

Understanding Subhas Chandra Bose in the 21st Century

- *A Leftist Organiser*

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Abstract

Subhas Chandra Bose was a leftist organiser and socialist prophet of the soil of mother India. He had been influenced by the personalities and careers of V.I. Lenin, Kamal Pasha, De Valera, Benito Mussolini etc. As a student of philosophy at Calcutta and Cambridge, he read the writings of Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Aurobindo and deeply influenced him of their ideas that the world is the field of play of God. After the resignation from the Indian Civil Service, he joined active politics at the age of twenty four. He was also a great leftist orator saying at the All India Compromise Conference at Ramgarh on March 19, 1940 such as, 'Leftist would be synonymous with socialism but in the present phase, the words' leftist and anti-imperialist should be interchangeable'. He never became an orthodox Marxism. He supported socialist ideology because of the national reconstruction without any social hindrance such as, poverty, illiteracy, unemployment etc. As a result in 1939 he wanted to organise the leftist forces by having formed a new party, the Forward Bloc. He strongly believed that all national problems and to scientific production and distribution can be effectively tackled only along socialistic lines. He had great respects for the character and personality of Mahatma Gandhi but he never became a Gandhism. Bose believed in political realism however he was not a fascist. Violence in itself is not the monopoly. In defence of Subhas Chandra Bose it can be said that his extreme restlessness for the independence of his country from the iron chains of British imperialism made him an advocate at least partly of fascistic ideas. His violent struggle appeared fascistic because he took armed help from the fascist powers of Europe and Asia. From the standpoint of political ethics there is nothing reprehensible about his action. In this sense he can be called a fascist only with such limited condition that he was allied with the fascist powers.

Keywords: foreign imperialist, forward bloc, leftist forces, landlordism, political realism.

1.1 Introduction

Netaji was a radical nationalist leader of India's freedom struggle who wanted to uproot any agency which help and corporate with the British colonial rule. He was an ardent believer of non-corporation to the British regime. He joined the Indian National movement in 1921 after resignation from the post of civil servant. He had contributed to the Indian National struggles for independence by founding Azad Hind Fauz allying with Axis power such as Germany, Italy and Japan as against the British. The government of Azad Hind (free India) was recognised by international powers. During the second world war INA made its headquarter at Mandalay (Myanmar) and marched up to Moirang. Andaman and Nicobar Island was handed over to the government of Azad Hind by the Axis power which has been considered to be the first liberated zone of India from the hands of the British. Which made the British surprisingly enough man like Nataji Subhas Chandra Bose could be able to

meet international alliance for the liberation of India which shock the British. Even though Netajis radical campaign to liberate India from the British colonial rule was not successful it gave a great blow to the mind-set of the British that British will no longer rule India for a prolonged period. We came to recognised radical thought loom large in his political philosophy when he declared that ‘Give me blood I will give you freedom’. He was profoundly devoted to the ideal of Indian freedom and tirelessly and recklessly worked for its realization. He was uncompromising almost defeat in his attitude and that was the reason why he always belonged to the left wing opposition to the Gandhian rightist wing in the Indian National Congress. He had been influenced by the personalities and careers of Lenin, Kamal Pasha, De Veleria and Benito Mussolini. A fearless and indomitable fighter, Bose was one of the greatest patriots of the world. Bose had studied philosophy as a student at Calcutta and Cambridge and had read the writings of Vivekananda and Aurobindo. But he was not a political philosopher or a theorist. He was a dynamic man of action. His strength lay in big political activities. He was a militant fighter for Swaraj. He was agitator, a propagandist, an uncompromising fighter and a revolutionary leader, rather than a philosopher. He was also a great orator. He certainly had some independent ideas with regard to the realisation of Indian political freedom. He is entitled to consideration in the history of modern Indian political thought because there undoubtedly are some political ideas of theoretical significance in his writings. His book ‘The Indian Struggle’ is full of sober analysis and keep reflection. His speeches are characterised by force and simplicity. He combined capacity for action and a keen analytical mind. Subhas Chandra Bose began public life as a non-co-operator but in 1923 he became a swarajist under C.R. Das as he was not in sympathy with the Gandhian programme. He was imprisoned in Burma from 1925 to 1927. From a swarajit, he became a member of the Independence League. He rose to political fame as one of the leader of the forces which were opposed to the acceptance of the federation contemplated in the Governor of India Act of 1935. In 1939, he wanted to organize the leftist forces by having formed a new party, the Forward Bloc, in May of that year. He could not succeed in building a strong Left- Consolidation Committee which had been formed in Bombay in June, 1940, consisting of the Congress Socialist, the Radical League of M.N. Roy, the Communist, etc. In March, 1940, he presided over the Anti-Compromise at Ramgarh. He stood for a joint demand by the Hindus and Muslims for a provisional national government to which all powers should be immediately transferred.

