



Hamburg

Wien

Budapest

Kangra

Jubar

Neu-Delhi

Bangkok



Eva Scherer and Imre Ungár shortly before their departure from Vienna in 1938

Eva Ungár wurde als Eva Scherer am 15. Dezember 1913 in Wien in eine sozialdemokratische Familie geboren. Ihr Großvater Paul Hönigsberg war Arzt, die Großmutter Emma Sozialdemokratin und Frauenrechtlerin. Ihre Mutter Clara zählte zu den ersten Medizinstudentinnen der Universität Wien, ihr Vater Eduard war Maschinenbauingenieur. Eva studierte ebenfalls Medizin und lernte beim Studium in Wien ihren zukünftigen Ehemann Imre Ungár, der aus Budapest stammte, kennen. Nach dem „Anschluss“ 1938 musste Imre Ungár aufgrund seiner jüdischer Abstammung Wien verlassen. Eva, selbst so genannter Mischling 1. Grades und Sozialdemokratin, begleitete ihn, und die beiden konnten mithilfe des indischen Kommilitonen Santosh Kumar Sen nach Indien emigrieren. 1949 kehrten Eva und Imre mit ihren Kindern in Imre's Heimatstadt Budapest zurück, wo sie an der Chirurgischen Abteilung des Nationalen Tuberkulose-Institutes Korányi tätig waren. Zwei ihrer vier Kinder wurden ebenfalls ÄrztInnen.

## Ten years in India

**Eva Ungár** geboren 1913/**born 1913**

Eva Ungár, née Scherer, was born in Vienna into a family of Social Democrats on 15 December 1913. Her grandfather Paul Hönigsberg was a doctor, her grandmother Emma a Social Democrat and feminist. Her mother Clara was one of the first women to study Medicine at the University of Vienna, her father Eduard was a mechanical engineer. Eva also studied Medicine and met her future husband Imre Ungár from Budapest during her studies in Vienna. Following the "Anschluss" in 1938, Imre had to leave Vienna as a result of his Jewish origins. Eva, herself a so-called 1<sup>st</sup> grade half-caste and a Social Democrat, accompanied him and, with the assistance of their fellow student, Indian Santosh Kumar Sen, they were able to emigrate to India. In 1949, Eva and Imre returned to Imre's hometown Budapest with their children, where they worked at the Department of Surgery at the National Tuberculosis Institute Korányi. Two of their children also followed them into the medical profession.

The following life story was written by Eva Ungár in German, many years before her death in 1998, and translated into English on the centenary of her and Imre's birth by Dr. Judit Zerkowitz. We would like to thank Eva's son, Prof. Tamás Ungár, for providing this manuscript and Dr. Margit Franz for her assistance.<sup>1</sup>

My family and friends kept encouraging me for many years to write about my experiences in India. I have always liked to talk about our life in India but to actually write about it was not what I ever intended to do. Now I have finally buckled down to it, not easily at all, yet in the hope that my grandchildren might profit from our story, and perhaps my other readers too.

### Studies in Vienna

My future husband was not admitted to the medical university in Budapest, Hungary, in spite of his excellent results, due to the "*numerus clausus* law" which severely limited the percentage of Jews allowed to attend university. We met when studying at the Vienna Medical School. After graduation in 1939 we had to escape from Hitler's empire. This topic has been expounded upon by many and in many ways. I would rather choose to write about our own adventures.

A young Indian doctor, Dr. Santosh Sen, was doing post-graduate studies in Vienna at that time and he was a good friend of ours. He obtained for us the permit to immigrate to India. Quakers<sup>2</sup> working in Vienna even procured a job for me, a one-year contract in the North Indian Mission Hospital.

Saying goodbye was very painful. I had to say goodbye to my family and also to my fatherland. Looking out of the window on the train going to the port of Hamburg I cried. An Austrian family were sitting in the compartment facing us. Before getting off, the head of that family shook hands with us and said, "Please do not think that everyone shares the same belief in Austria. We keep our fingers crossed for you, have a safe journey, we wish you luck."

<sup>1</sup> In conjunction with the life story of Eva Ungár see also: Margit Franz, *Gateway India: Deutschsprachiges Exil in Indien zwischen britischer Kolonialherrschaft, Maharadschas und Gandhi*, Graz 2015, p. 203 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Quakers or "Society of Friends": a religious community that originated in 17<sup>th</sup> century England and that, among other things, advocates peace, tolerance and freedom of faith.

