CHAPTER – III

SUBHAS – THE MAN BEHIND NETAJI

- a luminous icon of Subhas as it emerges from a close study of his letters written from Mandalay Central Jail

To know Subhas and to understand Subhas – the man behind Netaji – one has to delve deep into the innermost recess of his mind through his epistles written from jail. These letters give a revealing picture of Subhas – how he looks at life through the prison bars. The incidents narrated may apparently seem to be insignificant but they speak volumes. As Subhas himself wrote to Sarat Chandra Chattopadhaya: “The greatness of a man is manifest more through small incidents rather than big events”.

Personal letters act as index of the mind. The innermost thoughts of the writer sometimes find expression in his letters. Human feelings, human emotions, human thoughts which generally remain dormant in the subconscious mind may come alive and clamour for expression when the opportune moment comes. Personal letters, in fact, occasionally act as the mirror of the mind; they give a glimpse into the inner depth of the mind of the writer. They lay bare, as if, the very soul of the writer. And the reader can know the real self of him.

But the outflow of the inner thoughts of man may be obstructed by the prying eyes of the censor. And this is what happened to Subhas. As he himself

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This chapter is based on letters, written by Subhas from Mandalay Central Jail. Excerpts of the letters used here have been mainly taken from *Netaji Collected Works*, Volume III Netaji Research Bureau, Calcutta, 1981, (hereafter *N.C.W.*)
says: "... none cares to see the deepest articulation of the heart published in
the light of day open to scrutiny of all and sundry." Subhas conveys the same
feeling to his brother Sarat Chandra Bose: "Writing letters has become a
problem to me now and something like a nightmare too. The nightmare is
caused by the Sword of Damocles hanging over my head in the shape of the
Police Censor whose autocracy easily beats that of the late Tsar." And to
Basanti Devi (wife of C.R. Das) he expresses his agony for not being able to
express what he wants to say: "I wish to say so much – there is so much to
say but the time for that has not come as yet, I sat down to write this letter
after much hesitation – because it will pass through other hands."4

But in spite of this, the intrinsic value of a letter which serves as a
veritable link between the writer and his reader can never be ignored. "A
letter", as Dilip Kumar Roy writes to Subhas, "should try to compensate a
little for the physical distance between the correspondents; it should try, that
is, to surrender a wee bit of the personality of the writer to the recipients."5
And the letters written by Subhas tell a lot about the personality of Subhas.
Subhas looked at life from various angles and various perspectives depending
upon his varying moods. Sometimes he is philosophic, sometimes humorous
and witty, sometimes writhing with a mental agony. And sometimes he is a
stoic. As a result, the canvas of the letters written by Subhas is very expansive.
It embraces topics as diverse as religion and politics, philosophy and games. In
these letters the full personality of the writer is laid bare and the readers get a
glimpse of his thoughts and ambition, his concerns and mental agony. It may
be that sometimes small, apparently unimportant incidents find a place in his
letters but they speak volumes because what we learn from these anecdotes
gives an intimate picture of the man behind.

2 Letter to Dilip Kumar Roy, 2 May 1925, Ibid., p-55
3 Letter to Sarat Chandra Bose, 14 March 1925, Ibid., p.46
Subhas was arrested on 25 October 1924. He recounts the incident vividly. "In the early hours of the morning of 25 October 1924, I was roused from my sleep as I was wanted by some police officers. The Deputy Commissioner of Police, Calcutta, on seeing me, said, 'Mr. Bose, I have a very unpleasant duty to perform. I have a warrant for your arrest under Regulation III of 1818' He then produced another warrant authorising him to search my home for arms, explosives, ammunition etc. Since no ammunition was forthcoming, he had to content himself with taking a pile of letters and correspondence." Subhas was arrested and subsequently transferred to Mandalay Central Jail on 25 January 1925.

