra characterizes this new era of cosmopolitan revolutionary political thought and action originating in Bengal at the turn of the 20th century as being deterritorial i.e “fields of waves or vectors always on the way to somewhere else, circulating across state borders and in supranational communities of value and belonging.” Manjapra, *M. N. Roy*. 6

²³ A “violent insurgency of unprecedented proportions” calling for the boycott of British goods and institutions in response to the unpopular partition of the colonial province of Bengal into separate Western Hindu and Eastern Muslim regions enacted by the colonial government in 1905. The movement lasted until 1917. Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid. 4

²⁵ Ibid. 6

²⁶ Benoy Kumar Sarkar, *The Futurism of Young Asia: And Other Essays on the Relations between the East and the West*, x, 399 (Leipzig: Markert & Petters, 1922), //catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/012154832. 37

seen in the backdrop of the Japanese victory over Russia in the Russo-Japanese War, a world historical event that “transformed the character of reformist thought, perceptions of Western civilization, and critiques of the international order in major centers of the non-Western world.”²⁷ This Japanese military victory in the first modern war of the century became a global symbol of a victory of Asia over Europe and East over West, invalidating the idea of Western invincibility, “propelling all anticolonial nationalists to be more assertive”²⁸ and encouraging alternative visions to the existing Eurocentric world order that was constructed on the discourse of a racial hierarchies and modern progress that discriminated against non-Western peoples.

It was with this emboldened spirit in the aftermath of the Russo-Japanese war that Indian intellectualism – both political and religious – exported itself ironically to the same Western world that was often its chief nemesis. The years after the war saw a steady growth in the number of Indian students in Tokyo, rising from 15 in 1903 to 110 by 1910, much to the chagrin of the British government.²⁹ Bose himself took part in this burgeoning intellectual tradition, graduating with a B.A in Philosophy from the University of Calcutta in 1918, after which he moved to London in order to appear for examinations to join the Indian Civil Service.

Many radical-minded Indian revolutionaries – mostly the same “English-educated Indians coming from the milieu of the extremist faction of the Indian National Congress”³⁰ – also left the country pursue their political work in exile and in an atmosphere of relative political liberty as the colonial government had instituted several repressive laws in response to a rapid increase in

²⁷ Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought*, Columbia Studies in International and Global History (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007). 71-77

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Harald Fischer-Tiné, “Indian Nationalism and the ‘World Forces’: Transnational and Diasporic Dimensions of the Indian Freedom Movement on the Eve of the First World War,” *Journal of Global History* 2, no. 3 (2007): 325–44, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740022807002318>.

³⁰ Ibid.

revolutionary activity following the Russo-Japanese war. These revolutionaries in exile integrated quickly into their foreign surroundings, helped by the few pioneering Indian political *emigres* who had left before 1905, and established anti-British centers around the world – the first of which was paradoxically situated right in the heart of the empire in London - that became important hubs for the communication between and the co-ordination of a transnational anti-imperialist network. Bose on the other hand, unwilling to further serve his British colonial masters, had decided to resign from his job in the Indian Civil Service in 1921 and returned to India. "Only on the soil of sacrifice and suffering can we raise our national edifice"³¹, he wrote to his brother.

Back in India, Bose involved himself with the INC which had by this time grown out of its avant-gardist origins to involve and appeal to the regional masses. Working in the Bengal Provincial Committee, Bose came to be mentored by Chittaranjan Das, a prominent figure in Bengali politics as the one of the leading men of the Non-Cooperation Movement³² from 1920-22. Das, foreshadowing something that Bose would himself do some years later, eventually resigned his position as President of the INC in 1923 after disagreements with Gandhi over the latter's decision to adopt a more moderate stance and bring a halt to the Movement in light of the Chauri Chaura incident³³ of February 1922. Bose meanwhile continued his ascend up the Congress political ladder in the 1920s, becoming President of the All India Youth Congress and then general secretary of the INC. He frequently found himself in and out of prison for

³¹ Stephen C. Mercado, *The Shadow Warriors of Nakano: A History of the Imperial Japanese Army's Elite Intelligence School*, 1st ed (Washington, D.C: Brassey's, 2002). 73.

³² Movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi in September 1920 with the aim of self-governance and obtaining full independence. Gandhi persuaded all Indians to boycott all activities that sustained the British government and economy in India.

³³ Incident in the village of Chauri Chaura, modern day Uttar Pradesh, on 5 February 1922 in which a large group of protestors participating in the Non-Cooperation Movement set fire to a police station in retaliation to clashes with the police. Led to the deaths of 3 civilians and 22 policeman. Influenced Gandhi to halt the Movement.

participating in and leading the civilian disobedience movements that characterized Congress-led resistance in this time period.³⁴

Away from the situation in India, Germany – a nation that had undergone unification as recently as 1871- was embarking on its own expansionist foreign policy under Kaiser Wilhelm II. This *Weltpolitik* and the desire to ‘find its place in the sun’ put Germany at crosshairs with Britain as it sought to wrest recognition from the country “on whom the sun never sets.”³⁵ Indian revolutionaries in Europe were quick to anticipate and interpret these developments as conducive to a potential alliance with Germany over a common enemy. They would be undoubtedly aided in any pursuit of such an alliance by a German fascination with the Orient and especially India that had existed in the form of Indology studies that often identified India as the ancient spiritual, racial and intellectual origin of German identity. This regrounding of Germanness in the Orient also allowed Germans to claim a non-Englishness that fit nicely into the geopolitical jigsaw of *Weltpolitik*.

It was in this context that Indian revolutionaries led by Virendranath Chattopadhyaya³⁶ contacted the German Foreign Office at the outbreak of the First World War and eventually

³⁴ Gordon, *Brothers against the Raj*.

³⁵ Kris Manjapra, *Age of Entanglement*, Harvard Historical Studies (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2014),

<https://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=https%3a%2f%2fsearch.ebscohost.com%2flogin.aspx%3fdirect%3dtrue%26db%3de025xna%26AN%3d575610%26site%3dehost-live%26scope%3dsite>.

³⁶ Chattopadhyaya had been an active member of the India House in London – the first major anti-colonial center to be set up by revolutionaries in exile – along with Veer Savarkar, the founder of the right wing Hindutva movement that forms the ethos of India’s current ruling party, the Bhartiya Janata Party. He was forced to flee to Germany via France in 1914 following the British suppression of India House activities in the aftermath of the assassination of Sir William H. Curzon Wyllie, the political aide-de-camp to the Secretary of State for India, by Savarkar’s fellow revolutionary Madan Lal Dhingra in 1909. In addition to publishing anti-British propaganda in Germany, and coordinating other anti-colonial activity, the Indo-German alliance attempted several joint missions in Afghanistan and Turkey during the course of the war that proved to be ultimately futile. Chattopadhyaya actively assisted the German war effort by suborning Indian POWs and carrying out acts of sabotage in India in addition to propaganda missions in Romania and Turkey. Eventually, the committee was disbanded in November 1918, by which most Indian members had shifted their attention to the nascent Soviet Union that championed the liberation of all oppressed peoples. Ibid.

cultivated an alliance that led to the establishment of an Indian Independence Committee in Berlin with the aim of starting a revolution in India. The German demise in WWI and the consequential end of this specific war-time alliance did not bring Indian revolutionary activity in Germany to a halt. In the interwar years, “a contingent of radical anticolonial activists and ex-POWs formed the kernel for a significant Indian community in Berlin.”³⁷ Chattopadhyaya himself remained in Germany, where he continued his “anarchist” activities and became a supporter of a Communist movement. Continuing to pursue the diasporic revolutionary path of earlier decades, he also assumed membership of the League Against Imperialism, a transnational anti-imperialist organization that had been established in 1928 at a meeting in Brussels of the International Congress for the Emancipation of Colonies with offices in Berlin. This Congress was attended by Jawaharlal Nehru, a prominent INC politician, who conceived of the idea of opening a Congress Bureau in Berlin, an office to assist Indian students in industry and technical subjects which would be the first international outpost of its kind. This Congress Bureau was eventually established under the control of ACN Nambiar, a left-leaning Indian nationalist who had been working as a journalist in Berlin since 1924.³⁸

The diasporic Indian revolutionary movement which had planted its European roots in the early 1900s was then forced to acclimatize itself to a new fascist current sweeping European politics by the late 1920s. The Depression and the subsequent economic downturn had pressurized an already precarious post-Versailles order and contributed to the rise of right-wing regimes in Germany and Italy. Marxist internationalists such as Chattopadhyaya and Nambiar found themselves unwelcome in a National Socialist Germany and had to find other European

³⁷ Manjapra, *Age of Entanglement*. 77

³⁸ Interrogation of ACN Nambiar, 29 September 1945, KV2/3904, The National Archives, Kew Gardens, England.

homes. Chattopadhyaya moved to Moscow where he wrote for an organ of the Comintern only to succumb to Stalin's Great Purge in 1937. Nambiar spent the 1930s as a European vagabond after being expelled from Germany by the Nazi secret police in 1933. He would return to Berlin in 1942 to play a vital role in Bose's German project. As the doors were slammed shut for Marxist internationalists such as Chattopadhyaya and Nambiar, others opened for men like Bose and *svadeshi* intellectuals to forge even close relationships with Hitlerite Germany in the 1930s.

Both ideological and organizational Indo-German Nazi connections were formed reasonably early. In 1928, five years prior to Hitler's appointment as German Chancellor, the *Indisches Ausschuss* or India Institute, a branch of its parent organization the Deutsche Akademie³⁹, was founded by Dr. Karl Haushofer - a specialist in 'geopolitics' and one of the popularisers of the theory of 'Lebensraum' which advocated greater living space for the superior German race and drove the Nazi racial-military worldview. Haushofer was joined by Bengali nationalist Tarak Nath Das^{40,41}. Das, along with other Bengali intellectuals such as Benoy Kumar Sarkar, had been part of the National Council of Education in Bengal, a strong advocate for a *svadeshi* education curriculum in India and an 'authentic' Indian nationalism. The India Institute awarded scholarships to about a hundred Indian students between 1929 and 1938.⁴² Eventually, the Institute would help establish Nazi cells in various firms in Calcutta which were under German

³⁹ The Academy for the Scholarly Research and Fostering of Germandom was a state-backed German cultural institute. By 1933, it became heavily tainted with Nazi ideology like virtually all public institutions in Germany.

⁴⁰ Maria Framke, "Shopping Ideologies for Independent India? Taraknath Das's Engagement with Italian Fascism and German National Socialism," *Itinerario* 40, no. 1 (April 2016): 55–81, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S016511531600005X>.

⁴¹ In a long political career, Das was involved in the Ghadr Party in the United States, convicted in the Hindu Conspiracy Case during WWI and even taught in the History Department at Columbia University. While Das privately expressed concerns about the racist, religious and political persecutions in Nazi Germany, he was a strong advocate of the educational and economic co-operation between India and Nazi Germany through institutions like the Akademie. Ibid

⁴² Fischer-Tiné, "Indian Nationalism and the 'World Forces': Transnational and Diasporic Dimensions of the Indian Freedom Movement on the Eve of the First World War."

control and fund German language classes for Indian students who wanted to emigrate to Germany. Among the other Indians closely associated with the Institute in Munich was Ashok Bose, the nephew of Subhas Chandra Bose. Similarly, Nambiar mentions the inception of another organization “to win over Indian students in Germany to National Socialism.”⁴³ Through these institutions of cultural and economic exchange, Nazi party grew to have a predominant influence in factories and technical departments of the universities and polytechnics through which a stream of Indian students continued to pass throughout the 1930s, “many of whom were to a greater or lesser extent impressed by the Nazis.”⁴⁴ Some of these students returned to a universities back home in India such as the Benares Hindu University, Aligarh Muslim University or the Calcutta University which had by this time had “institutionalised support for National Socialism”.⁴⁵

Propaganda was another integral tool that the Nazi government used to expand its influence in the Indian subcontinent. The economic relationships that had been cultivated between the two countries facilitated Nazi propaganda missions carried out by local agents in India under the auspices of Nazi consular agents and with the financial backing of large German firms that had an Indian presence such as Siemens, Krupp and Bayer.⁴⁶ On the 6th of September 1939, Abdul Rahman Azad Saif - one such local agent, who had spent time in Berlin and worked as a journalist in Bombay – was detained under rule 26 of the Defence of India rules for allegedly collaborating with Nazi agents, being on the payroll of the German consulate in Bombay and disseminating Nazi propaganda. Earlier, Azad – upon being pressed by the German consulate in

⁴³ Interrogation of ACN Nambiar, 29 September 1945, KV2/3904, The National Archives, Kew Gardens, England.

⁴⁴ Fischer-Tiné, “Indian Nationalism and the ‘World Forces’: Transnational and Diasporic Dimensions of the Indian Freedom Movement on the Eve of the First World War.”

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Interrogation of ACN Nambiar, 29 September 1945, KV2/3904, The National Archives, Kew Gardens, England.

Bombay to pay the debts he had accumulated during his time in Berlin – informed the consulate of his willingness to serve the country and was awarded money in-return by German firms Havero, AEG and Krupps to run advertisements in his ‘Salar-I-Hind’ newspaper. We can surmise that these payments were effectively subsidies to get him to publish Nazi propaganda in the newspaper, an act that would eventually lead to his arrest. Before his arrest, Azad remained in frequent touch with party representatives in Bombay and was supplied with an expensive Telefunken Wireless receiving set by Siemens Ltd by which he listened to German propaganda and translated it into Urdu for publication in his newspaper. An intercepted telephone conversation between Azad and the German consulate in July 1939 brought further evidence of the Nazi backing of Azad’s newspaper, as he was transferred Rs. 1000 through which paid off his bills for paper and printing charges into his bank account on the same day as he made a call thanking the German Consul in Bombay Azad’s newspaper was also no obscure or idiosyncratic publication, being regularly delivered to libraries, public institutions, and well known politicians.⁴⁷

Azad proclaimed himself to be a staunch Nazi ideologue, visiting the Indo-German institute at least twice a week and styling himself as a National Socialist Aryan who believed that Communism was the main enemy of modern civilization. On being interrogated, he claimed that he would rather call himself a German Nazi than an Indian slave, stating his mission to root out Communism from India and save the country from civil war and poverty. This represented a dramatic about-face for a man who had spent the inter-war period publishing an allegedly pro-Bolshevist newspaper in Afghanistan that was even funded by the Soviets to engage in anti-British propaganda in the region. Men like Azad were more broadly representative of the

⁴⁷ File on Abdul Rahman Azad Saif, , KV2/3857, The National Archives, Kew Gardens, England

ideological shift in internationalist anticolonialism that this chapter has traced, especially in the context of the Indo-German relationship.