## To India via Siam

We arrived in Siam<sup>3</sup>. We had to wait in Bangkok<sup>4</sup> for the Indian residence permit in a Jewish asylum for refugees where we received fair treatment. Obviously waiting was not easy. It was the first time in our lives that we faced existential uncertainty and my husband was exasperated. Between us I was the more hopeful, the more trusting and kept trying to encourage him. It was there in the refugee camp that I read the Scriptures<sup>5</sup> for the first time and the Book of Esther<sup>6</sup> touched me the most. After three months the much-expected letter arrived from the Indian consulate. We could leave for Delhi<sup>7</sup>.

The parents of our friend who we met in Vienna, Dr. Santosh Sen, took us in, they were also doctors. Almost every foreigner, the English and the local upper crust, the top ten thousand of the Hindus all lived here in New Delhi, in this modern district, which was similar to large European cities. It was autumn already and the weather was not really much different from European autumns. The sight of the Mogul<sup>8</sup> palaces built 200 years earlier was stunning. The Mogul emperors invited the most renowned Italian master builders to construct their fairytale palaces, decorated even on the outside with semi precious stones, and to erect their sepulchral monuments. In the slums of Delhi where the poor lived we were shocked by the unimaginably abject poverty; we could never get used to that misery. There were old people and children wrapped in rags, hovels patched together of pieces of wood and tin, by the road there were small platforms behind which artisans were sitting cross legged, around them sitting in the dust and dirt children were playing and begging. Better-off people travelled in rickshaws that were drawn by people. Sewage ran down along the sides of the streets in narrow gutters, the entire gigantic slum part of the city was not provided with canalisation.

Soon we had to say goodbye to our hosts and for a time to each other as well. My husband was sent to the border of Patan<sup>9</sup> and I had to go to Kangra<sup>10</sup>, a small town in North

<sup>3</sup> Country in South-East Asia; Siam was renamed as Thailand in June 1939.

<sup>4</sup> Capital of Thailand.

<sup>5</sup> The writings collected as the Bible.

<sup>6</sup> A part of the Jewish *Tanakh* (the Hebrew Bible) and of the Christian Old Testament and one of only two books in the entire Bible named after women.

<sup>7</sup> Capital territory of India with New Delhi as India's capital.

<sup>8</sup> Muslim emperors who reigned in India from 1526 to 1858, e.g. Babur, Akbar and Aurangzeb.

<sup>9</sup> City in the North Indian state of Gujarat.

<sup>10</sup> Town in the North Indian state of Himachal Pradesh.

India. Both of us were placed in Mission Hospitals. Later my husband was sent on to a Danish tuberculosis centre to study with Dr. Friedmod-Möller, a TBC-specialist surgeon.

Soon after this the Lahore Mission Centre appointed him hospital director of the Tuberculosis Sanatorium in Jubar<sup>11</sup>. This 120-bed pavilion-system hospital lay at the feet of the Himalayas at an altitude of 1,800 metres. Here I could follow him by now, we went there together.

We came to know two groups of Christian missionaries in India. One was loyal to the government and belonged mostly to the Church of England. They considered the Hindus racially inferior and did not have any close personal contact with them. If a missionary became friends with Hindus quite often some pretext was found to send him home. There was a cathedral in India where only white people were allowed to worship.

There was, however, another group of missionaries, decent and courageous people, who served the cause enthusiastically. They often found themselves at cross-purposes with their religious leaders at home. The missionaries working in our hospital were such brave and humane people. My husband and I were atheists, yet they never wanted to force their belief on us.

### **Working in the hospital**

The Tuberculosis Sanatorium was maintained by several missions and several North Indian settlements and was led by a chosen body. In those times it was thought that only the climate of high altitudes and the salutary effect of bed rest, the so-called lying cure spent at those heights, could cure tuberculosis. We know this from Thomas Mann's novel "The Magic Mountain"<sup>12</sup>. The first surgical attempts were appearing in the United States. In India the course of the illness was aggravated by the fact that tuberculosis was a recently introduced illness, the English colonisers had brought it with them only about 200 years earlier. As a result, the population had no immunity to it of any sort. Often tuberculosis presented the symptoms of an acute infectious disease like typhoid fever and exterminated entire families without reaching chronicity in any of the patients. Apart from the lungs, tuberculosis of the intestines, bones and the serous membranes were very frequent.

<sup>11</sup> Village in the North Indian state of Himachal Pradesh.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Mann (1875–1955), famous German writer. His novel "The Magic Mountain" (German: "*Der Zauberberg*"), which was first published in November 1924, is widely considered to be one of the most influential works of 20<sup>th</sup> century German literature.



