CHAPTER XIV : SUBHAS BOSE

Bose's philosophy took shape under the conditions of British rule as India's revolt against British imperialism gathered momentum, and as the Gandhian movement became stagnant and lost vigour. As Bose himself poses his difference with Gandhi: "Gandhiji would not take his stand on economic issues—— Whether on political or social or economic questions he was temperamentally a believer in the golden mean. I then referred to——— some of the defects in his leadership and tactics, namely, his incorrigible habit of putting all the cards on the table, his opposition to the policy of social boycott of political opponents, his hope of a change of heart on the part of the British government, etc." Bose believed that the fight for political freedom will have to be conducted simultaneously with the fight for socio-economic emancipation. With his revolutionary tactics and emphasis on economic issues Bose moved away from Gandhi and gave an alternative leadership towards the concluding phase of the Indian struggle.

1. Philosophy

Bose's metaphysics is not much different from that of or of Gandhi. Spirit inherent in existence everywhere is the reality of the world. To the philosophical mind it has a dual aspect, — Spirit as revealed to intuition in its objective and Spirit as known to human intellect in its fragments, man mind, Bose agrees, with all its limitations cannot know the Absolute. It may be known by intuition or Yogic perception. Such knowledge known through intuition is a matter of individual perception. Because of its subjectivist character Bose neither affirms nor denies the validity of such intuitive perception. In this respect he is a 'benevolent agnostic'.
as he calls himself. His whole philosophy is centered round intellectual knowledge.

Our knowledge of Spirit known through intellect is not absolute but relative. But if human knowledge is relative, how can we claim that reality is Spirit working with a conscious purpose? Bose answers that our intellectual and moral necessity demands it. What then is the nature of Spirit which is reality? The nature of reality is love.

"I have come to this conclusion from a rational study of life in all aspects—partly from intuition and partly from pragmatic considerations. I see all around me the play of love; I perceive within me the same instinct; I feel that I must love in order to fulfil myself and I need love as the basic principle on which to reconstruct life. A plurality of considerations drives me to one and the same conclusion."

Thus Bose comes to the conclusion that Spirit not in abstract but Spirit-in-Love manifesting itself in the world process is the essence of reality. This conclusion is more pragmatic than rational. The test of truth is successful working and the notion of truth is Spirit-in-Love. That these two things are distinct in the mind of Bose is obvious; but as for him the very existence of Spirit depends upon the intellectual and moral necessity of him he test of truth is raised to the status of notion of truth. Inspite of this inherent defect Bose not entangle himself in the paradox of the pragmatic theory. The pragmatist's criterion of truth is successful working. The same idea once accepted as true as it worked successfully's answer is as false if it ceases to work with success later also are liable that as human knowledge is relative our concept does not proceed to change. But none of our beliefs are for truth. Thus with his from error to truth but from truth attempts to resolve the pragmatist approval of 'degrees of truth' paradox.

The foregoing analysis makes it clear that there is only a remote resemblance between philosophy of Bose and that of Hegel. Like Hegel, Bose believes in the reality of Spirit. But while the former

1. Ibid.
takes Reason as the essence of reality and the world process as the realization of the freedom of Reason, the latter thinks Love to be the essence of Spirit "unfolding itself in an eternal play of conflicting forces and their solutions."\(^1\) Behind the world process he finds an emotive urge and the ultimate unity of the human race is to be brought about on the basis of the instinct of love.

Although Hegel did not think of love as the essence of Spirit or Reality, some of the Left Hegelians had the same metaphysical conception as Bose. With Moses Hess "communism is the law of love applied to social life,"\(^2\) it is love organized into action. With Feuerbach, the force which binds human beings together and brings their common nature above their differences is love. "A loving heart is the beat of the species throbbing in the individual."\(^3\) Love strengthens the moral relations between men. When social relationships become moral relationships the opposition between the egoism of the self and the needs of the species is resolved. "Love is also the idealism of nature, love is also spirit, esprit ---\(^4\)"

Although Bose accepts Hegel's dialectics with reservation, he does not give an idealistic interpretation to history. In his scheme of values the material and the spiritual aspects of life are blended into a perfect synthesis.\(^5\) In his conception of love as the essence of Spirit Bose is indebted to the Vaishnava philosophy. His conception is akin to Aurobindo's religion of humanity, although on the actual progress of the Spirit towards self-realization, he holds quite different views.

