CHAPTER-II

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The present work is an attempt towards critical evaluation of the political thoughts of Subhas Chandra Bose. A proper assessment of his political thoughts will not be possible without an analysis of his philosophy of life.

Subhas Chandra Bose’s philosophy of life was mainly influenced by Swami Vivekananda’s (a great Indian monk and philosopher) idea of personal salvation and service to humanity. Bose said, “I was barely fifteen when Vivekananda entered my life. Then there followed a revolution within and everything was turned upside down. It was, of course, a long time before I could appreciate the full significance of his teachings or the greatness of his personality, but certain impressions were stamped indelibly on
As he was writing the early part of his life in Austria, Bose expressed his intention to write three chapters on his fundamental beliefs, namely, ‘My faith - Philosophical’, ‘My faith - Political’ and ‘My faith - Economic.’ These were to form the last three chapters of his unfinished autobiography, *An Indian Pilgrim*. Of these, he was, however, able to write only one. Bose attempted to sum up his philosophical ideas in a short article titled, ‘My Personal Testament’ which he drafted much later during his confinement in the Presidency Jail, Calcutta, in 1940.

Being conscious of a mission in his life and being imbued with an idea, Subhas Chandra Bose came to realize that for the development of his full-manhood, he was to be an embodiment of the past, product of the present and prophet of the future. To put it in his own words, “I now understand that to be a man in the real sense there are three prerequisites:

1) Embodiment of the past

2) Product of the present

3) Prophet of the future
“(1) I must assimilate the past history, in fact, all the past civilization of the world.

“(2) I must study myself - study the world around me - both India and abroad....

“(3) I must be the prophet of the future - I must discover the laws of progress - the tendency of both the civilizations and, therefore, settle the future goal and progress of mankind. The philosophy of life will alone help me in this.”

Subhas Chandra Bose’s interest in philosophy was deep-rooted and fundamental. He studied philosophy with keen interest to get at the real truth. Though an ardent student of Philosophy, he could hardly find any opportunity in the midst of his hectic life to deal with the philosophical problems in depth. Still, in the chapter ‘My faith - Philosophical’, in his unfinished autobiography, *An Indian Pilgrim* written only in ten days during his stay in Austria in 1937, there is the revelation of his philosophical outlook, though in a very concise form. It was his conviction that no realization of the higher purpose in life was possible except through an ordeal of
intense suffering and sacrifice. In one of his letters to his friend, Dilip Kumar Roy from Mandalay Jail on 11.9.1925, Bose wrote, “Is it not true that we are all philosophers in embryo, and it only requires a touch of suffering to awaken the philosophical impulse?” He made it very clear that complete realization of an ideal was not possible without supreme renunciation. He put the idea most admirably in a letter to his friend, Dilip Kumar Roy from Bombay (now Mumbai) on 21.12.1931: “Do you want the fragrance of the full-bloom rose? If so, you must accept the thorns. Do you want the sweetness of the smiling dawn? If so, you must live life through the dark hours of the night. Do you want the job of liberty and the solace of freedom? If so, you must pay the price, and the price of liberty is suffering and sacrifice.” He made it very clear that complete realization of an ideal was not possible without supreme renunciation. Bose further remarked, “If you are to make supreme sacrifice for an ideal, you have to accept that ideal in its fullest. In order to fully realize an ideal you must be prepared to renounce everything for its sake. Renunciation and realization are the two sides of one and the same thing. I am literally pining for this
complete realization on the one hand and supreme renunciation on the other.⁶

In his earlier life, Subhas Chandra Bose accepted Shankaracharya’s (a great Indian mystic) Theory of Maya (illusion) as the quintessence of truth and believed that it was possible for man to comprehend the absolute truth; but later on Bose changed his view. He refused to abandon the world as illusion. Bose accepted the supremacy of God but adhered to the conception of the reality of the world and creation. Subsequently, he came to believe in the concept of progressive evolution. For the acceptance of the concept of progress, Bose illustrated three factors, “Observation and study of nature...intuitive experience.... and consideration on biological and moral grounds.”⁷

