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Social Philosophy of Subhas Chandra - II SIBRANJAN CHATTERJEE

Deep spiritual feeling and inherent love for God of a boy of the age of fifteen or sixteen pre-determined the direction of his future life. Since his boyhood, Subhas was an introvert and preferred loneliness. He himself admitted that in some respects he had a touch of abnormality in his mental make-up and was also precocious.

The result was that at an age when he should have been busy in the football field, he was brooding over the problems which should rather have been left to a more mature age.³² Hence, it was not unnatural for the young Subhas to leave home and wander in the Himalayas.

This spiritual feeling was intensified with the passage of time. In a letter to Haricharan Bagchi from Mandalay Jail in 1926, Netaji advised the former to meditate every day, twice if possible, and to read regularly the letters and the speeches of Vivekananda. He further observed that one should not try other books before reading Swamiji's letters and speeches. In the same letter, Netaji wrote, 'The purpose of worship is to develop strength within one's self. You must contemplate some form of Power every day, seek strength from Her, offering all the five senses and all evil at Her feet.'³³

S. A. Ayer, the Minister of Propaganda of the Provisional Government of Azad Hind, wrote that many a night, after dinner, while in Singapore, Netaji used to send his car to the Ramakrishna Mission to bring the Swamiji in-charge of Singapore Mission or his fellow-worker, Brahmachari Kailasam, and spend about two hours or so in spiritual communion before retiring into his study sometime after midnight. Or, late at night, he used to drive incognito to the Ramakrishna Mission, there change into a priestly silk dhoti, shut himself up in the prayer-room, rosary in hand, and spend a couple of hours in meditation. This helped him face and solve complicated problems. Ayer further wrote that whenever Netaji was not actually doing some work or talking to somebody, he would withdraw within himself in a trice and would be in communion with God. His faith in the Supreme Being was an inexhaustible reservoir of courage and optimism.

³⁴ To quote Ayer: 'It was his intense spiritual faith that give him poise, tranquillity, quiet strength, infectious self-confidence, tolerance, charitability, natural humility and, most important of all, a touching and overpowering spirit of humanity.' 'Sanyasi (ascetic) was writ large on his forehead even when the Supreme Commander's cap rested majestically on his head at an alluring angle over his right brow'³⁵ he added.

This deep spiritual conviction determined the future life-direction of Subhas Chandra, without understanding of which it will not be possible to comprehend the social philosophy of Netaji. Only at the age of fourteen, in a letter to his mother from Cuttack, Subhas Chandra was asking his mother what sort of career for her children would please her most?-whether she would be the happiest if her children in later life became the judges, magistrates, barristers or high-placed officials and came to be admired for wealth and fortune by the men of the world, or if they could earn the respect of the learned and the virtuous for having grown up to be 'real men' even though they might be poor.³⁶ The intensity of realization of a boy of fourteen years astonishes us. At the same age in a letter to one of his classmates, Subhas Chandra wrote: 'My life is not for my own enjoyment. My life is of course not devoid of happiness but is not for enjoyment-my life is a mission-a duty.'

³⁷ We know that Subhas Chandra secured fourth position in the Indian Civil Service (ICS) Examination. At that time the selection of the Deputy Magistrate in the provincial service created stir in the society, not to speak of the ICS. Subhas Chandra joined the Indian Civil Service as a probationary,

but soon resigned. During that period he had been undergoing mental conflict which was reflected in one of his letters of 22 September, 1920, written from England to his elder brother Sarat Chandra Bose. He wrote: 'A nice fat income with a good pension in after life-I shall surely get. Perhaps, I may become a Commissioner if I stoop to make myself servile enough. Given talents with a servile spirit, one may even aspire to be the Chief Secretary to a provincial Government. But after all is service to be the be-all and end all of my life?'

38 After almost six months, on 16 February, 1921, in another letter from Cambridge to his elder brother, he said: 'I have written to father and to mother to permit me to take the vow of poverty and service. They may be frightened at the thought that that path might lead to suffering in the future. Personally I am not afraid of suffering-in fact, I would rather welcome it than shrink from it.'

39 In one more letter on 6 April 1921, written from Oxford Subhas Chandra informed his elder brother that he was fully conscious of the 'sacrifice' what he was determined to make. It meant poverty, suffering, hard work and possibly other hardships to which he did not expressly refer. But the sacrifice had got to be made-consciously and deliberately.