Eva and Imre at  
their wedding in  
Kangra, India,  
on 9 October 1939

During nine years in this hospital we experienced stages of the development of modern tuberculosis therapy. Our work was beautiful and exciting. At the start the only equipment we had was one working X-ray machine. In India very few places have toilets. Even in the hospital there were only room toilets. Everything had to be buried in the forest. In those parts water was also a rare treasure. It was carried into the buildings in buckets. We had to design the operating theatre, the whole surgical department ourselves. My husband and his caretaker were the designing engineers and some clever mountain peasants did the actual construction. Then an efficacious medicine, streptomycin, arrived and it helped! The almost hopeless work at the start turned into more and more of a successful and joyful activity. We received an American bronchoscope and to my best knowledge we carried out the very first bronchoscopy in India. The head technician was an uneducated peasant boy, self-taught, a real miracle of dexterity. He made all our surgical tools for lung operations copying borrowed American instruments.

When we first arrived, only the two of us, my husband and I, looked after the outpatients of the whole 120-bed hospital alone. Beside the X-ray machine we had a small but good laboratory. Later new medical equipment was gradually collected, new wings were built, private rooms were added to the hospital. We set up an outpatient section and provided some maternity beds for the local population. Hindu doctors came to join in and patients were streaming to us from every direction.

After nine years when we could return to Europe we left behind us a modern hospital, with a well-equipped operating theatre, a bronchology section and an intensive therapy and care unit. By then 25 nurses were working in the hospital, all Hindus. The chief nurse was a member of the English Mission.

We had 15 assistant nurses, mostly from the “sweeperout-caste”, the caste of the “untouchable”<sup>13</sup>, who cleaned the latrines, did the dirty work, and according to ancient laws were not allowed to eat with members of the other castes. We also had male nurses because our girls did not like to look after men, due to the scruples of their

<sup>13</sup> The caste system in India is a system of social stratification and has its origins in pre-modern Vedic Indian society (ca. 1500–500 BCE). The four *varnas* (classes) are the *Brahmins* (priests and scholars), the *Kshatriyas* (rulers, administrators, warriors), the *Vaishyas* (merchants, traders, farmers, artisans) and the *Shudras* (labourers). The four *varnas* are split up into thousands of subgroups, called *jatis*. Certain groups, formerly called *dalits* or “untouchables”, are excluded from this caste system. They are regarded as ritually impure, carry out the most menial work and are banned from full participation in Indian social life. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century new laws in India led to a change in the way the caste system is administered, e.g. discrimination against lower castes is illegal.

families. The Muslim women wore the *pardah*, long wraps, and only their eyes were visible. Our driver mended the electrical appliances, the gardener was also the postman and we had a social worker nurse, two clerks who did the administration, and last but not least we had a manager-cum-builder in one person.

In the small chapel of the hospital a retired Hindu minister, Padre Ibrahim served. The aged driver taught my husband to drive because lately he could not see very well in the dark and someone was needed from time to time to take the nurses to the cinema in a settlement 15 miles from us. Otherwise generally they made music or played parlour games. So the old driver was giving driving lessons to the head doctor in the afternoons. This student was a very impatient fellow, but no doubt he was quite clever. After a few weeks he declared that instruction is no longer needed. Our driver was terribly worried about the shortness of the course because the roads were in a dismal state in our nook of the forest. He raised his hands heavenward and prayed: “The Lord Almighty be with you”. But a driving licence was definitely needed. The driver then gave us sound advice. “The garage is not on English territory,” he said. “Ask the King of Kothar<sup>14</sup> to give you a licence.” To wit, my husband was the family doctor of the King’s Harem. The next day we had the driving licence.

The gardener kept our park in good order and condition. At the same time he was our postman. Although he was illiterate, never, not even one single letter that he delivered, went astray. He possessed the formidable memory of the illiterate.

The head of administration was a retired secondary school headmistress of Delhi, she was also a missionary. Our manager was a local Hindu landowner, a wonderful man. He walked five miles to work and five back for some symbolic little salary, he wanted to serve, to help the patients. He was well involved in almost everything. Except for the doctors, everyone was under his direction. He dealt with every business issue. He planned the new buildings, directed the construction and the maintenance.

### **At home in India**

Wonderful pine forests surrounded the park of the hospital, with countless colourful birds and predators. The wild beasts, jackals, panthers, monkeys were not dangerous, provided

<sup>14</sup> Village in the Kangra district in the North Indian state of Himachal Pradesh.

one left them alone, but a stupid child once wounded a panther with a shotgun. We had to turn to the military to have the wounded and enraged panther shot. The monkeys were entertaining at times but on the whole they are cheeky and decidedly harmful. They stole whatever they could. I once saw a woman who was baking bread in the open air. She had a beautiful and colourful silk scarf on her shoulder. The monkey sat down near her to beg for a morsel of bread. As he did not get it he wrenched the shawl from around her neck, climbed a tree and proceeded to shred it into strips. The woman reached out towards him with a chunk of bread, he took it and threw the remnant of the shawl back to her.

