

Subhas Chandra Bose and India's Struggle for Independence

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ABSTRACT: *Subhash Chandra Bose played a very active role in India's political life during most of the 1930's. He was twice elected President of the Indian National Congress, (1938 and 1939) the country's most important political force for freedom from the Raj or British rule. While his memory is still held in high esteem in India, in the West Bose is much less revered, largely because of his wartime collaboration with the Axis powers. Both before and during the Second world war, Bose worked tirelessly to secure German and Japanese support in freeing his beloved homeland of foreign rule. During the final two years of the war, Bose with considerable Japanese backing- led the forces of the Indian National Army into battle against the British.*

I. RECOGNIZED LEADERSHIP

Bose, a patriot of almost fanatical zeal, first joined the Indian National Movement in 1921, working under C.R.Das, whom he idolized. He was jailed for six months in 1921-1922 because of his political activities. Immediately upon his release, the 25 year old Bose organized (and presided over) the All- Bengal Young Men's Conference. As a result of his remarkable leadership abilities and ambition, he advanced quickly through nationalist ranks. He was soon elected General Secretary of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee (BPCC). In 1924, at the age of 27, Bose was elected the Chief Executive officer of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation, which effectively put him in charge of the second largest city in the British empire. As a result of his close ties with nationalist terrorists, in late 1924 he was detained by British authorities and held, without trial for three years in prison. In 1928, the 31- year old Bose was elected president of the BPCC, and at the Calcutta meeting of the Congress party held in December, he came to national prominence by pressing (unsuccessfully) for the adoption by his provincial committee of an independent resolution. By 1930 Bose had formulated the broad strategy that he believed India must follow to throw off the yoke of British imperialism and assume its rightful place as a leader in Asia. During his years in Mandalay prison and another short term of imprisonment in Alipore jail in 1930, he read many works on political theory namely on Fascism. Until his death 15 years later, Bose would continue publicly to praise certain aspects of fascism and express his hope for a synthesis of that ideology and socialism. His detailed comments on the matter in his book ' The Indian Struggle 1920-1934' which was published in 1935, accurately represent the views he held, throughout most of his career.

II. PROGRAM OUTLINED

During his political career, India's liberation from British rule remained Bose's foremost political goal. As he explained in his most important work, the Indian Struggle, the political party he envisioned " will stand for the complete political and economic liberation of the Indian people". He struggled throughout his life for the independence of India, in his own way. Along with his abiding love for his country, Bose held an equally passionate hatred of the imperial power that ruled it: Great Britain. Bose envisaged that the ' the complete political and economic liberation of the Indian people' would inevitably require the use of force. Although he occasionally claimed to 'detest' violence and criticized isolated acts of terrorism (which he considered ineffective and counterproductive) he was never really committed to Gandhi's policy of nonviolence. He regarded the Gandhi supported civil disobedience campaign as an effective means of paralyzing the administration, but regarded it as inadequate unless accompanied by a movement aimed at total revolution and prepared, if necessary, to use violence. Bose was able to give much grander expression to his ' militarism' when, in 1930, he volunteered to form a guard of honour during the ceremonial functions at the Calcutta session of the Congress Party. Such guards of honour were not uncommon, but the one Bose formed and commanded was unlike anything previously seen. More than 2,000 volunteers were given military training and organized into battalions. About half wore uniforms, which specially designed steel chain epaulettes for the officers, Bose in full dress uniform even carried a Field Marshal's baton when he reviewed his " troops".

The Indian National Army : A high point in Bose's ' military career' came in July 1943 in Singapore. At a mass meeting there on July 4, Rash Behari Bose handed over to him the leadership of the Indian Independence League. The next day, Subhash Bose reviewed for the first time the soldiers of the Indian National Army (INA) which then comprised of 13,000 men. In his address to the troops, which is a good example of his speaking style, he cited George Washington and Giuseppe Garibaldi as examples of men who led armies that won

independence for their respective countries. This "Free India Army" (Azad Hind Fauj) would not only emancipate India from the British yoke," he told the soldiers but would, under his command, become the standing national army of the liberated nation.