This shift itself hints at the ideological volatility of the relationship, that could not have been firmly rooted in either leftist or rightist thinking if it was so susceptible to floating with the political tides that were in fashion. It may well have been the case that both the extreme right and the extreme left shared a common ideological denominator – one that yearned for a revolutionary world-order freed from its capitalist and Anglocentric clutches - that appealed to international anti-imperialists. Perhaps the move to the right was a calculative decision that factored in increasingly powerful right-wing governments as powerful and necessary financial and military allies that could finally break weaker nations out of their imperial chains. This was a calculation that was undoubtedly influenced by the brazen political and propaganda maneuverings of these totalitarian regimes which showed that they were not afraid to follow a path that would put them at crosshairs with imperialist powers such as France and especially Britain.

What Maria Framke frames as Tarak Nath Das' "cautious dismissal"⁴⁸ of National Socialist racism is what characterized more general interaction between diasporic Indian nationalism and National Socialism in this period. Das continued to champion cultural co-operation with Germany but expressed severe disgust at Hitler's "civilized barbarianism"⁴⁹ and even attempted to arrange for mass Jewish immigration to India in 1938. This is not to suggest that Das completely eschewed fascist fantasies. He believed that any Indian identity should be defined by its Hinduness and his later writings showed considerable sympathy for Fascist Italy.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Framke, "Shopping Ideologies for Independent India?"

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

This ideological ambivalence is what characterized anti-imperialists like Das' flirtation with the emerging right wing in Europe in the late 1920s and the 1930s and would continue to plague Bose through his time in Berlin in the early 1940s. The attempt to 'shop' for ideological bits and pieces of fascist states reflected a gross misinterpretation of how these states were organized. A collectivized racist ethos that proliferated every aspect of organized political, economic and social life – both public and private – formed the lifeblood of the authoritarian regimes in Germany and Italy. It was misguided for example, to admire German economic miracles and simultaneously show disdain for its vile anti-Semitic policies, for both emanated from one state that structured to be the sole point of reference and service for the German people's community. Moreover, this racist and expansionist core of these states meant that the freeing of so-called 'lesser' peoples, which was the chief objective of Indian revolutionaries who interacted with these states, was inherently incompatible with the previsioned destiny towards which Mussolini and Hitler drove their states. These fundamentally expansionist designs that began to reveal themselves in the 1930s. The Italian invasion of Abyssinia and Hitler's quest for *Lebensraum* ('living space') for Aryans in Eastern Europe is what had antagonized the British-French duopoly, pushed the inter-war balance of power to the edge and thereby appealed to revolutionaries such as Bose who desired a similar destruction of the British dominated colonial status quo. Bose's failure to understand that this new wave of promised destruction was foundationally informed by theories of racial expansionism that ran contradictory to anti-imperialist principles is what would prove to be a fatal error in judgement on his part.

Bose made several trips to Europe in the 1930s, including visits to Berlin and Rome where he interacted with 'Il Duce' Benito Mussolini and was able to elicit a degree of fascination for the organization of these fascist states. In July 1933, he met Nambiar in Prague and implored him

to move back to Berlin, promising him that he would have Nambiar's expulsion order revoked by the Nazi Interior Ministry. Remarkably Bose would keep his promise, with German authorities not only cancelling Nambiar's expulsion order but even offering him a compensation of 2000 Reichsmarks for their earlier actions. Bose had seemingly succeeded in cultivating close diplomatic ties with the Nazi top brass and his attempts to go out of the way for Nambiar signal that Bose had already envisioned him as his second-in-command in any potential German alliance. Despite Bose's best attempts however, Nambiar still stuck by his principles and could not be convinced to return to Berlin.

Even without Nambiar, Bose continued his diplomatic mission in German, meeting top Nazis such as Alfred Rosenberg - influential ideologue and head of the Foreign Office – over several frequent visits in this time period. Nambiar claims that “Bose made a habit of exaggerating the tension in India and the active role of the Congress in India's freedom struggle.”⁵¹ At face value, this can be read as a sign of Bose's desperation to convince the Nazis of Indian revolutionary potential and to get them on board as powerful allies. Additionally, it may be evidence of Nambiar's own disillusionment with Bose's agenda or just an expedient attempt by Nambiar to disassociate himself with Bose's activities in the context of being interrogated for acts of treason by British authorities after the war had ended. Despite declining Bose's offer to return to Berlin in 1933 and remaining in Prague, Nambiar maintained a close relationship with Bose, who he met again in Munich in November 1935 and then at Christmas 1937, by which time Bose had climbed his way up the Congress ladder to be elected as President in 1938.

His radical leanings – including an admiration for an authoritarian wave that was making its presence felt on the global political stage in the 1930s – put him at odds with a Congress party

⁵¹ Interrogation of ACN Nambiar, 29 September 1945, KV2/3904, The National Archives, Kew Gardens, England.

which drew its lifeblood from Gandhian principles and espoused a strictly non-violent form of resistance and revolution. This rift pushed Bose to eventually resign from the presidency in 1939 and form his own faction - the All India Forward Bloc. When the Second World War broke out in August of the same year, Bose – much to Gandhi’s consternation – advocated a mass campaign of civil disobedience in Calcutta, which led to his arrest by British authorities. Bose’s seven-day long hunger strike in prison forced the British to eventually release him and place him on house arrest under constant surveillance of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID). It was in this context of political ostracism and disillusionment with the Gandhian direction of Indian revolutionary politics that Bose – who had been placed under house arrest after advocating a campaign of civil disobedience - escaped to Berlin disguised as Italian nobleman Count Orlando Mazzotta on the 16th of January 1941, via Afghanistan and the Soviet Union.

Chapter 2

A Marriage of Convenience: Bose in Berlin

Even though Bose no longer held this high standing in the Congress party, the “well-known Indian nationalist”⁵² was warmly received by the Nazi Foreign Office when he arrived in Berlin on the 2nd of April 1941, evidence of the close rapport with his German counterparts that he had managed to build in the decade prior. Just the day after his arrival, Bose met with Ernst Woermann, the Nazi Under-Secretary of State for Political Affairs in the Foreign Office to whom he “unraveled his political program, the main point of which was that an Indian government wanted to appear in Germany.”⁵³ He explicitly fashioned his vision around the London-based Polish, Czech, Dutch and Norwegian governments in-exile, which had all ironically been forced away from their homelands occupied by the same expansionist regime that Bose now absurdly expected to assist his own ambitions of Indian political freedom. Far from being a blatant political miscalculation, this was Bose taunting Germany to match or better the “clever subterfuge” by which “Great Britain endeavored to show to the world that she is in reality a champion of smaller nations.”⁵⁴ Statements like these would serve Bose’s larger mission in the initial stages of his diplomacy in Berlin, which was to convince Germany that the wartime upside of backing liberation movements such as the Azad Hind outweighed whatever misgivings the Germans might have harbored for supporting this cause.

Ultimately though, the military and geographical reality was that the *Wehrmacht* – despite its ruthless advances in Europe – was in no position to launch an assault in the Indian subcontinent. In any case, the Germans had begun to seriously consider an invasion of their allies, Soviet Russia, as the precursor to all other potential military operations in the East. Bose was unaware

⁵² Büro Staatssekretäre, Indien, R29615, 3 April 1941, The Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin, Germany.

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ Büro Staatssekretäre, Indien, R29615, 9 April 1941, The Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin, Germany.

of this impending military development and stressed the importance of maintaining the Russian alliance in his collaborative plans in all of his early official correspondence with the Germans. In addition to being at odds with the military position that Germany was soon set to formally assume, support for Indian nationalism also fundamentally contradicted the expansionist lifeblood of the Third Reich regime. These inconsistencies made Bose's task an uphill one, with the mutual affinities – both ideological and expedient – that he thought the two parties shared and outlined in several memoranda to the German Foreign Office often being lost in translation amidst the political and military realities of the situation. This chapter will explore the early exchanges between Bose and Nazi officials in Berlin which unveiled these crucial discrepancies on which the relationship was founded and would eventually struggle to escape when it eventually assumed form as the Free India Center and the Azad Hind Fauj.

Bose, who is derided for being naïve by the dominant and only historiographical narrative surrounding his relationship with Nazi Germany⁵⁵, seemed to be well aware of the ideological paradox in which he sought to establish this Indo-German alliance and insightfully adopted a chiefly strategical line of appeal to the German Foreign Office. He attempted to present himself and his plan as an invaluable asset to the Germans in what he perceived to be a battle of political and military one-upmanship between Britain and Germany. This ploy was underlined by a belief that the eventual destruction of Britain and her empire was the ultimate goal which both Hitler and he unequivocally shared. The defeat of France at the hands of the *Wehrmacht* had been interpreted by Bose as “a miracle in military warfare”⁵⁶ analogous only to the Napoleonic wars and the fall of Sedan. He was convinced that the next stage of the war would bring the

⁵⁵ Hauner, *India in Axis Strategy: Germany, Japan, and Indian Nationalists in the Second World War*.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 36

establishment of an anti-British Four-Power Bloc consisting of Germany, Italy, Soviet Russia and Japan, facilitating the destruction of the British empire and leaving colonies such as India in advantageous positions.

This is not to say that Bose himself had solely objective reasons for seeking a Nazi alliance. Bose's own volatile opinions of Nazi Germany, which undoubtedly informed the selection of his ally of choice, were in some ways a microcosm of the incomplete synthesis of ideas that came to define the relationship itself. Bose gave the impression of being mired in an unresolved ideological and moral dilemma which he was willing to overlook to fulfill his political aims. His own attitudes towards the Nazi regime fluctuated between both derision and admiration for Hitler's project. Just after the war began in 1939, Bose often publicly criticized Hitlerism as Fascist, ruthless and cruel, remaining steadfastly opposed to it "whether in India, within the Congress or in any other country."⁵⁷ Nevertheless, he could not "help but admire how she plans in advance, prepares accordingly, works according to a timetable and strikes with lightning speed. Could not these qualities be utilized for promoting a nobler cause?"⁵⁸ For Bose, there was no nobler cause than the guarantee of a British defeat and India's freedom, with the perceived chance to work with German military might providing an unmissable opportunity especially after his earlier premonitions of a Four-Bloc Alliance began to take shape through the Nazi-Soviet Pact of August 1939, even if he was averse to the racial and political baggage that came with it. Bose was convinced that he could successfully fight his own anti-imperial battle in what he himself referred to as a "war between imperialisms"⁵⁹, clear that any partnership formed would be less a romance of ideals and more a marriage of convenience. Bose struck a precarious

⁵⁷ Hauner, *India in Axis Strategy: Germany, Japan, and Indian Nationalists in the Second World War*.

⁵⁸ Hauner.

⁵⁹ Hauner.

Machiavellian alliance, one that was subservient to the external political and military forces on which its expediency relied instead of being organically rooted in and inherently guided by any shared set of principles.

Even Bose's shrewd approach to mask these evident ideological discrepancies was initially met with skepticism by the German Foreign Office. Woermann's telegraph after his first meeting with Bose shows understanding of the latter's aims in Berlin, including plans to begin radio broadcasting both in Hindustani and English as part of an intensive propaganda to "educate the people of India"⁶⁰ once the German press had officially announced his arrival in the country. Woermann remained less optimistic about Bose's ultimate goal which was the arrival of the Axis in India. This was championed on Bose's belief that "a modern army of 100,000 men would be enough to liberate India from English rule."⁶¹ Since a paltry 70,000 of the 300,000 troops in India were loyal British troops, to Bose the Indian army was in a "proper psychological moment for a revolution," having lost confidence in British military strength after the fall of France.⁶² This was the moment Woermann realized that "Bose's aspirations and German intentions were fundamentally disconnected."⁶³ Woermann wrote of his "purely non-committal attitude at this point"⁶⁴ to Bose's proposal for a Nazi invasion of India, preferring to consult Foreign Minister Ribbentrop who Bose would find "useful to meet after he had worked out his formal program in the next few days."⁶⁵

Bose formally laid out his aspirations days later on the 9th of April 1941 in an elaborate memorandum titled 'Plan for Co-operation between the Axis Powers and India'. This was Bose's

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Subhas Chandra Bose, R29615/139128, 3 April 1941, The Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin, Germany.

⁶² Hauner, *India in Axis Strategy: Germany, Japan, and Indian Nationalists in the Second World War*. 246

⁶³ Romain Hayes, *Subhas Chandra Bose in Nazi Germany* (London: C. Hurst & Co. (Publishers) Ltd., 2011). 29-30

⁶⁴ Subhas Chandra Bose, R29615/139128, 3 April 1941, The Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin, Germany.

⁶⁵ Ibid

most blatant expression of the strategic lens through which he viewed the value of an alliance. Bose regarded Britain not only as “the greatest obstacle to India’s advance towards her freedom as a nation but also in the path of human progress.”⁶⁶ According to Bose, Britain was a “gradually collapsing power” who continued to rely on the exploitation of India’s rich resources “in order to resume her fight against a new world order” of which Nazi Germany looked like the undisputed leader thanks to significant early victories in the war. Bose presented his agenda in the foreword to the plan not as an isolated struggle for independence, but as a vital piece in the new global balance of power jigsaw that entailed “the achievement of the common aim, the destruction of Great Britain.” Bose’s was not the only anticolonialism attracted to what seemed to be an increasingly likely German victory followed by a reconfigured world order in which Britain no longer called the shots. The height of the war had seen several other anticolonial revolutionaries from North Africa and the Middle East similarly flock to Berlin with pragmatic intentions.⁶⁷

The plan was divided into several sections, each of which dealt with the different geographic or thematic areas in Bose’s agenda. Despite this attempt at categorization however, the plan suffered from a lack of specific details and remained vague in its directives without providing measurable outcomes to Bose’s eventual agenda of achieving Indian independence. The fundamental contradiction between the lack of detail in the plan and the grandiose nature of its ultimate aims meant that it often ended up on the wrong side of the thin line between idealism and implausibility. This was especially damning for a plan which relied on expediency for its persuasive quality.

⁶⁶ Memorandum von Subhas Chandra Bose, R29615, 9 April 1941, The Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin, Germany.

⁶⁷ See more in Motadel, “The Global Authoritarian Moment and the Revolt against Empire.”

The first section, titled ‘Work in Europe’, dealt with Bose’s aspirations of setting up a free India government in Berlin that would be formally recognized by the Axis Powers through a treaty which would “provide for India’s liberation in case of an Axis victory.” It guaranteed “special privileges for the Axis Powers in India when the free government takes over”⁶⁸ without describing what these privileges might be or how they would coexist with the Indian political freedom that Bose desired. Bose also failed to reveal with whom he intended to constitute such a government.⁶⁹ There were few available Indians in Germany – if any – to whom Bose would have been able to delegate governmental responsibilities. The Indian population in Germany consisted mainly of stranded journalists such as ACN Nambiar and university students in German-occupied Europe who lacked the necessary political legitimacy and experience for an endeavor of this scale. In addition to a formal Axis backing of his free India government, Bose hoped to start an extensive propaganda campaign in Europe to be radio broadcasted to the Indian people, “calling on them to rise up for their freedom and launch a revolt against the British authorities, ”⁷⁰ assisted by arrangements made to send necessary materials via Axis-friendly Afghanistan in support of the rebellion.