Subhas Chandra Bose felt that though the Sankhya philosophy (a system expounded by an ancient Indian sage Kapila
dealing with the evolution of the world) was the oldest endeavour to describe the evolutionary progress in nature, it could not appeal to the human mind. In this connection, he referred to the Spencerian Theory of Evolution from the simple to the complex - Hartmann’s notion of the manifestation of blind will and Bergson’s idea of creative evolution. All of these theories were, in his opinion, inadequate and the Hegelian theory of dialectical evolution was acceptable to him. To put it in his own words, “All these theories have undoubtedly an element of truth. Each of the above thinkers has endeavoured to reveal the truth, as he has perceived it. But undoubtedly, Hegel’s Theory is the nearest approximation to truth. It explains the facts more satisfactorily than any other theory.”

Though Subhas Chandra Bose was influenced by Hegel’s theory of dialectical evolution, he did not subscribe to the Hegelian conception of the rational character of reality. Rather than accepting the rational character of reality, he observed, “For me, the essential nature of reality is Love. Love is the essence of the
Universe and is the essential principle in human life.... This statement may be challenged when one can see so much in life that is opposed to love; but the paradox can be easily explained. The ‘essential principle’ is not fully manifested yet; it is unfolding itself in space and time. Love, like reality, of which it is the essence, is dynamic....Reality, therefore, is spirit, the essence of which is Love, gradually unfolding itself in an eternal play of conflicting forces and their solutions.”

Thus, Bose’s approach to reality was essentially humanistic. Obviously, M.C. Taggart, the Cambridge Neo-Hegelian, influenced him also.

On the nature of reality of the world of phenomena, Subhas Chandra Bose kept his mind remarkably open. He said, “On the question as to the nature of the world of phenomena, we better keep an open mind while making note of all that science has revealed to us so far. More light is bound to come, as science makes further advance. Meanwhile, we should bear in mind that the old conception of materialism has broken down completely. It has been under crossfire, being attacked by scientific research on
one side and by philosophical reasoning and speculation on the other. Subhas Chandra was a firm believer in the creative role of ideas and ideals in moulding human history. As Bose puts it in his political Testament, "In this mortal world everything perishes and will perish - but ideas, ideals and dreams do not. One individual may die for an idea but that idea will, after his death, incarnate itself in a thousand lives. That is how the wheels of evolution move on and the ideas, ideals and dreams of one generation are bequeathed to the next. No idea has ever fulfilled itself in this world except through an ordeal of suffering and sacrifices."

One of his foreign admirers, Mrs. Kitty Kurti, described Bose as "...an outstanding person, a mystic, a spiritual man." His mystic and musician friend, Dilip Kumar Roy's assessment about him was, "Netaji was a mystic par excellence and not a mere politician." Subhas Chandra was not merely a politician, but a philosopher in a true sense - a philosopher, whose religion was love and dedication to the cause of his country and humanity at large.
Ever since his boyhood, both the Eastern and Western ideals of life attracted Bose’s mind. The spiritual heritage and philosophical legacy of India moulded his spirit. At the same time, he learnt to admire the Western culture, science, sociology, economy and the rich stock of knowledge. Bose emphasized the point that the Indians should profit by the experience of other countries, by striking a balance with their own needs, traditions and environments. As he said, “India should learn from and profit by the experience of other nations - but India should be able to evolve her own methods in keeping with her own needs and her own environments. In applying any theory to practice, you can never rule out our geography or history.”

One of the main factors, which triggered Bose’s political feelings, was the impolite behaviour of the Britishers towards the native Indians in the streets of Calcutta, in railway compartments and other places. He felt that if there was any interracial conflict emanating from the British misbehaviour then no proper justice could be found. Bose personally experienced such
incidents. His belief in Shankaracharya’s doctrine of ‘Maya’ was surely taken aback. He said, “It was quite impossible to persuade myself that to be insulted by a foreigner was an illusion to be ignored.”16 Bose noted in his unfinished autobiography, An Indian Pilgrim, that it was the beginning of the First World War in July 1914, which made him examine once again all his previous ideas. By that time, he was rather disappointed with yogis and ascetics and he asked himself whether it was possible to divide a nation’s life into two compartments and handover one aspect to the foreigners, while keeping the other half for the Indians. He soon arrived at a clear-cut conclusion, ‘If India was to be a modern civilized nation, she would have to pay the price and she would not by any means shirk the physical, the military problem. Those who worked for the country’s emancipation would have to be prepared to take charge of both civil and military administration.”17