2. Dialectics and Leftism

Coming to the law of progress or the process of unfolding of the Spirit Bose compares the different philosophical efforts to

1. Ibid. p. 144
2. Socialist Essays
3. Essence of Christianity, p. 266
4. Ibid. p. 47
5. See page 177 of this book.
explain it. - Spencer's theory of evolution from simple to the complex, Hartmann's theory of blind will, Bergson's theory of creative evolution and Hegel's dialectics which interprets progress as the product of conflicts and their solutions. Bose thinks none of these attempts made to comprehend the law of progress as futile. All of them contain some element of truth but Hegel's dialectics "approximate to reality more than any other". "At the same time it cannot be regarded as the whole truth since all the facts as we know them, do not accord with it. Reality is, after all, too big for our frail understanding to fully comprehend."¹

Thus Bose does not accept Hegel's dialectics as an infallible dogma. But he takes its substance. Progress is neither unilinear nor is it always peaceful in character. It often takes place through conflict. "Out of the conflict between 'thesis' and 'antithesis' 'synthesis' is born. This 'synthesis' in its turn becomes the 'thesis' of the next phase of evolution. This 'thesis' throws up an 'antithesis' and the conflict is resolved by further 'synthesis'. Thus the wheels of progress move on and on."² So, reality is Spirit which unfolds itself through the dialectical law.

Bose explains the working of the dialectical law in the Indian movement. In social progress a leftwing puts itself as the antithesis of the main stream of a movement. When the progress of the main stream is arrested it generates a leftwing movement as its opposite to stimulate the onward march of society and a conflict arises between the two. But this conflict is a temporary phase and a synthesis is reached when the conflict is resolved. Thus, in 1919 when the official Congress having lost its dynamism could not face the situation of post-war India and seemed to be stagnating a leftwing appeared in the form of Gandhi's movement but as the Congress accepted the tenets of Gandhi a synthesis took place between these two conflicting tendencies. For twenty years "Gandhi movement was able to maintain its progressive character and prevent the emergence of any big leftwing movement."³

¹ Autobiography, p. 144
² Forward Bloc, 3.8.39
³ Meaning of Leftism, January, 1941 (A letter from Kabul)
But as time went on Gandhi surrendered to the rightist demand for a parliamentary programme, stiffened his attitude to the left and assumed a policy of compromise with British imperialism. Having fallen victim to constitutionalism the Gandhi movement became stagnant and ceased to be revolutionary.

"Ever since Gandhism has begun to stagnate and a big left wing has emerged in opposition to it the Gandhites have become Rightists and Gandhian Consolidation has become to mean Right Consolidation. Philosophically speaking, Right Consolidation is the 'thesis' which demands its 'antithesis' or Left Consolidation. Without this 'antithesis' and the conflict following in its wake no further progress is possible. All those who believe in progress and desire it should, therefore, actively assist in this task of Left Consolidation and should be prepared for the conflict resulting therefrom." So left consolidation against the right is a historical necessity. Since stagnation has overtaken the right, i.e., the Gandhites history demands that a big left movement will grow so that progress may continue and the Forward Bloc Party was the product of this historical necessity.

The historical characteristic of Indian leftism is that it is divided into two steps, that of anti-imperialism and that of socialism. "In the present political phase of Indian life, leftism means anti-imperialism. A genuine anti-imperialist is one who believes in undiluted independence (not Mahatma Gandhi's substance of independence) as the political objective and in uncompromising national struggle as the means for attaining it. After the attainment of political independence leftism will mean socialism and the task before the people will then be the reconstruction of national life on a socialist basis."  

3. Socialism and Democracy

As a nationalist and anti-imperialist Bose stood all along for uncompromising struggle and for the complete independence of India.