The section titled ‘Activity in India’ outlined the propaganda offensive that Bose aimed to launch from Germany and later continue via transmitters and printing shops in the independent zone “in grand style”. Bose also hoped to co-ordinate a mass civil obedience campaign in India conducted by agents and party members to “hamper the activities of British authorities” as much as possible. Perhaps he had forgotten that his exile from India had driven him very much to the periphery of Indian politics, while those Congress leaders still in prominence such as Nehru and

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Hayes, *Subhas Chandra Bose in Nazi Germany*. 34

⁷⁰ Memorandum von Subhas Chandra Bose, R29615/139138-43, 9 April 1941, The Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin, Germany.

Gandhi would soon be arrested after the launch of the Quit India movement in August 1942. Nonetheless, Bose remained convinced that the intensive propaganda campaign he intended to conduct would be sufficient to induce the civilian population of India to “refrain from paying taxes to the authorities or obeying the laws of the British government”, with the eventual aim of organizing insurrections “which could then be used as a spring-board for the revolution of the masses.” Bose extended his earlier opinion of a fickle Indian army to the belief that secret action amongst these forces can facilitate a possible military rebellion in the country.

Bos’s plans were equally fantastical from a financial standpoint. He required all funds for his activities activities to be loaned to the Free India government, confidently promising to repay it in full after the termination of the war when an independent government would be installed in India. His most ambitious aim however and surprisingly one of the few aims he would go on to realize through the establishment of the Azad Hind Fauj – even if only partly and on a much smaller scale – remained the invasion of India by “a small contingent of 50,000 soldiers, equipped with up-to-date weapons”, enough to defeat the 250,000 troops stationed in India out of which, as mentioned, Bose estimated only 70,000 to be loyal to the Empire. This was Bose’s final piece in his jigsaw, which when completed would ensure that the British were “completely driven out of India”. Whether the Germans would be tempted into making this a similarly important piece of their own foreign policy puzzle remained to be seen, with Bose relying heavily on the staunchly anti-British form that it had assumed in wartime.

Woermann’s initial comments on the Plan, which he forwarded to the Foreign Office in a subsequent telegram, immediately added a dose of realism to Bose’s lofty ambitions as Woermann questioned the political and strategic implications of these aims. The kind of formal and public support that Bose was requesting would entail an outright German declaration of war

on English imperialism not just in India but across the British Empire. Woermann doubted whether this was the right moment for the official declaration of anti-imperialism as an Axis war aim. Any such official declaration would also inevitably require Adolf Hitler's approval, however such a demand "could only infuriate Hitler who despised the idea of non-European free governments setting up camp in Berlin."⁷¹ German policy on India was subservient to Soviet policy as a result of the 1939 Non-Aggression Pact between the two nations. While the Soviets were not particularly interested in India, the Germans did not want to arouse suspicion by making official policy claims over the region. The Germans also remained wary of antagonizing other recognized leaders such as Gandhi and Nehru by aligning themselves with Bose's "left-leaning Forward Bloc" to which they were opposed, worried that such a decision would defeat the propagandistic purpose of the exercise to find "an unfavourable response in large parts of India."⁷² Despite these doubts however, Woermann remained of the opinion that Bose should be offered generous financial support, even if he believed the moment was too premature to begin discussions of an Indo-German armed expedition into the subcontinent.

While Bose had failed to convince Woermann of his plan's expedient value, the Indian nationalist – who had made clear his preference for returning to the Indian border in case of a German non-response – was met by Nazi Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop at the upscale Hotel Imperial in Vienna on the 29th of April. The pattern that the conversation largely followed was one in which Ribbentrop showed both curiosity and skepticism about the revolutionary situation in India, with Bose attempting to allay any German doubts by continuing his charm offensive and emphasizing both the need for and timeliness of German involvement.

⁷¹ Hauner, *India in Axis Strategy: Germany, Japan, and Indian Nationalists in the Second World War*. 243

⁷² Aufzeichnung im Anschluss an die Aufzeichnung von 3 April, R29615/139133-4, 12 April 1941, The Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin, Germany.

Bose began the meeting by boldly claiming that both the Indian populace and the army were “ripe for revolution,” and only being “held at bay” by the British because of their modern weapons to which unarmed Indians were no match. Ribbentrop agreed and seemed to be more in awe of the “most remarkable results of modern weapon development” which had allowed Britain to establish such a strong foothold in large colonies such as India than concerned about the travails of a dominated Indian population.

Ribbentrop – like Woermann – seemed to share the same concerns of alienating Gandhi who the Germans clearly saw as the most influential of Indian revolutionaries at the time. In response, Bose was unwavering in his criticism of Gandhi for agreeing to help Britain in the war when it broke out, labelling him “a man of compromise” who “did not want to slam the door shut on the Englishmen.” To this Bose contrasted his own bravery in “asserting that the Führer would help India if he annihilated England” even at the risk of being arrested by English authorities, an event which eventually came to occur. Bose tried to evoke even more sympathy for his cause by claiming that Indians “feared that if England survived his defeat, a new wave of anti-Indian politics would emanate from her”, to which Ribbentrop assured that “this time they would come to an end,” even if “it would take some time.”⁷³

Bose even refers to the existence in India of a sort of Sturmabteilung (SA), the notorious Nazi paramilitary wing that had helped propel the party to power in the 1920s and 1930s through fierce street-fighting and intimidation of party opponents, claiming that a significant number of nationalist officers were ready to take part in an armed revolution. Even if Bose was right about the increasingly defiant attitude amongst the ranks of the Indian military, the SA were a much larger and supremely organized political and military unit to which parallels in India could

⁷³ Aufzeichnung – Über die Unterredung zwischen dem RAM und dem indischen Nationalistführer Bose in Wien, R27846/47245-47266, 29 April 1941, The Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin, Germany.

simply not be drawn at this stage. However, the mention of the SA and Bose's subsequent claims about the unimportance of Indian Communists, as well as a desire to see the emergence of a nationalist government in the case of a British exit, all hint that Bose's vision had expanded beyond just the strategic realms of this collaboration into ideological territory. Given his earlier vilification of Hitlerite fascism, this may have been just another one of Bose's many tactical ploys to strengthen his argument for this Indo-German collaboration. However Bose, who had never shied away from admiring German military prowess, seemed to have also been genuinely impressed by other ideological facets of the Nazi nationalist regime, including the demise of religion as a vital cog in state-structure. Bose complained of "the exceedingly bad condition which the English had given India, and which made it impossible for a Mohammedan, for example, to vote for him (Bose), even if he politically agreed with him only because Bose belongs to another religion."

Bose drew inspiration from some aspects of fascism for his own vision of a liberated India, naively ignoring – consciously or otherwise – the fact that "national socialism and fascism seek the domination of other races" and attributing such notions to English and Communist propaganda. Ribbentrop's response, stating that "racial purity would be upheld in India and would moreover comply with the laws of nature" paints a more realistic portrait of the inherently racist ideological pillars of fascism which Bose certainly did not share in his own vision for India, however nationalistic and militaristic it may have been. Bose's insistence in all his correspondence and his memoranda to be treated as an equal means that he was either oblivious to or more likely, deliberately ignored the degree to which racism fueled the existence and functioning of the Nazi state. Such a divide that meant the two parties – one seeking the liberation of a dominated race while the other engaged in racially and biologically fueled

conquest - could never tread on identical ideological ground even if Bose admired Nazi Germany for its other political and military achievements. Any prospects of an alliance would thus have to continue to rely on a strategic expediency of which Bose was still struggling to convince the Germans was necessary.



Shubas Chandra Bose (l.) with Himmler (r.)⁷⁴

Perhaps it was this lukewarm reaction from members of the Nazi top-brass as well as a changing military scenario that encouraged Bose to submit a ‘Supplementary Memorandum’ on the 3rd of May following German victories in North Africa, Greece and Yugoslavia which Bose thought had “created a profound impression in all Oriental countries, especially in India” and “shattered Britain’s prestige as a world power.”⁷⁵ Having understood that the establishment of a

⁷⁴ Bundesarchiv, Bild 101III-Alber-064-03A / Alber, Kurt

⁷⁵ Supplementary Memorandum, R29615/139153-56, 3 May 1941, The Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin, Germany.

provisional Indian government was beyond the realms of possibility, Bose instead focused all his energy on obtaining from the Germans an “early pronouncement regarding the freedom of India and the Arab countries... so that the present favorable atmosphere in these countries may be properly utilized.”

According to Bose, an immediate announcement would allow Germany to gain the sympathy of countries such as India in which anti-imperialist hopes tended to be pinned on the Soviet Union as a potential liberating ally. Rather prophetically, Bose knew that this declaration would take on an added significance for the Axis powers in case “a conflict between Germany and Soviet Russia proves to be unavoidable in the future.” Without a public announcement of support, Germany was sure to risk losing whatever anti-imperialist sympathy it had gained to the Soviets if a conflict between the two was to arise.

Bose’s prescient understanding of political currents and German maneuverings behind the scenes that would soon culminate in the ‘unavoidable’ breakdown of the Nazi-Soviet alliance as Hitler launched his offensive in the East was only momentary. He quickly reverted to his idealistic cocoon, arguing that the “desirable status quo between Germany and Russia should be maintained,” as he proposed implementing a channel of communication to strike at British power in India from Germany, the most practical of which would run through both Soviet Russia and Afghanistan, and thus inevitably require Soviet support.

Bose’s aspirations of a united Nazi-Soviet ally in his quest were thoroughly disconnected with the reality of anti-Soviet German military strategy as early as 1940, fueled by clashing Nazi and Soviet interests along the entire eastern front from Finland to the Black Sea. Increasingly, these clashes substantiated Hitler’s prior claim that “the fate of the European hegemony will be

decided only in the struggle with Russia.”⁷⁶ Hitler put these notions to action in the summer of 1940 when he ordered his military staff to prepare for a campaign against Russia, whose elimination, which he aimed to carry out in the spring of 1941, would extinguish England’s last hope in the war. Following the intended quick, six to eight week campaign against Russia, Hitler envisioned the penetration of Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan to eventually arrive at the Indian border.

Despite numerous attempts by the Commander-in-Chief of the Germany Navy Admiral Raeder to dissuade Hitler, the plan was set in stone with the issuing of Führer Directive 21 titled ‘OPERATION BARBAROSSA’ on 18 December 1940. Only some months after the directive, Hitler was already commissioning the Operations Staff of his High Command to prepare a study for an advance from Afghanistan to India after the completion of Barbarossa, suggesting that Bose’s extravagant idea of German military intervention on the Indian frontier was not completely infeasible, even if it remained on the back burner and dependent on a successful German assault on Russia.

Even if Hitler had already made up his mind to “break the British position between the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf... only after BARBAROSSA”⁷⁷, Woermann noted in early May that the Führer consented to Bose’s demands for a public declaration and agreed to release it in eight or ten days. In the meanwhile, Bose submitted another extensive memorandum titled ‘Detailed Plan of Work’ on the 19th of May, building on the two formal memoranda he had already laid out to his peers in the German Foreign Office. He stressed that a German declaration of support for Indian independence would be a “morally invincible”⁷⁸ challenge to British imperialism.

⁷⁶ Hauner, *India in Axis Strategy: Germany, Japan, and Indian Nationalists in the Second World War*. 249

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Detailed Plan of Work, Anlage 4, R67483/247450-4, 20 May 1941, The Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin, Germany.

In the appendix, Bose included a draft version of a declaration, recalling the Orientalist intellectual tradition by tracing the roots of the Indo-Germanic relationship in the “ancient culture and civilization”⁷⁹ of India which had always “fascinated the imagination of the German people” and led to the formation of intimate cultural bonds. According to Bose’s draft, Germany would recognize the “inalienable right of the Indian people to have full and complete independence” and true to Bose’s quixotic ambitions, assure them that the “New Order which she (Germany) is out to establish in the world will mean for them a free and independent India.” The declaration was unequivocal in stating that this new India would in no way be bound to fascism and would retain the freedom to choose its own form of government and frame its own national constitution. However, it retained Bose’s previously expressed ambivalence to a German state in which “every individual is guaranteed food, work, necessities of life and equal opportunities of growth, regardless of religion, class or any other consideration.” This quandary between a reluctance to project German authoritarianism onto his vision of a liberated India and a more enthusiastic admission that a German-backed free India would ‘naturally’ be in “in keeping with Germany’s own traditions” is one that Bose seemingly still had not been able to resolve. It can also be read, as it is by both Hayes⁸⁰ and Hauner⁸¹, as a reflection of Bose’s stubborn naivety in hoping that he could be able to selectively incorporate those aspects of Nazi statecraft that he deemed critical for his vision of a new India without necessarily having to accept unsavory others such as a totalitarian state and a defined racial hierarchy, which also composed the existential core of his German allies.

⁷⁹ Bose-Ribbentrop, R29615/139199-139204, 15th August 1941, The Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin, Germany.

⁸⁰ Hayes, *Subhas Chandra Bose in Nazi Germany*.

⁸¹ Hauner, *India in Axis Strategy: Germany, Japan, and Indian Nationalists in the Second World War*.

Much to his frustration however, on 24 May 1941 Bose was told of Ribbentrop's wish to further postpone the Declaration. Whatever German readiness to release the declaration that had existed earlier had all but vanished now, after a coup d'état led by Iraqi nationalist military generals to overthrow the pro-British government with assistance from Germany and Italy had been destined to failure by earlier in the month. A clearly exasperated Bose wrote directly to Ribbentrop in August 1941. He bemoaned the failure of the German government to come to a decision and release a declaration when the situation in India that "had been exceedingly favorable for the success of my (sic) proposals."⁸² The months since Bose had submitted his proposals in May had seen a seismic shift in the direction of the war with the invasion of the Soviet Union by Germany in June. Bose understood that this had considerably worsened the prospects of his own plans. He seemed especially concerned by how the launch of the invasion was being increasingly interpreted by the masses back home in India as an act of aggression by the Axis powers. A combined and effective Soviet-British-American propaganda offensive had seized the opportunity to "tell the Indian people that Germany is out for world-domination", who according to Bose, the Indian people were more likely to view "the march of the German troops to the East as the approach, not of a friend, but of an enemy."⁸³ Clearly, Bose had grown desperate for a formal declaration in recognition of the fact that the new Soviet-British-American alliance and its propaganda offensive had rendered Bose's own Axis-backed visions increasingly ineffective and improbable.

Despite several more attempts to reiterate the urgency of the situation and sporadic positive responses from both Hitler and Ribbentrop, Bose was ultimately never able to induce the

⁸² Entwurf Mazzota, Anlage 1a, R67483/247468-70, 20 May 1941, The Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin, Germany.

⁸³ Ibid.