Bose’s mind gradually turned from a religion-cum-social service orientation to politics. He became convinced that the “Political freedom was indivisible and meant complete
independence from foreign control. The War had shown that nations which did not possess military strength could not hope to preserve independence. "18

It is noted in his unfinished autobiography, *An Indian Pilgrim* that when a British Professor in the Presidency College, Prof. Oaten persisted in his insults on India and Indians, he took up the leadership of the students, who wanted to teach Prof. Oaten a proper lesson - a physical one. Although Bose himself was not involved in the fracas, but as the leader of the group, he was expelled from the College. This was the beginning of his 'Political' life from where there was no turning back. His system of ideas is a revolutionary doctrine in the context of Indian history, culture and civilization. It is against imperialism, oppression and exploitation of mankind. It is based on the Indian philosophy and thought and keeps with modern science and human values, assimilating the modern Western philosophical, political and material thoughts from their experiments.
Bose's political doctrine consisted of:

(a) Total and patriotic mobilization of the entire people of India for 'Unconditional Independence'.

(b) Military and moral training of the active and to-be-active soldiers for getting rid of the political enslavement.

(c) National self-respect and self-confidence, the two most essential qualities and essential pre-conditions for attaining independence from political subjugation, slavery and economic exploitation.

In support of the above, it can be mentioned here that Miss Khurshed Naoroji, grand-daughter of Dadabhai Naoroji (former Congress leader and the first Indian member of the British Parliament), convincingly remarked to the American publicist Louis Fischer — "if Bose entered India as the head of the Indian Army, he could rally the whole country" for implementation of his first goal.  

Bose's political Testament and message to the people of India contained the following fundamental views: "Forget
not that the greatest curse for a man is to remain a slave. Forget not that the grossest crime is to compromise with injustice and wrong. Remember the eternal law: You must give life, if you want to get it. And remember that the highest virtue is to battle against inequity, no matter what the cost may be."21

The basis of Bose’s political doctrine was renunciation and it can be found from his historical letter, ‘My Political Testament’, addressed to His Excellency, the Governor of Bengal, the Hon’ble Chief Minister of Bengal and the Council of Ministers. He wrote this historical letter from the Presidency Jail, Calcutta on 26th November, 1940. He had mentioned in this letter that the last weapon that a prisoner can resort to is hunger strike, without compromising with the brutal atrocities of the Government. This realization is reflected in the following lines of Bose’s Political Testament:

“What greater solace can there be than the feeling that one has lived and died for a principle? What higher satisfaction can a man possess than the knowledge that his spirit will beget kindred spirits to carry on his unfinished task? What better
reward can a soul desire than the certainty that his message will be wafted over hills and dales and over the broad plains to every corner of his land and across the seas to distant lands? What higher consummation can life attain than peaceful self-immolation at the altar of one’s cause? “Hence, it is evident that nobody can lose through suffering and sacrifice. If he does lose anything of the earth earthy, he will gain much more in return by becoming the heir to a life immortal. This is the technique of the soul. The individual must die, so that the nation may live. Today I must die, so that India may live and may win freedom and glory.”22

Subhas Chandra Bose’s political doctrine is a reflection of his political morality and astuteness. His philosophy of life and his political doctrine were intermingled with each other, which is evident from his clarion call, Chalo Delhi during his Azad Hind phase of freedom struggle in South East Asia.
NOTES & REFERENCES:


7. Bose Subhas Chandra - An Indian Pilgrim. Netaji Research Bureau, pp 142-143

8. Ibid. pp 143-144

9. Ibid. pp 142-144

10. V.P. Verma - Modern Indian Political Thought p. 574


12. Ibid, p. 380


16. Pradip Bose, Subhas Chandra Bose and India Today, Deep & Deep Publications Pvt. Ltd. p. 84


18. Ibid


22. Ibid. p.197