40 Is it possible to make such a great sacrifice 'consciously and deliberately' for a person lacking deep spiritual realization? While imprisoned in Insein Central Jail in 1927, the health of Subhas Chandra broke down. The British Government suggested his treatment in a foreign country, preferably in Switzerland but tagged, two conditions: (1) he would not be allowed to go home and meet his family members and friends before he sailed abroad. The ship by which Subhas Chandra would travel must not touch any port in India; (2) Subhas Chandra would have to stay abroad till the expiry of the Bengal Criminal Law Amendment Act, ie, till January 1930, and he would not be allowed to interact with anybody while in abroad.

41 Subhas Chandra, however, rejected these conditions as humiliating. While expressing his reaction to the first condition, Netaji, in a letter to his elder brother Sarat Chandra Bose on 4 April 1927, observed from Insein Central Jail: 'It is not easy for a Westerner to appreciate the deep attachment which Oriental people have for their kith and kin It would be typical only of a Western mind to presume that because I have not married-therefore I have no family (taking the word in its large sense) and no attachment for anyone.'

42 Regarding the second condition, the stand of Netaji was that it was not certain whether he would at all be allowed to return to India, as there was no guarantee that the Bengal Criminal Law Amendment Act would not be given another lease of life after January 1930.

43 The well-wishers of Netaji were insisting on him to accept these humiliating conditions if not for anything else, but solely for the sake of his better treatment abroad. At this Netaji, in a letter dated 6 May 1927, wrote to Sarat Chandra Bose from Insein Jail: 'I am not a shop-keeper and I do not bargain. The slippery paths of diplomacy I abhor as unsuited to my constitution. I have taken my stand on a principle and there the matter rests. I do not attach so much importance to my bodily life that I should strive to save it by a process of higgling. My conception of values is somewhat different from that of the market place and I do not think that success or failure in life should be determined by physical or material criteria. Our fight is not a physical one and it is not for a material object either.'

44 This incident again illustrates that one cannot develop such a determined and detached outlook on life without having a deep-rooted spiritual conviction. Social service: The second component of Netaji's social philosophy is his spirit of social service which is the product of his deep spiritual realization. Since boyhood he was actively associated with social work. During his school-days at Cuttack, accompanied by some friends, he used to go to the primary village schools situated in the outskirts of the town and did some teaching.

45 In 1913, when he came to Calcutta, he gradually realized that 'social service was an integral part of Yoga and it meant not merely relief to the halt, the maimed and the blind, but national reconstruction on modern lines.'

46 Towards the end of 1913 or the beginning of 1914, he joined an organization whose purpose was to give aid to the poor. This organization used to collect money and foodstuff every Sunday by begging from door to door. The begging used to be done by the student-volunteers and he was one of them.

47 After he had returned to Cuttack to spend his vacation with his parents, he, along with his friends, went to an interior village to nurse the cholera patients. In those days, cholera was a fatal disease and they took hardly any precautions against infection. This 'nursing expedition' continued for one week and this week's experience, in the words of Subhas Chandra, 'opened a new world before my eyes and unfolded a picture of real India, the India of the villages-where poverty stalks over the land, men die like flies, and illiteracy is the prevailing order.'

48 In 1915, there took place flood and famine in Bankura, Kumilla, Noakhali, etc. A flood and famine relief committee was set up at Presidency College which was chaired by the Principal, H. R. James. Subhas Chandra was one of the secretaries of the committee.

49 In a letter, dated 29 July 1915, to his friend Hemanta Kumar Sarkar, Subhas Chandra wrote: 'They have made me the Secretary of the College Famine Fund. I must work for it to a certain extent. There is no one else available Experience of famine is something that you cannot have all the time. My emotions want me to go-in fact I am eager to go ..."

50 After Subhas Chandra had returned to Cuttack as a 'rusticated student' in March 1916, he found enough time to devote himself to social service with 'passionate zeal'. At that time Cuttack and the surrounding areas were afflicted with cholera and small pox. Along with his old friends he used to go to different parts of the town and did voluntary nursing. This group of young men also worked in the cholera ward of the local Civil Hospital, for there were no trained nurses there. Further, they carried the dead bodies to the cremation ground and performed the funeral rites.

51 Subsequently, when Subhas Chandra joined active politics and emerged as one of the top leaders of the Indian National Congress, he set up a 'Sevasram' in South Calcutta. Till now this organization is functioning. Even from jail he kept detailed information about its activities. In a letter from Mandalay Jail in 1926, he wrote that he had not taken up Sevasram work as a whim. He could give up Congress work. But it was impossible for him to give up Sevasram work. 'Where else shall I get such a wonderful opportunity of serving 'Daridra Narayana'

52 asked Netaji. According to him, the first step towards equipping oneself for public service is to sacrifice all worldly interests and then devote oneself whole-heartedly to the national cause.

