

# Life and work of subhas chandra bose



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Towards a revival of the Bose legacy Madhuri Bose “ Rose early but found Prabha still suffering. A son was born at midday... ” reads a brief entry in Janakinath’s diary dated 23 January 1897. The newborn, the ninth child of Janakinath Bose and Prabhavati Devi was named Subhas Janakinath was then practicing law in Cuttack, in the state of Orissa. He headed a large extended family, in which, Subhas was to later recall in his autobiography An Indian Pilgrim, he felt “ like a thoroughly insignificant being.

My parents owed me to a degree”. It is now 111 years since the birth of Subhas Chandra Bose, and sixty-three years since his last known journey out of South East Asia, reportedly to the Soviet Union, in mid-August 1945. On 23 January every year Subhas’ birth anniversary is celebrated across India. Speeches extolling Bose’s charisma and personality, his unique contributions towards Indian independence continue to be made, and stirring national songs continue to be sung in his honour.

On that day, in addition to institutionally sponsored events, spontaneous remembrance ceremonies organized by neighbourhood and citizens’ groups also take place. This is a unique feature associated only with Subhas’ birth anniversary which reflects the depth of people’s veneration for him after more than half a century of his disappearance. This, in a sense, is a fitting tribute to a man who dedicated his life to liberating India from British colonial rule, and had a vision to make Free India one of the leading nations in the world.

But. 23 January will pass and Bose will again be relegated to the pages of history. Though deified by many, his ideology and mission are forgotten, or

are not even known by the younger generations of Indians. From his entry into the Indian political movement in the early 1920s, throughout his prison years and bouts of serious illnesses, Subhas had developed his thoughts on social, political and economic issues which then formed the basis of his ideology.

His famous address as the President of the 51st Session of the Indian National Congress at Haripura in 1938 contains the crux of his political and economic thinking and plans. Is it widely known that it was in Haripura that Subhas launched the very first Planning Commission for India? In all his key addresses in India and abroad, in articles published in various journals, Subhas articulated his vision for Free India. In his view the most important problems to be addressed in independent India were that of poverty, unemployment and illiteracy, challenges which have still not been met today after sixty years of independence. Together with the celebratory functions, a more fitting tribute to Subhas' memory will be to effectively propagate his vision and ideology which will in turn promote a better understanding of the history and politics of India, and also inspire the present generation of Indians to shape India on the basis of the high moral values and principles that Subhas stood for and practised all his life.

Subhas' works should be part of school and university curricula. Research institutes, including the Netaji Institute for Asian Studies (Kolkata) should actively encourage and support national and international scholars to reassess Subhas' role in the Indian independence movement, and also his contemporary relevance. A deeper study of his works will show that many of his social and economic plans still remain valid under present day conditions.

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In the current Indian situation where there is a bankruptcy of leadership, ideas, commitment and action, Subhas' message, through his writings, speeches and commentaries may help to resurrect the failing morale of those who are working to bring positive change in this country. Above all, Subhas' life-long emphasis on the importance of communal harmony and unity among peoples, irrespective of birth, caste, creed and religion, has not only remained relevant, in fact it has even gained a sense of urgency.

In a world torn by ethnic, tribal, religious and regional conflicts, Bose's unqualified rejection of bigotry of any kind from the very outset of his entry into the Indian political scene, and his repeated call for unity among all the peoples of India, famously reflected in the motto of his Indian National Army – Unity, Faith and Sacrifice, can help to create the only secure foundation of contemporary India.

Conscious of the grave danger that communalism posed to a country such as India, where people of many faiths were inextricably mixed together over centuries, Subhas had again and again warned against the virus of religious bigotry entering the fabric of politics. In referring to what should be the attitude towards religion and caste, Subhas had declared "... the Government of Free India must have an absolutely neutral and impartial attitude toward all religions and leave it to the choice of every individual to profess or follow a particular religious faith" (The Fundamental Problems of India, address at Tokyo University, November 1944).

Subhas' legacy will be better served if he is brought alive through his works. However, there is another reality. During the time of the British Raj, Subhas

as their Enemy No 1 was blacked out and his book *The Indian Struggle* banned in India. This is understandable and could have been expected from a colonial power determined to hold on to India and ready to suppress any threat to their rule.

