



CHANAKYA
UNIVERSITY
Rooted in ideals • Ascending with ideas

**Subhas Chandra Bose Chair
of International Relations**

CU-SCB/2026-27/TLV-002
PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

EPISODE -02

The Long View

**Netaji's Strategic Vision and
India's Role in Asia**

In Conversation with

Professor Sugata Bose

Guest host

Prof. Ashok K. Kantha

**Subhas Chandra Bose Chair of International Relations
Chanakya University, Bengaluru**

PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

The Long View

Netaji's Strategic Vision and India's Role in Asia

In Conversation with

Professor Sugata Bose

Gardiner Professor, Oceanic History and Affairs, Harvard University

Guest host

Prof. Ashok K. Kantha

Subhas Chandra Bose Chair Professor of International Relations,
Former Ambassador of India to China

The Long View | Episode-2

Netaji's Strategic Vision and India's Role in Asia

In Conversation with Chair Professor Ashok K. Kantha and Guest, Prof. Sugata Bose

Chanakya University Podcast Transcript No. CU-SCB/2026-27/TLV-002

© Chanakya University, 2026

The Subhas Chandra Bose Chair of International Relations is a pioneering initiative that brings a distinctive Indian perspective to bear on the dynamic complexities of twenty-first-century international relations. Anchored in India's strategic culture, the Chair seeks to support the country's rising trajectory in global affairs through innovative thinking, rigorous inquiry, and policy-relevant scholarship.

The Chair promotes interdisciplinary research, develops advanced expertise in international relations, contributes to the articulation of an Indian conceptual vocabulary for global discourse, and fosters partnerships among scholars, practitioners, and institutions committed to advancing knowledge and policy innovation. An initiative of the School of Law, Governance and Public Policy, Chanakya University, the Chair focuses on Asia, with particular emphasis on India's neighbourhood and regional strategic environment.

"The Long View: Conversation. Context. Consequence is a flagship podcast series launched by the Subhas Chandra Bose Chair on International Relations at Chanakya University. Debuting on Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's birth anniversary in 2026, the series provides forward-looking, India-centric perspectives on global affairs, strategic autonomy, and Asian geopolitics.

The podcast series can be watched and followed on the website, YouTube page, and Spotify account of Chanakya University."

Published by: Chanakya University
NH - 648, Haraluru - Polanahalli,
Near Kempegowda International Airport,
Devanahalli, Bengaluru - 562165

Table of Contents

Key Takeaways..... viii

Editorial Note:ix

Transcript 1

Summary 10

Podcast Links 10

About the Guest 11

About the Host11

About the Chair 12

Key Takeaways

- Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose combined strong moral convictions with practical strategic thinking to advance India's struggle for independence.
- Although the Indian National Army (INA) had suffered military defeat, its struggle and the subsequent INA trials had a powerful political and psychological impact in weakening British confidence in the loyalty of the Indian armed forces.
- The idea of an "Asian century" is an opportunity for Asia to regain its global importance. However, it should be based on a plural and multipolar Asia, rather than the dominance of any single power.
- India needs to strengthen its engagements with its immediate neighbourhood, including Southeast Asia, East Asia and the wider Global South, while also maintaining constructive relations with China, the United States and other major powers.
- Netaji's legacy remains highly relevant to contemporary India through his emphasis on social unity, equality, national strength and India's active role in shaping a peace and multipolar Asian order.

Transcribed and Edited by

Dr. Saurabh Kaushik

Dr. Saurabh Kaushik is a Research Fellow at the Subhas Chandra Chair of International Relations, Chanakya University. As a researcher and academic specializing in Peace and Conflict Studies, he has previously served as the Project Lead and Principal Investigator in an International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) funded project at The Himalaya Initiative, Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE), where he directed feasibility assessments for transboundary conservation measures in the Eastern Himalayas. Some of his other professional pursuits include experience as a Lecturer in the Department of Political Science at Rani Parvati Devi College of Arts and Commerce, Belagavi and Director of Research and Development at the Asian Institute of Diplomacy and International Affairs (AIDIA), Kathmandu.

