

The Provisional Government of Azad Hind: Character and Objectives

Ajmeet Kaur, Dr. Sukhjit Kaur Bhullar

Guru Kashi University, Talwandi Sabo, Bathinda (Pb).

Corresponding Author: Ajmeet Kaur

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On 21 October 1943, Provisional Government of Free India was set up by Subash Chandra Bose. In this paper the character and objectives of the Provisional Government of Azad Hind (Free India) has been analysed.

The character of the Provisional Government of Azad Hind under Netaji was absolutely national as it was composed exclusively of the Indians irrespective of class, caste, race, creed or religion. On 15 August 1943, in a broadcast from Tokyo, Netaji declared that "All Indians in East Asia are united regardless of religion or caste and they are determined to fight for the freedom of their common motherland." For him there was no religious or provincial difference. He looked at everyone without distinction and his spirit animated his men. In the I.N.A. there was no communal feeling of any sort in spite of the fact that everyman had full liberty to practise his religion in any way he liked. The success of this could be gauged from the fact that the most ardent supporters and admirers of Netaji respected everyman for what he was worth and not for his religion or the province he came from."¹

Again, the main objective of the I.N.A. movement was to supplement the national struggle for freedom going on in India as its external front - as an extension of that struggle "Subhas always regarded the I.N.A. movement", observed Girija Mukhejee, "as a projection, albeit active, of the movement for independence carried on by the Congress at home".² This view has been supported by K. K. Ghosh.³ Thus the basis of Netaji's I.N.A. movement was national unity and its prime objective was attainment of Indian national independence and establishment of her national sovereignty.

All this clearly establishes the nationalist character of the I.N.A. movement under Netaji. As a complement to this spirit of nationalism, I.N.A. was also based on a democratic foundation. The Provisional Government of Azad Hind stood to be a government of the people, for the people and by the people. In the words of Netaji, "it was the only lawful government of the Indian people. After the attainment of freedom it will make room for a permanent government to be set up inside India in accordance with the will of the Indian people."⁴ And "until a permanent National Government of Azad Hind is set up on the Indian soil, the Provisional Government will administer the affairs of the country in trust for the Indian people."⁵

The procedure of administration in the Provisional Government, as adopted by Netaji was also highly democratic. According to Ayer, he was a democrat in heart and dictator in effect. This was certainly one way of describing him as a dictator. He meant that any dictatorial bias was "an intangible, elusive and inescapable part of him", but the democratic bias was so strong in him that he could never be really a dictator. Subhas Chandra was a dictator in the sense that he did high-powered thinking, planning and working out of the minutest details with regard to every important matter, occasionally sounding his inner 'cabinet' on broad policy and details. He would convince regarding his planning and the practicability of its execution. Then he would go to his cabinet to explain his ideas. "The sheer boldness and majestic sweep of his planning admitted of little or no room for ordinary minds to suggest practical alternatives or worthwhile improvement. His planning was such that it deserved acceptance in complete. His dictatorship was no bitter pill, for only in the most acceptable and happiest sense was he a dictator."

He was a source of inspiration to his cabinet colleagues and always dealt them democratically. He strictly adhered to a democratic procedure. He would come to the Cabinet meeting or meeting of the Military High Command, prepared to explain the why and wherefore of his main ideas, listen attentively to the differing view points of his colleagues, answer anyone of the objections, then, elucidate and elaborate every point of detail, and close by a convincing picture of the ultimate fruition of his plan.