Axis declaration that he so desperately desired. As the German strategic situation steadily declined, the prospect of any formal German announcement became even more unsustainable than it had been earlier on. In early September, Hitler made the decision to further postpone any declaration to prevent an invasion of Afghanistan by Soviet-British forces even if Ribbentrop and Woermann informed Bose that Germany remained committed to issuing a declaration. Ribbentrop had personally attempted to convince the Führer of the necessity of issuing a declaration, albeit to no avail. By early 1942, even though a Tripartite declaration involving both Italy and Japan had also been prepared, Hitler rejected it and instead approved Bose's plan to move the center of his revolutionary activities to Southeast Asia where he would be close to home and receive the support of Japan. Eventually Bose boarded a *U-180* submarine bound for the Indian Ocean in February 1943 with no formal declaration.

Bose's first month in Berlin during which he attempted to formalize this Indo-Nazi collaboration provided frequent evidence of his own ideological ambivalence as he attempted to cultivate an anti-imperialist alliance with one of the protagonists of what he himself labelled as a "war between imperialisms."⁸⁴ This fundamental paradox made Bose hesitant and pushed him into framing any potential relationship as one of invaluable political expediency to compensate for a clearly lacking ideological symbiosis. The relationship that Bose's early advances produced was in this way precarious from the very outset, as its strategic value hinged on the rapidly shifting military ebbs and flows of the Second World War which neither Bose nor the Nazis could fully control. Events like the launch of Barbarossa or the failed German-backed coup in Iraq only served to underline this structural and ideological uncertainty and steer Bose's already lofty ambitions further away from reality.

⁸⁴ Hauner, *India in Axis Strategy: Germany, Japan, and Indian Nationalists in the Second World War*. 78

To hold Bose's idealism accountable for the clear dissonance in aims and objectives that was evident in the early stages of the relationship is far too simple of an argument to make. It overlooks the various forces – moral, political, personal, strategic and historical – that both facilitated the formation and formalization of this unlikely alliance but also simultaneously set it up for eventual failure. Even if Bose did at times seem out of touch with the political and military realities within which the alliance existed, he seemed to be well aware of its inherent structural flaw – namely the ideological paradox – from which it would struggle to escape. It was this paradox which meant that Bose, for better or for worse, never completely aligned himself with Nazi principles and practices even if he did very openly admire them from afar, preferring to emphasize the military and strategic expediency of the relationship. This is not to say that politics and propaganda proved to be completely “subservient to military aims of the collaboration”⁸⁵, which is often the argument used to paint Bose as a progressive figure and absolve him of the moral implications that an alliance beyond the strategic realm would warrant. Even if the alliance remained chiefly strategic, there is evidence such as a partially anti-Semitic article written by Bose for Goebbels's newspaper *Der Angriff* that Bose certainly flirted with the ideological pillars of his German allies⁸⁶. Nevertheless, Bose's early weeks in Berlin saw the establishment of a new Indo-German alliance which very much drew on the previous relationships between the two peoples which were thought to have spanned not just centuries but even millennia. The relationship was established on a shaky middle ground between ideology and expediency, reluctant to completely embrace the first and always falling short of achieving the second. As the following chapters will reveal, this lack of a firm foundation, neither in

⁸⁵ Hayes, *Subhas Chandra Bose in Nazi Germany*. 151

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 166

ideology nor in expediency, would remain a perennial spanner in the wheels of both organizations that the relationship gave birth to - the Free India Center and the Azad Hind Fauj.

Chapter 3

Radio Revolution: The Free India Center and Azad Hind Radio

While Bose's strategic ambitions of a formal declaration of military support from the Germans remained stalled as Nazi war aims evolved to suit their new objectives in the East, the Germans were much more proactive about organizing the propaganda apparatus which formed an equally key component of Bose's masterplan. This German enthusiasm was in itself an extension of a desire to maintain the non-committal position to Bose's more significant political and military requests while retaining his trust and more importantly using him as a strategically useful propagandistic tool. The operation would be conducted out of a Free India Center (FIC) established in the neighborhood of Tiergarten in central Berlin. Eventually, the FIC did come to run a comprehensive radio transmission program, however it remained constrained by what Bose had failed to achieve on the diplomatic level – namely a formal political and military backing of his Azad Hind aims. This constraint was compounded by the organizational structure of the FIC, which came to consist of a hodgepodge of personalities, men with vastly different backgrounds or qualifications and, more importantly, no-one experienced with the large-scale leadership that an organization tasked with implementing Bose's grand vision undoubtedly required. The organization predictably descended into delinquency after Bose's – and consequently Azad Hind's - departure to the Far East in early 1943, leaving a leadership vacuum in Europe that Bose's deputy ACN Nambiar struggled to fill.

In a secret speech to journalists in November 1938, Hitler had underlined the usefulness of propaganda for the conduct of *Blitzkrieg*. The propaganda offensive that Bose conceived to augment existing anti-British sentiment in the Indian subcontinent was not completely novel to the Nazis who had already launched short-wave broadcasts spreading Nazi propaganda in foreign languages to non-Germans even before the outbreak of the war. The Nazis had in fact been

engaged in propaganda work specifically in India through the Department of Political Broadcasting of the Foreign Office which monitored and diffused pro-German propaganda abroad.⁸⁷

The German readiness to commit to Bose's wish to launch a propaganda offensive was a carrot dangled to Bose while they remained firmly non-committal to his more ambitious military plans. The Third Reich was already familiar with radio propaganda not just as a domestic state-building tool but also as a supremely important weapon in their foreign policy arsenal. George Orwell, who was involved in British wartime propaganda in the colonies, pointed out the ruthless hypocrisy behind German propaganda, which "with an utter unscrupulousness," he wrote in his diary in spring 1942, was "offering everything to everybody, freedom to India and a colonial empire to Spain, emancipation to the Kaffirs and stricter race laws to the Boers."⁸⁸ Orwell's critique reveals a more general German tendency to issue empty promises through the use of propaganda for strategic gains, often without the intention of materially backing them up. Ultimately, the German willingness to let Bose run his own propaganda program allowed the them to both continue benefitting from the loyalty of a potentially resourceful pawn. It appeased Bose while facilitating an expansion of their pre-existing propaganda offensive aimed at inciting anti-British elements. It lulled Bose into a false sense of optimism for a military declaration that was never going to come.

The strategic value that the Nazis placed on a collaborative propaganda mission was reflected in the steps taken to formalize its structure and infrastructure. Ribbentrop, in the days following his first meeting with Bose, had already begun asking the Foreign Office Broadcasting

⁸⁷ Hauner, *India in Axis Strategy: Germany, Japan, and Indian Nationalists in the Second World War*. 250

⁸⁸ Motadel, "The Global Authoritarian Moment and the Revolt against Empire."

Bureau (*Rundfunkstelle*) about the possibilities and effectiveness of a propaganda offensive in India. The Bureau had been broadcasting a daily half-hour long German news update between 20.00 and 21.00 IST in Hindustani at three different frequencies which had received sympathetic reactions from nationalists in India.⁸⁹ These inquiries were followed up by a detailed memorandum addressed to Ribbentrop by Herr Rühle, the head of the *Rundfunkstelle*, in which Rühle outlined specific proposals to expand Indian broadcasts and make them more effective.⁹⁰

As for the content of these broadcasts, Rühle not only seemed to share Bose's romantic and revolutionary sentiments but also understood the appeal that a message centered around modernity – both political and economic – would have on an increasingly ambitious and radical Indian workforce and student population who he envisioned as the primary target audience of a German propaganda offensive. By reminding the Indian youth of the “unemployment and social misery” through which British rule was depriving them of fully achieving their status as modern citizens, Rühle hoped to “lift the ambition and the sacrificial skin of the young Indians” and “agitate in the tone of the Indian radicalists against the "*Farangi* (foreign oppressors)". German radio broadcasts were to thus relay Indian history as a sequence of struggles against these ‘*Farangi*’⁹¹ and accentuate that young Indians would find no accommodation in a British-controlled economy if they did not succeed in liberating their country in this war. This emphasis on modernization was to also manifest itself by addressing Indians across all social strata and not

⁸⁹Notiz für den Herrn RAM, R67483/247482-3, 3 May 1941, The Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin, Germany.

⁹⁰ Notiz für den Herrn RAM, R67483/247484-88, 3 May 1941, The Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin, Germany.

⁹¹ The memorandum contained both technical specifications of the operation (i.e the plan to increase the number of broadcasts to three times a day at 07.45, 18.15 and 20.45 IST at various frequencies) as well as an extensively researched opinion on the language(s) and content of the broadcast operation. Rühle advocated the use of a counter-propaganda offensive to combat British attempts to “activate the recruitment of Indian soldiers and bring the Indian army to a force of one million men” and “convert Indian industries to produce war materials for British forces in the Middle East and Africa.” Ibid.

pandering to the existing social divisions in the country which British-rule had fostered as remnants of a backward past.

The propaganda offensive was also seen as a potentially useful way to stir up the revolutionary sentiment through “nationalistic songs and war chants” amongst Indian soldiers in the British Army who were suffering epidemics and losses in Africa. While the decision to draft these prisoners of war into an auxiliary Indo-German military force was far from being finalized at this point in the relationship, the view towards Indian soldiers in the British army shows that the Germans – if they already had not began to consider the formation of the Azad Hind Fauj – were certainly keeping tabs on the development of the situation involving Indian prisoners of war in Africa. While Rühle realized that a revolution in India could not be achieved solely through broadcasting, he believed in propaganda as a useful tool to foment discontent amongst Indian students, workforce, industry and soldiers – all key colonial cogs of the modern British war effort.

Rühle’s memorandum was followed by several shorter notes compiled by the *Rundfunkstelle* in following days which assessed the logistical and technical nuances of the propaganda operation. In one note, the Bureau outlined an extensive survey of languages that could be used for the broadcasts.⁹² As for the locations from which these broadcasts could be transmitted, the plan was to broadcast from neighboring countries in Southeast Asia from which radio waves could travel to India. This included cities such as Saigon, Chungking, Bangkok and

⁹² English was spoken by 60 million Indians and was the language of choice of the intelligentsia. Hindustani meanwhile, was the preferred tongue of north Indians but also spoken by the intelligentsia and had the benefit of being understood by 200 million Indians, thus being the most convenient language for German broadcasting at least in the initial stages of the operation. The note also includes comments on the various other languages spoken by the Indian people including Bengali, Tamil and Telugu which Rühle suggested should also be incorporated to extend the reach of German broadcasts.

Notiz für unsere Akten, R67483/247474, 7 May 1941, The Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin, Germany.

Shanghai, where the weak short-wave radio transmitter which Germany had already installed was to be increased in power from one to five kilowatts. Both Afghanistan and Japan were also considered. German experts had installed a medium-wave radio named station Tiger in Kabul before the war which would have been an effective location from which to broadcast, the Germans doubted whether the present Afghan government would support this plan.⁹³ Telegram correspondence between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Berlin and the German Legation in Kabul dated 26 June 1943 suggests that the Afghani government did eventually give the Germans consent to use this transmitter⁹⁴ even if it was limited to being once a week, “inaudible and almost always subject to interference.”⁹⁵ The Germans were also wary of exercising influence on the Japanese political programme, however they hoped that the pro-Axis government in Iraq could be convinced to start broadcasts in Hindustani.⁹⁶

The German charm offensive seemed to be working as Bose began to shift his focus away from his initial desperation to induce an Axis declaration and onto his ‘obsession’ with using radio transmission as an effective way of stirring up the Indian masses. Bose laid down the roots of the *Zentralstelle Freies Indien* (Free India Center) in early 1942. This was the alternative to the initial plan to set-up a provisional government, which by now had been shelved by both parties because of its infeasibility. This is not to say that the FIC was an organization imagined completely by the Germans and designed to serve only their strategic aims. The Germans had in fact put forward the idea of establishing an Indian Independence Committee. However, this did

⁹³ Notiz, Antworten zu den Fragen betreffend die Aufzeichnung Über Rundfunkpropaganda nach Indien, R67483/247469, 12 May 1941, The Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin, Germany.

⁹⁴ German Intelligence Work in Kabul, 26 June 1943, HW12/290/119686, The National Archives, Kew Gardens, England.

⁹⁵ German Intelligence Work in Kabul, 29 June 1943, HW12/290/119689, The National Archives, Kew Gardens, England.

⁹⁶ Hauner, *India in Axis Strategy: Germany, Japan, and Indian Nationalists in the Second World War*, 251

not appeal to Bose as he thought its structure as a democratic body would make it impractical and unworkable, a concern that reveals his underlying affinity for a dictatorial form of government. Instead, the Free India Centre was to be established to “serve as the brain of the revolution”, with Bose as its all-powerful head – an organizational flaw which, even if it was shaped by a reality in which Bose had no Indian equals with which to lead his project, would only eventually hamper the Centre’s ability to function, particularly in Bose’s absence. Bose envisaged its primary functions to be “directing world propaganda against British Imperialism from the Indian standpoint, organizing and sending practical help to India for the revolution”⁹⁷ in addition to managing the establishment of Free India Legion, discussed in the next chapter.

The Free India Center, however autocratic Bose hoped to make it – could not function as a one-man-show. While Bose had previously drawn on the somewhat mystically intertwined ancient past that India and Germany shared to buttress his diplomatic overtures, he was to now rely on the more recent ‘entanglements’ between the two nations that drew Indian emigrants like ACN Nambiar and Iqbal Shedai to settle in Europe staff the FIC. In his desperation to recruit able men Bose found himself grasping at straws, relying mainly on the networks that he had built up in his time in Europe to gather a group of men who had not much else in common except for their subcontinental origins.

Access to the transcript of Nambiar’s five-week long interrogation conducted by an Indian Security Unit official following his arrest on the 7th of June 1945 allows us to create a detailed history of his time in Europe, his relationship with Bose, and the workings of the Azad Hind and FIC in Germany. Nambiar had been ostracized from Germany after the Nazi rise to power because of his Communist leanings and had later refused a return even when Bose

⁹⁷ Detailed Plan of Work, Anlage 4, R67483/247450-4, 20 May 1941, The Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin, Germany.

managed to overturn his ban in 1933. The German invasion of Czechoslovakia in March 1939 and the eventual outbreak of the Second World War had led Nambiar from Prague to Paris and eventually to Montpellier as he tried to keep ahead of the rapid German advance in France. Nambiar's constant and frequent relocation at this point in his life belies his narrative of being a harmless student journalist and hints at a more active revolutionary career which he was probably wary of divulging to his interrogators, aware that he would have no Nazi alibi for the anti-British activities he engaged in at this time. While he was in Montpellier attending the University and writing for the French press, Nambiar learned from his friend of Bose's disappearance from India and from "that date expected that he would come to Europe to resume his activities from there."⁹⁸

In the third week of August in 1941 as Bose had already begun to implement his idea of establishing the FIC in Berlin, Nambiar was visited by Dr. Oesterreich, an employee of the Economic Department of the German Embassy in Paris, asking him to mysteriously return with him to Paris. A hesitant Nambiar made the decision to take the train to Paris only after Oesterreich had whispered a password 'BOSE' into his ear. In Paris, Nambiar was to encounter Bose in a hotel room at the swanky Ritz, where Bose was staying under his Italian pseudonym Orlando Mazzotta. The men were joined by Iqbal Shedai. Shedai was a fellow Indian nationalist who broadcasted daily propaganda targeted to the Muslim population of India and the Middle East via a shortwave station in Rome which had been organized and funded for him by the Italian government. This venture, called Radio Himalaya, had interested Bose, who now sought to bring Shedai under his Azad Hind umbrella.

