



To my mother and to the memory of my father

Marzia Casolari

In the Shade of the Swastika

The Ambiguous Relationship between
Indian Nationalism and Nazi-Fascism



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Introduction

Initially, the research that led to the publication of this book appeared to have as its main subject the foreign policy of fascist Italy and India. However, it then became increasingly clear that Italy's "Indian policy" was contradictory in nature. Decisions were taken, but nothing came of them. Contacts were established, but these proved totally unfruitful. There was no general agreement within the fascist leadership about aims and objectives. The decisions made were more frequently owing to the initiative of individuals, and often the Minister of External Affairs was not aware of certain developments. However, despite several failures of the Italian foreign policy in India, it is worth to analyse the nature of the contacts between the men of the fascist regime and exponents of Indian nationalism and the results that these contacts produced.

If Italy's "Indian policy" lacked continuity and presented many incongruities, a number of Indian nationalists developed a growing interest in fascism. These men considered the fascist regime as a point of reference and an example to be followed. This interest grew independently from the fascist regime's own interest in Indian nationalist organisations. Indeed, the Italian fascist leadership was unaware that a number of organisations were engaged in in-depth debates about Italian fascism, and looked upon fascism favourably. The Hindu nationalist organisations – RSS and Hindu Mahasabha, above all – and other less well known entities such as the *Bombay Group*, *Lokandi Morcha*, and the *Swastik League* (founded by M.R. Jayakar, himself a leading figure in the Hindu Mahasabha) were all keenly interested in fascism.

Subhas Chandra Bose's relations with the Axis powers, his flight from India via Afghanistan and related topics have been purposely

treated, in this volume, as a matter of fact.¹ Instead, other aspects have been investigated more carefully, such as Bose's potential role as a liaison between the Hindu Mahasabha, the German Consulate in Bombay and Rash Behari Bose in Japan.

Relations between the fascist regime and Pan-Islamic groups in Italy and Europe have not been examined here. Although the fascist government dedicated much attention to Arab organisations and obtained some results, relations with exponents of the Indian Pan-Islamic movement were sporadic and mainly based on personal relations.² The most significant contact, in this regard, was perhaps Mohammad Iqbal Shedai, a rather obscure figure, once close to Barkatullah. Shedai was considered by the fascist regime as an important leader of the Gadhar Party, while the sources prove that, in actual fact, he represented not much more than himself.³ Regarding possible contacts between the fascist regime and the wider Muslim political environment in India, during this research no historical evidence has emerged

¹ On the subject have been already published two excellent studies, namely Milan Hauner, *India in Axis Strategy. Germany, Japan, and the Indian Nationalists in the Second World War*, London, 1981 and Leonard A. Gordon, *Brothers against the Raj. A Biography of Sarat & Subhas Chandra Bose*, New Delhi, 1990. Both works provide detailed accounts of events. An interesting collection of documents with an accurate reconstruction of developments has been provided by T.R. Sareen: *Subhas Chandra Bose and Nazi Germany*, New Delhi, 1996.

² Renzo De Felice, *Arabi e Medio Oriente nella strategia di guerra di Mussolini*, in "Storia Contemporanea", December 1986.

³ Shedai's influence has been overrated by Italian historians. Renzo De Felice, for instance, describes Shedai as a key figure. De Felice was led into this error by Mussolini's high estimation of Shedai, shared by a number of representatives of the fascist government: Renzo De Felice, *L'India nella strategia politica di Mussolini*, in "Storia Contemporanea", December 1987. Historical evidence prove that Shedai received money from the Italian government in exchange for his liaison work with exiled Arab nationalists in Europe. Unlike Bose, he was almost unknown and he cannot be considered an influent political figure in India. Up to now, the relations between fascist Italy and Indian political environment has been studied only by Italian contemporary historians, who are not specialised in Indian history and politics. They did not look into the question of the real consistency of the Gadhar Party or Shedai's influence in India. Regarding the political profile of the Gadhar Party, after the World War II, its stance was close to Soviet Socialism. Emily C. Brown, *Har Dayal. Hindu Revolutionary and Rationalist*, New Delhi, 1976, and S. S. Joshi, *Hindustan Gadhar Party. A short history*, New Delhi, 1978.

of contacts between the fascist regime and exponents of the Khaksar Movement.

The relations between Indian nationalism and fascism or nazism should be seen in the light of the efforts of Indian nationalists to build up non-British political models and to shape national organisations accordingly. As this volume aims to prove, these models and organisations not always and not necessarily were anti-British.

Anyone who credited nationalist organisations with a political role, and who might provide material aid, was more than welcome. On the other side, Italy's growing interests in India must be considered as complementary to the relations between the fascist regime and the nationalist movements of North Africa and Western Asia, which occupied a central position in Italy's foreign policy, essentially anti-British, at the time.

1 – India and Italy's foreign policy under the fascist regime

From the late 1920's, fascist Italy was eager to gain a foothold in India. However, Italy was very careful about competing with the British in South Asia. In Rome, several analysts believed that the fascist regime would last for a long time. The general view was that the British Empire was declining, and the Italian Foreign Office was eager to play its part in Britain's downfall. This view had political, as well as economic implications. If the British were to leave, Italian traders and entrepreneurs had to be ready to meet the challenge. If the British empire collapsed, a quantity of channels would open for new political influences and economic perspectives.

During the 1920s, there was a widespread feeling, in Italy, that the requests resulting at the end of World War I had not been met. This feeling was nurtured by the incoming nationalist propaganda of the fascist movement. France and Great Britain were seen and described as arrogant, rapacious powers, totally uninterested in the needs of their previ-

ous allies. Italy, on the other hand, was portrayed as a nation capable of defending the interests of the victims of Anglo-French greed. The rhetoric of Italian fascism placed British and French non-recognition of Italy's political role on a par with the injustices these powers inflicted upon their colonies. Consequently, Italy regarded herself as a defender of the rights and aspirations of colonised countries and people. By presenting this picture to the world, the fascists found it easier to open up negotiations with the nationalist movements of Africa and Asia, including India.

When fascism raised to power, it chose to continue the policy adopted by the previous government, as far as India and Asia were concerned. The government's interest had been limited to the economic sphere alone, and this implied total recognition of Britain's prerogatives in the area. This policy was abandoned when Mussolini assumed direct control of the Foreign Office in 1932, after evicting the Foreign Minister Dino Grandi, considered too moderate and pro-British. The so-called Italy's Indian policy was then about to see some major changes. The new trend meant not only compliance with "the requests of the highest levels of the PNF [*Partito nazionale fascista* – National Fascist Party]", but also with

the need... of an "universal fascism" among the various fascist intellectual and youth groups.⁴

This new radical stance determined a change in Italy's approach to India. If until that time the fascist government had been anxious to promote Italian interests in the Indian subcontinent while carefully avoiding all conflict with the British, from the early 1930's on, Italy started to seek out the support of authoritative political figures in India.

"Fascism was presented as a 'new civilisation'... the standard bearer of a new economic system capable of healing the wounds inflicted by

⁴ R. De Felice, *Mussolini il duce. I. Gli anni del consenso 1929-1936*, Turin, second edition, 1996, p. 408.

supercapitalism”.⁵ In a lengthy, unsigned report of January 1930, British economic and administrative affairs in India were described as obsolete. According to the regime analysts, British rule faced a crisis. Protectionism and political intransigence were considered a lethal combination for British rule.⁶ In the meantime, “the people of India were developing “a very high opinion of their own potential and resources”.”⁷ The regime started to address directly to African and Asian (including Indian) nationalist movements. A comparison was drawn between the British and the Latin civilisation. It was pointed out that Britain herself had felt the influence of Latin culture for hundreds of years:

We therefore find unacceptable the idea of a fundamental opposition between East and West. It is unacceptable to us precisely because we are a Latin and a Mediterranean people. Not only geographically but as far as culture and religion are concerned. Imperial Rome built a bridge between East and West, and the Catholic Church has continued to do this.

... the ties between India and Mediterranean Europe go back through all history.⁸

A line of continuity was thus found between Italy and Western Asia. Iraq was described as an “economic dependency of Bombay”. Moreover, it was stated that

the ties between these states of the eastern Mediterranean, the Middle East, such as Egypt, Palestine, Iraq, and India are not only economic but also political.

... Should India become self-governing, the political significance of these States will change.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Archivio Storico del Ministero degli affari esteri (Historical Archives, Ministry of External Affairs – ASMAE) Serie Politica (Political Series), Great Britain, 1930, b.1213, report entitled “La situazione politica in India” (The Political Situation in India), January 1930.

⁷ ASMAE, Ibid.

⁸ ASMAE, Ibid.

Eastern Mediterranean will once more acquire its former historical role. And East and West will meet at Rome once more.⁹

Ultimately, British interests in India had to be weakened if they were also to be weakened in the Middle East. Only then could Italy expand eastward, toward Asia.

With the start of the Ethiopian campaign, relations between Great Britain and Italy broke down in India too. The Italian Consulate in Calcutta had in the meantime effectively produced pro-Italian sentiments in India. The contacts with the Indian political milieu proved fruitful, and a rather explicit pro-Italian, anti-British front had been created. This had important repercussions on Indian public opinion, and contributed to the growth of a non-collaborative attitude toward the British. Italy's political propaganda and activities reached their peak during the period between the Ethiopian War and the Second World War, particularly in 1938 when, after the Italian General Consulate in Calcutta, another one was set up in Bombay. The Bombay Consulate was intended as an outpost in Italy's attempts to establish links with Marathi nationalism.

Politically, from 1938-39 on, Germany, with its aggressive foreign policy, gradually took Italy's place in the minds the Indian radical nationalists, above all the Hindu nationalists.

World War II and its aftermath ended all Italian ambitions in India.

2 – Fascism and Bengali nationalism

The first outpost of Italy's expansion campaign was Bengal. Among the provinces of British India, Bengal had always been the most exposed to Western influences. It was therefore considered the ideal contest for building up political bridges. The fascist regime began a propaganda campaign in 1925, when an outstanding figure as Rabindranath Tagore

⁹ ASMAE, *Ibid.*

was singled out for special attention. Although, as known, the attempt to involve Tagore in Italian political affairs was a failure, Italy went ahead.

Two were the factors behind the Italian increasing political influence in Bengal. One was the intense activity of the General Consulate in Calcutta. The other was the affinity between fascism and Bengali radicalism. After all, they shared the same aim: undermining the British rule. Moreover, Bengali nationalists were attracted by fascism, which was considered a revolutionary movement. It was not difficult to cultivate an interest in Italy among young Bengali students. Those who joined Italian Universities underwent also fascist indoctrination. Once back in India, they collaborated with Bengali periodicals, distributed throughout India, such as the famous *Modern Review*. Some of these young men, such as Benoy Kumar Sarkar, went on to reach positions of importance. Other well known figures as Tarak Nath Das and Kalidas Nag, and famous and influential personages such as Subhas Chandra Bose and Rash Behari Bose were sympathetic towards fascism. A number of Indian famous and less known figures also wrote on fascism and Mussolini's Italy.

The fascist regime's strategy reached two important goals. Firstly, an important and influential political leader as Subhas Chandra Bose took up the fascist line (Bose was in constant contact with Mussolini from 1933 to 1944). Secondly, public opinion in Bengal proved to be pro-Italian. This attitude became of vital importance at the time of the Abyssinian war.

3 – Fascism and Hindu nationalism

Unlike the connections with Subhas Chandra Bose and Bengali nationalists, no longlasting relationships were established between the fascist regime and prominent Hindu political leaders. Indeed, the fascist regime displayed a basic lack of interest in this movement. This attitude

was owing to poor knowledge of the Indian political organisations other than the Congress. However, these organisations were attracted by fascist ideology and highly appreciated the supposed organisational capacity of the fascist regime. Published materials, official records and other documents circulating among various offshoots of Hindu nationalism prove that the Hindu Mahasabha, the RSS and other organisations of lesser importance displayed an interest in fascism from the 1920's right into the 1940's. Articles written by Mussolini and his biographies, as well as quotations from his writings, circulated within these groups. It therefore may be concluded not only that there was an awareness of fascism but also that the regime was looked upon most favourably.

B. S. Moonje travelled to Italy in 1931, also meeting Mussolini, in order to study the organisation of the fascist state first hand. Moonje's visit may be considered a turning point, since he insisted on structural changes within the RSS, based on the example of fascist youth organisations.

About 1938, Nazi Germany became the main point of reference for the Hindu Mahasabha, under Savarkar's presidency. Germany's rabid policies regarding race were taken as the model to be adopted to solve the 'Muslim problem' in India.

We may briefly conclude that secular nationalist groups which had direct dealings with the fascist regime were basically immune to its ideology. This was owing to the fact that their relations with Mussolini's Italy were seen exclusively as a means to an end. Italy projected an image of itself as a power capable of providing these organisations with the political and logistical means to oppose British interests. Conversely, the Hindu nationalist movements (at that time, less involved at the international level) did not have the capacity and the intellectual and human resources to establish relations with friendly states, who might provide them with concrete aid in their struggle for power. Furthermore, the emphasis Hindu organisations placed in the 'race' issue distracted attention from the colonial issue.

In conclusion, Hindu organisation adopted two main political lines over the period between 1920 and 1940. On one hand, the 'race'

issue was maximised, finding its fullest expression in the *Hindutva* discourse, which had much in common with widespread racial ideas in Europe at that time.

On the other hand, Hindu organisations made remarkable efforts to convince public opinion that the Hindu population lacked a sense of militancy. According to them, Hindu society should be militarised with an anti-Muslim scope. From the 1920s onwards, Muslims became then the main target of Hindu policy, and Muslims started to be perceived and described as more threatening than the British rulers.



CHAPTER I

Italian fascism and Indian radical nationalism: the early phase

1 – Early contacts between the fascist regime and Indian intellectuals: Tagore's journeys to Italy

Relations between fascist Italy and Indian nationalism date back to 1925-26. At that time an exchange of visits took place between Carlo Formichi (1871-1943), the most illustrious Indian scholar in Italy of the period, his disciple, Giuseppe Tucci (1894-1984)¹ and the Bengali poet, Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941). Tagore's visits to Italy had received a remarkable attention from Italian scholars, who wrote several articles and a volume on the subject.² However, the political capital the fascist regime hoped to make out of Tagore's visits to Italy is a topic which has been somewhat neglected. The question is of some interest in that it sheds light on the hopes the fascist government had pinned on cultural relations between Italian intellectuals, the University of Shantiniketan and Bengali political circles.

¹ Formichi and Tucci are dealt with in more or less all the available studies concerning the Indian policy of the fascist regime. Particularly worthy of note are Renzo De Felice, *L'India nella strategia politica di Mussolini*, in "Storia Contemporanea", December 1987, and Valdo Ferretti, *Politica e cultura: origini e attività dell'IsMEO durante il regime fascista*, in "Storia Contemporanea", October 1986, as well as the pertaining studies cited below.

² Gianni Sofri provides a brief, very lively account of Tagore's visit to Italy in his volume *Gandhi in Italia*, Bologna, 1988, pp. 30-32. Sofri clearly shows how the fascist regime attempted to make political capital out of Tagore's stay in Italy. For a portrait of Tagore and an overview of his relation with Italy, see Mario Prayer, *Internazionalismo e nazionalismo culturale. Gli intellettuali bengalesi e l'Italia negli anni Venti e Trenta*, supplement no. 1 to "Rivista degli Studi Orientali", Rome 1996, p. 13. This is undoubtedly the most precise account of events, alongside Vito Salierno's article, *Tagore e il fascismo. Mussolini e la politica italiana verso l'India*, in "Nuova Storia Contemporanea", September-October 1998, pp.63-80.

Before dealing with Tagore in Italy and Formichi and Tucci in India, it is necessary to briefly examine the main events leading up to this exchange. Contacts between Formichi and Tagore had started up in summer 1921. Acting as an intermediary was Kalidas Nag (1892-1966), at the time a young academic and very close to Tagore. Subsequently, Nag became one of the main supporters of the Italian political activities in India.³ In the early 1920s, Nag was on the first of his two trips to Europe, where he resided from 1920 to 1923. Tagore visited Italy in 1925, stopping off in Milan, on his way back to India after a trip to South America. Mussolini wished to invite him personally to Rome. However, for health reasons travelling had become tiring and Tagore did not wish to prolong his stay. It cannot be ruled out that the advises of Tagore's anti-fascist friends had a part in this decision.⁴ Tagore received an invitation to lecture at the *Circolo filologico* (Philological Circle), and on 22nd January among other subjects he spoke about Italy as he had seen when he was seventeen years old, on his first trip to Europe, and about Italy in 1925. In his speech, Tagore expressed some opinions that, later on would have been used against him by the fascist regime:

You are now suffering. The shadow of the poverty of Europe projects itself onto the world. You were great when you knew how to love. Now you suffer because you do not love. Without love, beautiful things cannot be created. The monotonous mask of a commercial civilisation does not express the soul. Beauty of born out of patience; and the greedy have none. Where, today, is a voice to be found which can interpret all humanity?⁵

³ Prayer, *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁴ V. Salierno, *op. cit.*, p. 65-66, 67-68 and 70.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 67 and p. 70. This was most probably the speech published in *Vishvabharati Quarterly*, III, 1, April 1925, p. 1-10, under the title, *The Voice of Humanity*. Mario Prayer briefly mentions it, *op. cit.*, p. 19, but not the venue. He also dates the speech 24.1.25 and not 22.1.25.

Since Tagore had been so cordially welcomed to Italy on this occasion, statements such as these were not dwelt upon. Although this was a purely personal visit, Tagore took this opportunity to invite Formichi to India to lecture at the Vishvabharati University of Shantiniketan. Formichi was to stay in Shantiniketan from November 1925 to March 1926. Shortly before leaving for India, Formichi asked Mussolini if he might bring along “some Italian academics who would be able to organise an introductory course in Italian culture”.⁶ The Vishvabharati University should provide living and travelling expenses for Formichi and the Italian government foot the bill for the young scholar who was to accompany him.⁷ The choice soon fell on

an example of the new trend in Indian studies in Italy, Dr. Giuseppe Tucci,... assistant librarian at the Chamber of Deputies and a teacher of Indian Religions at the University of Rome, with a profound knowledge of oriental languages, versatile mind – all in all an honourable representative of Italian learning.⁸

Tagore’s visit to Italy occasioned rumours that he might be an opponent of fascism. In January 1925, Formichi rushed to Tagore’s ‘defence’.

He was, and is, unaware of the fact that someone wanted to paint him in anti-fascist colours. I was with Tagore from the time of his arrival at the port of Genoa until his departure from Venice. I can safely say that Tagore has nothing to do with political propaganda

⁶ ASMAE, Archivio Scuole (School Archives), 1923-28, b. 667, file 5, letter from Formichi to Sua Eccellenza Benito Mussolini, 14.10.25 and letter dated 21.10.25 (no letter-head) in which Formichi requested an audience with the *duce*. Both before he left and on his return Formichi was received by Mussolini. This practice of briefing and debriefing with Mussolini, so to speak, became a habit.

⁷ ASMAE, Ibid.: from the *Promemoria per il Capo di Gabinetto di S.E. il Ministro* (memorandum for the principal private secretary of His Excellency the Minister), 12.11.25, we learn that Tucci’s journey to India and his stay there were financed from a fund of 35,000 liras, drawn from a sum obtained from foreign propaganda work.

⁸ ASMAE, Ibid.

and would be deeply offended, indeed shocked, to learn that he might be suspected of encroaching upon the political life of the country of which he was a guest.⁹

Formichi was pleased to learn that the misunderstandings which had arisen as a result of Tagore's remarks of 22nd and 24th January in Milan had been cleared up, after a number of interviews in which Tagore expressed favourable opinions of Italy and fascism. Formichi, by way of justification, added that he knew

that, as soon as he is up to the journey, Tagore wishes once more to breathe the healthful air of Italy. It is inadmissible, and does less than justice to our sense of hospitality, to place Tagore under suspicion in this way. Tagore is great man and his conduct unimpeachable. He sincerely loves our country and wishes only to see Italy fulfil its ambitions.¹⁰

Formichi reached Bombay on 19th November and Tucci on 2nd December 1925, and both went immediately to Calcutta.¹¹

From the records, we learn that the most active supporter of this campaign was “*Commendatore*” *Ciro Trabalza*, the Director General of Italian Schools.¹² When these preliminary contacts were being esta-

⁹ ASMAE, *Ibid.*

¹⁰ ASMAE, *Ibid.*

¹¹ ASMAE, *Ibid.*, communiqué n. 1448 B-53, from the Italian Consulate-General in Bombay, 3.12.25 to *Commendatore* *Ciro Trabalza*, Director General of Italian Schools. The Bengali nationalist journal, *Forward*, also published a message from Mussolini congratulating Formichi and Tucci on their appointments. Mussolini added that he hoped cultural relations between Italy and India would strengthen: ASMAE, *Ibid.*, article enclosed with report no. 1637/101, from the Consulate-General of Calcutta, 25.11.25 to the Minister. *Forward* published also summaries of the lectures on philosophy Formichi held in Calcutta shortly before leaving for Italy.

¹² Practically all Tucci's and Formichi's correspondence from Shantiniketan was addressed to *Trabalza*. Formichi wrote to him from Brindisi on 3rd November 1925, when he was about to leave for India. As soon as he reached Shantiniketan on 7th December 1925 Tucci wrote a letter, thanking *Trabalza* for his aid. Both Tucci and Formichi were delighted that matters had been arranged according to their wishes. This correspondence is in ASMAE, *Ibid.*

blished between Italian and Indian intellectuals, Mussolini seems to have done little more than approve Formichi's and Tucci's proposals. However, both Formichi and Tagore were later to call upon Mussolini's services.¹³ On 9th December, Formichi sent Trabalza a lengthy account of the first days of his stay in Shantiniketan, in which he explicitly referred to the propaganda aims of his stay in India. Formichi told Trabalza that Tagore would be back in Italy the following spring,¹⁴ and added that Allahabad and

other Indian Universities are asking me to visit and lecture. It is my intention to travel everywhere in my efforts to promote the cause of Italy. I assure you (...) that our work, in terms of propaganda value, is of inestimable value. It is my earnest desire that His Excellency, Mussolini, know that I consider myself a standard bearer, entrusted with the sacred Tricolour of our nation, a task which redoubles my strength and determination.¹⁵

On 7th December Tucci, too, wrote to Trabalza from Shantiniketan, thanking for his support, and described developments at the Vishvabharati University, as well as his new teaching duties. Tucci added that he was already active on the propaganda front:

Apart from a few conferences and lectures, which I will held here on the history of Italian literature, as well as a number of articles on Italy which I am working on, I hope to talk in other cities in India, if the occasion arises. I wish to prove worthy of my mission and of those who sent me here. I also wish to exalt Italy in the eyes

¹³ As soon as Formichi reached India, on 25th November 1925 Tagore sent a telegram to Mussolini thanking for his support and for the gift of five hundred books. ASMAE, *Ibid.*: the letter to Mussolini was enclosed with a letter to Trabalza from Tagore's son, Rathindranath, involved in the administration of the Vishvabharati University.

¹⁴ Apparently, Formichi was trying to arrange Tagore's second visit to Italy right from the start of his stay in Shantiniketan. This is confirmed by the fact that he and Tagore discussed the trip on 8th December 1925 (See. V. Salierno, *cit.*, p. 70: Salierno quotes Formichi's book, *India e Indiani*, Milan, 1929, p. 243).

¹⁵ Archivio Scuole, b.667, *cit.*

of the citizens of India who are seeking out new approaches to the West...¹⁶

Tucci's articles were published in the *Vishvabharati Quarterly* and the *Modern Review*.¹⁷ At that time, Tucci laid down the foundations of later collaboration between the Italian General Consulate in Calcutta, the editorial board of the *Modern Review*, and the circle of intellectuals, journalists and activists to whom the journal was addressed. Tucci was fully aware of his role since, as he himself put it,

I have been eager, too, to maintain contacts with the leading intellectual circles and cultivate relationships based on friendship or at least be on nodding terms with persons who in one way or another represent the most influential currents of thought here. It goes without saying that should we wish to forge stronger links with India in the future, it will be that much easier if we can already count on ties with individuals and groups.¹⁸

The Italian authorities agreed that in his next visit to Italy, Tagore should be an official guest.¹⁹ However, Tucci and Formichi were also in for a reminder:

... of course, having been delegated such authority, it is I who will have the last word (hardly necessary as far as the Consul and yourself are concerned, whose capabilities, circumspection and dedication to our cause are irreproachable) as to our conduct in

¹⁶ ASMAE, Ibid.

¹⁷ ASMAE, Ibid., letter from Formichi to the Italian Consul General in Calcutta, Pervan, 21st February 1926, containing an account of his activities during his stay in Shantiniketan.

¹⁸ ASMAE, Archivio Scuole, 1929-35, b.858, Tucci's report to Mussolini, dated 24.11.26, enclosed with a letter from the Consul General Pervan to the Ministry, 28.12.26.

¹⁹ The Italian government wanted this to be an official visit. Tagore was initially against the idea but finally agreed: see M. Prayer, cit., pp. 19-20. Also ASMAE, Archivio Scuole, b.667, cit., 15.5.26, Report n. 3865/70, to the General Secretary, signed by Trabalza, and report n. 667/67, Calcutta, 17.5.26, from the Italian General Consulate to the Ministry.

India and with regard to the opinion of the British. Our task is to propagate our language, culture and learning and promote Italy in the countries which provide us with hospitality. How this is perceived is entirely the affair of our hosts. For our part we shall work in favour of deeper cultural ties with India, but shall distance ourselves from any comments made in our favour – including those of a political nature on the part of active groups in what is, after all, a foreign country.²⁰

Formichi left India on 10th March 1926. The differences between how Tagore perceived relations with Italy and the perceptions and desires of the fascist regime come to light in the account of Formichi's activities at the time of his departure provided by the Consul General in Calcutta.

A moving and pleasant farewell ceremony in Formichi's honour was held on the evening of 5th March at Dr. Rabindranath Tagore's home. In this austere setting – austere yet becoming in its modesty – the ceremony was performed very much in accordance with the canon of Indian custom and clearly took on the character of ritual (songs, floral tributes, precious gifts, etc.). Dr. Tagore's farewell speech, addressed to Formichi, was exemplary for its eloquence... [Formichi] sincerely expressed his gratitude for all the kindnesses received, and hoped that relations between our two peoples become more intimate over time.

It was for us, as representatives of Italy, a gratifying and instructive experience. Our presence in India was warmly appreciated. If Italy, and Formichi himself, have come out of it with flying colours, all

²⁰ ASMAE, Ibid., draft of a letter to Formichi, 19.1.26, headed "*Illustre e caro Professore*" (Dear Illustrious Professor). At that time, the Italian authorities were careful not to provoke the British. This was, as already said, the Italian policy up to the time of the Ethiopian campaign. However, a certain ambiguity may be noted in the words Italians used to describe this policy. During the years leading up to the Second World War, the Italians became more and more openly anti-British. Given the special relations between Britain and India, the messages the fascist regime sent out were more ambiguous here than in other areas of Italian foreign policy.

the merit goes to Formichi and we should be grateful to him for his services to Italy.²¹

Tagore had different views. The farewell ceremony was celebrated in the manner traditionally reserved for special occasions. Tagore honoured a dear friend taking his leave, and expressed genuine feelings, perceived by others as potentially beneficial to their own political purposes. This should be borne in mind with reference to the reasons behind the rift that later developed between Tagore and the Italian representatives.²² Between the ideas and practices of fascism and the personal qualities and standing of a man like Tagore there could be no accord.²³ Tagore was not immediately aware of the true nature of fascism and Mussolini,²⁴ or of Tucci's and Formichi's aims. He was soon to find out, much to his displeasure. The Italians wanted to make political capital even out of their gifts. Formichi wrote,

When he receives honours from important persons such as the British Governor, Lord Lytton, British academic, writers and journalists, Mr. Spender, Mr. Malvine, Lord Simha [sic], the Maharaja of Tripura, German writers and journalists, the German Consul etc. etc., Tagore heaps praise on these tributes and their bearers. Although a poet whose message is one of peace, the admiration he feels for his illustrious visitors is heartfelt. The heroes of art and of thought cannot but harbour a fellow feeling for the heroes of the field.²⁵

²¹ ASMAE, Ibid., report no. 410/41, from the Italian General Consulate in Calcutta, 11.3.26, to the Foreign Office.

²² Tagore's farewell address to Formichi (written personally by Tagore and published in booklet form) reveals once more that Tagore, morally speaking, stood head and shoulders over Formichi: ASMAE, Ibid., *Vishva-Bharati Farewell Address to Professor Carlo Formichi*, Calcutta, 9.3.26, enclosed with report no. 410/41, from the Italian Consulate-General in Calcutta, 11.3.26, to the Foreign Office.

²³ M. Prayer, op. cit., p. 12.

²⁴ Tagore, for instance, described Mussolini in positive, somehow enthusiastic terms, as a "personalità creatrice" (creative personality): see M. Prayer, Ibid., p. 22.

²⁵ ASMAE, Archivio Scuole b.667, cit., letter of 21.2.26 from Formichi to Pervan, cit.

On his return, Formichi presented Mussolini with Tagore's gift: the ten volumes of his complete works, two essays by Formichi on religious thought in India and a volume, *Salus Populi*, published in Turin in 1908. While providing an account of his work in India, Formichi seems to have considered himself a precursor of fascism.

I confess with some pride that in this work, published so long ago, we find an anticipation of developments and of a conception of the State such as Mussolini's own. The book may only be of curiosity value today, and yet it is of historical significance. In 1908, amid a storm of protest, I put forward principles which I see finally gaining ground today.²⁶

After this exchange of gifts, the Italian authorities accorded official recognition to Formichi "for services rendered to the nation".²⁷ Formichi, for his part, rallied the press to his side in order that his meeting with Mussolini on his return receive maximum publicity.²⁸ We may conclude that Formichi was an ambitious man. Having received such high public recognition, his main concern was to see Mussolini's praise in print, and not Tagore's message. Mussolini's favour may be seen as a feather in Formichi's cap and a stepping stone to a certain position of power.²⁹

²⁶ The emphasis is Formichi's; ASMAE, *Ibid.*, 7.4.26 letter from Formichi to Tralbalza. The books were then sent on by Mussolini to the Minister of Education for use at the Oriental School of Rome: letter dated 2.5.26 from the Minister of Education, Pietro Fedele, to Mussolini.

²⁷ ASMAE, *Ibid.*, report to the Minister, 1.5.26, also referring both to Tagore's books and Formichi.

²⁸ These requests were made fairly insistently in a letter to the General directorate of Italian Schools, 16.4.26. In his Report to the Minister, no. 4258/7, 20.5.26, Tralbalza suggested that Mussolini make out a special payment to Formichi of 5,000 liras. Both documents are to be found in ASMAE, Archivio Scuole b.667, *cit.*

²⁹ The matter was settled amicably by means of a courteous reply from the Director General of Italian Schools to Formichi dated 23.4.26. It was stated that the situation would be rectified and that Formichi's requests would be met.

Soon after Formichi's return, preparations were made for Tagore's second visit to Italy. Tagore received an official invitation from the Italian government and arrived in Naples on 31st May 1926. Alongside Tucci's collaboration in India and Formichi's efforts at home, the Italian authorities in Rome were intent upon avoiding all possible contacts between Tagore and Italian opponents to the fascist regime. Tagore did meet Benedetto Croce, but it wasn't easy. The encounter was practically a clandestine affair. Tagore's "escorts" did their best to prevent the meeting, but failed. However, they kept the newspapers out of it. Tagore's second visit differed considerably from his first. The intention of the fascist establishment to make political capital out of Tagore's presence was so evident that things could only go from bad to worse. The press contributed to this disastrous situation by distorting the content of Tagore's interviews. Formichi, Tagore's interpreter on these occasions, probably had a hand in this. What the government wanted from Tagore was basically a declaration in favour of fascism. He made no declarations of this kind, and certainly not the statements which made their way into the fascist press.³⁰ After Tagore's return to India, two anti-fascist friends, Georges Duhamel and Romain Rolland, persuaded him to declare that the interviews were false. Tagore also condemned fascism in an open letter sent from Vienna on 20th July to the Chancellor of the Vishvabharati University, C.F. Andrews. The letter was published by a number of Indian daily newspapers. Formichi was furious, and the incident led to a permanent rift between Formichi (and the Italian authorities) and Tagore. Furthermore, these developments hindered collaboration with the Vishvabharati University.³¹ On 15th September, Formichi wrote a letter to Trabalza in which he confessed that,

³⁰ See M. Prayer, *op. cit.*, p. 20-21, 29-30 V. Salierno, *op. cit.*, p. 71-80, G. Sofri, *op. cit.*, p. 31-32.

³¹ The reference is to the institution of a committee for encouraging such exchanges and to the idea of creating a Vishvabharati scholarship of 50 rupees for Italian students: M. Prayer, *Ibid.*, p. 20.

I have suffered a great deal and felt much bitterness over the summer recess. Tagore failed to honour his word. He also went back on his previous statements and published an article in the Manchester Guardian, which can only be described as despicable in which he attacked Fascism and our Duce. He then tried to justify this behaviour by writing me a cowardly letter in which he explained that he was obliged to make these declarations to dispel the rumours fostered by our press, which then spread throughout Europe and India, that he had become a supporter of the Fascist cause. I was having none of it and I made it quite clear to him that I considered our friendship over. You were away from Rome at the time, but I kept the Marquis Paulucci in the picture.

I found Tagore's article personally offensive since he insinuated that the interpreter during the interviews with non-English speaking journalists had distorted his statements in order to create the impression that he looked upon the duce and fascism favourably. I asked the Marquis Paulucci for permission to reply and wrote an article based on the facts of the case, which the Manchester Guardian published on 25th August, in which I proved that *Signor Poeta* [Mr Poet] is nothing but a buffoon. I was pleased and grateful that the Duce stood by me on this in allowing me to show Tagore up for what he is.

However, Tagore's perfidious behaviour is a painful memory that I shall carry with me to the grave. His behaviour, in any case, has compromised and perhaps even completely undone all our efforts as regards cultural bridge building between Italy and India to date, the prospects for which had been so promising.

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that we have gained a foothold. The seed has been sown in India. It is up to us to nurture these relations and bring them to fruition. We can rule out Tagore and his followers. Actually, I am writing a book on this painful business. There's more to India than Tagore and his cronies. When you return to Rome, call me so we can discuss the proposal to the Duce concerning Tucci who, in the light of these events, can no longer stay in Santiniketan, although there is no real reason why his cultural work should not continue. I admit that I was in a certain sense relieved that you were away from Rome when everything came to a head. I was reluctant to inform you of developments

because I didn't want to disturb you during your much-deserved holidays after a year's hard work.

When we meet, I want to put you fully in the picture and show you Tagore's letter and my replies, his libellous article, my denial of his accusations, and all other documentation you may require.³²

Formichi hit back hard, and was not averse to insult. It tells us how much Formichi had taken his political task to heart and that success in this field was much more important to him than Tagore's friendship and esteem, not to mention the Vishvabharati University. He made no attempt to heal the rift. Indeed, Formichi immediately set his sights on other potential allies. His behaviour was typical of the Europe Tagore spoke of in 1925, an aggressive Europe with no qualms about using force when necessary. This was a mentality which Tagore would have nothing to do with. He stated, for example,

My mind is passing through a conflict. I have my love and gratitude for the people of Italy. I deeply appreciate their feeling of admiration for me, which is so genuine and generous. On the other hand the Italy revealed in Fascism alienates herself from the ideal picture of that great country which I should so love to cherish in my heart.³³

and precisely with regards to fascism,

But whatever may be the cause, the methods and the principles of Fascism concern all humanity, and it is absurd to imagine that I could ever support a movement which ruthlessly suppresses freedom of expression ... and walks through a bloodstained path of violence and stealthy crimes. I have said over and over again that the aggressive streak of nationalism and imperialism religiously cultivated by most of the nations of the West, is a menace to the whole world.³⁴

³² ASMAE, Archivio Scuole, b.667, cit.

³³ ASMAE, Ibid.

³⁴ ASMAE, Archivio Scuole, b.858, cit., "Tagore on Fascism and Mussolini", in *Forward*,

How different from Formichi! Tagore was uncompromising but not embittered. The form and content of Tagore's statements reveal at the same time an inner struggle and obeisance to the principle that ideals take first place over crude material gain and political advantage.

Italy's bumpy start in India came out of the offhand manner in which her representatives conducted their affairs. Little could be got out of Tagore's visit, publicity-wise, either nationally or internationally, so the event was played down. However, as we have already noted, Italy still looked to India for support.

2 –Giuseppe Tucci's political mission in India

Giuseppe Tucci gradually replaces Formichi as a key figure in Indo-Italian political and cultural relations. Formichi himself urged that Tucci prolong his stay in India for some years more, to complete his studies in Nepal and Tibet and at the same time continue to 'promote' Italy's 'image'.³⁵

Tucci, as a linguist and scholar, consolidated the work put in at Shantiniketan but did not neglect his political duties.³⁶ That Tucci should also undertake more clearly political tasks was agreed upon by

24.8.28, enclosed with no. L215/95, Calcutta, 25.8.26, from the Italian Consulate-General to the Ministry. Enclosed, is also a Memorandum to the Minister, an unsigned and undated draft of which is to be found in the file, probably written in September, and an undated report signed by Trabalza to the Under-secretary of State.

³⁵ ASMAE, *Ibid.*, report n. 323/27, Calcutta, 20.2.26, to the Foreign Office. The Italian Consul General in Calcutta provided an assessment of Tucci's work and requested that Tucci's activities receive encouragement. With regard to Tucci's research in the Himalayas, he suggested contacts with the Italian missionaries in Assam, who, since they were close to the Tibetan border, might be of help to Tucci in locating buddhist manuscripts.

³⁶ Cf. M. Prayer, *op. cit.*, p. 41 and ASMAE, Archivio Scuole, b.858, *cit.*, file "Dacca (Indie) Università", Report from Tucci to Mussolini, Dacca, 24.11.26, enclosed with a letter from the Consul General, Pervan, to the Ministry, Rome, 28.12.26.

Formichi and others. Paolo Orano, a member of parliament and the author of a biography of Mussolini³⁷ also wrote personally to the *duce*, recommending that Tucci remain in India:

You will appreciate that Tucci's lectures on Italian language and culture are helpful in that they generate a certain interest in things Italian and in the achievements of the Fascist Government among Indian intellectuals. We may say that we have carried out a number of tasks neglected by all other governments of the past. Please take the appropriate measures. It is a known fact that the German government has already expressed concern over the efficacy of our propaganda activity. We must meet this great challenge, and we have no finer candidate for the task than Tucci.³⁸

In a word, Italy was eager to win the cultural battle against other European nations and create a niche for itself, that could prove useful in the event the British leave India.

Mussolini's immediate response to Formichi's suggestion was to send a telegram to the Italian Consul General in Calcutta in which he expressed his "pleasure on learning of revived cultural relations between Italy and India" and agreed wholeheartedly that Tucci should remain in India. He added that he would personally make the necessary arrangements.³⁹ Mussolini personally contacted the Education Minister to impress upon him the importance of Tucci's mission and the successes he obtained until that time.⁴⁰ We learn from such exchanges that Mussolini's interest in Formichi's and Tucci's work grew

³⁷ The title of the biography was *Mussolini da vicino* (Mussolini, behind the scenes), translated into Bengali in 1928 by a student and close collaborator of Tucci in India, Pramatha Nath Roy: ASMAE, *Ibid.*, annual report on Tucci's activities in 1927-28 drawn up about the end of 1928. Roy received a scholarship to study in Italy and went on to play a key role in propaganda work favouring Italy's cultural policy toward India.