53 In a letter from Cambridge to Sarat Chandra Bose in February 1921, Subhas Chandra gave vent to his feeling on this subject. With a heavy heart he wrote to his fellow-traveller Bhupendra Nath Bandyopadhyay: 'Today many workers in Bengal have developed a strong business and traders' mentality. They have started saying: "give me power-else I shall not work". I should like to ask-since when has service to the poor been converted into a business or a contract? I always knew that the ideal of service was :

"fâ* fâ* [ôjî' >à[Ö Wjâ*
=àA_j (tm)[f ÔêjfiÚ Î'-o"

(Give away, ne'er turn to ask in return, Should there be the wealth treasured in thy heart.)

54 There is nothing surprising in that the Bengali who has already forgotten about Deshbandhu's sacrifice, should have forgotten Swami Vivekananda's 'Bir-Bani', preached so many years ago."

55 Netaji linked social service with spiritual feeling. In his autobiography, Netaji wrote: '...for spiritual development social service was necessary. The idea came probably from Vivekananda' for... he had preached the ideal of the service of humanity which included the service of one's country.'

56 Political action The political activism of Netaji is the result of his same spiritual conviction. Politics is a vital component of society. In Political Science we draw a line of distinction between the state and the society. There is a consensus among political scientists that the society is wider in concept than the state and that, in order of time, society is prior to the state. Nevertheless, the state is the most significant and society is an integral part of the state. Hence, any discussion of social philosophy shall include political philosophy. However, I do not intend to deal in detail with the political philosophy or thinking of Netaji. I like to mention only that Subhas Chandra was not a political philosopher, but was a selfless political actionist. He was never a systematic political thinker, nor he ever staked his claim to be so. He did not have the time to indulge in theorization about the political concepts. But he possessed a highly intellectual bent of mind and had enough foresight to plan well ahead of his time. From his diverse activities one can have a glimpse of his political thinking.

Attitude to alien rule As noted earlier, Subhas Chandra was the product of resurgent extremist nationalism of Bengal which was based on the cardinal principle that no sacrifice was too great for the cause of liberation of the motherland. He devoted himself to the Non-cooperation Movement body, heart and mind. But the sudden withdrawal of the movement in February 1922 by Gandhiji broke his heart. Subhas Chandra wrote in 'The Indian Struggle': 'To sound the order of retreat just when public enthusiasm was reaching the boiling-point was nothing short of a national calamity.'

57 After Gandhi-Irwin Pact and the postponement of the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1931, Netaji became sceptical about India's success under Gandhiji's leadership. At the Karachi Session of the Congress in March 1931, he opposed the Gandhi-Irwin Pact.

58 Netaji said: 'No real change in history has ever been achieved by discussions. The only alternative is war.'

59 In a joint statement, Subhas Chandra and Vithalbai Patel observed: 'Mr Gandhi as a political leader has failed', and called for 'a radical reorganization of the Congress on a new principle with a new method, for which a new leader is essential.'

60 After becoming the Congress President for the second time in 1939, Netaji wanted to give a notice to the British Government to leave the country within six months.

At the personal level both Subhas Chandra and Gandhiji had admiration for each other. Both were the two formidable sons of India who had a common goal to liberate India from the British rule and make a new India free from exploitation and oppression. The candidature of Subhas Chandra for the Congress Presidentship at the Haripura Session of the Congress in 1938 was sponsored by Gandhiji. In a conversation with Louis Fischer, an American journalist, Gandhiji described Netaji as a 'patriot of patriots.'

61 Gandhiji visited the INA detention camps more than once and in an address said: 'Netaji was like a son to me. I came to know him as a lieutenant full of promise under the late Desabandhu Das ...'

62 In his turn, Netaji, in an address from the Azad Hind Radio on 6 July 1944, described Gandhiji as the 'Father of our nation.'

63 In a broadcast on the occasion of Gandhiji's 75th birthday on 2 October 1943, Netaji said: 'The service which Mahatma Gandhi has rendered to India and to the cause of India's freedom is so unique and unparalleled that his name will be written in letters of gold in our national history for all time.'

64 Subhas Chandra and Gandhiji differed in their political technique. The former was convinced that the British rulers were so unscrupulous and inhuman that Gandhiji's non-violent means would not yield any result. According to him, it is futile to expect a change of heart in the British rulers merely through our own suffering and by trying to love them. There is no alternative to uncompromising struggle against British imperialism. In the Radio Broadcast address to Gandhiji over the Azad Hind Radio on 6 July 1944, Netaji said: 'The British Government will never surrender to persuasion or moral pressure or non-violent resistance.'