⁹⁸ Interrogation of ACN Nambiar, 29 September 1945, KV2/3904, The National Archives, Kew Gardens, England.

Bose recognized the value that Shedai would bring to the Azad Hind radio operation. As someone who was already carrying out nationalist broadcasts to South Asia from Europe, Shedai could provide the much-needed *savoir faire* – both technical and otherwise – that Bose’s cohort of assembled men quite clearly did not possess. More importantly however, considering the fact that the Germans were more than willing to share their broadcasting technology and infrastructure with Bose, the incorporation of Shedai would allow Bose to extend the reach of Azad Hind radio to Shedai’s primarily Muslim target audience and also open the door to an Azad Hind presence in Rome, where Shedai was based. However, Bose’s desire to be the sole leader of his project meant that he would never strike a fruitful partnership with Shedai, who was unwilling to be subordinated to Bose. The breakdown of Bose and Shedai’s relationship, when added to the already incongruent foreign policy actions of the two Axis allies, affected the possibility of a joint Italo-German operation to support Bose’s Azad Hind cause.

Despite being war-time allies, Hitler and Mussolini’s foreign policies – especially towards South Asia and the Middle East – were often disjunct. This was partly the result of an unequal alliance with the Germans reluctant to involve the Italians whom they considered unreliable in major foreign policy decisions. Hayes suggests that Bose shared these concerns and was similarly opposed to the formation of any joint Italo-German collaboration to further his aims.⁹⁹ During a visit to Rome in May 1942, Bose met prominent Italian officials including Foreign Minister Ciano and Mussolini himself. During these meetings Bose explicitly requested to set up an FIC and a Azad Hind broadcasting station in Rome, independent of Shedai’s activities. He also obtained necessary approvals for the dispatch of Indian POWs from Italian territories in North Africa to Germany. These were the men who would be the first recruits to the

⁹⁹ Hayes, *Subhas Chandra Bose in Nazi Germany*. 124

Azad Hind Fauj which is explored in the next chapter. While Bose still believed that Shedai could be brought under his wing, Shedai had grown increasingly antagonistic to Bose and wrote several ludicrous letters to the Italian Foreign Ministry in opposition to any partnership with him. Hayes claims that Shedai may have played a role in influencing the Italian Foreign Minister, who was left unimpressed and non-committed after meeting Bose in Rome.

Shedai and Bose eventually came to see each other as rivals, with the polemic content of their radio programmes mirroring their personal tensions. The two men aired out their arguments on religious grounds, with each accusing the other of representing a communal and exclusive vision, although this was not the case. Shedai was very much a proponent of the pan-Islamic school of thought, which had emerged in the latter half of the nineteenth century as a collective recognition of a global Muslim identity and a transnational desire to combat the discrimination against Muslim minorities in modern nation states.¹⁰⁰ Bose used Shedai's distinct Muslim identity and agenda as ammunition, often accusing Shedai of being sectarian and supporting the Muslim League in Azad Hind broadcasts, despite the internationalist nature of pan-Islamic anticolonialism, which was cosmopolitan and tended to embrace non-Muslim societies in Asia and Africa.¹⁰¹ In response, Shedai wittily named his own broadcast programme Azad Bharat to distinguish himself from what he postulated to be Bose's inclusive and Hindu proclivities, perhaps unaware Bose's vision. Just as Bose had perverted the Islamic facets of Shedai's vision, Shedai too was indulging in a misrepresentation of Bose's secular vision, with both the FIC and the Azad Hind Fauj being reflections of this vision as multireligious organizations.

¹⁰⁰ Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia*.

¹⁰¹ Aydin. 81

Shedai also took aim at Bose's by this time unmistakable penchant for authoritarianism. He often criticizing the cult of personality that Bose had created within the Azad Hind. In one Radio Himalaya broadcast aired on February 6 1942, Shedai spoke of how he had "no desires to become a small or great leader" and that he was "quite unlike those mean people who, not having been recognized as great leaders, can never feel at rest." He "urged all Indians to be at guard against such leaders." He ended the broadcast by asking: "Have you understood why we call you, our listeners, now on 'Azad Bharat' and not 'Azad Hind'?"¹⁰² Ultimately however, the inability of Bose and Shedai to co-operate, because of both Bose's personality and the ideological differences between them, was only detrimental to both these men who would have perhaps been better off sharing resources for their largely similar broadcasting aims. More significantly, it mirrored the lack of a cohesive Axis strategy in Europe towards India, with the Italians unwilling to back Bose especially if their 'superior' German counterparts had taken no such formal position.

Nambiar's story and involvement with the FIC unfolded quite differently to that of Shedai, even though he was reluctant to immediately accept Bose's invitation in Paris to join in him in the "well-arranged" and "serious" work that the latter wanted to carry out in Berlin. Nambiar had instead returned to Foix, and pleaded bad health to avoid being summoned to Berlin by the German police that Bose sent for him. Later in December, Bose sent a letter to Nambiar, evoking the famous lines from Shakespeare's Julius Caesar "There is a tide in the affairs of men which taken at the flow..." and Nambiar eventually made his way to Berlin with

¹⁰² Indische propaganda, R60670, 6 February 1942, The Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin, Germany

another Indian acquaintance called Mukherji, presumably because Bose had told him to “bring any other Indians he (sic) could.”¹⁰³

The two men were booked at the Hotel Esplanade in Berlin, and made their way to Bose’s villa on Sophienstrasse in the posh neighborhood of Charlottenburg, replete with a butler, cook, gardener, and an SS-chauffeured car¹⁰⁴ which had all been gifted to him by the German government. During Bose’s time in Berlin, the villa became notorious for hosting gatherings not just for the band of Indian ‘revolutionaries’ which Bose had managed to collect in Berlin, but also for the other anticolonial activists in a city that was very much a revolutionary entrepot during the war. Bose had been issued ration cards by the German government specifically for the purpose of entertaining these international guests. Nambiar and Mukherji attended one such gathering on their first day in Berlin. This was a tea party for Bose’s birthday which was also attended by Emilie Schenkl, Bose’s one-time secretary in Vienna whom he had married in a secret ceremony in 1937 and could now be reunited with in Berlin. Nambiar claims that this gathering was the first time he heard Bose being referred to as ‘Netaji’, giving birth to what came to be popular moniker. The men at the gathering – “some old friends and other new ones” – all ceremoniously administered an oath to Bose as their leader.

The next morning, Nambiar was taken to the FIC at 2 Liechtensteinallee in a central location in Berlin. The German-sponsored¹⁰⁵ FIC was established as the focal organization for Bose and his Indian revolutionaries in Germany, issuing passports, providing accommodation

¹⁰³ Interrogation of ACN Nambiar, 29 September 1945, KV2/3904, The National Archives, Kew Gardens, England.

¹⁰⁴ Hayes, *Subhas Chandra Bose in Nazi Germany*. 67

¹⁰⁵ “When I first joined the FIC, I was told by Bose that his activities were being financed by a loan from the German government. This was paid as a monthly grant amounting to 35,000 RM a month to two separate accounts both in the name of Orlando Mazzotta: 25,000 per month paid into the FIC account proper, and 10,000 into Bose’s private account.” Interrogation of ACN Nambiar, 29 September 1945, KV2/3904, The National Archives, Kew Gardens, England.

and offering several other concessions for its Indian members. The office occupied one story of the three story building at this time but would later go on to subsume the entire building. The office consisted of seven rooms and employed fourteen Indian men and four German women as secretaries in addition to Nambiar and Mukherji. On the very same day – the 26th of January 1942 – the FIC also hosted a celebration of the Indian Independence Day , commemorating the declaration of independence that the Indian National Congress had officially promulgated 12 years earlier in which it announced its resolution of ‘Purna Swaraj’ or complete self-rule. The celebration was replete with speeches and films that projected a glorified vision of a Free India. Despite being in a different physical space to revolutionary political leaders, the Azad Hind very much occupied a place in the same revolutionary cannon of Indian anticolonialism that had birthed the INC. Ironically Bose, who had emerged as the clear leader of the German wing of Indian anticolonialism was still intent on maintaining his incognito status in Germany and therefore not present at this celebration.

Nonetheless, the transmission of the Azad Hind Radio as an independent shortwave station, which was the primary task of the men that came to run the FIC, was designed solely around Bose’s ideas. Each member of the FIC received a circular written by Bose with instructions pertaining to the content of these broadcasts, with Bose asking them to emphasize the likelihood of a German victory in the war and the inevitable defeat of Britain and her imperialism while he worked through diplomatic channels to obtain a declaration. Bose kept in touch with the FIC and Azad Hind Radio via daily fifteen minute meetings with the full cohort in which the broadcast for the following day would be planned. Nambiar, who Bose had nominated as his deputy, also had the additional privilege of meeting Bose five times a week and was

charged with the responsibility of smoothly running the office and obtaining a new premises for it.

Bose himself came out of hiding in an Azad Hind broadcast made on 19 February 1942, seeing the fall of Singapore - at the time a major British military base in South-East Asia - to Japanese forces as the “end of the iniquitous British regime and the dawn of a new era in India.”¹⁰⁶In his characteristically opportunistic fashion of doing politics, Bose announced his intentions of “heartily co-operating with all those who will help us in overthrowing our common enemy in the sacred struggle to break the chains of servitude that have bound us for so long.” Two weeks later, Bose made a similar but much longer broadcast asking his fellow countrymen to engage in a guerilla war to drive out British Imperialism even if this meant enduring “misery, jealousy and even prison.” Bose’s message contained an extensive 18-point list of how his listeners may carry out this “great task” at hand, including a boycott of British goods, the organization of strikes and mass demonstrations as well as setting fire to materials intended for the British war effort, a throwback to *svadeshi* principles. He routinely ended his messages with the battle cry “Long Live the Revolution! Long Live Free India!” (Inquilab Zindabad! Azad Hind Zindabad!).¹⁰⁷

Bose’s programmes regularly advised listeners to avoid making the “fatal mistake” of believing in the Allied propaganda offensive in India or even that disseminated by the Indian National Congress, which he claimed were just “voices coming through the channels of British propaganda.”¹⁰⁸ Bose’s attempts to delegitimize all other propaganda ring quite ironic since he was himself fighting an uphill battle for the legitimacy of his own Azad Hind project. Bose’s

¹⁰⁶ Handakten Keppler, R27501, 1931-1944, The Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin, Germany.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

desperation to obtain a formal declaration of an alliance with Germany was in recognition of the fact that any other activities under Azad Hind's purview, however passionate and well-planned, would always carry with them the risk of not being taken seriously. A population thousands of miles away was being inundated with official British propaganda that framed Germans as antagonists and not the munificent liberators that Bose portrayed them as. Severely constrained by the diplomatic deadlock previously discussed in Chapter 3 and with Hitler's pragmatism preventing any grand statement of alliance¹⁰⁹, Bose did not have the luxury of proclaiming this achievement on air and was instead limited to making indirect references to a potential but confirmed alliance with Germany.

Azad Hind's claim to legitimacy was also severely handicapped by the personnel (or the lack of them) at the organization's disposal. While men like Nambiar had "lived remarkably cosmopolitan lives in a world of heightened global connectivity,"¹¹⁰ there was no real criteria for recruitment of members to the FIC. In his account, Nambiar details the frequent addition of men to the office and how the group tended to take on board any Indian man in Europe with whom they even had the slightest acquaintance, provided he was willing and able enough to help. Beyond their qualifications, one must also be skeptical of the motivations of these men, which, based on the diverse spectrum of their careers and pasts, were surely not driven by strong ideological connections to Bose's vision. Their volunteering for this effort probably had more to do with the lavish lifestyle and protection that an association with German state resources potentially afforded them. Nambiar claimed that it was only Bose who was given a villa, car and ration cards while other members remained subjected to poor living conditions and restrictions

¹⁰⁹ Mark Mazower, "An International Civilization? Empire, Internationalism and the Crisis of the Mid-Twentieth Century," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 82, no. 3 (2006): 553–66.

¹¹⁰ Motadel, "The Global Authoritarian Moment and the Revolt against Empire."

on movement. He also claims that any granting of special facilities did not induce all Indians to join the FIC as some still obtained the same facilities from industrial works or educational institutes. ¹¹¹However, as will be shortly discussed, Nambiar's own forays into luxury and hedonism were soon revealed to his cohort so these comments must be taken with a grain of salt. Also Nambiar, a man who clearly harbored socialist sympathies that would otherwise make him a pariah in the Nazi *volksgemeinschaft*, ironically came to assume undisputed leadership of the FIC as Minister of State without portfolio after Bose's departure in 1943. As we will see, Nambiar would struggle to lead the men under him, who like Nambiar, had a diverse range of backgrounds, interests and motivations. Bose's leadership and the cult of personality that had formed around him thus remained essential to the FIC and its unity..

In April 1942, Bose attempted to set up a Planning Committee consisting of some members of the FIC and other Indian volunteers who had lived in Europe and imbibed German industrial and technical know-how by working at corporations such as Skoda, Phillips and Siemens. Nambiar was made the Chairman of the committee, with various other members given the roles and responsibilities of planning arms production, regulating the financial question, mineral resources, chemical productions, etc. This was an insight into the modern, industrial and German-influenced vision of free India that Bose had in mind and wanted to cultivate even before Indian freedom or even a German formal alliance had been guaranteed. However, much like the weaknesses of the FIC itself, the Planning Committee "either lacked practical experience in their subjects, or if they had that experience, lacked the broader outlook for large scale planning." ¹¹²

¹¹¹ Interrogation of ACN Nambiar, 29 September 1945, KV2/3904, The National Archives, Kew Gardens, England.

¹¹² Ibid.

Such shortcomings did not render Azad Hind Radio completely futile. Within a few months of its operation, the radio program was expanded to air for 2 hours instead of the earlier 15 minutes and included transmission in several other Indian languages such as Bengali, Tamil, Pashtu, Telugu and Persian. There were also weekly 10 minute programmes in Gujarati, Marathi and Canarese/Kannada, all a sign that Bose's propaganda was not falling on deaf ears and had a sufficient degree of listenership. Scriptwriting and translation was made possible through a division of labor.