³⁸ ASMAE, Archivio Scuole, b.858, cit., letter from Paolo Orano to Mussolini, 23.1.26.

³⁹ ASMAE, Archivio Scuole, b.667, cit., outgoing telegram, no. illegible, 8.4.26.

⁴⁰ ASMAE, *Ibid.*, signed draft of letter from Mussolini to Pietro Fedele, Minister of Education, 4.5.26.

proportionately with his increasing conviction that much was to be gained politically thereby. The two Italian intellectuals had a political role, and Tucci was perfectly aware of the political significance of his teaching post at the Vishvabharati University; which he considered a

thriving centre of Italian studies in India, as testified by the interest shown in our civilisation and thought.⁴¹

The purpose of this propaganda work was to prepare Italian expansion in an environment that had little to do with culture as such. In an undated note, probably written in February 1926, it was suggested that Italian should be taught on a regular basis at the Vishvabharati University.

The government must take advantage of our favourable position by instituting the chair on a permanent basis. It would greatly benefit relations between Italy and India. It goes without saying that trade is always preceded by intellectual exchange.⁴²

It was also suggested that Tucci should travel around India and elsewhere before going back to Italy.⁴³ The Italian Consul General in Calcutta made this quite clear when he referred to

a complex programme of work requiring lengthy study and research both in Indian (Nepal, the northern provinces etc.) and perhaps in other Far Eastern countries.⁴⁴

⁴¹ ASMAE, *Ibid.*, Shantiniketan, 23.2.26 from Tucci to Trabalza.

⁴² ASMAE, Archivio Scuole, b.858, *cit.*

⁴³ The Italian Consul General in Calcutta suggested this from the very outset. In the report dated 25th August 1926 referred to above, he suggested a new appointment for Tucci, and urged that he remain in India. In his report to the Under-secretary of State, Trabalza informed that according to the Government's final decision Tucci should receive an academic post elsewhere. A telegram from Minister of External Affairs, Dino Grandi, to the Italian General Consulate in Calcutta contained an order to the effect that Tucci's mission was considered to have ended, and requested that the Consulate to indicate other posts and tasks for Tucci. ASMAE, *Ibid.*, outgoing telegram no. 5541/20 of 17.10.26.

⁴⁴ ASMAE, Archivio Scuole, b.667, *cit.*, report dated 21.3.26, *cit.*

Tucci was seen to be furthering the cause of

Italian studies while at the same time engaging in intellectual propaganda work already in progress.⁴⁵

It was decided to await the end of the academic year before transferring Tucci elsewhere. The invitation from the University of Dacca couldn't have come at a better time. Tucci was asked to lecture on Buddhism there. Tucci raised no objections. Dacca was an important University and the Chancellor was also the Governor of Bengal.⁴⁶

Unlike Formichi, Tucci managed to keep out of the fray and maintain relations with Tagore and his circle.⁴⁷ As he explained in January 1927, some time after he had taken up his post in Dacca,

I don't think the Tagore affair need impinge upon possible relations between the two countries. Much can be done outside the circles linked in one way or another to Tagore.⁴⁸

When Tucci reached Dacca, he embarked upon a project for the institution of study grants for youngsters who wished to study in Italian Universities. Through his efforts, this project received official backing and developed accordingly. He stressed the need for direct cultural contacts between Italy and India insofar as,

⁴⁵ ASMAE, *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ ASMAE, *Ibid.*, incoming telegram no. 5558, Calcutta 18.10.26 from the Consulate to the Ministry. Tucci was to receive monthly payments of 600 rupees (approx. 4,200 liras) with a further 200 rupees from the University of Dacca: incoming telegram no. 5775, Calcutta, 27.10.26, from the Consulate to the Ministry, and a telegram to the principal private secretary of the Minister, no. 8867/133, 30.10.26, signed by Trabalza. Funds totalling 35,000 liras earmarked for expenses when Tucci left Italy for his stay in Shantiniketan. Expenses incurred by Tucci in India were as follows: 9,345.90 liras for the journey, 65,000 for the mission itself (5,000 liras per month), from December 1925 through December 1926: Memorandum for the Principal Private Secretary of the Minister, no. 856/9, 29.1.27, signed by Trabalza. Tucci received 22,532.40 liras, gross as payment for his services in 1927: ASMAE, *Ibid.*, communiqué n. 876/2, 31.1.27, to the Consulate General in Calcutta.

⁴⁷ Cf. M. Prayer, *op. cit.*, p. 35-39.

⁴⁸ ASMAE, *Ibid.*, letter from Tucci to Trabalza, 11.1.27.

If we manage to bring youngsters to our Universities, prospects will be opened up for long-lasting cultural contacts which will bear fruits also after my departure.⁴⁹

He also noted that Italy's great rival in India, Germany, was moving along similar lines. It was, he thought, imperative that Italy rise to the challenge and compete with other nations in India, if she was to gain a 'sphere of action' there. The Italian Consul General in Calcutta called for the institution of four or five advanced study grants for young Indians who wished to go to Italy.⁵⁰

In the meantime, Tucci combined his teaching activities with promoting the image of Italy and of fascism in India. The prospect of strengthening links with local political and intellectual circles was always before him.

Notwithstanding the distance and the still all too few contacts between our countries, after two years in Bengal and daily contacts with the men who most faithfully reflect the cultural life of today's India, I assure you that there is a growing interest in Latin and especially Italian culture, mainly among the youths. Recent developments have brought Italy into the limelight; they also encourage a move away from the plane of pure ideality and favour collaboration of a more practical nature. Your Excellency's example is much admired by India's youth, above all now that a book in Bengali tongue has been published, "Mussolini and Today's Italy", which the most popular periodical here ("Prabasi") recommends to its readers.⁵¹

⁴⁹ ASMAE, *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ ASMAE, *Ibid.*, report no. 498/59. The request was sent on 12.2.27 by the newly appointed Italian Consul General in Calcutta, Ugo Tommasi, to the Foreign Office.

⁵¹ ASMAE, *Ibid.*, Report to the Foreign Secretary, 9.10.27, with an accompanying letter to the Italian Consul-General in Calcutta, 11.10.27. Many works on fascism and Mussolini were being published in India during the late 1920's. Many articles dealt with the features of fascism and the new direction taken by Italian politics under the fascist regime. Among the periodicals, the most interested in fascist Italy and its regime were mainly from Bengal and Maharashtra, the two most radical provinces of India, from the political point of view.

Tucci's impression was that Indian youths were critical of the British model and were interested in what "Latin culture" might offer. It was surely no mere coincidence that the Association "Union Indo-Latine", favouring cultural exchange, should be set up in Calcutta. This Association "concretely worked toward a rapprochement between India and the Latin world".

An effective exchange programme involving students and teachers capable of attracting Indian scholars to Italian Universities rather than to French or German ones had to be set up. With this aim in mind, Tucci collaborated with the *Istituto fascista di cultura* (Fascist Cultural Institute) to win over the "intellectual movement coming to the fore in India".⁵²

Tucci's report was circulated among the Italian authorities, who in turn expressed the desire that

the proposals drawn up by Tucci, in an attempt to render cultural exchange between the two countries more fruitful over time, be carefully considered by the Ministry.⁵³

Tucci's proposals did receive attention, and Tucci may be seen as the pioneer and driving force behind a systematic approach to cultural relations between the fascist regime and India. Although there is much in common between these measures and the dealings which led to the exchange of visits between Formichi, Tucci and Tagore, this later phase did not come up against the obstacles encountered earlier. Tucci's plans proceeded by degrees and met with growing success right up to the outbreak of World War II.

⁵² The Italian community in Calcutta gradually forged closer links with Indian nationalists in Bengal. Furthermore, its propaganda activities reached a peak during the campaign in Ethiopia.

⁵³ ASMAE, Archivio Scuole, b.667, cit., report no. 2271/299, Calcutta, 13.10.27 from the Italian Consulate General in Calcutta to the Minister and a Memorandum for the Under-secretary of State. The contents of the report were included in a memorandum drawn up by the General Directorate of Italian Schools, 17.11.27.

The first sign of the Tucci's success was when one of his students, Pramatha Nath Roy, applied to the Ministry of National Education in 1928 for a grant to attend the University of Rome, using special funds set aside by a decree of 1923. Roy, who had until then taught Sanskrit at a college in Dacca had begun to show an interest in Italian culture. He went on to translate the works of various well-known Italian writers, and essays on the fascist philosopher, Giovanni Gentile.⁵⁴ At the end of the year, Tucci drew up a report and mentioned Roy for the first time.⁵⁵ In the meantime, Roy started his translation of *Mussolini da vicino*, the already mentioned biography, written by Paolo Orano.

Roy stayed in Italy during the academic year 1929-30.⁵⁶ With this journey, he wished to "gain deeper knowledge of the language and literature of Italy at a University of the Kingdom".

In the meantime, after his second year in Dacca, Tucci concluded that he had already

done much, and there is good reason to be satisfied. However, in Calcutta, where I have only been occasionally, I could do more, and, where conditions permit, organise something permanent.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ A leading philosopher and fascist, Giovanni Gentile (1875-1944), played a key role in the reform of the Italian public education system. Gentile remained faithful to the fascist party in 1943 and supported the Social Republic despite the fact that, at that time, he was less favourably viewed by the fascists. Over and above his declining status within the ranks of the fascist regime, he was killed at his home in Florence on 15th April 1944.

⁵⁵ ASMAE, *Ibid.*, undated end-of-the-year report, enclosed with report no. 2570/238, Calcutta, 18.11.28, from the Italian Consulate General to the Ministry.

⁵⁶ Roy had to postpone his trip to Italy until the next year. This was because the Italian Consul General was anxious that the university's Italian course continue under Roy's guidance..ASMAE, Archivio Scuole 1929-35, b.990, Borse di Studio, Gran Bretagna, n. 11264, from the Ministry of National Education to the Foreign Office, 14.6.30 and n. 1085/76, from the Consulate-General in Calcutta to the Foreign Office, 23.6.32.

⁵⁷ ASMAE, Archivio Scuole, b.858, *cit.*, report no. 1752/130 from the Consulate General, Calcutta, 5.8.29, to the Foreign Office.

Tucci planned two courses in Calcutta for 1929, one on Italian literature and history, and another on fascist legislation.⁵⁸

With regard to activities of a more openly propaganda-oriented nature, Tucci saw his role in the following terms,

My knowledge of both English and Bengali and my qualifications as a scholar of Indian culture have brought me into contact with the cream of Indian society, and it is in these circles that Italy's image can be best promoted with a view to quashing those false, preconceived ideas all too frequently bandied about concerning Italy and the conditions prevailing there.⁵⁹

Tucci's stay in India saw him engaged in a number of activities such as teaching, research, political and propaganda work and trips to the Himalayas. Indeed, there were no dividing lines between these activities. Tucci was not one to passively put into practice the ideas of others. He wanted to make his own personal contribution to the fascist regime's plans for India and was admirably placed to do so.

The existing studies on the topic, tend to prove that Tucci was rather independent from the fascist regime and that he used his political links to do his studies in India and the Himalayan area. On the contrary, the records prove that he was engaged by the regime and paid for his mission. In other terms, promoting fascist Italy in India, not only culturally but politically, was his job. It is therefore difficult to deny his professional dependence on and political deep connection with the fascist regime.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ ASMAE, *Ibid.* In 1929 Tucci was not teaching at Benares, as Prayer erroneously believes (*op. cit.*, p. 40). However, he may have held a number of Italian language and literature lectures. This is corroborated by a report of March 1931 deposited at the Fondazione Gentile and in ASMAE, *Raccolta Generale* (RG), b.7, file 13, dated 16.3.31. From the job records in ASMAE, *Archivio Scuole*, b.667, *cit.*, it would appear that Tucci taught only in Calcutta and Dacca.

⁵⁹ ASMAE, *Archivio Scuole*, b. 858, *cit.*, report 5.8.29.

⁶⁰ ASMAE, *Archivio Scuole*, b.667, *cit.*, Memorandum for the Principal Private Secretary of the Minister, no. 856/9, 29.1.27, signed by Trabalza: Tucci was to receive monthly payments of 600 rupees (approx. 4,200 liras) with a further 200 rupees from the Univer-

3 – Culture as a means of political expansion

At the beginning of the 1920's, several Government officials had already reached their own conclusions as to how inroads might be made into the Indian subcontinent. In August 1929, Gino Scarpa, the Italian Consul General in Colombo,⁶¹ told the Ministry of External Affairs that he firmly believed

sity of Dacca: incoming telegram no. 5775, Calcutta, 27.10.26, from the Consulate to the Ministry, and a telegram to the principal private secretary of the Minister, no. 8867/133, 30.10.26, signed by Trabalza. Funds totalling 35,000 liras earmarked for expenses when Tucci left Italy for his stay in Shantiniketan. Expenses incurred by Tucci in India were as follows: 9,345.90 liras for the journey, 65,000 for the mission itself (5,000 liras per month), from December 1925 through December 1926 Tucci received 22,532.40 liras, gross as payment for his services in 1927: ASMAE, Ibid., communiqué n. 876/2, 31.1.27, to the Consulate General in Calcutta. VERIFICARE valore attuale.

⁶¹ Gino Scarpa was one of the key figures of the so called Indian policy of fascist Italy. He began his career as director of the Economic and Foreign Information Office. After a mission to Russia, in 1922 his book, *La Russia dei Sovieti* (Soviet's Russia) was published by the *Lega italiana per la tutela degli interessi nazionali all'estero* (the Italian League for the protection of Italian interests abroad). The book analyses the general situation in Russia, including economy, finance, the state of the industries and foreign trade. This interest in Russia was perhaps the result of the socialist past of this young official of the Ministry of External Affairs. Scarpa then became a republican, and his name is to be found in the files concerning subversives. His name was finally taken off this list in 1925. See Gianni Sofri, *Gandhi in Italia*, cit., p.27-30 and R. De Felice, op. cit., p. 315, who quotes police sources (Archivio Centrale dello Stato – State Central Archives, hereinafter ACS – Ministero dell'Interno, Direzione generale Pubblica Sicurezza, Divisione Affari generali e riservati, 1939, A1 file “Scarpa Guido”; Ibid., Div. Polizia politica, file “Scarpa Luigi detto Gino”). During the spring of 1922 Gino Scarpa headed an Italian trade delegation accompanying a diplomatic mission to Afghanistan. Toward the end of September 1922, Scarpa left for Bombay, after his appointment, in the spring or summer of 1922, as Trade Attaché at the Bombay General Consulate. The British authorities noticed Scarpa in Afghanistan and were decidedly wary of him. Their fear was “that he will try to maintain connection from India with Bolshevik Legation at Kabul and his activities should be carefully watched”: India Office (hereinafter IO), L/P&S/10/987, telegram 222, Shimla, 20.9.22 and minute of the Secret Department of 23.10.22; telegram 250, dated Peshawar, 21.10.22 and from British Minister, Kabul, signed by Maconachie, to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. Also IO, L/P&S/12/81: the file is entirely dedicated to Gino Scarpa, and above all the secret report dated 18.6 (probably 1934), stamp (illegible), to a certain Butler. An interesting note from British intelligence is dated 15.6.31 (this is fully reproduced – see document 1 of the Appendix). For further information on Scarpa's movements and other details see National Archives of India (NAI), New Delhi, Commercial Department, 1017 G(I), 1923, letter of 24.5.22 from the

that Britain will lose ground here and that it is therefore necessary to show our face and forge close links with the peoples [of India]. ... Nowadays, among the continental nations – excluding Russia – Italy is the country which attracts most attention.... Also because of a lack of means at my disposal, I have only been able to establish personal relationships, and not just the occasional lavish social function. I might almost say I have befriended influential figures both British and Indian. The Indians are very pleased that I am interested in their customs and religions because they see in it something that it not a mere form or courtesy. ... And these relations might serve as a bridge and a starting point for any further propaganda work we may wish to initiate. I firmly believe the most useful moves should be made in Italy. By this I mean that as many tourists from these areas as possible should go to Italy and, most of all, students.⁶²

The need was felt to beat off France and Germany, who were very active also on the cultural front. It was thought that as many Indian students as possible should be attracted to Italian Universities since, as Scarpa put it, they represented “tomorrow’s ruling class”.

Rome must become the intellectual hub of the Mediterranean and the bridge between East and West. Many kingdoms and empires have fallen by the wayside, but Rome’s ideal mission endures through the centuries.

The so-called opposition between East and West which hobbles the Anglo-Saxon mentality never found a place in Rome. Rome achieved greatness through trade between, and domination over, these large portions of humanity.⁶³

Italian Embassy, London to Lord Curzon, letter dated 15.7.23, from the Italian Embassy to Balfour, signed by De Martino, and a note from the Foreign and Political Department dated 9.10.22. During this period, the British authorities could hardly have imagined that Scarpa would indeed make trouble for them, not because of any communist leanings but as an accredited agent of the fascist regime.

⁶² ASMAE, AP, Gran Bretagna, 1929, b.1207, report no. 186, 13.8.29, from the Italian General Consulate, Colombo to the Foreign Office.

⁶³ ASMAE, Ibid.

These thoughts appear to anticipate the tones and content of Mussolini's famous inaugural speech pronounced for the *Istituto per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente* (ISMEO) (Institute for the Middle and Far East) on 22nd December 1933.

Scarpa was also engaged in negotiations for the inclusion of Italian in the curricula of a number of Indian schools. We may therefore conclude that Tucci's work was in harmony with the aspirations of various government circles in Rome. Many of the measures taken in the field of culture, with Tucci as the main actor, paved the way for enduring relations with politically minded intellectuals and nationalists. By this time, Tucci had become the only true spokesman of the fascist regime in India, and, more importantly, the only link with local political circles.

The Italian consul in Calcutta sent a report drawn up by Tucci (addressed to the duce and the Foreign Office and Ministry of National Education) with his own assessment of Tucci's activities.

He is highly thought of both by the Indians and the British.

He has a lively mind, and has therefore come to understand not only the philosophy but also the mentality of these people. He has used the past to understand the present and the present to understand the past; he has not been blinded allurement of philology and is a valuable asset in any prospective attempt at cultural penetration of India on the part of the government.

I think these five years and Tucci's own studies have laid the foundations of his relations with India.

I trust the government will provide him with the opportunity to take up his studies in India at some time in the future and establish a school in Italy such as would make Rome a centre of Indo-Buddhist studies. This would be a most positive development and would provide a focal point of attraction for all Asians, in India and the Far East.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ ASMAE, Archivio Scuole, b.858, cit., report of 3.12.30.

These were the premises behind the Institute for the Middle and Far East. Among the aims of this institute (presided over by one of the few leading intellectuals who had embraced fascism, Giovanni Gentile, and directed by Giuseppe Tucci) was the encouragement of cultural exchange between Italy and a number of Asian countries and co-ordination of activities concerning Asia. An undeclared aim of the institute was the political indoctrination of young scholarship holders arriving in Italy from various parts of Asia.

In 1930, a few months before returning to Italy, Tucci provided an account of his activities up to that time and a plan of action for the future. After mentioning the many works translated from Italian into Bengali by his students at Shantiniketan, Dacca and Calcutta, he stated that P.N. Roy, to whom we have referred above,

at present teaches Italian free of charge at the University of Calcutta, Post Graduate Department, and hopes that our government will in some manner repay him for the many services he has rendered.⁶⁵

Furthermore, Italian was officially recognised as a facultative subject for examination at the University of Calcutta, thanks to the mediation of the new Italian Consul-General in Calcutta, Antonio Arrivabene, and the support of Surendra Nath Das Gupta (1885-1952), already at that time an illustrious professor at the University of Calcutta and a collaborator of the fascist regime on the cultural exchange front.⁶⁶ At Das Gupta's insistence, the University of Calcutta agreed to change its rules and accept Italian as a subject for examinations on condition that the Italian government sent examiners there. Roy, who could by now speak and write Italian fluently, also took on this duty. During the spring of 1933, he was appointed professor of Italian literature at Benares.⁶⁷ Roy and his like were extremely useful assets in the campaign to win Indian

⁶⁵ On Roy, see Prayer, *Internazionalismo*, cit., pp. 50, 60 and 78.

⁶⁶ Archivio Scuole, b.858, cit., report of 3.12.30.

⁶⁷ ASMAE, Archivio Scuole, b.990, cit., Borse di Studio, Gran Bretagna, report no. 843/78, from the Italian Consulate, Calcutta, 19.4.33, to the Foreign Office.

students over to fascism. Roy received the (considerable) monthly sum of more or less 700 liras from the Foreign Office in Rome for his work at these two prestigious universities between 1934 and 1935.⁶⁸ Apart from his teaching activities, Roy was also actively engaged in fascist propaganda in Indian journals. He published various articles on Italy and fascism in the *Modern Review*,⁶⁹ and a book, *Mussolini and Cult of the Italian Youth* brought out by the *Modern Review* in 1932.

The consolidation of cultural exchange was necessary in order not to “lose the fruits of all that has been done”. Citing France and Germany (which already handed out study grants to Indian students), Tucci once more insisted that the Italian government had to do likewise, and not abandon the field – as had already happened with two students he had proposed. “Italian institutes and the private companies”, it was hypothesised, should set up a number of scholarships for Indian students while the Consul-General would decide upon the selection procedure. Bilateral cultural exchange on a larger scale was considered an absolute priority, since

All messages of good will directed at some of the most eminent men of letters and of the sciences in India would undoubtedly be much to our advantage. An invitation to an Indian scientist come to Italy on his travels, or an honorific degree at one of our universities, might well lead to the same in India, to the benefit of scholars active in the same fields.⁷⁰

Italy was justified in its interest in India because

India is one of the largest countries of the East and, whatever the future has in store for this country, it has enormous potential and

⁶⁸ ASMAE, Archivio Scuole 1929-35, b.947, Spese, file Calcutta.

⁶⁹ *Giovanni Papini*, June 1933, *India and Italy. A Plea for Cultural Cooperation*, November 1933 and *Eleven Years of Fascism*, January 1934.

⁷⁰ ASMAE, Affari Commerciali 1930-31, Indie Inglesi, pos.55, report to His Excellency the Chairman of the Italian Academy, Darjeeling, 4.3.30, enclosed with report no. 884/62, from the Italian Consulate-General, Calcutta, 1.4.30, to the Foreign Office.

resources. If the New Italy turns her back on India, she does so at her peril.⁷¹

The new Institute for the Middle and Far East, ISMEO, was seen as a means of consolidating the work already done at that time.

4 – The fascist regime and Bengali intellectuals

When ISMEO was being founded, contacts had already been made between the Italians and Calcutta intellectuals (including the university). One of the key go-betweens was Kalidas Nag. In the meantime, after his first meeting with Formichi, Nag had become an active promoter of a programme for the economic emancipation of India “from the British yoke”. This programme involved training youngsters at universities and institutes and in private European companies to build up an entrepreneurial class capable of initiating industrialisation, considered a vital stepping stone on the path toward post-colonial independence.⁷² Tucci was an ideal link in the chain, and in 1933 he and Nag entered into correspondence after a long period of silence dating back to the Tagore affair. Tucci, for his part, was confident that once the student exchange programme he had so coveted had finally been set up Indians would come forward. Nag had already had dealings with the Deutsche Akademie⁷³ and, in 1931, founded the *India Bureau*, an organisation whose task it was to disseminate and generate

⁷¹ ASMAE, Ibid.

⁷² M. Prayer, op. cit., p. 60.

⁷³ As we learn from a leaflet published by the Deutsche Akademie in the private papers of M.R. Jayakar in Delhi, said academy provided scholarships to Indian students at the finest universities in Germany. Indian scholars had an opportunity to meet personages such as Helmut von Glasenapp and Karl Haushofer, the famous expert on geopolitics: NAI, Jayakar papers, microfilm, r.n. 94. In 1934 the Deutsche Akademie opened a branch in Calcutta, in order to foster relations between Germany and India: Milan Hauner, *India in Axis Strategy. Germany, Japan and the Indian Nationalists in the Second World War*, London, 1981, p. 58.

interest in Indian culture and traditions above all among what Kalidas Nag called India's "sister countries" (neighbouring countries which had undergone India's influence). The India Bureau published *India and the World*, "An organ of Internationalism and Cultural Federation", with Nag himself as editor.⁷⁴ In 1930 and 1931, Kalidas Nag went often to Italy and spoke with officials at the Foreign Office.⁷⁵ The Italian government considered Nag an ally. During the period in which ISMEO was being set up, he was appointed the representative in India of the inter-university organisation, *Istituto Interuniversitario di Roma*. Furthermore, since the summer of 1931, Nag had been placing Indian students at the University of Perugia.⁷⁶ While ISMEO was being set up, Nag, as director of the India Bureau and representative in India of the *Istituto Interuniversitario di Roma*, had become actively involved in establishing contacts between Italy, the University of Calcutta, and local intellectual and political circles.

The following letter from Nag to Giovanni Gentile (6th June 1933)⁷⁷ clearly illustrates the nature of these contacts:

As the representative for India at the *Istituto Interuniversitario di Roma*, I wish to introduce my friend and colleague, P.N. ROY, M.A. who wishes to visit Italy for the purposes of completing his doctoral thesis on Indo-Italian culture and consolidating relations between our two Nations. ROY had the privilege of studying Ita-

⁷⁴ ASMAE, RG, b.7, cit., booklet published by the India Bureau: the India Bureau had ties with the Institute of International Education in New York, the National Council of Education in Washington, Berkeley University, the Institute of Indian Civilization in Paris, the Università per stranieri (university for foreign students) in Perugia, the Kern Institute in Leida, the Deutsche Akademie in Munich, the National University in Peking and the Imperial University in Tokyo.

⁷⁵ M. Prayer, *Internazionalismo*, cit., p. 62.

⁷⁶ See M. Prayer, op. cit., p. 63, and ASMAE, RG, b.7., cit., from Kalidas Nag to the Italian Consul in Calcutta, Edoardo Pervan, 15.6.31 and 19.9.31, and to Emilio Pagliano, 12.9.31 and 19.9.31.

⁷⁷ Fondazione Gentile, Corrisp. da terzi a Gentile (missives to Gentile), Carelli Mario file: Mario Carelli, soon to become the librarian at ISMEO, translated into Italian from the original English Nag's letter sent by Nag, as director of the India Bureau, to Gentile.

lian under S.E. Tucci in person during the latter's stay in Bengal. My own university, the University of Calcutta was the first to organise a systematic course made up of weekly Italian language and literature lessons. ROY conducted the Italian Seminar. Not only did he manage to inculcate in students his own very real enthusiasm; he also wrote important articles in our main newspapers, thereby propagating Italian thought and letters. ROY has also written an excellent book, "Mussolini and Cult of the Italian Youth", published enthusiastically by my brother-in-law, Ramananda Catterji (sic), former director of the MODERN REVIEW [in capitals in the original] based in Calcutta.

ROY is still a close collaborator of the Italian Consul-General in Calcutta and of other friends of ours who are working toward creating permanent intellectual relations between India and Italy. The *Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente* and its special Indian sections, the Hindusthan Association and the India Bureau, owe their existence to your own efforts and the noble efforts of the government. At this most opportune time, ROY is planning to come to Italy for a two-year stay; and I am sure the efforts of such a trustworthy colleague will contribute greatly to our common cause. I advised him to collaborate closely with you, the genius who guides all intellectual and educational movements in today's Italy. I would therefore be most grateful to you if you could facilitate his work as much as possible.⁷⁸

From the early 1930's on, fascist sentiment was growing at the Modern Review. The activities of the Italian consulate in Calcutta and pro-Italian propaganda work also contributed to this state of affairs. Relations with politically minded intellectuals in Bengal had developed considerably, also involving leading figures such as Syama Prasad Mookerjee (1901-1953).⁷⁹ Mookerjee, a leading hindu nationalist

⁷⁸ Roy later became a member of the organising committee of the *Confederazione degli Studenti Orientali* in Rome and the *Federazione degli Studenti Indiani*, also in Rome: M Prayer, *Internazionalismo*, cit., p. 93.

⁷⁹ Information on Mookerjee is to be found in Balraj Madhok, *Potrait of a martyr: Biography of Dr. Shyam Prasad Mookerji*, Bombay, 1969.

and founder of the Jana Sangh, was also chancellor of the University of Calcutta from 1934 to 1938. In a letter to Gentile, Tucci described Mookerjee as “our most important collaborator” in Calcutta, together with Das Gupta.⁸⁰ A letter from Nag to Gentile dated 8th June 1933 indicates that Nag had personally had a hand in setting up ISMEO, since he had made specific proposals as to its structure.⁸¹

Benoy Kumar Sarkar and Tarak Nath Das were also contacted. An in-depth biographical study of Benoy Kumar Sarkar (1887-1949) reveals his ties with the fascist regime.⁸² There is no need to examine Sarkar’s career at length here. However, we may mention his revolutionary sentiments as a young man, and his ties with Lala Lajpat Rai, Rash Behari Bose and the Berlin Committee. Between 1914 and 1925, Sarkar had spent some time in Europe, the United States and Japan. He journeyed to Italy twice, in 1924 and 1925, residing at Bolzano with his Austrian wife. During this period, he entered into correspondence with Formichi (whose work on the politics of ancient India he admired) and was also able to witness first hand the early years of fascism. When Matteotti was murdered, he sided with Amendola and the anti-fascist liberals.⁸³ Sarkar then came to admire fascism and what he thought was the economic miracle it had brought about. He viewed the fascist electoral reform favourably, without understanding its implications, and drew parallels between Italy and India. As a ‘second class’ European power, Italy stood at the halfway point between the more highly developed nations and those which had been left behind. he therefore saw Italy as a country that was closer to India than the other more advanced European powers could ever be.⁸⁴ Espe-

⁸⁰ Fondazione Gentile, Corrisp. da terzi a Gentile (missives to Gentile), file Tucci Giuseppe, undated letter in all probability written around the year 1935.

⁸¹ See appendix, doc. 7.

⁸² Giuseppe Flora, *Benoy Kumar Sarkar and Italy*, “Occasional Papers on History and Society”, Centre for Contemporary Studies, Nehru Memorial Library, New Delhi, 1994.

⁸³ B.K. Sarkar, *The Politics of Boundaries and Tendencies in International Relations*, vol. I, *Analysis of the Post-War World Forces*, first edition. , Calcutta, 1926, cited by G. Flora, p. 14-21 and 74n.

⁸⁴ Flora, *Ibid.*, p. 25, citing the work by Sarkar mentioned above.

cially in later life, Sarkar was not a political activist, at least with regard to Indian affairs and he stood apart from the nationalist struggle. It must be said that, despite his relations with the fascist regime (and very concrete relations with fascist officialdom), he was not a dyed in the wool fascist. True, Sarkar, as opposed to Tarak Nath Das and Kalidas Nag, Sarkar was the only Indian to consider accepting a highly prestigious public role within the framework of the fascist regime, as director of the *Istituto Italo-Indiano*. He was encouraged to make this move, initially, by a number of members of the fascist executive, namely the directors of the institute for promoting exportation, *Istituto per le Esportazioni* (INE). He even received Mussolini's support. The institute that Sarkar and the INE had in mind was seen as ancillary to ISMEO.⁸⁵ The priorities of the *Istituto Italo-Indiano* lay in the fields of economics, education and training, and not politics (which was, together with culture, ISMEO's sphere, properly speaking). Sarkar was even briefly considered for the post of director of ISMEO. Tucci advised against this – this is a highly significant detail – since he believed the director should have “the broadest field of action”. He also pointed out the “inappropriateness of an Indian as head of an institute”.⁸⁶ One plausible explanation for Tucci's move was that he wanted the post for himself.

We are not interested in establishing to what extent Sarkar compromised himself with the fascist regime, or whether he was indeed a fascist.⁸⁷ Rather, we are interested in the fascist regime's perception of Sarkar's role and the roles of others who had ties with ISMEO and, more in general, the fascist regime's attitude toward Indians residing in Italy who had established links with political circles there, with a view to creating alliances. Analysis of developments reveals quite clearly that the Indians whom the fascist regime rallied to its side were at the same time the targets and agents of an Italian propaganda cam-

⁸⁵ Flora, pp. 35-65, V. Ferretti, op. cit., p. 783-784, p. 788.

⁸⁶ ASMAE, RG, b.7, cit., memorandum for His Excellency the Minister, 13.4.31.

⁸⁷ G. Flora dwells on this issue the section entitled *Was Sarkar a fascist?*, op. cit..

paign directed at India toward the end of the 1930's. What the fascist regime needed, at least during the first half of the 1930's, was a group of individuals who could be used to favour expansion in India. These individuals were members of a nascent entrepreneurial class whose development, it was hoped, would be such that Italy might stand out as India's major partner in dealings regarding government contracts and openings for investment. Italy's efforts were also directed at a future political élite that would look favourably upon Italian business interests, ideally based on relations of an exclusive nature. These were the future entrepreneurs of India who were now economic students and scholarship holders arriving in Italy. The political élite was seen as consisting of persons already active and, where possible, influential. Sarkar, as a politically minded intellectual and academic, and others of similar standing, were considered as useful potential allies of the fascist 'India policy'. When a director had to be chosen for ISMEO, and Tucci was finally appointed, this did not mean breaking off relations with Sarkar. Sarkar never knew that the Foreign Office investigated his behaviour and attitudes with the aid of the Italian consulate in Calcutta.⁸⁸ he was unaware of the fact that they considered him "both morally and politically" untrustworthy.⁸⁹ We have no way of knowing whether the investigation was part of a smear campaign started up to keep Sarkar out or whether Sarkar's political sympathies were found not to be up to fascist expectations. It has already been noted that he had at a certain stage sided with the liberals. Furthermore, his idea of founding an organisation that in a certain sense might be seen as a rival to ISMEO may well have been looked upon with some suspicion in fascist government circles. After all, it was a dependency of the Foreign Office. In any case, Sarkar, who was unaware of all these

⁸⁸ ASMAE, RG, b.7, cit., outgoing telegram no. 3951/19, from the Foreign Office, 2.5.31, to the Italian Consulate in Calcutta.

⁸⁹ ASMAE, Ibid., incoming telegram no. 3228, from the Italian Consulate in Calcutta, 5.5.31 the Foreign Office, Rome, also cited by Flora, op. cit., p. 56.

intrigues, continued to write on fascist Italy's economic system.⁹⁰ He also taught one of the ISMEO scholarship students at the University of Calcutta, and in 1938, at the very height of the Italian propaganda campaign, Sarkar stood by his Italian associates.

The early years of Tarak Nath Das (1884-1958) are well documented, but not his later life. Tarak Nath Das frequented revolutionary groups and was a member of the Anushilan Samiti. In 1906 he travelled to Japan and San Francisco, where he enrolled at the University of California, Berkeley. In 1907 – with two other leading figures of the nationalist revolutionary movement, Ram Nath Puri and Pandurang Khankhoje – he founded the Hindustan Association and its journal, *Circular-i-Azad* (Freedom Circular). The organisation and its periodical were set up in order to promote the nationalist cause and its methods among Indian residents in the United States and Canada. It also sought the support of American radicals. The periodical was a short-lived affair, but Das (who in the meantime had become the movement's leader) now set up a revolutionary periodical, *Free Hindustan*. He worked for some time at the United States Immigration Office in Vancouver but had to resign after the Canadian government had filed a protest in Washington as a result of the periodical's rabidly anti-British stance. Tarak Nath Das then dedicated himself totally to propaganda work and established contacts with Indian revolutionaries based in London and Paris. During

⁹⁰ Without considering references included in other works relating to separate questions, Sarkar's works concerning Italy, fascism and the fascist economic system are as follows: *Italo-Indian Intercourse*, "India and the World", Aug. 1932; *Contacts with Economic Italy (1929-1931)*, "Journal of the Bengal National Chamber of Commerce", June-Dec. 1932; *Public Works in Fascist Italy*, "Calcutta Review", October 1933; *The Creation of Small Landowners in Fascist Italy*, *Ibid.*, January 1934; *Giorgio del Vecchio on Anti-Legislation Movements*, *Ibid.*, Aug. 1934; *Trade Balance and Public Finance: the Experience of Fascist Italy*, *Ibid.*, June 1935; *The Paretian Circulation of Elites Examined*, *Ibid.*, Jan.-March 1936; *Economic Italy during the First Years of the Fascist Regime*, *Ibid.*, April 1938; *The State in Neo-Idealism*, *Ibid.*, Sept. 1938; *Volpe versus Croce regarding Italian Political History*, *Ibid.*, Dec. 1938; *Industrial Planning and Economic Autarchy*, *Ibid.*, Aug. 1939; and the chapter, *The Transition in Italy to an Industrial State*, in *Economic Development – Snapshots of World Movements in Commerce, Economic Legislation, Industrialism and Technical Education*, Madras, 1926.

World War I, he was a member of the Berlin Committee, and trained Indian prisoners with a view to conducting anti-British disruptive activities. In 1916 he set up branch offices of the Pan-Asiatic League in China and Japan, and joined the *Young Hindustan Association of Constantinople*, which had ties with the Berlin Committee. At the end of the war, what with the disbanding of the Berlin Committee, Tarak Nath Das returned to the United States where he founded the Friends of Freedom for India Society, which established ties with the Gadhar Party. In 1922, one of the directors of the Berlin Committee, Viredranath Chattopadhyaya, asked Tarak Nath Das' to help him reorganise an Indian national revolutionary committee which, among others, included Rash Behari Bose and Barkatullah. Das obtained American citizenship by naturalisation in 1914, and lived out the rest of his days there.⁹¹ We know little of his later life. However, it is clear that he was influential among Indians residing in Europe, above all among students with whom he had established ties via the Deutsche Akademie, the Hindustan Association and ISMEO. We have a testimony from Taraknath Das himself, concerning his role as Hindustan Association-ISMEO go-between:

I have waited for more than ten years in order to promote Indo-Italian relations and for the first time I have gone into the question of a rapprochement between Italy and India with the Member of Parliament, Signor Tittoni, President of the Senate, whose writings are considered today the guiding light behind fascist foreign policy. I have been to Italy on various occasions and have discussed the prospect of an organic and ordered approach to organising such activities. In any case, I would inform you that the Hindustan Association was set up by Indian students in Italy with the enthusiastic support of Italian friends and above all of Prof. Tucci and the Baron Ricciardi.... I wish to stress once more that Hindustan Association is entirely the work of Indian stu-

⁹¹ T.R. Sareen, *Indian Revolutionary Movement Abroad (1905-1920)*, New Delhi, 1979, p. 65-68, 121,124, 151, 167 and 252; Prayer, *Internazionalismo*, cit., p. 85-92.

dents in Rome who deserve as much assistance as possible from Indians interested in Indo-Indian intellectual co-operation.⁹²

Das liaised between the fascist regime, nationalists travelling though Europe and Indian students. He played an active part in pro-Italian propaganda work and stood by Italy over the more controversial issues. He defended Italy's conduct in Ethiopia and considered it a desperate attempt to counter British imperialism. He believed India stood to gain from any successful attempt at undermining Britain's position in Africa.⁹³

Tarak Nath Das' collaboration with the *Modern Review* represented the high point in the promotion of the image of fascism in India. He had always been more of a 'politician' than Sarkar, and the topics he chose to write on were more openly political.⁹⁴ Tarak Nath Das had been a revolutionary as a young man, but during the early 1930's he had become a moderate. As we shall see in the following chapter, while in the United States, Das also maintained contacts with hindu nationalists.