Dr. Kaushik holds a Ph.D. from the Department of Peace and Conflict Studies at Sikkim University (2026). He has acquired an M.A. in Diplomacy, Law & Business from O.P. Jindal Global University (2016) and B.A. in Political Science from Madras Christian College (2013). He is a recipient of the UGC Senior Research Fellowship (2019) and the Junior Research Fellowship (2017), and was honoured with the Dean's Award for Excellence from the Jindal School of International Affairs. His research focuses on transboundary natural resources conflict and cooperation, subregional integration and non-traditional security threats with a regional focus on South Asia. Possessing technical expertise in mixed-method tools and techniques, he has published research on security sector reforms, refugee movements and regional integration in South Asia.

Editorial Note:

This transcript has been lightly edited for readability, clarity and British English. Repetitions, fillers, false starts and obvious speech-recognition errors have been removed or corrected while preserving the substance and conversational character of the discussion. The views expressed by the participants are their own and do not necessarily represent those of Chanakya University or the Subhas Chandra Bose Chair of International Relations. The opening promotional teaser has not been repeated in the main transcript.

Transcript

Prof. Ashok Kantha: Hello, and welcome to the Long View. It's our space to slow down a little, step back and look at the world with some perspective, some depth, look at the context, understand how today's choices shape tomorrow's possibilities. This podcast is part of the work we do at Subhas Chandra Bose Chair at Chanakya University, and the whole idea is to put India and our neighbourhood and Asia at the centre of how we look at the world, and I believe that's where we belong. Today I'm delighted to welcome a very distinguished guest whose scholarship has shaped global understanding of both Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and the wider Asian world. Professor Sugata Bose is a Gardener Professor of Oceanic History and Affairs at Harvard University and he is one of the world's foremost historians of modern South Asia and Indian Ocean. He is also the Chairperson of Netaji Research Bureau at Kolkata. His biography of Netaji, 'His Majesty's Opponent', remains possibly the most authoritative book on Netaji's global history and his strategic thinking. His recent work, 'Asia after Europe', offers a soothing reinterpretation of Asia as an idea – plural, contested and constantly remade. So, we are very happy that he is with us today. Professor Bose, welcome to the Long View.

Prof. Sugata Bose: Thank you very much. First of all, I am delighted that Chanakya University has established a Chair named in honour of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and you, Ambassador Kantha, is the first holder of that Chair.

Prof. Ashok Kantha: Thank you. It's really a privilege for me to be the first holder of this Chair. Netaji has always been a hero for me, from my childhood days and you are a person who has made it easier for us to understand Netaji in his strategic thinking and the way he looked at not only India of that period, the colonial period, but also his global perceptions. So let me start with your understanding of Netaji as a global strategist. In 'His Majesty's Opponent', your book on Subash Chandra Bose, you present him as someone who fused moral conviction with strategic calculation. He pursued coalitions with both Germany and Japan even though he did not have any illusions about policies of those two countries. My question is, and this is something which often bothers many of us, how did he manage to reconcile the strategic imperative to exploit contradictions in the imperial world at that time with his own moral anchor of his very strong moral conviction? You have dealt with this issue in your book. So I would like to have your view on that.

Prof. Sugata Bose: Subhas Chandra Bose had determined the mission of his life very early on and he had adopted the Sanskrit maxim derived from Swami Vivekananda "Atmano mokshartham jagat hitaya cha" (आत्मनो मोक्षार्थं जगद्धितयि च) meaning "For your own self salvation and for the service of humanity," – that was to be the goal of his life. Later on, during his political career, he would often say towards the end of his speeches – "India freed means humanity saved". In a sense, his nationalism was a subset of his determination to serve suffering humanity. Now, of course, once he entered the pragmatic world of politics, he had to study the interplay of global forces. He had an analytical mind and you are absolutely correct to note that he was quite critical of Nazi racism in Germany during his visit to Europe, his enforced exile in Europe between 1933 and 1936. Also, he was quite critical of Japan's invasion of mainland China in 1937, and he wrote a long essay titled "Japan's role in the Far East",