And thus began his period of incarceration. He was far away in a distant land behind the prison bars practically torn away all on a sudden from his near and dear ones. But his sufferings in the Mandalay Central Jail, his trials and tribulations could not stifle his indomitable spirit. May be, he became a sadder and wiser man. His introspective mind utilised the time for a better purpose. He says: "Problems which to me were unsolved seemed to be nearing solution. And I must thank solitude and distance from home for giving me that detached viewpoint which is necessary for the solution of many of our problems .......... as things stand now I still hope to make the most of my stay here."

And in the same vein he goes on saying: "In any event, I claim this for myself that many of the most tangled questions which whirl like eddies in our individual and collective life are edging gradually to the estuary of a solution. The things I could only puzzle out feebly, or the views I could only offer

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6 N.C.W., Vol II, p. 141
tentatively in days gone by are crystallising out more and more presentably from day to day." 8

It would be worthwhile to note here Subhas' deft and admirable use of different figures of speech – similes like "whirl like eddies", or metaphors – "edging gradually to the estuary of a solution" – which give a glow to his writing throughout may be found strewn all over his writings like sparkling germs. To return to the main theme of discussion – to Subhas it was a dawn of realisation of a basic fact – that a higher purpose is incessantly at work which has a benign influence on a savant’s life and work. Buffers and disappointments might be there but they bolster the determination to achieve his objective.

There are advantages, Subhas came to realise, to be away from one's hearth and home, because distance lends a different perspective which has a value of its own. He says: "I must thank solitude and distance from home – for giving me that detached viewpoint which is necessary for the solution of many of our problems." 9

But it is not that doubts never assailed his mind. What is the ultimate purpose of all these? – this was the moot question. And so he asks himself: "What purpose is He seeking to fulfil by sending us to exile, is something that I can hardly comprehend. That is why I am praying to Him all the time that He may, through all the misfortunes and obstacles, direct the course of my life....." 10 But Subhas is not a pessimist. To him sorrows and sufferings are just like a threshold leading ultimately to fulfilment. And that is why he firmly asserts: "So far I am concerned I see little warrant for pessimism or despondency. On the contrary I feel, sorrow and suffering should impel us to courage for a higher fulfilment. Do you think that what you win without pain

8 Letter to Dilip Kumar Roy, 2 May, 1925 Ibid. p. 57.
9 Letter to Dilip Kumar Roy, 11 September 1925, Ibid., p.86. 58-59
and struggle has any lasting value.?\textsuperscript{11} These undoubtedly are the noble utterances of a noble mind.

Subhas, in fact, is a born optimist. Faith never deserts him. “We are able and prepared to disregard all the sufferings and shackles of the present, dreaming and thinking of the glorious future that awaits us”, very emphatically he says. \textsuperscript{12} He knows that faith is the life-buoy which will enable him to float in the ocean of life. And so, with a firm determination he asserts: “I will continue to believe that human spirit is true, his life is true, and the bond between man and man is true.”\textsuperscript{13} This belief is the anchor of his life. And this is also the tenet underlying ancient Indian culture and Indian heritage to which Subhas strongly subscribed.

Subhas is proud of his Indian culture and he holds his heritage in high esteem. “From the ashes of the dead past India is again rising phoenix-like to take her place among the free nations of the world, so that she may deliver her message, the message of the spirit and thereby fulfil her mission on earth”, very convincingly he asserts.\textsuperscript{14} And that is why holding high the banner of ancient Indian history and tradition he can speak out so forcefully in his letter to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Burma: “Civilizations have risen and fallen, empires have grown and have melted away into thin air, Babylon and Nineveh, Carthage and Greece have crumbled into thin dust. But Indian culture is as potent a factor today as it was thousands of years ago when some of the foremost nations of the modern world were no better than savages.”\textsuperscript{15} These are the utterances of a historian-cum-patriot. The greatness and past glory of India is always before his mind. And this gives him a special moral strength to castigate his opponents.

