INTRODUCTION

Subhas Chandra,

As Bengal's poet I invite you to the honoured seat of the leader of the people. We have the sacred assurance of Gita that from time to time the Divine champion of the good arises to challenge the reign of evil. When misfortune from all directions swarm to attack the living spirit of the nation, the anguished cry calls forth from its own being the liberator to rescue...

- Rabindra Nath Tagore

This dissertation is neither a comprehensive history of the freedom movement, nor just a biography of a great political leader - though all these come *ipso facto* within the purview of discussion.

The more we know about Subhas, the more he appears to us as an enigma. To approach this enigma one has to make a three-dimensional introspective study of him - his heredity and environment - which were definitely significant factors in the development of his personality, the extensive range of his studies encompassing history, philosophy, international relations and various other subjects which moulded his views and lastly, the different currents and cross currents of politics - both national and international - which all the time were giving new turns and twists to his career some segments of which cannot be easily explained.

This dissertation, in fact, is the saga of the chequered career of a charismatic leader - a patriot in the true sense of the term - who could spurn with disdain the easy comfort of a secure job and dedicate himself wholeheartedly to the service of his motherland in bondage and in doing so glaringly brings out the truth in the adage that patriotism sometimes burns itself up in its flame and fury.
Subhas was a prolific writer. Whether in prison or out of prison his pen was never idle. To make a psycho-analytical study of his life and philosophy, one has to delve deep into the inner recesses of his mind and glean from there the precious gems that constitute the whole gamut of his philosophy.

And along with this one has to take note of his *elan vital* - a term propagated by the French philosopher Henri Bergson (1859 - 1941)\(^1\) to indicate the vital impulse to overcome all obstacles and move along the road to progress. Subhas was deeply impressed by this philosophy which was a source of inspiration to him and which taught him to go through suffering and sacrifice. Along with this an unflinching devotion to the spirit of Indian nationalism was always there to buoy him up in all adversities.

In fact, the basic philosophy of Subhas emanates from the very core of Indian nationalism of which he is very much conscious. He firmly believes that "Indian nationalism is neither narrow nor selfish, nor aggressive. It is inspired by the highest ideals of the human race viz. *Satyam* (the True), *Shivam* (the Good) and *Sundaram* (the Beautiful)."\(^2\) This nationalism can have full play only in an independent country. To achieve this a new generation of men and women has to be created. They will form the *Samyavadi Sangh*. The idea of *Samya* (equality) is a very old Indian conception first popularised by the Buddhists 500 years before the Christ. In one of his letters dated 22 February 1934 from Geneva to Satyendra Nath Majumdar, Subhas writes that his principal task will be to organise the *Samyavadi Sangh* and preach the

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1 Bergson's philosophy is dualistic - the world contains two opposing tendencies - the life force (elan vital) and the resistance of the material world against that force. Intuition gives us an intimation of this all-pervading life force. Bergson got Nobel prize in Literature in 1927.

principles of Samya. His firm belief is that the party that will emerge out of this will liberate the country.³

Subhas came back to his motherland in quest of this independence on 16 July 1921, resigning from the Indian Civil Service. The stage was all set to usher in a new personality. And Subhas jumped into the fray under the able guidance of C.R.Das without being influenced by the charisma of Gandhiji and his creed of non-violence. He flung himself whole-heartedly into his two-fold responsibility of nation-building and fighting against the Raj. This was the beginning of his chequered career which after various vicissitudes of fortune culminated in his 'political coronation' at the fifty-first Congress at Haripura in 1938. There his political sagacity and nationalistic spirit was at full play. His presidential address touching upon practically every facet of the political and socio-economic issues is an authentic historical document. He was also the progenitor of the National Planning Commission - a landmark in the arena of economic regeneration. Next year (1939), in the Congress Presidential election, Subhas offered himself as a candidate against the teeth of opposition of Gandhiji and his henchmen. He came out with flying colours defeating Gandhiji's nominee Pattavi Sitaramayya. As a result the full blast of Gandhiji's wrath fell on Subhas. The situation has been cogently summed up by Hiren Mukherjee: "... At the Tripuri Congress itself where Bose presided in spite of his fever, incidents happened at the insistence, no doubt, of the pious votaries of non-violence for which it is better that a veil is drawn."⁴