It is therefore particularly ironic that after the government of free India came to power, a systematic attempt was made by forces in the new administration to reduce Subhas to merely a Bengal hero, who though deemed idealistic was seen to be misled, and had made the terrible mistake of finally discarding Mahatma Gandhi's non-violent way to independence. It is only because Subhas had entered the minds and hearts of the Indian people, and of the peoples of Asia, that all attempts at diminishing his stature and role in Indian and global politics have not fully succeeded.

The role of the first government of independent India under Prime Minister Nehru in this process of suppression and distortion cannot be ignored nor denied. Historians have noted that Nehru had always perceived Subhas as his main rival, and his own statements bear evidence to that fact. Subhas himself had once written that " nobody has done more harm to me personally and to our cause in this crisis than Pandit Nehru (letter to his nephew Amiya Nath Bose, 17 April 1939).

As more evidence begins to emerge it will be possible to make an objective and proper assessment of the role and personalities of our leaders, including Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru, Patel and others. When in August 1945 Subhas disappeared, his beloved elder brother Sarat Chandra Bose was in prison. Sarat and Subhas had shared an extraordinary relationship as brothers. Their

close personal and emotional bond was enriched and deepened by their shared social and political ideology and goals. After Sarat was released in September 1945, he immediately resumed his campaign for a free and united India.

He also decided to acquire the Bose ancestral house on Elgin Road in Calcutta to establish an institution for the study and propagation of Subhas' ideology. Soon after, in 1946, Sarat inaugurated ' Netaji Bhawan' at their ancestral house and laid the foundations for a Netaji museum and research centre in the name of his brother, who was by then popularly known as Netaji (our leader). It was Sarat's wish that the Bose house should also be used for public and charitable purposes. The Azad Hind Ambulance Service which he set up provided much needed medical and social services in the city, especially during the dark days of communal trife. These were tumultuous times for Bengal and India as a whole. A new alternative was beginning to emerge in Bengal's political firmament. Sarat Bose was seen to carry the torch forward. He became the undisputed leader of the Congress Party in West Bengal. He was then elected leader of the Congress Party in the Central Legislative Assembly and became the Leader of the Opposition. Sarat's membership of the Interim Government was, however, short-lived. He left the Interim Cabinet and the Congress Party refusing to agree to the partition of India on communal lines.

Within a few short years a greater tragedy was to strike. On 20 February 1950, the very morning Sarat was to make an urgent appeal to the people of the two Bengals to reunite, he suddenly passed away in an attempt to keep alive the Bose legacy and to give it concrete shape, the close followers of the

Bose Brothers, supported by Sarat's family, set up The Sarat Bose Academy at Netaji Bhawan in 1952. It gathered within its fold eminent historians, lawyers, journalists and other committed voluntary workers. It also attracted interested persons from overseas.

The Academy launched an ambitious programme to develop Netaji Bhawan as a centre of excellence for research and exchange on both national and international affairs. It also aimed to function as a centre for the promotion of arts, music and languages, while continuing to provide other public services. It was to be the main archive for the works of Sarat and Subhas and for all types of documents and records related to them. The major objective of collecting key documents as well as photos and films on the life and activities of Subhas Chandra Bose began in earnest.

Amiya Nath Bose, General Secretary of the Sarat Bose Academy, who took up his father Sarat's mantle, engaged himself fully in this task. He collected a substantial amount of materials, including primary documents, newspaper clippings, journals, films and other source materials on Netaji's activities both in India and abroad. All of these materials were deposited at the Netaji Museum and archives to be made available "... to students and scholars for the study of and research about the life and work of Netaji ...".

The Sarat Bose Academy began publication of Subhas and Sarat's works, and set up a comprehensive photographic exhibition portraying the life and work of the Bose Brothers. By the late 1950s, significant progress had been made in the collection of materials for the Netaji Museum and its archives, and it was concluded that it would be appropriate to create a separate body ' to

undertake a systematic study of Netaji's life and mission'. This led ultimately to the creation of the Netaji Research Bureau in 1957 under the chairmanship of the well-known journalist Satya Ranjan Bakshi and Sisir Kumar Bose (a son of Sarat Bose) as General Secretary.