III. DETERMINED LEADERSHIP

Bose clearly admired strong, vigorous, military type leaders and in 'The Indian Struggle' he listed several whom he particularly respected. These included Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin and even a former British Governor of Bengal, Sir Stanley Jackson. Bose admired Gandhi for many things, not least his ability to "exploit the mass psychology of the people, just as Lenin did the same thing in Russia, Mussolini in Italy and Hitler in Germany". Bose's militarism, ambition and leadership traits do not necessarily indicate (contrary to popular opinion) that he was a leader in the fascist mold. In this regard, it is worth noting that during his many years as heads of various councils, committees and offices, and during 15- month tenure as President of the Indian National Congress (February 1938 to May 1939), Bose never acted in an undemocratic manner, nor did he claim powers or responsibilities to which he was not constitutionally or customarily entitled. Bose clearly anticipated that the British would be driven out of India in an armed struggle (under his leadership), and that a social and political revolution would begin the moment the Indian people saw British rule under attack in India itself. This revolution, he believed would bring an end to the old caste system and traditional social hierarchy, which would be replaced by an egalitarian, casteless and classless society based on socialist models. This explains what Bose meant in the 'The Indian Struggle' when he wrote of the need for a strong, single-party government, "bound together by military discipline" with dictatorial powers for some years to come, in order to put India on her feet. Only a strong government, strict discipline, and dictatorial rule would, according to Bose, prevent the anticipated revolution from falling into chaos and anarchy. He rejected Communism (at least as it was practiced in the Soviet Union) principally because of its internationalism, and because he believed that the theoretical ideal found in the writings of Marx could not be applied without notification, to India. He was opposed to liberalism believing that greater emphasis should be placed on social goals than on the needs or desires of individuals.

IV. MASS MOBILIZATION

Bose was nonetheless, a consistent advocate of total mobilization, the mustering of national resources on a scale normally associated with military –like action. Realizing that manpower was easily India's greatest resource (and arguably the only one available to the independence movement), he proclaimed that all Indians-male and female, urban and rural, rich and poor-should actively participate in the fight for freedom. From his earliest days in politics to his death in 1945, he sought to rouse the great Indian masses, and involve them directly in the political struggle. Their support for representatives at the provincial or national levels was not enough they must themselves rise up and win independence. During the 1930's however, his political position was never strong enough to call for other resources than manpower, nor was India-under British control-able to offer other resources. Additionally, total mobilization during peacetime, without an impending war or revolution in the awareness of the masses, had never been achieved (not even by the Nazis) and arguably never could be achieved. Bose, an astute man, no doubt realized this. With the formation of provincial government of Azad Hind, he was at last in a position to appeal directly for total mobilization to the mass of Indians-at least in Southeast Asia, and less directly to those in India itself. Along with his call for mass mobilization, he demanded that all, available resources be provided for the cause of freedom. Of course, Bose demanded not only the total mobilization of Indian resources in south Asia, but of Indian resources everywhere. He called for mass mobilization not only in support of his army, but also for his dynamic new government, the various branches of which required financing and manpower.

V. WOMEN'S EQUALITY

Bose called on both men and women for total support. Unlike the German National Socialists and the Italian fascists, who stressed the masculine in almost all spheres of social and political activity. Bose believed that women were equals of men, and should therefore be likewise prepared to fight and sacrifice for India's liberation. Throughout the 1920's and 1930's he had campaigned in India to bring women more fully into the life of the nation. After his return to Asia in 1943 he called on women to serve as soldiers in the Indian National Army-at the time a most radical view. A women's regiment was formed in 1943, and came to number about 1,000 women. It was named, appropriately, the "rani of Jhansi Regiment". While those less suited to combat duties were employed as nurses and in other support roles, the majority were trained as soldiers. When the INA attacked British forces from Burma in east India in mid -1944, the women of the Jhansi regiment fought alongside the men, suffering equally heavy casualties. When the army was forced to withdraw, the women were given no privileges. Along with men, they marched for more than a thousand kilometers.