He insisted on calling a meeting of the Cabinet every time policy was to be decided, and once the decision was officially taken by the Cabinet, then and then alone he would use discretion to speak in the name of the government in explaining the implications of such a decision, and the possibilities of success or failure of certain moves in pursuance of the decision. He always took particular care to put his Cabinet colleagues absolutely at ease by avoiding all signs of impatience, intolerance or resentment on questions of even entirely

divergent views. He carefully listened to all the arguments marshalled in favour of the opposing view. "This was a real education in democracy to his colleagues. He never believed in confronting his colleagues with a fait accompli and then wrangling their unwilling approval."⁶

Capt. Lakshmi Swaminathan, of the Rani of Jhansi Regiment said that Netaji "was not at all arrogant in trying to force his opinion on others. He acted all the time in a very level-headed, persuasive and rational manner, and step by step, tried to explain when he was doing certain things and what his reasons were, and what he believed would be the outcome. His utter, absolute sincerity struck me most and I felt that this man would never take a wrong step and that one could trust him completely and have the utmost confidence in him. We do not have a one-man dictatorship, we are fellow-fingers in the same field."⁷

There were some allegations of dictatorship against Netaji such as, "under Axis Patronage Netaji more and more acted like a dictator"⁸ and he converted the I.N.A. Cabinet into an engine of his autocracy. But this allegation was totally baseless. The I.N.A. Government was based on the joint responsibility of Netaji and the Cabinet, and his procedure of administration, was never dictatorial, it was rather democratic, as pointed out above by some of his colleagues who, therefore, had strong objections to this label of dictator or fascist on Netaji. All these allegations were to be rejected as biased and baseless.

Netaji created a new tradition in the I.N.A., a nationalist, democratic, secular and cosmopolitan tradition both in the military and civil administration of the Azad Hind Government. In order to understand the character and objectives of the Azad Hind Government comprehensively, it is worthwhile to examine the administrative policy and programme of the Provisional Government of Azad Hind.

(a) Financial Policy: Immediately after Netaji assumed charge of the I.N.A. movement, he located the sources of his supply of men and materials which were interrelated. According to Hugh Toye he had decided that Burma and Malaya would be his main source of supply of men and Thailand of materials and he sent his personal representatives to these two countries. As Malaya was close at hand, he opened recruitment and training centres all over Malaya for this purpose. With regard to his canvassing for funds, it is necessary to refer to the final paragraph of the note exchanged between Colonel Tamura and Pritam Singh in 1941. It read that the Japanese Army would make available whatever materials and funds were needed to carry on I.I.L. activities and the latter would be at liberty to receive donations offered voluntarily by Indians residing in the areas of Japanese military operations. In his meeting with Netaji in Singapore, Tojo endorsed the old note and gave Netaji a free hand in collecting funds from Indian residents of South East Asia.

On the basis of this agreement, Netaji for raising money for financing the national liberation movement collected contributions from the Indian communities, and financial help from the Japanese government. He personally made a hectic tour over the length and breadth of East Asia and appealed to the resident Indian communities to donate liberally for their motherland's cause. With the increasing recruitment of soldiers, the increased expenses required more funds to be raised. He called for 'a total mobilisation for a total war' - total mobilisation of all the resources of the three million Indians in East Asia. At first there were liberal donations from every strata of the Indian communities according to their mite. It is pertinent to note that the contributions made by the middle class and the poor comparatively more than that of the rich, showing their greater zeal than the latter in the national cause. On May 29 in a single day Bose collected some five million rupees worth of cash and valuables at public meetings.

On 23 January, 1945 Netaji observed 48th birthday. On this occasion, despite of war adversaries, the Indian community of Rangoon showed their trust and faith in their leader with full vigour and enthusiasm. In spite of their untold hardship they donated gold and jewels weighing in total one and half times the weight of Bose, amounting to around 100 kilograms.

But this type of response was not found everywhere where gradually liberal, even handful contributions were not forthcoming. Hence, he was compelled to take recourse to pressure, exaction and threat to force donations from them. Punitive action was also taken in the case of defaulters including arrest and confinement to the concentration camp by the Board of Management which was established particularly for this purpose with Major General A. C. Chatterjee in its charge. The Board also under the instruction of Netaji, imposed a systematic levy on Indian property.

Regarding the second source of fund, he realised that he could not do without Japanese finance, and often said that all help offered must be accepted for the sake of his country, but he was also aware of the strong feelings among his followers that Japanese money must not imply Japanese dictation. Some Japanese assistance was indeed his due. The Japanese must naturally continue to maintain the prisoners of war whether they were in the I.N.A. or not.