By providing liaison between the fascist regime and the Bengali *intelligentsia* the young scholarship holders, such as Monindra Mohan Moulik, and the aforementioned P.N. Roy, may be rightly considered collaborationists. As opposed to other individuals who had already politically made a name for themselves in India, and who, before coming to Italy, had already accumulated experience in political and intellectual circles, these youngsters, so to speak, fresh out of college. They were more malleable, and their prolonged stays in Italy (a re-

⁹² Fondazione Gentile, Corrispondenza da terzi a terzi, (missives not personally addressed to Gentile) letter from Das to Roy, cit.

⁹³ T.N. Das, *An Internationalist on the Italo-Abyssinian Dispute*, "Modern Review", October 1935, cit. in M. Prayer, *Internazionalismo*, cit., p. 92.

⁹⁴ The following articles on Italy appeared in the "Modern Review": *England has no debt to Italy but not to India*, September 1925; *Italy's Air Force*, July 1926; *Italy's Vigorous Maritime Policy*, December 1926; *New Italy and Greater India*, June 1931; *The New Greater Italy and Signor Mussolini*, (?); *Cavour as a Liberator and Unifier of Italy*, May 1933.

quirement of their studies) exposed them to fascist indoctrination. Furthermore, the privileges they enjoyed could only inspire a certain gratitude toward the fascist regime. Moulik, a student of Sarkar's, went to Italy in 1934 on a University of Rome political sciences scholarship. He had been much recommended by Nag and Syama Prasad Mookerjee. Toward the end of the 1930's, Moulik too, was to play his part in the regime's propaganda activities in India.⁹⁵ According to Justo Giusti del Giardino, the Italian acting Vice Consul in Calcutta, in a report to the Ministry,

The Mayor of Calcutta, the Chancellor of the university, and Prof. Nag enthusiastically commended Moulik to me. I have met him and believe their recommendations are fully justified. After his year of work at the University of Rome, he will aid us considerably in spreading our ideas, and developing Italian trade and economic openings here in India.⁹⁶

We shall see in the following chapters that Moulik was to be considered one of the key players in Italy's propaganda work in India during the Ethiopia crisis and after.

Italy's first outpost in India, in all senses, was Bengal. The foundations laid over the period we have considered created inroads toward a wide spectrum of the Indian political scene. From the early 1930's on, ties were established with other exponents of Indian nationalism. such as the hard-line Congress faction, including Subhas Chandra Bose and the Hindu nationalists. The fascist regime varied its

⁹⁵ The extant literature does not provide significant information on Moulik's publications in India, despite the fact that Moulik supported the cause of fascist Italy during the Ethiopian war. His stance clashed with that of others in India belonging to various political currents. The author received this information from Moulik's daughter, Achala. With regard to Moulik's stay in Italy, see M. Prayer, *L'intervista Gandhi-Mussolini: pagine "italiane" dal diario di Mahadev Desai*, in "Storia Contemporanea", February 1992, p. 78-79, *Internazionalismo*, cit., p. 64-65, and Ferretti, op. cit., p. 797.

⁹⁶ ASMAE, RG, 1934, b.32, file 13, report no. 1952/255 of 8.10.34.

tactics according to circumstances and to whom it specifically dealt with. Bengal, as an Italian 'outpost' in India, was a valuable asset during the intense propaganda campaign occasioned by the war in Ethiopia.

CHAPTER 2

Italian fascism and Hindu nationalism

1 – Building the network: early contacts with Hindu nationalism

Italians made any possible attempt to establish ties with Indian political and intellectual circles. The previous chapter described the early contacts between the regime and Bengali nationalism. In the same period the regime organised important events and in the representatives of the fascist regime had the occasion to meet leading exponents of Hindu nationalism. Between December 1928 and January 1929 the *Lega Navale Italiana* (Italian naval league) organised a three-month cruise in India and Ceylon organised.¹ Members of Italian high society and aristocracy – including industrialists, businessmen, politicians, and, above all, Edda Mussolini, the *duce's* daughter – took part in this trip. The high point of the cruise was Benares. A conference was held at the Benares Hindu University, with the Chancellor, Madan Mohan Malaviya, two hundred professors and “all the students” attending. The theme was “Fascism and the Duce”.² A similar cruise was organised in September 1932 by the company *I Grandi Viaggi* (Great

¹ ACS, Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri (Prime Minister's Office – PCM), 1940-43, b.3002, letter no. 50 of 11.1.28, from the Chairman (Presidente) of the Lega Navale Italiana, Cito Filomarino, to Mussolini; letter no. 154, 3.2.28, from the Secretary General (Segretario Generale) of the Lega Navale, to Hon. (Onorevole) Giunta, Undersecretary of State at the Prime Minister's Office (Sottosegretario di Stato alla Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri) Note for His Excellency the Chief of State, 15.2.29.

² For information on the two journeys, see ASMAE, RG, b.7, note dated Rome, 8.10.31 (in this document it was also suggested that a number of Round Table Conference participants should be invited to Italy).

Tours), based in Milan.³ Once more, the cruise passengers included a number of Italian aristocrats, industrialists, high level professionals, politicians and "representatives of the most important categories of intellectuals".⁴ Although this time there were no personalities like Edda Mussolini, the Italian and Indian press dedicated more space to this tour.⁵ Again, at the Universities of Benares and Calcutta were organised celebrations and gala dinners. As already pointed out, Indian intellectuals were considered an important resource. Given the political role of the Benares Hindu University (BHU) and the political standing of Malaviya, no real distinction can be made between the political repercussions of the event and its cultural significance.⁶

It should be noted that the most important currents of political Hinduism had already spontaneously developed an interest in fascism during the late 1920's. It is hard to assert whether fascism had a part to play in the birth of militant organisations such as the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS). The structural similarities between these

³ Società Geografica Italiana (Italian Geographic Society – SGI), Archivio Amministrativo, b.99, letter from the head office of the company, Grandi Viaggi, to the Società Geografica Italiana, 1.9.32, and letter dated 4.9.32 from Vacchelli to a certain Biagio Gabardi.

⁴ SGI, Ibid., undated draft letter from the Chairman of Grandi Viaggi to the Italian Consul General in Bombay, Renato Galleani d'Alliano.

⁵ The newspapers, *Giornale d'Italia*, *Popolo d'Italia*, and *Il Messaggero* announced the cruise on 12th October, 12th and 13th October, and 20th October 1932, respectively. Indian newspapers in English concentrated on the importance of the travellers. *The Times of Ceylon* of 18th January published an article on the cruise. The file contains cuttings from *The Times of India* (15.12.32), *The Evening News* (Bombay, 21.12.32) and *The Statesman* (Delhi, 30.12.32): SGI, Ibid., file a.

⁶ For full documentation on Madan Mohan Malaviya, including a political portrait, a description of the part he played in founding the BHU and the political role of the BHU see Alessandra Consolaro's excellent *Madre India e la Parola: la definizione della hindi come lingua e letteratura nazionale e le università "nazionali" di Benares* (Mother India and the Word: definition of Hindi as national language and literature and the "national" Universities of Benares) degree thesis, Pisa, May 1999. Unfortunately, due to a lack of collaboration in Benares, and limited access to sources regarding Malaviya and the local political and cultural scene (given to scholars on a selective and discretionary basis), Consolaro was unable to fully assess the relations between Malaviya and the fascist regime, or his personal attitude toward Italian fascism. However, this is the most complete study available on the political role of the BHU.

organisations and the fascist militias are striking, and have been noticed by practically all observers of the RSS. Hedgewar's 'official' biographers felt obliged to declare that

... some critics compared this arrangement to the Fascist army of Mussolini. But the Sangh had no need to derive its inspiration from any such perverted foreign model; it modelled itself on an ideal Hindu family.⁷

The RSS method of recruitment was practically identical to that of the *Balilla* youth organisation in Italy. *Shaka* members, for instance, were grouped according to their age (6-7 to 10; 10 to 14; 14 to 28; 28 and older). This is amazingly similar to the age bands of the hierarchical organisation of the fascist youth organisations, with its subdivision of boys and young men in *Figli della Lupa*, *Balilla*, *Avanguardisti*, and *Camicie Nere* (Sons of the She-Wolf, Balilla, Avant-gardists and Black-shirts). The hierarchical ordering of RSS members, however, came after the organisation was founded and may well have been derived from fascism, as we shall see.

Initially, the RSS must have been very closely modelled on the *akharas*, the Bengali gymnasiums where martial arts and paramilitary training were performed – and the secret societies founded in Maharashtra by young militants close to Tilak, including Savarkar brothers.⁸ It is also a known fact that the decision to found the RSS was taken by a small group of individuals, all belonging to the same political environment. Apart from Hedgewar, the group of founders of the RSS included B. S. Moonje, L. V. Paranjipe, Babarao Savarkar, and a certain Tholkar. All were members of the Hindu Mahasabha.⁹ Before

⁷ B. V. Deshpande, S. R. Ramaswamy, *Dr. Hedgewar the Epoch-Maker*, Bangalore, 1981, p. 112.

⁸ Stanley A. Wolpert, *Tilak and Gokhale. Revolution and Reform in the Making of Modern India*, Berkeley, 1962, p. 123.

⁹ D. R. Goyal, *Rastriya Swayamsewak Sangh*, New Delhi, 1979, p. 59. Highly critical, Goyal has displayed great care in handling these historically significant details. The account

founding the RSS in autumn 1925, Hedgewar met Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, at the time confined at Ratnagiri, and asked his advice on how to set up the organisation.¹⁰

Although the decision to found the RSS was taken by local political circles, the members of these groups must have been fairly interested in developments outside India. Italy's recent history and the remarkable events witnessed there, of course, had not escaped the attention of Indian public opinion, included Marathi and Hindu nationalists.

2 – Italian fascism in Marathi publications

If Hedgewar read one of the leading daily newspapers in Maharashtra, *Kesari*, he must have been aware of the political changes taking place in Italy and, however vaguely, he would also learned something of their nature. Between 1924 and 1935 *Kesari* regularly published articles on Italy, fascism and Mussolini. Furthermore, other publications on the fascist regime and the *duce* were also being distributed in India. These works were mainly in Italian and were translated into local languages.

What impressed the Marathi journalists was the socialist origin of fascism and the regime's apparent capacity to transform Italy from a backward country to a top ranking world power. Indians could not know, then, that there was actually very little truth behind the demagogic rhetoric of the fascists. Moreover, Indian journalists were convinced that fascism had restored order in a country previously upset by political tensions. In a series of editorials, *Kesari* described the passage from liberal government to dictatorship as a shift from anarchy to a social order in which strife had no more reason to exist.¹¹ Col-

provided by Goyal was procured from Paranjipe himself, who mentioned the foundation of the RSS in a commemorative article published by the *Kesari* on 5th July 1940), immediately after Hedgewar's death.

¹⁰ Deshpande-Ramaswamy, op. cit., p. 82.

¹¹ The details are in *Kesari*, 13.5.24, 24.6.25, 10.11.25 and 24.11.25. The content of

umn after column *Kesari* described the political reforms carried out by Mussolini, like the substitution of the elections with the nomination of the members of Parliament,¹² and the replacement of Parliament itself with the *Gran Consiglio del Fascismo* (Grand Council of Fascism). Mussolini, who was an enemy of democracy, had firmly established the principle of dictatorship according to which “one man’s government is more useful and more binding” for the nation than institutional democracy.¹³ All this is strikingly similar to the RSS’s principle of “obedience to one leader” (*ek chalak anuvaritva*).

In a long article of 13th August 1929, “Italy and the Young Generations”, it was stated that the younger generations in Italy had wrested the reins of power from their elders, leading to a “fast ascent of Italy in every field”. The article went on to describe at length the organisation of Italian society according to fascist models. The sense of discipline pervading Italian youth was explained in terms of a strong attachment to religious principles. Italians responded to the call of their faith. Their defence of the institution of the family was considerable, also reflected in a respect for traditional values. A recent movement in favour of divorce, for instance, disappeared after the rise of the fascist regime. The article described the measures adopted by the fascist government to protect the family, like the tax imposed to the singles. Women had no voting rights and they did not claim them. According to the article, Italian youths thought that the ideal environment for women was the home. The article focused then on the fascist youth organisations, the *Balilla* and the *Avanguardisti*.

One might wonder how the Indian press could be so well informed about recent developments in Italy. One source, in all likelihood, was an Italian pamphlet in English, *The Recent Laws for the Defence of the State* (1928).¹⁴ The National Militia, defined here “the bodyguard of

these articles is presented here in summary form after translation from Marathi by a young Indian colleague.

¹² Ibid., 17.1.28

¹³ Ibid., 17.7.28: the article quotes a speech by Mussolini without specifying its date.

¹⁴ A copy of the pamphlet is in NAI, Foreign and Political Department, 647 G 1927.

the Revolution", received special attention, alongside the restrictive measures adopted by the new fascist order, namely the ban on "subversive parties", limitations to the press, expulsion of "disaffected persons" from public administration, and, finally, the death sentence.

Significantly, the shift from the Liberal phase to fascism tout court is described by the pamphlet in strikingly similar terms to those employed in the articles described above:

This step [the shift to fascism] has struck a death blow to the thread-bare theories of Italian liberalism, according to which the Sovereign State must observe strict neutrality towards all political associations and parties. This theory explains why in Italy the Ship of State was drifting before the wind, ready to sink in the vortex of social dissolution or to be wrecked on the rocks of financial disaster.¹⁵

Another inspiring source for the literature published in *Kesari* was D.V. Tahmankar, the newspaper's London correspondent and a great admirer of Mussolini. In 1927 Tahmankar published a book entitled *Muslini ani Fashismo*, (Mussolini and Fascism), a biography of the dictator, with several references to the organisation of the fascist state, the fascist social system, fascist ideology, and Italy's recent past. One chapter was entirely dedicated to fascist society and its institutions, and especially the youth organisations.

By the late 1920's, the fascist regime and Mussolini had many supporters in Maharashtra. The aspects of fascism, which appealed most to the Hindu nationalists, were, of course, the supposed shift of Italian society from chaos to order, and its militarization. This patently anti-democratic system was considered a positive alternative to democracy, seen as a typical British institution.

A subtext of this literature was the parallel between fascism and the Risorgimento, Italy's struggle for unification. Marathi national-

¹⁵ NAI, Ibid.

ists, and the radicals in general, saw fascism, which was ushering in a state organised along rational lines, as the final chapter of the epic experience represented by the Italian Risorgimento.

3 – Moonje's trip to Europe

The way the political literature described fascist Italy was exciting, and it is hardly surprising that a number of influential Hindu nationalists should be tempted to go and personally see the achievements of the fascist regime.¹⁶

On his return from the first Round Table Conference, in the spring of 1931, B.S. Moonje left for a tour around Britain and Europe, with the intention of staying in Italy for some time. This was undoubtedly a turning point in RSS's development. The journey was carefully planned to take in educational and military institutions in Britain, France, Germany and Italy.

On 3rd October 1930, N.B. Parulekar, head of the International Institute of India, sent Moonje copies of a dozen letters of introduction for contacts in Europe,¹⁷ including one to Fritz Grobba.¹⁸ Early on in his career, Grobba had been the German Chargé d'Affaires in Kabul, and at the end of 1923 he had already gained a reputation as one of the leading experts on Arab questions. At the time of Moonje's visit to Europe he was head of German Consulates in the East. In 1941 he became chief of the Office for the Middle Eastern Affairs at

¹⁶ Both before and after the advent of fascism, at some stage during their journeys to Britain, many Indians stopped off in Italy. At first, this was because Italian boats coming to Italian ports provided the most convenient form of transport from India to Britain. Indians could take advantage of the journey to see Italy, a country renowned for its beauty. The changes introduced by the fascist regime were bound to arouse people's curiosity and attract visits from politicians, irrespective of their ideals or standing.

¹⁷ Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML), New Delhi, Subject file n. 16.

¹⁸ This letter, also dated 3.10.30, was addressed to F. Grobba, Berlin, Willhelmstrasse: both are enclosed to a letter from Parulekar to Moonje.

the German Foreign Office.¹⁹ Toward the end of the 1930's, Grobba was one of the key figures in German foreign policy in Arab countries and India. Most probably, at the time of these letters he was already an influential figure.

Parulekar's letter of introduction described Moonje's role within the Hindu Mahasabha as follows:

This Body represents the millions of Hindus of the country and Dr. Moonje is its leading spirit.²⁰

With regard to Moonje's visit and the reasons behind it, Parulekar added:

You know at present there is a growing tendency in India to build educational and commercial relations with countries other than Great Britain. Particularly the desire to develop such relations with Germany is strong and, I am sure, it is bound to lead to the benefit both of India and Germany. Dr. Moonje will be travelling as our representative and would like to make contacts with men in educational and industrial lines in which case I am sure your assistance will be greatly valued. If it is possible for him to meet representatives of German manufacturers in a conference and also German educators, I am sure, such gatherings will be valuable for the building of contacts between these countries. We should like to open up a few chances of work for students who would know German machines as it is difficult to supply such technicians in India and therefore it works against a wider use of such imported machinery. Then again we are interested in making contacts with German scholars, leaders of culture and political thought and I should request you to try what you possibly can in introducing Dr. Moonje to respective people.

¹⁹ R. De Felice, *Arabi e Medio Oriente nella strategia di guerra di Mussolini*, in "Storia Contemporanea", December 1986, p. 1273. See also, by F. Grobba, *Manner und Machte im Orient. 25 Jahre diplomatischer Tätigkeit im Orient*, Göttingen, 1967.

²⁰ NMML, Moonje Papers, f.n.16, cit.

The aim of Parulekar's Institute, with an office in Berlin and two in New York, was to promote social relations between India and the world at large, also in the fields of cultural activities and education.

Grobba replied to Parulekar in November:

I have written to Dr. Moonje and hope he will inform me in time about his arrival. I will be very pleased to discuss the matters proposed in your letter with him and to render him all possible facilities during his stay in Germany.²¹

In October 1930, Moonje corresponded with a certain Penelope Betjeman, as confirmed by a single letter in the records (a reply from Mrs Betjeman), dated 22nd October.²² In itself, this letter would be of little importance, were it not for the fact that it mentions Scarpa, whose address Moonje had sent to Mrs Betjeman, and to Tucci. Mrs Betjeman hoped one day to study under Prof. Tucci. It is clear from the letter that both Moonje and Mrs Betjeman knew Tucci and Scarpa. However, only Tucci was to play a part in Moonje's tour in Italy.

The main moving force behind the organisation of Moonje's trip to Europe was Tarak Nath Das, who on 16th November 1930²³ wrote to Moonje urging him to visit Italy and Germany. Das also asked Moonje to keep him informed as to developments so that he might arrange visits to German institutes of higher education.²⁴ Tarak Nath Das had been a member of the *Deutsche Akademie* since 1927. Das

²¹ NMML, Ibid., letter from Parulekar to Moonje, 21.11.30. Parulekar passed the message on to Moonje. He also provided the names of addresses of other possible contacts in Europe and in the United States. Moonje never went to the United States.

²² The file contains no copies of Moonje's letters to Penelope Betjeman, but only the ladies' missives to Moonje.

²³ NMML, Moonje papers, f.n.16, cit.: at this time, Tarak Nath Das was residing in New York, and was special correspondent for *Liberty*, a Calcutta paper, and *Deutsche Presse-Korrespondenz* a Hanover paper. He also worked for the *Modern Review*, the *Calcutta Review* and *The Nihon*, in Tokyo.

²⁴ NMML, Ibid., letter of 28.11.30 from Tarak Nath Das to Moonje. At the end of November Das had already made a few contacts, such as Prof. Aufhauser, an Indian scholar at the University of Munich.

himself was also eager to meet Moonje. At the end of December, Tarak Nath Das wrote to M.R. Jayakar,²⁵ a leading member of the Hindu Mahasabha, to inform him that the *Deutsche Akademie* would be most pleased to be of assistance to Moonje in Munich, and arrange visits to German cultural institutions and meetings with several personalities.

At the end of January 1931, immediately after the Roun Table Conference, between 23rd January and 14th February 1931 Moonje visited British schools, institutions and arms manufacturing plants, thanks to the collaboration of the British authorities.²⁶ He left then to Paris, where he stayed from 15th to 23rd February. Here, too, he was mainly interested in military institutions training schools, rather than tourist sights. After Paris, Moonje stopped off briefly in Brussels, where he was accompanied by a guide, a certain Miss Pommeret (who had also accompanied him in Paris and who he was to meet up with again in Italy). Moonje reached Germany on 25th February. The British authorities in Berlin provided him with assistance to organise visits and meetings. On 27th February, he met Grobba, and on the next day started a round of visits which took in youth organisations, sports facilities, sporting organisations, military institutions and schools. Moonje and Grobba met on at least three other occasions, on 28th February, 5th and 7th March, together with members of the German army staff. Moonje was more impressed by the grandeur of the German institutions and organisations than anything he had seen in France and Britain.²⁷

On 1st March 1931, Moonje wrote to Tarak Nath Das, announcing that he would soon be in Italy. He provided indications as to his movements and the length of his stay. On 6th March, Das, in Florence at the time, wrote to Tucci to inform him of Moonje's arrival, adding:

²⁵ NMML, Ibid., from Tarak Nath Das to Jayakar, 26.12.30. M. R. Jayakar's papers at the National Archives in Delhi include a leaflet from the *Deutsche Akademie*.

²⁶ For a detailed account of the trip to Europe, see Moonje's personal notebook, in NMML, Moonje papers, microfilm, Diary, r.n.1, 1926-31.

²⁷ Ibid., 28.2.31.

I hope that during his stay in Rome he will meet responsible Italian statesmen and educators and those who will be able to explain the Fascist Militia system from Balilla up to him.²⁸

In his letter, Tarak Nath Das took the opportunity to make a number of proposals:

Regarding the steps to be taken to promote cultural relations between India and Italy, I have given considerable thought, and I wish to suggest that as the next year is going to be the 10th anniversary of the Fascist Revolution in Italy, it will be a very wonderful if some Italian scholar go (sic) to India to deliver a course of lectures on "Italy Since the World War" before various Indian universities. By this, India will be greatly benefited, because a large number of Indian scholars and students will have the opportunity to learn something about the great experiment in government and all walks of life now being carried on in Italy.²⁹

Politics and culture blend once more. Tucci had brought P. N. Roy, one his former students at the University of Calcutta, to the University of Naples as his assistant. Das therefore proposed that the University of Calcutta should return the favour by asking a scholar from Italy to India to lecture on Italian History, especially on the early post-war years. He also expressed the hope that the University of Calcutta might start up an Italian History course. Das had discussed this point with Formichi and was hopeful that Tucci would agree. Tucci informed the Ministry of External Affairs about Tarak Nath Das' proposals.³⁰ Das was described as "a great friend of Italy" who "has disseminated much information on modern Italy in his studies and articles", a "person who is sincerely working toward a convergence

²⁸ ASMAE, RG, b.7.

²⁹ ASMAE, Ibid..

³⁰ ASMAE, RG, b.7, Rome, 12.3.31, not headed, addressed to "Eccellenza" (Excellency), sent to *Ministero degli Esteri* (Ministry of External Affairs), enclosure to letter from Tarak Nath Das to Giuseppe Tucci.

between our two countries, both culturally and in practical terms". Tucci proposed that any Indian University that might wish to send an invitation of this kind, it should do so "via private channels... in view of the politically delicate nature" of such a move. The main concern was the possible reaction of the British authorities, keenly aware of the political implications of such exchanges.

Tucci went on to describe Moonje, due shortly in Rome:

Moonje is pro-British. He was a participant at the Conference of London, and he is likely to be selected as the person responsible for bringing about a reform of India's armed forces.

The Balilla organisation and pre-military training have been very much the centre of attention in India. These are urgent issues which India must come to terms with very soon...

Moonje... will soon be with us Italy... It is also in our own interest that he be given an opportunity to study how our organisations work, and he should receive all due assistance.³¹

4 – In Italy: the meeting with Mussolini

After stopping off in Prague and Vienna, Moonje set out for Italy on 10th March. After a one-day visit to Venice, on 12th March he went on to Florence, where Miss Pommeret joined him the following day. He also met Tarak Nath Das at Hotel Washington, where Das was staying with his wife. Moonje recalled the meeting as follows:

Dr. Das looks about 50 years of age and has preserved his health quite unlike a Bengali, but his wife...

We had long conversations: Dr. Das complained that he has ruined his whole life in the service of India from the time of agitation of the Partition of Bengal but no Indian who comes to Europe ever

³¹ ASMAE, Ibid.

cares to meet him or enquire about him. Much less help him. His wife took care to tell me that she helps him with her own money which she freely spends on the propaganda which Das carries on in favour of India's Freedom. He asked me to do certain things in India to enlist the sympathy (sic) of America. I said that he should write to me in detail in India and I shall do my best.³²

Apart from this meeting, Moonje spent his journey in Florence in sightseeing. On 14th March he left for Rome, where he put up at the hotel *Albergo Venezia*.

On 16th March, he went to the British Embassy where he met the ambassador. The ambassador contacted immediately the Foreign Office, applied for the authorisations Moonje required to visit the military schools and requested a meeting with Mussolini. The required visits were to the *Scuola Militare di Roma* (Rome Military School), *Scuola di Cultura Fisica di Roma* (Rome School of Physical Culture), the *Ospedale Militare di Roma* (Rome Military Hospital), the *Accademia Navale di Livorno* (Livorno Naval Academy), C.R.E.M. at La Spezia, the *Scuola dei Cadetti* (Cadets School) at Caserta, and the *Scuola per meccanici* (Mechanics School) at Capua.³³

Moonje met Tucci during the afternoon of 16th March. In his notebook, Moonje wrote a colourful, but unflattering portrait of this, to his mind, rather pretentious Italian scholar:

Proff. (sic) Tucci was introduced to me by letter by Dr Taraknath Das. He know (sic) Sanskrit well and tries to speak on occasions in Sanskrit. He was for 5 years in India travelling in Tibet and Nepal, collecting manuscripts in Buddhistic philosophy and literature of which he has got a fine collection which he calls unique in Europe. His face did not impress me; neither his manner of conversation or acting which appeared to me as fussy and

³² NMML, Moonje papers, microfilm, Diary, r.n.1, 1926-31

³³ ASMAE, Gab. 47, Pos.7, Udienze (meetings), 1930-33, b.27, letter (in French) from British Embassy to Signor Rossi Longhi, *Ministero degli Affari Esteri* (Ministry of External Affairs), 16.3.31.

sentimental. He said he loves India as his home of culture and though a Roman Catholic by birth, he is practically, he said, he is (sic) a Buddhist. He has converted one of his rooms into something looking like a temple with the image of Buddha and several other images of Gods and Goddesses in the Buddhistic mythology (sic). He is at present editing a Buddhistic manuscript which he describes as of rare excellence...

The Professor promised to see the Foreign Minister this evening to secure permission for my visiting the military schools...³⁴

On 17th March, Moonje met the War Minister, who informed him that he would be able to visit a number of military schools the following day. On 18th March, the Departmental Staff of the Ministry of External Affairs informed Moonje that head of the government would receive him the following day, at 6.30 p. m.³⁵

On 18th March, Moonje, started his day with a visit to St. Peter's church and the Military Museum. In the afternoon, in the company of the Colonel at the Supreme Command, Gandin, Moonje visited the *Collegio militare* (Military College). Moonje observed

It is an Institution for the training of Cadets. It gives both Civil and Military Education. Military training is compulsory for every Italian. We saw the boys under physical training and drill. It did not impress me. The discipline and organisation are not so strict as in Sandhurst. The boys too did not appear so well developed physically as the British, French or the Germans. In short the general atmosphere did not strike us as that of the Sandhurst...³⁶

He did not know that the best had yet to come.

Compulsory military training later on became a *leitmotiv* in

³⁴ NMML, Moonje papers, microfilm, Diary, r.n.1, cit.

³⁵ ASMAE, Gab.47, cit., n. 1102, 18.3.31, answer to request no. 1078, submitted 16.3.31 by Gabinetto del Ministro (Minister's Departmental Staff): Moonje mentions this document in his private diary.

³⁶ NMML, Moonje papers, microfilm, Diary, r.n.1, cit.

Moonje's engagement in favour of the "Indianisation" of the Indian army. In several occasions, he underlined the necessity to introduce compulsory military training in India.

The next day Moonje visited the *Scuola Centrale di Educazione Fisica* (Central School of Physical Education) and the *Accademia Fascista di Educazione Fascia* (Fascist Academy of Fascist Training), where he saw fencing and jujitsu matches. He then went to the Olympic Stadium, at the time under construction, which, the colonel assured him, would soon be the largest in Europe. Moonje then visited the Mussolini Forum, also under construction.

Finally, after lunch, Moonje visited the *Balilla* organisations, the *Legione Marinara Caio Duilio* (Navy Legion Caio Duilio), with youths from the *Balilla* and *Avanguardisti* organisations, and the *Legione Monti*, this too with youths from the *Balilla* and *Avanguardisti* organisations. Here he witnessed ordinary physical training displays and training with rifles and machine guns.

After these visits, Moonje began to take a greater interest in these institutions, and was full of praise for the paramilitary exercises he had seen:

The Balilla Institutions and the conception of the whole organisation have appealed to me most, though there is still not discipline and organisation of high order. The whole idea is conceived by Mussolini for the military regeneration of Italy. Italians, by nature, appear to be ease-loving and non-martial like the Indians generally. They have cultivated, like Indians, the works of peace and neglected the cultivation of the art of war. Mussolini saw the essential weakness of his country and conceived the idea of the Balilla organisation.³⁷

Moonje, too, like other Indian political exponents and intellectuals, pointed to certain similarities between Italian and Indian society,

³⁷ NMML, Ibid.

between the character of respective populations and similar factors prevailing in both societies.

He digressed at length upon the meaning of the term *Balilla*. It was the nickname of a young Genoese patriot who had provoked a revolt against the invaders by throwing a stone at an Austrian. This episode must have held some special message for Moonje, who pointed out that

This organisation is therefore given this name of Balilla to infuse the spirit of patriotism and love of independence amongst the boys and girls of Italy³⁸

He then added a few notes on compulsory paramilitary training

This Balilla training is practically compulsory and the State is the most influential patron. The State provides a part of the fund, while the public generally, in appreciation of the movement subscribe large and small amounts. Nothing better could have been conceived for the military organisation of Italy.

Moonje returned to the theme of cultural affinities between Italy and India.

The name Fascist is derived from a Latin proverb which means that a small sticks (sic), so long as they are separate from each other, can be easily broken but when they are tread (sic) together into a bundle, they become unbreakable. There is a Sanskrit proverb conveying the same meaning i.e. a blade of grass is of no account but when several such are wound up into a rope they acquire such strength that they can tie an elephant to a post.³⁹

³⁸ NMML, Ibid.

³⁹ NMML, Ibid.

About the symbol of the 'fascio', the fasces, and its meaning:

The idea of Fascism vividly brings out the conception of unity amongst people. India and particularly Hindu India need some such Institution for the military regeneration of the Hindus: so that the artificial distinction so much emphasised by the British of martial and non-Martial classes amongst the Hindus may disappear. Our Institution of *Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sangh* of Nagpur under Dr Hedgewar is of this kind, though quite independently conceived. I will spend the rest of my life in developing and extending this institution of Dr Hedgewar all trough out (sic) the Maharashtra and other provinces.⁴⁰

This passage is particularly meaningful, for at least three reasons. In the next pages it will be seen as Moonje, once back to India, started to improve the RSS and its strength and to found a military school that was strictly connected with the RSS. Secondly, this record is one of the evidences (others will be examined in the next pages) that Moonje was the connecting element between the RSS and the Hindu Mahasabha. Finally, this record provides a clear evidence that after his trip to Italy and his visit to Italian paramilitary bodies, Moonje modelled the RSS according to the features of the fascist organisations.

The diary goes on with the description of the *Balilla* organisation. Moonje was most impressed when Col. Gandin informed him that 7,500 youths received basic military training in Italy:

I was charmed to see boys and girls well dressed in their naval and military uniforms undergoing simple exercises of physical training and forms of drill... I was very much impressed with the conception of the movement.⁴¹

⁴⁰ NMML, Ibid.

⁴¹ NMML, Ibid.

Toward the end of 1931, Gandhi, too, saw the Balilla at work and, unlike Moonje, was not impressed.⁴²

Oddly enough, Moonje forgot to mention his meeting with Mussolini that day, but he gave a detailed account on 20th March. Given the importance of the document, it is entirely reproduced here.

I forgot to mention in my yesterday's note that I got a letter dated 18th from the Foreign Office at Rome saying that H.E. Premier Signor Mussolini will be pleased to see me at Palazzo Venezia at 6.30 p. m. on 19th. Accordingly I went with the Colonel quite in time to the palace. Miss Pommeret brushed my cap and coat and trousers and cleaned my boots with her own hands. I expressed my gratefulness to her for her solicitude that I may appear smart and well dressed before the much-talked of Italian personality and statesman as a representative of Indian aspiration. The Palace is one of the old historic buildings and has big halls. I was soon called in. Signor Mussolini was sitting alone at his table at one of the corners of one of the big halls. As soon as I was announced at the door, he got up and walked up to the door to receive me. I shook hands with him saying that I am Dr Moonje. He knew everything about me and appeared to be closely following the events of the Indian struggle for freedom. He seemed to have great respect for Gandhi. He sat down in front of me on another chair in front of his table and was conversing with me for quite half an our (sic). He asked me about Gandhi and his movement and pointedly asked me a question – "If the Round Table Conference will bring about peace

⁴² Much has already been written on Gandhi's visit to Italy, and it will not be dealt with here, apart from the following brief summary. Gandhi was in Italy from 11th to 13th December 1931, he too on his return from the Round Table Conference. The Mahatma met the *duce* and talked briefly with him. He met various personages in Rome and visited the *Opera Nazionale Balilla*. He watched the *Avanguardisti* being drilled, listened to fascist anthems, and was welcomed by guards of honour. As the champion of non-violence, Gandhi was somewhat disconcerted by all this. He then made no reference to his Roman journey at any time thereafter. Gino Scarpa had organised the visit. For a systematic, detailed account of the visit, see G. Sofri, *Gandhi in Italia*, cit. For an unusual behind-the-scenes account of the meeting between the *duce* and Gandhi, see Mario Prayer, *L'intervista Gandhi-Mussolini: pagine italiane dal diario di Mahadev Desai*, in "Storia Contemporanea", February 1992.

between India and England". I said that if the British would honestly desire to give us an equal status with other dominions of the Empire, we shall have no objection to remain peacefully and loyally within the Empire: otherwise the struggle will be renewed and continued. Britain will gain and be able to maintain her premier position amongst the European Nations if India is friendly and peaceful towards her and India can not be so unless she is given Dominion Status on equal terms with other Dominions. Signor Mussolini appeared impressed by this remark of mine. Then he asked me if I have visited the University. I said I am interested in the military training of boys and have been visiting the Military Schools of England France and Germany. I have now come to Italy for the same purpose and I am very grateful to say that the Foreign office and the War office have made good arrangements for my visiting these Schools. I just saw this morning and afternoon the Balilla and the Fascist Organisations and I was much impressed. Italy needs them for her development and prosperity. I do not see anything objectionable though I have been frequently reading in the newspapers not very friendly criticism about them and about your Excellency also.

Signor Mussolini – What is your opinion about them?

Dr Moonje – Your Excellency, I am very much impressed. Every aspiring and growing nation needs such organisations. India needs them most for her military regeneration. During the British Domination of the last 150 years, Indians have been waved away from the military profession but India now desires to prepare herself for undertaking the responsibility for her own defence and I am working for it. I have already started an organisation of my own, conceived independently with similar objectives. I shall have no hesitation to raise my voice from the public platform both in India and England whenever occasion may arise in praise of your Balilla and Fascist organisations. I wish them good luck and every success.

Signor Mussolini – who appeared very pleased – said – Thanks but yours is an uphill task. However I wish you every success in return.

Saying this he got up and I also got up to take his leave. I brought forward my hand to wish him good bye but he said – Not yet, I

will see you off at the door. He walked up to the door and warmly shook hands with me wishing me good bye and good luck. I walked out of the room and the door was closed on me.

So ended my memorable interview with Signor Mussolini, one of the great men of the European world. He is a tall man with broad face and double chin and broad chest. His face shows him to be a man of strong will and powerful personality. I have noted that Italians love him. I was told by Colonel that when the Fascist Revolution succeeded and Mussolini marched on Rome with his Fascist organisation and over throwing the former Govt. became himself the Premier, he called on the King and said – I am your most loyal and obedient servant. How noble and how selflessly patriotic!⁴³

It should be taken for granted that, as with the meeting with Gandhi,⁴⁴ Mussolini and Moonje spoke in English together.

On 20th March the visits went on. The first was to the *Scuola Militare Centrale*, in Civitavecchia, which included training classes for infantry and officers and engineering courses. On his way from a place to another, Moonje could observe the countryside around Rome. His remarks on the people are of some interest. Once more, the theory of specific affinities between India and Italy, was foremost in his mind.

... The country-side and the country-people not very different from the Indian country-people and country-side. They are like the Indians simple and not so imperialist as the English. Agriculture is done both by horse and by oxen but the village headmen or owner of agriculture and some times shepherds also were seen to be riding their country horses while supervising the agricultural works of labourers or tending the sheep. Our Indian agriculturists have entirely given up horse-riding. It is a pity. We must carry on a propaganda for reviewing horse riding.⁴⁵

⁴³ NMML, Moonje papers, microfilm, Diary, r.n.1, cit.

⁴⁴ G. Sofri, *Gandhi in Italia*, cit., p. 59.

⁴⁵ NMML, Ibid.

Italy was less organised and disciplined than Britain. Moonje considered Italy a still tradition-bound nation and, compared with more advanced European nations, one he could identify with more easily.

That same day, Moonje visited the *Scuola di Cavalleria* (Cavalry School) at Tor di Quinto, near Rome, and on 21st March he had a tourist sightseeing of the capital, in the company of Colonel Gandin and Miss Pommeret. On the same evening he left for Naples, where he visited the schools at Caserta and Capua. On 23rd March, Moonje boarded the *Aquileia*, bound for Bombay, arriving 7th April.

Tucci met Moonje the following June, and noted:

For the preparation of the masses, the Indian leaders want to import fascist techniques of organisation. Dr. Munji came to Italy after the Conference of London to study the Balilla and our youth enrolment. The Balilla has aroused considerable interest in India, but the only information they have is second hand. It is quite clear how important a fascist youth organisation in India would be to us.