In December, 1940, he escaped from incognito. He reached Berlin by air from Kabul in March, 1941. The story of his escaped from the country through Peshawar and Kabul to Germany is an epic of adventure. From Berlin, on February 27, 1942, he began a vehement propaganda campaign against the British imperialist and continued his broadcasts for several years from various places. In June, 1943, Bose arrived in Japan. On July 5, 1943, he announced the formation of the Indian National Army composed of over sixty thousand Indians. He gave the battle cry ‘March to Delhi’. On October 21, 1943, Bose established the Provisional Government of free India. From February 1944 to April 1945, the Indian National Army carried on a heroic campaign against the Allied forces and even entered Indian Territory. Unfortunately, on August 18, 1945, while on way to Tokyo, Bose received fatal injuries in plane crash in Formosa and died in the evening on the same date. Thus during the Second World War, he allied himself with the fascist forces and began a battle for the independence of India on a violent basis by organising the National Army. The transition in the political career of Bose is thus interesting. From an active member of the Swaraj party he became the leader and commander of the forces of the Indian National Army for the liberation of India. People

reverentially called him as Netaji. He was one of the unsung heroes of India. Now people of India realised and recognised his contribution in freedom struggle side by side with Mahatma Gandhi.

1.2 Historical background

Ideology usually refers to a set of ideas, values, and a world-view which can shape the thoughts and actions of individuals and wider society. It has an influence on social structures, economics, and politics. Karl Marx defined ideology as a set of ideas and beliefs that are manipulative and convincing on the surface level, but are not actually true - what he called false consciousness. Karl Marx created this concept to explain how the ruling class justifies their elite status through the sociocultural beliefs they spread in society. Actually an ideology is a set of opinion/belief of a group or an individual. Very often ideology refers to a set of optical beliefs or a set of ideas that characterize a particular culture. Monarchism, feudalism, imperialism, capitalism, nazism, fascism, totalitarianism, utilitarianism, communism, socialism, marxism etc. are some of the ideologies on which socio-political life of mankind have been based. As an ideology, the left ideology is characterized by an emphasis on the ideas such as, freedom, equality, fraternity, rights, progress, reform and internationalism. It is regarded as an expression of social welfare as the most important goal of its government. Communism, socialism, marxism etc. belong to left ideology because they seek to achieve social equality and egalitarianism, and are often in opposition to social hierarchy and private property; any they are present accepted as the standard form of leftist ideology. Left politics socially involve a concern for those in society whom its adherent perceive as disadvantaged relative to others as well as a belief that there are unjustified inequalities that need to be reduced or abolished. Leftists believed in Marxian economics, named after the economic theories of Karl Marx. Some distinguish Marx's economic theories from his political philosophy, arguing that Marx's approach to understanding the economy is independent of his advocacy of revolutionary socialism or his belief in the inevitability of a proletarian revolution. Marxian economics donot exclusively rely on Marx and draw from a range of Marxist and non- Marxist sources. The dictatorship of the proletariat and workers' state are terms used by some Marxist, particularly Leninists and Marxist–Leninist, to describe what they see as a temporary state between the capitalist state of affairs and a communist society.

