

The Other Side of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose

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With that supernatural personal charisma, Subhas Bose kept addressing the mammoth gathering in the rains for hours, while assuming the leadership of the INA in July 1943, on arrival from Germany. The audience kept dancing in maddening excitement at his every exhortation, shouting and pledging sacrifice for India, their motherland.

The above phenomenon in S. E. Asia reflects the mass appeal of Netaji known to many. But it would be equally intriguing to note his relatively lesser known emotional temperament. Two such incidents can be cited as memorable.

Once while on a visit to Bangladesh (erstwhile East Bengal), as Bengal Congress President, Bose had asked the boatman as to why was he so afraid to cross over the Padma river in a stormy weather? The boatman had replied that it was not for himself but for the safety of the illustrious passenger and his entourage, that he was anxious about. This brought tears to Bose's eyes, who, however, diverted the attention of his companions by joining the boatman in a Bhatiali song, followed by a Shyama Sangeet (song devoted to Goddess Kāli) and Tagore's 'O Amar Desher Maati' by himself.

On another occasion, while putting a new badge on Zaman Kiani, promoting him to the rank of an INA General, he said, 'In a

foreign land, this is all that I can do for you Kiani Sahib, for the great services rendered by you' and tears rolled down his cheeks, which affected the entire military gathering and they wept.

The domesticities of this irrepressible *prince among patriots* also makes interesting reading. Once when his wife Emilie Schenkl kept on insisting from Vienna for bangles from India, Bose, being totally unsure of the lady's choice, pacified her by declaring that the best of the glass bangles in the world being imported from Czechoslovakia or Japan, she should better try buying them in Europe itself. However, his justification for not sending our Indian tea was much stronger in the sense that he hated wasting money by paying 10 shillings as duty for a pound of tea!

On the other hand, Bose's genuine keenness in capturing the ethereal beauty of Kanchanjunga or Dalhousie during the rains in his camera and sending out the best snaps to Vienna and his ardent passion for purchasing some of the best art books and Viennese or German classical music records, bring to light the other facets of his character. Emilie had to be sternly cautioned by Bose to 'think thrice before you act' after she had bungled in spending a huge sum of money in airmailing to him from Vienna to Badgastein, an entire lot of his clothing, even though she was repeatedly told to send only the 'Trench coat'.

Many domestic trivialities such as teaching her yogurt preparation or dieting exercises through his letters (while himself suffering in Yarawada jail or Arthur Road prison) or giving lessons on ‘Nishkāma’ prayer or on demarcations between Kaffee, Cafe and Coffee, sending stamps to her for collection or quips on his Bengali Dhoti-Kurta clad photographs, highlight the lighter, witty, romantic side of Netaji. His love of nature becomes alive in his expressions on mad waterfalls (‘Pagla Jhora’) of Darjeeling or the snow-capped Alpine peaks (‘grand and sublime’).

His emphatic views on how Austria could compete with Switzerland in attracting more Indian tourists or his masterly analysis ranging from Goethe’s Shakuntalā to the German version of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, on to India’s Olympic chances in Hockey or his amusingly candid contention that being born in the previous century he was too old for Emilie, reveal to us a different Bose, more homely, more close, more credible, more earthly.

Human proximity

While languishing in sick bed in a cold Calcutta hospital, with deafening cacophony of street traffic all day long, coupled with painful cries of patients around, he had smilingly remarked that the noisy, crowded, smelly atmosphere was more comforting to him because of human proximity, rather than the never-ending isolation in jails. A similar humorous remark followed his visit to Lahore (now in Pakistan) after resigning from the second term of Congress Presidentship. On receiving a much warmer reception, he said *‘India is a strange place, here people love you for giving up power, rather than for being in power.’*

It makes one shiver in thrill at the unconventional approach adopted by him in

growing a Pathan-like beard within the confines of a tent (set up in his Elgin Road bedroom itself) prior to his great escape, in the guise of the Empire of India travelling insurance man, Mohd. Ziauddin. Of course this Pathan disguise proved a little too good when his earnest endeavour to stop the Russian ambassador’s car in a Kabul bazaar failed because the Russian refused to be convinced that he was Bose.

Coming back to amusing events, we are reminded of a period when Bose was recuperating from a ‘strange illness’ during February 1939 in Calcutta. Good wishes kept pouring in from all over the country, in form of packets, amulets, *ashirvādi* flower, sacrificial ashes, etc. from Hakims, Vaidis, Homeopaths, Naturopaths, Astrologers, Parsi specialists, etc. Bose, though innately rationalistic, wished to respect the sentiments of the people (like when asked to shave his head on his father’s death, Bose obeyed, but not before questioning Gauri Nath Shastri, ‘Do the Shastras say so?’) but in the process he found to his utter dismay, his pillows had started getting elevated to unusual heights, with the materials underneath!! There were also rings with gems to combat Tantrik *‘Mārana-Kriyā’*. To top it all, came along ‘Gluckslee’ from Vienna, a special plant to bring in good luck!