Also, with regard to the army, the general impression is that Munji will become the Minister of War in India. Over and above his specific role as Minister of War, we must keep an eye on this movement. We must forge links with the leaders of this movement and be prepared for all eventualities. A free India will have to re-organise and fit out its army.⁴⁶

To sum up, a few more words should be spent on Moonje's meeting with Mussolini. The *duce* seemed to be careful. Above all else, he was interested in sounding out the nationalists and their stance with regard to Great Britain. This was not a time for concrete proposals. There was nothing official on Moonje's trip to Italy or his meeting with the *duce*. Unfortunately, as opposed to the Ghandi meeting, and indeed most Mussolini's audiences, there is no official account of this

⁴⁶ ASMAE, Archivio Scuole, 1929-35, b.858, cit., 29.6.31 to an unidentified 'commendatore', probably Trabalza.

exchange. Although the meeting lasted even longer than that between Mussolini and Gandhi, nothing particularly significant appears to have transpired. The fact that Moonje met the *duce* is an important aspect for the Indian historiography. Furthermore, the nameless organisation “quite independently conceived” mentioned by Moonje during the conversation with Mussolini could only be the RSS. It is interesting to see Moonje presenting the RSS as his own creation. His links with the RSS had always been close, and the alliance had strengthened in the meantime. Firstly, Hedgewar grew up, as it were, under the Moonje’s protective wing.⁴⁷ It was Moonje who maintained the young Hedgewar and brought him into his own household when he had no one to turn to, and Moonje who sent Hedgewar to the National Medical College in Calcutta, rather than have him take up an academic career. In Calcutta, Hedgewar was to receive training in revolutionary action under the watchful eye of trusted Bengali militants.⁴⁸ The ties between Moonje and Hedgewar were meant to last, and deeply influenced both Moonje’s and Hedgewar’s later decisions and experiences in the political arena. From 1927, when Moonje became the chairman of the Hindu Mahasabha, the two organisations became even closer. Moonje invited the RSS to attend the annual meeting held at Ahmedabad and put its militia through its paces in public. On this occasion, Hedgewar managed to meet up with Hindu Mahasabha leaders from all over India.⁴⁹ Furthermore, Hedgewar was secretary of the Hindu Mahasabha between 1926 and 1931.⁵⁰ Relations between these two organisations reached their high point during Moonje’s vice-presidency of the Hindu Mahasabha (1931-1933).⁵¹

⁴⁷ Walter K. Andersen, Shridhar D. Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Hindu Revivalism*, New Delhi, 1987, p. 31.

⁴⁸ Deshpande-Ramaswami, cit., p. 14-32. According to the two authors, Hedgewar’s role was as intermediary between the Anushilan Samiti and revolutionary groups in Nagpur.

⁴⁹ Andersen-Damle, op. cit., p. 39.

⁵⁰ NAI, Home Poll. Dept., 28/8/1942, Intelligence report, headed Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh, dated 7 March 1942.

⁵¹ IO, L/1/1/1465, biographical note, “Dr. Balkrishna Shivram Moonje. (Vice-President of the Hindu Mahasabha)”, undated, enclosed with a letter from the Information Depart-

The meeting between Moonje and Mussolini was bound to influence future developments within the Hindu nationalist movement. However, it is odd that nothing immediate came out of that meeting as far as the fascist regime was concerned. True, another important member of the Hindu Mahasabha, Madan Mohan Malaviya, did travel to Italy in December 1931 with the Mahatma Gandhi. It is not known if he attended the meeting with Mussolini. In any case, the press, which concentrated on Gandhi, ignored Malaviya, and his presence is an almost completely unknown detail, both in India and Italy.⁵²

Although there was no immediate follow-up to Moonje's Italian trip, its impact on the future development of Hindu militancy can hardly be underestimated.

5 – “Militarize Hindu Society”

Back in India, Moonje kept his promise, and immediately set about his projects for the foundation of a military school and the re-organisation of militant Hindus in Maharashtra. He wasted no time. As soon as he reached Poona, he was interviewed by *The Maharashtra*. Regarding military reorganisation of the Hindu community, he stressed the need to ‘indianize’ the Army and expressed the hope that conscription would become compulsory and an Indian would be put in charge of the Defence Ministry. He also made clear references to Italy and Germany:

In fact, leaders should imitate the Youth movement of Germany and the Balilla and Fascist organisations of Italy. I think they are eminently suited for introduction in India, adapting them to suit the special

ment, 8.4.42, signed Miss F. M. Sinton, to C. M. Green, Reuter.

⁵² G. Sofri, op. cit., p. 30 and p. 33.

conditions. I have been very much impressed by these movements and I have seen their activities with my own eyes in all details.⁵³

Fascism soon became a subject of public debate and Hedgewar himself was among the promoters of a campaign in favour of the militarization of the Indian society. On 31st January 1934, Hedgewar chaired a conference dealing with fascism and Mussolini, organised by Kavde Shastri. Moonje's speech closed the event.⁵⁴

A few months later, on 31st March 1934, a meeting was arranged between Moonje, Hedgewar, and Laloo Gokhale. The subject was, again, how to militarily organise the Hindus along Italian and German lines:

Laloo – Well you are the president of the Hindu Sabha and you are preaching Sanghathan of Hindus. It is ever possible for Hindus to be organised?

I said – You have asked me a question of which exactly I was thinking of late. I have thought out a scheme based on Hindu Dharm Shastra which provides for standardization of Hinduism throughout India... But the point is that this ideal can not be brought to effect unless we have our own swaraj with a Hindu as a Dictator like Shivaji of old or Mussolini or Hitler of the present day in Italy and Germany. But this does not mean that we have to sit with folded hands untill (sic) some such dictator arises in India. We should formulate a scientific scheme and carry on propaganda for it.⁵⁵

Moonje's trip to Italy, did not – as was instead the case with Subhas Chandra Bose and other nationalists – lead to any further co-operation

⁵³ “The Mahratta”, 12.4.31, *Dr. B. S. Moonje on Round Table Conference. Special interview for ‘The Mahratta’*, paragraph entitled *National Militia*. An account of Moonje's tour of Europe is to be found in M.N. Ghatate, *Dr. B. S. Moonje – Tour of European Countries*, in N. G. Dixit, ed. by, *Dharmaveer Dr. B. S. Moonje. Commemoration Volume. Birth Centenary Celebration 1872-1972*, Nagpur, 1972, p. 68.

⁵⁴ NMML, Moonje papers, microfilm, Diary, r.n.2, 1932-36.

⁵⁵ NMML, *Ibid.*

between Hindu nationalism and the fascist regime. However, these contacts were important from the ideological and organisational angle.

As already pointed out, immediately after his return to India, Moonje made the first steps toward the foundation of a military school. This was his main activity, besides the political militancy within the Hindu Mahasabha. Back from his European tour, he explained his plan to several personalities, and spoke about it in public occasions. The result of Moonje's activity was the foundation of the Bhonsla Military School, in 1934.⁵⁶ For this purpose, the same year, he began to work at the foundation of the Central Hindu Military Education Society, whose aim was

to bring about military regeneration of the Hindus and to fit Hindu youths for undertaking the entire responsibility for the defence of their motherland⁵⁷

to educate them to the *Sanatan Dharma*, and to train them "in the science and art of personal and national defence".⁵⁸ It should be concluded that Moonje's programme was entirely devoted to Hindu society, and not to Indian society as a whole.

The other function of the Military Education Society was that of facilitating the diffusion of military education and supporting the foundation of new schools. At the time of the foundation of the school and the Society, Moonje publicly admitted that his idea of militarily reorganising Hindu society was inspired by the "Military Training Schools of England, France, Germany and Italy".⁵⁹ Moreo-

⁵⁶ Moonje had already shown some interest in the question of military education by the end of 1920's. He was in favour of the Indianization of the army. In 1927 he worked at the foundation of the Aeroclub of India. In 1929 he was appointed to the selection committee examining candidates to Sandhurst Military Academy. In the same year he founded the Rifle Association in Nagpur. NMML, Moonje papers, microfilm, Letters, r.n. 7, 1926-28.

⁵⁷ NMML, Moonje papers, Subject files, n.24, 1932-36, document entitled "The Central Military Education Society", undated, most probably written in 1935.

⁵⁸ NMML, Ibid.

⁵⁹ NMML, Moonje papers, Subject files, n. 23, 1934-36, Report of the progress of the

ver, there is an explicit reference to fascist Italy and nazi Germany in a document circulated by Moonje among those influential personalities who might be expected to support the foundation of the school.⁶⁰ Right from the first lines it was stated that

This training is meant for qualifying and fitting our boys for the game of killing masses of men with the ambition of winning Victory with the best possible casualties (sic) of dead and wounded while causing the utmost possible to the adversary.⁶¹

Moonje does not give any clear cut indication as to his "adversary", was it an external enemy, the British, or the 'historical' internal Muslim enemy.

A lengthy dissertation follows, on the relation between violence and non-violence. In it, many examples from Indian history and Hindu holy books are mentioned, all drawn on to justify the idea of organised violence and militarism. On the contrary, non-violence was considered a cowardly form of abdication of responsibility.

Moonje's views corresponded almost perfectly with Mussolini's:

... The same thought is repeated though in a more forceful and direct language by Signor Mussolini, the maker of modern Italy. When he says:
 "Our desire for peace and collaboration with Europe is based on millions of steel bayonets".⁶²

He went on quoting Mussolini's *Doctrine of Fascism*,

"I absolutely disbelieve in perpetual peace which is detrimental

Work of the Society from 1st January, 1935 to 15th August 1936.

⁶⁰ NMML, Moonje papers, Subject files, n.25, 1935, "Preface to the Scheme of the central Hindu Military Society and its military school". Document undated, but certainly drafted in 1935.

⁶¹ NMML, Ibid.

⁶² NMML, Ibid.

and negative to the fundamental virtues of man, which only by struggle reveal themselves in the light of the sun”.

“War alone brings up to its highest tension all human energy and puts the stamp of nobility upon the peoples who have the courage to meet it”.

“It [?] Fascism – believes neither in the possibility nor the utility of perpetual peace. It thus repudiates the doctrine of Pacifism which is born of renunciation of the struggle and an act of cowardice in the face of sacrifice”.⁶³

Moonje added that these considerations did not aim at legitimating a climate of civil war. As opposed to the Indian situation, where the British were responsible for the maintenance of the public order, peace should rise from the self-defence of a militarily organised nation and not from the fear of stronger enemies.

Italy and Germany offered further examples of this belief:

His Majesty, the King of Italy, says:

“Italy wants the longest possible period of peace but the greatest guarantee for a peace is the efficiency of the Italian armed forces. The Government was striving to augment the efficiency of forces, which depends upon the cadres, materials and the unity of command. Efforts must be made to improve the physique of the Italian youths and their preliminary training in order to raise the level of soldierly efficiency”.⁶⁴

Moonje also quoted a booklet entitled *Wehrwissenschaft* (Military Science), by Ewald Banse, an obscure professor at the Brunswick Technical High School:

“The starting point of the book is that war is inevitable and certain and that it is imperative to know as much about it and to be as efficient as possible... the mind of the nation, from childhood

⁶³ NMML, Ibid.

⁶⁴ NMML, Ibid.

on must be impregnated and familiarized with the idea of war”, because, the Professor says:
 “The dying warrior dies more easily when he knows that his blood is ebbing for his National God”.⁶⁵

The spirit of the last sentence is surprisingly akin to the one of the main principles of Hindu nationalism.

For practical examples, Moonje returned again to the example of Italy and its military and paramilitary organisations, and reported what he had seen with his own eyes. He described in detail the structure of the *Figli della Lupa* (‘She Wolf’s Children’), the *Balilla* and the *Avanguardisti*. He asserted that these organisations could provide paramilitary training to the male population from the age of 8 up to 18, when the youths became ‘Young Fascists’. Italy was therefore in a position of having “command of 6,000,000 trained and disciplined men ready to face any emergency”.

The result was that

The Balillas are taught to build up moral character and take the first steps towards becoming soldiers.⁶⁶

As a consequence,

There will thus be no longer any distinction between the citizen and the soldier between the civilian and the man in uniform.⁶⁷

Of course, nowadays it is well known that, in spite of a supposedly remarkable number of militarily trained citizens, Italy lost the war. Moonje was apparently unaware of the true facts. Military training in Italy was poor. The determination of the Italian people was mostly in Mussolin's imagination, and social cohesion at a low ebb.

⁶⁵ NMML, Ibid.

⁶⁶ NMML, Ibid.

⁶⁷ NMML, Ibid.

Fascist ideas had been taken up by many Hindu nationalists, at least in Maharashtra. The above mentioned article had been printed in the form of a pamphlet and distributed among the people Moonje tried to involve in his project, and, in all likelihood, also reached a wider public.⁶⁸ Fascism must have met with a certain amount of approval among Hindu and radical political circles, although it is hard to establish how popular it was.

The idea behind the school was "the military regeneration of the Hindus irrespective of their castes or sects".⁶⁹ Moonje was concerned that the so called "martial races and castes" might be weakening:

Looking at the present conditions of Hindus from this point of view, it cannot be denied that the physical development of our boys is at a low-ebb, and the martial instinct is practically extinct in most of them.⁷⁰

This, according to Moonje, was a threat to Hindu society, especially in comparison with the martial qualities of the Muslims, so well represented in the army.

The concern over the lack of military training among Hindus was due to the fact that the majority of the population was Hindu. Hence,

no movement for Swaraj could be said to be soundly based where the largest and most influential community, the Hindus, is designated as non-martial.⁷¹

Initially, Moonje seemed to believe that the Hindu Mahasabha would serve as the main means of military training among the Hindus. This idea was illustrated in the document, "General Scheme of the Hindu Mahasabha Military Schools for the Military rejuvenation

⁶⁸ The printed copy of this script is in NAI, Jayakar papers, microfilm, f.n.6, r.n.2.

⁶⁹ NMML, Moonje papers, f.n.24, 1932-36, "General Scheme of the Hindu Mahasabha Military Schools", also undated, but most probably written in 1935.

⁷⁰ NMML, Moonje papers, f.n.23, cit., "Prospectus of Bhonsla Military School Nagpur Established 1934".

⁷¹ NMML, Ibid.

of Hindus".⁷² Although undated the document can be placed in the early 1930's, perhaps 1932. It can be considered an early piece of Moonje's theorisation on military education. This theoretical construct would later find a practical application at the school set up by Moonje as a model for similar bodies of varying sizes and importance emerging in the main centres in Maharashtra, like Nagpur, Poona and Nasik.

Moonje's school was in all respects like a secondary school. Over and above the traditional curriculum of the Anglo-Indian education system, however, it included

compulsory training in physical exercises, organised games, infantry drill, rifle practice, swimming, riding, horsemanship, the indigenous exercises and arts of self-defence, such as wrestling, lathi play, sword play etc., and generally in the science and art of modern warfare in its elementary aspect under trained teachers.⁷³

In Moonje's intention these "trained teachers" should be recruited from the "Hindu Sewak Sangh",⁷⁴ to make sure that they were "imbued with the spirit of the Hindu movement inaugurated by the Hindu Mahasabha".⁷⁵

Moral teachings, based on Hindu traditions and on Indian "sacred books", first and foremost, the Bhagavadgita, but also the Ramayana and Mahabharata, not to mention the works of the masters of epic and devotional literature (Ramdas, Tulsidas and Tukaram). It was hoped that this literature would "inculcate ideas of common brotherhood of 'Purn-Hindutva'" in the youths.⁷⁶

⁷² NMML, Moonje papers, f.n.24, cit.

⁷³ NMML, Ibid.

⁷⁴ It is not clear whether Moonje, referring to the Hindu Sewak Sangh, was thinking of the RSS or Hindu militants in general, including voluntary Hindu associations.

⁷⁵ NMML, Moonje Papers, f.n.24, cit.

⁷⁶ NMML, Moonje papers, f.n.23, cit., "Prospectus", cit.

The school should be conceived like a military camp, in which strict discipline was to prevail.

Moonje reckoned that an institute for 300 youngsters, with facilities such as a swimming pool and stables, would cost approximately 150,000 Rs. The school was to be financed by donations and monthly fees paid by the students (from 20 to 300 Rs).⁷⁷

The public relations campaign aimed at potential sponsors reached its high point in 1936. During this period, Moonje had established contacts with various royal families from Indore, Travancore, Bikaner, Vizagpathnam, Kashmir and Barodacol. An appeal was also made to the Maharajas of Mahabaleshwar, Miraj and Patiala, the princess Kamala Devi of Gaikwad, as well as the Maharajas of Udaipur, Jaipur, Jodhpur, Bundi, Koha, Dholpur and Palampur, some of whom made donations.⁷⁸ At the same time, Moonje had established contacts with a number of British personalities, especially in army circles, where Moonje sought technical advice. One such contact was Major Rend, Military Secretary of the Commander-in-Chief, General Sir Robert Cassels, with whom Moonje had entered into correspondence. There may have been some fellow feeling between the two. Cassels was Moonje's superior. Moonje was indeed a member of the examinations board of Sandhurst Academy in India. Moonje was interested, above all, in establishing contacts with the Viceroy, Lord Willingdon first, and then Lord Linlithgow. Cassels and the Viceroy made small dona-

⁷⁷ NMML, Moonje papers, f.n.24, cit., "General Scheme...", cit.

⁷⁸ NMML, Ibid., microfilm, Letters, r.n.11, Part I 1936-1947. Moonje corresponded with royal families between April and July 1936. On 24.7.36 in a letter to Ranade, he complained about the donations made by Marathi princes: "There is one more point that the Princes of Maharashtra should bear in mind in this respect and it is this that if the Maharashtra Princes were to pay such small donations as of Rs 1000/ then what right have we to expect higher donations from the Princes of Northern India and Kathiawar". The reason for Moonje's concern is disclosed in the previous lines of the document: "... if for want of money the enterprise were to fail the whole Maharashtra and the whole Hindu Community would be thoroughly discredited before the eyes of the government". Therefore, "I had appealed to the Princes of Maharashtra for at least Rs 5000/ each".

tions (100 Rs) and declared that they were on the whole in favour of the project.⁷⁹

Apart from the difficulty to raise sufficient funds, Moonje had to face other difficulties. Originally, the school was to be in Nagpur, but there was no land available. At last, a site was found in Nasik, and building began in early 1937. The Bhonsla Military School was inaugurated in the spring-summer of 1938.⁸⁰

Moonje had finally reached his objective. Of course, the context was different, but the values and practices that Moonje considered the roots of military education were more or less those of the *akharas* and the secret societies. The RSS had contributed to the dissemination of these ideas among Hindus, although as an organisation, it maintained a secretive character and strict selection procedures. The Institutions for military education, the RSS and other bodies had complementary roles

⁷⁹ NMML, *Ibid.*, 18.3.36 from Moonje to Major Rend and 19.3.36; from New Delhi, to Bertand Glovey. Moonje requested a meeting and mentioned a letter of introduction from the Viceroy's Private Secretary; New Delhi, 19.3.36, to General Sir Robert Cassels, with a general statement as to his intention to set up the school. Cassels sent a message of support with a small donation and Moonje thanked him. Press Statement 21.3.36, on the meeting with the Viceroy and the Viceroy's appreciation. Letter to the Viceroy, New Delhi, 22.3.26, in which Moonje thanked the Viceroy for the donation of 200 Rs. Press Statement 10.4.36, regarding Sir Robert Cassels' message of support to Moonje and Cassels' donation of 100 Rs. Sir Robert Cassels stated that schools of this kind would be vitally important for a future Indian Army. In a letter of 10.4.36 from Nagpur, Moonje wrote to Cassels thanking him for the cheque and informing him of the Press Statement. Letter, New Delhi, 19.4.36 to the Viceroy's Private Secretary and, enclosed, dated 19.4.36, a personal letter to Lord Linlithgow with a request for support for the school, as already done by his predecessor, Lord Willingdon. Regarding the position of the British authorities about the foundation of Moonje's military school, see D. Rekhade, *Bhonsla Military School*, in *Dharmaveer*, cit. p. 74.

⁸⁰ NAI, Jayakar papers, cit., letter from Moonje to Jayakar, 23.2.37 and undated letter with no heading, referring to the inauguration of the school. The correspondence reveals that Jayakar had made many donations (1,000 Rs in June 1936 and 10,000 Rs between summer 1937 and summer 1938: Moonje thanked Jayakar by letter on 7th June 1936, and in two letters, one also of 7.6.37 and the other dated 26.5.38. Moonje exhorted him also to make donations of 5,000 Rs each time. Since Jayakar was a leading figure of the Hindu Mahasabha, it is important to note that he was so much in favour of Moonje's plans for militarization and the military school. Finally, these financial details give an idea of the extent of the Hindu Mahasabha's involvement in the campaign for militarization.

and all contributed to disseminate among the largest possible part of the Marathi Hindu society traditional values and militant spirit.

The links between the RSS, the Hindu Mahasabha and the military institutions connected with Moonje were fairly close. Hedgewar was a member of the board of governors of the aforementioned Central Hindu Military Education Society,⁸¹ together with Jayakar, Kelkar, Aney and Khaparde (all leading members of the Hindu Mahasabha) and, of course, Moonje. The chairman was Shreeman Motilal Manakchand, also known as Pratap Seth, and the vice-chairman was Khaparde.⁸² The rules of this new society included a provision whereby if it were to be disbanded, all real estate and other properties including liquid assets and donated goods were to be devolved to the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh.⁸³

British sources confirm the existence of close links between Moonje and the RSS, as well as the fascist character of the latter. According to an Intelligence report of 1933, "Note on the Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh", Moonje had re-organised the Sangh in the Marathi speaking districts and in the Central Provinces in 1927. The report, describing the activity and the character of the RSS, warned that

It is perhaps no exaggeration to assert that the Sangh hopes to be in future India what the "Fascisti" are to Italy and the "Nazis" to Germany.⁸⁴

⁸¹ NMML, Moonje papers, microfilm, Letters, r.n.10, cit., Bombay, 20.8.35, to Vishvanath Rao Kelkar.

⁸² NAI, Jayakar papers, cit., "Constitution of the Central Hindu Military Education Society", appendix to description in summary form of "The Central Hindu Military Education Society", sent by Moonje to Jayakar as enclosure to a letter dated 9.7.35.

⁸³ "The Central Hindu Military Education Society", a copy of which is to be found among Jayakar's papers, as well as in NMML, Moonje papers, f.n.24, cit.

⁸⁴ NAI, Home Poll. Department, 88/33, 1933. This view is contrary to Jaffrelot's interpretation, according to which "As distinct from Nazism, the RSS's ideology treats society as an organism with a secular spirit, which is implanted not so much in the race as in a socio-cultural system... Finally, in contrast to both Italian fascism and Nazism the RSS does not rely on the central figure of the leader". Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, New Delhi, 1996, pp. 63-64.

The RSS had at this time 66 branches and approximately 6,000 members. Its influence was spreading toward the United Provinces and Bombay, and in July 1931 an office was opened up in Benares.

During the meeting of 24th – 26th September 1932, the Hindu Mahasabha passed a motion praising Hedgewar for his success in building up a strong Hindu organisation. The meeting urged RSS to open up offices throughout India. It was in fact noted that no new offices, as such, had actually been opened.

Furthermore, we learn from this paper firstly that the RSS, by its very nature, was opposed to Gandhian non-violence. We also learn that Hedgewar saw the RSS as a means of collective self-defence, while Moonje had other ideas:

Dr Moonje went even further by favouring offence rather than defence, and advocated a policy of “STRIKE FIRST”.⁸⁵

During the second round of the Bombay and Suburban Hindu Sabha Conference, held in Bombay on 23rd and 24th June 1934, the RSS came in for praise once more:

This conference congratulates Dr. Hedgewar of Nagpur, for the great service he has been rendering to the Hindu Cause by organising a volunteer corps called the ‘Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh’ wherein Hindu youths of all castes from Brahmins to the so called untouchables are being trained with a view to prepare the Hindus, the premier community in India, to be able to discharge their prime duty of undertaking the sole responsibility for the defence of India, with or without the cooperation with others. This Conference appoint (sic) the Committee (sic) of the following persons to carry on the work of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh in Bombay and Suburbs...⁸⁶

⁸⁵ NAI, Ibid.

⁸⁶ Maharashtra State Archives (hereinafter, MSA), Bombay, Home Special Dept., 355 (73) D pt. II, Report, “Second Session of the Bombay and Suburban Hindu Sabha Conference”,

The list included 15 names, among which N. D. Savarkar and N. C. Kelkar. This is further documentary evidence of close and warm relations between the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS.

The developments described above indicate that Moonje's militarization plans had been put into practice. Both the Hindu Mahasabha (though the personal efforts of one of its leading figures) and the RSS contributed to Moonje's cause. It is also quite clear that these initiatives were all vitally important elements of a general campaign aiming at creating militant Hindus, and indeed more and more Hindus responded to the call over the following decade.

It is, however, capable of being used for any purpose the organisers decide on, and is a potential danger. The Sangh is essentially an anti-Muslim organisation aiming at exclusively Hindu supremacy in the country.⁸⁷

Finally, it is clear who was the "adversary" mentioned in the document quoted above: the internal Muslim enemy, rather than possible external enemies, and much more than the British rulers.

Bombay City, S.B., June 25th.

⁸⁷ NAI, Home Pol. Department, 88/33, 1933, "Note on the Rashtrya Swayam Sewak Sangh", cit.



CHAPTER 3

Italy's Indian policy during and after the Ethiopian war

1 – Subhas Chandra Bose and fascist Italy

Over the months and years that followed Moonje's visit, a number of the most important Indian leaders also came to Italy. Their impressions and attitudes varied considerably. Gandhi was perhaps the only visitor whose only desire was to see first hand what was going on in Italy, and he was more alarmed than fascinated by the regime. No doubt, Subhas Chandra Bose's attitude when he visited Italy in 1933 was more in line with Moonje's.

Bose left Bombay on 22nd February 1933 on the Lloyd Triestino steamship, *Gange*, arriving in Venice on 6th March, after a brief stop-over in Brindisi.¹

Bose had been a long-time admirer of the fascist regime and the changes it had purportedly brought about. In all likelihood, Bose aimed at establishing contacts with the fascist government. The contact established by Italian representatives and personalities with Indian intellectual and political circles, as described above, may well have led to Bose's involvement.

Subhas Bose was appointed Mayor of Calcutta on 23rd September 1930. That year he had been arrested and freed a few days before taking office. As Mayor, Bose was able to promote a vaguely socialistic programme, to improve basic services and the living conditions of the people. Bose's campaign was inspired by the indications provided

¹ NAI, Subhas Chandra Bose papers, Letters from S. C. Bose to Divekar, 15.3.33. As yet, little is known about Divekar. He sent funds from India to Bose in Europe and provided assistance during his journey.

by C. R. Das in 1924 and aimed at improving schools, building new houses, roads, and infrastructures. He devoted particular attention to the needs of the poor. The model was that of the advanced societies of Europe, and, above all, those governed by socialists. In his inaugural speech, Bose made an explicit reference to fascism, which he considered a form of socialism, its perfect version indeed:

... I would say that we have here in this policy and programme a synthesis of what Modern Europe calls Socialism and Fascism. We have here the justice, the equality, the love which are the basis of Socialism, and combined with that we have the efficiency and discipline of Fascism as it stands in Europe today.²

A few years later, in *The Indian Struggle*, Subhas elaborated his idea of a combination of the principles of socialism and fascism, as the bedrock of an ideal political and governmental system. Bose had always been an admirer of the western thought. During his imprisonment, he had access to English translations of two Italian political works, *Bolshevism, Fascism and Democracy* by Francesco Nitti, in the English edition of 1927, and Ivanoe Bonomi's *From Socialism to Fascism*, published in London in 1924.³ The negative aspects pointed out by these Italian intellectuals failed to shake Bose's positive attitude toward fascism. The negative features of fascism were not useful to the synthesis between the good sides of both, fascism and socialism, which Bose aimed at build up. Like the Marathi nationalists, Bose saw fascism as a means of creating an efficient organisation of society, based on order and discipline.

However superficial this view may have been, Bose shared none of the racist and communalistic ideas of the Hindu nationalists. On the other hand, he also criticised Jawaharlal Nehru's view, according to which the

² "Calcutta Municipality Gazzette" (CMG), 27.9.30, quoted by Leonard A. Gordon, *Brothers against the Raj. A Biography of Sarat & Subhas Chandra Bose*, New Delhi, 1990, p. 234.

³ Gordon, *Ibid.*, pp. 235 and 674-675.

world was faced with a choice between communism and fascism and that there was no compromise between these two systems. Bose was convinced that a synthesis between fascism and communism would take place in the future, creating a new era in world history. He felt that India might be the stage upon which this union might take place.

... the Indian awakening is organically connected with the march of progress in other parts of the world and facts and figures have been mentioned to substantiate that view. Consequently, there need to be no surprise if an experiment, of importance to the whole world, is made in India – especially when we have seen with our own eyes that another experiment (that of Mahatma Gandhi) made in India has roused profound interest all over the world. In spite of the antithesis between Communism and Fascism, there are certain traits common to both. Both Communism and fascism believe in the supremacy of the State over the individual. Both denounce parliamentary democracy. Both believe in party rule. Both believe in the dictatorship of the party and the ruthless suppression of all dissenting minorities. Both believe in a planned industrial reorganisation of the country. These common traits will form the basis of the new synthesis. That synthesis is called by the writer ‘Samyavada’ – an Indian word, which means literally ‘the doctrine of synthesis or equality’. It will be India’s task to work out this synthesis.⁴

Bose went on to explain why communism could never take root in India. Firstly, Communism had no sympathy for nationalism, whereas the Indian movement was a nationalistic movement. Some (but not all) economic principles of communism might enjoy considerable popularity in India. On the other hand, the communist anti-religious approach was totally inappropriate to the Indian context, where religion plays a prominent role.

⁴ Subhas Chandra Bose, *La lotta dell'India 1920-1934* (The Indian Struggle), first edition in Italian, translated and edited by ISMEO, Florence, 1942, pp. 300-301.

In a letter to Divekar, Bose very briefly summed up the theory of samyavada, describing it as the guideline for future political action in India.

You are quite right when you say that the present situation is extremely depressing. We are at the end of one phase of our movement and naturally when there is an ebb-tide, all the filth is exposed to your eyes.... The old parties are all played out. Our hope lies in a new party. That party may grow out the Congress Socialist Party or it may not. I believe that the present struggle between Communism and Fascism in Europe is bound to lead to a higher synthesis which I call Samyavada.⁵

On 17th January 1935, a second edition of Bose's book was published in India and London, in English. Scarpa mentioned the book in a note to the Foreign Office, and enclosed an article of 7th September 1934, *Fascism comes to India*.⁶ The Italian authorities were not only aware of Bose; but they also admired him.

The official reason for Bose's visit to Italy was to obtain medical treatment for the tuberculosis he had contracted in jail. The British authorities suspected that medical reasons was an excuse. They were uneasy at Bose's presence in Europe. They considered it very likely that Bose would soon get in touch with other Indian revolutionaries and plan activities potentially very harmful to British interests.⁷ At first, the British authorities tried to prevent his departure. However, later on they decided to authorise his departure for Europe.

⁵ NAI, Private papers, Subhas Chandra Bose papers, cit., letter to Divekar, 18.5.35.

⁶ ASMAE, AP, India, b.3, 1934-35, Fasc. Rapporti Politici (Political reports file), Appunto per la Dir. Gen. AP (Notes for Office of the Director General), Rome, 11.1.35; the enclosed article was published by *The Osaka Mainichi* and *The Tokyo Nichi Nichi*. This proves that Subhas Chandra Bose was already popular in Japan in this early stage of his liason with authoritarian political systems.

⁷ IO, L/P&J/7/792 Pt I, telegram no. 1646, 11.4.27 and noted from the Public and Judicial Department the Secretary of State, 15.12.32.

Bose records that he was warmly welcomed by the Indian community in Italy:

We reached Brindisi on the 5th March and on arrival I was greeted with a message of welcome and good wishes on behalf of the Hindustan Association of Rome.⁸

Bose was a celebrity not only among the Indians residents in Italy. Indeed he was well known also to the the Italian authorities, who treated him as an important guest:

Before we reached the Port, the agents of Lloyd Triestino Company who had arrived on board, came up to my cabin accompanied by the Purser and informed me that [he] had received instructions from Rome to look to my comforts at the time of disembarking and they wanted to know what they could do for me. Soon after this, the manager of Lloyd Triestino company also arrived on board and after welcoming me, informed me that he had instructions from the Italian consul to see that I was well looked after. The Customs formalities were waived in my favour and I could disembark at once and leave for my hotel.⁹

Bose was accompanied to his hotel by a representative of the shipping company and was greeted with military salutes along the way at two checkpoints.¹⁰ He was pleased at this welcome:

⁸ This and the following passages concerning Bose's arrival in Italy are to be found in Bose's letters to Divekar, NAI, Private papers, cit. Information on the relatively unresearched Hindustan Association in Rome is limited to a note drawn up by ISMEO which, we are informed, contributed to the founding of this group. See IO, L/P&S/12/81, Intelligence file dated 31.7.1933, enclosed with a letter of 6.8.33. The note, which provides detailed information on Gino Scarpa and Italian activities, is provided the appendix (document 2). This is the second part of the note of 15.6.31, cited above (see appendix, document 1). See also the minutes of the first meeting of the *Istituto per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente*, 26.5.33 (Fondazione Gentile, Enti, b.3 ISMEO, fasc. 9, Varie).

⁹ NAI, Private papers, cit.

¹⁰ These details were included in a letter to the Amrita Bazar Patrika published on 25.3.33. Another letter accompanied by a brief editorial comment, *Honoured in Land of Mussolini*,

Returning the salute, I began to wonder how strange it was that a man who had been harassed and persecuted by policemen in his own country should be saluted by policemen in a foreign land, where he was a stranger.¹¹

This reception, so different from the way Bose had been treated in his homeland, was probably bound to influence his later decision to turn to Italy for aid.

The day after his arrival and the various formalities, Bose was too weak and did not feel up to a visit to Venice. However, he could not avoid the journalists. Once more, Bose was surprised by his unsuspected celebrity:

What struck me was the remarkable grasp which the representatives of the Italian press had of the Indian situation and the fairly correct information which they had of the prominent public men in our country. The next day the Italian papers of Rome, Milan, Bologna, Florence and Venice came out with long notes on the Indian political situation.¹²

On 8th March, Bose left for Vienna, where he was welcomed by the local community of Indian students. Thus, Bose began his three-years journey in Europe.

Bose was in Germany in August 1933, where he paid a visit to the Italian Embassy in Berlin. D.B. Banerjea, a professor at Berlin University, accompanied him. An official of the Italian Embassy wrote a record of the visit:

provides a detailed account of Bose's stay in Italy. The letter and the editorial comment were published by *Liberty* (25.5.33). Regarding Bose's welcome by the Italian authorities: ASMAE, SP, India, b.3, cit. The Foreign Office, with express telegram n. 205974", 27.2.33, informed the Prefect of Venice that, according to the instructions received from the Italian Consul General in Calcutta, while in Italy Bose should be provided assistance "in a strictly non-official capacity". In his reply, the Prefect stated that he had delegated this task to the Director of the local branch of the insurance company, Lloyd Triestino (letter no. 619, dated 4.3.33).

¹¹ NAI, Private papers, cit.

¹² NAI, Ibid.

Mr Chandra Bose and Prof. Bannersea (sic) declared that they were not disciples either of Gandhi or of Tagore, since they did not believe either in the strategy of passive resistance or in civil disobedience. They were, instead, active revolutionaries. Obviously, I told them that, since these questions regarded the internal affairs of India, of course, I could make no comment.

They also told me that they wished to go to Rome and study fascism and the corporative system. They expressed a wish to meet up with the competent royal authorities to be facilitated in this task.¹³

A hand-written note dated 26th August 1933 contains the suggestion that Bose and Banerjea contact the propaganda office of the Ministry of Corporations, and that the Foreign Office be kept out of the affair. Another note, dated 28th August, confirms this plan:

telephone call to [...] Propaganda Office at the Ministry of Corporations with names of the visitors. I indicated that the visit should not be made officially known and that Bose's and Bannersea's (sic) requests should be sent on to those institutions of the Regime that they might wish to study. The Ministry of Corporations wants to know when to expect them in Rome.¹⁴

Toward the end of the year, Bose returned to Italy. He participated to the organisation of the Congress of Oriental Students, planned in coincidence with the inauguration of the *Istituto per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente* (Institute for Middle and Extreme Orient – ISMEO), in December 1933.¹⁵ Italian and English records do not contain much information on the subject. Italian authorities did not want that the British government came to know about their collaboration with a controversial person like Subhas. On the other hand, British authori-

¹³ ASMAE, SP, India, b.3, cit., “express telegram n.3374/1481”, from the Italian Embassy in Berlin to the Ministry of External Affairs, 11.8.33.

¹⁴ ASMAE, Ibid.

¹⁵ Both events have received much attention from Italian historians, especially in the essays cited above, by De Felice and Ferretti, respectively.

ties gave very little publicity to these facts, as proved by the very limited amount of strictly confidential records on the subject. According to a note dated 29th December 1933

His indirect involvement in the Congress was most useful since the Indians who received his aid and advice managed to hamper all efforts to turn the Congress into a prevalently Muslim organisation. They also insisted on Rome as their Permanent Office and on our collaboration.¹⁶

Bose had cooperated with Tucci to create this Permanent Office in Rome.¹⁷

The British authorities were aware of Italy's relations with Asian countries and observed carefully the developments behind-the-scenes of the *Oriental Students' Congress*. They constantly watched Bose's activities in Italy and in their informal notes to the British Foreign Office and the Italian Ministry of External Affairs they expressed concern over Bose's supposed pro-communist leanings, noticed also by the Italian authorities.¹⁸ The British informants described Bose's ties with international and Indian communist organisations and with M.N. Roy. However, the Italian authorities did not seem to be impressed by such information and Bose was given a free hand to meet Mussolini. At the end of December 1933 he requested and obtained a meeting with the *duce*. The meeting took place on 6th January 1934. The delay was due to the official visit in Rome of Sir John Simon, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. It was decided to postpone the meeting after his return to Britain.¹⁹

¹⁶ ASMAE, Gab. pos.7, Udienze, Subhas Chandra Bose. Regarding Bose's collaboration with the organisers of the first Congress is the subject see a note "Per Sua Eccellenza il Capo del Governo" (for His Excellency the Head of the Government) dated 23.1.35.

¹⁷ Gordon, op. cit. p. 278.

¹⁸ IO, L/P&S/12/107 and L/P&S/12/81, report from the British Ambassador in Rome to Sir John Simon of 2.2.34 (appendix, document 10 nell'originale) and a report on Scarpa and Italian activities, dated 31.7.1933. Again on Bose's political ideas, ASMAE, Gab. pos.7, cit., file in English headed "Subhas Chandra Bose", sent to the Foreign Office on 16.1.34.

¹⁹ ASMAE, Gab. pos.7, cit, Note of 29.12.33 and "Pro-Memoria" (Memorandum) drawn

Among Italian sources, there are no records about the meeting, but it is mentioned in a letter from Bose to Lothar Frank, who had been his host in Berlin:

Mussolini asked Subhas Bose during his conversation: 'Do you really and firmly believe that India will be free soon?' When Bose said 'yes', Mussolini asked him again: 'Are you for reformist or revolutionary methods for achieving Indian independence?' Bose said in reply that he preferred revolutionary to reformist methods. Mussolini said, 'Then indeed you have a chance.' Continuing the discussion, Mussolini told him: 'You must immediately prepare a plan for such a revolution and you must work continuously for its realisation'.²⁰

In 1934, Bose requested two more meetings with the *duce*. A second meeting took place on 28th April, while the third one should take place in November, but was called off since Bose had to return to India, because his father was dying.²¹

Bose's visits to Italy did not have an official character. However, the fact that Bose and Mussolini met so frequently, and the account of the first meeting, suggest that, as an erstwhile revolutionary himself, Mussolini must have nurtured a sincere fellow feeling for Bose. The choice of Bose, among other Indian leaders, as the spokesman of Indian nationalists in Italy, seems to depend mostly on Mussolini. In the following years, Mussolini considered Bose as the representative of Italy's "Indian policy". The *duce* did not forget Bose even at the odd time of the Italian Social Republic.²²

up by Aloisi for Starace, 29.12.33.