The Azad Hind project was intensified as the British attempted the infamous 'Cripps Mission' in March 1942, sending a mission headed by senior minister Sir Stanford Cripps to negotiate with leaders of the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League by offering India dominion status after the war in exchange for loyalty to the British war effort. Bose saw this as a symptom of great unrest in India, and established parallel radio services to the Azad Hind called the Congress Radio and the Azad Muslim Radio to be transmitted from the same sports field in Berlin. Bose thought this would help him both win over Gandhi supporters and counteract the activities of the Muslim League. Rather ambitiously, Bose also laid down plans to begin broadcasting to as far as Ireland and the United States. Reportedly, Ribbentrop attributed the eventual failure of the Cripps Mission in India to the efficiency and impact of Azad Hind transmissions.¹¹³

The aftermath of the failed Cripps Mission saw Indian National Congress politicians adopt the Quit India movement, which Bose interpreted as affirmation of the appeal boycott and guerilla tactics that Azad Hind radio had advocated. Broadcasts thus became more focused on the internal situation in India, with Bose personally writing the scripts as tensions flared back

¹¹³ Hayes, *Subhas Chandra Bose in Nazi Germany*. 173

home. On the 12th of June 1942, with the world press as his audience, Bose announced that the failure of the Cripps Mission had “began the last phase of India’s national struggle”¹¹⁴ during which it was “the right and duty of the Indian people to accept any help which is offered to them.”¹¹⁵ Explicitly distinguishing himself from Gandhian tactics of passive resistance and civilian disobedience back in the subcontinent, Bose presented himself as a leader who “will not hesitate to draw the sword when the time comes.”¹¹⁶ Keeping with his tendency to temper any underlying authoritarian designs that he may have held for India’s post-independence future, Bose promised “not to do anything which will not meet the widest approvals of nationalist circles in India” even if he admitted to having his “own ideas regarding post-war reconstruction in Free India.”¹¹⁷ This kind of moderation took on an even greater significance in press conferences such as these as well as in the dissemination of radio propaganda. It allowed Bose and the Azad Hind project to appeal to the more general Indian nationalist sentiment that may not necessarily have otherwise condoned this Indo-Nazi collaboration, especially amidst an extensive British propaganda offensive that regularly desecrated Bose’s image by presenting him as a disloyal Nazi quisling.

Despite the progress of the FIC, Bose had grown frustrated by his inability to make a formal announcement and increasingly drawn to the situation in Asia where Japanese troops were making advances towards Burma and India’s eastern frontier. Bose had begun to consider leaving for South East Asia by the spring of 1942 and was offered encouragement in his meeting with Hitler later in May. In a handwritten letter to Ribbentrop in December, Bose argued that

¹¹⁴H.E Bose at the Press Conference, Handakten Keppler, R27501, June 12 1942, The Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin, Germany.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

“his presence in Far East is more necessary than before (sic)” and that he would be “profoundly grateful to your excellency and the German government for the help in this matter. (sic).”¹¹⁸

Bose had already arranged travel there before this letter but his plans to fly to the Far East in an Italian aircraft had broken down. Technical difficulties grounded the plane, being no longer allowed to fly over Soviet territory and incapable enough of flying the longer distance around it. Bose did eventually make his way to the Far East in a German U-Boat in March 1943, where he succeeded in accomplish his goal of setting up a provisional government that came to be officially recognized by Japan and eventually even Germany. Bose had not tempered his ambitions after his German sojourn, and spoke about “being determined during this winter to march into India and hoist our national flag on the mainland of India. Then we will begin the historic march to Delhi...”¹¹⁹ in a broadcast aired from Tokyo soon after the Japanese Premier had announced the formation of an Azad Hind government in November 1943.

In Bose’s absence, the Azad Hind leadership in Germany passed into the hands of Nambiar, who claims that the mood in the FIC was fairly positive until 1942 and turned especially sour after Bose’s departure owing to communal tensions and the formation of a faction that resented Nambiar’s leadership because he “lived better than them.” Vyas, one of Nambiar’s colleagues in the FIC, gives us a more detailed and less biased assessment of Nambiar’s leadership. Nambiar by this time had taken more than just a leaf out of Bose’s book as his relationship with his secretary – a Miss Niedemayer – began to transgress professional boundaries. Vyas claims that she had been intentionally employed by the Germans as a spy and successfully seduced Nambiar into becoming a “German slave.”¹²⁰ Nambiar thus descended (or

¹¹⁸ Handakten Keppler, R27501, 1931-1944, The Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin, Germany.

¹¹⁹ Decrypts of intercepted diplomatic communications, HW12/291, The National Archives, Kew Gardens, England.

¹²⁰ Extract from statement of M.R.L Vyas, KV2/3904, The National Archives, Kew Gardens, England.

ascended) into a lifestyle of German aristocracy, claiming to be on worktrips while holidaying in the South of France with Niedemayer, much to the chagrin of his FIC colleagues. Nambiar may have claimed that to merely be attending to the affairs of the FIC branch in Paris, established at 12 Place Vendome in September 1943. This expansion in itself was a sign that the FIC and Nambiar had begun to reach well beyond their means, facilitated of course by generous German funding. Vyas also lets us into the factionalism and internal dissension that grew within the FIC after Bose's departure, even if Nambiar claims that radio broadcasting continued with the same intensity. The enthusiasm in the camp picked up after the Japanese announcement of a provisional government in November 1943 but literally came crashing down as the office was destroyed in a bombing of Berlin in the same month. While Nambiar continued living in Berlin, the other staff members of the FIC were moved to Hilversum with the intention of positioning the FIC closer to the location of the Azad Hind troops, who by this time were being used to defend German positions in the Atlantic.

The move to Hilversum only served to fortify the anti-Nambiar faction, and several members of this faction wrote to the German Foreign Office complaining of Nambiar's inept leadership, holding him responsible for pieces of luggage that were lost during the transfer. Nambiar refers to these complaints as "trivial,"¹²¹ however a letter written by him to Bose dated 12 January 1945 suggests that internal rifts were really starting to impair the functioning of the FIC and Nambiar's ability to lead it. In the letter which was later recovered from a German U-Boat, Nambiar refers to a tiredness that has set into the group, with his men being "too impatient and annoyingly sensitive."¹²² This tiredness and the troublesome nature of certain members,

¹²¹ Interrogation of ACN Nambiar, 29 September 1945, KV2/3904, The National Archives, Kew Gardens, England.

¹²² Appendix - Interrogation of ACN Nambiar, 29 September 1945, KV2/3904, The National Archives, Kew Gardens, England.

described as the men he thought would “relieve me (sic) greatly in directions,”¹²³ kept him from “attending to more important jobs.”¹²⁴

These internal fissions within the FIC were compounded by a derailing German war effort which naturally meant that the Nazi apparatus had little, if any time for its Indian pet project. Nambiar tells Bose of his troubles in “pushing through arrangements these days” and of “carrying on my (sic) work in these rather difficult conditions.”¹²⁵ Nambiar insists that the FIC continued to have the support of the Reichsfuhrer and “the man you met in Vienna who gave you the long cigarettes”¹²⁶, a possible coded reference to Ribbentrop. In reality however, contacts between the German Foreign Office and the FIC became negligible by October 1944¹²⁷, by which time most German officials involved in this specific relationship had either been transferred or executed. The office was eventually dissolved on the 8th of April 1945 with the entry of American troops being imminent. All documents were destroyed, except for a few which Niedermayer kept as souvenirs.

Nambiar was arrested later that year in Bad Gastein, Austria by British authorities for collaborating with the enemy. On the 30th of July 1946, Nambiar made an application for the return of two funds - one for the Free India Center of Reichs Marks 263,220 which money it is understood was originally paid to him by the German Foreign Office - and a personal account of RMs 40,000. Both these accounts were deposited in the Dresdner Bank in the British Sector of Berlin. We do not know if they were credited back to Nambiar, but British authorities recommended a 50% fine on these funds.¹²⁸ Earlier in 1946, a German woman named Eva

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Interrogation of ACN Nambiar, 29 September 1945, KV2/3904, The National Archives, Kew Gardens, England.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

Walters wrote to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in London asking about the whereabouts of Nambiar and “willing to do anything possible to help him in his deplorable state,”¹²⁹ claiming that she too had been involved in a romantic relationship with him. By 1948, Nambiar had obtained an Indian passport and was eventually appointed as the Indian Ambassador to West Germany in 1955, being given another chance to continue his German holiday and reconcile with the ghosts and girlfriends of his past.

Born out of the German refusal to present Bose with an official diplomatic platform from which he could conduct his revolutionary activities, the FIC nonetheless created an elaborate propaganda program that effectively disseminated the Azad Hind vision back to the Indian subcontinent. Despite its best efforts to position itself as the Indian revolutionary beacon in Europe, it could never achieve the legitimacy of a provisional government, the establishment of which had been one of Bose’s initial demands. The constraints that arose from Bose’s diplomatic failure to form an official regime, as discussed in Chapter 3, were exacerbated by a reality in which the FIC members except for Bose, despite being cosmopolitan intellectuals typical of their time, did not hold the necessary political abilities for a mission of this stature. With his cohort’s shortcomings and his own authoritarian inclinations, Bose concentrated an immense amount of executive control in his hands and left a gaping power vacuum after his departure that Nambiar was unable to fill. Nambiar’s interrogation lets us into the factionalism – religious and otherwise – that came to define the group fellow as members increasingly resented his lavish lifestyle. By the time the German war effort grinded to a halt in 1945, the FIC had descended into a chaos that exposed the organization for what it really was – the illegitimate child

¹²⁹ Interrogation of ACN Nambiar, 29 September 1945, KV2/3904, The National Archives, Kew Gardens, England.

of a broken relationship. Its close-knit sister organization, the Azad Hind Fauj, would suffer a similar fate...

Chapter 4 The Königsbruck Chronicles: A history of the Azad Hind Fauj

“I swear by God this holy oath, that I will obey the leader of the German race and state, Adolf Hitler, as commander of the German armed forces, in the fight for the freedom of India, whose leader is Subhas Chandra Bose, and that as a brave soldier, I am willing to lay down my life for this oath.”¹³⁰

In August 1942 a group of 600- 700 Indian men swore this oath of allegiance to confirm the establishment of the Azad Hind Fauj (Free India Legion). This Legion was the manifestation of one of Bose’s most desired early designs - namely the establishment of a military force capable of successfully liberating India from British control via a surgical intervention backed by the resources and capabilities of a German army that was steamrolling its way through much of Europe at this time. At the ceremony, Bose was accompanied by officers of the German High Command, the Japanese ambassador to Germany, FIC members and a cohort of German photographers. The oath-taking ceremony was merely a formalization of a process that had been taking place for months prior to it, as Indian POWs were shipped to German military centers mainly from North Africa via Italy to undergo training with a view towards the formation of the Legion.

The oath’s first and imperative demand was an obedience to Hitler and the German race and state. The fight for Indian liberation was only then mentioned as an afterthought, with no reference to why a future Indian race and state might be equally as valid as the German one that the oath glorified. By framing the fight for Indian liberation as a mere possible consequence of loyal service to Hitler and the German armed forces, the oath confirmed that Indian freedom by itself was not a German priority. For the Germans, the fight for Indian liberation held value in how it would serve the war-time political and military needs of the German peoples and not in

¹³⁰ SIR 1382, Appendix 2, 12 Jan 1945, W106/5881, The National Archives, Kew Gardens, England.

the recognition that Indians were similarly deserving of their own state-building project. Azad Hind was thus reduced to an initiative aimed to benefit not the Indian but the German race and state. During the establishment of the Legion, Bose often futilely insisted on a racial and military equality within the Legion and between the Legion and the German army. Through the distinct hierarchy of loyalties that it established however, the oath was a reflection of the overarching Nazi worldview of German greatness in which there was little room for the racial and political equality of other peoples. The Free India Legion thus became just another weapon in the German war-making arsenal, an extension of the role which Bose had assumed as a tool for spreading German propaganda on the global political stage.

Just as the Azad Hind project as a whole remained mired in subservience to the political and strategic designs of its German facilitators, the Azad Hind Fauj was to be similarly hamstrung through its lack of legitimacy in German eyes especially as the Wehrmacht continued to earn significant victories on the battlefield advance until the summer of 1942. Despite attaining official status as a regiment of the German army through the oath, the Indian Legionnaires were theoretical outcasts – socially, racially and militarily – in the Nazi *volks-gemeinschaft*¹³¹. This is not to say that the Legion continued to exist as an insular, ‘miniature India’ on the peripheries of its German homeland. Firstly, Bose’s best attempts to instill in it an identity based on values fundamental to his Azad Hind vision were largely unsuccessful. Most of its Indian members were drawn to the Legion more through a desire to embark on a novel European adventure than any ideological proclivity to Bose or ‘Azad Hind’. Moreover, the Legion fostered various connections between Indian troops and their German colleagues, superiors and even civilians. As the war drew on and German resources became

¹³¹ The Nazi concept of a racially pure German society united by a mystical soul through which individuals became part of a greater whole worth dying for.

increasingly strained, German idealism – of a racially pure society and by extension military – fell flat when confronted with the reality of a desolate situation both domestically and beyond its borders. It was this withering *volksgemeinschaft* which the Legion came to embody and in which it had to function. From being deemed unfit to take part in German military operations, Indian men now found themselves thrown in the deep end as the German army desperately gasped for air. Tales emerged of unprecedented social interactions between these once-pariah Indian men and German civilians. These interactions – some even producing marriages and families – had been as unimaginable as the destruction of the Third Reich that by 1944 was an imminent reality. In this way, the Azad Hind Legion, which emerged as an ambitious German afterthought as the Third Reich rode high on its early military successes, came to symbolize the equally desperate downfall of its racially pure and militarily invincible national identity.

A reading of the oath that Legion members were made to take captures the awkward and essential contradiction that formed the basis of the relationship between these Indians in exile – both men like Bose and Nambiar but also ex POW Legionnaires - and forms the crux of this essay's argument. Bose's proud brand of Indian nationalism was merely instrumentalized for wartime gains by the Nazi machinery. While these early volunteers recognized Bose as the leader of their fight to liberate India, the oath mandated an equal if not superseding loyalty and subjugation to Adolf Hitler as the commander of German armed forces. In volunteering to fight for the liberation of their own peoples from the colonial yoke, these men were ironically chaining themselves to an arguably equal evil of the wartime whims of a racist and expansionist Nazi state. Fittingly, an overwhelming majority of Azad Hind troops would never make it anywhere close to their homeland's borders or its fight for independence and instead found themselves propping up hopeless German defenses in the Netherlands and France as the German war effort

began to capitulate. The chaos and casualties within the Legion eventually came to reflect the gradual attrition of the German army and in turn the Nazi state, to which the fate of Azad Hind had become inextricably linked. In the autumn of 1944, the Legion, which by this time had grown to a strength of 3000 men, was forced into retreating from France in the face of rapid Allied advances. As the war drew to a close in the spring of 1945, most Legionnaires, including the German officer corps, had disappeared. About 500 men attempted to flee to Switzerland or Austria, only to be taken into French captivity.¹³² In this way, as the Third Reich was reduced to rubble, the Azad Hind Legion was similarly gutted not even 3 years after its formal establishment.