VI. COMMITMENT TO YOUTH

Bose was also deeply committed to the youth movement, a devotion that featured prominently in his political ideology. Convinced that young people were by nature idealistic, restless and open to new ideas-such as his own radical and militant outlook- Bose accordingly devoted a great deal of time and effort to the new Youth Leagues that were formed in a number of provinces during the 1920's. Throughout his career he presided over far more youth conferences than any other all-India political figure, and his speeches to younger people he steadfastly urged a spirit of activism that contrasted sharply with the passivism preached by Gandhi and many of the older politician's. One of the most hopeful signs of the time, he claimed at the 1928 Maharashtra Provincial Conference, "is awakening among the youth of the country." Bose believed that India's liberation would be achieved only through the efforts and sacrifices of the militant, revolutionary and politically conscious younger generation.

VII. BOSE'S UNIQUE POLITICAL IDEOLOGY

While Bose political ideology can reasonably be described as essentially fascistic, two qualifying points need to be made here. First he was ardent patriot and nationalist, Bose's nationalism was cultural, not racialist. Second, his radical political ideology was shaped by a consuming frustration with the unsuccessful efforts of others to gain independence for India. While he was ambitious, and clearly enjoyed devotion to his followers, his obsession was not adulation or power, but rather freedom for his beloved Motherland- a goal for which he was willing to suffer and sacrifice, even at the cost of his life. Bose was favourably impressed with the discipline and organizational strength of fascism and socialism. During his stay in Europe during the 1930s, he was deeply moved by the dynamism of the two major "fascist" powers, Italy and Germany. After observing these regimes first-hand, he developed a political ideology of his own that, he was convinced, could bring about the liberation of India and the total reconstruction of Indian society along vaguely authoritarian-in socialist lines. Bose's lack of success in his lifelong effort to liberate India from alien rule was certainly not due to any lack of effort. From 1921, when he became the Indian to resign formally from the Indian Civil Service, until his death in 1945 as leader of an Indian government in exile, Subhash Chandra Bose struggled ceaselessly to achieve freedom and prosperity for his beloved homeland.

VIII. TRIPURI SESSION

The Tripuri Congress session of 1939 is a crucial event in the history of the Indian National Congress. The united resistance and non-cooperation of the conservative leadership cleared the way for the removal of the recently re-elected Congress president Subhash Chandra Bose. Gandhi himself had proposed Bose's name as the President of the Congress in the Haripura Session of 1938. However Bose started making efforts to bring an end to his conflict with Gandhi after the Tripuri session. If Bose showed any soft attitude in certain situations towards Gandhi it was due to strategic reasons, not due to any weakness. Probably he had hoped that he would be able to convince Gandhi to accept the relevance and importance of his plan of action.

IX. CONCLUSION

Bose advocated complete freedom for India at the earliest, whereas the Congress Committee wanted it in phases, through a Dominion status. Bose was elected president of the Indian National Congress for two consecutive terms, but had to resign from the post following ideological conflicts with Mahatma Gandhi and after openly attacking the Congress's foreign and internal policies. Bose believed that Mahatma Gandhi's tactics of non-violence would never be sufficient to secure India's independence, and advocated violent resistance. He established a separate political party, the All India Forward Bloc and continued to call for the full and immediate independence of India from British rule. He was imprisoned by British authorities eleven times. His famous motto was "Give me blood and I will give you freedom". His stance did not change with the outbreak of the Second World War, which he saw as an opportunity to take advantage of British weakness. At the outset of the war, he left India, travelling to the Soviet Union, Germany and Japan, seeking an alliance with the aim of attacking the British in India. With Japanese assistance, he reorganized and later led the Indian National Army, formed from Indian prisoners-of-war and plantation workers from British Malaya, Singapore, and other parts of Southeast Asia, against British forces. With Japanese monetary, political, diplomatic and military assistance, he formed the Azad Hind Government in exile, regrouped and led the Indian National Army in battle against the allies at Imphal and in Burma. His political views and the alliances he made with Nazi and other militarist regimes at war with Britain have been the cause of arguments among historians and politicians, with some accusing him of fascist sympathies, while others in India have been more sympathetic towards the inculcation of realpolitik as a manifesto that guided his social and political choices. He is presumed to have died on 18 August 1945 in a plane crash over Taiwan. However, contradictory evidence exists regarding his death in the accident.

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