²⁰ Sisir Kumar Bose and Alexander Werth (ed), *A Beacon across Asia*, New Delhi, 1973, quoted by Gordon, op. cit., p. 278.

²¹ ASMAE, Gab. pos.7, cit, documents of April 1934 and letter from Bose to Mussolini, 29.11.34, accompanied by a note dated 3.12.34 addressed to the *duce*, with a very brief report on Bose. De Felice mentions these circumstances briefly on p. 1324-25 of the already article mentioned above. The article is somewhere imprecise, for instance when it reports that Bose had not attended the congress of December 1933. Not only was Bose there, but he was elected chairman of the congress.

²² The so called Social Republic represented the decline of Italian fascism, after 25th July

Italian authorities, and Mussolini himself, were interested in establishing lines of contacts with influential Congress leaders. The Congress was the only Indian political organisation they were truly interested in. They rightly reckoned the Congress to be the most representative body of the majority of Indians, and the only organisation that could oppose the British. The effectiveness of anti-British activities depended exclusively upon the involvement of the Congress.

During his first three years in Europe Bose primarily concerned with observing the situation and seek out potential Indian allies for Italy's "Indian policy". His early journeys for closer connections over the years.

2 – The Ethiopian war and its effects on Indian political environment

On 2nd October 1935, Italian troops invaded Ethiopia. As usual in highly dramatic circumstances, Mussolini announced the break out of the hostilities from the balcony of his headquarters in Palazzo Venezia, in Rome. He pronounced a strongly rhetoric speech.

Italy's unsatisfied claims to parts of the African continent ended with a war. Immediately after the outbreak of the hostilities, as promised in case of attack, the Society of the Nations imposed economic sanctions to Italy. Besides the sanctions, resumed during the summer of 1936, for several months the Italian invasion of Ethiopia obtained universal criticism. It was one of the most serious international crises Italy faced at that time.

It was precisely at this stage that close relations between the Italian government and Indian nationalist circles were to prove their worth.

1943. When the "Gran Consiglio" (the Grand Fascist Council) discharged Mussolini, several of his faithful comrades stood by the *duce* and followed him to Salò, on the Lake of Garda, where he set up his headquarters. Italy was thus cut in half. The north came under the control of the Fascist Republican Government (Italian Social Republic) and central and southern Italy came under the Badoglio government.

When Italy found herself in an uncomfortable situation, at the international level, especially in colonised countries,²³ the fascist regime choose to champion the cause of the oppressed peoples of the world. The Italian propaganda, at this time, had a double standard: while other colonial powers, especially Britain and France, were sharply criticised, Italian colonial ambitions were justified and defended. This contradiction had been evident for some time. From the last half of the 19th century on, Italy's colonial interests became increasingly stronger. The rise of the fascist regime added fuel to these ambitions. Besides, the regime tried to establish good relations with Arab and Asian nationalists. Italy presented herself as a 'civilising' nation, opposite from Great Britain and France, whose colonial policy was mere exploitation of their dominions. The question of whether the nationalist leaders of these countries actually believed Mussolini and his officials is out of discussion here. However opportunistic she might seem, Italy had managed to create a sphere of influence in certain Asian countries, and she was determined not to sacrifice this position.

Before the Ethiopian crisis, there were no tensions toward Italy from Indian public opinion or the British authorities. Public reactions, including protest demonstrations in various parts of India, came to the fore only after the Italian invasion.²⁴ The later stages of the crisis had already led to press criticism. The Italian authorities in Italy and India immediately took action and organised their own counter-propaganda campaign. The fascists had prepared for this eventuality before the invasion and disseminated pro-Italian propaganda as soon as the war brake out.

Paradoxically, as a result of the war Italy managed to gain a firmer foothold in India, thanks to this strenuous pro-Italian campaign. The ties activities established at this time were to prove useful over the next few years.

²³ Giuliano Procacci, *Dalla parte dell'Etiopia. L'aggressione italiana vista dai movimenti anticolonialisti d'Asia, d'Africa, d'America*, Milan, 1984.

²⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 47-48.

3 – Building up bridges with the Indian political environment: the connections with the Bengali nationalism at the time of the Italo-Abyssinian war

The Italo-Abyssinian war offered to the supporters of Italy's Indian policy the chance to start a strong anti-British campaign. For the first time the regime adopted an open anti-British stand, at the international level. The target of fascist political activities in India were prominent, politically engaged intellectuals, especially Bengali intellectuals. Bengal and its political circles represented, since approximately three decades, the ad-vanguard of intense anti-British activities. Moreover, the Bengali revolutionary tradition matched with the radical, violent character of the fascist regime. The first contacts were established with Indian students and scholars living in Italy or elsewhere in Europe.

Amiya Chakravarti was in Italy in 1935 as president of the Indian and Sinhala Students' Federation. He contributed greatly to the Italian anti-British propaganda.²⁵ Chakravarti, a philosophy teacher, had once been a close collaborator of Tagore, for whom he was secretary for six years, and had also worked in this capacity for the Vishvabhara-ti. There are a number of reports, written by the Italian authorities, on Chakravarti's personality and political activities:

Up to the present, Prof. Chakrawarty's (sic) relations with Italian cultural circles have been excellent. As President of the Indian Students' Federation, he has distinguished himself at all times in his efforts to facilitate our propaganda work and promote the understanding of Italian civilisation among his fellow Indians.²⁶

²⁵ ASMAE, Gab.pos.7, Udienze, Chakravarti Amya, handwritten letter from Vittorio Amadasi to an unidentified count, 19th August [1935].

²⁶ ASMAE, Ibid., unsigned, undated biographic file headed "Prof. Chakrawarty"; an identical hand-written copy was enclosed with the previous letter.

The official who drew up this file also noted that Chakravarti was most impressed by the “*programma di collaborazione fra Oriente e Occidente*” (programme of co-operation between East and West) launched by the *duce* on the occasion of the first Congress of Oriental Students in 1933. He also helped to organise the second Congress of Oriental Students in December 1934. As president of the Indian and Sinhala Students’ Federation, he favoured the transfer of its head offices from Vienna to Rome. Chakravarti was in Italy at the time, attending a “cultural meeting organised by the Federation”, at Ortisei.²⁷

During the anti-Italian campaign, the fascist authorities took note of Chakravarti’s views regarding the Abyssinian question:

We are well aware of the fact that the campaign so capably orchestrated by vested interest presents the political issue concerning Italy and Abyssinia as a racial issue, concerning all the peoples of Asia and Africa.

Gandhi himself has taken part in this movement, and has done nothing but repeat his long-held views on the equality between races.

We learn from the Indian press that this campaign has gained considerable ground and that the pro-Italian feelings which had come to the fore over the last few years have in fact been practically expunged

Only very few people (such as Subhas Bose and Prof. Chakrawarty) (sic) have been able to see the situation in its true light....

Prof. Chakrawarty is well aware of the true situation and is also fully aware of the damage done by this anti-Italian campaign.

At the moment, he is anxious to receive fresh confirmation of his

²⁷ ASMAE, *Ibid.*, report no. 91, unsigned and undated, probably drawn up in August, 1935. Chakravarti was an ambiguous person, and the Italian authorities came to believe he was a British agent. This is unlikely, given his liaison work between the fascist regime and leading Indian nationalists. Regarding Italian suspicions, see “express telegram n. 572/80”, from the Consulate-General in Calcutta, 9.2.38, to the Foreign Office: the document specifies that Chakravarti was an “agente dell’Intelligence Service” (an intelligence agent). The Italians also suspected that Chakravarti was liaising with British pacifists and Rev. Andrews.

own personal convictions from an authoritative source that Italy's actions are not inspired by racist ideals of any kind and that Italy intends to continue with her programme of collaboration with the peoples of Asia.²⁸

It was also pointed out that Chakravarti

wishes to explain to Your Excellency the Chief of the Government the state of relations between East and West in relation to the Italo-Abyssinian war.

Alongside Subhas Chandra Bose, the well-known nationalist leader, Chakravarti is one of the few Indian intellectuals capable of understanding Italy's position with regard to Abyssinia, who does not share the anti-Italian attitude now prevailing in India.²⁹

It was also stated that:

He is perfectly aware of the fact that Indians, believing to statements concerning Italian presumed hostility against coloured races, thereby strengthening British opposition to us, are playing into British hands and renewing their age-old ties of serfdom.

The above notes were forwarded with other information to Mussolini on 22nd August 1935. They referred also to Chakravarti's request that the *duce* himself provide assurances that the Italian government had no intention to change its attitude toward Asia:

May I ask Your Excellency permission to repeat, in Your name, that the Italo-Abyssinian war has not altered nor will it alter the statements contained in Your Excellency's appeal from the West to the East for reciprocal understanding and collaboration, an appeal made without making distinctions of believe or race, which established cultural and civil equality? May I believe that

²⁸ ASMAE, Ibid.

²⁹ ASMAE, Ibid.

current events have not changed the premises for that collaboration between East and West, which Italy desires?
 ... an assurance of this kind on the part of Your Excellency, however brief, would be broadly disseminated in order to curb the anti-Italian propaganda campaign now taking place in Asian countries, conducted mainly by British agents.³⁰

In January 1935 Chakravarti was obtained his first audience with the *duce*, together with delegates from the Federation who were meeting for the fourth time in Rome. Chakravarti's application for a further audience with the *duce*, in the summer, was successful.

There is no record of the January meeting, but reference is made to it elsewhere in the file. British documentation also shed light on both meetings.

The fact, however, that Italy was maintaining contact with the Indian nationalists was further corroborated by information received from a secret source in August, 1935, to the effect that Amiya Chakravarty, the President of the Indian Students' Federation in Europe, had, after visiting Subhas Bose at Karlsbad, interviewed Signor Mussolini in Rome to discuss the admission of Indian students into Italian Universities.³¹

Although Chakravarti was a figure of secondary importance, he did act as liaison between the fascist regime and a number of very high ranking Indian nationalists and was the bearer of Mussolini's invitation to Nehru in late February-early March 1936.³²

The Foreign Office had been looking into the Indian nationalist movement and its representatives. The correspondence dating from spring 1936 to the beginning of 1937 contains detailed reports on

³⁰ ASMAE, Ibid.

³¹ NAI, Foreign and Political Department, 280 N 1936, "Note on the connection of the Italian Consul-General in Calcutta with pro-Italian and anti-British propaganda", dated 7.2.36 and signed by M.K. Johnston, Deputy Commissioner of Police, Special Branch Calcutta.

³² G. Procacci, cit., p. 60.

Bose and his political activity up to the time of his arrest in 1936, and on Nehru, whom, had he not turned the invitation down, Mussolini would have been pleased to meet. In August 1935, Nehru travelled through Italy on his way to Switzerland where his wife, who had health problems and needed medical care. Nehru was welcomed in Brindisi by local fascist representatives. The regime was very interested in Nehru. He was more radical than Gandhi and more famous than Bose. According to the regime's view, if Nehru were to have taken a less intransigent view of fascist Italy and her colonial policy, Italy's image in India would have benefited enormously.³³ Bose himself might have been "useful... for his contacts with the Pan-Indian Congress".³⁴ As already pointed out, Italy's intention was to establish friendly contacts and create an alliance with the Congress. Liberals, socialists, the Communist Party, the "Muslim parties" and the Congress, defined the "Nationalist Party", were held up for comparison in a document entitled "Note on the main Indian parties". The note, full of generalisations and errors, describes Bose e Nehru as

the two main political figures coming to the fore within the Indian nationalist Party after Gandhi, who has withdrawn from active struggle...³⁵

Although he disapproved fascism, Nehru would have met the *duce*, more out of curiosity than anything else. However, he rightly feared that while the Abyssinian issue was at its height, a meeting with Mus-

³³ With regard to Mussolini's invitation, which reached Nehru through Amiya Chakravarty, see G. Procacci, cit., p. 60. Regarding Mussolini intention to meet Nehru, see R. De Felice, *L'India*, cit. pp. 1319-1320. Information on Bose and Nehru is in the respective personal files, ASMAE, Gab., pos.7, cit. "Bose" file is undated, but most probably drawn up in early 1937. With regard to Nehru, see the document headed, "Alcuni punti che può esser utile tener presente nel colloquio con Nehru" (notes which should be borne in mind during the conversation with Nehru), of 7.3.36, quoted by De Felice, *ibidem*.

³⁴ ASMAE, Gab., pos.7, cit., unsigned, unheaded note addressed to Mussolini, dated 15.2.36. The document is entirely quoted by R. De Felice, *ibidem*, p. 1326.

³⁵ ASMAE, *Ibid*. This undated document was drawn up in 1937.

solini would only benefit the Italians, from the propagandistic point of view.³⁶

Since a high profile policy, aiming at involving leading Indian nationalists, were out of question, Italians decided to adopt a lower standard in their approach to the Indian political environment. However, they could, at least, involve Subhas Chandra.

Vittorio Amadasi, secretary of the *Scuola Orientale* in Rome and the review, *Jeune Asie*, and politically active among Asian students, was to be sent to Karlsbad, where Bose was undergoing treatment for tuberculosis. Italians wanted Bose to contact the leaders of the Indian nationalist movement and explain them

the political motives behind the Abyssinian question which are undoubtedly advantageous with regard to the Indian question.³⁷

Bose could also use his influence with of a number of nationalist newspapers and win them over to the Italian cause. Bose was supposed to work with Amiya Nath Sarkar, the assistant secretary of the Indian Students' Federation, to draw up plans with Subhas, who was about to leave to India.

In November 1935, Bose published two articles, one in *Amrita Bazar Patrika* and the other in the *Modern Review*.³⁸ The first paragraph

³⁶ This is pointed out both by Procacci (Ibid. pp. 60-61) and De Felice (Ibid. pp. 1319-1320). Both historians quote a well-known piece of Nehru's autobiography. A number of references to fascism and fascist imperialism are to be found in Nehru's *Selected Works*. Nehru's and the Congress views of fascism and Italy's role in international affairs, over the period between the Italo-Abyssinian war and Spanish Civil War up to the time of the *Anschluss* and on until the start of the Second World War are well documented (see records held by the All India Congress Committee at NMML, and above all among the Foreign Department records: files: nn. 39-1936; 40-1936; 4-1937; 12(III)-1938; 19-1938; 31-1938; G-21-1926; AICC-1927 (3-9); G-71-1938; O.S. 40-1940; FD-7(I) 1936; FD-7(II) 1938; FD-9 1936; FD-11 1936; FD-12B 1936).

³⁷ ASMAE, Gab.pos.7, cit., note to Foreign Office, 6.9.35: the file also contains two documents of the British Embassy in Rome of 24.8.35 and 27.8.35 and one to the Foreign Office of 8.8.35.

³⁸ Procacci, cit., p. 52, mentions the article appeared in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* without providing its date of publication or title. The second article, *The Secret of Abyssinia and its*

of the article published by the *Modern Review* was entitled *What is that Lesson*, and opened as follows:

It is this that in the 20th century a nation can hope to be free only if it is strong, from a physical and military point of view...

Reading this statement, it seems that Bose supported the Abyssinian cause. However, after looking into the history of Abyssinia, from the time of Napier's defeat (1868) and thereafter, Bose compared the situation in 1935 with the Libyan campaign of 1911. Like the Libyan campaign, the Italo-Abyssinian war might break down into a broader conflict, at the European level. Further in his article Bose described the developments which led up to the the Italo-Abyssinian war in clear anti-British terms. Italian policy in Ethiopia was described as a counterbalance to British imperialism.

The enthusiasm for the sanctions of the League of Nations does not arise from a love of peace or a desire to champion Abyssinia. The British Imperialists are hiding their concern behind these 'righteous' aims in order to win the support of opinion which is devoted to the League and to the cause of peace. It is actually using enthusiasm for peace to prepare the British people for Imperialist war.³⁹

After looking into strategic questions, Bose turned to the relations between India and Abyssinia. He warned his nationals against British attempts to exploit for their own ends the pro-Abyssinian feelings expressed by the Congress. He was bitterly opposed to the British decision to send Indian troops to Abyssinia to protect Indian and British citizens there.⁴⁰ Bose criticised the justifications made by the British and observed

Lesson is dated 15.10.35, but came out the next month.

³⁹ S. C. Bose, *Ibid.*, p. 573.

⁴⁰ See NAI, Foreign and Political Department, 389 N 35, 445 N 35 and 456 N 36 for information on these contingents and a special corps to protect the British legation in Addis

Indian troops were sent with the idea of committing Indian support to British policy in Abyssinia and on the other hand, to remind Italy that the vast resources of India are behind Great Britain.⁴¹

Since a European conflict looked very likely in August and September, it was equally that India would be dragged in. The risk the nationalist cause faced was that

... if war had broken out in Europe, Great Britain would have emerged victorious – thanks to the resources of India – but Abyssinia would have shared the fate of Palestine and India would have continued enslaved as before.⁴²

The situation described by Bose was opposite to the reality. He laid the emphasis on British cunning and distracted his readers' attention from Italy's aggression of Abyssinia. Somewhere in the article, Bose criticised also Italian imperialism and Italy's conduct in Abyssinia. If he had been openly pro-Italian, he might well have had his article proscribed. It was of vital importance to him, instead, to direct public opinion toward a discussion of British colonial policy rather than of Italy's behaviour. He hoped to mitigate the effects of the anti-Italian campaign. Significantly, Bose provided no indications as to how Indian public opinion might manifest its solidarity toward the Abyssinian cause avoiding that such solidarity was exploited by the British. According to Bose's views the Abyssinian question had a secondary role, while his priority was criticizing British interests. Furthermore, Bose's attitude might be seen as an indirect appeal to Indians to adopt a neutral stance, rather than support the British (anti-Italian) cause. In any case, it seems that Bose was able to "change the anti-Italian line adopted by the well-known Calcutta newspaper, Forward".⁴³

Ababa.

⁴¹ S.C. Bose, cit., p. 576.

⁴² S.C. Bose, *Ibid.*, pp. 576-577.

⁴³ ASMAE, Gab., pos.7, cit., note to Mussolini, 15.2.36, cit.

4 – The Italian propaganda in Bengal and its impact

Besides the publication of Bose's article, a strong pro-Italian propaganda started up with the support of the *Italian Community* in India, backed by the Italian Consulate General in Calcutta. The intention was to direct Indian public opinion toward a neutral stance in order to hinder the British in any attempt to militarily involve India in the Abyssinian affair. The British policy was criticised, while Italy was described as the only possible alternative.

The Italian Community distributed two kinds of publications, in English, pamphlets and typed leaflets, which came out on a regular basis, at times almost daily. The pamphlets, nearly all of which were on Abyssinia, appeared fairly regularly between October 1935 and May 1936.⁴⁴ Some of these publications described exclusively the contemporary situation in Ethiopia, others had a historical perspective. This second type of publications were dealt with the recent relations between Italy and areas of interest for her, not only Eastern Africa or Libya, but also Tunisia, that the journalist Lessona went so far as to define as an extension of Sicily. This literature described the various stages of Italy's colonisation in Africa were examined, while events and agreements were presented as part of a well-founded tradition and in such a light as might justify Italy's rights in that area. Italian friendship with Ethiopia was emphasized, as well Italy's peacekeeping, protective, civilizing policy in favour of local populations:

44 *Ethiopia Today*, by Niliacus (a pen name); *Slavery in Abyssinia*; *Italy and the People of Asia* by Guido Sollazzo; *Twelve Years of Fascism*, by P. Roy; *Italy and Africa*, written by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Alessandro Lessona; *Anti-Abolitionist Ethiopia*, also by Niliacus; *Italy and Abyssinia*; *Italy and Abyssinia (1897-1935)*; *America and Italo-Ethiopian Controversy*; *Italo-Abyssinian Dispute before the League of Nations*; *Speech of Baron Aloisi Head of the Italian Delegation to the League of Nations Assembly of October 9, 1935*; *Islam and Ethiopia*, signed by Paolo Balbis; *The League of Nations and the Chances of War*, by Manfredi Gravina; *Comment upon a Speech* by Luigi Villari; *Italy on March* by Corrado Zoli; *Italy and Eritrea: Yesterday and Today*, by Gen. Anacleto Bronzuoli; *Twilight of Geneva*. These publications have been gathered together in a volume and may be consulted at the library of the Italian Ministry of External Affairs in Rome.

she [Italy] felt able to bring the most valuable aid to Ethiopia for the development of her many unexplored resources and to assist her on the path of final progress towards higher forms of civilisation.⁴⁵

This idea was taken up at length in the pamphlet *Slavery in Abyssinia*.

The natural beauty of the country makes it one of the most picturesque parts of the African continent and a future of great prosperity is in store for Ethiopia, owing to the resources of the soil and mineral wealth, if it were not for the backward state of civilisation as it exists there at present. Ethiopia is, in fact, an anachronism among the nations of the XX century, held together by a system of feudal Government and with slavery as the basis of economic life.

Twelve Years of Fascism, by a certain P. Roy (undoubtedly Pramatha Nath Roy), stands out from the other publications in that it does not deal with Abyssinia. Instead, it gives an account of the twelve intervening years since the rise of the fascist regime. Roy emphasized those aspects which had most favourably impressed Indian public opinion, namely the presumed capacity of fascism to transform a backward country such as Italy at that time into an advanced nation, the social organisation of fascism, and what Roy described as a strengthened sense of discipline among the population. He returned to the subject of the “Balilla”, the “Avanguardisti”, the training camps, the uniforms, and that sense of discipline he so much admired. He pointed at the assistance offered to mothers and infants as examples of the high level of development of the fascist society. Roy’s rhetoric was so deeply imbued by fascist ideals that it would be hard to distinguish it from the language used by the regime’s official writers. Roy wrote, for instance,

I will conclude this article by answering a question. What has been the effect of twelve years of Fascism upon the spirit of the race? In my book on Mussolini I wrote that it was as yet early for

⁴⁵ A. Lessona, cit., p. 14.

Fascism to produce any moulding effect upon the mentality of the race. But now a generation seems to have arisen with a distinct Fascist mould of the mind. Twelve years of ceaseless effort which Fascism has made to train the race has not gone in vain.

The literature distributed by the Italian Community in Calcutta used every possible subject to draw out a powerful message, in order to put in a favourable light fascism and Italy's position in Ethiopia. Considering the wide distribution of the propagandistic literature published by the Italian Community, it must have been effective in reaching people, if not in influencing their opinions. Apart from the pamphlets, leaflets were printed more frequently and more widely distributed. In all likelihood, this campaign started in Summer-Autumn 1935. Unfortunately, only a few of these leaflets were dated and therefore no precise account of this campaign can be provided. However, it lasted for about one year.⁴⁶ The campaign was launched by an open, undated letter bearing the following announcement.

A few Italians, resident in India and sincerely attached to her, have decided to diffuse as widely as possible, among the public of this Country, informations (sic) about various questions which are of interest to their Country and to try to make a modest contribution towards explaining the events in which Italy has a share....

This work was necessary at a moment when a section of the Indian Press, not always thoroughly acquainted with all the facts of the Abyssinian question, did not spare Italy the coarsest of invectives and the gravest of charges, attempting in this way to cast a shadow on the relations, always marked with correctness and cordiality, between the two nations whose economic interests are complementary to one another without ever coming to clash...⁴⁷

⁴⁶ A number of the mentioned publications are in NAI, Foreign and Political Department, 612 N, 1935 and 532 N 1935; others under ASMAE, AP, India, b.4, cit.

⁴⁷ NAI, Ibid., 532 N 1935, cit.

The letter was followed by a paper entitled *The [sic] Fascism: Here is the Enemy*, signed by C.R. (i.e. *Civis Romanus*), a recurring pen name in this series. The enemies of fascism were

the Asiatic communism, the German socialism, the English liberalism, the French democracy, the universal free-masonry.⁴⁸

According to the author, all the above mentioned groups exploited the Abyssinian affair to discredit fascism. The Italo-Abyssinian war was, instead, described as a war of liberation.

The war which is going to meet a stupefied (sic) world is a war of vindication, the war of Fascism and of the Duce, necessary to our national existence, the war of toiling civilisation against barbarism and slavery.

Italy, tried by centuries of oppression, wanted to become, and actually became, a military nation, even more a warlike nation.⁴⁹

According to the article, fascism was responsible of Ethiopia's improved economic conditions, and this was the evidence of Italy's good intentions in Africa.

The other bulletins rebuked the Society of Nations, Great Britain, and their policies with regard to the Abyssinian crisis. Other pamphlets had a more evident propagandistic character, like the *Plan for a Superior School of Islamic Culture in Tripoli*,⁵⁰ in which emphasis was laid upon a supposed good side of Italy's military involvement in Africa and of the fascist activities abroad. This literature aimed at showing the Italy's civilising mission, not only in Africa but also in Asia.

At this stage a question should be raised about the expected results of this propaganda. In the final part of the leaflet *The Foundation of the*

⁴⁸ NAI, Ibid.

⁴⁹ NAI, Ibid.

⁵⁰ NAI, 612 N 1935 cit.

*Problem*⁵¹ a chapter, *Neutrality*, posed the question, “What does Italy expect from other countries?”. There is but one answer, Neutrality – namely, no arms and military equipment for the Abyssinia, and

It also means abstention from any step whatsoever which, under the guise of the most humanitarian and international intentions, only encourages the intransigence and aggressiveness of Abyssinia [...]

The intention was to encourage Indian public opinion to oppose any policy which might be detrimental to Italy.

Also the effects of this campaign should be evaluated. The Italian Consul General in Calcutta, Guido Sollazzo, wrote,

We have been more successful than I dared imagine. The tired lie of a racist, anti-Asian Italy has been exposed at last. All the newspapers which have dealt with the question have conceded that I was demonstrably right. And yet others fought shy of the proofs I presented [...] and stuck to the position of their so-called solidarity with the black savages so described by the Duce.⁵²

Sollazzo overestimated his influence. In fact, the local daily newspapers were most critical of Italy during the summer of 1935. However, more lenient opinions did emerge, later, in September. All main papers in India condemned Mussolini’s arrogance, as manifested in his request to the Society of Nations for an Italian mandate over Abyssinia. Indian public opinion was also fully aware that the *duce* was absolutely determined to

⁵¹ NAI, *Ibid.*, Bulletin n.7.

⁵² ASMAE, AP India b.4, cit., letter of 26.8.35 from Italian General Consulate in Calcutta to the Press and Propaganda Ministry (c.c. Foreign Office and Italian Embassy in London). The letter dealt with a bitter argument with Rev. Andrews, a professor at Shantiniketan and a friend of Tagore and Gandhi, whose political views were very much in line with Gandhi’s. In an article published in the Allahabad *Leader* of 5.8.35 Andrews sharply criticised the racist views Mussolini expressed in his interview published by the *Echo de Paris* on 21st July 19.35. The Italian Consul General in Calcutta felt obliged to reply with an article under his own name, published by *Forward* on 17 August.

have Abyssinia. The Indian press was also aware of the racist motivations put forward by Italy with regard to her claims on Ethiopia.⁵³

In September, the press was more interested on the debate at the Society of Nations and the various stages of the crisis, which was moving fast toward the point of no return. On 17th December, the Italian Consul General in Bombay, Galleani d'Agliano, noted that

... generally speaking, the comments on the Italo-Ethiopian conflict are less forthright and more moderate.⁵⁴

Right from the outbreak of the hostilities, the Italian Consulate in Calcutta issued leaflets, mostly dated between October and December 1935. They contained reports of the military operations and the state of international negotiations. From 18th October 1935, the Italian representatives also despatched to the local dailies, telegraphic agencies and foreign Consulates news broadcast in English by Radio Littorio Press. The main recipients were the *Star of India*, the *Advance*⁵⁵ and, last but not least, the *Forward*.

According to the reaction of the British authorities in India, the Italian campaign must have been effective. The British had kept a close eye on developments and immediately realised that the so-called "Italian Community" was basically a front for the activities of the General Consulates in Calcutta and Bombay. In November, the British authorities noticed a qualitative change of the Italian propaganda and they had already a clear idea of activities carried out by fascist emissaries:

⁵³ ASMAE, Ibid., press file from Sollazzo to the Ministry of External Affairs, dated 9th August.1935, including press clippings from the following newspapers: *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, *Hindustan Times*, *The National Call*, *The Mussalman*, *Civil and Military Gazette*, *Leader*, *Star of India*, *Forward*, and *Statesman*.

⁵⁴ ASMAE, Ibid., "express telegram n. 98", from the Italian Consulate-General in Bombay to the Press and Propaganda Ministry and Foreign Office.

⁵⁵ ASMAE, Ibid., and "express telegram n. 2717", dated 31st October.1935, from the Italian General Consulate in Calcutta to the Press and Propaganda Ministry c.c. Ministry of External Affairs and Italian Embassy in London.

... On the other hand the Italian Consul sends a weekly account of Italian news (culled from Italian papers) to the local press for publication. These weekly pro-Fascist writings are generally taken from the "Corriere della Sera" of Milan and Populo (sic) d'Italia of Rome, two important Fascist organs. One Mukherjee, an employee of the Italian Consulate, and Pramatha Roy (who has come to India after having studied at the oriental Institute of Rome) are translating these passages from the above mentioned newspapers. The "Advance" and the "Forward" are publishing these Italian reports which are styled as "War News via Rome". Amiya Sarkar who has been staying in Rome for some time, is writing pro-Fascist articles to the "Amrita Bazar Patrika"... It is said that Sarkar's articles are inspired from Fascist sources.

2. The so-called "bulletins" which were sent to Indian publicists like Prof. Benoy Sarkar and Kalidas Nag, have now lost their novelty so it is said that the Italian Consul is using the method of propaganda alluded to above. The Italian newspapers "Corriere della Sera" and "Il Populo (sic) d'Italia" are sent to the Forward at the suggestion of Subhas Bose. These journals are rabidly anti-British and they will certainly contain full reports of anti-British demonstrations organised by Fascist organisations in Italy....

In this tense situation, the Italian Consul's weekly despatches to the local press will cause much excitement. So long the nationalist papers "Forward", "Advance" and "A. B. Patrika" were condemning Italy. Now that Italy is determined to flout the League and Europe single-handed, the Indian publicists and agitators are beginning to lionise Mussolini, specially as he is indulging in all sorts of anti-British sentiments.⁵⁶

At the beginning of February 1936 the British authorities made an in-depth investigation of Italian activities since 1933. They were interested in Scarpa's contacts with Bengali nationalists and Kalidas Nag,

⁵⁶ NAI, 612 N 1935, cit., Intelligence record entitled "Statement of C.112 dated the 6th November '35".

“with whom he was arranging to send Indian students to Rome”.⁵⁷ At that time, *India Tomorrow*, a periodical of the All Bengal Students’ Association, published a number of articles in favour of the fascist regime and its policy. At the same time, Kalidas Nag, in his *India and the World*, encouraged Indian students to visit Italy and to travel there on Italian ships. On Scarpa’s return to Italy, his successor, the newly appointed Italian Consul General, Guido Navarrini resumed the contacts with Kalidas Nag, who acted as an intermediary between the Italian General Consulate and the local political environment.

On 13th January 1934, the Italian Consulate-General issued a 10-rupee scholarship for Italians who intended to teach Italian at the University of Calcutta. The appointment was given to Emilio Benasaglio, in the summer of 1935.⁵⁸

The British described the Italian courses at the University of Calcutta in the following terms:

The creation of the post of Professor of Italian in the Calcutta University thus takes on none too pleasant a political aspect, for if, as one may reasonably assume, Benasaglio is the agent through whom the Consul-General is carrying on his political propaganda (and there is plenty of secret information on this point which is

⁵⁷ NAI, Foreign and Political Department, 280 N 1936 and IO, L/P&S/12/1536, “Note on the connection of the Italian Consul General in Calcutta with pro-Italian and anti-British propaganda”, dated 7th February 1936 and signed by M.K. Johnston, Deputy Commissioner of Police, Special Branch, Calcutta. It is worth noting that information contained in this document was the subject of a long letter (n.843-P.S.) from G. F. Hogg, Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal, to the Foreign Secretary to the Government of India, sent on 26th February 1936. The British authorities in London were fully informed as to developments. Most probably they had not underestimated the potential dangers of this situation.

⁵⁸ Benasaglio had been in India for 16 years. At first, he headed a company importing Italian goods which closed down because of the great depression, then worked for the trade and tax company S. K. Sawday, based in Calcutta. He then became a customs agent for the firm Firpo. He lived always in very precarious conditions. He acted for a long time as honorary vice-consul: NAI, *Ibid.*, letter from the proprietor of the firm, Sawday to Metcalfe, 9.8.36 and a detailed note by the Foreign and Political Department, 17.8.36.

substantiated by our watch reports) his unique opportunities for such works amongst the University cannot be gainsaid.⁵⁹

According to the British authorities, the Italian Consulate in Calcutta wished

to create a state of friendship between itself and those classes of Indians from whose ranks the revolutionary forces were chiefly drawn...⁶⁰

The publications disseminated by the Italian Community were printed in Calcutta by the Saraswati Press, the Indian Daily News Press and the Mukharji Press, and in Benares by the Uttara Press. The Saraswati Press was considered “a nationalist organisation”. The Indian Daily News Press belonged to *Forward*, and the Uttara Press was owned by Asit K. Mukharji, who also published the periodical *Bishan*.⁶¹ The Italian Consul General wrote a number of these leaflets himself. These were

distributed and circulated through various channels but, although some were handed over by prominent citizens who have no anti-British feelings at all, most of them came to us through secret sources...⁶²

The anti-British tone of this semi-clandestine literature spurred the British to conduct an enquiry. At the end, they concluded

we got reliable and corroborated information that the Italian Consul-General was definitely directing this propaganda campaign.⁶³

⁵⁹ NAI, Ibid.

⁶⁰ NAI, Ibid.

⁶¹ Extract from the Statement of C-112 dated 2.3.36: NAI, Foreign and Political Department, 179 X 1936 and 280 N 1936, cit. A letter in the latter file, dated 11th January 1936, from the Italian Consul-General to the publisher of the *Bishan*, A.K. Mukharji, alludes to possible publication of an English version of this periodical to which the Italian Consul might contribute “indirectly to the modest limit, possible to me”. The Consul may have gained full control of the periodical in March.

⁶² NAI, Ibid.

⁶³ NAI, Ibid.

The police trailed Benasaglio. The post office box number was registered in his name. An evidence that there was no Italian Community in India: it was nothing but the Italian Consulate itself.

The British authorities, on their hand, spotted two main strategies behind the Italian propaganda. The first strategy aimed at establishing and strengthening links with the most radical local nationalists. According to the information collected by the British authorities, in December 1935

... the Consul, while interviewing some Indian nationalists, suggested that the Indians should resort to “direct action” in order to exact their power and to oppose the Governor and the Government. He said that it was men like Sarat and Subhas Bose of whom India stood in most need at the moment, and that India should resort to class collaboration in order to overthrow British Imperialism.⁶⁴

The Italian Consul then expected the Bengali nationalists, whom he met on a fairly regular basis, to oppose the sanctions and promoted a “Fascist League” in India, with direct links with the Consulate. The League was then to become “a large and powerful political unit”. The Indians were to be given the impression that a presence was emerging in their country alternative to the British, in not opposed to them.

Secondly, the Italians representatives tried to strengthen existing links with the Bengali nationalist press. In November 1935, the British authorities came to know that Sollazzo had financed *Forward*, in exchange, of course, for articles in favour of Italy. In March 1936 the British intelligence service had no doubts that the Italian Consul General was planning to found a monthly review with the collaboration of Asit Mukharji’s *Bishan* and *Forward*. The agreement was that the Italian Consul should write under a pen name. Benasaglio, who supervised the implementation of the project, introduced Mukharji

⁶⁴ NAI, Ibid.

to the German Consul, Wachendorf. The Italian Consul General also requested (and obtained) Wachendorf's collaboration. Benasaglio intended to present Mukherji also to the Japanese Consul, since he believed that the Italian, German and Japanese governments were being unfairly treated by the Indian press. It was decided that the periodical (more than 60 pages) should initially have at least 200 subscribers.⁶⁵

The British noticed the anti-British tone of the Italian propaganda campaign.

... 'Sanctions' were the direct result of the British policy, and the Abyssinian conquest was an economic issue over which Italy would be prepared to fight against England if the latter provoked her by economic strangulation.⁶⁶

The war bulletins released by the Consulate, besides the news from the front, contained unrelenting attacks upon the Great Britain. These were duly recorded by the British authorities.

The Italian Consul has been publishing more anti-British news and comments after the Italian annexation of Abyssinia. The Consul thinks that the Indians should emphasise the fact that English prestige has received a terrible setback at the hands of Mussolini.⁶⁷

Finally, the British authorities requested the removal of the Italian Consul General and that his assistant be expelled from India.⁶⁸ The Consul General left India on 29th September 1936⁶⁹ and was replaced by Camillo Giuriati.⁷⁰ As soon as he reached Calcutta, Giuriati con-

⁶⁵ NAI, Ibid.

⁶⁶ NAI, Ibid. note dated 7th February 1936, cit.

⁶⁷ NAI, Ibid., extract of 14th May, 1936 in an Intelligence Bureau note dated 23rd May 1936.

⁶⁸ NAI, 280 N 1936, cit., records of the period February-September 1936.

⁶⁹ NAI, Ibid., telegram of 3rd October 1936 from Bengal Darjeeling to Foreign Simla and identical telegram, with the same date, from Viceroy, Simla to Secy of State for India, London.

⁷⁰ NAI, Ibid., 19th September 1936 from Benasaglio to Chief Secretary to the Govern-

demned the conduct of his predecessor and insisted that he had no intention to engage in pro-fascist and anti-British propaganda. Nevertheless, the British authorities soon noticed the strong anti-British feelings of the new Consul General. They came to know that the Italian Consul had established contacts with a number of local nationalist leaders to whom he distributed propaganda material. Giuriati also tried to pressurise the nationalist press of Calcutta and Bombay into boycotting Reuters in favour of the Italian agency, Stefani. He took steps to offer better prices than Reuters'.⁷¹

5 – Some steps forward: Italian political activities in Maharashtra

The replacement of the Italian Consul General took place when the tension provoked by the Abyssinian crisis were gradually dissolving. These two factors contributed to improve the relations between Britain and Italy. The anti-British propaganda was interrupted. However, Italian representatives did not abandon their inroads into the Indian press or the contacts with local politicians. The pro-Italian propaganda influenced the local public opinion in favour of Italy and fascism.

As the Ethiopian crisis reached its height, a new General Consulate was opened up in Bombay. The political milieu was as radical as in Bengal. Since summer 1935, the Bombay office had “intensified counter-propaganda activities as a measure against the hostile campaign carried out by the local press and in public places”.⁷² The two

ment of Bengal. At the end, Benasaglio's expulsion was revoked: telegram of 23rd September 19.36 from the Italian Consul General, Sollazzo, to Foreign Secy India Govt. and telegram of 25th August 1936 from Viceroy, Simla, to the Secretary of State for India, London.

⁷¹ NAI, External Affairs Department, 649 X 1937, a copy of the report drawn up by the Intelligence Bureau, dated 23.11.37.