It is interesting to note the modern and liberal outlook of Bose when he advises his nephew in Germany, as far back as in 1938 to go ahead and marry the ‘out-of-caste-girl’, as every man and woman had the right to marry the person of his or her choice. Besides one must take up studies on sex, prior to marriage.

The way Bose could inflame the spirit of self-sacrifice in a person is well known: a classic example being the old Muslim businessman Seth Habib in Singapore in

1943, who left his entire fortune and as a pauper, joined the INA. However, relatively lesser known is the amusing incident of a Japanese girl getting impressed by Bose. It was in 1944, on a return journey from Tokyo to Singapore that Bose, with a batch of senior INA officers, was being entertained by Japanese geisha performers over dinner in a Nagasaki hotel, as the Governor's special guests. The banjo-playing girl, at the end of her delightfully lively performance, insisted that she should spend the night in Bose's room. Bose, like a benign Buddha (with an expression of deep contemplation) humoured her like a kind parent, persuaded her to go back home, without really hurting the feelings of the starry-eyed young fan.

Minor irritants

'No coffee, No parade' agitations among military recruits in INA were minor irritants those days. The way Bose had tackled the problem of too many religious greetings in his army (comprising Garhwalis, Dogras, Rajputs, Sikhs, Muslims, Christians, etc.), by simply substituting his brilliant innovation 'Jai Hind' (the term we use even today) and the way he came endearingly close to the common soldier and deservingly earned the everlasting label of 'Netaji' show his marksmanship in human relations. With this we realize how wrong Shedai of Indian Legion was when he tried to belittle Bose by remarking that since Orlando Mazotta (Bose's passport name in Germany) belonged to a class that had nothing in common with the soldiers, he could not understand them. A more sinister scar on Bose as 'an extremist, a wild man, a menace to society' was quashed by the foreign editor (W. N. Ewar) of the *Daily Herald*, London, when he commented on Bose's book '*Indian Struggle*' on 28

January, 1935 that here was a book that was both 'calm, dispassionate and an ablest work on current Indian politics', not possible by a person with the above dubious distinction.

It is undeniably an uphill task to fathom the depths of Netaji's character. For example, even while exclaiming at the beauty of Belgian countryside ('I feel it like a dream!') in the company of Vithalbhai Patel in 1933, the moment the doorman at the entrance of a famous Casino (in the same place, near Antwerp) requests him to take off his Indian long coat, he cancels his programme and walks off without a word. This once again vindicates the clarity of his thought and action.

His well-known 'one-point-aim' mission (coined frequently by his close friend Dilip Kumar Ray and his first biographer Hugh Toyne) of overthrowing the 'white-faced foreigner', nucleated in Presidency College and proved to be the turning-point for his lifelong resolute conviction. He admitted later recalling the tragic events of 1916 and their inner significance: 'my Principal expelled me but he had made my future career'.

Rewinding back to amusing events, Laxmi Sehgal had recalled later that as 1939 passed to 1940 and England pre-occupied became England in-Peril, Bose's elation grew. As the news came over the radio that France had fallen, his face lit up with joy, he hugged some of us and danced around the room like a merry school boy, because he was pleased to see that India could take advantage of it.

Such 'One-point-aim' persons do not abound. Hence, eventhough Lord Almighty has blessed us with a billion, most of us being multi-point-aim persons, there is a heady cocktail of aim-clashing, bringing the net result to 'you know—better'. ■

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(Continued from page 23)

- each other, discrimination is noticed in household management. The wife had to bear all the burden in managing the household affairs.
- (vii) The brotherless daughter's right of inheritance was first recognized in Vedic period.
- (viii) In Vedic India, wife had no legal right over her husband's property. She had only ownership over her wedding gifts.
- (ix) On the basis of the references of the *Rigveda* and the *Atharvaveda* cited in the text of the paper, Upadhyay concluded that the unmarried daughter had the share over her father's property. But the word 'share' was not clearly defined by him in his book—*Women in Rig Veda*. But we maintain that an unmarried daughter with brother had no right over her father's property; she had only the privilege of maintenance of her father's property.
- (x) So far as the married daughter was concerned, she had no right over her father's property. She could only claim the gifts given to her at the time of marriage.
- (xi) Generally widows had no right over her husband's property. But the widows acquired their husband's share as the guardians of their minor sons. But if the widows were remarried, they did not get any share of their husband's property.
- (xii) In Vedic period men were engaged in many occupations, but women were only engaged in weaving industry reflecting imposition of restrictions on the choice of occupation for women. ■

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