\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{14} Letter to the Chief Secretary to the government of Burma through the Superintendent of Jail, Mandalay Central Jail, 16 February, 1926. \textit{Ibid.} p.223-224.
\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 224.
In fact, Subhas feels that what is needed most to restore this lost glory is the earnest endeavour on the part of everybody to strive his utmost to develop his powers to fullness. "We must be moulded from within", he says. 16 And that is why he says: "What we badly need today is a double dose of the activist serum, rajas." 17 It may be that because of this belief he cannot fully subscribe to the views of Sri Aurobindo though he reverently admits that he is a dhyani. Subhas feels like that because, according to him, the danger lies in the fact that "the active side of a man might get atrophied if he remained cut off for too long from the tides of life and society." 18 But at the same time he feels that this criterion is for common mortals and not for a superman like Sri Aurobindo. This is because it might be possible for a savant like him to lead, during a particular phase of his sadhana "a life which only apparently looks on the surface like selfishness or ego-centricism;" 19 he is beyond the comprehension of common mortals. And realising his own incapability Subhas completely surrenders himself to that savant. He writes to his brother Sarat Chandra Bose; "Aurobindo Ghosh is to me my spiritual guru. To him and to his mission I have dedicated my life and soul. My decision is final and unchangeable." 20

Subhas, a karama-yogin as he is, in fact, never despises philosophic contemplation or spiritual quest as futile. On the contrary, he strongly appreciates meditation which uplifts and ennobles the mind. He encourages every kind of art which he considers to be different types of meditation. Music, for example, though he himself was not well-versed in this art, is held in high esteem by him. And so he exhorts his friend Dilip Kumar Roy, an

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16 Letter to Dilip Kumar Roy, 9 October 1925, Ibid., p. 132.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid., p. 133
exponent of music, art and culture: "Flood our whole countryside, my friend, with songs and recapture for life the spontaneous joy we have forfeited. He who has no music in his composition whose heart is dead to music is unlikely to achieve anything big or great in his life....... he who cannot respond to music can never scale heights of thought and action. We want that the experience of ananda - sheer causeless delight - should quicken every drop of our blood because we can only create in the fullness of 'ananda!'" 21 And this is the primary reason why he insists upon engaging instructors for teaching children painting and music at home, and he is fully aware that "the good that will follow from all these, they will enjoy for these rest of their lives." 22

It is interesting to note in this connection that Dilip Kumar Roy acquainted Rabindra Nath Tagore with the views of Subhas regarding the function of art. Tagore was deeply impressed and overjoyed. He did not expect such a depth of mind in such a young body. In his exhilaration he was quick to come out with his highly complimentary remarks. He wrote to Dilip Kumar Roy: "What Subhas has written about art is unexceptionable. When art reaches its excellence, the gifted and those who can appreciate art also reaches out to the highest level of perception. It cannot be expected that everyone is capable of easily reaching that level - it is there that the clouds of variegated range of aesthetics gather - and it is because clouds gather at that inaccessible height that rains come down below." 23. To attain this esoteric height is not easy. It is only possible for a person like Subhas who is endowed with a highly receptive mind and whose range of knowledge and vision is awe-inspiring.

22 Letter to Bivabati Bose, 28 July 1926, Ibid., p. 344.
23 Letter from Rabindranath Tagore to Dilip Kumar Roy regarding Subhas Chandra Bose's letter to Dilip Kumar roy dated 9 October 1925. Roy published this in his Bengali book called Anami, pp. 331-333. Ibid., p. 345.
But to reach the stage when *ananda* permeates the mind and soul is not easy. Only a person whose heart is receptive and responsive and who can glean grains of joy from apparently small and insignificant incidents can feel this *ananda* which sometime may find expression through humour – an unalloyed delight. All the hardships that Subhas endured could not smother his spirit and stifle his innate sense of humour because of the flame of this *ananda* in his heart. In his letter to Bibhabati Bose Subhas writes: “I feel concerned from time to time lest I should lose all sense of humour as a result of prolonged imprisonment. The *Shastras* say: *Raso bai sah* that is to say God is but all-pervading delight. So one who has lost his sense of humour, he has undoubtedly lost the cream of life – *Ananda* or bliss; his life has then become worthless, devoid of happiness and full of misery.”\(^{24}\) Subhas feels himself lucky because he has not lost his sense of humour. In one of his letters to Dilip Kumar Roy he writes: “I have some sense of humour and proportion.”\(^{25}\) This humour, it may be noted in this connection, has nothing to do with the original meaning of the word ‘humour’ according to which there are four humours in the human body – phlegm, blood, yellow bile and black bile or melancholy. Individual temperaments derive their quality from the predominance of one or other of these humours. The people of phlegmatic temperaments are of very calm temperament, sanguine (bloody) indicates hopeful, robust temperament, choleric (yellow bile) are easily angered and the melancholics (black bile) are of depressive temperament.