⁷² ASMAE, AP, India, b.4, cit., letter n. 49, from the General Consulate of Italy in Bombay, 5 September 1935, to the Foreign Office (c.c. Ministry for Press and Propaganda).

Consulates worked together on this activity. The Bombay Consulate had “created a propaganda fund with donations from companies and fascist elements based in Bombay” and sent to Calcutta “not less than 150/- Rupees every month”.⁷³ Bombay used this sum to produce propaganda material and distributed among “traders and intellectuals” in the area. There was also a special bureau

which depends directly from the local office of the Fascist Party, set up and supervised by myself, and issues propaganda... which in a certain sense may be considered more timely and appropriate than Calcutta’s, with regard to this jurisdiction. I make use of radio bulletins and other news items I have access to.⁷⁴

On 5th September 1935, the Consul wrote the following letter,

since the General Consulate has a functioning receiving station, daily updates from the Italian news service will be sent to the General in Calcutta, the Royal Legation in Kabul, the Consular office in Karachi, to Commendatore Massone in Simla, to the Consular correspondent in Goa, to all Italian missions, and to the Kolar Branch of the Fascist Party.

Every two or three days, according to the importance of the news items, bulletins will be sent out to the above mentioned destinations and to the universities, schools, companies and famous persons.⁷⁵

Items were sent also to the local newspapers for publication. Among these journal, the most favourable to Mussolini’s Italy was “the new nationalist organ, non socialist, the *Daily Sun*”, followed by the *Bombay Chronicle*, the *Hyderabad Bulletin* and the periodical *The Indian Liberal*. Distribution was fairly widespread and all the means available

⁷³ ASMAE, Ibid.

⁷⁴ ASMAE, Ibid.

⁷⁵ ASMAE, Ibid.

were used. The promoters of this propaganda aimed at reaching high level targets, as proved by several pamphlets printed by the Italian Community in India collected among M.R. Jayakar's papers.⁷⁶

During the Ethiopian crisis and its aftermath, Italian propaganda activities intensified and improved in their quality, also thanks to the collaboration of exponents of the Indian nationalism. The British authorities suspected that the *duce* was personally involved in this activity:

The Consul pointed out that Mussolini is very much interested in the growth and progress of the Nationalist movement in India; and Mussolini has been thinking of granting many more scholarships to the Indian students for studies in Rome. And Mussolini regularly reads the Indian Nationalist journals.⁷⁷

According to a British report of March 1938,

... negotiations... have taken place between a representative of the Amrita Bazar Patrika (who happens to be a dismissed Indian Police Officer) and the Italian Consul-General.

The main points that emerge are that the Consul General is trying

- a) to introduce the Stefani News Agency to the Indian national Press;
- b) indirectly to influence commercial journals against trade agreements within the British Empire; and
- c) to influence selected nationalist papers in favour of Italian propaganda by promising them advertisements from Italian commercial concerns.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ NAI, Jayakar papers, microfilm, r.n.23, Italo-Abyssinian War.

⁷⁷ NAI, External Affairs Department, 17 N 37, note drawn up by the Bengali police in December 1936 on the basis of the views expressed to the publisher of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* by the Italian Consul in Calcutta.

⁷⁸ NAI, Home poll. Depart., 137/38, 1938, dated note 21.3.1938, signed by Bamford. This document is quoted also by Flora, *Benoy Kumar Sarkar*, cit., p. 60-61. Giuriati managed to convince a number of Italian firms and shipping companies to publish their advertisements in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* instead of *The Statesman*: NAI, Ibid., Summary dated

The Consul General wanted

editors of Indian nationalist journals to publish articles and leaders based on materials to be supplied by the Italian Consul General.⁷⁹

The activities of the Italian Consulate included also culture. The Italian Consul General decided to open up an office of the Dante Alighieri Society, an association whose official mission was to promote Italian culture world-wide. Calcutta's branch of the Society was supposed to have also political purposes:

The committee of the Society is to be formed of disaffected Indians of pro-Italian tendencies.

Benoy Kumar Sarkar suggested to the Italian Consul General (with whom he was "on intimate terms") to set up an "Asiatic Society" in Calcutta. One of the objectives of the Society was to provide information in India on Arab countries,⁸⁰ while

the Society's aims and objectives are in consonance with Fascist ideals.⁸¹

The Dante Alighieri Society in Calcutta, the *Bangiya Dante Sabha*; was founded on 18th March 1938. One of the two presidents was Benoy Kumar Sarkar, and one of the two honorary secretaries was Monindra Mohan Moulik.⁸²

19.3.38.

⁷⁹ NAI, Ibid.

⁸⁰ NAI, Home poll. Dept, 79/38, 1938 "Note on Italian Activities in India", 6.1.38.

⁸¹ NAI, Ibid., summary of a report dated 25.6.38, in "Note on the political intrigues of the Italian Consulate-General in Calcutta", 2.7.1938.

⁸² ISMEO, Carte Formichi (Formichi Papers), pamphlet issued by the *Bangiya Dante Sabha*, including plans for meetings and conferences held in the Society headquarters between March 1938 and January 1939.

The British observed carefully the activities of the Italian Consul General, without overestimate them, because

He could undoubtedly find a number of Indians quite sufficient for his purposes who, while not necessarily being particularly pro-Italian, would be glad to use any material that he provided in order to embarrass the British...⁸³

The Italian Consul General invited the representatives of the *Nationalist Press*, the *Amrita*, the *Hindustan Standard* and the *Advance* to go every day to the Consulate to personally verify the quality of the Stefani agency news reports, broadcast initially only to the Italian Consulate.⁸⁴ The Consul was also thinking of getting in touch with the Muslim community, but nothing came of this idea.

The Italian diplomat was also in contact with the editor of the *Forward*, with a journalist based in Calcutta who worked for the *National Call*, printed in Delhi. The journalist published news from Italy, duly vetted by the Italian government, in exchange for advertising from Italian companies. Another contact was a correspondent of the *Hindu*, from Madras.⁸⁵

All these manoeuvres were expensive. Transferring the advertising from the *Statesman* to the *Amrita* required the payment of 1,000 rupees per month. The Calcutta branch of the Dante Society costed 200 rupees per month. The Italian lectureship at the University of Calcutta amounted at 100 rupees (approx. 700 lira) per month.⁸⁶

The Italian Consulate in Bombay was also very active, especially in the summer of 1938, when Mario Zanotti Bianco was appointed. Mario Carelli, former secretary and librarian of ISMEO arrived in

⁸³ NAI, 137/38, cit., note dated 2.4.38, signed J.Hennessy.

⁸⁴ NAI, 79/38, cit., note dated 6.1.38, cit.

⁸⁵ NAI, Ibid., note 2.7.38, cit., abstracts of reports of May 1938 and 6.6.38, 31.5.38, 23.6.38

⁸⁶ NAI, Home poll. Dept., 22/37/39, undated note entitled "Expenditure of Foreign money in India".

Bombay on 28th June 1938. He was responsible for further activities directed by the Italian General Consulate. The day after his arrival, Carelli wrote a letter to the president of the ISMEO, Giovanni Gentile, in which he outlined his plans.

I contacted the Royal Consul, Commendatore Mario Zanotti Bianco and his wife, who were and will be most helpful. They believe my mission here of the utmost importance. We are considering to revive the *Casa degli italiani* (the house of Italians) and, if we are through and circumspect, we hope it will function as a branch of the *Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente* [Italian Institute for Middle and Far East].

Yesterday I went to the St. Xavier College, part of the local University, to take contacts and fix agreements with the Jesuits who run it. They appointed me as Professor of Italian.

All this will take some time, and the official Italian course will not start, I believe, until January 1939. At the moment, there will be certainly at least a preparatory course, which I will hold.⁸⁷

As proved by a document of the end of 1938,⁸⁸ Carelli was looking beyond the regional boundaries and had contacted the Consulate in Calcutta to co-ordinate the activities of the Italian Consulate in Bombay and the local political circles with the Consulate in Calcutta. The following passage deserves to be quoted at length, since it sheds light on the connections that representatives of the fascist regime tried to establish in India. After referring to the need for more consistent exchanges between Italy and India, Carelli outlined a detailed plan:

⁸⁷ Fondazione Gentile (Gentile Foundation), Corrispondenza da terzi a Gentile (Correspondence from third subjects to Gentile), file Carelli Mario, undated letter (datable 29.6.38).

⁸⁸ Gentile Foundation, Correspondence from third subjects to Gentile, "Relazione del Prof. Mario Carelli, bibliotecario dell'I.S.M.E.O., inviato in missione a Bombay" (report by Prof. Mario Carelli, ISMEO librarian, on his mission to Bombay), to Giovanni Gentile, Bombay, 29.11.38, quoted by Prayer, *Internazionalismo*, cit., p. 64.

c) scholarships. A number of Indians who were keen to visit Italy by their own means or sent by ISMEO came to me for information. One of these is the Principal of the Hindu College at Surat. Another is a writer on religious matters, who will meet His Excellency Tucci in Bombay. With regard to ISMEO scholarships to Indians, I can say, under my own responsibility, that I will be able to find suitable persons for these scholarships. For better assurance, always under my responsibility, I can arrange direct correspondence with ISMEO for these persons. The Consul General should take the final decision, only after examining them carefully.

d) information and general advice. With Prof. Dasgupta, I have also looked into the Petech affair.⁸⁹ and I have already written on this matter to the Deputy General Secretary in Calcutta on 10.11.38. As I pointed out in my report to the Minister (see enclosed), I believe that Calcutta is a fertile field for Italian cultural expansion in India. If Dr Petech would be sent here, we would be advantaged to have a young representative of the Italian culture and a passionate scholar of India.

Cultural propaganda in Calcutta might also benefit from the aid of Dr. Monindra Mohan Mouluk. If it is true that to be successful any initiative must have the right man for the right job, he can be considered the best result obtained by ISMEO. Mouluk so deeply transformed during his stay in Italy that now, back in India, in his country, known for its capacity to absorb people, he feels uncomfortable and talks always of his desire to return to Italy. He is one of the few, perhaps the only, Indian I met who seems to understand Italy and who has become both intellectually and passionately infused with our spirit and culture. He recently wrote in the Modern Review an article on Gabriele d'Annunzio in which he displayed a knowledge of the poet that many Italians might envy.

As already said, I met Prof. Das Gupta in Calcutta. He appears to be very pleased with the honour received from the University of Rome and would like to confer a similar one upon our Vice-President.

⁸⁹ Luciano Petech is a famous Italian scholar of ancient Indian languages and culture.

The activity of the ISMEO was brought up and praised during the debate that followed two of my three lectures in Calcutta. At my second lecture, the chairman went so far as to declare that today, persons wishing to study Buddhism should not come to India, but go to Italy and study at ISMEO, under the guide of His Excellency Tucci.

Your name is known at the Ramakrishna Mission, and was warmly reminded by the director of the Ramakrishna Mission at Khar, Swami Sambuddhananda.⁹⁰

The Italian Consul in Calcutta tried to get in touch with Bose family. A rather sophisticated network, to be casual. Through a coordinated activity, Italians exponents tried to use as much as possible the two most radical environments and most sensitive to the regime's charm.

According to the British Intelligence,

Comm. Giuriati is an ardent admirer of Subhas Bose and... he regards his "Indian Struggle" as more important than Gandhi's or Nehru's autobiographies. The Consul-General has been promised an introduction to Sarat Bose by the latter's private secretary.⁹¹

On 18th June

Prakash Mallik, Sarat Bose's private secretary, discussed Congress politics with Comm. Giuriati and received Fascist propagandist literature from him.⁹²

Only a few months later, in October 1938, Carelli informed Gentile of the progress made:

I must thank you for entrusting me with this mission in Bombay, which is promising. My Italian course up to now has been

⁹⁰ Fondazione Gentile, Correspondence, cit., 29.11.38.

⁹¹ Extract of a report dated 10.6.38, contained in NAI, 79/38, cit., note 2.7.38, cit.

⁹² NAI, Ibid., report dated 23.6.38.

successful and I have met fine students who might prove most deserving of scholarships in the future and well follow in Moulik's. Italian culture here is highly appreciated and its promotion would be easier if our *casa d'Italia* (house of Italy) would be better equipped and more attractive. In any case, things are moving. For the coming season (November-March) I am preparing a number of lectures on art to be held here and in other intellectual circles. In the last days I lectured on education in Italy in a local school and had the opportunity to describe your reform. It was a great success. The lecture was followed by a lively debate, all very friendly, and I was asked to hold other lectures on Italy.⁹³

Among the students of the Italian courses in Bombay a certain Madhav Kashinath Damley was particularly promising. Carelli suggested him as a translator into Marathi of the English version of Mussolini's *Dottrina del Fascismo*. The book was published in summer 1939 in instalments in the Marathi weekly founded by Damley, the *Lokandi Morcha* (Iron Front). The publication costed 2,800 Italian lira.

Only the instalments of 8th, 15th and 22nd June are available in the archives.⁹⁴ These instalments were a faithful translation of the first thirty pages of Mussolini's work, where he explained the basic doctrines of fascism. Later issues were to contain the next chapters. The first page of the 8th June issue published also the translation of the article entitled "New Measures in Favour of Italian Workers", written by Virginio Gayda, a famous Italian journalist of this period. The translation of a pamphlet by A. Pagliaro was published by *Lokandi Morcha* in five instalments between 6th July and 10th August 1939. Unfortunately, there are no copies in the archives. On 27th July was published an article written in English by Mario Carelli, "The Institution of the House of the Fasci & Corporations".⁹⁵ The author argued that

⁹³ Fondazione Gentile, Correspondence, cit., 11.10.38.

⁹⁴ On 15th and 22nd June the weekly published two front-page articles on trade unions in Germany.

⁹⁵ ACS, Ministero della Cultura Popolare (Ministry of Popular Culture – Minculpop), 17 bis, file 26, Gran Bretagna (Great Britain), part 14, Royal Consulate Bombay, report

the House of the Fasci and the Corporations represented the people's interests better than the parliament, which was made up of men who were far from the corporative interests of the people. Members of parliament drew up laws concerning economy and society, exclusively on the basis of their authority rather than out of their practical experience. Carelli argued that the parliament could issue only contradictory and chaotic laws. The parliamentary reform which led to the institution of House of the Fasci & Corporations was described as the backbone of the social revolution made by the fascist regime:

Old fashioned parliamentary regimes mix groups or party interests with those of the nation and take special care in the electoral equality of the citizens, while the corporative system endeavours to bring about an actual equality in the masses by filling the gaps dividing them.

Thus,

Lack of executive power and party struggle in other States are symptoms of the decay of political bodies doomed to die and to be replaced by new ones which will better satisfy the political, social and economic needs of our country.

Right from the beginning of his activities, Damley became a target of the British authorities who, in the autumn of 1939, forced him to close down his periodical after he had published an article which the local government considered subversive. The authorities demanded a bail from Damley, which he didn't pay, and publication was interrupted.

Damley was a Chitpavan Brahmin from Poona, living in Bombay, whose journal was printed at his father's printing shop. According to the description given by the British authorities,

n.1904/St.3, from Italian Consulate, Bombay, 4 August 1939, to the Ministry of Popular Culture. A copy of the article is also to be found in Maharashtra State Archives (MSA), Home Special Dept., 830 (I) 1939.

He holds extreme political views and believes himself to be a follower of B.G. Tilak... He openly says that he is enamoured of the history of Italy and Nazi Germany.⁹⁶

The description made by the Italian Consul completes the picture:

Of fascist ideas, he founded an organisation to which he has given the name "Iron Guards" inspired by our own, albeit modified to fit in with the conditions prevailing in India.

He and his friends wore the black shirt, the first Blackshirts in India.

The growth of this organisation has been compromised by the outbreak of the war.⁹⁷

Damley had been close to the Vyayamshala or Physical Culture Institute in Poona. He was a typical exponent of the Marathi militarist culture. The British knew that he had established contacts not just with the Italian Consulate and especially with Carelli, but also with the German Consulate. Here Damley was in touch with the official in charge of the information service, a certain Lesczynski,⁹⁸ who was also the representative of the German News Agencies. Lesczynski liaised also with Savarkar.

Fascist and nazi intrigues in Bombay were soon discovered by the local press, which made much ado about this news. The "Bombay Chronicle" published a long article in two instalments entitled *Anti-Comintern over India* (22nd and 24th June). The first instalment had the subtitle, *Background of Nazi Fascist Propaganda*, and the second *How Communalism is Exploited by Fascists and Nazis*.⁹⁹ Both ar-

⁹⁶ MSA, Home Special Dept., 830 (I), note dated 11th July 1939.

⁹⁷ ACS, Minculpop., 17 bis, cit., report n.2298/St.3, from the Italian Consulate, Bombay, 4 October 1939, to the Ministry of Popular Culture.

⁹⁸ MSA, 830(I), cit., letter from Chief of Police in Bombay to M.K. Johnston, Assistant Director, Intelligence Bureau, 12th July 1939.

⁹⁹ Copies of the two articles are to be found in MSA, Home Special Dept., 830 (I) 1939 and ASMAE, AP, India, file n. 10, 1939, enclosed with Indian press report no. 84, sent by the Italian Consulate in Calcutta to the Foreign Office on 17th June 1939.

ticles pointed out that nazist and fascist ideas did not appeal much Indian public opinion at large, which was still strongly influenced by the Congress. However, these ideas had a certain consensus among the ranks of radical nationalism, and they contributed to foment the communalist tensions.¹⁰⁰

... the communalists – specially the more militant among them – have shown definite sympathies for the Fascist ideology... The Nazis’ glorification of the “Aryan” race is erroneously interpreted by militant Hindus as a vindication of their own doctrine of race and caste. The adoption of the old Hindu symbol of the Swastika by the Nazis is regarded by them as a manifestation of the proximity of Hitler’s philosophy to Hinduism.¹⁰¹

The second instalment disclosed the relations between the leaders of the Hindu Mahasabha, the Japanese Consulate and Indians exiled in Japan. About fascist ideological influence on the Marathi militant environment, the article warned:

Here and there, however, one may find small organisations which are run on near-fascist lines and are thus potentially dangerous. The Military School and various Physical Culture centres run by Hindu Communalists are obviously inspired by the example of fascist storm troops.¹⁰²

To confirm the description of the “Bombay Chronicle”, it should be remembered that in Bombay existed the Swastik League. It was

¹⁰⁰ Both articles assert that fascism and nazism had made an impact upon the minds of Muslim radical groups such as Khaksars, in northern India. However, there no records proving direct contacts between these groups and nazist or fascist organisations or exponents. The impression is that references, on the part of Indian Muslim political organisations, to nazist or fascist ideas were sporadic, and more implied than direct. This was not the case with the Hindus, who openly admitted their ideological and organisational inspiration to Mussolini’s Italy and Hitler’s Germany.

¹⁰¹ *How Communalism*, cit.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

founded on 10th March 1929 by a group of wealthy local professionals and by M.R. Jayakar, who became also its chairman.¹⁰³ The League published a monthly bulletin, the *Swastik Herald* and, from 16th April 1934, it had an also office in the centre of the town. The Swastik League, like other paramilitary groups, organised drills, sports events and parades. The League aimed at creating a voluntary, paramilitary corps for Hindu self-defence in case of aggression from Muslim “hooligans”. The organisation was equipped with ambulance and first aid, in order to face emergency during communal riots. The organisation provided Hindus with any possible instrument to face inter-communal tensions. As other organisation of the same kind, also the Swastik League made little difference between defence and aggression. It openly followed the example of fascist paramilitary organisations:

In the near future, our G.O.C. intends to form a Cadet Corps, consisting of boys between the age of 15 and 18 years. The training which these cadets will receive will ultimately enable them to join the League’s Volunteer Corps...

This reminds us of a picture published in the Sunday Chronicle on the 28th instant, showing two of Sgr. Mussolini’s “Baby Soldiers” remaining on sentry duty at the entrance of their annual encampment at Camp Dux, where the young members of the *Avan Guardista*, (sic) a youth organisation of Italy for boys from 14 to 18 years of age, get first hand acquaintance with the tools of war. Neither we nor our cadets can expect to be able to get such a direct training, but all the same, the efforts to train a boy in military discipline will never be wasted and will in course of time make that boy an ideal volunteer.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ NAI, Jayakar papers, microfilm, r.n.135, record entitled “A Short History of the League for seven Years (10 March 1929 to 10 March 1936)”, undated but produced in March 1936, most probably a circular to be distributed on the anniversary of the foundation of the Swastik League.

¹⁰⁴ NAI, *Ibid.*, r.n. 13, copy of the *Swastik Herald* of 7th November 1934.

Only in 1940, when nazism had shown its true nature, the League feel it should to take a distance from and abandon the *swastika* as a symbol. In the issue of July-August 1940, the *Swastik Herald* published an article with the title *Hitler and the Swastik League*, which stated that “The symbol ‘Swastik’ stands for Germany and Germany, at present, is Hitler” and continued by pointing out the differences between the the Leagues ideological background and nazist values.

Hitler discriminates between Aryans and non-Aryans between Germans and Jews. The League, though it is a purely Hindu organisation, does not make a difference between the Hindus and the non-Hindus.... Hitler has many enemies, the League cannot have any. He is revengeful; the League is forgiving and tolerant. He is violent and wild; the League is not. He thinks and acts in terms of destruction. He has destroyed many families, many nations: nay, the peace of the world. Armed to teeth he is running amuck. The League stands for construction. He is an enemy of humanity. The League is a saviour of humanity. It has saved thousands of human lives. Its ambulance is most efficient.

The article ended with an appeal to the government to allow organisations such as the Swastik League to arm themselves and form a voluntary militia against the threat of nazism.

6 – Changing perspectives: The image of fascism and nazism in the Indian press in the late 1930s

In the late 1930’s, the Indian press showed a great interest in Italy, as proved by the reports sent by the Bombay and, to a lesser extent, Calcutta Consulates to the Foreign Office in Rome regularly, more or less weekly, between 1937 and 1939.¹⁰⁵

105 The records are represented by a great amount of news clippings from Indian news-

The main newspapers paid particular attention to Italian facts or to international affairs concerning Italy. The accounts were unbiased, sometimes articles were directly or indirectly critical, sometimes ridiculed Italy, the fascist regime and its figures. This kind of press cannot be compared with the pro-fascist one and the level of information it provided was high. Italian propaganda and fascist influence on Indian radical circles had no effects on the main newspapers, the only ones that could reach Indian masses. After all, the British were still in control of the Indian political situation. Between 1937 and 1939, *The Times of India*, the *Sind Observer*, the *Bombay Sentinel*, the *Evening News* and the *Daily Gazzette* continued to deal with incoming events, like the consequences of the Ethiopian war, its effects on the Abyssinian people and on the Italian economy, Italian economic self-sufficiency and its consequences, the Spanish Civil War, the Anglo-Italian relations, and those between Italy and Germany, rearmament in these two countries, the meeting between Hitler and Mussolini. The Anti-Comintern pact, the Rome-Berlin "Axis" and their effects on the balance of power in Europe had a remarkable space in Indian newspapers. By autumn 1937, many believed there would be a war involving the entire world and India had to prepare for it.

A selection of the news of 1937 proves how Indian newspapers and, consequently Indian public opinion, were fully aware of the atrocities committed by nazism and fascism. On 28th June, *Illustrated India* provided a detailed account of the murder of Rosselli brothers.¹⁰⁶ *What Fascism Means* was the title of an article published by the *Kaiser-i-Hind*,

papers, especially from those printed in the Bombay Presidency, sent mainly from the local Italian Consulate and, to a lesser extent, from the Calcutta Consulate. These papers are collected in ASMAE, AP, India, b.5, 1937, b.6, 1937-38, b.9, 1939.

¹⁰⁶ ASMAE, AP, India, b.5, cit., abstract of an article whose title was translated into Italian as *Luridi riflessi sul fascismo* (Dirty speculations on Fascism) enclosed with express telegram n. 1969/323, from the Italian General Consulate in Calcutta, 8th July 1937, to the Ministries of External Affairs and Popular Culture and to the Italian Embassy in London. On 23.9.37, the *Bombay Sentinel* carried the article, *Murder of Italian Exiles*: ASMAE, AP, India, b.6, cit., enclosure to bulletin no. 460/3568, from the Italian Consulate-General in Bombay to various recipients, including the Foreign Office (24.9.37).

from Bombay, of 19th September.¹⁰⁷ It denounced ill-treatments and prevarications of Jews and political opponents in Germany:

Fascism is the enemy of science, of rationalism, of educational progress... Fascism kills, tortures and terrorises...

The racial laws passed in Italy in 1938 and following discriminations and purges, of anti-Semitism overwhelming not only in Germany, but also in Italy, all this news soon reached India. *The Times of India* of 25th August even suggested that Italian and German agents were behind the increasing of terrorist actions in Palestine.¹⁰⁸ The Palestinian question and the Italian and German foreign policies in Middle East were carefully examined by the Indian press in English.

Besides opinions on anti-Semitism in Italy, the Indian press published also description of Italian society, so different from the image of the country that the fascist regime tried to promote. One of the most meaningful examples of how common was the awareness about the real nature of fascism is the summary made by the Italian authorities of an article published by the *Hindustan Standard* of 7th December 1938. Italian atmosphere was described in the following terms:

The correspondent's gives a picture of Fascist Italy which humiliates the Italian People. He sees only mourning clothes and sadness on the face of every citizen on the road. Fear silences the souls of the people who look like enchained... Poverty everywhere. The workers' wages are poor and heavily taxed. The workers and the middle classes do not have enough to eat and the food is poor. Referring to Italian volunteers in Spain, the correspondent claims that they could hardly be called "volunteers", since they are forcefully enrolled...¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ ASMAE, Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ ASMAE, AP, India, b.7, 1938, enclosed with bulletin no. 227/3203, from the Italian Consulate in Bombay, 25th August 1938 to various recipients, including the Foreign Office.

¹⁰⁹ ASMAE, AP, India, b.8, 1938, enclosed with express telegram n. 5531/726, from the

The *Illustrated Weekly*, a widely distributed Indian magazine, on 4th December 1938 published the article *Dictatorship. What it offers: The Inevitable End*. With regard to control and limitations imposed by the fascist regime on personal freedom, it stated that

Dictatorship involves not merely misery for its subjects, but also their steady and relentless degradation. Card-index, finger-print, microphone and all other devices of detection and organisation which the machine age has put at the service of criminology become on a vaster scale the instruments of criminal government.

From the end of 1938, as fascist ideology had enormously increased its influence over Europe, more and more articles in India came out against totalitarian regimes, which were described in gloomy terms. In the same year, there was much consternation over German expansionism and nazi ambitions toward Central-Eastern Europe. Oddly enough, the Sudeten question received more attention, than the *Anschluss* itself.

As war clouds gathered, anxiety increased on what position India should take. However, it was quite clear that the Congress Party line would prevail. In other terms, India should support Great Britain in its struggle against the Axis powers.

The *duce's* pictures were very common in the press. He appeared in different situations, while doing several activities, both private and public. He was often portrayed in demagogic postures. The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of 26th November 1937 published a picture of an uniformed Mussolini with his arm raised in the Roman salute in front of the crowd in Piazza Venezia, during the celebrations for the King's birthday. During the summer of 1938, all main Indian dailies published the photos of a shirtless Mussolini harvesting in the fields in the countryside around Rome. Other pictures portrayed him when, at the end of the harvest, spoke to the masses.

Italian General Consulate in Calcutta, 21st December 1938, to various recipients, including the Foreign Office.

Mussolini and the institutions of the fascist regime were well known in India. Information was available for anyone. It was possible to have first hand news on the main event involving Italy and Germany and, to a lesser extent, on Italy's internal situation. Also the crimes perpetrated by the regime were therefore known.

CHAPTER 4

The Second World War

I did not meet Savarkar personally, though I certainly experienced his remarkable influence, and I came into contact with many other Indian leaders in Berlin, Constantinople, and Kabul. Indeed the German members of my Mission in Kabul were led to pursue our own strategic aims against the British rule, and we were so struck by the profound patriotism of our Indian friends that we had only India's fate in mind, and Afghanistan became merely a geographical starting point for the general struggle for India's freedom.

Savarkar's unswerving attitude carried us through the most formidable struggles and his conduct was an example to all us....

Savarkar deserves such a memorial in the light of precedence given to Mahatma Gandhi and Pundit Nehru.¹

1 – Savarkar, president of the Hindu Mahasabha

After a 26 years long detention, Vinayak Damodhar Savarkar was unconditionally released on 10th May 1937.² Savarkar was elect-

¹ Vidya Sagar Anand, preface to Savarkar. *A Study in the evolution of Indian Nationalism*, London, 1967. The quotation is from Otto von Hentig, a high rank official at the German Ministry of External Affairs during the 1920's and 1930's. He played an important role in organising anti-British activities of the German government among Indian revolutionaries, acting as liaison on behalf of the German government in its relations with Indian revolutionaries. During the second World War, von Hentig, with Grobba and Niedermayer, undertook the task to to revive the anti-British revolutionary activities performed by the Gadhar Party and the pan-Islamic movement during the first World War.

² After his involvement in the assassination of Sir Curzon Willie, Savarkar was sentenced to transportation to Port Blair jail until 1960. In 1923 his punishment was commuted into

ed president of the Hindu Mahasabha at the party meeting held at Ahmedabad, a few days after his release. He kept this position until 1942. Over his long permanence at the head of the party, he could develop a specific political line which, on one hand, was deeply leader-oriented, while, on the other hand, it represented a remarkable evolution if compared with the previous party policy.

Although Moonje had been president only for a year, his influence over the party had also been strong and it can be said that he continued to virtually lead the party until Savarkar took over.³ Moonje's militaristic vision of Hindu nationalism was shared by Savarkar right from the first years of the latter's exile at Ratnagiri. As head of the party, Savarkar maintained this policy, although he added other elements, more in keeping with his personal background and ideas. Savarkar's political thought can be defined as a kind of radicalism with socialist leanings, which appears as a peculiar version of "national socialism". He approached autonomously the ideals of fascism and nazism, and not through direct contacts with the regime emissaries. He came across this ideas spontaneously, along his political path, and adopted some of them. Although he had withdrawn from Indian politics for many years, he probably came to know about Italian facts from the Indian press that, as already seen, devoted a constant attention to Italian politics. He might have been also aware of the Italian activities in India.

Savarkar expressed his views about violence during a meeting with some journalists, short after his release, on 25th June 1937 at the offices of the Kesari. According to the police report on the subject,

He further said that... he was still of opinion that independence could only be achieved through an armed revolution and the so-

life confinement in Ratnagiri, and definitely cancelled in 1937.

³ This is confirmed by Indra Prakash, a member of the Hindu Mahasabha since 1927, in his *Hindu Mahasabha, its contribution in India's Politics*, Delhi, 1966. Moonje's role is dealt with on pp. 46-47: "Dr. Moonje's regime lasted for about six years. Although different persons were invited to preside over the consecutive sessions of the Hindu Mahasabha, Dr. Moonje virtually controlled the destiny of the Hindu Mahasabha".

cialist would not flinch to take up to arms, at the proper time... It was therefore welcome that socialism had been progressing in the Congress ranks. If Socialists stood for the abolition of all religions in the world, he would be the first man to join them. But if they aimed at the abolition of Hindu religion only, he would oppose them, even though he was in agreement with their economic and political ideology.⁴

Relations between the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS were as important as ever. Right from his release, Savarkar attended meetings and made public speeches, often to students. Most of these meetings were organised by local RSS offices. Militants took part in numbers to these happenings and sometimes Savarkar thanked them publicly.⁵ Neither could be forgotten Hedgewar's role, mentioned in several occasions by Savarkar in his speeches:

... congratulating the Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh of Dr. Hedgewar of Nagpur on its work and discipline.⁶

This tribute to the Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh continued in the following years. On 29th July 1939, Savarkar spoke in front of approximately 5,000, people during the Guru Purnima celebrations organised by the RSS in Poona.⁷ Several years later, during a RSS's Officers' Training Camp held in Poona between 27th and 29th May 1943), at the presence of Golwarkar, who had taken Hedgewar's place at the head of the RSS, of Moonje, of his brother, Babarao and in

⁴ MSA, Home Special Dept., 60 D (g) Pt.II, 1937, Intelligence report "Meeting of V. D. Savarkar with journalists on the Morning of 25.6.37", undated but clearly drawn up on the same day of the meeting.

⁵ See MSA, Ibid. records from June and July 1937.

⁶ MSA, Ibid., Extract from the Bombay Secret Abstract for week ending 15.1.38, headed "Hindu Affairs".

⁷ MSA, Home Special Dept., 60 D (g) Pt.III 1938, "Extract from the Bombay Province weekly letter No. 31, dated 5th August 1939". The Guru Purnima is a festival dedicated to the figure of the spiritual master.

front of about 5,000 people (approx 1,000 were women, V. D. Savarkar who was no more president of the Hindu Mahasabha,

expressed his pleasure to see the display by Swayamsevaks in great number and said that he was proud to see the branches of the Sangh spread throughout India during his visits to various places... He was pleased to see the Hindu Youths, boys and girls, joining the institutions, based on Hinduism, in great number.⁸

During these meetings, militants collected funds for donations to their newly released leader. At the already mentioned 1943 Training Camp, Savarkar celebrated his 61st birthday. In this occasion the Hindu leader received a donation of about 180,000 rupees. The sum was made up of donations from Hindu organisations, the municipality of Poona and private individuals.⁹ A few days before, at Bombay, Savarkar received a gift of 61,000 rupees.¹⁰ Other large sums were donated by members of Hindu organisations at the towns he visited during one of his political campaigns in the same period. In early June, Savarkar was in Ahmedabad, invited by the Gujarat Provincial Hindu Mahasabha. Also there, he received a similar sum (the exact figure is not specified).¹¹

These public meetings were the ideal venue for Savarkar to explain the ideas he held since a long time, namely the impossibility to achieve the unity between Muslims and Hindus, or his ideal of a Hindu nation. He underlined that Hindus should arm themselves and organise from the military point of view. "Militarise Hindudom and Hinduise

⁸ MSA, Home Special Department, 1009 III 1942, police record "A summary report of the concluding ceremony of the Officers' Training Camp of the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh, at Poona on the 27th May 1943".

⁹ MSA, Ibid., note dated 10.6.43

¹⁰ MSA, Ibid., report dated 31st May "V. D. Savarkar's 61st Birthday Celebrations" and report of 5.6.43, "V. D. Savarkar: 61st Birthday Celebrations of". Savarkar received the donation from V. V. Kelkar and P. B. Bhave, respectively chairman and publisher of the Nagpur Adesh, during a meeting organised by the Dadar Hindu Sabha.

¹¹ MSA, Ibid., damaged report, lacking the date, "Hindu Sabha Camp (Shibir)".

All Politics” is the well-known slogan, created, supported and disseminated by Savarkar. Passages such as the following provide a clear picture of these two main tendencies in Savarkar’s political thought:

You should not abandon Hinduism, even if you are offered Kingdom of India. Hinduism and Independence are inter-dependent. The second point is that you should all take military education. In my time I used to practice lathi at midnight outside the village Nasik.¹²

The affinity with the project realised by Moonje was evident and Savarkar underlined it clearly:

At present I see that many students know lathi practice and drill but now they must go a step further and learn military education, for starting which, I congratulate Dr. Munje.¹³

He concluded by saying that Germany had once done the same.¹⁴

2 – Savarkar, fascism and nazism

According to a police report of a meeting held in a small village in early February 1938, Savarkar, speaking to about 800 people, urged that Hindu society should militarise. He told his listeners that

All nations were preparing Arms and Mussolini had armed even children with rifles.¹⁵ Savarkar was fairly outspoken in his views concerning India’s international relations with countries other

¹² MSA, Home Special Dept., 60 D (g) Pt.II 1937, cit., “Summary report of the meeting held in the Tilak Smarak Mandir on behalf of Poona students”, 3.8.37.

¹³ MSA, Ibid.

¹⁴ MSA, Ibid.

¹⁵ MSA, Ibid., “Extract from (...) Secret Abstract for the week ending 12.2.38”.

than Britain. He had been released and had made his return to the political scene during in the period between the signature of the Rome-Berlin Axis and Japan's decision to join it. The exponents of the radical nationalism, as it will be better explained in the following pages, appreciated this alliance and had a very favourable attitude to the Axis powers.

On 1st August 1938, in Poona, Savarkar talked to more than 20,000 people. The topic of his speech was "India's foreign policy". The following excerpts are transcriptions of the main points he made on that occasion, as summarised in a press statement issued by the Bombay office of the Hindu Mahasabha.

He observed India's foreign policy must not depend on "isms". Germany has every right to resort to Nazism and Italy to Fascism and events have justified that those isms and forms of Governments were imperative and beneficial to them under the conditions that obtained there. Bolshevism might have suited Russia and Democracy as it is obtained in Briton (sic) to the British people.¹⁶

According to Savarkar, each political system of government was appropriate to the nature of the respective populations. Savarkar criticised Nehru's view regarding the attitude India should adopt toward the Axis powers.

¹⁶ NMML, Savarkar papers, microfilm, Roll no. 23, part 2, Miscellaneous Correspondence Jan. 1938-May 1939, "Press Note issued by the Hindu Mahasabha Office Bombay Branch", undated. Savarkar's speech is also briefly summarised in MSA, 60 D (g) Pt.III, cit., "Extract from the weekly confidential report of the District Magistrate, Poona, dated the 11th August 1938". The Italian Consul in Calcutta provided a fairly detailed account of the speech as published by the Ananda Bazar Patrika of 3rd August, in the abstract "Critiche al viaggio di Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in Europa" (Critique to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's trip to Europe): ASMAE, AP, India, b.7, 1938, report from Indian newspapers, enclosed with express telegram no. 3489/46, from the Italian Consulate in Calcutta, 12 August 1938, to the Ministry of External Affairs.

Who are we to dictate to Germany, Japan or Russia or Italy to choose a particular form of policy of Government simply because we woo it out of academical attraction? Surely Hitler knows better than Pandit Nehru does what suits Germany best. The very fact that Germany or Italy has so wonderfully recovered and grown so powerful as never before at the touch of Nazi or Fascist magical wand is enough to prove that those political “isms” were the most congenial tonics their health demanded.

India may choose or reject a particular form of Government, in accordance with her political requirements. But Pandit went out of his way when he took sides in the name of all Indians against Germany or Italy. Pandit Nehru might claim to express the Congress Section in India at the most. But it should be made clear to the German, Italian, or Japanese public that (...) Hindu Sanghatanists in India whom neither Pandit Nehru or (sic) nor the Congress represents, cherish no ill-will towards Germany or Italy or Japan or any other Country in the World simply because they had chosen a form of Government or constitutional policy which they though (sic) suited best and contributed most to their National solidarity and strength.¹⁷

Savarkar actually defended Germany regarding the Sudetenland question.

... as far as the Czechoslovakia question was concerned the Hindu Sanghatanists in India hold that Germany was perfectly justified in uniting the Austrian and Sudeten Germans under the German Flag. Democracy itself demanded that the will of the people must prevail in choosing their own Government. Germany demanded plebiscite, the Germans under the Czechs wanted to join their kith and kin in Germany. It was the Czechs who were acting against the principle of democracy in holding the Germans under a foreign sway against their will... Now that Germany is strong why should she not strike to unite all Germans and consolidate them

¹⁷ NMML, Ibid.

into a Pan-German state and realise the political dream which generations of German people cherished.¹⁸

On the eve of the Second World War, Savarkar felt he should publicly declare what should be the approach of the Hindu organisations toward other nations:

Any nation who helps India or is friendly towards her struggle for freedom is our friend. Any Nation which opposes us or pursues a policy inimical to us is our foe. Towards those who do neither, India must maintain an attitude of perfect neutrality refusing to poke her nose unnecessarily into their internal or external policy.¹⁹

This speech was published by the famous German newspaper *Volkischer Beobachter*, with a certain delay, on 30th November 1938.²⁰

Only under Savarkar's presidency the Hindu Mahasabha formulated its own foreign policy, similar to the Congress line, inspired by Nehru. However, among foreign political actors, Savarkar chose possible allies who were different from Nehru's ones.