Generally, each ideology contains certain ideas about what it considers the best form of government i.e., autocracy or democracy and the best economic system i.e., capitalism or socialism. In this context, we will try to discuss all the facts, useful of historical background and current situation of the term left and right. The word left and right were initially used in the French revolution of the 18th century. At that time, France had monarchy, one king and his dynasty would rule the nation. Some people were in support of monarchy and some were against it and wanted democracy in their nation. At that time, the sitting arrangement of France parliament was in the followingway:-

- People sitting on the right side were those who were loyal to their monarch, mainly the wealthy class;
- People sitting on the left side were those who were poor and were not loyal to their monarch and wanted democracy in their nation. These people were not happy from the monarchy and wanted a revolutionary change in the existing system.
- Therefore, the definition of left and right came from these historical facts and people used different words or tag for Left and right, which are the following:-
- Left means reformist, revolution.
- Right means conservative, establishment.

1.3 Objectives of the study

- To make a critical observations of left ideology in general perspective.
- To make a critical observations of left ideology of Subhas Chandra Bose.
- To make a critical observations of the importance and significance of the lefty ideology to the society.

1.4 Methodology of the study

The study is historical, descriptive as well as analytical. Both primary and secondary sources have been used. Primary sources include some of the original works of Subhas Chandra Bose. Secondary sources like ideas on the works by different authors and research scholars in the form of books, research papers, materials available on internet and newspapers, etc. have also been used.

1.5 Review of Literature

Literature includes books articles research papers, dissertation, thesis which is most related to the topic. Very few books concerning the research topic have been received here such as the book entitled of 'Political Theory - Principles of Political Science written by Dr. Vidya Dhar Mahajan in 1988 and found that Karl Marx's ideas are still relevant in today's world and can answer the complex and difficult questions faced by capitalism in the 21st century. His ideas and methods of analysis can still be used to interpret the world in order to change it for the betterment of the society. He further expressed that Karl Marx attacked capitalism from various angles. As regards its social aspect he condemned capitalism because it exalted the fortunate few at the expense of the oppressed many and cheated millions of the people of the just fruit of the labour. Then he himself believed that the inner contradiction in capitalism would ultimately lead to its destruction so that capitalism is its own grave-digger. The book entitle of 'History of Western Political Thought' written by Dr. R.S.Chaurasia in 1969 and found that communism was considered to be a purely scientific theory head boiled and perfectly realistic in contrast to Utopian socialism of some of their predecessors. He further remarked that left ideology may be defined as a philosophy of history based on materialistic conception of human development and aiming for the dictatorship of proletariat during transitory period and striving ultimately for classless and stateless society. It also found that historical materialism is the application of principle of dialectical materialism to the development of the society. In the book entitled ' Problem of Political Philosophy' written by K.K Kulshrestha and S.P. Kashyap in 1975 which is published by S. Chand and Company P. Ltd. and expressed that the Marxist idea of the critical method is a legacy from Socrates and Plato. It further expressed that class struggle is the motive force of social development. In V.I. Lenin's book entitled 'The History Destiny of the Doctrine of Karl Marx Collected Works Vol. 18' in 1986, published by progress publishers, Moscow and it pointed out, is that it brings out the historic role of the proletariat as the builder of socialist society. This book dealt on the life and revolutionary politics of V.I. Lenin. Lenin further admitted that the ideal depends upon the revolution in road to proletarian revolution. The revolution proletariat in alliance with the mass of peasantry moved to proletarian revolution. Tsarism was hated by the entire population of Russia. Once again, in the book entitled 'History of Political Thought' written by Radhey Shyam Chaurasia in 2003 and expressed that Stalin differed with Trotsky regarding the international character of the working class