65 Hence, the adoption of any means to drive out the British rulers from the Indian soil will be justified, and in this respect, Bose and Gandhiji differed. Incidentally, it may be noted that the concept of 'Satyagraha' was not simply a political strategy to Gandhiji, but was a philosophy of life. Besides, the unique contribution of Gandhiji was to involve all sections of the Indian masses in the liberation movement, and that was not at all possible before Gandhiji who, in fact, fulfilled the dream of Swami Vivekananda in this respect. In Swamiji's view, the mission of any national organization should be for the destitute, the poor, the illiterate peasantry and the labouring classes.

66 In May or June 1897 at Almora, in his conversation with Aswini Kumar Datta, a prominent leader of the Indian National Congress, Vivekananda impressed upon him the urgency of involving the masses in the activities of the Congress.

67 It was Gandhiji who, for the first time, succeeded in involving the 'masses', in the true sense of the term, in the mainstream of the Congress and thereby of the Indian national movement.

Netaji's political modus operandi is described as militarism which is the natural corollary of his social philosophy. Netaji put emphasis upon the urgent need of a national army, strong and well-organized, to fight for the liberation of the country and also the maintenance of its freedom. Examples of Washington and Garibaldi, who achieved independence with the help of their national army, were in his mind. Netaji felt that unless the might of British imperialism was wrecked from outside, it would be difficult to ask them to surrender. To him, there is no harm in taking the help of outside powers on the basis of reciprocal relationship. Citing example from history, he argued that Garibaldi had taken the help of Austria's enemies. For the downfall of Czarist regime in Russia, Lenin had taken the help of 'reactionaries' even.

Concept of samyabad

According to Netaji, after independence, nationalism should be based on socialism. Establishment of socialism or 'samyabad' (he himself coined the term) was his important political goal. He was the first political personality within the Indian National Congress to define the objectives of Indian freedom in terms of socialist objectives. In his presidential address at the Haripura Session of the Congress in 1938, Netaji said: 'I have no doubt in my mind that our chief national problems relating to the eradication of poverty, illiteracy and disease and to scientific production and distribution can be effectively tackled only along socialistic lines.'

68 Although a separate subject of comprehensive discussion, the cardinal principles of Netaji's socialism included the adoption of economic planning as a technique to achieve the goal of socialism (Indeed, the history of our freedom struggle will remember with profound regard Netaji as the father of Indian National Planning.), assigning limited role to the private sector and greater role to the public sector in the initial years after independence, special emphasis on improving the lot of the peasants (agrarian reform on the basis of reform of land-system, including abolition of landlordism, abolition of agricultural indebtedness, formation of co-operative institutions, etc.)

69, ensuring the linguistic and cultural autonomy for all sections of the Indian community, assimilation of all the knowledge that the outside world could give and which would be of benefit to the material prosperity of India without, however, sacrificing the original character of the

Indian society and culture. Among other things, Netaji put emphasis upon the development of heavy industries and planned industrial development (In this respect Netaji sharply differed from Gandhiji and came closer to Nehru.) and categorically stated that there should be no discrimination on gender ground. He also advocated Municipal Socialism, ie, to utilize the municipality for the service of the community as a whole.

70 Netaji rejected the concepts of materialistic interpretation of history and class-struggle, the two basic postulates of Marxism-Leninism. He said: 'Class-conflict is something that is quite unnecessary in India.'

71 Likewise, Vivekananda observed: 'You must take care not to set up class-strife between the poor peasants, the labouring people and the wealthy classes.'

72 Having deep-rooted spiritual feeling and conviction, Netaji disliked the anti-religious and atheistic stance of Marxism-Leninism. Besides, Netaji observed: 'Communism today has no sympathy with Nationalism in any form and the Indian movement is Nationalist movement, a movement for the national liberation of Indian people.'

73 In brief, Netaji's idea of socialism did not conform to socialism of the Marxian model or any conventional form. He said: 'Indian Socialism did not derive its birth from the books of Karl Marx. It has its origin in the thought and culture of India.'

74 Strong government For the implementation of socialist principles, Netaji advocated a strong government with a single party rule committed to the principles of nationalism and socialism as well as military discipline, for a temporary period. In his own words, 'there must be a strong central government by a strong party bound together by military discipline.'⁷⁵ There is, however, disagreement of views among the political thinkers whether Netaji had a feeling of contempt or abhorrence for the British system of parliamentary democracy.

To sum up, Netaji's political activity and thinking, though scattered, are the reflection of his social philosophy, and deep spiritual conviction is a basic determinant of his social philosophy.

Notes and References

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