which came out in *The Modern Review*, and we have reprinted it in Netaji's collected works. He was very clear-eyed about the nature of the regimes in Germany and Japan, but I think he believed very strongly that British imperialism was the greatest scourge in the world at the time that he lived. And therefore, India had to be freed, and also the other colonized peoples in Asia and Africa, also needed to be freed from British imperial domination. And therefore, he always had this sense that India must take advantage of an international war crisis to strike for freedom. However, I would also say that it is sometimes simplistically assumed that he simply adopted this notion of my enemy's enemy is my friend. I don't think that was what determined his wartime alliances. He had been in the Indian freedom struggle for two decades ever since he resigned from the ICS and plunged into the Indian freedom struggle led by Mahatma Gandhi. And he noticed that during those 20 years, India's civilian masses had all rallied to the Mahatma's call and joined the Congress's Non-Cooperation Movement and Civil Disobedience Movement. But the British had very cleverly kept Indian soldiers insulated from these swirling currents of civilian discontent in India. And therefore, he needed access to India's soldiers. And where could he find them? Only in territories that were occupied by enemies of Britain. And he was determined that he would replace the loyalty of Indian soldiers to the British King Emperor with a new loyalty to the cause of India's freedom and that I think is what influenced his decision to escape from India in January 1941. And of course, it was my father, his nephew, Sisir Kumar Bose who was just a 20-year-old medical student at the time, who drove him from Kolkata to Gomoh, on the first leg of that Mahanishkraman or the Great Escape.

Prof. Ashok Kantha: That is really a fascinating story of how he escaped from India and how he built up INA and the role that INA played. In fact, I had the privilege of representing India in Southeast Asia, so I have seen how it continues to resonate so strongly. The question I wanted to raise with you, that you know, there was military defeat of INA, but both ideas propounded by Netaji, as also the INA itself, you know, had tremendous political and psychological impact on the British Raj – the INA trials in Red Fort and later Naval Ratings Rebellion. How do you look at it – in a way the resonance of post war history, of both ideas propounded by Netaji, as also the afterlife of INA?

Prof. Sugata Bose: I think on the mark, in suggesting that Netaji and his Indian National Army, was able to very quickly turn a military defeat into political victory. Now, I just mentioned his escape in 1941, and at that stage, he had taken advantage of the German Soviet non-aggression pact, which was hanging by a thread. But, once the situation changed, he was unhappy in Europe, and he was desperate to come to Asia from at least February of 1942, after he heard the news of the fall of Singapore, which he saw as a great defeat of the British Empire. Unfortunately, it took about a year for this plan – to come by submarine from Europe to Asia – to reach fruition. And therefore, for Netaji and the Indian National Army from July 1943, it was a race against time. Had he been able to come to Southeast Asia a little sooner and had the INA's armed thrust from the Northeast of India coincided with Mahatma Gandhi's Quit India rebellion, then in fact, the military outcome could have been very different. Nevertheless, the Indian National Army fought bravely – around Imphal and Kohima and Arakan – fought very important defensive actions in Burma. And even after the retreat, and Netaji retreated on foot with the soldiers of the Rani of Jhansi regiment and many of his close colleagues, he

was constantly saying in 1945 that there would be a great impression made by the struggle of the Indian National Army on the Indian soldiers and also Indian civilians in the immediate post-war period. And in that he proved to be right. He was, of course, helped in a certain way by a grave error of decision made by the British from their point of view – to put on trial three officers of the INA at the Red Fort – one Hindu, one Muslim and one Sikh. And so, a slogan arose “Lal Kile se aayi awaaz: Sehgal, Dhillon, Shahnawaz” just as Netaji had been able to unite, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, and people from all the different regions of India in his Azad Hind movement, that inspired the Indian public and what happened was of course that the British came to realize that they could not use their colonial Indian army anymore to hold India in subjection. And what is more, the British had tried initially to use Indian soldiers elsewhere in Southeast Asia. They had even tried to help the French and the Dutch reoccupy their colonies. But by 1946, it was clear that that option was not available to the British. So, in many ways, the political impact of Netaji’s Azad Hind Fauj played a very important role in paving the way not just for India’s independence but for the freedom of other colonies in Asia as well.

Prof. Ashok Kantha: You are absolutely right. Netaji’s role and INA and the Red Fort trial undoubtedly accelerated the departure of the British colonial masters not only from India but from the region. Now let me come to one of the ‘what ifs’ of history, a counterfactual which people raise from time to time. What would have happened in case the Japanese had really triumphed during the Second World War at least in the Asian theatre? How would it have impacted Netaji’s vision? Would it have, you know, advanced the vision or compromised it or transformed it? What is your opinion on that?