We lived in great peace and calm until the outbreak of the civil war<sup>15</sup>. We had joy in our work, we had everything we needed. We had many doctor friends in various cities, mainly in North India. They would send patients for bed-rest cure and later for lung operations as well. We would visit each other, consult each other, learn from each other and quite often we even spent our holidays together.

The hospital was developing fast. We only accepted money for the development of the hospital. The rich Hindus donated willingly and we wrote their names onto the walls of the hospital. We received a modest pay from the board of the hospital. We could not even imagine accepting money or presents from our patients. There was great poverty around and we could not forget that we owed our lives to India.

We felt at home in India. We spoke English, the official language of India, and we learned a tolerable Urdu<sup>16</sup> as well because we thought we could really get to know our people if we speak their native language as well. There are about at least 25 languages in India, which belong to various language groups, but some could be considered only a dialect of another one. In North India mostly Urdu and Hindi were spoken.

<sup>15</sup> On 15 August 1947 the partition of the British Indian Empire led to the creation of the sovereign states of the Dominion of Pakistan (it later split into Pakistan and Bangladesh) and the Union of India (later Republic of India). The Partition was a highly controversial arrangement and remains a cause of much tension on the Indian subcontinent today. The former British province of Punjab was split between India and Pakistan. The mostly Muslim western part of the province became Pakistan's Punjab province; the mostly Sikh and Hindu eastern part became India's East Punjab state. In Punjab, where the new border lines also divided the Sikh regions in half, there was much bloodshed; in Bengal and Bihar, where Gandhi's presence assuaged communal tempers, the violence was more limited. In the riots which preceded the partition in the Punjab region, between 200,000 and 500,000 people, among both the refugee and resident populations of the three faiths, died in the violence. Other estimates of the number of deaths are as high as 1,500,000. The great majority of Indians remained in place with independence, but in border areas millions of people (Muslim, Sikh, and Hindu) relocated across the newly drawn borders. UNHCR estimates that 14 million Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims were displaced during the partition; it was the largest mass migration in human history.

<sup>16</sup> National language and *lingua franca* of Pakistan and official language of six states of contemporary India. Urdu is spoken by more than 100 million people and is mutually intelligible with Hindi. Urdu and Hindi are both varieties of Hindustani, which is the fourth most commonly spoken language in the world after Mandarin, English and Spanish.

### Family life

Our first two children were born, two boys, the first in 1943 and the second in 1945. My first-born son was six months old and cried a lot, I can even say he was screaming. My children were looked after by a woman who herself had many children. One day she flung wide the door of my room and cried: "Doctor, if I may not pick up this poor child I will not come back to you tomorrow morning." Indians keep their infants close to themselves; babies mostly sit on their mother's hip. According to the then prevalent European beliefs we held the view that the least physical contact is the ideal. Indians are excellent pedagogues. They love their children but do not spoil them. Very soon the children take part in doing family duties too but they also have their rights. During all my stay in India I never heard one bad word said to children. When this elder son of mine came to be two years old, our secretary, a retired secondary school headmistress, said to me: "Eva, let me take your son home to stay with me for two days, you are not educating him properly." In three days my son was home and could hardly be recognised. The wilful, short-tempered child turned into an angel. Unfortunately the miraculous change did not last long, in spite of the great many excellent pieces of advice.

Balu was the name of the woman who looked after our children. She was with them from morning till evening as I was working in the hospital all day. The children cried when she left in the evening for which, in secret, I was sometimes quite jealous. Balu migrated into the village next to our hospital with her husband and three children because where they came from there was great poverty. Her husband worked in road building; he was a stone-breaker. Balu's 25-year-old son was a tailor and her 20-year-old daughter joined us as a nurse. She also had a 15-year-old son. They were all healthy. Then two of her elder children died of tuberculosis. I persuaded her to return to their old village with her husband and remaining son as they now had only one child left. We separated in tears. When saying goodbye Balu made me promise to let her know if ever we were in trouble. Their guru would pray for me and the Lord God would help me.

We engaged a young wife to be with my sons and her husband also was hired as a house-boy. The husband kept asking me to hire someone for cleaning the floor because that is a job only for the "untouchables". I did not comply with his wish and after a while he accepted the situation and stayed with us. I had to hire a cook. I noticed that he never allowed the children to enter the kitchen. One day our nanny whispered to me that our new cook is a leper. My husband examined him and laughed at me, he found that the cook only had a

leg ulcer due a to insufficient blood circulation. After two of our employees had handed in their notice I called out the head of the nearby leper station, which was only 20 kilometers from us. The colleague confirmed the diagnosis of our employees. “Did my husband make a mistake?” I asked. “Well,” he answered, “the cook has one leg with a leprous ulcer and one leg where the ulcer is caused by inadequate blood circulation and he showed your husband this other, non-leprous leg.” So in fact he duped my husband. According to the laboratory tests, to our great luck, he was not infectious but after all this we had to dismiss him.

