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## Political Philosophy of Subhas Chandra Bose, Bengali Revolutionary Nationalist, 1897-1945

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THE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF  
SUBHAS CHANDRA BOSE, BENGALI  
REVOLUTIONARY NATIONALIST, 1897-1945

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. . . He (Subhas Bose) gave to India her first Azad Hind Raj, a "Free Indian State," and with it her great national salutation Jai Hind "Glory to India," side by side with Bankim Chandra's gift Vande Mataram "I Salute Thee Mother." For all that he has achieved, his name and fame will be a beacon light for all Indians, irrespective of caste, creed or colour; and he will be a pattern and exemplar for all lovers of their country and people, who want to see them free. To have known such a man is a great honour; and to have come in touch with him, even in a perfunctory manner, is certainly a great good fortune . . . I have sought to give a record of . . . one, who, for the spirituality of his outlook, the depth of his love for his motherland and the greatness of his achievement, can without travesty be hailed as a **Patriot Saint of India** . . . Suniti Kumar Chatterji.

Subhas Chandra Bose, (1897-1945), as Bengali Revolutionary Nationalist, is a sort of Jekyll-Hyde yet Roosevelt-Hitler type of mutant in modern Indian political history. The only All-India Congress Party rival and ideologist who ever seriously challenged Mahandas Gandhi's leadership, Bose's political philosophy was sprinkled with fascist and communist ideas as well as being based upon Indian and British political thought. Subhas Bose, of more pragmatic bent than the Mahatma, more nearly resembled the activism of C. R. Das, the Patels, Lajpat Rai, Tilak, and Motilal Nehru, who followed a relatively forceful policy. Allegedly, Bose would, on the edge of violence, advise the use of force—even the bomb and revolver—as reprisals, although the lack of weapons in itself made Gandhi's non-violent technique ultimately obvious even to Bose and the question of armed terror irrelevant. Gandhi, therefore, had no problem with either Congress strongman, Sardar Patel, or Congress Socialist, Pandit Nehru, once his charismatic leadership of the masses had been established and his method proved successful, such as the sensational Salt March to the sea.

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Bose, on the other hand, had rejected Gandhi as his guide after returning from Cambridge in 1921. Deshabandhu C. R. Das, Congress leader of Bengal, appealed to Bose's pragmatic sense and became his political guru, or teacher. They were very close—Bose was Calcutta Mayor Das's chief executive officer, and they served political prison sentences together. The untimely death of Das in 1925 caused Bose to assume domination of Congress in Bengal, once the rural faction of J. M. Sen Gupta was brought into line. Editing the party newspaper, serving as labor and youth leader, as Bengal and National Congress officer, Bose performed admirably as an executive. The Volunteers he commanded, uniformed, and drilled before the 1928 Calcutta National Congress session, were a portent of the future Netaji's I. N. A. Whether to be called an example of Karl Wittfogel's "oriental despotism," Hitler's "fuhrer prinzeip," (Netaja means leader), or Lenin and Stalin's "dictatorship of the proletariat," the second but high caste Kshatriya Bose was "acting out" his warrior caste tradition, and in the following years was to become an eclectic authoritarian.

Norman D. Palmer in *The Indian Political System* (1961) refers to Paul Appleby's appraisal of modern Indian political leadership as being "extraordinary" with reference to such leaders as Gandhi, Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel, and before them Tagore, Gokhale, and Tilak. Palmer considers the latter along with Gandhi, Bose, Vinoba Bhave (Gandhi's disciple), Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, and Nehru to be truly "charismatic," to use Max Weber's term for the near-demigod in mass politics. Since Indians place great emphasis on the good effects resulting from personal contact with a "great man," called *darshan*, the concept of the hero in history is especially important there. It is ironic that both Carlyle and Nietzsche gave vent to such themes in Europe about the time of that second great rush for overseas colonies in the African chapter of colonialism in late nineteenth century. However, from Joseph Conrad to Hannah Arendt, keen observers of that mad race for raw materials, have shown the brutalization that primitive conditions effectuated upon effete examples of Western Culture—like Kurtz and Carl Peters, causing a more calloused capitalistic leadership than ever before—such as Leopold decimating the Congo tribesmen or Wilhelm boasting of the new Huns (his Germans) in putting down the Boxers. Likewise, in twentieth century India, both before and after independence, illiterate masses, fragmented politically in village life, must have "democracy" imposed upon them from above. Nehru, nevertheless, has not abused his powers.