Prof. Sugata Bose: Well, one thing such a counterfactual would never have done was to compromise Netaji’s vision. Netaji was never prepared to compromise with injustice and wrong. And of course, in relation to the British, even in 1940, he had held a huge anti-compromise conference. He was a realist and who was constantly trying to strengthen India vis a vis not just Britain but also his wartime ally Japan. So, for example, he had really wanted to let the British retreat from Imphal because he was really desperate to come into Assam and Bengal, and he felt that there would be an internal uprising, and the whole of Eastern India and the people there would rise in his support. Unfortunately, the Japanese decided to lay siege to Imphal, and he more or less came to terms with that strategy, when some of his officers explained to him that maybe it is not such a bad idea because if Imphal fell, then there would be large numbers of Indian soldiers who would then add to the strength of the Indian National Army, and that would increase the Azad Hind government’s leverage in relation to Japan. So, he was constantly trying to strengthen India. Also, if you read all of his wartime speeches, his broadcasts, whether from Europe or from Asia, he was constantly emphasizing that his socioeconomic views had not changed at all wherever in the world he might be at the present moment. Even from Germany he was saying, “I am no apologist of the tripartite powers. I don’t need any credentials when I speak to my own people”. And therefore, I think he was deeply, you know, committed to the ideals that had animated his entire struggle for India’s freedom. And of course, to Mahatma Gandhi he said in a broadcast, that if the British have not been able to deceive him or make him compromise, then no other power would succeed in doing so. So, he was constantly making sure that India’s position was strong whether in



relation to its opponents or its allies of the moment.

Prof. Ashok Kantha: You are absolutely right. Let me now turn from Netaji's world to another broader intellectual pursuit of you – the idea of Asia. You have reinterpreted re-imagined Asia as a contested plural historically constructed space. Now against that background, this popular notion of 21st century being 'Asian century', how do you assess it? Do you think it's a parochial and somewhat presumptuous enterprise or does it has validity?

Prof. Sugata Bose: Well, what I would say is that in the 2020s where we are located, I think Asia, as a whole, has been recovering the global position both economic and strategic, that it had lost about 200 years ago. However, we ought not to simply believe in that teleology that the 21st century will necessarily be an 'Asian century'. It will depend on the nature and stature of Asian statesmanship, if that goal has to be achieved. I don't think that an aspiration for Asia to rise is necessarily a parochial ambition because it could be seen as an effort to achieve global equality – something which had been denied during the long one to two centuries of colonial rule depending on which part of Asia we are talking about. But I have put forward in my book "Asia After Europe" a vision of a pluralized continentalism. If we look at the history of the best ideas about building Asian solidarity – there were some in the early 20th century who talked about 'an Asiatic Federation'. Figures like Okakura of Japan or Sun Yat-sen of China or indeed Netaji's political mentor Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das, and he was very deeply influenced by Deshbandhu in talking about Asian unity and Asian universalism. But I can see that there are challenges. What is the most powerful country in Asia going to do? Will China make the same mistake as Japan did in the 1930s? Or can we think in terms of a different kind of a multipolar Asia? And so, towards the end of my book, which is overall an optimistic book, because if you look at the intellectual, cultural, political conversations taking place across Asia, there is reason to be optimistic, that there were Asian leaders who had a grand vision of the future of Asia. But towards the end of the book there's a pessimistic note asking what China is going to do. I engaged with a very senior Singapore-based historian, Wang Gungwu, who had asked, "What kind of China is now rising? Can it avoid being a nation state, that when powerful will emulate the national empires, or will it be a benign and peace-loving multinational state?" And he was showing, how some of the ideas of Chinese intellectuals of the early 20th century, and in particular he mentioned one figure Gu Hongming, who spoke about Tianxia (天下, "all under heaven") – a sort of a universal morality rather than an aggressive nation-based empire, and how his works had been revived in China in the very early part of the 21st century. But I comment in my book that Wang Gungwu's work, titled *Renewal*, was published in 2013, and at that point there was some hope for the future. But I suggest that the vision of Gu Hongming had then been swept aside by the thought of Xi Jinping. And my conclusion was that "... the rise of a new hegemon pursuing an ambitious project of nationalistic imperialism does not bode well for the more generous imaginaries of Asia in the 21st century". But that does not mean that the more generous imaginaries cannot fight back. And I would say that it's now in the domain of contingency what we do to see whether we can bring back these generous imaginaries of Asia into our political and international discourse.