The novelist George Meredith in his *The Idea of Comedy* (1877) gives perhaps the most comprehensive definition of humour in accordance with the modern usage. It is an attitude of mind readily responsive to the incongruous and ridiculous, but preserving a feeling of sympathy and kindness for the


object of laughter. And Subhas looks at humour from this angle and places it on a high pedestal. That is why he very convincingly says: "The greatest in this world – for instance, Deshabandhu, Rabindranath Tagore and others – till very late in life or even till the last day of their lives – never lost their sense of humour and enjoyment. This is the ideal we should emulate". 26

Very stoically Subhas endured the enervating climate and 'all-pervading dust' at Burma. But even these could not rob him of his inherent sense of humour. Babu Jitendra Bose, Subhas writes, once described his favourite Cossipore as a "kingdom of dust". In Mandalay the picture is just the same. As Subhas writes with a wry smile: "In Mandalay the dust is in the air – therefore you must inhale it. It is in your food, therefore you must eat it. It is on your table, your chair and your bed – therefore you must feel its soft touch...." 27 Similarly, regarding the food habit of the Burmese, his remarks, made casually, are worth quoting: "Some philosophers regard this planet of ours as created for the enjoyment of men. I have no doubt that of all the countries in the world, Burma is the one place where these philosophers will have the largest following...... in the Burmese Code, inedible flesh does not exist. Crows, cats, dogs and even snakes are welcome in the kitchen and they can all get secure corners in the stomach of men." 28 It may be that when Subhas comments that 'some philosophers regard this planet of ours created for the enjoyment of men' he has in his mind the philosophy of the Greek philosopher Epicurus (341-370 B. C.) who defined philosophy as the art of making life happy, with pleasure as the only goal – the motto being – eat, drink and be merry.

His comments regarding a man named Yanka who is in charge of looking after the kitchen is equally humorous. "He is only seventy-one years

26 Letter to Bivabati Bose, 11 September 1925, Ibid., p. 118.
28 Ibid.
old but his appetite is insatiable. Many are of the opinion that he is an
carnate of Lord Bholanath because his tummy resembles Mahadeb’s. It
is his faith that gastronomy is the highest truth in this world.”

Subhas’ letters to his ‘Mejobowdi’ (Bibhabati Bose) are replete with
anecdotes sparkling with humour. Regarding the food served in Mandalay jail
he observes, may be while laughing up in his sleeves,” The other day the
Manager fed us with hot jilabis – and we blessed him wholeheartedly. Sometime ago he entertained us with rosogollas; although the balls were
floating in the syrup all right, they had no syrup inside, and if you throw them
at anybody there was the risk of his head getting fractured. Nevertheless, we
swallowed the hard as iron rosogollas without a tear and in gratitude prayed
for the Manager’s long life.”

In fact, humour flows like an under-current inside him and gushes out
spontaneously when the opportune moment comes. When his Mejobowdi asks
him about his clothes his prompt retort was: “Do you not know that we are
guests of the Emperor? How can we be in want of anything? If there be any,
the prestige of the Emperor will be at stake. Is that at all possible? There are
instances galore like these of his effervescent humour in his letters.

It is interesting to note that sometimes Subhas’ observations are more
witty than humorous. Humour, it may be mentioned in this connection, is a
quality intrinsic to the subject that is found funny or incongruous whereas, wit
is an intellectual quality of the person using it. But one must have a very
receptive and responsive mind capable of catching all the nuances and
incongruities. Subhas had a keen interest in human nature which was nurtured
and fostered by his wide range of study.