Thus, Netaji Bhawan, with its three main organs, namely, the Sarat Bose Academy, the Netaji Research Bureau and the Azad Hind Ambulance Service, was designed to act as the lead institution to uphold and promote the Bose Brothers' legacy, and to work towards realising their cherished goals.

However, here again the forces bent upon destroying the Bose legacy went to work. Gradually the Netaji Research Bureau came under the direct influence of the Nehru dynasty dominated Central Government. The Sarat Bose Academy moved out of Netaji Bhawan. Netaji Research Bureau became the only organ to remain under the directorship of Sisir Bose.

Since its inception until now, over a period of fifty years, the Netaji Research Bureau has accomplished one of its basic goals and has published, in twelve volumes, almost all of the writings, speeches, letters of Subhas, the bulk of which was originally collected under the auspices of The Sarat Bose Academy. Reportedly Netaji Research Bureau has obtained substantial funding from the Central Government to carry out its work. But judged against its own objectives, and what was envisaged by its founders, the work of Netaji Research Bureau may be said to have been limited.

Netaji's own works are not widely available, and conditions of access to the archives at Netaji Bhawan are obscure. Was there a price to pay for support from those who have an interest in keeping the Bose Brother's legacy in



check? In view of the current realities of India today, those who believe in Subhas' ideology and its relevance in contemporary India, must take the initiative to revive, disseminate and act on the basis of that ideology. Such initiatives are already being taken by certain civil society and media groups both in India and abroad.

This year a major website is being launched by a voluntary group called MissionNetaji which will be an online archive for all of Subhas' works, a data base of bibliographies and of scholars. It will also contain photographs and audio-visual materials. The overall objective is to provide access to relevant materials to all those who wish to study the life, activities and ideology of Subhas, and also to those who wish to define their actions in terms of Bose's vision of India and the world. The author is the daughter of Amiya Nath Bose. Ms Bose is an international human rights specialist and is currently based in New York.

Based on an article published in Asian Studies, the journal of the Netaji Institute for Asian Studies, Kolkata. Subhas Chandra Bose and India's Struggle for Independence By Andrew Montgomery When one thinks of the Indian independence movement in the 1930s and early 1940s, two figures most readily come to mind: Mahatma Gandhi, the immensely popular and "saintly" frail pacifist, and his highly respected, Fabian Socialist acolyte, Jawaharlal Nehru. Less familiar to Westerners is Subhas Chandra Bose, a man of comparable stature who admired Gandhi but despaired at his aims and methods, and who became a bitter rival of Nehru.

Bose played a very active and prominent role in India's political life during most of the 1930s. For example, he was twice (1938 and 1939) elected President of the Indian National Congress, 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. Ideology of Fusion As early as 1930 — in his inaugural speech as mayor of Calcutta — the fervent young Bose first expressed his support for a fusion of socialism and fascism: / 1 "... I would say we have here in this policy and program a synthesis of what modern Europe calls Socialism and Fascism. We have here the justice, the equality, the love, which is the basis of Socialism, and combined with that we have the efficiency and the discipline of Fascism as it stands in Europe today. In years that followed, the brilliant, eclectic Bengali would occasionally modify this radical doctrine, but would never abandon it entirely. For example, in late 1944 — almost a decade-and-a-half later — in a speech to students at Tokyo University, he asserted that India must have a political system " of an authoritarian character. . . To repeat once again, our philosophy should be a synthesis between National Socialism and Communism. " / 2 In the wake of the

crushing defeat in 1945 of Hitler and Mussolini, “fascism” has arguably been the most despised of all political ideologies.

Postwar western society recognizes no fascist heroics, and even considers “fascist” traits — particularly the authoritarian, charismatic, personal style of leadership, and the positive evaluation of violence and the willingness to use it for political purposes — to be decidedly unpalatable. In India, though, Bose is regarded as a national hero, in spite of his repeated praise (as will be shown) for autocratic leadership and authoritarian government, and admiration for the European fascist regimes with which he allied himself.