Subhas Bose saw the need for the greatest possible national unity in the new free India to withstand the decentraliza-

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tion tendencies of linguistic and historical differences engendering bitterness, hate, and suspicion between regions, not to mention casteism and communalism. Both Selig S. Harrison's *India: The Most Dangerous Decades* (1960) and Amaury de Rien-court's *The Soul of India* (1960) point out such Balkanization problems facing India in the 1960's and the latter also refers to "the most baffling set of social and economic problems likely to present themselves anywhere in the world." They fear a dictator, such as Ayub Kahn of Pakistan or Soekarno of Indonesia, may soon be indicated for India to hold the nation together against these divisive forces. Harrison is especially concerned with the linguistic nationalisms that have already divided Bombay state and threaten to create a separate Sikhdom state out of Punjab. Because of the unpopularity of Hindi in the non-Hindi speaking areas, Harrison not only fears the decline of English as lingua franca but also looks somewhat wistfully at Subhas Bose's 1938 Congress Presidential Address at Haripura in which he called for the use of the Roman script for the Hindustani basic language employed in the British Indian Army to be considered for the unifying of all India itself.

Norman Palmer cites such diverse pessimists about liberal democracy's future in India as Jayprakash Narayan, C. Rajagopalachari, India's only Governor-General during the interim before Republic Day in 1950 and now leader of the Swatantra right-wing, anti-socialist political party, and Suniti Kumar Chatterji. The latter, professor of Calcutta University, in his "Personal Reminiscences" for the Netaji commemoration volume edited by S. R. Sharma, (Agra, 1951), relates:

Subhas is no more, he is now gathered to the Hall of Heroes . . . he turned lifeless and brainless automata into living and thinking men. The personnel of the Indian Army, magnificent fighters, but unthinking pawns in the Englishman's game of imperialism, were made by him to feel for the first time in a hundred and fifty years that they too were men, and had their duty to their people and country — their destiny was not to remain for ever the slaves of the British Sarkar . . .

Chatterji also praised Bose's proving Hindu-Muslim communalism "is an artificial creation, an incubus" of the British colonial divide and rule policy, pitting people alike in blood, language, culture, history, life and mind against each other because of the "outer paraphernalia of formal religion." He credits Bose with making "the Hindu and the Muslim, the

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Sikh and the Christian, and the native Indian and the Anglo-Indian, feel as brothers, as one Indian people, single and indivisible." This great achievement—brought to light at the post-war trial of the I. N. A. officers (one Sikh, one Muslim, and one Hindu) for war crimes and treason, brought such reaction in the form of naval mutinies, police strikes, and riots in the major cities that the British transfer of power was surely hastened.

Chatterji's valedictory is certainly one of darshan. It is certainly overdone, but is sincere. New York Times reporter A. M. Rosenthal has described the alternative to the method of "totalitarian democracy," whether it is called guided, partyless, or equalitarian (Bose's term) as "the attempt of the Government to match the awakening desires of an enormous population and to convince itself and the people that they should resist the attractions of what seem to be the swifter methods of authoritarianism." Norman Palmer, himself a pessimist about Nehru's liberalism surviving him, cites the great successor to Gandhi as believing the peaceful Indian revolution was truly revolutionary and one of the most significant in world history, but was far from complete in the social and economic sphere.

This latter phase must necessarily mean transforming a caste-ridden society into a truly secular national state, where religion is not mixed up in politics. As Dr. Ambedkar, India's best known "untouchable," has said, during the draft constitutional debates: "The religious conceptions in this country are so vast that they cover every aspect of life from birth to death." Norman Palmer has concluded, in fact, that there is no such thing as Indian political theory *per se*, separate from Hindu religious concepts. In fact, Palmer cites Professor J. P. Suda as concluding that a truly secular state would not be anti-religious or irreligious, but merely neutral in religious matters; yet, the danger in this idea would be the loss of the peculiar Indian genius for spiritual greatness, which Arthur Koestler fails to find relevant today in his provocative recent book, *The Lotus and the Robot*, (1960), debunking the mysteries of the East as offering no answer to the ills of "Western materialism."

Nevertheless, religion was strongly used to free India politically, and may be difficult to eradicate from the social revolution. Subhas Bose, himself, differed with Nehru on the question of communism in the 1930's over the religious matter, with Bose siding closer to Indian tradition. Tilak, the Maharashtra activist, revived the cult of Shivaji, the great seventeenth century Maratha warrior-hero in the 1890's. The Gan-

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apati festivals were used for political purposes. He also reinterpreted the *Bhagavad Gita* so as to preach a philosophy of political and religious action. This was similar to the interpretation of Ramakrishna's divinings by the Bengali, Swami Vivekananda. The latter proposed the "Sannyasi Statesman" as the noblest ideal, and his teaching captivated the young Subhas Bose's mind. Then, after World War I, the Gandhian campaigns of satyagraha (soul force) and ahimsa (nonviolence) as well as his theories of "only good means to achieve ends" gained hold. The Bengali remained more activist in the Tilak tradition, however, and Bose himself made public obeisance to the Goddess Kali, the symbolic representation of *Shakti*, primal power. During post-World War I, India was ripe for Gandhi's new method of non-violence, non-cooperation, mass protest, boycott, and strike. The relatively small terrorist movement in Bengal and Punjab, plus such conspirators with the Germans as Har Dayal's *Ghadar* (Mutiny) Conspiracy in California and Mahendra Pratap's Turco-German Mission in Europe, led the British to suppress rather than reward the thousands of Indians who had fought and died for their masters in many lands.