Prof. Ashok Kantha: You are absolutely right Prof. Bose to raise those questions, those doubts. I would like to be optimistic about the prospects of Asia. But, this kind of pluralist

vision of Asia you talked about essentially has to be in a multipolar world. It cannot be one dominated by a single hegemon. When Deng Xiaoping received Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in December 1988, he also talked about the Asian century, but he predicated that on the requirement that China and India will both rise, and they will remain friendly countries. Now, the first part of that assumption is correct, but the second part is a little contested. More importantly, and this I wanted to have your comments in light of recent developments. Is China really interested in a multipolar Asia? I am raising this question because in our discussions with the Chinese colleagues we have raised this point. We have noticed that, for instance, when Prime Minister Modi met with President Xi Jinping in Tianjin, our readout of the meeting talked about multipolar world and multipolar Asia. While the Chinese only talked about the multipolar world. When we asked them why this divergence? In fact, some of them were quite blunt, that we can't really have a multipolar world when there is only one great resident power in the Asian continent. So, things are really changing. Asymmetries have become so strong. How do you look at the present situation, especially in a Trumpian world, which is characterized by great degree of turbulence and uncertainty?

Prof. Sugata Bose: Well, there is always that temptation by a leading power, and China happens to have an economy which is six times the size of the Indian economy, and that gap has increased ever since 1979, even though India has grown very fast as well. India is a more populous country than China, and of course, the challenge that we face is how to peacefully manage the rise of both China and India. There will be temptations within certain circles of the Chinese leadership to play the dominant role. After all, China sees itself as the rising power, which is challenging the United States of America, and therefore, there will always be that temptation. But I think if wiser counsels prevail in China, then they may well choose to fall back on what Deng Xiaoping was suggesting in 1988. That all of Asia must rise, certainly both China and India must rise, and we have to accept the notion of a multi-polar Asia. So this will be a contest, and my sense is that what we need to find is the right balance. If you look at very recent developments, there has been a slight improvement in relations between India and China. But that, I fear, has been a little too reactive to the unpredictability in global affairs that has been injected by Trump's United States of America. I think we need to be a little more pro-active and have a clear doctrine of the role that we want to play both across Asia and the Indian Ocean interregional arena and it must be based on Indian strength. I think we need to augment naval strength in the Indian Ocean world but always be open to diplomatic negotiations. Try to have good relations with other countries of Asia, from Japan through all of the ASEAN countries, but also try to persuade China that even their interest does not necessarily lie in projecting dominance but accepting a certain notion of a multipolar Asia. It will not be easy but that should be the challenge of Indian diplomacy in the Asian theatre.

Prof. Ashok Kantha: You are right. We can't give up on this enterprise but the fact remains that as asymmetries increase between India and China, something you referred to, increasingly Chinese interlocutors, and I can only talk about Track II dialogue now, they suggest that even recent improvement in our overtures to China is because of our vulnerabilities. Because we are under pressure in our relations with the USA and that is why we are trying to sort of improve relations with China. But, I would like to have your comment on the larger global order. What is happening today in terms of great power rivalry – 'weaponization of interdependence or



integration' as Mark Carney described in his Davos speech – a retreat from globalization and diminished multilateralism. Are these trends relatively transient or are they driven at least partly by personalities like Donald Trump and Xi Jinping? Or are we in a new normal in terms of an altered world and there is no going back to what existed earlier?