Like the leaders he admired in Italy and Germany, Bose was (and still is) popularly known as Netaji, or “revered leader.” “His name,” explains Mihir Bose (no relation), one of Subhas’ many biographers, “is given [in India] to parks, roads, buildings, sports stadiums, artificial lakes; his statues stand in place of those of discarded British heroes and his photograph adorns thousands of calendars and millions of pan (betel-nut) shops.” It is always the same portrait, continues the writer: Bose in his Indian National Army uniform, “exhorting his countrymen forward to one last glorious struggle.” / 3 No less a figure than Gandhi paid tribute to Bose’s remarkable courage and devotion. Six months after his death in an airplane crash on August 18, 1945, Gandhi declared: “The hypnotism of the Indian National Army has cast its spell upon us. Netaji’s name is one to conjure with. His patriotism is second to none. . . His bravery shines through all his actions. He aimed high and failed. But who has not failed.” / 4 On another occasion Gandhi eulogized: “Netaji will remain immortal for all time to come for his service to India.” / 5 Many of Bose’s admirers have been inclined to downplay or even ignore the

fascist elements in his ideology, and even to pretend they never existed. For example, the text of Bose's inaugural speech as mayor of Calcutta, cited above, was reprinted in a laudatory 1970 "Netaji Birthday Supplement" of the Calcutta Municipal Gazette, but with all references to fascism, including his support for a synthesis of fascism and socialism, carefully deleted. / 6 Several admiring biographers have found it easier to ignore the fascist elements in his ideology than to explain them.

Their subjective accounts do not even inform the reader that Bose spoke positively about some features of fascism, or else, in an attempt to remove from their hero any possible taint, they qualify his remarks in ways that he himself did not. / 7 'Fascist'? During his lifetime, Bose was frequently denounced as a fascist or even a Nazi, particularly in the wake of the radical, revolutionary (as opposed to reformist) views he expressed in radio addresses broadcast to India from National Socialist Germany and, later, from quasi-fascist Japan. 8 For example, The Statesman, a highly influential Calcutta periodical, charged in November 1941: "Mr. Bose's views are those of the Nazis, and he makes no secret of it," / 9 while the BBC, Britain's worldwide radio voice, frequently accused him of "Fascism" and "Nazism." / 10 Additionally, historians and writers who do not admire Bose readily point up his "fascist" views. A. M. Nair, a historian who has written favorably of Indian revolutionary Rash Behari Bose (who had sought Japan's help during and after the First World War), found nothing to praise about Subhas Chandra Bose.

After all, wrote Nair, he was clearly a fascist. / 11 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 that

December, he came to national prominence by pressing (unsuccessfully) for the adoption by his provincial committee of an independence 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, including Francesco Nitti's Bolshevism, Fascism and Democracy and Ivanoe Bonomi's From Socialism to Fascism.<sup>12</sup> It is clear that these works on fascism influenced him, and caused an immediate modification of his long-held socialist views: as noted above, in his inaugural speech as mayor of Calcutta, given a day after his release from Alipore jail, he revealed his support for a seemingly contradictory ideological synthesis of

socialism and 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 first published in 1935, accurately represent the views he held throughout most of his career. As such, the most important of them, along with Bose's own actions, will be analyzed here in some detail. Program Outlined Contending that the Indian National Congress was somewhat "out of date," and suffered from a lack of unity and strong leadership, Bose predicted in *The Indian Struggle* that out of a "Left-Wing revolt there will ultimately emerge a new full-fledged party with a clear ideology, program and plan of action. / 13 The program and plan of action of this new party would, wrote Bose, follow this basic outline: / 14 " 1. The party will stand for the interests of the masses, that is, of the peasants, workers, etc. , and not for the vested interests, that is, the landlords, capitalists and money-lending classes. " 2. It will stand for the complete political and economic liberation of the Indian people. " 3. It will stand for a Federal Government for India as the ultimate goal, but will believe in a strong Central Government with dictatorial powers for some years to come, in order to put India on her feet. " 4.