From among the 500 Legionnaires that were eventually captured by French authorities attempting to desert, the interrogation of 3 such men captured in Ruffec, France in August 1944, offers important clues to these soldiers' wartime experiences. These confessions were compiled in the Bannerth Report by Combined Services Detailed Interrogation Centre, a British intelligence agency that interrogated enemy troops and informants beginning in November 1942. The Bannerth Report, along with other testimonies of Legion members and a detailed account of the Legion and its activities in ACN Nambiar's interrogation, allows us to paint a vivid history of the Legion as it navigated an increasingly war-ravaged Europe.

Preparations to form the Legion were underway soon after Bose's arrival in Germany in April 1941. For Bose, a possible Indian Legion was "an old dream, inspired by the Legions started by other countries in the last war."¹³³ As early as June 1941, Bose sent one of his first Indian aides referred to as Dhawan to Italy to contact Indian POWs who had been captured in

¹³² Joachim Oesterheld, "The Last Chapter of the Indian Legion," 24.

¹³³ Interrogation of ACN Nambiar, 29 September 1945, KV2/3904, The National Archives, Kew Gardens, England.

battle.¹³⁴ However, these POWs in Italy were not the first members of the Azad Hind Legion and instead came to form the Battaglione Azad Hindoustan in August 1942. This was an Italian military experiment forcibly shelved in November 1942 as troops revolted upon hearing of the Axis defeat in El Alamein.¹³⁵ The first members of the Legion, had instead already been shipped from Libya, where they were captured during the battles for Tobruk in December 1941. This initial group of 12 men sent to Berlin to receive training in propaganda, would form the nucleus of the Legion in Frankenburg. Simultaneously, there was another special Legion group being raised in Messeritz, where intelligent soldiers were trained in sabotage, espionage and propaganda.

By February 1942 this initial group in Frankenburg, aided by an influx of other POWs and civilian volunteers, had grown to 80 Indians. All of these recruits wore German uniforms, with “orange, white and green flash on the shoulder strap, later changed to the springing tiger on the right arm”^{136 137} and continued to receive informal training. Most POW convoys came directly from Italy and were sent to disinfection camps in Germany before their arrival at military camps. In July 1942, despite the arrival of frequent batches of POWs from Italy’s now unsuccessful experiment, the High Command of the German Army (OKW) threatened to disband the unit in Frankenburg if it did not grow to 600 members. By the time the oath of allegiance was

¹³⁴ Ibid.

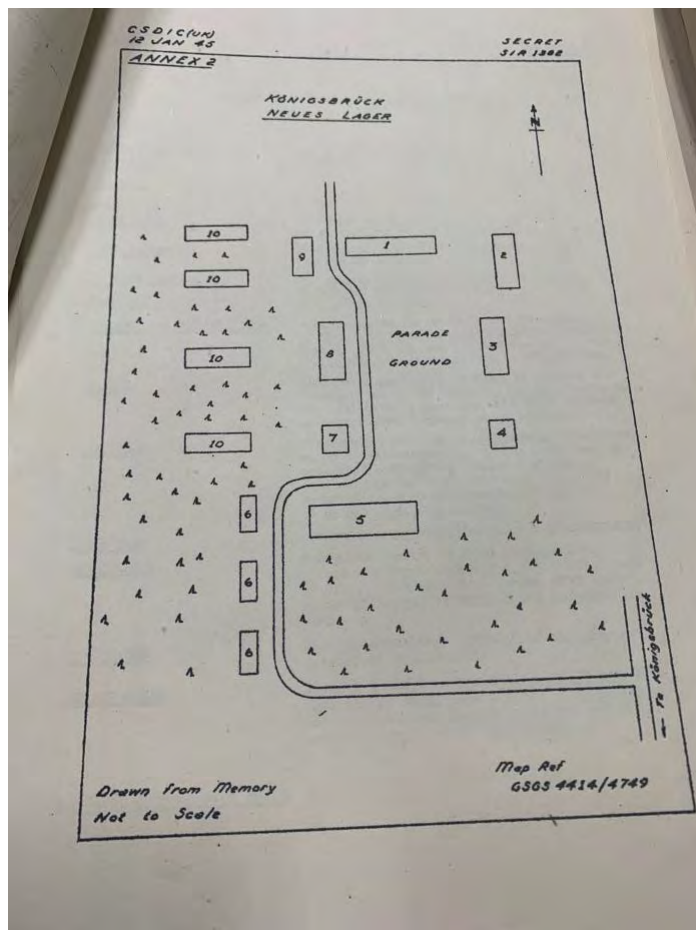
¹³⁵ POW interrogation records suggest that Bose expressed a desire to amalgamate this Italian force with the Azad Hind Legion as late as July 1942. Ibid.

¹³⁶ The combination of orange, white and green is symbolic for the tricolor of the Swaraj Flag that was made the official flag of the Indian National Congress in the 1930s and continues to represent the Republic of India. Instead of Gandhi’s *chakra* or spinning wheel that was adopted by the INC however, Bose’s Azad Hind flag came to contain a springing Mysore tiger imprinted on the tricolor. This was the personal emblem of Tipu Sultan, erstwhile warrior-king of the Indian princely state of Mysore who retains a legacy as a heroic and ferocious opponent of the British Raj in the 18th century.

¹³⁷ SIR 1382, 12 Jan 1945, W106/5881, The National Archives, Kew Gardens, England.

taken in the end of August, the enrollment of 300-400 Muslims had taken the unit's size to the OKW's desired threshold.

From the FIC, Bose selected Ganpuley and Sultan to attend to the Legion and its activities. Their work consisted of visiting the Legion and bringing any complaints to the notice of the Legion's German commanders. Ganpuley and Sultan complained to Nambiar that they had no real power and were unpopular amongst Legion members. They joked that even Bose's mistress Schenkl knew more than them, with Bose remaining coy on any conversations he had with the Foreign Office or Army authorities, maintaining the authoritarian tendencies he had already showed in his leadership of the FIC. The unit was moved from Frankenburg to Königsbruck in July 1942, where troops had access to better facilities for training and accommodation. In Königsbruck, the Legion expanded in size and was divided into two infantry battalions containing ten companies altogether. Nambiar cites that German military successes up until August 1942 were the main drivers of Legion recruitment. As these successes dried up, so did recruitment to the Legion. Nonetheless, by the time of Bose's departure for the East in early 1943, the Legion at Königsbruck consisted of 1000 men.



Maps of the POW camp in Königsbruck.¹³⁸

¹³⁸ SIR 1382, 12 Jan 1945, W106/5881, The National Archives, Kew Gardens, England.

The group at Messeritz remained much smaller in size given its status as a specialized task force. Nambiar claims the German Army gradually began to lose interest in this secondary group by the end of 1942 as “the military situation necessitated the giving up of more ambitious plans.”¹³⁹ Bose attempted desperately to prevent the dissolution of the group, approaching top-ranking Nazi Heinrich Himmler through a contact he had developed at the opening of the German-Indian Society in Hamburg during earlier visits to Germany. However, Bose seems to have only been successful in buying a few weeks more of time, given that the group was eventually dissolved in January 1943 and its men transferred to the Legion in Königsbruck. Some of the men who were transferred in this way did not settle down, and most were sent away to SS schools in Berlin and Cologne.¹⁴⁰ In April 1943, the unit was given its official title of the *Indische Legion* and shortly after the Indian Infantry Regiment 950, cementing its status as a part of the German Army.

The men placed in charge of the groups in Frankenburg and Messeritz is a reflection of lacking interest in the Legion on the part of the German army. The Frankenburg division was placed under the command of a General Fromm, who would be assassinated for his involvement in the infamous July Bomb Plot, a failed attempt on Hitler’s life in July 1944. The Messeritz group similarly came to be led by Col. Von Der Heyde, who was the personal assistant of Col. Von Stauffenburg, the man charged with placing the bomb in Hitler’s room. Both Fromm and von der Heyde ended their careers being persecuted for highest form of treason in the Third Reich. We can thus extrapolate that these men were far from being the cream of the Nazi crop of military generals. Instead, they were who remained after superior colleagues had been given

¹³⁹ Interrogation of ACN Nambiar, 29 September 1945, KV2/3904, The National Archives, Kew Gardens, England.

¹⁴⁰ SIR 1382, Appendix 2, 12 Jan 1945, W106/5881, The National Archives, Kew Gardens, England.

more significant roles in battle on the two fronts. This made them well suited for roles in the Indian Legion, which for all its regalia and formality remained very much on the periphery of the Third Reich just like Fromm and von der Heyde.

It is also entirely possible that these men were still seen as loyalists to the Nazi Party in 1942 and that any underlying anti-Nazi sentiments that they would go on to reveal had little to do with their appointment to these leadership posts. However, the profile of the 3 German members of the Legion interviewed in the Bannerth Report indicate the overall composition of the group, we find even more evidence of the Legion's existence as an organization of pariahs, not only Indian but also German in origin. The three men interrogated were PW A (Bannerth), PW B (Stabzart Koch-Grunberg) and PW C (Lt von Trott zu Solz), all of whom had served as officers in the Indian Legion. PW A was a Catholic priest aged 49, who served in the last war in which he spent three years as a POW in India. In 1938, he served a prison sentence for anti-Nazi activities, following which he was posted to the Stemm Kp, Arbeits Kdo Frankenburg, which was the beginning of the Indian legion. He is described as "a genuine opponent of the Nazi party."¹⁴¹ PW B was a doctor in Liberia with an interest in tropical diseases. Like PW A, he too had been posted in June 1942 to Arbeits Kdo Frankenburg and remained with Legion ever since. He is noted as anti-Nazi, with his uncle being hanged for anti-Nazi activities. PW C was a 26 year old soldier, initially drafted to a unit in Russia in 1940. He came from an active anti-Nazi family and his brother was hanged after the Nazi purge of opponents known as the Night of Long Knives of 1934.

This combination of German ideological misfits in charge of a group of Indian POWs, equally out of place in completely unfamiliar surroundings, understandably did not make for

¹⁴¹ SIR 1382, 12 Jan 1945, W106/5881, The National Archives, Kew Gardens, England.

smooth sailing in the Legion's early days. Firstly, the selection of these Indians from POW camps gave them a sense of entitlement to special considerations, including an anxiety to be promoted as officers, without which many preferred to return to their prisoner status. Excellent rations given to these POWs upon recruitment had made a good impression compared to the hardships suffered in North African camps and in transit, but also fostered this special sense of entitlement. The use of extra ration supplies and Red Cross parcels as incentives for Legion members who, for the most part tended to be "very half-hearted"¹⁴² about Bose's cause, was to remain a theme throughout the Legion's existence. Instead of any special treatment however, German officers often treated them roughly both in speech and action. There were also several more practical issues that plagued the Legion's members. Some had originally been non-combatants and struggled to keep pace with the prescribed military training, especially in the harsh German winter that was far removed from the warmer weather of Asia and North Africa to which were acclimatized. Other obstacles included language difficulties that "created a strange atmosphere but did not lead to acute trouble"¹⁴³ as well as what Nambiar describes as the 'sex question', for which brothels were eventually set up in the Netherlands after the unit had been transferred.

Even if these Indian Legionnaires felt like outsiders in Germany, they became central to the Azad Hind project by providing Bose with a community through which he could kickstart his nation-building exercise. By instilling in the Legion the values that formed the essence of the Azad Hind vision, Bose attempted to mold it into a quasi-Azad Hind state. For Bose, the Legion was a microcosmic, miniature Azad Hind; its very first prototype. While Chapter 3 constructs a

¹⁴² SIR 1382, 12 Jan 1945, W106/5881, The National Archives, Kew Gardens, England.

¹⁴³ Interrogation of ACN Nambiar, 29 September 1945, KV2/3904, The National Archives, Kew Gardens, England.

perception of Azad Hind that is reliant solely on the diplomatic musings of its undisputed leader, the accounts of Legionnaires in this chapter enable us to examine how Bose's vision informed both intra-community and inter-community relationships on the ground. These relationships often came to revolve around how Bose attempted to tackle the questions of race and religion in the Legion and by extension in a free India. The subject of race took on an heightened significance because of the Legion's existence in the midst of a highly racialized German state and society. Religion on the other hand, was an issue more intrinsic to the subcontinent, a region in which Hindu-Muslim tensions had grown to become an unavoidable political issue during British colonial rule. Building a bottom-up analysis from the accounts of soldiers and other persons involved with the Legion also gives us a more multi-directional history of the Azad Hind. These histories are distinct from those presented in earlier chapters, which rely almost exclusively on source material produced by men at the helm of the project such as Bose and Nambiar. A focus on rank and file soldiers allows us to understand how successfully Bose was able to transmit his brand of nationalism to these ex POWs. The extent to which the Azad Hind project was accepted by Legion members can indicate how much the broader Indian population may have taken to Azad Hind if Bose's masterplan had come to fruition.

As long as he remained in Germany, Bose's primary tactic to influence the frequent arrivals of POWs consisted of making visits to the POW camps as arrivals steadily filtered in. He was usually accompanied by FIC officials including Nambiar on these visits. Multiple POW interrogation reports, including the Bannerth report, indicate that Bose made his first visit to the Frankenburg camp as early as December 1941, when it consisted only of the 12 initial POWs who had arrived from Libya. The majority of these 12 POWs "fell at the feet of Bose and

acknowledged him as their leader.”¹⁴⁴Abid Hassan, an FIC member who accompanied Bose, was not as well received the POWs saw that he was carrying the flag of the Indian National Congress, which had to be rolled up because of soldiers’ objections. This evidences that Bose and the FIC still saw themselves as outposts of the INC in the early stages of this operation. Eventually however, a new and distinct Azad Hind flag was unveiled during the oath-taking ceremony in late August 1942. Just like on the Azad Hind emblem, Gandhi’s non-violent spinning wheel had been replaced by Bose’s aggressive springing tiger. That the Congress tricolor was retained on the Azad Hind flag suggests an acknowledgement that both men desired the same end, even if they had by now adopted radically different means to it.

In another visit to Königsbruck in September 1942, Bose attempted to rally the spirits of POWs by speaking at great length about the German advancement in El Alamein and the advance of Japanese to the Indo-Burma frontier. His speech was translated from Hindustani to German by Hassan, presumably so it could be understood by the German officers in attendance. Bose emphasized the need for discipline and the importance of having faith in the German leadership. He called for complete unity, and asked the soldiers to not be swayed by provincial or religious feelings. Bose spoke again on the following day, addressing a new batch of 250 POW arrivals. Despite the initial enthusiasm for Bose amongst the Legionnaires, Bose had little success as a propagandist and orator. One Legionnaire referred to as Z/207 in his interrogation report notes that Bose “did not give an impression of a magnetic personality.”¹⁴⁵The Bannerth report backs this claim and refers to Bose’s first speech to the POWs as being a “complete failure.”¹⁴⁶He was frequently interrupted by a distracted audience. The Germans were hoping for

¹⁴⁴ CSDIC report G/85, 25 Jan 1945, W106/5881, The National Archives, Kew Gardens, England.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ SIR 1382, 12 Jan 1945, W106/5881, The National Archives, Kew Gardens, England.