1. Ibid.  
2. Ibid.
As a believer in socialism and dialectics he accepted class struggle as a necessary fact for the onward march of society. But socialist reconstruction is not possible before political emancipation. Hence, Bose believed with Lenin that the anti-imperialist movement must pass into a socialist revolution for the socio-economic emancipation of the masses. With this purpose in view he wanted the collective affiliation of workers' and peasants' organizations to the Congress. But owing to the rightist opposition Bose failed to carry out this programme and to convert the Congress into a broad-based mass party. This fact led him to believe that a leftist movement in cooperation with peasants and working workers will emerge from the Congress to carry on the fight for economic emancipation together with the fight for political liberty. Thus Bose's ideal is closely akin to that of Mao Tse-tung. As with Mao, so with Bose the task before the colonial and semi-colonial countries is the overthrow of foreign imperialism and socialist reconstruction must follow the attainment of political independence and the assumption of power by the workers and peasants. India must have "a socialist system in which the initiative will not be left to private individuals but the state will take over the responsibility for solving economic questions."

This socialist programme is outlined as follows:

1. Complete political and economic liberation of the Indian people.
2. A thoroughly modern and socialist state.
3. Scientific large scale production and state planning.
4. A new social structure on the basis of the village communities of the past, breaking down existing social barriers like caste.
5. Abolition of landlordism and a uniform land tenure.
6. Social ownership and control of both production and distribution.
7. A new monetary and credit system in the light of modern theories and experiments.
8. A federal state with a strong centre.

1. Ibid
10. Freedom of religious worship for the individual.
11. Equal rights for every individual.
12. Linguistic and cultural autonomy for all sections of the Indian community.
13. Application of the principles of equality and social justice in building up the new order.¹

Bose was never a democrat in the orthodox sense of the word. He did not believe that the problem of a backward country like India will be solved by means of a traditional democratic machinery. In order to put through essential reforms within a short period, the state will have to be a people's state and a strong centralized state. "You cannot have a so-called democratic system if that system has to put through economic reforms on a socialist basis ......... Therefore modern progressive thought in India is in favour of a state of an authoritarian character which will work as an organ, or as the servant of the masses and not of a clique of a few rich individuals ...... We must have a government that will function as the servant of the people and will have full power to put through new reforms concerning industry, education, defence, etc, in Free India."² This idea of a centralized state seems to be very near to the democratic centralism of the Soviet constitution and of People's China. Of course, Bose never explicitly expressed himself anywhere about the form of government India will have to adopt after independence.

4. Doctrine of Synthesis

In spite of some Marxian elements in Bose's political philosophy his religious and intellectual bias leads him to reject the materialist conception of history. "The materialistic interpretation of history which seems to be a cardinal point in Communist theory will not find unqualified acceptance in India, even among those who would be disposed to accept the economic contents of Communism."³ For Bose

¹ (a) Indian Struggle, Vol. I, pp. 428f. (b) Meaning of Leftism
³ Indian Struggle, Vol. I, p. 432
history is not to be interpreted in material terms. There are other
elements in man, viz., religious, ethical, racial, aesthetic, etc.,
which guide the course of history. Marxism gives too much importance
to the economic factor in human life. "We fully appreciate the impor-
tance of the economic factor which was formerly ignored but it is
not necessary to over-emphasise it."¹

Bose lays particular stress on religion as an independent
motive force in society and especially so in India. "Owing to the
close association between the Church and the State in Russian history
and to the existence of an organized Church, communism in Russia
has grown to be anti-religious and atheistic. In India, on the contrary,
there being no organized Church among the Indians and there being
no association between the Church and the State, there is no feeling
against religion as such. Further, in India a national awakening
is in most cases heralded by a religious reformation and a cultural
renaissance."²

Without prejudice to this socialism Bose was a nationalist to
the core. He did not share the Marxian assessment of nationalism as
a bourgeois sentiment. "What we in India would like to have is a
progressive system which will fulfil the social needs of the whole
people and will be based on national sentiment."³

Bose also differs from communism on such vital issues as the
relative importance of the working class and the peasantry. India
being predominantly an agricultural country will have to keep the
problem of peasantry in the forefront. Bose, however, agrees with
Marx on many vital matters. He did not only accept socialism and
class struggle, he welcomed Soviet state planning and Soviet solution
of the problem of minorities. His views with regard to Indian socialism
are set forth in his Trade Union speech (July 4, 1931) : "Between
these two groups (right wing and communist - N.B.) stands another