Our hospital was at an altitude of 1,800 meters in the middle of a huge forest. Immediately around us there were pine forests, but in the higher parts there were Himalayan cedars, which are similar to the cedars of Lebanon. Our hospital was on the border on the English territory<sup>17</sup>. In Free-India<sup>18</sup> smaller and greater Hindu kings, so-called *ranas*, *rajjas*, and *maharajas* reigned. The smaller kings, the *ranas*, would be called big landowners in Europe. In the wooded zone the trees belonged to the king and the pasture between the trees belonged to the peasants. In summer the grass was thickly covered by pine needles. If there was a forest fire in summer only the needles burned on the trees and under them. The strong wind spread the fire and younger saplings also died. This was a source of conflict between the *ranas* and the peasants in every single year. Mostly it was the peasant lads themselves who set fire to the forest so that their cows could graze in a lush pasture.

One time it was our gardener, Nabbi Ram, who took over organising the putting out of the fire because the nearness of the fire endangered the buildings of the hospital. He convened peasant lads from two villages, who made a human chain and in a 15 meter wide strip they made the ground needle free. Along one strip they lit a counter fire and, in this way, when the great fire reached the counter fire it could not spread to where whatever was inflammable had already burnt out. As soon as the fire-fight ended a new fire broke out which obviously must have been started deliberately by another village. The fight against the fire lasted well into the evening. That is when it came to light that Nabbi Ram's wife had been in labour for 48 hours, without any help. We quickly sent two men to her village with a stretcher and she gave birth to her child in the hospital. Thousands of smaller and larger animals escaped from the fire. One night we were travelling in an open car by such

<sup>17</sup> British India included areas directly governed by the United Kingdom at the Indian subcontinent (without Ceylon, present-day Sri Lanka) excluding the approximately 565 princely states.

<sup>18</sup> “Free-India” refers to 565 (at the time of independence in 1947) nominally sovereign princely states, which were ruled by local royals whose foreign and defence policy was determined by the British. According to international law they were regarded as British protectorates.



Imre with his first-born son Tamás, 1943



5-year-old Tamás Ungár (middle)



Tamás Ungár (right) with his friend Timothy, 1947



Baby Tamás Ungár, 1943

a forest fire. Suddenly a huge panther appeared in front of us in the full beam of our headlight. It was a fabulous sight, still we were very frightened, but the panther ran away.

### **Adventurous visit to the palace**

I must relate an adventurous visit to a patient. Not far from Jubar there was a smallish kingdom nestling somewhere in the high mountains, I forgot its name. Its king was young. He lived in a castle with his wife and children. He sought medical advice and convened two doctors to consult, my husband and an Indian doctor from Simla<sup>19</sup>. His wife was gravely ill. I was young at the time, adventure appealed to me and so I joined my husband on the trip to the mountain castle. Our director tried to dissuade me. He said it was monsoon season and we'd have to ride upstream in the bed of a river! I did not listen to him. I calmed him down by saying that I would wear Wellington boots and trousers. He laughed at me, not much use will that be to you, he said. In the morning a huge Rolls-Royce parked in front of the door of the hospital and the driver took us to some point where we had to wait for horses. We could see no road anywhere, there was only a huge river storming its way down from the mountain along a narrow valley. On the bank of the river there was a small peasant hut. The Rolls-Royce turned round and left. We could not see either a man or a horse, although earlier we had phoned to the castle to announce that two doctors were arriving. At long last two men appeared with a horse, they came with long mountain climbing sticks and each was equipped with a gas lamp. They both were wet up to the shoulders. When they caught sight of me they said they would immediately bring another horse, unless "*Sabib*" (the gentleman, my husband) wanted to walk. "*Sabib*" did not want to walk so they set out up the mountain for a horse. Twilight was coming, my husband was angry and went to ask for lodging in the peasant hut. He came back even angrier, having learnt that the peasant was a Brahmin, a member of the highest Indian cast and said that he cannot let anyone else but Brahmins into his house. Finally the two men reappeared and there was yet another horse.