He aimed, however, to pay for all the civilian activities of the League, including the recruitment and training of civilians for the I.N.A. By October 1943, these expenses amounted to about a million local dollars a month, and the bill was to increase five-fold when the new recruitment and training projects developed. Incomes had not been generated in the same proportion, less than two million dollars in all having been subscribed up to July, 1943.

One of his achievements in this matter was the Indo-Japanese Loan Agreement of 1944. Throughout the negotiations he insisted on obtaining loans without any strings and assuring repayment. He insisted that India was not Japan's client, but temporarily weak co-equal government and army. Japan implemented this agreement with Free India, with a loan of 100 million yen. About 90 million Yen remained unused when Japan surrendered to the allies in August 1945. Netaji spent all the remaining funds as discharge allowance to the military and civil personnel of the I.N.A., to all members and employees of the I.N.A. and the Provisional Government. Japan waived claims to its repayment.

(b) Military Policy: On the military side and we find that the I.N.A. Government maintained its independence vis-a-vis the Japanese, with regard to the I.N.A., and that there was personal influence of Netaji, as Joyce Lebra points out, on the formulation of Japanese policy and strategy toward the I.N.A. There were several instances, where it is demonstrable that without Netaji and his powerful charismatic impact, Japan would have followed other courses in dealing with the I.N.A. or with the question of policy towards India in general.⁹

At first, Japan was reluctant to accept Netaji as the leader of the I.N.A. as already stated, Japan wanted to control the I.N.A. which they feared would not be possible in the event of assumption of its charge by such a strong personality and independent fire-branded man like Netaji whose political credentials in the light of his activities in India, were well-known to them. This was the reason that Japanese tried to prevent his arrival in Japan, and to keep him inactive even after his arrival. But Netaji's hypnotic personality and independent and sincere approach, won over the heart of Tojo and many other top ranking Japanese military officials. As a result they found themselves compelled to accept Netaji's viewpoints and demands as far as possible. They accepted Netaji's proposal of formation of the Provisional government of Azad Hind and recognised it; under his pressure they ceded Andaman and Nicobar Islands to the Azad Hind Government, accepted Netaji's demand for more arms for expansion of the I.N.A. and in spite of their initial reluctance established full and formal relations with the Provisional Government of Azad Hind by sending Mr. Hachiya as Ambassador. Again, of the two factors which determined the strategic planning of Japan for the Imphal campaign, one being Japan's domestic consideration, the other was Netaji's influence, and the power the Japanese judged he had with the Indian public opinion. This influence of Bose was mentioned in the strategic planning session before the Imphal campaign, in Tokyo. In fact, it was the reluctance to disappoint him that influenced the Japanese decision to undertake the Imphal campaign and delay the retreat later, since Netaji saw it as the last opportunity to advance into India. The Japanese Government at first did not want to deploy the I.N.A. in this campaign. Deemed as unfit for such arduous campaign, the Indian soldiers were sought to be kept away from the actual battle. The Japanese soldiers would perform that duty. But it is under Netaji's pressure and persuasion, that the Japanese reversed their decision and agreed to engage the I.N.A. troops in this campaign. To prevent any treachery by the Japanese troops, Netaji adopted a stern independent attitude during this warfare. He clearly instructed his troops, that in case the Japanese did anything harmful to India, after crossing India's border, they were to turn their guns against the Japanese without the least hesitation. This clearly bears out the patriotic and independent attitude of Netaji in the whole affair. To avoid disputes at a later stage in case Britain was defeated, Netaji wanted clear agreement with the Japanese beforehand about the administration of Indian territories occupied by the Japanese army. The I.N.A. was empowered to collect the arms available on the battlefield. It was also agreed that the only flag which was to fly in the liberated areas would be the Indian tricolour. Indian territory to be occupied by the army was to be administered by the Indians and for this Netaji prepared in advance the machinery by recruiting men. Major General A. C. Chatterjee was appointed Chief Administrator of the liberated areas. Regarding the newly acquired Andaman and Nicobar islands, Netaji named them as Sahid and Swaraj and placed them under D. Loganadhan as the Chief Commissioner.

