

My parents met when my Mother went to his office to submit an article she had written on child labour in tobacco factories. She once told me during that first meeting with my Father, he criticized the way manner in which Indian political leaders were functioning. She apparently asked him what he had done for his country that he could condemn others. My Mother had just returned from her stint as rector, in the women's ashram at Wardha, which was close to Gandhi's ashram. (It housed the wives of the imprisoned political leaders etc.) *On hearing the story of the Blossoming Lotus written by Thea von Harbou I felt there was an uncanny similarity between Savitri Trewlaney criticizing Krishna Desai, the Indian medical student in Britain for his (initial) lack of sympathy for the cause of Indian independence, and my mothers chiding Tendulkar for criticizing the Freedom Fighters.*

My Mother came from a conservative but very educated Brahmin family in Belgaum. Her friendship with my Father created quite a sensation in the small town of Belgaum as all knew that he had a German wife. My maternal grandfather felt certain that she would not see reason and stop meeting him unless he took some stern action. He did just that and asked her to leave the house. It was then that Dr Tendulkar took her to the small Indian village, Belgundi, about 25 kms away where he was building a house. She lived there with no electricity, no flowing water in a half built house. She began working with the villagers, teaching them basic lessons on cleanliness and how to write and read. While Dr. Tendulkar promised to marry my Mother he told her about Thea von Harbou and the fact there could be no marriage without Thea's consent.

Soon after this my Father was detained as a political activist by the British in April 1941 for almost 4 years. My Mother continued living in the village doing social work. It was at this time that my maternal Grandfather Mr. N V Gunaji wrote to Gandhi about my Mother, requesting Gandhi to tell my Mother to return home. Mr. N V Gunaji was a naturopath and had treated Mahatma Gandhi several

times. That is how Gandhi got involved in the marriage of my parents. Gandhi called my Mother to his ashram in Sewagram, listened to her and made her promise that she would not meet my Father for five years to test their love. He promised her that on Tendulkars release he would personally officiate at their marriage. My Mother returned to Belgundi village but because of her instigating nearby villages against the British as part of the 'Quit India program' she too was imprisoned by them for almost two years.

Gandhi knew that my Father was married to Thea von Harbou I am told that Gandhi asked for Thea von Harbou to give her consent to their marriage.(*Whether there was any correspondence between Thea von Harbou and Gandhi has yet to be found and I am in the process of researching this.*). Both my parents were released and they were married in August 1945 in Wardha Sewagram When my parents were married they had to promise Gandhi that they would not have children till independence and so my Father sent my Mother to Michigan Ann Arbor to do a post graduate course for a year or so. Before my Mother could return Gandhiji had been assassinated in 1948.

In 1952 my Father sent my Mother to stay with Thea von Harbou in Germany. My Mother mentioned to me that Thea von Harbou had a large photo of my Father in her room which she would constantly stroke with great affection. My Mother would request Thea to visit India, promising her to look after *Schönheit* (*Beauty*) and *Pumpnickel* (Thea's pets). *Tai* (Thea's name of honour, which means *grand sister*) would say 'No' because "what would Ayi do with an old woman like me?"

I think both women were remarkable, both loved the same man though they came from different backgrounds, culture, religion and background! It was a strange relationship: Thea was 17 years older than my Father and my Mother almost 10 years younger than him. (A difference of about 27 years between the two women!) During her stay in Berlin, my Mother had a sudden attack of

appendicitis and had to be operated upon and she was looked after by Thea von Harbou. When my Mother left Berlin Thea made her promise that if she ever had a daughter she would call her Thea. I was born in 1955 and was duly named Laxmi Thea Tendulkar.

In 1945 after his release and wedding Tendulkar started working on various projects that he had been planning. These included cement, aluminum, and paper. The project which materialized was a cement factory in Bagalkot which is functioning even today! With a lot of persuasion he was able to get financial support from the State Government of Karnataka and the Trust of the Nizam of Hyderabad. He also traveled extensively in Karnataka collecting proxies and selling shares. By 1950 he had successfully started the construction of *Bagalkot Cement co.* Tendulkar ordered the machinery from *Krupps*. In fact the entire plant and machinery was the first overseas order that *Krupps* received after World War II. My Father made several trips to Germany and always kept in close touch with his German friends. Thea von Harbou died in 1954, just a year before the first clinker fell from Bagalkot Cement Company.

My Father had been in Gandhiji's ashram in 1923 before he left India for Europe. Being a brilliant student he had excelled in Sanskrit. He was closely associated with various Indian freedom fighters and in his youth had worked under Sardar Vallabhai Patel. During the four year enforced confinement pre independence he had an opportunity to reestablish links with Indian political stalwarts. Interestingly till the day he died Dr Tendulkar would always wear white Khaddar – hand spun yarn the symbol of Freedom Fighters in India.

My Father also worked on a huge aluminum project on the western coast of Indian at a place called Ratnagiri with collaboration from *ALCOA*. However, due to the heavy restrictions imposed by the State Government of Maharashtra on foreign equity and investment in the 1960's the project did not fructify. Over the years he purchased over two hundred acres of land piece by piece in Belgundi,

the village of his birth, where he planted a wonderful mango orchard and built a glass house perched on top of the hill from which provided a wonderful panoramic view. He succumbed to a heart attack in 1975 in Belgundi at the age of 71. Those who were close to him remember his brilliance, vitality and tremendous zest for life.