Prof. Sugata Bose: My sense is that we are witnessing some deep systemic shifts of which the personalities that you mention – Donald Trump of the United States of America and Xi Jinping of China – are more symptoms than drivers of the changes that are taking place in the global balance. But I would not want to completely rule out the role of personality in global affairs. Donald Trump in particular is a maverick, and I have not seen any political personality in the United States who elicits such strong reactions, both favourable and unfavourable. His style of functioning is very very distinctive, and it is this unpredictability that I think has been of great concern to the erstwhile allies of the United States in the West, both Canada which you mentioned and Europe. Now when Mark Carney talks about a 'rupture' not a transition, he is mainly thinking of the rupture between the United States on the one hand, and Canada and Europe on the other. Now that is not necessarily the kind of rupture that is of the greatest salience to us, because we have to think more globally. We have to think in terms of Asia. But this kind of rupture obviously has also had an impact on India's foreign policy and India's trade policy. Just look at the recent free trade agreement that we have signed with the European Union. Now if India is slightly improving relations with China because of what the United States is doing, Europe is doing exactly the same. So, I can understand those kinds of short-term adjustments that are taking place. But we have to think globally, we have to think about the rest of Asia. And for the moment at least on the economic front, we have been trying to improve relations, signing trade agreements with the United Kingdom, with Europe. We are even having talks with Latin America. But we have to find some way of connecting India much more meaningfully with the most economically dynamic region of the world which happens to be Southeast Asia and East Asia. Now, of course, we chose not to join RCEP, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, which you know, all of the ASEAN countries joined, along with China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand. I think we were concerned about again the dominance of China within that framework, but we have to find some ways in which we can still tie up closely with our greater neighbourhood. There are other countries in Asia which have their conflicts with China – Japan, Vietnam. And yet they are trying their best to find ways of negotiating and engaging without giving up their fundamental national interests. And India also must, in its posture towards the rest of Asia, seek to do exactly that. And so, I would say we are in a period of rupture, not just an uneasy transition, but it is not the kind of rupture which I think a Canadian leader or European leaders would emphasize. We have to see the global balance shifting on our own terms and take our diplomatic decisions on that basis.

Prof. Ashok Kantha: I fully agree with you about what you said about doing more in terms of our engagement with Southeast Asia. Sometimes I get the feeling that our Act East policy is losing momentum while we are tending to look Westward a little more eagerly. Engaging with western countries is perfectly in order, but there is so much more we need to do with Southeast Asia and East Asia. Now, here again, I would like to go back to the whole idea of rupture. Are we really moving towards a rupture in terms of US engagement with its allies and

partners, whether it's in Europe with NATO or in Asia with Japan and Korea? Or are we looking at the terms of engagement being reworked and new equilibriums emerging? Now, for us, it is an important question because if there is a rupture, if there is a major retreat of the USA from the Indo-Pacific (in terms of what they have been talking about western hemisphere being the area of primary importance), it has significant implications for us. How do you look at it? What kind of end game, if one can speculate on that, is on the horizon? Or are we in for a very extended period of disorder?

Prof. Sugata Bose: Well, I think that from the United States perspective, the rupture is potentially greater with its own North American and European allies. And this is why Mark Carney is so concerned, why he felt that he had to make this trip to China, trying to improve relations with a rising superpower. That is the reason why the British Prime Minister Keir Starmer felt that he had to go to China recently and so on. My sense is that the rupture may not necessarily be that great or that long-lasting when it comes to Asia. Now, of course, if you look at Trump, his aggressiveness has been greater towards his own European allies, and the reason why I am saying that Europe has more to worry, is that it is not just Trump. If you look at his support base, the people around him, his Vice President, they actually have a world view which is almost anti-European. But when it comes to Asia, even the Trump administration will be somewhat cautious in dealing with China, as we have seen even in trade talks, trade deals and so forth. But given that China is the main challenger, it would not be easy for the United States to completely give up on its old alliances with Japan, with South Korea, with much of Southeast Asia. And that is something that India must remain attentive to. In our pursuit of a multipolar Asia, we need to have good relations with the Southeast Asian and East Asian countries, but always with a view towards being able to talk to China, based on what are our minimal national interests that we need to protect.

Prof. Ashok Kantha: Prof. Bose, from your vantage point in Boston, Massachusetts, and someone who also divides time between Kolkata and USA, how do you look at this triangular equation involving India, USA and China? I am posing this question because very often we get the feeling that China looks at India through the prism of its strategic contestation with the USA. So, how do you see these triangular dynamics working out?

Prof. Sugata Bose: Well, I'm sure you have seen in your own diplomatic life, and now in Track 2 talks, that China will always raise this question to India, that don't trust the United States beyond a certain point and so forth. And I think in many ways, maybe we should not become a prisoner of this triangular relationship, which we obviously have to negotiate to our own advantage. But also see how we can establish closer relations with the rest of Asia with ASEAN, with Japan, with Europe and so on, so that we have more room for manoeuvre in this United States, China, India, triangle. So, my suggestion is that we should find ways of breaking out of this triangle, having broader based relationships, with much of the rest of Asia and the rest of the globe including the Global South.