150-200 volunteers out of the 400 POW present, but only 3 were forthcoming. Other accounts suggest that the Legionnaires looked to him as someone who would protect their interests and listen to their complaints¹⁴⁷. When his departure in February 1943 was not made known to the Legionnaires, the Legionnaires circulated wild rumors about Bose being imprisoned by the Germans. Many felt as if “their last protector had deserted them.”

Bose’s inefficiency in achieving mass recruitment meant that potential recruits were subjected to violent acts coercion by propagandists, who occasionally meted out sodomy and other physical punishments for offences such as discarding Legion uniform. In one such example, a group of Muslim volunteers who wished to leave Legion in December 1942 were first confined in cellars and then sent to a Russian POW camp in Saxony. The horrific conditions of the camp and the misery and suffering of Russians automatically convinced these members to rejoin the Legion. German authorities often pretended to be oblivious the brutalities dished out by Indian propagandists. However, this kind of coercion was resorted to seldomly. The relative absence of force did not mean that the POWs were increasingly convinced by Bose and his propagandists to join the Legion. Instead, the Bannerth report crudely reflects the ulterior motives of most men that joined the Legion. “Most of the volunteers followed blindly like sheep having no clear idea of what they were doing. They saw their friends already in Legion uniform and were attracted by the sight of fine clothes, pretty girls and possibilities of a free social life generally.”¹⁴⁸

An extensive propaganda program designed by the FIC and disseminated amongst Legionnaires by both Indian and German propagandists was then established to sustain whatever

¹⁴⁷ CSDIC report G/73, 15 Jan 1945, W106/5881, The National Archives, Kew Gardens, England.

¹⁴⁸ SIR 1382, 12 Jan 1945, W106/5881, The National Archives, Kew Gardens, England

little pro-Legion sympathies that Bose's personality and other more coercive methods had evoked in them. Initial methods included speeches made by FIC members on their frequent visits to these POW camps. Originally, all volunteers were assured that they would be supplied with arms, instructors and officers to fight against the British only for the liberation of India. FIC members also frequently referenced past revolutionary events in India such as the Jalianwala Bagh incident and alleged atrocities of General Dyer¹⁴⁹ or more current affairs like the arrest of Nehru and Gandhi in August 1942. Again, this suggests that the FIC saw itself as very much a part of the revolutionary precedent set by the Congress in India and not as a distant outlier from what was happening on the subcontinent.

Newspapers formed an important propaganda tool within the Legion. *Bhaiband* ("brotherhood"), a news publication exclusive to the Legion, was founded in July 1943. The paper was issued thrice a week and attempted to raise the morale and increase the prestige of the Legion by emphasizing various virtues such as obedience, self-sacrifice, sobriety. One Legionnaire notes that the content of these newspapers was often trite, with most attention being paid to its news items that were actually bad for propaganda as news of German defeats began to flood in¹⁵⁰ The Legion also had its own radio transmitter that received broadcasts of the Azad Hind Radio in addition to the bi-monthly Azad Hind periodical that was issued by the FIC. The Azad Hind publication was more technical than the *Bhaiband* as its audience was not limited solely to these soldiers. Its articles usually dealt with themes such as political economy and

¹⁴⁹ On 13 April 1919, Acting Brigadier-General Reginald Dyer ordered troops to fire into a crowd of unarmed civilians gathered in a park in Amritsar to celebrate the Sikh festival of Baisakhi and peacefully protest the arrest of two national leaders. At least 400 people died and another 1000 were injured. Incident became notorious in Indian nationalist history as a marker of British brutality and lack of accountability.

¹⁵⁰ CSDIC report G/85, 15 Jan 1945, W106/5881, The National Archives, Kew Gardens, England.

modernization, which interested Legionnaires who wanted to see India become independent and thrive.

In the Legion, films took on both a recreational and educational role. A German officer referred to as Captain Sonnel took the POWs to a cinema in the town once a week to show them propaganda films specifically tailored to the Legion. At first, these films showed the depressed conditions in India and contrasted them with German military strength. This was resented by the POWs and Legion officials eventually stopped showing these films. After this Sonnel took over entertainment himself by conjuring up shows and encouraging POWs to start amateur dramatics.

The organization of the Legion as well as the propaganda to which Legionnaires were subjected were informed by Bose's insistence that Indian Legionnaires should have full equality of status with their German colleagues. This was undoubtedly a difficult task in light of the racial views expressed by men like Hitler in the formative years of the Nazi Party. In *Mein Kampf* written in 1925, Hitler had made no secret for his contempt of Indian anticolonialist leaders as "Asiatic jugglers"¹⁵¹ and had even cited the British rule of India as an example for Germany's future domination of *Lebensraum* in Eastern Europe. These opinions stemmed from his understanding of Asian and Arab peoples as racial inferiors who deserved not much else but to stay under white men's dominion. Nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenborg similarly believed that any Nordic or Aryan blood in the subcontinent had dissipated by mixing with dark-skinned races and that the "poor bastards" in India deserved to be under British domination.¹⁵²

In a meeting with Hitler in May 1942, Bose made sure to point out these remarks and asked Hitler to retract them by making a public statement of support for India's fight for

¹⁵¹ Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Hitler's Priestess: Savitri Devi, the Hindu-Aryan Myth, and Neo-Nazism* (New York, NY: New York Univ. Press, 1998). 65

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

independence.¹⁵³ Even if Hitler ignored Bose's plea, there is evidence that the Germans did indeed alter their racial propaganda towards Indians in the aftermath of the establishment of the Legion. An energetic pro-India propaganda began in 1942 in which the official party line indiscriminately recognized all Indians as Aryans. The unity of the Indian and German race was played up as a crucial factor as the Oriental Department of the German Foreign Office invoked the study of Sanskrit and the close relationship of peoples of Aryan culture that had been propagated by Orientalists during the turn of the century. This propaganda went a long way in enabling the assimilation of several Legion members into German society as we shall see later in this chapter. The average German read these propaganda tracts and was likely to believe that a Sikh man or even a darker-skinned South Indian who he encountered in Berlin was a man with a common Aryan culture. This sense of racial unity was also felt within the Legion, as a widespread belief emerged that Hitler was also a Hindu since he did not smoke, was a vegetarian and harbored the swastika.¹⁵⁴

This fostered several intimate relationships between Legionnaires and the German civilian population, who were mostly welcoming of Indian troops. The Legionnaires were allowed freedom in Königsbruck and struck intimate connections with German women and girls. This led to protests by Nazi elements in the population but no action was ultimately taken to restrain Indians. This relative freedom and taste of European social life had a profound effect on the mentality of these Indian men, who focused their service on one aim: amusement. Red Cross parcels soon became the currency of hedonism within the Legion, as favors from German women began to be won by offers of the contents of these parcels. Several Indians married

¹⁵³ Handakten Keppler, R27501, 1931-1944, The Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin, Germany.

¹⁵⁴ CSDIC report G/85, 15 Jan 1945, W106/5881, The National Archives, Kew Gardens, England.

German girls and even had children with them. The Legionnaires success with women even contributed to an increase in volunteers in its early days in Germany. German officers quickly realized the value of these parcels in holding the group together and began to use them as bribes to keep Legionnaires satisfied. In one case, a German officer deceived Red Cross authorities and arranged for an increased supply of parcels by claiming that the original supply had been sent to a POW camp that could not be inspected because of an epidemic.¹⁵⁵

Despite Bose's insistence on a racial equality and the unexpected ways in which Indian assimilation into German society played out, relations between German officers and Indian Legionnaires remained fraught with tension. This was more to do with a general dismay at German officers who came to the Legion only as a refuge from the Eastern Front and were posted, for the most part, with no special qualifications. German officers also had trouble dealing with the social nuances and caste-based traditions that continued to influence the Legion. While the Legion was in France, a German POW who shot a cow while the Legion had to be sent away after protests from the Legion's Hindu members.¹⁵⁶

One of the POWs interrogated in the Bannerth Report accuses this German pro-India propaganda and the Legion itself of being decidedly pro-Hindu. However, we can assume that this accusation stems from the POW's own pro-Muslim bias – he had been the ringleader of the pro-Muslim revolt that saw POWs sent to Russian POW camps and return in disgust. In reality, Bose tried to abolish religious and caste differences within the Legion, in which men of all castes and religion trained in mixed squads, slept and ate together. This was markedly different to how the British had administered the colonial army in India, often exacerbating caste and religious

¹⁵⁵ SIR 1382, 12 Jan 1945, W106/5881, The National Archives, Kew Gardens, England

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

divides through discriminatory selection policies and the differential treatment of soldiers.¹⁵⁷

According to Abid Hassan, Bose was inspired by the Nazi political program of attempting to create one sole national religion to unite its people's community. Bose intended to model both the Legion and a Free India on this German model, uniting Muslims and Hindus in a national religion similar to the *Reichskirche* in Germany in a bid to forge a nationalism that transcended inflammatory religious divides.¹⁵⁸ Bose spoke explicitly of the "great deal of equality within the Legion compared to the Muslim League." He denigrated the growing wave of Islamic nationalism and calls for a two-state partition in India led by Mohamad Ali Jinnah as "a clique closely related to British interests" with the aim of divesting India's national forces¹⁵⁹. Some anecdotal evidence suggests that Bose may have actually been successful. A Madrasi (from the southern Indian region of Madras, present day Chennai) told POW A (Bannerth), "In India there are many religions and many gods, but here everything is "Jai Hind". Similarly, a POW named Puran greatly annoyed the Sikhs by proclaiming that "In Free India there will be one ruler and one religion."¹⁶⁰ Religion was only referred to when it could be used to bolster up claims, such as Hindus complaining of being overlooked in promotions or pro-Pakistan Muslims bringing up the partition issue in opposition to Bose.

The dissipation of traditional religious practices however, seems to have been accompanied by a relaxing of India's strict cultural mores amongst the POWs as they reveled in the relatively upscale European living conditions and the sexual liberty that a war-ravaged domestic situation offered to them. German commanders perceived a lack of discipline amongst

¹⁵⁷ Seema Alavi, *The Sepoys and the Company: Tradition and Transition in Northern India, 1770-1830* (Delhi ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

¹⁵⁸ CSDIC report G/85, 15 Jan 1945, W106/5881, The National Archives, Kew Gardens, England.

¹⁵⁹ Handakten Keppler, R27501, 1931-1944, The Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin, Germany.

¹⁶⁰ SIR 1382, 12 Jan 1945, W106/5881, The National Archives, Kew Gardens, England

the unit from its very inception and led to its disbandment being considered in early 1943. Incidents of crimes, both sexual and otherwise, steadily increased as soldiers grew increasingly desperate and frustrated in response to the collapsing German war effort. This was especially the case as the unit was transferred to Holland and eventually France under the false pretext that battle on the Atlantic coastline would serve them well for their eventual missions on the vast coastlines of India. In France, German commanders had to offer hope of wine and plunder to Legionnaires to prevent mass desertions. Legionnaires frequently committed rape in their new locale, and a French priest disturbingly informed POW B that a woman he knew had been raped by no less than 20 Indians.¹⁶¹ Having lost sight of its mission that was now all but impossible, the interests of Legion became confined to alcohol and brothels.

This study of the Legion's general organization and the comportment of its members suggests that, much like Bose, Nambiar and the Nazi state, they struggled to believe in Azad Hind as a valuable vehicle to an independent India. As any little faith steadily evaporated with the war drawing to a close, the Legion, instead of being a bastion of Azad Hind nationalism, grew into a hedonistic and corrupt organization intent on self-enjoyment in a bid to have one last day in the European sun. The collapse of the Third Reich and the eventual disbandment of the Legion did not necessarily leave Legionnaires distraught. Many had by this time completely renounced any affiliation to India – both the colonial state or the soon to be independent nation. Instead, Legionnaires were more concerned about extending their own European adventure, with some even placing bets on Russia as their saviors, even if they had maintained strong anti-Bolshevik beliefs otherwise.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

By now, Bose was already in Asia where he would go on to lead a similar Azad Hind Fauj (INA). The INA and the public trials of its members after the war had ended in 1945 are credited for arousing a national consciousness within the soldiers of the Indian Army that forced a decisive shift in Britain's policies towards India and accelerated the independence process.¹⁶² The INA's predecessor, the original Azad Hind Fauj, is instead condemned to a historical abyss, relying on a fascinating collection of archived episodes that to preserve this peculiar episode in the history of Indian nationalism.

¹⁶² Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy*, 2nd ed (New York: Routledge, 2004).

Conclusion

The diverse Azad Hind stood in contrast to the homogenous Nazi regime within which it existed. In its emphasis on upholding the diversity and equality of its members' races, religions and languages it reflected Bose's vision of a liberated India in which unity and diversity could co-exist to form a modern, powerful nation-state. Bose's decision to implant this state within the Nazi *volksgemeinschaft*¹⁶³ was less of a moral failure than it was a naïve gamble on a radical solution that was also partly influenced by Bose's ambivalent admiration of German economic and military miracles and a personal penchant for holding authoritarian power. In spite of these proclivities, Bose was aware of the inherently racist core of Third Reich ideology according to which he and his fellow "bumptious Orientals" were seen as nothing but "garrulous posers"¹⁶⁴ and "Asiatic jugglers"¹⁶⁵ who deserved to be subjugated by superior white races. Whatever early reservations that Bose had of this "selfish and arrogant"¹⁶⁶ racism at the core of Nazism however, seemingly vanished as Bose resorted to unlikeliest of means in the hope of fulfilling his nationalistic ambitions.

Ultimately, Bose was mistaken in believing that this fundamental ideological divide could temporarily be bridged by a more common desire to make war-time gains against the British enemy. As the Nazis pulled their plug on their pet project and Bose himself moved on to friendlier shores in Asia, it became clear that a homogenous fascism could not coexist with a diverse *azad hind*. If the recent popular protests against the BJP are any indication, Bose's lesson could not be more applicable today, even as India approaches its 73rd year of *azadi*.

¹⁶³ The Nazi concept of a racially pure German society united by a mystical soul through which individuals became part of a greater whole worth dying for.

¹⁶⁴ Motadel, "The Global Authoritarian Moment and the Revolt against Empire."

¹⁶⁵ Mein Kampf, Engl.ed, 612

¹⁶⁶ " *The Essential Writings of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose*. Edited by Sisir K. Bose & [Sugata Bose](#) (Delhi: [Oxford University Press](#)) 1997, 192

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