It will believe in a sound system of state-planning for the reorganization of the agricultural and industrial life of the country. " 5. It will 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 will strive to break down the existing social barriers like caste. " 6. It will 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. “ 7. It will seek to abolish landlordism and introduce a uniform land-tenure system for the whole of India. 8. It will not stand for a democracy in the Mid-Victorian sense of the term, but will 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. “ 9. It will not restrict itself to a campaign inside India but will resort to international propaganda also, in order to strengthen India’s case for liberty, and will attempt to utilize the existing international organizations. “ 10.

It will endeavor to unite all the radical organizations under a national executive so that whenever any action is taken, there will be simultaneous activity on many fronts. ” Synthesis Bose went on to note that Nehru had said in 1933: “ I dislike Fascism intensely and indeed I do not think it is anything more than a crude and brutal effort of the present capitalist order to preserve itself at any cost. ” There is no middle road between Fascism and Communism, said Nehru, so one “ had to choose between the two and I choose the Communist ideal. / 15 To this Bose responded: / 16 “ The view expressed here is, according to the writer, fundamentally wrong. . . One is inclined to hold that the next phase in world- history will produce a synthesis between Communism and Fascism. And will it be a surprise if that synthesis is produced in India?... In spite of the antithesis between Communism and Fascism, there are certain traits in common. 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 will form the basis of the new synthesis. That synthesis is called by the writer “ Samyavada” — an Indian word, which means literally “ the doctrine of synthesis or equality. ” It will be India’s task to work out this synthesis. ” Before taking a closer look at these remarkable words, four points need to be made. First, Bose’s fascist model was almost certainly Mussolini’s Italy, not Hitler’s Germany.

In 1934 Bose made the first of several visits to Fascist Italy and found both the regime and its leader very agreeable. On that occasion he had a cordial (first) meeting with Mussolini — “ a man who really counts in the politics of modern Europe. ” / 17 After *The Indian Struggle* appeared in print in 1935, Bose made a special stop in Rome personally to present a copy to the Duce. / 18 Second, the book was completed a full year before the commencement of the Italian invasion of Ethiopia (Abyssinia), in October 1935.

While Bose would, by the time he completed his book, have known about such violent incidents as “ The Night of the Long Knives” — the SS killing of dozens of SA men on June 30, 1934 — he had no real reason to consider the European fascist regimes unusually violent, murderous or bellicose. “ I should like to point out that when I was writing the book,” he later explained, / 19 “ Fascism had not started on its imperialistic expedition, and it appeared to me merely an aggressive form of nationalism . . . What I really meant was that we in India wanted our national freedom, and having won it, we wanted to move in the direction of Socialism.



This is what I meant when I referred to a “ synthesis between Communism and Fascism. ” Perhaps the expression I used was not a happy one. ” Third, despite Bose’s claim to represent the political left, and that a party supporting a fusion of fascism and socialism would be ushered in by a “ Left-Wing revolt,” the ideology he expounded might more appropriately be regarded as right wing. Bose’s ideology was radical and contained socialist elements — such as the desire to abolish the traditional class structure and create a society of equal opportunity, and the claim to represent the peasants and workers.

To that extent it can be considered left wing. It is worth noting that Hitler’s “ right wing” political movement — the National Socialist German Workers’ Party — shared many of Bose’s “ socialist” goals. / 20 Nehru, a committed socialist, challenged Bose’s characterization of himself and his followers as left wing: “ It seems to me that many of the so-called Leftists are more Right than the so-called Rightists. Strong language and a capacity to attack the old Congress leadership is not a test of Leftism in politics. / 21 Lastly, it should be noted that Bose was willing to tone down his more radical political beliefs on those occasions when he considered it advantageous or necessary to do so. For example, in his February 1938 inaugural speech as President of the Indian National Congress, Bose — probably in a sincere attempt to placate the Gandhian faction — made statements that appear to represent almost an about face from the political views he had expounded in *The Indian Struggle*. In a future independent India, he said, / 22 “ the party itself will have a democratic basis, unlike, for instance, the Nazi party which is based on the “ leader principle.