30 Letter to Bivabati Bose, 11 September 1925, Ibid., p. 121.
31 Ibid., p. 123.
Subhas was a voracious reader with a keen inquisitive mind and an avid interest in different branches of knowledge. His incarceration gave him a unique opportunity to study whatever he liked and replenish his thoughts and ideas. And there was no dearth of books, even in the prison of Mandalay, because his sources were many. He used to get his supply of books from Dilip Kumar Roy, Sarat Chandra Bose, Gopababdhu Das, Shibnath Chatterjee and also directly from the Book Company.

Subhas evinced keen interest in the selection of books and this is evident from the queries he made. For example, to Shibnath Chatterjee he writes: "Are there any translations in Bengali of the Sam Veda, Yayur Veda and the Atharba Veda? (I have heard there are translations by Durgadas Lahiri)...... Have you in your possession any such books dealing with the History of India, the History of Bengal, with Education and Culture?" Subhas' interest in books on different subjects apparently seems to be so bizarre that one feels stupefied with amazement while going through the list of books. Here is an excerpt from one of his letters to the Manager, Book Company, Calcutta, requesting him to send the following books:

1) Prantoshinee (a book of Tantra) – Compiled by Sri Ramtoshan Bhattacharyya and published by Prankrishna Biswas.
2) Trantrasar (a book on Tantra published by Sri Rasikmohan Chattopadhyaya
3) Brihat tantrasar, written by Srimat Erishnananda
4) Tarangini – by Srimat Brahmanandagiri
5) Shyama Rahashya by Srimat Purnananda Paramhansa
6) Tara-Rahashya by Srimat Brahmanadagiri
7) Purohit Darapan published by Basumati

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and the list goes on ad libitum" 33

From Gopabandhu Das Subhas wants to know the names of some suitable and interesting books in Oriya which he says, "I can commence studying as soon as I am able to read Oriya tolerably well" 34 To his friend Dilip Kumar Roy his request is for :

1) *Romain Rolland* by Stephine Zweig
2) Atonement by Thomson
3) *Brothers Karamazov* by Dostoievsky
4) *The Coming Race* by Nalini Gupta
5) *Smoke* by Turgenev" 35

All these clearly indicate that Subhas had an inordinate passion for learning. This undoubtedly gave him a refined and broad outlook and helped him to view life with equanimity. And so only a man like Subhas can say : "Even after all external want has been met, man cannot attain happiness without inner peace and satisfaction" 36 He gives predominance to mind and quotes Milton : "Milton said – 'The mind is its own place and can make a hell of heaven and heaven of hell." 37

This wide reading gave Subhas a clear idea of how a library is to be built up. Books should not be collected haphazardly for a library – he advises. A particular method must be followed. He writes to Hari Charan Bagchi : ".... But still there should be a method. First of all, you should collect well-known Bengali, English, and Continental literary works. Then, you should collect history books relating to India, England and all other countries of the world.

Then you should obtain books on science and biographies of great men. Simultaneously, please try to collect books on economics, politics, agriculture and commerce. It will be good if you can collect books on all subjects at the same time. The important point is that there should be some books on every subject—so that a person of any taste will have something to read...."  

This illustrates Subhas' sound knowledge of library science and also his keen interest in the subject.

But Subhas' interest and concern was not confined to any particular field. His divergent intellectual curiosities mirrored the remarkable eclecticism of his ever-active mind. He could look far ahead of his time. Even when far away from the madding crowds' ignoble strife and the hum and bustle of Calcutta, he never failed to spare a thought for the Social Service Department which he had built up as the Chief Executive Officer of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation. He cogently expresses his ideas in one of his letters: "All people are not good for all kinds of works.... People shy away from certain type of work." And to solve the problem he evolves a novel principle or method which is more akin to what is, in modern terminology, called 'ergonomics' Subhas had suggested that ways and means should be sought and evolved to get the people interested in the work to be allotted to them. In short, the work schedule and work pattern should be moulded according to the physical and mental ability of the workers. The work may be of any type—from making packets with old newspapers or producing finished products out of cotton or shell to more sophisticated work in the weaving department.