movement. He further expressed that Stalin made Russia a world superpower but he did not believe in the withering away of the state. In place of bringing state towards an end, he made the state omnipotent and according to some persons gave socialism of rather to say state socialism to Russia instead of Communism. Finally it became Marxism, Leninism, Stalinism and so on. In the book entitled 'History of Political Thought' written by Das P.G in 1995, Delhi, New Central Book Agency (P) Ltd. and expressed that Stalinism is different from Leninism because the theory and practise of Stalin is very close to totalitarian rule in the erstwhile USSR. The author further expressed that Stalin completely revised Lenin's idea about the states socialism and social classes respectively. He further proclaimed that the doctrine of peaceful co-existence of countries with different social system. Regarding this theme on 'Understanding Subhas Chandra Bose in the 21st Century - *A leftist Organiser*' is very much different and especially from the others write ups which is a quite unique.

Importance of the study

His views are more relevant even today because both globalisation and privatisation have failed to solve many social issues and challenges such as poverty, unemployment, inequality, environment degradation, communal conflict and so on. Hence there is a need of rethink and recheck about his idea of leftist ideology in order to solve of all our problems.

Statement of the problem

The genres of literature produced so far discuss on left ideology which found different viewpoints written by different writers. Generally common people thought that 'Understanding Subhas Chandra Bose in the 21st century- *A Leftist Organiser*' is above all the subjects so that such simple thought is very much challenging and also inspiring me to take up the present research paper. So this study is still lagging behind and quite distinct from the others' write ups.

Major finding of the study

- i) He was a man of action.
- ii) He was one of the charismatic leader of Indian freedom struggle.
- iii) He was one of the unsung heroes of Indian freedom struggle.
- iv) He believed in political realism.
- v) He never became an orthodox Marxist.
- vi) He was a recognised spokesman of the leftist forces.
- vii) He stated that the eradication of poverty and illiteracy were the great task of the national reconstruction.
- viii) Like Tilak Bose stood for action.
- ix) He never became a Gandhian.
- x) He never became the fascist intentionally.

1.6 Different facets of Left Ideology of Subhas Chandra Bose

a) His ideas of political foundation

Bose was a great man of action. He was not a philosopher nor has he written anything of theoretical philosophical worth. But he had studied philosophy as a student. He had been tremendously inspired by the writings of Vivekananda and Aurobindo. Bose had been immensely drawn to Vivekananda whom he studied at the age of fifteen. In Vivekananda he found the embodiment of fearless manhood. From him, he learnt the philosophy of life - Atmano Mokshartham Jagadhitaya – for personal salvation and for the good of humanity. He regarded his utterances as

‘heroic’. Bose did not accept the Samkarite theory of illusion although, as a student, He believed in God. But he refused to abandon the world as maya. He had come under the deep influence of the ideas of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda thetically responded to the monistic spiritualism of Samkara’s Vedanta. It, on the other hand, had a predilection for theistic philosopher. Bose accepted the supremacy of a providential dispensation but thoroughly adhered to the conception of the reality of the world and the imperative character of its obligations and claims. Bose reject the concept of maya and accepts the reality of the world. He also believe in the concepts of progressive evolution. For the acceptance of the concept of progress he adduces three considerations. First, the observation of natural phenomenon and history would indicate that there is progress. Secondly, Bose says that there is an intuitive apprehension that we are moving ahead. Thirdly, he also adds as axiological consideration. He says that the faith in progress is a necessity both on biological and moral grounds. Subhas Chandra Bose had hoped that a revitalized leftist party would grow in India because he felt that the India National Congress under the Gandhi’s leadership was a conglomerate structure trying to somehow to combine socially heterogeneous and even antithetical elements. Hence, for the new party in which he had hopes, he would outlined this programme which in a sense may be said to contain his essential political ideas:-