The fortitude and forbearance shown by Subhas at this juncture elicited unstinted approbation of even the poet Rabindranath who stated in a message: "The dignity and forbearance you have shown in the midst of a most aggravating situation has won my admiration and confidence in your

leadership. The same perfect decorum has still to be maintained by Bengal for the sake of her own self-respect and thereby to help to turn your apparent defeat into permanent victory. "

Subhas was practically compelled to give way in the face of concerted opposition and political machination of a coterie. He could comprehend well enough what was coming but a shrewd politician would have been more tactful. The question that very naturally crops up is why Subhas did not try to take the bull by the horn. Why didn't he try to effect a compromise? A biographer clearly brings out this attitude of Subhas: "... there was no compromise in Bose's make up, no middle way - no toleration of any opinion but his own. You either agree with him or you were an enemy to be faced. This was always his way, it was his strength and weakness and the undoubted cause of his downfall now." 

In this connection it is interesting to note the views of Anita Pfaff, the daughter of Emilie Schenkl and Subhas. In a recent interview (20 January 2001) given to Desh, a Bengali fortnightly, she analyses the causes of Subhas' debacle and comments: "I do not think that my father was well-conversant with the complicated political equation. It might be that his resignation from the Congress Presidentship enhanced his prestige but that does not indicate the political acumen of my father. Had he been a good politician he would never have relinquished."

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7 Desh, 20 January 2001, pp. 44-61. The interview was taken by Sumon Chattapadhaya and translated by the author.
But nothing could undermine the indomitable spirit of Subhas. Though apparently unsuccessful, he was mentally unvanquished and fully geared up to face any challenge and chalk out his own course of action. In his Presidential Address at the All-India Anti-Compromise Conference held at Ramgarh, Bihar, on 19 March 1940, he firmly declared that the door has to be banged on all talks of compromise with the Imperialists. "The age of Imperialism is drawing to a close and the era of freedom, democracy and socialism looms ahead of us."

Subhas was arrested again for the eleventh time on 11 July 1940 for leading the movement for the removal of the Holwell Monument. From the prison he wrote a stirring letter on 26 November 1940 addressed to the Governor of Bengal, the Chief Minister and the Council of Ministers, Bengal, and he calls this "My Political Testament." "It is a more heinous crime to submit to a wrong inflicted than to perpetuate that wrong.... 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. This is how the wheels of evolution moves on and the ideas, ideals and the dreams of one generation are bequeathed to the next." And this is the philosophy of Subhas. The ultimatum given by Subhas - that he will resort to fast unto death - worked and on 5 December 1940 he was released from prison and put under house arrest.

In the meantime, the gathering war-clouds which were looming large in the horizon for quite sometime had, as predicted by Subhas, culminated in war. Subhas was practically waiting for this. He was convinced that this was the most opportune time and he must make full use of the situation. And surreptitiously he left his home early in the morning of 17 January 1941 in

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1 Essential Writings, pp. 259 - 60.
2 Ibid., p. 267.
disguise "to create a history which will shine brightly for ever and continue to
inspire patriots of all ages and all climes in the struggle against slavery of all
kind."

And thus began the odyssey of Subhas in quest of independence - a saga
of patriotic feats of blood and tears. As Subodh Chandra Sen Gupta puts it so
eloquently :"Through the ordeal of hunger, thirst, privation, forced marches,
hair breadth escapes, and disastrous chances by flood and field, Subhas
Chandra Bose wrested freedom from the British and left it to others to unfurl
the National Flag on the Red Fort."

A psycho-analytical study of Subhas reveals that nothing could deter him
from following his own logic - his chosen path. His political equation, right or
wrong, prompted him to leave his own country in quest of independence with
the help of the Fascist Camp. And this is the story of a tragic hero who shot
high up like a luminous meteor fading into extinction leaving a trail of glory
behind.

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12 General ideas about a tragic hero are set forth in the *Poetica* of Aristotle, the Greek
philosopher - the tragic flaw in the hero, which may be a defect of character, an inability to
judge situation or even a virtue, that makes his ruin inevitable. The catastrophe results from
the conflict involving the chief character and it ends in the defeat of the hero by his opponents
or by impersonal forces. *And for similar reasons, Subhas, like a classical tragic hero, had to
face the frowns of fortune and suffer defeat.*