Thus it was found that Netaji's presence, and his role in the Independence movement in South-east Asia produced a re-evaluation of the Japanese policy towards India and the I.N.A.

(c) Civil Administration: In the field of civil administration, Netaji envisaged two phases of civil administration. Firstly, in the liberated areas, a section of volunteers of his Azad Hind Dal (Free India Party), close on the heels of the military advance and occupation of the territories by the I.N.A., were to perform urgent tasks of reconstruction such as repair of damaged houses and construction of new houses, road repair, arrangement of water and electric supply, handling of refugees, maintenance of law and order and reconciliation of the Indian population. Then as soon as an area ceased to be operational, a provisional administration would take over and this would last until the future government of Free India was settled. It was with this end in view of the civil administration in the liberated areas that postal stamps of the Azad Hind Government were printed, and arrangements made for printing paper currency of the said Government. Netaji's administration - military and civil - marked a unique combination of strong discipline on the one hand, and benevolence and clemency on the other. But there was no personal bias, no religious or racial rancor was involved. Everything was decided on the merit and demerit of the case. Thus as the Supreme Commander of the Armed forces he saw to the enforcement of strict discipline among the soldiers. He warned them particularly against rape or plunder after

crossing into the Indian border. As there were women's regiments he kept close vigilance over the moral disposition of the soldier's throughout. He was a stern enemy of the deserters. Desertion was made a capital crime by him for which he authorised death penalty by Court Martial; and had ordered the I.N.A. Police to list undesirable officers who might still have escaped suspicion. He also announced the observance of a 'Traitors' Day' on which I.N.A. Units would compete in doing public dishonour to the deserters. He brought in a measure that "every member of the I.N.A. Officers, N.C.Os., or Sepoy would in future be entitled to arrest any other member of the I.N.A. no matter what his rank may be, if he behaves in a cowardly manner, or to shoot him if he acts in a treacherous manner."

In civil administration also similar strong line of action was taken by him. He found it necessary to tighten up League discipline, he suspended all elections during the war, and ordered expulsion of any one not wholeheartedly co-operating or making counter-propaganda. For this he strengthened the League's internal security system. In this way he introduced and upheld a strong sense of discipline in his system of administration.

Along with this strong line of action, there was also a soft line of action marked by humanitarian feeling and recognition of merit. Thus he always appreciated the plight of the soldiers and as far as possible, tried his best to provide them facilities. Thus he introduced family pension for the soldiers killed in action, and ensured proper care for the wounded and reward for the brave.

Netaji's ideal of functional realism led him to join hands with the Axis Powers for his country's freedom, but he was ever vigilant to safeguard the national independence of India and never sacrificed his independent stand to realise it without a slightest tendency of compromise. His end was freedom of India and the Axis help was merely the means to this end, there being never any ideological proximity or affinity with Fascism or Nazism.

This patriotic ideal had been all along preserved by the Azad Hind Government reflected in its different programmes and activities sought to be achieved by his abiding faith in and commitment to honesty, sincerity, integrity, discipline and efficiency. On the basis of these virtues and qualities he built up the military and civil administration of his I.N.A. Government as an organised and efficient administrative and military machinery.

The locus standi of the Provisional Government of Azad Hind had been proved with logical and factual evidence and justified on the basis of international law that it constituted a legitimate government accredited with national sovereignty and recognised by other countries. All the pre-requisites for the formation of a government were fulfilled by this government like territory, international recognition, habitual obedience of the people, financial resources, organised government, existence of a state machinery and a code of law etc. This is why the I.N.A. movement, as Bhulabhai Desai, the Defence Counsel in the I.N.A. trial, pointed out, with reference to facts and figures, was not an insurgency, and constituted no war crime against the British Government. It was a national war of independence for India under a national Sovereign State against the British Raj.

END NOTES

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