- (i) The party would stand for the interest of the masses, that is, of the peasants, workers, etc. and not for the vested interest, that is, the landlords, capitalists and money lending classes.
- (ii) It would stand for the complete political and economic liberation of the Indian people.
- (iii) It would stand for a Federal Government for India as the ultimate goal, but would believe in a strong Central Government with dictatorial powers for some years to come, in order to put India on her feet.
- (iv) It would believe in a sound system of state planning for the reorganisation of the agriculture and industrial life of the country.
- (v) It would seek to build up a new social structure on the basis of the village communities of the past, that were ruled by the village ‘Panch’ and would strive to break down the existing social barriers like caste.
- (vi) It would seek to establish a new monetary and credit system in the light of the theories and the experiments that have been and are current in the modern world.
- (vii) It would seek to abolish landlordism and introduce a uniform land tenure system for the world of India.
- (viii) It would not stand for a democracy in the mid-Victorian sense of the term, but would believe in government by a strong party bound together by military discipline, as the only means of holding India together and preventing a chaos, when Indians are free and are thrown entirely on their own resources.
- (ix) It would not restrict itself to a campaign inside India, but would resort to international propaganda also in order to strengthen India’s case for liberty, and would attempt to utilize the existing international organization.
- (x) It would endeavour to unite all the radical organizations under a national executive so that whenever any action is taken, there would be simultaneous activity on many fronts.

b) Was Bose a fascist?

Bose believed in political realism. He had a keen and subtle mind. He accepted the necessity of foreign propaganda for arousing sympathetic world public opinion for the cause of India’s

liberation. He thus believed in soliciting friends for India outside the shores of the country. There could be no denial of the fact that Subhas had emotional learnings towards the strong ways of the fascist dictators. In 1934-35, in his book, *The India Struggle*, Bose had regarded Mussolini as ‘a man who really counts in the politics of modern Europe.’ He regarded Gandhi’s visit to Italy and his interview with Mussolini in 1931 as very significant. He wrote: “.....The Mahatma rendered great public service by his visit to Italy. The only regret is that he did not stay there longer and did not cultivate more personal contacts.” Bose did not subscribe to the traditional conventional technics of the Victorian democracy in England or the bourgeois republics in nineteenth century France. He felt in 1934 that the next historical phase in the evolution of political ideology in the world was going to be a synthesis between communism and fascism. The synthesis which he regarded as Samyavada, he felt, India should make efforts to consummate. In the chapter entitle ‘A Glimpse of the Future’, in his book, *The Indian Struggle*, Bose wrote: “In spite of the antithesis between Communism and Fascism there are certain traits common to both. Both Communism and Fascism believe in the supremacy of the state over the individual. Both denounce parliamentary democracy. Both believe in party rule. Both believe in the dictatorship of the party and in the ruthless suppression of all dissenting minorities. Both believe in a planned industrial reorganization of the country. These common traits would form the basis of the new synthesis. That synthesis is to lose him and certainly not at this hour. We need him to keep our struggle free from bitterness and hatred. We need him for the cause of Indian independence.

In defence of Subhas Chandra, however, it could be said that his extreme restlessness for the independence of his country from the iron chains of British imperialism made him an advocate, at least partly, of fascistic ideas. He was an extreme nationalist and believed in resorting to violent technics for the liberation of the country. He actually organized the Indian National Army for India’s liberation during the Second World War. In so many countries of the world violent struggles have been waged for the achievement of independence. Violence in itself is not the monopoly of fascism. But Bose’s violent struggle appeared fascistic, because he took armed help from the fascist power of Europe and Asia. From the standpoint of political ethics there is nothing reprehensible about his action. But any way, he can be called a fascist only in this limited sense that he was allied with the fascist powers. He never sanctioned imperialistic expansion, he did not subscribe to the cult of racial supremacy. He had been, while in the Indian National Congress a wrong to speculate that he could have allied himself with the exploiting and dominant classes as the fascists in Germany and Italy did, if he could have assumed political power. At the philosophical level, Bose believed in the Hegelian theory of dialectical rational evolution and the Vaishnava concept of love, and there is nothing to make one hazard that he would have recognized the fascistic irrationalism philosophy of the acceptance of the will and intuition of the leader as of more eminent worth than the concepts of equality and internationalism. Hence it is clear that Bose did not accept some of the basic philosophical and political assumptions and tenets of the fascist philosophy. He shared none-the-less, the criticism of parliamentary democracy with the fascists. From the above statements we came to understand that Subhas Chandra never became a fascist intentionally.