We mounted. It was pitch dark by then, our escorts lit lamps. We started climbing the mountain. The rocky path led once on this, once on the other bank of the river. When one of the men reached the other bank he called his horse and with the lamp held high showed him the way. In wet boots and with wet saddles we crossed the river at least ten times. Finally in the forest we reached a dry path and could pour out the water from our boots. It started to

<sup>19</sup> Present-day Shimla, capital city of the North Indian state of Himachal Pradesh. In 1864, Simla was declared as the summer capital of British India.

snow and we were cold. I tried walking from time to time to warm up a little. Somehow, with great difficulty, we managed to reach the royal castle. We were led into a fabulous and well-heated hall and were offered dry clothes and a sumptuous meal. After dinner we would have liked to see the patient but they said it was not possible as she was already sleeping. So we too went to bed, we were dead tired. Barely had we fallen asleep when, at around midnight, we were woken by a dreadful racket of drums and trumpets. The servant told us they were just chasing away bad spirits. As one of the main complaints of the queen was sleeplessness we could hardly hold back laughter and all our resentment evaporated.

The consultation took place in the morning. The two doctors established that they could not find any symptom of any illness. Then I asked the two colleagues to let me in to see the patient. The twenty or so year old princess lying in her bed and I immediately recognised each other: she was the daughter of the neighbouring King of Kothar who I had already treated several times. I sat by her bed and explained to her that no illness had been diagnosed. I asked her if it would be possible that she had some complaint of psychological origin. If she tells me everything maybe I can help. The gravely ill princess immediately sat up straight. For at least half an hour she was enumerating her complaints. Her young husband lived the life of a modern industrial magnate – in the film industry –, his kingdom did not interest him in the least; he was convinced that this antiquated “institution” would die out in no time. He visited his wife and children once a week. The queen spent her days surrounded by servants. Her two small children were brought up by nannies, she was not allowed to as much as touch them. She was bored to death! When she was a young girl she lived in the town, attended secondary school, passed the matriculation exam and would have liked to attend university but her husband did not let her. I promised her that I would try to persuade her husband about the cause and solution of her ailment. Then we three sat down with her husband to discuss the issue. After this we charged a huge bill (so high as never before) and said goodbye. The king took our advice.

We protested against riding in the river bed again and so they let us have their own horses, excellent Himalaya ponies. We rode up to Simla and from there the Rolls-Royce took us home. This was the scenic route, we thought, somewhat longer but at least it must be safer. My horse took the lead, the two men were following slowly along the road to Simla. I pulled the reins so that the horse should slow down, but it made him run. I held the rein tighter and the horse was already in full gallop, perspiring all over. Suddenly, to the great

Eva Ungár  
(2<sup>nd</sup> from  
left) with a  
Canadian  
doctor and  
two nurses,  
Jubar



Eva with hospital staff, at the front her sons  
Peter (left) and Tamás



Peter (left) and  
Tamás with her  
*ayah* (nanny) Nani,  
1948



People at an  
event in Jubar



Imre Ungár in the operating theatre



Imre and Eva (at the back) with their sons Tamás (front row, left) and Peter with hospital staff



Christening of Peter Ungár (center), in the foreground his brother Tamás; the parents Eva and Imre are standing to the left and the right of the priest.

fear of both my horse and me there appeared a bull walking towards us in the path. The horse stopped. I was waiting in silence, much frightened. Luckily the bull stepped out of the way and the two men appeared too. I heard them cry from far: “Eva, are you mad? Why are you running so?” Soon the mystery was cleared. The horses were trained the other way round, pulling on the rein meant running, loose rein meant stopping, explained the doctor from Simla, rather late. We arrived in Simla comfortably. My right arm had to be in plaster cast for two weeks, because pulling hard on the rein caused tendovaginitis. Our colleagues showered me with ironic comments.

### **Musings about religion**

Before arriving in India I had no scruples concerning my worldview. I thought I was an atheist like my father, although my father could have been called anti-clerical in those days. Once he said to me that Jesus was the first social democrat. When I could say goodbye to him in Vienna, at the age of 86 he calmed me with his characteristic cheerful smile: “By now I also believe in God,” he said.

Several of the missionaries working around us became our friends. Thanks to that we gradually learned about Christian teaching. After such a conversation a missionary who had become my friend asked me if I wanted to confirm. My husband could be christened and also confirmed. Why ever not, I said, although I could not have known anything about my husband’s intentions. I got closer to the teaching of Christ, real faith, however, I think, was not yet the issue. I just didn’t want to cause disappointment to our friends. We went to Lahore<sup>20</sup> and the celebration was to take place the next day.