By the time World War II threatened liquidation of the British Empire, Subhas Bose nearly symbolized all that had gone wrong between India and Great Britain. Despite an overall enlightened record of British colonialism in India—medicines and sanitation information saved lives, but ironically, increased famine victims; railroads crisscrossed India to bring grain to sufferers and accelerate population growth but could also carry repressive troops—racial discrimination was certainly the ultimate source of the social antagonism which led to the naval mutinies at the time of the I. N. A. trials. Although the British authority, Phillip Mason, contends the Labor Government was ready to quit India anyway, British Intelligence Officer Hugh Teye's first-hand biography of Bose, *The Springing Tiger*, convincingly shows that Netaji's glorification by Nehru and Congress leaders at the Red Fort trial was a calculated and successful campaign. The sensationalism of Sunday supplement stories in the Indian press that Bose was still alive was confirmed by Sardar Bose. Brother Subhas was allegedly prepared to lead a People's Army out of Communist China. Sardar's landslide victory and other Leftist successes at the polls in post-Republic Bengali politics, especially in Bengal, helped perpetuate the myth for years. Two AIFB lower house members won in 1962 in Calcutta. It further remains a tragedy that the two all-Indian leaders, Gandhi and Bose, who both so steadfastly opposed partitioning Pakistan, were not permitted opportunity to personally attempt a unified approach. But mar-

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tyrdom in each case—Bose for independence, Gandhi for communal understanding—left their legends more lasting.

Bose had two political philosophies: Marxist and **Forward Blocist**. The former he derived from his Red Flag trade union and youth group contacts, from visits with Benes, Laski, Romain Rolland, his longtime friendship with Nehru, and finally, in death, the objective use by the Communists of his personal popularity as revolutionary myth. His concert with the Axis in his career's finale, and his association, literally, with Mussolini, Hitler, and Tojo, fix his star as a symbol of totalitarian dictatorship and enemy of Western democracy. Indians honor him, however, for his unmitigated harassment of the British Raj—more as the Tom Paine than the Benedict Arnold, as some British hold, of the Indian Revolution.

However, Bose's ashes still lie in an urn in a temple in Japan, and have been officially so established. (Tom Paine, incidentally, still remains an atheistic American Founding Father never yet commemorated on a postage stamp.) The similarity is that both share some tarnish, or in Bose's case, taint. His argument with Nehru in **A Bunch of Old Letters** that Jewish refugees should not be accepted from Germany because it would give a certificate of good conduct to the real enemy, Great Britain, was callous. Some reports of Bose after the futile efforts of his "malaria units" at Imphal are discrediting, namely Hugh Teye's, although Major General Shah Nawaz Khan, Deputy Communications Minister in New Delhi, rescues his military reputation in his published memoirs.

Selig Harrison refers to Bose as the "most categorical" and "unabashed" candidate for "dictatorship in India's political heritage" in his **The Most Dangerous Decades**. Harris Wofford, recently an assistant to the President of the United States, now in charge of the U. S. Peace Corps program for Africa, has in 1960 written in a personal letter:

. . . For me Subhas represents the X factor in the politics of India—the immeasurable, incoherent, largely irrational force of superstition and frustration and anger and violence which lurks under the surface in every country. . . Nehru has outfoxed these forces in India, at least for the time being and has been on balance a successful calming factor, however ineffective he seems to me to be in dealing with many of India's most pressing problems . . . In 1957, I was struck by how much progress, at least on the surface, the process of westernization . . . has made. Yet we see only the top of the iceberg. What is below the surface is beyond us, but I fear that what I here called the X factor is not at all dead there.

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As a quasi-totalitarian ideologue, Bose typically invoked the name of justice and history. In *The Indian Struggle*, 1935-1942 Bose stated:

. . . But Forward Bloc will have no truck with Imperialism. Socially, Gandhism is intimately linked up with the "haves"—the vested interests. As the "have-nots" are becoming class conscious . . . the breach . . . is widening . . . With regard to the future, Gandhian ideas of post-struggle reconstruction which are partly medieval and partly anti-socialist are contrary to those of the Forward Bloc, which has a thoroughly modern outlook and stands for socialistic reconstruction.

Perhaps the historical conflict between Gandhi and Bose represents the paradigmatic conflict — the Jefferson-Hamilton myth — in the developing story of modern India.