1. Indian Struggle, Vol.II, p.120
3. Meaning of Leftism. Cf. Moses Hess whose socialism had a place
   for nationalism as the feeling of a distinctive character and culture
   but not for greedy acquisitive nationalism which lives at the
   expense of others.
group which stands for socialism — for full-blooded socialism — but which desires that India should evolve her own form of socialism as well as her own methods. To this group I humbly claim to belong. I have no doubt in my mind that the salvation of India, as of the world depends on socialism. 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."

Emphasis upon the religious factor does not blind Bose towards the material side of life. "Our emphasis was not on civilization but on culture, not on the material side of life but on the intellectual and spiritual........ Emphasis on the intellectual and spiritual side caused us to neglect the development of science and left us comparatively weak on the material and physical side of life ........

Owing to the interrelation between the soul and the body, the neglect of the body not only weakens the nation physically, but in the long run weakens it spiritually as well, India at the present moment appears to be suffering not merely from physical weakness but from spiritual exhaustion as well,— the inevitable result of our neglecting one aspect of life. And if we are to come to our own once again, we have to advance simultaneously on both fronts."!

The dialectical spiral of contradiction and synthesis has a wider meaning for Bose than for Hegel and Marx. The opposition of thesis and antithesis operates in a matrix of numerous forces and factors. It is the task of each age to produce its own synthesis out of these opponent diversities. Between conflicting pulls India must forge her destiny which Bose visualised as "modern India based on the past", a "perfect synthesis of all that is good in the East and the West", "a golden mean between the demands of spirit and matter, of the soul and the body." In this general scheme of synthesis Bose found an approximation of some of the cardinal elements of communism and fascism. He entered into a polemical controversy

1. The Pyramids, in Writings and Speeches, Edited by J.S.Bright
with Nehru about the comparatives merits of communism and fascism and differed from Nehru's view that our choice is restricted to these two alternatives. These two ideologies have some common traits, e.g., party dictatorship, state supremacy, planned economy, etc. "These common traits will form the basis of the new synthesis. That synthesis is called by the writer 'Samayavada' — an Indian word, which means literally 'the doctrine of synthesis or equality'. It will be India's task to work out this synthesis."

5. Conclusion

This brings out another Hegelian element in Bose's philosophy. The state is not a necessary evil to be thrown out into the dust heap of antiquities. With Bose the state is the indispensable instrument for a mass party to initiate much-needed reform and planning. The immediate goal of the party is seizure of power. The Congress is to play this role but if it proves unequal to the task some other party organized on mass basis should come forward and undertake the job. Violence and non-violence are entirely questions of technique to be decided by pragmatic necessity. There is no moral issue involved in selecting the most appropriate means for advancing towards the end. "The bugbear of violence has always been on Gandhi's brain. It has completely driven out of him all hopes of mass resistance to British imperialism."

What was an article of faith with Gandhi, Bose thought to be a fear always weighing upon him and pulling him up from facing the full consequences of a national revolt and continually urging him to lower the flag and seek compromise. Bose's path is that of a full-fledged revolutionary which leads to a radical overhauling of society with the employment of all possible means but with the heart tested and purified in the ordeal of suffering and sacrifice.

Thus struggling starting as a pragmatic idealist Bose ends by being a social revolutionary. He forms a view of life which gives

1. Indian Struggle, Vol.I. p.431
meaning and purpose. Since life has for him a social context the meaning and purpose of life is to free itself from social bondage. Hence the dialectic and pragmatic truth of life is struggle, ceaseless struggle for freedom and progress. There are gaps in this system of ideas and Bose never rounded off his thoughts into a complete ideology. His doctrine of synthesis was never worked out into details and he never spoke out his mind about how the golden mean between spirit and matter will be given effect to. But his philosophy was not merely an intellectual realization. Applied to his own life and to the Indian political scene this philosophy of struggle and freedom proved its truth and threw him up as the accredited leader of the Indian revolution at its most crucial phase.