It was only on the eve of the day that I started thinking about what I had got myself into and most of all what I got my husband involved in. I was seriously frightened, thinking that this all was a lie, yet I did not have the courage to admit it. That was the time when I said my very first prayer: “God, if you exist, forgive this fake confession of faith.” The next morning I could no longer keep my anxiety in me. How shall I stand in front of my honest parents? Even suicide entered my mind. Then I told everything to my husband. He was surprised and gave this answer: “What makes you think that my belief is not real?” I was astounded. “But why have you not talked about it all this time?” I asked. “Because I did not think my faith was strong enough,” he answered. Suddenly I saw in front of my eyes the huge and

<sup>20</sup> Today capital city of the Pakistani province of Punjab, in the 1940s capital of Punjab Province of British India.

strong hand of God, holding us in his palm in the past and he will not desert us in the future either. He answered my prayer! I felt such joy that I had never experienced before.

### **Friends in India**

We had many friends, many of who are no longer alive. There were Hindus, English, Anglo-Indians, Canadians, Germans. Our closest friend was Dr. Santosh Sen whom we first met in Vienna and who saved our lives. Later he became the head of the surgical clinic of Delhi. We often spent our winter holiday with him and his family.

Kumar Yodister was a patient of ours for a year. He was a lawyer, responsible for Hungary in the International Chamber of Lawyers. He even spoke a few words of Hungarian. His wife was a teacher from Wales, who founded and directed a huge college in Delhi.

Mrs. Satiavati was our patient for months and we became friends. She was a devoted colleague of Gandhi's<sup>21</sup>. She told us a great deal about the Freedom Movement. She went through great suffering, the greatest of which was the death of her little daughter. This child was born during their English captivity and was educated there too for years. The daughter was 10 years old when her mother was sent to prison again. Her husband informed her that their child had scarlet fever. The paediatrician said that there was no hope for recuperation so they wrote a petition to the English authorities to allow the mother to say goodbye to her dying child. The permission was refused.

Padre Ibrahim, the head minister at the hospital, was a retired Anglican minister. He often could not see eye to eye with his superior, the Anglican bishop. Our chapel had two sacristies. We asked Padre Ibrahim to let us have one of them for the use of our kindergarten, and he complied willingly as many children were running up and down without supervision in the garden of the tuberculosis hospital. We provided a kindergarten nurse from the young nurses of the hospital. The bishop then heavily scolded Padre Ibrahim because the vestry was a blessed room of the church. Padre Ibrahim's teacher was the famous Sadhu Sundar Singh<sup>22</sup> (Sadhu means teaching missionary) who served in Tibet, in a country where strangers could not go. He did not return from his last mission. His student Ibrahim, who was called to him very young, was an uneducated Muslim cobbler

<sup>21</sup> Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, better known as Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948), leader of the Indian freedom movement, known for his non-violent resistance against British colonial rule in India.

<sup>22</sup> Important Indian Christian missionary (born 1889, last seen in 1929 setting off on a journey to Tibet).

who sat on the wayside working. Ibrahim became a devout Christian; he learnt to read and write, graduated at college and became a priest. He was a wonderful man, full of love; he was bright and very well educated.

Hede Dial, the wife of our friend Rameswar, was a German woman who had been put in prison in her own country for her solidarity with the Jews and for her anti-Nazi political activity. She escaped from captivity and found her new homeland in India.

Miss Doki, the much loved Doki! She was Anglo-Indian, the head of a mission hospital in Palampur<sup>23</sup>, in a wonderfully beautiful valley of the Himalayas. She knew and loved England and often was divided in her allegiance: she loved both countries and the love of people was radiating from her. Often she was forced to perform smaller surgical interventions without ever having studied surgery. She sewed the surgical stitches with her sterilised darning needle and thimble.

Eileen Snow! She was an English doctor, the director of a medical school in Ludhiana<sup>24</sup>, a university town in North India. She was a very talented doctor, a missionary, full of love for our fellow human beings.

We had so many excellent friends that it would be too long to write about them all. Just to briefly mention a few more: Mr. Giton, headmaster in a missionary school, in Palampur. He was a Huguenot<sup>25</sup>. Mary Holtby was a Canadian head nurse in a gynaecological hospital in Kangra. She knew a great deal about surgery. I learned the caesarean cut from her. We knew the headmaster of the English military college in Sanawar<sup>26</sup>, he helped us to evacuate the Muslims during the civil war. And how many more unforgettable friends we had then!

### **The civil war and our return to Europe**

India managed to throw off the English yoke without the use of arms. *Satyagraha*<sup>27</sup> was Gandhi's way of fighting: fighting without arms. His freedom fighters were physically

<sup>23</sup> Green hill station and municipal council in the Kangra Valley in the North Indian state of Himachal Pradesh.

<sup>24</sup> City in the Northwest Indian state of Punjab.