Prof. Ashok Kantha: When we pursue agency, we need to diversify our engagements, with Global South and with countries across the world, as it is important. Let me now go back to Netaji and his strategic thinking. What concrete lessons can be derived from Netaji's both thinking and the way he dealt with a fractured, very difficult, international environment,



when we are ourselves negotiating today a world which is going through a turbulent period, and where one can argue that strategic space available to India has been diminished to certain extent? What kind of concrete lessons can you think of where Netaji's thinking will be of help to us?

Prof. Sugata Bose: I think Netaji's main relevance today in India is actually domestic. I mean he was the only leader who believed in the equality of all religious communities, all linguistic groups, the genders, and on the basis of his principle of Samyavada or "egalitarianism", he was able to build a kind of unity which perhaps no other leader had succeeded in doing. So that, in some ways, is his principal relevance today. But beyond that, Netaji is one figure who commands a lot of respect in our immediate neighbourhood. And one of our failures in terms of Indian foreign policy is that we seem to have alienated most of our immediate neighbours and in some ways Netaji may have a role to play – his historical stature and his contemporary position – in repairing some of these relations. India has a legitimate ambition to play a very important role on the global stage, and we cannot allow nagging problems in the neighbourhood to constantly hobble that aspiration. Beyond that, of course, Netaji was a true beacon across Asia between 1943 and 1945. And that is something that is well remembered across Asia. And even as we look for global engagement, there is nothing wrong in letting Asia have a privileged position in our geography of global relations. And that is something that Netaji taught us how to do. He was the leader of a subject nation which formed a government in exile, a revolutionary government. And he showed how it was possible to deal with the highest dignity, with very problematic characters on the global stage at that time. You know, leaders of Germany, leaders of Japan, actually making sure that he had enough of a support base in Japan before he met Tojo, to make sure that he will get the Japanese leader to accept certain positions that will be to the advantage of India. So, those are the kinds of lessons I think that Netaji holds for us, as we negotiate another very turbulent phase in international affairs.

Prof. Ashok Kantha: In fact, on all those counts, including the need to ensure social cohesion, equality and plurality as we journey towards the objective of Viksit Bharat or developed India in 2047. Likewise, the importance of neighbourhoods, there are people who argue that we can transcend neighbourhoods. But at least in our group in the Subhas Chandra Bose Chair, we firmly reject that proposition. We, in fact, are focusing on Asia and within Asia to privilege our neighbourhood – that is going to be our primary focus because our rise has to be anchored in our neighbourhood. That is extremely important. Prof. Bose, it has been a really rich and wide-ranging conversation with you and as expected we have learned so much from your thinking, your writings, your work on a very wide range of issues from Netaji's strategic thinking to the idea of Asia to where we are today in a very turbulent global environment. So, thank you very much for helping us and our audience understand both history and very sort of complicated contemporary geopolitics. It has been a real honour for us to host you on the Long View. Thank you very much.

Prof. Sugata Bose: Thank you very much and all my best wishes for the work that you do and will continue to do as the holder of the Subhas Chandra Bose Chair at Chanakya University. I am glad to hear that you will be focusing on both the immediate and the greater

neighbourhood of Asia.

Prof. Ashok Kantha: Prof. Bose, we will be looking forward to getting your guidance from time to time because there is so much you can do to further a cause which I can see is very important for you and for us.

Prof. Sugata Bose: Thank you very much. Jai Hind!

Prof. Ashok Kantha: Thank you very much. Jai Hind!



Summary

In this episode of The Long View, Prof. Sugata Bose, Gardiner Professor of Oceanic History and Affairs at Harvard University, Grandnephew of Subhas Chandra Bose and Chairperson of the Netaji Research Bureau, joins Subhas Chandra Bose Chair Professor of International Relations, Ashok Kantha at Chanakya University. The conversation begins with Subhas Chandra Bose's moral and strategic worldview, how he reconciled ethical conviction with geopolitical realism, his wartime strategic leadership, and the formation and legacy of the Azad Hind Sena (INA). Prof. Bose reflects on Netaji's political afterlife and then the discussion moves to contemporary geopolitics, the idea of an "Asian Century," multipolar Asia, India–China asymmetry, US–China rivalry, shifting global power equations, and India's strategic choices in a turbulent international order. From history to contemporary international order, Episode 2 connects Netaji's thought with India's current realities, exploring how New Delhi can navigate rupture, rivalry, and opportunity with clarity and confidence.