c) Political ideas of Forward Bloc

Subhas Chandra Bose founded the Forward Bloc to galvanize the forces that accepted the view of uncompromising the British rule in India and its immediate ending by all means. This party was not to be engaged in the metaphysical subtleties of Ahimsa but was to be concerned solely with the submersed the dominant guiding leftist principles of the Forward Bloc:

- (i) Complete national independence and uncompromising anti-imperialist struggle for attaining it.
- (ii) A thoroughly modern and socialist state.
- (iii) Scientific large-scale production for the economic regeneration of the country.
- (iv) Social ownership and control of both production and distribution.
- (v) Freedom for the individual in the matter of worship.
- (vi) Equal rights for every individual.
- (vii) Linguistic and cultural autonomy for all sections of the Indian community.
- (viii) Application of the principle of equality and social justice in building up the New Order in Free India.

Although the fascistic element are thoroughly toned down in this summary there is no unequivocal declaration of the principle of political freedom. There is the tame assertion of religious, cultural and linguistic autonomy and freedom. Even equality of right is adhered to. But perhaps there is deliberate omission of the principle of political freedom. In a sense political freedom may be said to be comprehended in equality of rights but from the standpoint of democratic political philosophy, a more categorical enunciation of leftist political freedom would have been appreciated.

1.7 Conclusion

As a political worker and leader, Bose stood for a strengthened nationalism. Patriotism was the as sense of his personality and the supreme expression of his soul. Hence in his writings one finds a repeated emphasis on an all absorbing nationalism. His own province, Bengal, was rent by communal tensions. But Bose preach and fought for a pure nationalism. In his political activities, both in India and outside, Bose always stood up as a valians. Spokesman of a nationalism that gave no concession to any communalism. Although in the theoretical analysis of nationalism, Bose has not made any contribution, by his effective leadership and his great genius for action, he has helped in the popularization of the ideal of the supremacy of the nation in a country which has been dominated by the heritage of feudalism, ecclesiasticism and despotic imperialism. In the field of Indian political theory, Bose has not made any remarkably original contribution. His significance lies, however, in stressing, along with Gandhi as well as some other left-wingers, the urgency of the solution of the pressing economic problems. He was a dynamic man of action, a militant fighter for Swaraj, an agitator, a propagandist, an uncompromising fighter and a revolutionary leader rather than a philosopher. He pleaded for the abolition of landlordism, faith in the extension of the co-operative movement like J.V. Stalin's collectivisation of agriculture in Russia during his period in the name of socialistic pattern of society. He accepted the urgency of the social conflicts between the 'have and the have-nots'. He felt that the richer and well-to-do sections in the country were bound to gravitate to the side of the foreign imperialists. His whole concepts of future Indian dream must be in the hands of socialist economy in order to avoid the big gap between the two class divisions. He strongly believed that only socialist idea can answer by the socialization of the means and factor of production.

Reference

1. Quoted in The Indian Annual Register, 1938, Vol. I, p.341
2. Ibid, p.346
3. General Mohan Singh, in 'Netaji', Congress Unmasked, Chap. IX, pp118, attempts to interpret Subhas Bose as a Marxist revolutionary.
4. The Indian Struggle: 1935-1942, p. 120.
5. Bose was an admirer of the theory of Free Money evolved by Silvio Gesell. See The Indian Struggle: 1935 -1942, p. 72.
6. Ibid, pp.431-32.
7. Ibid., p.120
8. Subhas Chandra Bose, " The Role of Mahatma Gandhi in Indian History".Chap. XVI of The Indian Struggle, pp406-14