Savarkar's reference to the German minorities in Czechoslovakia was a clear comparison to the Indian situation. Speaking at Poona on 11th October 1938,²¹ to approximately 4,000 people Savarkar went on, stating that, if there were to be a plebiscite in India, Muslims would choose to side with Muslims and Hindus with Hindus. He believed that neighbourly relations between peoples, even over hundreds of years, was not enough to forge a nation, since "The common desire to form a nation was essential for the formation of a nation".

¹⁸ NMML, *Ibid.*

¹⁹ NMML, *Ibid.*

²⁰ NMML, Savarkar papers, microfilm, R. n.1, part 2, March 1937-May 1938: the version in English of the article published by the *Volkischer Beobachter* tallies with the press statement mentioned above.

²¹ MSA, 60 D (g) Pt.II 1937, cit., "Extract from the weekly confidential report of the District Magistrate, dated the 21st October 1938".

It should be also noticed that after Savarkar's arrival on the political scene, the Hindu-Muslim relations took a more radical character. Savarkar considered the policy adopted by the Muslim League as the main responsible of the growth of separatist feelings among the Muslim community. Many of Savarkar's speeches reflected his belief that separation between Hindus and Muslims had already a matter of fact. This kind of political dialectic inflamed the sectors of the public opinion who were close to the Hindu political organisations and led them to separatist feelings, similar to those shared by the Muslims.

Between 1938 and 1939 the reactions of the Anti-Nazi League, the Congress, and the progressive press toward German anti-semitism and German politics showed that Indian public opinion and the nationalist leaders were fairly well informed about the events in Europe. If Bose, Savarkar and others looked favourably upon racial discrimination in Germany or did not criticize them, it cannot be said, to justify them, that they were unaware of what was happening.

The great anti-Jewish pogrom known as the "Crystals night" took place on 9th November 1938. In early December, pro-Hindu Mahasabha journals published articles in favour of German anti-semitism. This stance brought the Hindu Mahasabha into conflict with the Congress which, on 12th December, made a statement containing clear references to recent European events. Within the Congress, only Bose opposed the party stance. A few months later, in April 1939, he refused to support the party motion that Jews might find refuge in India.²² Savarkar and the Hindu Mahasabha had a similar opinion.

In sharp contrast with the Congress line, in occasion of a public meeting held at Malegaon in the autumn 1938, Savarkar dealt at length with the "Jewish problem" in Germany. According to him, India should follow the German example to solve the "Muslim 'problem'":

²² M. Hauner, *op. cit.*, pp. 66-67.

A Nation is formed by a majority living therein. What did the Jews do in Germany? They being in minority were driven out from Germany.²³

Some time later, when the Congress passed the already mentioned motion, during a public meeting held at Thana, at the presence of local RSS voluntary workers and supporters, Savarkar stated that

In Germany the movement of the Germans is the national movement but that of the Jews is a communal one.²⁴

On 29th July, in Poona, speaking about Hindu-Muslim relations, Savarkar quoted the German anti-Jewish policy as an example

Nationality did not depend so much on a common geographical area as on unity of thought, religion, language and culture. For this reason the Germans and the Jews could not be regarded as a nation.²⁵

Without a common cultural, linguistic, and religious background, not even Hindus and Muslims could reach the national unity. Muslims would just have to accept to be a minority whose rights depended upon the magnanimity of the Hindu majority.

During the 21st congress of the Hindu Mahasabha held in December 1939, Savarkar once more drew parallels between the Jewish 'problem' in Germany and the Muslim 'problem' in India:

... the Indian Muslims are on the whole more inclined to identify themselves and their interests with Muslims outside India than Hindus who live next door, like Jews in Germany.²⁶

²³ MSA, Home Special Dept., 60 D(g) Pt.III 1938, cit., "Translation of the verbatim speech made by V. D. Savarkar at Malegaon on 14.10.1938".

²⁴ MSA, Ibid., "A report on the meeting held on 11.12.1938".

²⁵ MSA, Home Special Dept., 60 D(g) Pt.III 1938, cit., "Extract from the B. P. weekly letter n.31, dated 5th August 1939".

²⁶ A summary of Savarkar's speech during the 21st session of the Hindu Mahasabha was

On the basis of this principle,

Just as the land of Germans is Germany... even so we must have it indelibly impressed on the map of the earth of all times to come “Hindustan” – the land of the Hindus.²⁷

Ideas of this kind circulated beyond the Hindu Mahasabha, within the broader Hindu political milieu. Golwarkar’s well-known statement is almost coincident with Savarkar’s views:

German national pride has now become the topic of the day. To keep up the purity of the nation and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of the Semitic races – the Jews. National pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well-nigh impossible it is for races and cultures, having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by.²⁸

Golwarkar went further than Savarkar and even considered the possibility of denying the Muslims the citizens’ rights:

in one word, they [Muslims] must cease to be foreigners or may stay in the country wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment, not even citizen’s rights.²⁹

It is well-known that Golwarkar’s idea of nation was inspired by Johann Kaspar Bluntschli, “an exponent of German ethnic nationalism” and author of *The Theory of the State*.³⁰

published in the *Bombay Chronicle* of 29.12.1939.

²⁷ *Bombay Chronicle*, *Ibid.*

²⁸ Madhav Sadashiv Golwarkar *We, or Our Nationhood Defined*, Nagpur, 1939, p. 37.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

³⁰ Cristofhe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, New Delhi, 1996, pp.

Hindu public opinion was continuously exposed to statements of this kind, disseminated by any possible mean. The Mahratta of 6th January 1939 published the article The Savarkar Method of rejuvenation of the Hindudom. New Drive in Hindu Thought and Action. Savarkar's concept was repeated: "Germans are the nation in Germany and the Jews are a community". More or less the same words used by Savarkar.

The Second World War had broken out only a few months before, and the Hindu Mahasabha's policy was already influenced by the new international atmosphere.

3 – The Hindu Mahasabha and the Axis Powers at the outbreak of the Second World War

It is worth of interest to examine the Hindu Mahasabha policy during the months leading to the outbreak of the second world war and immediately after. As war became more and more likely, so Germany's increasingly explicit anti-British policy presented this nation as a possible ally for the Hindu Mahasabha. Among the key elements to understand the Hindu Mahasabha policy at that time are the well documented relations between Savarkar and Rash Behari Bose,³¹ who had lived in Japan for many years.

Soon after his arrival in Japan, on 5th June 1915, Rash Behari established links with the German Consulate in Shanghai. On one hand he was engaged in liaising with Indian revolutionaries expatriated in Japan and in the United States and, on the other, in sending small consignments of arms to India on a regular basis.

In 1917, Rash Behari met Tarak Nath Das. In 1924 he founded the Indian Independence League, whose role during the Second

32 and 53-54.

³¹ The best-known biography of Rash Behari Bose is Uma Mukherjee, *Two Great Indian Revolutionaries*, Calcutta, 1966, especially pp. 97-162.

World War was to prove most important. Rash Behari had invented the slogan, “Asia for Asians”, and firmly believed that Indian independence would pave the way for the independence and freedom for other countries in Eastern Asia. India was a sort of bridge for a vast Pan-Asiatic movement, stretching from the Middle to the Far East. In 1934 the Italian showed some interest, although rather careless, in Rash Behari Bose. The Italian ambassador in Tokyo had been attracted by Rash Behari’s periodical, *The New Asia*, published by the association bearing the same name. The magazine aimed at “the complete independence for Asia”.³² It published brief bulletins and comments concerning international politics and paid particular attention to questions relating to India, to the British policy, and to the Middle East. Tarak Nath Das was the correspondent from Europe.

Italian sources provide information on Rash Behari’s early days in Japan. In May 1934, the Italian Embassy in Tokyo sent to the Ministry of External Affairs a report which, among other information, disclosed the connections between Rash Behari’s and the local political context:

... following British insistence he was extradited... without the aid of the “ronin” (a sort of errant knight) Mitsuru Toyama, president of the “Association of the Black Dragon”... a very powerful fellow, guardian of ancient Yamato warrior traditions, and the terror of the ministries. Toyama took Bose in as a house guest, and the police dared not arrest him. Mr. Bose then married the daughter of a wealthy trader in Tokyo and became a subject of the Emperor of Japan. He is one of the most ardent supporters of the cause of freeing Asia from “the yoke of the white man”. The liberation should obviously take place under Japan’s leadership.³³

³² Some copies of *The New Asia* are to be found in Italy: ASMAE, AP, Giappone, b.6, 1934, fasc. Movimento Panasiatico (Pan-Asiatic movement), enclosed with express telegram no. 410/255, dated 16 May 1934, signed by Auriti.

³³ ASMAE, *Ibid.*

A record of February 1934 provides information on the Pan-Asia movement, Toyama and the Association of the Black Dragon.

The Pan-Asiatic movement in Japan is an extension of the movement for Sino-Japanese unification... The campaign for the “liberation of the Asian races from white oppression” was revived after the Russo-Japanese war in which, for the first time, a Western power was beaten by an Eastern one. Heart and soul of this movement is the ronin Mitsuru Toyama... and his reactionary, nationalist association, the Black Dragon...³⁴

Furthermore,

After the developments in Manchuria and Japan’s decision to abandon the League of the Nations, the activities of the Pan-Asiatic movement increased, also as a result of the government support. The so-called Monroe Doctrine doctrine for Asia has been put forward. Politicians, army officers and writers are uttering the new sentence “Asia for Asians”. One nationalist writer, Mr. Hajime Hosoi... has organised with the help of the leaders of many “right wing parties”... “The Young Asia League”... Its slogan is “Asia for Asians” and its aim is a continent-wide union of Asian countries.³⁵

The former Foreign Minister of Japan, Yoshizawa, Mitsuru Toyama, the Mayor of Tokyo, the Ministers of Education and of Overseas Affairs as well as the Legations of Afghanistan and Persia supported the League.

Rash Behari was involved with the Japanese right wing from the beginning. It is not possible to know if the correspondence between Rash Behari and Savarkar started during the latter’s period of confinement, immediately after he was released, or in 1938. Actually, the first

³⁴ ASMAE, *Ibid.*, express telegram no. 166/113, from the Italian Embassy in Tokyo, 24 February 1934, to the Ministry of External Affairs, signed Auriti.

³⁵ ASMAE, *Ibid.*

recorded correspondence between the two dates back to 7th March 1938. Furthermore, at least two of Rash Behari's letters were published by Savarkar in *The Mahratta*.³⁶ It was expected that, after the publication of Rash Behari's letters,

All Hindu Sanghathanists in India find themselves strengthened in their views and activities to see you advocating the cause of Hindu Sanghatan and taking up such a far seeing and insightful (sic) view of the Indian situation Political and Social.³⁷

Rash Behari Bose's views and those of the Hindu Mahasabha were so similar that Savarkar invited Rash Behari to send a message to the Hindu Mahasabha congress to be held in Nagpur on 28th December 1938.³⁸

In the summer of 1938, Rash Behari had already told Savarkar that he intended to open an office of the Hindu Mahasabha in Japan. It was to be

an authorised international mouth piece of the Hindu Mahasabha and Hindudom as such in Eastern foreign countries.³⁹

Savarkar approved Rash Behari's proposal, encouraged him to put it in practice, and advised him about what to do. Savarkar pointed out that the Hindu Mahasabha offices abroad were to depend directly from the headquarters.⁴⁰ At this time, Savarkar also tried to liaise with

³⁶ NMML, Savarkar papers, microfilm, roll n. 23, cit.: a letter of 23 May 1938 referring to the letter of 7 March 1938 was sent to Rash Behari Bose by the Secretary of the Hindu Mahasabha Bombay office. The document contains also a reference to a Rash Behari Bose's letter published by *The Mahratta* and in other maratha journals in spring 1938. A second letter dated 11 July 1938 from Rash Behari to Savarkar, published by *The Mahratta*, is referred to in an unsigned letter, dated 11 August 1938 to the publisher of the newspaper, Gajanrao Ketkar, and in another letter dated 18 August 1938, to Rash Behari Bose, from the Secretary of the Hindu Mahasabha, J. D. Malekar, Bombay office.

³⁷ NMML, *Ibid.*, 18 August 1938, cit.

³⁸ NMML, *Ibid.*, letter from Savarkar to Bose, 14 November 1938, signed President Hindu Maha Sabha.

³⁹ NMML, *Ibid.*, 18 August 1938, cit.

⁴⁰ NMML, *Ibid.*, letter 14 November 1938, cit.

the Italian, German and Japanese Consulates. He hoped they could publish the press communiqué related to his speech of 1st August in the respective countries. For this task, Savarkar engaged Jugalkishor Birla,⁴¹ elder brother of the well-known Calcutta industrialist, Ghan-shyam Das Birla, who was a very keen supporter of the Hindu Mahasabha. A copy of the press statement was sent to Rash Behari too, not only to publish it in the local newspapers but also to forward it to the Japanese government.⁴²

While there is no archival evidence of any contacts between Savarkar and the Italian Consulate or Consulate officials, plenty of records is available, showing Savarkar's connections with German agents. From November 1938 on, Savarkar had been writing to two German agents, G. L. Lesczczyński – representative of the German News Agencies – and a certain P. Pазze. The latter was fronting as a manager of a company based in Bombay,⁴³ but he was involved in propaganda activities orchestrated by the German Consulate. These two fellows arranged the publication of Savarkar's speech in the *Volkischer Beobachter*. However, before going ahead with the publication, Lesczczyński wanted to know how big was the party headed by Savarkar, in order to know “exactly what amount of influence the Hindu Maha Sabha wields in the country, the strength of its membership etc.”. On 22nd November, the party headquarters promptly informed Lesczczyński that

So far as the Hindu Mahasabha is concerned it is an All India organisation representing Hindus just as the Moslem League represents the Moslems. Its membership runs (sic) several thousands.⁴⁴

⁴¹ NMML, *Ibid.*, letter from Savarkar to Birla, 2.11.38, hand signed V. D. S.

⁴² NMML, Savarkar papers, r.n. 23, *cit.*, letter from the secretary of the Hindu Mahasabha to Rash Behari Bose, 4 November 1938.

⁴³ NMML, *Ibid.*, letter from secretary of the Hindu Mahasabha to Pазze, 19.11.38, thanking Pазze for passing the press statement containing Savarkar's speech of 1st August on to the German Consul. On the same date, Lesczczyński informed Malekar by letter that he had received the press statement sent to Pазze on 10 November 1938.

⁴⁴ NMML, *Ibid.*

Over the next few months, relations between Germany and the Hindus increased. In early December, Malekar sent Leszczynski a copy of an article published in an unspecified “Marathi leading Daily”, in which Germany’s conduct over the Jewish question was described in favourable terms. Two days later, Leszczynski sent Savarkar a complimentary copy of *Mein Kampf*.⁴⁵

Germany and Japan were attracting the attention of radical nationalists to a greater extent than Italy. Both, Germany and Japan, were well armed and were capable to destroy Great Britain. Hindu nationalists the German political system. After her victories in China following the invasion of 1937, Japan was seen as the champion of Asian nations in their struggle against the Western powers. In a letter dated 9th July 1939, Rash Behari Bose drew Savarkar’s attention to the increasing military might of Japan and her success in China:

Japan considers it her God-sent mission to drive out British influence not only from China but from the whole Asia eventually. I therefore hope that the Indians, particularly the Hindus, will co-operate with Japan for this object.⁴⁶

In 1939 *The Mahratta*, now a periodical, and no longer a daily newspaper, published several articles on Germany and Italy. The territorial claims of both nations were defended, while British and French intransigence was seen as the main cause of Germany’s annexation of Central Europe as well as the Italian invasion of Albania.⁴⁷ The journal provided detailed accounts of the growing strength of the Rome-

⁴⁵ NMML, *Ibid.*, letter from Malekar to Leszczynski, 7.12.38, and Leszczynski’s reply, 9 December 1938. The content of file no. 3, ASMAE Gab.409, consists of a copy of Savrkar’s *The Indian War of Independence of 1857*. It is not clear whether the Italian Ministry of External Affairs acquired the volume at that time or later, when Bose returned to Europe in the early 1940’s. However, it is worth noting that the Italian authorities perhaps did not completely ignore Savarkar and his activities.

⁴⁶ NMML, Savarkar papers, microfilm, Roll n.12.

⁴⁷ *The Mahratta*, 28 April 1939, *Why Italy Invaded Albania?*, *26 May How Germany’s National Socialism Arose?* and *Inciting Mussolini against Hitler*.

Berlin Axis and the relations between the two countries. They had approached each other because both had been subject to an 'encirclement policy'.⁴⁸ According to Berlin correspondent of the journal,

Totalitarian States are eager not to have a war, but they want justice. The democratic countries of England and France have taken nearly everything and they will not brook any opposition.... Germany and Italy... are doing their best. They have themselves made many guarantees and non-aggression pacts to other States. The present German-Italian act is their chef-d'oeuvre, and a fitting reply to the actions of England and France.⁴⁹

On 8th and 15th December 1939 was published, into two instalments, the article *Failure of Democracy and Rise of Fascism* was published. The topics were similar to those already examined by the *Kesari* in the 1920s. The rise of fascism was described as a response to the crisis of the democratic systems. After providing an account of the early years of the fascist regime, the writer concluded that fascism was the only political force capable not only of overcoming the crisis of the democratic system, but also the incapacity of reformers and revolutionaries "of giving the new form to the society". Fascism could only be born out of the failures of socialism. Beyond all negative aspects of fascism – including the use of violence – Mussolini was seen as "a Fascist leader possessing the most realistic political vision". Although the sanghatanists continued to show a great deal of interest on fascism, by the spring of 1939, Germany became the main point of reference of the Hindu Mahasabha, at the international level. On 25th March 1939, the party spokesman stated

Germany's solemn idea of the revival of the Aryan culture, the glorification of the Swastika, her patronage of Vedic learning and

⁴⁸ The *Mahratta* published two articles on the relations between Italy and Germany, on 19th May and 2nd June 1939, respectively *Germany – Rome Axis Strengthened* and *German-Italian Pact concluded. Reaction to Encirclement Policy*.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 2 June 1939.

the ardent championship of the tradition of Indo-Germanic civilization are welcomed by the religious and sensible Hindus of India with a jubilant hope. Only a few socialists headed by Pandit J. Nehru have created a bubble of resentment against the present Government of Germany, but their activities are far from having any significance in India. The vain imprecations of Mahatma Gandhi against Germany's indispensable (sic) vigour in matters of internal policy obtain but little regard in so far as they are uttered by a man who has always betrayed and confused the country with an affected mysticism. I think that Germany's crusade against the enemies of Aryan culture will bring all the Aryan nations of the World to their senses and awaken the Indian Hindus for the restoration of their lost glory.⁵⁰

A month later, on 23rd April, Savarkar felt obliged to reply to the message from Roosevelt to Hitler and Mussolini. In his cablegram, Savarkar told the American president:

If your note to Hitler actuated by disinterested human anxiety for safeguarding Freedom and Democracy from Military Aggression pray ask Britain too to withdraw her armed domination over Hindustan and let her have free and selfdetermined Constitution. Great nation like Hindustan can surely claim at least as much international justice as small nations do.⁵¹

Savarkar wanted a copy of his message to be distributed to all German, Italian and Japanese press agencies and delivered to Hitler in person. A leading member of the Hindu Mahasabha, Indra Prakash, personally sent the message to Leszczynski. Unable to contact the Italian and Japanese Consulates in Calcutta, he sent copies directly to the Prime Minister of Japan and to Mussolini. Leszczynski sent a copy

⁵⁰ The statement, in Auswartiges Amt-Politischen Archiv (AA-PA, Bonn)/Pol.VII, Statement by the spokesman of the Hindu Mahasabha, 25.3.1939, is mentioned by M. Hauner, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

⁵¹ NMML, Savarkar papers, r.n.23, *cit.*

to Hitler. Indra Prakash requested Rash Behari Bose to distribute the message to the Japanese news agencies.⁵²

4 – Subhas Chandra Bose: back in Italy

When the Italian authorities received information that Bose was about to return to India, in February 1936, they sent a representative to Paris to ask Bose to pay a short visit to Italy and, eventually, meet the duce. The fascist regime was interested in collaborating with Bose because “Bose’s influence in India has never ceased to be massive”⁵³. He was running, together with Nehru, for the presidency of the Congress at Luknow. This increased his importance. The meeting with Mussolini took place on the last day of Bose’s stay in Italy as a guest of the Italian government, which met his expenses.⁵⁴ As usual for most of Mussolini’s meetings, there is no record of the talks. It is, however, possible to notice that Bose’s journey in Europe was influenced by his links with Italy and his relation with the duce, whom Bose met in all special occasions, especially before and after his departures, arrivals, movements.

Bose’s first trip to Europe paved the way for his further activities. Later, during the war, Bose had to change his strategy, adapt it to the new circumstances provoked by the war and their repercussions on the Indian situation.

Subhas Bose left Italy on 27th March 1936, on 8th April he reached Bombay, where he was immediately arrested. He was released in the

⁵² NMML, *Ibid.*, Roll n.4, S.n. 8: letter from Leszczynski to Indra Prakash, 27 April 1939; two letters from Indra Prakash to Savarkar, dated respectively 28 April and 4 May 1939. A translation of the message to Roosevelt made by the Italian Consulate General in Calcutta is in ASMAE, AP, India, b.10, cit., *Notiziario indiano* (Indian bulletin) n.2 (dal 16 al 30 aprile-1° maggio 1939). The record is in the bulletin of 25 April.

⁵³ Translation of the author.

⁵⁴ ASMAE, *Ibid.* Meeting registered on 27 Marc 1936: note dated 2 April 1936, confirming that the Ministry was to pay for Bose’s stay at the Grand Hotel.

spring of 1937. Over the summer months, before his second brief trip to Europe toward the end of the year, Bose went to the Himalayas and meditated upon recent developments in international relations, prospects for the future, and the role he was to play. Japan's aggression on China brought him to side emotionally with China. Bose was, nevertheless, aware that Japan's military strength was the consequence of the birth of an Asian power, capable of threatening the interests of the Western powers in Asia.

Japan has done great things for herself and for Asia. Her re-awakening at the dawn of the present century sent a thrill throughout our Continent. Japan has shattered the white man's prestige in the Far East and has put all the Western imperialist powers on the defensive... She is extremely sensitive – and rightly so – about her self-respect as an Asiatic race. She is determined to drive out the Western powers...⁵⁵

Right the day after his arrival, on 25th January 1938 Subhash Chandra Bose received a letter from Rash Behari, who congratulated him for his appointment as president of the Congress. Rash Behari drew up a list of what he thought the Congress's priorities should be:

What is now wanted for the Congress to lead the country correctly is to have revolutionary mentality... The fetish of non-violence should be discarded and the creed should be changed. Let us attain our goal through all possible means: violence or non-violence. The non-violence atmosphere is simply making Indians womanly men... The Congress should devote attention to only one point, i.e. military preparedness... The Congress should agitate for control of the Army first, all branches of Army... Strength is the real need... I think Mr. Moonji has done much more than the Congress by establishing his military school.

⁵⁵ S.C. Bose, *Japan's Role in the Far East*, published in the *Modern Review* summer 1937, reprinted in *Through Congress Eyes*, Allahabad, 1938 (?), quoted in L. A. Gordon, *op. cit.*, pp. 329-330.

Indians should first of all be the masters of the Army. They must secure the right to bear arms.⁵⁶

Rash Behari's point of view is coincident with Savarkar's political beliefs. However, Rash Behari had a broader political vision, he looked at an international dimension which went much beyond the Indian borders:

The Congress should support the Pan-Asia movement. It should not condemn Japan without understanding her motive in the Sino-Japanese conflict. Japan is a friend of India and other Asiatic countries. Her chief motive is to destroy British influence in Asia. She has begun with China.

The Congress ought to have a world look (sic). International situation should be studied and utilised for India's benefit and interests. We should make friends with Britain's enemies. This should be our foreign policy... Interest is always the basis. Japan is at present the eyesore of England, Russia and America for obvious reasons... The Congress had made a great mistake by carrying on anti-Japanese movements. We should remember that a time may come when England will shake hands with Japan and control India pointing to (sic) Japan the anti-Japanese activities of the Indians in Japan's hour of trial. It is now the best policy for the Indians to support Japan and utilise this opportunity to increase their influence in world politics extract (sic) as much concessions from Britain now as possible.⁵⁷

As far as democracy was concerned:

For a subject country dictatorship is absolutely necessary in a freedom movement. As in time of war dictatorship is indispensable, at present in India's struggle for freedom dictatorship is equally

⁵⁶ A copy of this letter, intercepted by the police, is in NAI, Home Poll. Dept., 32/2/38, Criminal Investigation Dept., Special Branch, Lucknow, U.P., 12.2.38. Gordon, who quotes this document on p. 371 of his volume, believes the letter never reached Subhas. This is unlikely, because the letter was published as an appendix to Crossroads, by S. C. Bose.

⁵⁷ NAI, Ibid.

indispensable. Democracy is all right in peace time, but if it is observed in war time, disaster is surely to overtake that country.⁵⁸

The postscript of Rash Behari's informed that a book by Subhas Chandra Bose (probably *The Indian Struggle*) had been translated into Japanese and published in a local periodical, an evidence that Subhas Chandra was rather popular in Japan.⁵⁹

On 22nd December 1938, Bose met in Bombay two representatives of the foreign branch of the national-socialist party, Oswald Urchs and Dr. F. Wulfestieg. Urchs sent an account of the meeting to Berlin and observed that Bose had expressed his reservations over the nazi racial policy. Bose also felt that Germany might be angling for an agreement with Great Britain. Bose was, of course, eager to know precisely what Germany's intentions were toward India. Although Urchs had already advised his superiors that Bose was an element to be reckoned with, until that time, no one in Berlin had given serious consideration to start a collaboration with the Bengali leader.⁶⁰

Within the Congress rumours began to circulate regarding contacts between Bengali extremists and the Italian and German authorities. These rumours soon reached the party leaders:

The weekly "Forward" published in Calcutta is rapidly becoming the mouthpiece of propaganda on behalf of Italy, and to a lesser extent, on behalf of Germany. Dr. Kalidas Nag, who was invited to become the editor of this paper, also approached the Japanese Consul General for some subsidy in return for publishing Japanese anti-British propaganda.

Lala Dina Nath of the daily "National Call", who lives in Calcut-

⁵⁸ NAI, *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Unfortunately, it is not possible to establish whether there was any regular contact between the two leaders. The correspondence published by the Netaji Research Bureau in Calcutta does not include other letters between Subhas Rash Behari. Likewise, since researchers not belonging to the Netaji Research Bureau are not permitted to examine this correspondence, it is impossible to know whether Subhas and Rash Behari were in epistolary contact before the second world war.

⁶⁰ L. A. Gordon, *op. cit.*, pp. 370-371, and M. Hauner, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-70. The latter includes in the appendix (pp. 644-653) the report that Urchs sent to Berlin.

ta, visited the Italian Consulate for regular publication of Italian news. The “Amrita Bazar Patrika” is negotiating with the Italian Consul General to become the mouthpiece of pro-Italian propaganda.

The Italian Consul General is reported to be in touch with the Congress President who should, in his opinion, “make an end of Gandhian non-violence, make the Congress a powerful youth organisation”.⁶¹

Although his name was not mentioned, the reference to Subhas Chandra Bose is clear. Although the document is undated, it is well-known that Neta-ji was elected President of the Congress for a second term during the Tripuri session, in March 1939. Since Subhas is referred to as the president, the note can be dated to the period between his re-election and resignation, in May 1939. Most probably these suspicions led Gandhi to oppose Bose’s re-election at the Tripuri session and, as a consequence, to Bose’s decision to leave the Congress.⁶²

Nehru, who had tried to negotiate, corresponded with Subhas during the spring of 1939. Their exchange shows to what extent the positions of the two leaders regarding the international questions had more weight than the internal policy of the party. In a letter to Nehru of 28th March, Bose passionately supported his views on the international situation and used provocative tones:

In international affairs, your policy is perhaps more nebulous. I was astounded when you produced a resolution before the Working Committee sometime ago seeking to make India an asylum for the Jews. Foreign policy is a realistic affair to be determined largely from the point of view of a nation’s self-interest.... Now,

⁶¹ NAI, Sardar Patel Correspondence, Microfilm, Reel n.21 Undated, untitled note which, in the file, follows a document dated 23.3.39. The records contained in the file date to 1939.

⁶² M. Hauner, *op. cit.*, p. 70, confirms that suspicions over possible contacts between Bose and Axis officials may have determined the opposition of Gandhi and of the Congress leadership to Bose’s re-election as president.

what is your foreign policy, pray? Frothy sentiments and pious platitudes do not make foreign policy. It is no use championing lost causes all the time and it is no use condemning countries like Germany and Italy on the one hand and on the other, giving a certificate of good conduct to British and French Imperialism.... I have been urging... everybody... including Mahatma Gandhi and you, that we must utilise the international situation to India's advantage and... present the British government with our National Demand in the form of an ultimatum...⁶³

On 3rd April Nehru replied.

The fact that in international affairs you held different views from mine and did not wholly approve our condemnation of Nazi Germany or Fascist Italy added to my discomfort.⁶⁴

5 – World War II

On 7th September 1939, at the start of the war, a certain Mandlekar wrote Savarkar a long letter in which he outlined the stance to be taken at the Working Committee of the Hindu Mahasabha planned for 10th September. The subject of the meeting were the recent international developments. Mandlekar suggested that

no reference should be made to the justice or otherwise of the claim of residents of Danzig to return to the Reich; for, in principle we shall have to support the action of the Germans of Dan-

⁶³ This letter, published in S. C. Bose, *Crossroads*, is quoted by L. A. Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 384.

⁶⁴ This letter, published in *A Bunch of Old Letters*, New Delhi, 1958, is quoted by L. A. Gordon, *Ibid.*, p. 382.

zig; not that we should denounce this but then under no circumstances can we take part in this War on the side of British. Hindu Sabha should declare an attitude on Neutrality...⁶⁵

This stance was highly ambivalent. Mandlekar suggested neutrality with regard to Germany, but not an open opposition to the British government. This thin dive was to underpin the later, decidedly ambivalent, policy of the Hindu Mahasabha, not only regarding the international situation and the war, but also the internal politics and the relations with the government. The two issues were totally intertwined.

At the Working Committee of 10th September, the Hindu Mahasabha expressed its position of neutrality toward Germany, as agreed previously:

The Working Committee does not believe in the claims of any Power among the belligerent Nations engaged in the present War in Europe of which are themselves Imperialistic in character and outlook, to the effect that it has been actuated solely by moral and altruistic considerations apart from its own national self-interest.⁶⁶

The Committee went on to make demands which would have to be fulfilled as soon as possible, in order to allow India the emergency provoked by the war. The fulfilment of these requests were considered as a preliminary condition for a collaborative attitude toward the British.

As the task of defending India from any military attack is of common concern to the British Government as well as ourselves and as we are unfortunately not in a position today to carry out that responsibility unaided, there is ample room for whole hearted cooperation between India and England.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ NMML, Savarkar papers, microfilm, r.n.12, cit.

⁶⁶ NMML, Moonje papers, Subject files, n.51.

⁶⁷ NMML, Ibid.

The ambivalence of the Hindu Mahasabha could hardly be more evident. While, on one hand, were condemned as fake and egoistic Britain's reasons for entering into the war, on the other the Hindu Mahasabha was prepared to collaborate with the British to defend India. Initially, the Working Committee demanded also, as another condition, Britain's recognition of a central government of India, with full powers. On this specific point, the Hindu Mahasabha soon compromised. Other requests were a programme of military training for the Indian population and the 'Indianization' of the army, to be completed as soon as possible. There should be no more discrimination between the so-called "martial" and "non-martial classes". The Hindu Mahasabha also called for changes to the Arms Act, according to the laws applying in the Great Britain, the recruitment, at the national scale, of territorial forces and paramilitary groups of university students and the institution of military organisations in the provinces where they were absent. Furthermore, a larger number of cadets should be enrolled in the military academies. The government was also required to modernise the industrial manufacturing of arms, so that India should not depend on other nations and could equip its own army.

It should be reminded that, later on, the Hindu Mahasabha concentrated its efforts on the creation of a Hindu National Militia, which enrolled into its ranks only young Hindu men aged from eighteen to forty. The document went on criticising the Muslim League and accusing it of taking advantage of the international crisis to promote the interests of the Muslim community alone. Also the Congress was blamed, not only for not representing Hindus but also for having dealings both with the League and the government behind the back of the Hindu Mahasabha. The latter portrayed itself as the only political organization capable of representing the interests of the majority of Indians, in opposition to the Congress and the League.

After the Working Committee had presented its resolution, the leaders of the Hindu Mahasabha concentrated immediately on the key issue of organising a national militia. On 15th September, Moonje sent a letter to a number of some party cadres to inform them of the

program presented at the Working Committee decisions taken and to request them to take part to the meetings to put the program in practice.

On 27th September, Moonje sent out a circular letter to invite the party members to a meeting in Poona planned for 8th October. He described the role of the organisation to be founded

I have the pleasure in bringing to your notice a resolution of the Hindu Mahasabha for the organisation of the Hindu Militia in the country for the purpose of taking part in the defence of India both from external and internal aggression, whenever an occasion of emergency may arise during the course of the Anglo-German War.

... I believe that it will be quite in the fitness of things, in view of the historic All-India Military leadership of the Maharashtra, that a beginning should be made in the Maharashtra; so that the lead may be taken up by the whole of India afterwards.⁶⁸

Who else could be this “internal” enemy, if not the Muslims and the Congress? Records are very clear, on this aspect. In an appeal bearing as a title the name of the new militia, Rama Sena, Moonje listed the main differences between the Hindu Mahasabha and the Congress. The Congress held to a non-violent line, which Moonje considered a “cult of the charkha”. On the other hand, the Muslim League and other more radical Islamic groups such as the Khaksars and Khudai Khidmatgars, were re-organising along paramilitary lines. The Hindu Mahasabha, in its efforts to represent the Hindu majority, differed from the Congress but nevertheless had not fallen victim to the “Sectarian Communal fanaticism” displayed by the Muslims. Nevertheless, Moonje observed, caution was required.

But there is one worry which is meenacingly (sic) uppermost in its mind at the present moment and that is – what will happen if,

⁶⁸ NMML, Ibid.

in the mutually antagonistic and clashing ideologies, the Charka were to come into conflict with the Rifle... ?⁶⁹

Moonje did not exclude the threat of civil war, caused by a possible clash between non-violent Gandhians and armed Muslims. According to Moonje, The Hindu Mahasabha had no alternative, but taking up arms and forming a corps of voluntary fighting men. As first step, the Working Committee was asked to draw up a list of organisations already engaged in the military training of the youths, and to select among them only the most suitable for the new militia.⁷⁰ The correspondence of October 1939 between Moonje, Hedgewar, General Nanasahib Shinde from Baroda, Khaparde, and a certain Jadhava,⁷¹ discloses the main mission of the militia which, as described in the records, should have an anti-Muslim character and that the RSS was to play a leading role in its organisation. The prospect of defending India from possible aggressions of the Axis powers is not mentioned. General Shinde, in a letter to Moonje dated 16th October, was happy to inform that Sikandar Hayat Khan, leading of the Unionist Party, in power in Punjab) was no longer alone in his task to organise 50,000 men for the defence of India. On 18th October, Moonje's reply contained an explicit reference to the RSS:

I am glad to note that you have approved of my idea of a Hindu National Militia for Maharashtra as is being organized by the Hindu Mahasabha.

I have been myself thinking of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and I am corresponding with their leader. They may have their peculiar (sic) difficulties and the point is that the Militia should

⁶⁹ NMML, *Ibid.*, "The Rama Sena, Hindu Mahasabha. Appeal", signed by Moonje, undated, but most probably written after the resolution of 10th September.

⁷⁰ NMML, *Ibid.*, account of the meeting held in Poona on 8 October 1939. The document is undated, but it bears the handwritten note "October 1939".

⁷¹ NMML, *Ibid.*, letter from General Nanasahib Shinde to Moonje, 16.10.39 in reply to Moonje's letter of 11 October; Moonje's reply of 18 October; two letters of 18 October from Moonje to Hedgewar and Khaparde; 19 October Jadhava to Moonje in reply to a letter from Moonje of 17 October; finally Moonje's reply of 24 October 1939.

be organised under these circumstances whether the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh can undertake the task or not.⁷²

Moonje's own military school could play a part in organizing the militia.

I can make arrangement of training free of charge... seargents (sic) in my School... After these Seargents are trained they will be located in different centres throughout the Maharashtra and they will recruit and train Militias in their own centres and will keep a register of their own; besides a consolidated register of all such centres would be kept in the central office.⁷³

The same day, also on behalf of Shinde, Moonje wrote to Hedgewar asking to join forces with him. Moonje intended to discuss all these questions on the occasion of his meeting with Hedgewar, planned for the end of the month in Nagpur. The RSS, thus, had the chance to fulfil its aim: militarise Hindu society at the expenses of the Muslims.

Always on 18th October, Moonje wrote also to Khaparde and warned that

... the Moslems are making themselves a nuisance. The Congress Government will not stand up but will yield to them. We cannot expect any consideration at the hands of the Congress Government. We shall have to fight both the Government and the Moslems just as the Khaksars are doing in the U.P. The Hindu Mahasabha will give its support to such fights as the Muslim League is supporting the Khaksars: you must prepare the volunteers in your towns. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh may be useful and handy.⁷⁴

⁷² NMML, Ibid.

⁷³ NMML, Ibid.

⁷⁴ NMML, Ibid.

On 27th October, a Lahore militant informed Moonje that

We have at present in Punjab several Dals and Sanghs, the total number of members of which is approximately about 50000; but they are not working under a single organisation. There are Rashtriya Sevak Sangh, Atma Sangh, Mahabir Dal, Seva Sangh and Akali Dal working under different leaders. They have a sort of military organisation. The Akali Dal is armed with swords: but the others have other weapons. The Rashtriya Sevak Sangh has only lathies. The first thing to do is to bring all these sanghs on a uniform basis working under a single leadership though not of one man but of a council.⁷⁵

The records prove that the Hindu radical organisations were armed, albeit in some cases in a rudimentary manner and there was, at least in Punjab and Maharashtra, a climate of mobilization. A force of 50,000 men was significant, even if they were only trained militants and not proper soldiers.

Among all opinions in favour of the creation the Hindu contingents, the only dissonant voice was that of Jadhava, who wrote to Moonje on 19th October 1939:

To form two separate Militias based on religious differences is to invite a communal quarrel every now and then. The Mahomedans are competent to form a united body. The Hindus are by nature fissipari (...) their Militia will hardly form a compact body. I am afraid of serious difficulties after the Militia come into existence. I think that an Indian Militia irrespective of caste or creed should be organised.⁷⁶

More than a year earlier, the British authorities expressed doubts, with regard to Moonje's military school, which were similar to those

⁷⁵ NMML, Ibid.: reply to Moonje's letter of 17 October; the signature is not readable.