In fact, this is the basic principle of 'ergonomics' which, in simple words, means—the study of the relationship between man and his working

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environment. It means rescheduling methods of work and, if necessary, designing machines so that due regard is paid to the capabilities and limitations – physical and psychological – of the human beings who have to use them. The object is to enable a person of ordinary abilities to carry out his task safely, efficiently and comfortably. But, it is interesting to note, that the term 'ergonomics' was born as late as 1949 but Subhas expressed his ideas in his letter dated 3 July 1925 to Hari Charan Bagchi. 40 It indicates how advanced was his thought – process compared with his contemporaries. Subhas was a visionary no doubt, but at the same time he was a pragmatist.

Another feature of this pragmatic thinking pertaining to a quite different field can be discerned from one of his letters. 41 Subhas wanted the Calcutta Municipal Corporation to get in touch with the University of Calcutta for “the opening of a sub-department in the domain of Political Science for teaching Municipal Government to the students of Political Science.” Analysing the advantages of such a move, he says: “There is a great advantage in including Municipal Government within the curriculum of Political Science.. It will make one aspect of the whole subject of Political Science altogether realistic.” 42 This letter was written on 26 April 1926. How appropriate was Subhas’ thought-provoking pragmatic suggestion is evident from the fact that what Subhas realised at that distant past was subsequently implemented years later by the academics, and now Public Administration has found a secure place in the curriculum of Political Science of practically all Universities.

Subhas was also very much concerned about a big problem confronting Orissa and Bengal as well. He expresses his concern to Gopabahadhu Das and writes: “In both these provinces we are at the mercy of the rivers but we know

40 Ibid., pp. 79-82.
41 Letter to Santosh Kumar Basu, 26 April 1926. Ibid., p. 282.
42 Ibid.
so little about the origin and growth of rivers. Our engineers know precious little about river and our public men know still less.” 43 But it was not in the nature of Subhas to sit idle. He says that he had to study something about rivers in the Civil Service Course and so now he starts ‘thinking seriously about commencing an intensive study of the problem.’

Subhas’ pragmatic views are also evident from his remarks on modern industrial condition. He was alive to the problems facing the Indian industries. He categorically expresses his well-thought-out opinion: “Under modern industrial condition, I do not think it is desirable to stake one’s future on a single industry. It is always desirable – if possible – to take up allied industries as well, so that waste products can be utilized – advertisements and overhead charges can be shared and joint purchase and joint sales attempted with a view to economy.” 44 The advice seems to come from an expert in business management and shows the business acumen of Subhas.

Subhas was also interested in establishing home or cottage industries. “Another thing comes back to my mind again and again…… and that is about making buttons of shell. In many village homes of the Dacca district, this industry is active. Men and women of poor households do this job in their spare time.” 45 It is evident that nothing escaped the attention of Subhas. His forethought enabled him to see things in their right perspective.

Along with industry, agrarian reforms were also in the agenda he chalked out in his mind. Regarding this, Subhas’ idea was that agrarian problems can be solved through co-operation. But too much of leaning on the co-operative banks, he felt, would not serve the purpose. Very cogently he expresses his viewpoint. “Production has to be increased by reducing the cost

43 Letter to Gopabandhu Das, 7 April 1926, Ibid., p. 274.
44 Letter to Sarat Chandra Bose, 6 June 1925, Ibid., p. 69.
45 Letter to Anil Chandra Biswas in July (date not mentioned) Ibid., p. 179.
of production by the farmers for purchasing seeds, fertilizers, ploughs, cattle etc. through co-operatives. Thereafter, efforts have to be made to sell the farm produce at a higher price through co-operatives rather than to the monopolists. If the people of the country do not practise co-operation and unity for the solution of the problems of daily bread, they will not be able to work unitedly for a great cause. 46 This agrarian reform, regarding which, Subhas gave his well thought-out opinion, is also the chief concern of the economists of today. The future of the country depends on the upliftment of the condition of the poor cultivators – this is now realised by all and sundry.