<sup>25</sup> Huguenots were French Protestants who followed the teachings of the theologian and pastor John Calvin (1509–1564) and who, due to religious persecution, were forced to flee France to other countries in the sixteenth and seventeenth century.

<sup>26</sup> Town in the North Indian State of Himachal Pradesh.

<sup>27</sup> Sanskrit and Hindi for "holding onto truth", a philosophy and practice of passive and non-violent resistance inaugurated by Mahatma Gandhi as a method of gaining political and social reforms.

flattened by the English tanks but they would not get out the way. They would die of hunger strikes; they patiently bore years of captivity. Finally England gave up, relented, but upon one condition: India had to be divided. A horrible civil war broke out between Hindus and Muslims. The English employed the old and dreadful, but tried and tested method of “*Divide et impera*”<sup>28</sup>. I do not think that this way the English could have gained anything else but blood and tears.

Dividing India, which was the condition attached to granting independence, led to horrible butchery between the two countries. Both countries chased away or killed their citizens of the minority religion. Hundreds of thousands of people died while trying to escape.

One day my husband got an open letter saying that Hindu fanatical fighters were giving 24 hours for the evacuation of Muslim patients and employees of the hospital. After that deadline, when they arrived at the hospital they would kill every Muslim and us and our children as well. At that time more than 50 Muslims were at the hospital. We sat down to discuss this. We knew that we could not solve this task ourselves without help. We decided that we would all together ask for help from a military school. We asked for a larger car for the transportation. A Muslim driver brought the bus and then he escaped into the forest. He had every reason to be afraid. Our hospital employees and their families stormed the bus. My husband was obliged to order the men out so that first the women and the children could sit down in the bus. The men climbed the roof and held on to the steps. Everyone could find a place in or on the bus. My husband made an effort to learn how to drive the bus. The police and the army had been disbanded by the English, they were allowed to leave the barracks; we asked for help in vain.

Pernette Bourdillon, the matron or head nurse and the missionary decided to accompany my husband, and I was to look after our children. This meant that during the journey probably both of them would be killed. They were just about to start when a huge convoy appeared with Sikh<sup>29</sup> soldiers armed to the teeth. This is the end, we thought.

Then a young Muslim officer jumped off one of the military jeeps and said, “Every-

<sup>28</sup> Latin “*divide et impera*”: “divide and rule”.

<sup>29</sup> Follower of Sikhism, a monotheistic religion which originated in the Punjab region of India and Pakistan during the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Sikh communities exist all around the world. Male Sikhs have “*Singh*” (Lion), and female Sikhs have “*Kaur*” (princess) as their middle or last name. Sikhs may also be recognised by the five Ks: uncut hair which is kept covered (*kesh*), an iron or steel bracelet (*kara*), a sword tucked into a strap or a belt (*kirpan*), a cotton undergarment (*kachehra*), and a small wooden comb (*kanga*). Initiated male Sikhs must cover their uncut hair with a turban.

one change to the convoy. We are the last regiment in the English barracks that has not demobilized. We'll take every Muslim to the Pakistani border." In the evening we got a phone call. They had all managed to cross the border. That very night this Muslim officer was shot by his own soldiers.

The civil war was raging. By now I know that every civil war works the same way; it is a great shame of mankind. For years I lived in the belief that the Hindus are better than the Europeans. That they are tolerant and philanthropic. It was a great disappointment but I had to realise that human nature is basically the same everywhere, everywhere in the world.

### **Where to live?**

The war and Nazism had ended in Europe. Why should we still live in India? Why should we not go back to our home country? But where is our home country? I was often homesick, but not homesick for Vienna. When I was young I liked Vienna so much that I could not have imagined living anywhere else, but what happened before and during the Second World War there made me hate Vienna. I tried everything possible to modify this evidently false image of my hometown, but without success. I was homesick for Europe, I yearned to see again as soon as possible the members of my family who managed to survive. My mother-in-law, one brother of my husband and the 16 year old daughter of the other brother survived the horrors in Hungary. My husband's father and adored brother did not return from labour service. In his farewell letter he asked us to adopt his child.

So, although we did not know much of the political situation in communist Hungary, we decided to return to Hungary. Saying goodbye to India, our endless number of friends and our joyful work was extremely hard.

Having arrived home we were slow in writing letters, and so Yodister, one of our best friends in India was worried about our well-being and came over to Hungary! He managed to find us in Budapest without knowing our address. We were much ashamed for not having sent a word about how we were. After that many of our unforgettable friends also came to visit. Hede Dial came several times to spend some time with us in Budapest. We enjoyed her serene personality and excellent sense of humour.

We were happy to be at home again. India, however, with the unforgettable memories and unforgettable friends has remained part of our lives forever.