⁷⁶ NMML, Ibid. As far as the author of the letter is concerned, Jadhava, it was not possible to find any information about him.

expressed by Jadhava.. On 17th May 1938 the Secretary of State for India, Lord Zetland, told the Viceroy that, although the school had been founded with the intention of enrolling students from all communities, it had become an exclusively Hindu institution.⁷⁷ The Secretary of State was only partially reassured by the fact that the Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief had officially approved the founding of the school. However, Linlithgow, had come to regret his earlier decision to support the school.

I am by no means enthusiastic about this venture, but when I came here it had already reached a stage at which it would have been undesirable and difficult for me to dissociate myself wholly from it, more particularly as Chetwode has given Moonje a very strong public commendation and Willingdon had not only commended the project but had given a donation. I have confined my association with it to a donation of the same size of Willingdon's, and to somewhat jejune and carefully guarded messages on two occasions... While Moonje claims that its primary object is to serve as a feeder to the I.M.A., its Articles of Association specifically state that its object is to give instruction to Hindu youth, &c.; and I am myself apprehensive that it is likely to develop on Hindu communal lines. But I have not taken this too seriously, for I think the prospect of Moonje's getting all the money he wants or of ever being able to make anything of his College is insufficiently great to justify us in feeling any very marked concern. His whole object, of course, has I suspect been to produce a counterblast to Aligarh.⁷⁸

The Hindu National Militia was not to be. However, preparations for the reorganisation of the Hindu community along paramilitary lines were to have an effect on future developments.

Also Rash Behari Bose expressed his views on the militarisation issue. At the end of October 1939, he wrote to Savarkar and explained

⁷⁷ IO, Mss Eur 125/5, 1938, Letters from the Secretary of State for India.

⁷⁸ IO, Ibid., Letters to the Secretary of State for India, 19 May 1938.

which stand the Hindu Mahasabha should adopt and which prerogatives the Hindu society should have, once this had been reorganised. Rash Behari's wish was that India created an alliance with Japan and China to form a pan-Asiatic front, opposed to the British rule.

I am glad to know that the Hindu Maha Sabha sympathises with Japan in her attempt to rid China of foreign influences. A new government is shortly going to be established in China, and it will co-operate with Japan against British influence. As soon as it is established, you should, if possible, in your capacity as the President of the Hindu Mahasabha, send a letter of congratulation to it. Efforts should be made for Hindu-Buddhist solidarity among India, China and Japan.⁷⁹

By reorganisation of the Hindu society, Rash Behari meant standardisation of religious practices and people's customs, and militarization.

The old ways of thinking and doing would be of no avail. Especially the Hindu community must discard the old ways and adopt new ways and methods. There should be standardisation of customs, manners, food, dress, religious ceremonies etc. There should be a well organised corps of Hindu volunteers in every village, town and city under the Hindu Maha Sabha whose duties would be to educate and protect Hindus and Hinduism.⁸⁰

Also Rash Behari recognised the two key words, Hinduism and militarisation, and supported the Hindu Mahasabha choices. On the other hand, he attacked the Congress and Gandhi, whose influence on Indian politics he considered "pernicious". Rash Behari insisted that democracy was of no use to the struggle for independence:

⁷⁹ MSA, Home Special Dept., 1009, 1939-40, Intelligence report entitled "Hindu Maha Sabha: Activities of -", dated 2 November 1939.

⁸⁰ MSA, *Ibid.*

Indians generally speak of democracy without fully understanding the significance of the word. No nation has been able to attain freedom through democracy. It is through autocracy that nations secure their freedom and expansion. For preserving the interests of a country, democracy is all right. But for development, progress and expansion, autocracy is absolutely indispensable.⁸¹

Besides theorising, Savarkar worked toward the concrete realisation of his aims. At the beginning of October 1939, the Viceroy invited to a meeting in Delhi the leaders of the most important political groupings, Gandhi, Jinnah, Savarkar, Ambedkar, Subhas Chandra Bose, and a number of representatives of less important organisations, as well as exponents of the native states. The meeting between the Viceroy and Savarkar took place on 9th October. Linlithgow provided the Secretary of State with an account of Savarkar's proposals.

The situation, he said, was that His Majesty's Government must now turn to the Hindus and work with their support. After all, though we and the Hindus had had a good deal of difficulty with one another in the past, that was equally true of the relations between Great Britain and the French and, as recent events had shown, of relations between Russia and Germany. Our interests were now the same and we must therefore work together. Even though now the most moderate of men, he had himself been in the past an adherent of a revolutionary party, as possibly, I might be aware. (I confirmed that I was). But now that our interests were so closely bound together the essential thing was for Hinduism and Great Britain to be friends; and the old antagonism was no longer necessary. The Hindu Mahasabha, he went on to say, favoured an unambiguous undertaking of Dominion Status at the end of the war. It was true, at the same time, that they challenged the Congress claim to represent anything but themselves.⁸²

⁸¹ MSA, *Ibid.*

⁸² IO, Mss Eur F 125/8 1939, Letters to the Secretary of State for India: this letter is dated 7 October, but the account of the meeting with Savarkar is in a postscript of two days after that meeting.

As to the possibility that Congress ministers might resign, as threatened, Savarkar commented that “he could produce much better men to fill the places so vacated”. This sentence confirms that the Hindu Mahasabha was perfectly willing to accept government posts and collaborate with the government. Savarkar assured that

With the Congress out of the way and the general governmental situation in a state of dissolution, they might be able to produce some extremely good advisers.⁸³

Savarkar also wanted to know if the Viceroy was considering to take on Muslim advisers, to face the political crisis that was likely to come about if Congress members were to resign. As the meeting drew to a close, the Viceroy asked Savarkar

whether I could look for some general support from the Mahasabha in relation to whatever might be done at the Centre.⁸⁴

Savarkar replied that

without asking public opinion he was disposed to think that the answer would be “Yes”, once the Mahasabha knew the scheme.⁸⁵

Regarding militarization, Savarkar remarked

... the importance of military training for Hindus and the repeal of the Arms Act; of a national militia; of compulsory military training for the educated youth of the Hindu community, and the readjustment of the plan of recruitment for the ordinary Indian Army in favour of Hindu classes at present without a real chance of securing admission to the Army.

It was of the out most importance, he said, that we should chastise

⁸³ IO, Ibid.

⁸⁴ IO, Ibid.

⁸⁵ IO, Ibid.

the frontier tribes now... But the chastisement must be with Hindu troops, the only troops on which we could rely!⁸⁶

At the time, Savarkar had still in mind the Italian model. On 21st January 1940, at a meeting attended by about 4,000 participants, while addressing the issue of military training and how this was to be imparted, he informed the listeners that

In Italy a man from his boyhood up to old age is given Military training.⁸⁷

In 1940, the Viceroy decided to extend the membership of the Executive Council to prominent Indians, representing significant sectors of the society. He also decided to create the War Council with representatives from the main political forces in India. While the Congress refused to take part, the representatives of the Hindu Mahasabha and the League accepted to participate to the preparatory meetings to define the terms of the presence of their members to the Councils.⁸⁸ The Working Committee of the Hindu Mahasabha's, chaired by Moonje, held in Bombay on 22nd September 1940, approved the following resolution:

In view of opportunity that present war offers for general militarization of Hindus and organisation of system of India on sound modern lines so that India may be converted into self-contained defence unit, Mahasabha is prepared whole-heartedly to work out schemes of expansion of Executive Council and War advisory Council but on honourable terms of equity and justice...⁸⁹

⁸⁶ IO, Ibid.

⁸⁷ MSA, Home Special Dept., 60 D(g) Pt.III, cit., document headed, "A summary report of the meeting held at Kalyam on 21.1.1940".

⁸⁸ IO, Mss Eur F 125/9 1940, Letters to the Secretary of State for India, letter dated 1 September 1940. Amery succeeded Zetland as Secretary of State for India.

⁸⁹ IO, Mss Eur F 125/28 1939-40, Telegrams to the Secretary of State for India, telegram from the Governor General to the Secretary of State, 23 September 1940. Savarkar enclosed a copy of the resolution in a letter dated 25 September to the Viceroy, in which he confirmed that party was ready to collaborate with the government and to take part in the expanded

It is well known that, when the Viceroy promised that no powers would be transferred to a system of government without the consent of a wide range of powerful sectors of the Indian political scene, the Working Committee of the Hindu Mahasabha replied with a resolution where it declared it would tolerate no violation of Hindu interests (and not the interests of all Indians).⁹⁰

The remarkable correspondence exchanged between Moonje, Savarkar and the Viceroy in 1940 illustrates the fierce competition between the Hindu Mahasabha and the League over the seats to be reserved to their representatives within the Councils. Each party controlled the results obtained by the opposing front in view of future constitutional developments in India. Those days, Moonje made full use of the power conferred upon him as vice-president of the Hindu Mahasabha and had a prominent role in the negotiations with the Viceroy. On 19th August, Savarkar provided Lord Linlithgow with a list of Hindu Mahasabha members for inclusion in the prospected Executive Council. The list included Moonje and Shyama Prasad Mookerji.⁹¹ In a letter of 26th September the Viceroy, Moonje remarked that the Hindus

will be in a position to give immensely large help both in men, material and intellect than the Muslim League can hope to do, in organising the defence of India, on modern scientific lines... Thus Hindustan and Britain are allied together in unshakable bond of union for long long years to come.⁹²

The government ignored the insistent demands of the Hindu Mahasabha to provide the Hindus with arms. It decided not to ease up the restrictions in force at that time or to increase the quantity of arms for military or paramilitary schools and organisations. As proved by the vo-

councils: Mss Eur F 125/122 1940, Correspondence with Persons in India.

⁹⁰ IO, Mss Eur F 125/28, cit., telegram from the Governor General to the Secretary of State for India, 25 September 1940.

⁹¹ IO, Mss Eur F 125/122, cit.

⁹² IO, Ibid.

luminous correspondence between Savarkar and the Viceroy throughout 1941,⁹³ militarization was the other side of the collaboration offered by Hindu Mahasabha to the government. The Hindu Mahasabha pointed out that institutional collaboration and defence of the nation could turn in favour of Britain's position in India. This strategy was the new version of the old responsive co-operation. The Hindu Mahasabha historians believe that Savarkar shared Tilak's political vision, according to which a specific end could be reached by several means.⁹⁴ In the presidential speech held in 1942, Savarkar publicly declared that

the policy of Responsive Cooperation... covers the whole gamut of patriotic activities from unconditional cooperation to active and even armed resistance...⁹⁵

This position is contradictory and objectionable. It is hard to deny the collaborationist attitude of the Hindu Mahasabha.

The key stone to understand ambiguous policy of the Hindu Mahasabha is militarisation. According to biased accounts, the collaboration offered by the Hindu Mahasabha to the British aimed at providing the Hindu masses with arms and military training which would otherwise be beyond their reach, given the restrictions in force. These arms might be used against the British, at the right moment or if the occasion came.⁹⁶

⁹³ IO, Mss Eur F 125/123 1941, Correspondence with Persons in India.

⁹⁴ S. V. Bhalerao's, Savarkar. His Socio-Political Thought and Leadership, submitted to the Nagpur University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Social Sciences, p. 234-235. The academic year is not specified but the study dates back to the middle of 1990s.

⁹⁵ The passage quoted by Bhalerao is to be found in the collection of Savarkar's speeches, Hindu Rashtra Darshan, Bombay, 1949.

⁹⁶ D. Keer, op. cit., p. 257. Savarkar's nephew, Vikram, agreed with this version during an interview with the author of early March 1997, as did both Bhalerao and Vishvas Savarkar, the latter in Veer Savarkar I.N.A.'s Source of Inspiration, contribution to the commemorative volume, Savarkar, published by the Savarkar Darshan Pratishthan, Bombay, 1989. This interpretation is shared by Uma Mukherjee, op. cit., pp. 159-160 and Khare, Political Memoirs, 1959, p. 52.

The British were fully aware of these intentions.⁹⁷ Various measures were taken and they refused to allow the Hindu Mahasabha to arm itself or to repeal the Arms Act. According to some scholars sympathetic to the Sangh Parivar, in the 1940's Savarkar was working toward an aim he had cherished since the early 20th century. He wanted to gather as many arms as possible and rise up against the British when the right moment would come.⁹⁸

6 – Re-writing history. different interpretations of the meeting between Subhas Chandra Bose and Savarkar

To confirm this interpretation, Hindu right wing intellectuals point out at a circumstance where Savarkar openly supported a possible alliance with the Axis powers. The episode is the meeting between, Savarkar and Subhas Chandra Bose, which took place in Bombay on 22nd June 1940.⁹⁹ During the meeting, Savarkar suggested that Bose go to Europe and ask for support from the Axis powers.

There is some discordance about the date of the meeting. According to police records, it was on 22nd June, while according to other sources it took place on 29th June and was secret. Savarkar disclosed it on the occasion of the disbanding of the Abhinav Bharat, in 1952.¹⁰⁰ In spite of the secretiveness of the meeting, it was registered, as always, by the British authorities and also the press noticed it. The Times of India of 24th June 1940 published the article Communal Unity Move. Mr. Bose's effort in Bombay, where it was reported that

Mr. Bose had also talks with Mr. V.D. Savarkar, President of the All India Hindu Mahasabha, at the latter's residence at Dadar on

⁹⁷ D. Keer, *Ibid.*, p. 259.

⁹⁸ B. V. Bhalerao, *op. cit.*, pp. 213, 218, 220-221, 224, 235.

⁹⁹ Also confirmed by Keer, *op. cit.*, p. 260.

¹⁰⁰ Vishvas Savarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

Saturday evening. It is understood that the discussions related to the present political situation in the country and the steps the Hindu Mahasabha and the “Forward Bloc” should take in co-operation with other parties. The results of the talks, it is stated, were not encouraging.¹⁰¹

According to the police,

Subhas Chandra Bose arrived in Bombay on June 22nd and had discussions with M. A. Jinnah and V. D. Savarkar with a view of exploring the possibilities of co-operation between the Forward Bloc and the Hindu Mahasabha respectively. Bose’s efforts were apparently productive of no result. The Bombay Forward Bloc endeavoured to arrange a meeting on June 23rd at which Subhas Chandra Bose would speak, but it was necessary to abandon the meeting on account of lack of support.¹⁰²

The two leaders had already met in 1938 in Calcutta. On that occasion, apparently, Savarkar told Bose that he had decided to return to revolutionary activities.¹⁰³

Archival sources contain no reference to the meeting. However, according to a version accepted by pro-Hindu authors, Savarkar told Bose that the situation of the moment was similar to the conditions prevailing during World War I.¹⁰⁴ Now, it seemed again possible to create a liberation army. According to this reconstruction, Savarkar would have informed Bose about the news received from Rash Behari, who had reasons to believe that Japan would enter the war by the end

¹⁰¹ MSA, Home Special Dept., 1023 1939-40.

¹⁰² MSA, *Ibid.*, S. A. dated 29.6.40, Forward Bloc.

¹⁰³ B. V. Bhalerao, *op. cit.*, p. 234.

¹⁰⁴ Vishvas Savarkar transcribes the conversation between the two leaders as if it was a quotation from V.D. Savarkar’s own words. Nevertheless, he omits to mention his sources and does not specify if they were a notebook or an eyewitness account. Therefore, this version cannot be relied upon. Certainly, an account of the conversation is contained in the volume in Marathi, *Veer Savarkaranchi Abhinav Bharat Sangata Samayinchi Utkrishta Bhashane*, selected speeches by Savarkar published by Abhinav Bharat.

of the year.¹⁰⁵ This might be the right time for an invasion of India on the part of soldiers equipped with modern Japanese and German arms. According to this account, Savarkar had suggested that Bose take command of the Indian prisoners of war in Italy and Germany, proclaim India's independence and, as soon as Japan declared war, invade India from Burma or the Gulf of Bengal. The nationalists serving under the British ranks and the paramilitary groups were to spearhead the advance of the liberation army. Savarkar informed Bose about the British intention to arrest him soon and suggested that, like Rash Behari, he seek refuge in Europe or Japan.

This account of the meeting follows real historical developments so closely that it may well be a fabrication. According to a more reliable version, based on the eyewitness of Savarkar's bodyguard, a certain Shri Kasar, Rash Behari asked Savarkar to lead a revolt he was planning in the Far East or to send someone suitable in his place. Savarkar refused to take on this responsibility but suggested three suitable persons, Moonje, Subhas Chandra Bose and Tarasingh.¹⁰⁶ Another reconstruction is that, on two occasions, Rash Behari sent missives to Bengali revolutionaries requesting Subhas' presence in Japan.¹⁰⁷ As usual, the documentary evidence is far from clear. Subhas Chandra Bose had been liaising with the Japanese representatives in Calcutta since 1938 and sent an emissary to Japan to meet Rash Behari, in order to inquire about the real intentions of Rash Behari and the Japanese.¹⁰⁸ Whichever version is correct, it is hard to say that Savarkar suggested Bose to contact the Japanese, since Subhas had been contemplating Japan as a possible ally already in 1937.

¹⁰⁵ Japan entered the war eighteen months later than predicted by Rash Behari.

¹⁰⁶ B. V. Bhalerao, *op. cit.*, pp. 221-222. This is by far the most authoritative of the quoted sources cited, because his work is correct from the historiographical point of view. Unfortunately, Bhalerao provides no indication of the circumstances of his interview with Savarkar's bodyguard.

¹⁰⁷ Uma Mukherjee, *op. cit.*, pp. 160-161.

¹⁰⁸ Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 416.

From his side, Bose mentioned his meeting with Savarkar in *The Indian Struggle* and observed that the president of the Hindu Mahasabha seemed unconcerned about the international situation. Savarkar's main priority, Bose believed, was rather the military training of the Hindus and their conscription in the British army in India.¹⁰⁹ On the other hand, on 25th June 1944 Bose, during a Radio Singapore broadcast, spoke about Savarkar in the following terms:

When due to misguided political whims and lack of vision almost all the leaders of the Congress party have been destroying all the soldiers in Indian Army as mercenaries, it is heartening to know that Veer Savarkar is fearlessly exhorting the youths of India to enlist the Armed Forces. These enlisted youths themselves provide us with trained men and soldiers for our Indian National Army.¹¹⁰

In the light of such statement it is unlikely that Savarkar and Bose had come to an agreement regarding a revolt to be led both from within and outside India. Bose's remarks, instead, suggest that Savarkar and the Hindu political organisations had only a limited role in developments at that time.

The debate about the supposed talks between Bose and Savarkar and their subject reminds another similar event, the meeting Bose twice tried to organise with Hedgewar, in 1939 and on 20th June 1940, the day before Hedgewar's death. According to the two biographies of Hedgewar, one in Hindi and one in English,¹¹¹ Bose and Hedgewar didn't meet on either occasion because Hedgewar was seriously ill. The founder of the RSS died on 21st June 1940. Bose engaged the general secretary of the

¹⁰⁹ Bhalerao, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 223, Vishvas Savarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 151. Rash Behari praised Savarkar in similar terms during a radio broadcast quoted by D. Keer, *op. cit.*, p. 350. Unfortunately, Keer does not provide the date for the broadcast but does note that the message was published by *Free Hindustan* on 27 January 1946.

¹¹¹ Respectively, Deshpande-Ramaswamy, *cit.*, pp. 175-176, who also briefly mentions the meeting with Savarkar, and C.P. Bhisikar, *Keshav: Sangh Nirmata*, New Delhi (year not specified), pp. 58-59, quoted by D. R. Goyal, *op.cit.*, p. 52.

RSS, G. M. Huddar, to arrange the meeting with Hedgewar. According to Huddar, Hedgewar was not at all interested to meet Bose.¹¹² Furthermore, when Hedgewar tried to meet Bose in 1928 in Calcutta, during the annual session of the Congress, Bose met Hedgewar just for a few minutes. At that time, indeed, Hedgewar was an unknown local leader. Bose comment, at the end of the meeting, was:

... the Hindu society is almost a dead society. I don't think it can again become active and militant.¹¹³

In conclusion, it seems that Bose had never been a particularly keen supporter of Hindu nationalism. His own idea of nationalism was secular.¹¹⁴ The INA, for instance, enlisted Indians regardless of their religious beliefs, and it included a number of Muslims.

How explain, then, the discrepancies between biased literature, eyewitnesses and official records? According to some authors, Bose minimized the meeting in order to protect Savarkar from possible suspicions. Bose was a self declared revolutionary, constantly watched by the police. However, when *The Indian Struggle* was published in 1942, Bose was already in Europe, while Savarkar was in India. Had Bose admitted that he had been instructed by Savarkar, the latter might have suffered as a consequence.

As suggested above, the sources provided by the politically oriented writers are most vague. The accounts not always seem reliable, the interviews are often undated and the archival references are almost totally neglected. There is enough reason to doubt the veracity of the reconstruction of the meeting between Bose and Sarvarkar. Last but not least, there is no references, in Savarkar's correspondence, of a plan to join forces with a foreign power.

¹¹² Goyal, *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 51-52.

¹¹⁴ For confirmation, see Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Hitler's Priestess. Savitri Devi, the Hindu-Aryan Myth and Neo-Nazism*, New York-London, 1998, p. 90.

It should be remembered that Savarkar disclosed the subject of the meeting four years after the Gandhi's assassination, when the image of the Hindu Mahasabha was damaged from its heavy implication in the incident. To worsen the position of the Hindu Mahasabha was the charge of collaboration with the British.

Some scholars believe that this interpretation of the events was sponsored by the RSS in an attempt to indirectly attack Nehru and rehabilitate Bose, who, at that time, had become rather unpopular among the Hindus.¹¹⁵ However, this interpretation completely overlooks the fundamental divergences between Savarkar and Bose over the Muslim question. Bose had always been close to the Muslims and had occasionally collaborated with them, much to the displeasure of the Hindu nationalists.

It is therefore more likely that Savarkar, acting on behalf of Hindu militant circles, tried to legitimize their objectionable stance. Associating his own image with that of an Indian leader whose prestige stood unchallenged, such as Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, presenting himself as Netaji's mentor and guide, Savarkar tried to rehabilitate his position and that of the Hindu radical organisations.

Savarkar was probably considering the possibility of calling upon the nationalists enlisted and trained in the British army and to revolt. He actually admitted his intention. Although there is no proof that Savarkar stood behind Bose, it cannot be ruled out that, on Bose's return, the Hindu nationalists might have supported him. Certainly, both Savarkar and the Hindu nationalists knew of Bose's plans. According to a memorandum drawn up by British Intelligence of 1st February 1941, Sarat Chandra Bose and a number of unidentified Hindu Mahasabha leaders were informed about the intentions of Subhas, and the plans Rash Behari and Raja Mahendra Pratap were preparing with the Japanese aid.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Goyal, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

¹¹⁶ IO, R/3/21, attachment to a letter of 1st February 1941 from the Deputy Commissioner, J. V. B. Jannvrin, to G. H. Puckle, Assistant Director, Intelligence Bureau, New Delhi.

It may be concluded that, at least at that time, Savarkar was more interested in obtaining government and administrative posts for the Hindu Mahasabha, than getting involved in an armed revolt. With the war in full swing, during the period leading up to the Quit India Movement, Savarkar and the Hindu Mahasabha, as was their wont, wavered. Shortly after Japan's declaration of war and Japanese troops captured Rangoon on 14th December 1941, Savarkar publicly declared that a joint effort was required to defeat "Japan and her Fascist allies in Europe".¹¹⁷ Just two months later, on 17th February 1942, Savarkar declared that if Japan approached the Indian border with the intent to invade while, at the same time, declared she would be ready to grant India its independence, this would have inflamed Indians. He advised the British to do whatever they could to convince the Indians that by fighting by Britain's side they were striking out for their freedom. Savarkar repeated this message in the resolution passed by the Working Committee held at Lucknow on 28th February and 1st March 1942.¹¹⁸

7 – Toward Independence

The response of the Hindu Mahasabha to the failure of the Cripps mission is to be found in a letter from Savarkar to the Viceroy, dated 5th July 1942. With regard to independence Savarkar repeated what he already stated in February.

To be plain, the Japanese or the Germans can only promise Independence for India after the conclusion of the War. If but the

¹¹⁷ NMML, Savarkar papers, microfilm, r.n.17, letter (illegible signature) from the Prime Minister's Office, 15 December. 1941: with reference to the declaration released by Savarkar on 14 December, after the Japanese captured Rangoon, the president of the Hindu Mahasabha was required to do nothing that might add to the government difficulties.

¹¹⁸ NMML, *Ibid.*, r.n.24.

British Government promises unequivocally to grant that very Independence added to co-partnership in the Indo-British-Commonwealth on equal terms, the Japanese and the Germans would be surely deprived of the only stunt they can utilise today with some effect against England so as to nullify the democratic objective which Britain professes to defend and maintains to be the cause which forced the War on her.¹¹⁹

This was a rather indirect way of telling the British that if independence were to come to India after the war, then it was better to accept German and Japanese offers and reach independence with their help, even after the war. Declarations of this kind must have been influenced by the Japanese invasion of the Andaman islands in March 1942. This event must have also determined the refusal of the Hindu nationalists to take part in the Quit India Movement. Japan's military might have given to the leaders of the Hindu Mahasabha the tangible sensation of the Allies' imminent fall. This idea incentivated the Hindu Mahasabha to negotiate with the future, possible victors, the Axis powers. The Hindu wavering attitude of the Hindu Mahasabha was also based on the belief, widespread not only among the Hindus, that the British would be obliged to leave India. There was therefore no more need to adopt a coherent collaborative attitude, but it was more advisable to explore possible alternatives.

It is hard to assess if the militarization process to which cooperated the Hindu Mahasabha, the RSS and a host of other smaller associations, groups and local military schools, obtained tangible results. It is also impossible to quantify the number of people who actually took part to this process since, apart from the military schools, membership of these organisations was secret. No information is available regarding the efficacy of the campaign of Hindus' enlistment in the army and it is impossible to establish if the recruits figures, within

¹¹⁹ IO, Mss Eur F 125/124 1942, Correspondence with Persons in India.

that community, grew.¹²⁰ The paramilitary strength of the RSS can be indirectly measured by the uneasiness the British authorities began to show toward the RSS potential force, at the beginning of the 1940s. The British suddenly realised they had, up to that moment, underestimated the RSS potential. According to an Intelligence report of March 1943,¹²¹

Provinces, particularly the Central Provinces, Bihar, the United Provinces, Bombay and the Punjab, regard the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh as a harbourage of considerable potential danger. Alliance with the Hindu Maha Sabha, extending in degree to the latter's control, is not doubted, although this has not been proved. The Sangh has been described as the Hindu answer to the Khaksars; it is anti-British; it has shown signs of pro-Japanese bias; in its organisation and behaviour Fascist tendencies are obvious.¹²²

The British authorities were considering to ban the RSS annual training camps.

A report of March 1942 provides some details about the extension of the RSS and the number of adherents, which grew uninterruptedly between 1936 and 1941. The RSS had 200 branches and 25,000 members in 1936; 350 branches and 40,000 members in 1938; 500 branches and 60,000 members in 1939, 700 branches and 80,000 members in 1940; 700 branches and 150,000 members in 1941.

¹²⁰ At the moment of writing this book, the documents held by the Indian Ministry of Defence, the only sources which might clarify these aspects, were still inaccessible.

¹²¹ NAI, Home Poll. Dept., 28/8/1942, cit., Intelligence Bureau report, dated 27.3.43, containing an account of the Fourth Security Conference held in Nagpur on 8th and 9th March 1943.

¹²² The fascist tendencies of this organisation are also mentioned in NAI, Home Poll. Dept., 28/3/43. This file contains several police reports.

Furthermore,

The volunteers are organised in military formations – platoons, companies and battalions – and strict discipline is maintained.¹²³

It is not possible to ascertain how many of these militants would have joined the INA, if the occasion came. The documents contain no reference to this aspect and witnesses in favour of this hypothesis are subsequent to the facts.

Moonje, speaking in Nagpur on 11th November 1945 on the Indian National Army Day, suggested that, at a certain moment, conditions could have been favourable to support, from within the country, Bose's possible invasion of India

If there had not been such a religious and fanatical propaganda of Non-Violence during the last 25 years since Mahatma Gandhi came into the Congress and if the programme of Militarisation as propounded by the Hindu Mahasabha would have been carried on with impetuous enthusiasm all round and if the recruits in the Army, instead of being condemned as mercenaries as they were by the Congress leaders, had been sent into the Army with the joint blessings of the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha, who can describe what would have happened in India on this side of the line of invasion of India through the Indo-Burma frontier of Babu Subhas Chandra Bose?¹²⁴

However, Moonje pronounced this speech, when the war was over.

In those years came out in India a huge reserve of militants who, at the right moment, could become a rudimentary army, perhaps poorly

¹²³ NAI, Home Poll. Dept., 28/8/1942, cit., Intelligence report, 7 March 1942, cit.

¹²⁴ NMML, Moonje papers, Speeches, f.n. 90, "Summary of Dr. Moonje's speech delivered on the occasion of observance of the Indian National Army Day at Nagpur as organised by the Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha, on 11th of November 1945 at the Nagpur Town Hall".

armed and equipped, but perfectly capable to engage in pressure, disturb and intimidation against the enemies.

In the 1940s, the RSS still cultivated totalitarian leanings. A report of May 1942 provides an account of a speech given to volunteers in a training camp in Poona:

Dr. P.C. Sahasrabudhe addressed the volunteers on three occasions. On 4.5.42 he announced that the Sangh followed the principle of dictatorship. Denouncing democratic Government as an unsatisfactory form of Government, he quoted France as a typical example and, praising dictatorship, he pointed to Japan, Russia and Germany. He particularly praised the Fuehrer principle of Germany. On 21.5.42 he drew attention to the value of propaganda, quoting Russia and Germany as examples, and again extolled the virtues of the Leader principle, citing Mussolini's success as a further example.¹²⁵

On the basis of the observations mentioned in the last few pages, it is possible to draw out some conclusions. Considering the strength and the extension of the RSS from the early 1940's on, two aspects emerge which require particular attention. The first aspect is represented by the progressive growth of the RSS, right from its foundation. This was probably due to the adoption of a systematic work at the grass-root level. As already pointed out, between 1936 and 1941 the RSS had grown almost four-fold in terms of branches and, in terms of membership, six-fold. The second aspect is represented by a couple of questions that arise spontaneously: who was the enemy? Has this militia been used against any one? Unfortunately, this militia became effective during the partition, when the Sangh Parivar forces massacred the Indian citizens belonging to the 'enemy' community.

¹²⁵ NAI, 28/8/1942, cit., "Summary of a report on the officers' Training Camp of the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh held in April/May 1942 at Poona". A copy is also to be found in MSA, Home Special Dept., 822 IInd 1940-41.

This concept of 'enemy' made the whole difference between Indian nationalism and Hindu nationalism. The wide range of streams of the Indian nationalism, from the revolutionaries to the Muslim League and the Congress had, at least for a time, the British as their enemy. It is true that from the late 1930s the Muslim League began to develop its objectives, diverging from the Congress policy. It cultivated systematically the idea of forming a Muslim state. However, these objectives never embraced the idea of fratricide. The creation of a Muslim state did not entail the oppression of the Hindus. Indian Muslims, rightly or wrongly, considered the foundation of their own state as a reparation for the inadequacy of a policy which did not properly represent the interests of the Muslim community. The aggressive anti-Muslim discourse of the Sangh Parivar and the violent climate that it contributed to create fostered the secessionist tendencies within the Muslim minority. In a word, anti-Muslim smear campaigns contributed as much to partition as the call for a separate state that gradually widespread among Indian Muslims.

The writings of the Sangh Parivar often draw comparisons between the Khaksars and Hindu paramilitary organisations. As in the 1930s, the Hindus continuously warned that militias were counteract the Muslims, who were better organised. The Khaksars were made out to be more powerful than they actually were. In fact, the Khaksars played a secondary role in Indian politics and they cannot be compared to the Hindu organisations in terms of size and extension, especially after the partition. True, it was a combative organisation, fascinated by Mussolini, but there is no evidence of contacts between the Khaksars and the fascist regime.

The other Indian nationalists, the communists under M. N. Roy, the Congress, and the revolutionaries aimed just at one objective: putting an end to the colonial rule. The only real differences between these forces laid in the methods to be adopted, the priorities and the strategies. Subhas Chandra Bose himself, who had established close contacts with the fascist regime and the third Reich and was influenced by the fascist ideology, was impervious to anti-Muslim sentiments. In Europe, he had

close links with pan-Islamic nationalists and, as pointed out above, a number of Muslims were enlisted in his INA.

The nature of Bose's relations with the totalitarian regimes is still open to debate and will perhaps never be entirely clear. There can be little doubt, however, that he entertained with the Axis powers an opportunistic relationship. On the basis of the principle 'my foe's foes are my friends', Italy, Germany and Japan could be India's friends, at least until the British Raj had collapsed. Unfortunately, it will never be possible to know what would have happened had Subhas reached India, or had the Japanese invaded.



Conclusions

From an overall evaluation, Italian policy in India may appear contradictory and evanescent. Many streams were opened, but no one came to concrete results. The point is that, in many cases, some choices of the regime obtained some results, but they differed substantially from the initial expectations.

The liaison developed by Giuseppe Tucci in the 1920s with the Bengali nationalism and subsequently cultivated by the consular representatives in Calcutta and, at a lesser extent, in Bombay, at the end was abandoned. The remarkable popularity of the fascist regime had not been fully exploited. While the Italian representatives in India were fully aware of the consensus obtained among Bengali political circles, they were, on the opposite, totally unaware about the widespread sympathy of the Marathi nationalism toward fascism and the *duce*.

It is true that, when the Italian Consulate in Bombay, in accordance with the Ministry of External Affairs and the Ministry of Popular Culture, started its propaganda among the Marathi nationalists, it was too late. The war was approaching. When Italy entered into the second World War, its consulates were closed and many Italian citizens in India were interned in camps. Italy could not activate any more its agents and emissaries, also because of the strict control and censorship system enforced by the British authorities during the conflict.

In the previous years, especially by the end of the 1920s, when Marathi political literature was full of article and books about Mussolini and fascism, no one paid enough attention and properly understood all this interest for the fascist regime. This must be the main reason why the Marathi consensus toward the fascist regime had never been fully exploited.

Not even more evident *avanches* by remarkable representatives of the Marathi Hindu nationalism were noticed. After Moonje's visit to

Italy nobody took the chance to foster the contacts with this meaningful Indian political element. At that time the regime had more ambitious targets, like Gandhi and Nehru, in other words the top of the main Indian political party, the Congress. These leaders, though, remained indifferent.

The fascist government had a more coherent and far-sighted approach with other components of the Indian nationalism like, for instance, Indian activists living in Europe. With them, the relations were more fruitful.

Until the final deterioration of the International situation, with the outbreak of the second World War, the Indian liaison was part of a more extended network, focused on the Arab world. The Italian authorities perceived the intimate connection between Indian and Arab nationalism as two sides of a broad anti-British movement. The collaboration between the fascist regime and Arab and Indian nationalisms reached its peak in the period between the Italo-Abyssinian War and the second World War.

The Italian policy toward these parts of the world evolved continuously, according to the changes of the international context and the relations between Italy and Great Britain. The Italian policy toward India had several transformations, from an early stage, when it was determined essentially by economic interests and by the attempts to expand Italian trade to India, to a further stage when Italy tried to obtain its own space in India, without clashing with Great Britain. In this stage, Mussolini believed that a friendship between Italy and Great Britain was possible. Subsequently, Italian demands became more and more pressing, especially when the fascist establishment shifted the focus of its policy from internal questions to International issues and developed a more aggressive colonial policy.

On the other side, Britain was not ready to allow other nations to create their own economic space in India. It became clear to the Italian authorities that it was impossible to deal with India, unless it was politically controlled by the British. The freedom of India was convenient from the economic point of view.

The deterioration of the British empire represented a double advantage: opening up the Indian markets and weaken the British power at the international level. To undermine the British position it was necessary to inflame anti-British feelings, not only in India but also elsewhere in the Middle East.

At a certain stage, the regime shifted its interests from economic relations to political ties. It looked for a section of Indian political scene that could easily become an instrument of Italy's anti-British policy. A remarkable amount of records prove this change. They show how, from the second half of the 1930s, Italian economic initiatives in India gave space to political designs. With the approaching of the second World War and after its outbreak, political ties became vital from the strategic point of view.

A final evaluation of the policy of fascist Italy in India is rather negative. It appears as a series of lost chances. Especially the relations with Indian nationalism were neglected, while Indian nationalism was the only political subject which had the capacity to influence Indian public opinion.

On the other hand, fascism had a great impact on Indian nationalism from the ideological point of view. This does not mean that radical and Hindu nationalism represented, to use Nehru's words, "an Indian version of fascism". Certain political and ideological categories cannot easily be exported outside Europe, to a milieu which is extraneous to the values that produced fascism and nazism.

Nevertheless, many groups of Indian and Hindu nationalism shared several of those values. It has been written elsewhere in this book about militarism and the cult of masculinity behind the request of the Hindu Mahasabha to the British government to abandon the distinction, within the Indian society, between "martial" and "non-martial" races and castes. It has already been written about the discriminating racism developed by the Hindutva forces and their concept of internal enemy (the Muslims and the Congress). It has been written that Hindu and radical nationalism devoted a great interest on

the organization of the fascist state and its social order and how they were considered as models to be followed in India as well.

It would be possible to establish if these groups represented a real “Indian version of fascism”, only if they had the chance to rule India at the time when nazism and fascism were in power in Germany and Italy. In this case, would Indian radical nationalists adopt the same principles and methods?

Moreover, Bose, Savarkar, Moonje, Golwarkar must have been informed about the brutal side of fascism and nazis, because British press provided a very complete information to the Indian public opinion and depicted in a very complete way the true face of fascism and nazism. Bose knew Italy and Germany from within. Did they try to ignore the most brutal aspects of fascism and Nazism or did they believe that it was possible to separate the “bad” side of those regimes from the good one, if any? Did they want to export to India only the positive aspects of fascism and nazism?

These questions, remain, at present, unanswered. Opportunism may be the case for some of Indian nationalist leaders, at least for Subhas. Some of them tried to obtain the support of the totalitarian regimes, and ignored their negatives aspects. Others were more interested in applying some fascist models, leaving behind the negative sides.

The research which originated this book was started when the Ayodhya quarrel was at its peak, in 1992. The draft of this book was written just across Ahmedabad riots of 2002. <these were the most tense moments in a climate of more or less low intensity conflict, which lasted all these ten years.

When the Hidutva forces went to power in India at the end of 1990s, while the BJP government in Delhi tried to maintain a certain balance, more radical forces, at the periphery of the country, showed their most aggressive face. The minorities issue was used as an electoral tool by the BJP and the Sangh Parivar. If, at the government level, the

1 This question is raised, without giving the answer, with reference to Subhas Chandra Bose by L.A. Gordon, cit., p.279.

authoritarian backdrop had been under control, in the India streets and States the forces which shared the power with the BJP showed a racist approach which resembled very closely that of Savarkar and Golwarkar. These two leaders built up their concept of nation and “race” with fascist and nazist models in mind. The Hindu fanatics, who were inspired by Savarkar and Golwarkar, between 1992 and 2002, posed a serious threat to the Indian democracy.



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