Click here to watch ↓



Subhas Chandra Bose Chair of International Relations

presents

The Long View

CONVERSATION • CONTEXT • CONSEQUENCE

Episode 02

Podcast Links

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rMWMEGu3qWE>

Spotify: <https://open.spotify.com/episode/1pHkP1h5GYUYkeHb5Al8Oe?si=-FOaC4wsVQjagUNSFQ-sKfQ>

About the Guest

Sugata Bose is the Gardiner Professor of Oceanic History and Affairs, Harvard University. He has served as Director of Graduate Studies in History at Harvard and as the Founding Director of Harvard's South Asia Institute. Prior to taking up the Gardiner Chair at Harvard in 2001, Bose was a Fellow of St. Catharine's College, University of Cambridge, and Professor of History and Diplomacy at Tufts University.

Bose was educated at Presidency College, Calcutta, and the University of Cambridge where he obtained his Ph.D. His many books include *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy* (with Ayesha Jalal, 5th edition 2022), *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (2006), *His Majesty's Opponent: Subhas Chandra Bose and India's Struggle against Empire* (2011, 10th anniversary edition 2022), *The Nation as Mother and other visions of nationhood* (2017) and, most recently, *Asia after Europe: Imagining a Continent in the Long Twentieth Century* (2024). He was a recipient of the Guggenheim Fellowship in 1997 and gave the G.M. Trevelyan Lecture at the University of Cambridge. In 2015 he was awarded the Rabindra Puraskar.

Sugata Bose has jointly with Sisir Kumar Bose edited the 12-volume *Collected Works of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose*. He is joint editor with Krishna Bose of *Rabindranath Tagore, Purabi: The East in its Feminine Gender*, translations of Tagore's poetry by Charu C. Chowdhuri and translator of Tagore's songs in his book *Tagore the World Voyager*. He has made three highly regarded documentary films on modern South Asian history and published several albums of Bengali music and poetry, including *Amar Rabindranath (My Tagore)* in 2010.

Sugata Bose served as a Member of Parliament in India elected to the 16th Lok Sabha (2014–2019) representing the Jadavpur constituency in Bengal and throughout that period as a member of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs. His eloquent speeches in Parliament in defense of democracy were widely heard and appreciated.

About the Host

Prof. Ashok Kantha is the Chair Professor of the Subhas Chandra Bose Chair of International Relations at Chanakya University. A career diplomat with over 38 years of experience, he served as India's Ambassador to China (2014–16), Secretary (East) in the Ministry of External Affairs, and High Commissioner to Sri Lanka and Malaysia. He is a former Director of the Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi, and has held several senior positions dealing with China and India's neighbourhood. A specialist on China and South Asia, he was also the lead Indian negotiator for key agreements with China on the boundary question and military confidence-building measures.



About the Chair

The Subhas Chandra Bose Chair of International Relations is a pioneering initiative that brings a distinctive Indian perspective to bear on the dynamic complexities of 21st-century international relations. Anchored in the country's strategic culture, its mandate is to support India's rising trajectory in global affairs through innovative thinking and rigorous inquiry. The Chair seeks to foster interdisciplinary scholarship, equip advanced learners and researchers with expertise across key domains of international relations, develop an Indian conceptual vocabulary for IR discourse, and build partnerships and a collaborative community dedicated to advancing knowledge and policy innovation. An initiative of the School of Law, Governance and Public Policy, Chanakya University, the Chair focuses on Asia, with special priority given to India's neighbourhood.

Transcription Note: Podcast script edited by Dr. Saurabh Kaushik, Research Fellow at Subhas Chandra Bose Chair of International Relations, Chanakya University, Bengaluru.





CHANAKYA UNIVERSITY

Rooted in ideals • Ascending with ideas

Chanakya University Global Campus

NH-648, Haraluru, Near Bangalore International
Airport Devanahalli, Bengaluru - 562165

www.chanakyauniversity.edu.in