But work for a great cause – in fact, any cause – is liable to be futile if the problems of health facing the country is not properly tackled at the proper time. As the Chief Executive Officer of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation, Subhas’ earnest endeavour was to find out ways and means of solving the health problems pester ing the country. Sitting inside the iron cage at Mandalay Central Jail he tried to give shape to the ideas he had in his mind. In one of his letters he writes, “I have learnt a lot about health problems from Caullic’s Physical Efficiency, Macdougall’s National Welfare, and National Decay and a number of other books. It will probably be no exaggeration to say that no organised research has taken place in our country. On the other hand our health has been going down day by day. In my opinion Muller’s exercise should be introduced in our country on a large scale. One can strengthen his physique by this system without any expense and I feel it will be suitable for our country.” 47

But along with this physical strength, what is needed most is moral strength. This moral strength, Subhas feels, is required to understand the true nature of the conflict of ideas that is incessantly going on

46 Letter to Dr. A. C. Ukil (the date not mentioned but the letter was received on 11 June 1926.) Ibid., p. 302.
47 Ibid., pp. 303-4.
“struggles in this world”, he says, “are at bottom conflict of ideas – conflict between false ideas and true – or as some would like to say, between different degrees of reality or different degrees of truth”. 48

Ideas play a crucial role, Subhas feels, in moulding human movements. “Ideas are the stuff of which human movements are made and they are not static but dynamic and militant. They are as dynamic as the Absolute Idea of Hegel, the Blind will of Hartmann and Schopenhauer, the ‘elan vital’ of Henri Bergson. Ideas will work out their own destiny and we, who are but clods of clay encasing sparks of the Divine Fire, have only to consecrate ourselves to these ideas. A life so consecrated is bound to fulfil itself regardless of the vicissitudes of our material and bodily existence”. 49

As a serious student of philosophy, Subhas had a keen interest in the subject. His readings of systematic philosophy included Kant, Hegel, Bergson and other Western thinkers. Subhas was strongly influenced by the French Philosopher Henri Bergson (1859-1941) – well-known for his brilliant philosophical works (which won him the 1927, Nobel Prize in Literature.). He also had a great interest in politics and international affairs. Subhas was deeply impressed by the dualistic philosophy of Bergson – that the world contains two opposing tendencies – the life force (‘elan vital’) and the resistance of the material world against that force. Man knows matter through his intellect with which he measures the world. In contrast with intellect there is intuition, which gives an intimation of the ‘life force.’ Subhas had great faith in Bergsons ‘elan vital’ which became a sort of guiding principle of his life. He refers to this ‘elan vital’ when speaking of the lethargic nature of the Burmese men, he says, “What they lack most of all is initiative – what Bergson would

48 Letter to Sarat Chandra Bose, 6 May 1927, N. C. W., Vol IV, p. 244.
49 Ibid., p. 225.
call ‘elan vital’ the vital impulse to overcome all obstacles and march along the road to progress.”

Subhas’ philosophy also evolves out of his deep love of nature. He becomes lyrical while describing the beauty of nature. In one of his letters he writes, “The azure sky, green fields, the mountain ranges all around, the play of light and shade in the forests, the continuous roar of the waterfall – all these keep me contented. They keep me satisfied both in body and mind. When it clears up a little, I must move out in a silent communion with Nature.”

And in a similar vein he writes in another letter, “As darkness descends, the sun disappears behind the high ramparts of the fort of Mandalay and the Western Horizon is lit up with the rays of the setting sun and the crimson rays give the countless clouds a dazzling beauty.”

These lines seem to be the outpourings of the pulsating heart of a born poet which may be called universal poetry and which follows a fundamental aesthetic order.

This deep love of nature ultimately leads to religion, which, as Subhas says, “is woven into the very texture of our daily and social life and permeates our whole being – individual and national.” But this process of permeation may be abstruse because religion concerns itself with that which transcends the known, the natural, or the expected; it is an acknowledgment of the extraordinary and the mysterious. The religious consciousness recognises a transcendent, sacred order. Subhas places religion on a high pedestal and that is why he can assert: “When economic freedom is lost – subsistence is lost;

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52 Letter to Anath Bandhu Dutta, December 1926 (date not mentioned) Ibid., p. 132.
when political freedom is lost – honour is lost; when religious freedom is lost – everything is lost." 54

It is in this context that Subhas cogently analyses the situation in the West where Secularism and its offspring cynicism have well-nigh crushed out of existence the soul of Europe. But there was a time when Europe did believe in religion. She had not then become drunk with wine of power or maddened with the lust of loot – and she had not substituted the theory of Nordic Supremacy for the Christian doctrine of the equality and brotherhood of men. In that golden age her fulfilment constituted in serving God, not mammon; in living a Christian life, not in piling up dollars. ” 55 Subhas, in fact, is well-conversant with the history of the world – past and present and that is why he is capable enough and also competent enough to vehemently castigate the mammon —worshippers of European countries.

To Subhas religion and philosophy (and in a sense nature too) are not apart; he synthesises them into one. In one of his letters to his brother Sarat Chandra Bose he refers to “the dynamism of the Absolute Idea” of Hegel, the ‘ Blind Will’ of Hartmann and Schopenhauer, the ‘elan vital’ of Henri Bergson. 56 Subhas, in fact, was very much influenced by these philosophers. When he reiterates the dynamism of the ‘Absolute Idea’ he has in his mind the essence of the philosophy of the well-known German philosopher – Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770 – 1831). Philosophy; according to Hegel, goes beyond religion, as it enables man comprehend the entire historical unfolding of the Absolute. His ‘Absolute Idealism’ envisaged a world – soul that develops out of the dialectical logic. In this dialectic, one concept (thesis) inevitably generates its opposite (anti-thesis) and the interaction of these leads to a new concept (synthesis). This in turn becomes the thesis of a new triad.

55 Letter to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Burma, 16 February 1926, Ibid., p. 223.
Subhas had great faith in the tenet of Hegel. Hegel preached that religion moved from the love of nature to worship of nature (pantheism) through a series of stages to Christianity – where Christ represents the union of God and Man – of spirit and matter.

Subhas also refers to the ‘Blind Will of Hartmann and Schopenhauer’ in the same letter. Edward Von Hartmann (1842 – 1906), the German philosopher leapt into fame with his *Philosophy of the Unconscious*. By the expression ‘unconscious’ Hartmann meant the inexplicable forces of nature which activate the world – process and he saw this world – process as a struggle between blind impulse and reason.

This conflict between individual wills is also the main thesis of Arthur Schopenhauer (1788 – 1860), the reputed German philosopher. The bias of his own temperament and experience was germinal to the development of his celebrated philosophy of pessimism. The ‘Blind Will’ referred to by Subhas, is manifest in individuals as a will to live.

This will to live is manifest in the fact that like the phoenix, a nation, even through the process of death, may regain a new life. It is because creation does not and cannot end at any point of time. Subhas believed that at the core of everything the ‘*elan vital*’ of Bergson – the force that moves the world to creativity and progress – is always at work.

Subhas’ basic and inherent philosophy as it gradually unfolds itself through his letters makes his personality fascinating. All these letters bring out the picture of a Man – a Man in the real sense of the term. The period that Subhas spent inside the prison bars gave him ample opportunity to develop his latent faculties. Sri Sisir Kumar Bose says succinctly that his experience in

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Ibid.
Mandalay during the period of his incarceration "led to a transmutation of his personality as a whole – physical, intellectual, emotional and ideological, and laid the foundation of the leader that was to come." 58 These letters written by Subhas are just like chinks in the window of his mind giving a glimpse of the icon of Subhas – the Man. They are the precious possession of the posterity pining to know everything about the Man behind Netaji.

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