



NETAJI SUBHAS OPEN UNIVERSITY

School of Social Sciences

DD 26, Sector I, Salt Lake, Kolkata – 700064

Website: www.wbnsou.ac.in

Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Memorial Lecture Series

The School of Social Sciences (SoSS) of Netaji Subhas Open University (NSOU) has been organizing this prestigious annual lecture consistently since 2010, the members of the School are also engaged in publishing the lectures regularly at due time. The University authority has decided to organise Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Memorial Lecture every year to pay its tribute to the great living legend dedicated for the freedom of the motherland from the colonial shackles, and entrusted it's largest academic unit at that time, the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, with the responsibility to conduct it in a rightful manner. Subsequently, however, the School was ramified and three Schools of Studies, viz School of Humanities, School of Social Sciences, and School of Professional Studies were formed in the year 2015. As such, the newly constituted School of Social Sciences, emerging from the erstwhile School of Humanities & Social Sciences, is now entrusted to hold the annual Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Memorial Lecture on behalf of the University. Thus, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Memorial Lecture has been initiated at NSOU as mark of respect to the undying spirit of "Netaji ", the great patriotic soul and an indomitable symbol of struggle against all the social oddities. Over the years, it has become one of the most prestigious and befitting annual event in the NSOU.

The Third Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Memorial Lecture was delivered by Professor Sekhor Bondopadhaya on 25 January, 2012. Professor Subha Sankar Sarkar, Honorable Vice Chancellor of Netaji Subhas Open University (NSOU) presided over the occasion. The programme was organised by NSOU and held at the auditorium of Bangla Academy, Kolkata. Professor Bandyopadhyay spoke on "Decolonization and the Crisis of Hindu Nationalism in India, 1947-52".

In the presentation of Professor Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, the main concern relates to what he would like to delineate as Hindu nationalism as positioned against what he calls a projected 'threatening other' i.e the Muslims. They have been presumed as a non-cohesive entity, although these 'others' lost no time to have a solid political platform of theirs in the shape of the Muslim League, set up way back in 1906 through the Aligarh initiatives of elite Muslim leaders in anticipation of a share in local self government held out by Morley-Minto reforms. The 'other' was a resultant of the hitherto latent political



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competitiveness among the Muslims, duly acknowledged by the colonial rule's tried strategy of "divide and rule". Bandyopadhyay, of course, does not go back that far and would rather take as his starting point the consequences of the Congress readiness to the proposed partition of only two of the most militant anti-colonial provinces of India, i.e. Punjab and Bengal. If whole of Bengal went to Pakistan, which was timely and valiantly stopped by the intervention of Dr Shyamaprasad Mukhopadhyay and which saved thousands of Bengali Hindus from becoming "a perpetual minority" (p.51), the horrors of partition would have taken enormous proportions—witness the forcible exodus.

A parallel exodus, no less tragic, took place from one part of Punjab to another but then there was the saving grace of an impromptu exchange of population. In those days the All India Hindu Mahasabha, founded long after the Muslim League had staked its claim for an enhanced political space, was the only national forum of Indians attached to Hindu identity, who could not, for known reasons, rely on the kind of intercommunal politics in which the League and the Congress were entangled. Post independence, followers of both the Congress and the Mahasabha heard extraordinary proposal from both Gandhi and Mukhopadhyay on the desirability of winding up the two platforms, of course for two different reasons. As was to be expected this was no music to the ears of those in the upper echelon of the Congress outfit, who had tasted power and wanted more of it. Bandyopadhyay picks up the specific case of the Mahasabha and explores the predicament it necessarily went through because it stayed out of the charmed circle of power and thought it to be meet and proper to call for an internal debate on the fate of the forum. In their wisdom the Mahasabha stalwarts did not come up with any sustainable plan for reorientation of the organisation which, according to Bandyopadhyay, only hastened its demise. It goes to his credit that instead of making a sterile narrative he turns the debate into an exploration of the undeniable plurality of approaches within "a major Hindu nationalist group". He also seeks to locate the debate in the broader discourse of postcolonial modernity in India. The central point was that of choosing between the western type liberal democratic nation state to which the Congress leaders were committed and the modern equivalent of a Hindu rashtra free from any communal-theocratic orientation but based on national solidarity with necessary reliance on the essence of Indian heritage.



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There was no binary consideration, unlike Bandyopadhyay's formulation (p.53), of material as opposed to cultural-spiritual aspirations since the Hindu doctrine of purushartha does not discount but accords due weightage to material progress if achieved through ethical and not devious means. The construct under contemplation had necessarily to factor in the question of Muslim minority in a Hindu rashtra. The hypothetical issue, hinted at in this context, whether the Mahasabha would throw open its membership to all ethnic categories including the Muslims (p.53), is immaterial because the Muslims could possibly have no reason to quit their own political organisation which was very much alive and capable of kicking when necessary. More important and relevant was the question if the political base of the Mahasabha needed to be broadened enough to rope in the non-bhadralok rural commoners for which again radical economic reforms had to be incorporated in the organisation's agenda. Significant also was the question if the Mahasabha was to register its active presence in Indian politics in the teeth of the near total hold of the Congress and do so either all by itself or in combination with other non-Congress smaller regional parties. Bandyopadhyay meticulously examines the position of the key personalities and finds an interesting fragmentation.

On one side were the rational modernists inclined to accept a composite view of the nation-in making fit to operate a civilized democracy without being misguided by secularist pretensions; on the other he places those envisaging the Hindu rashtra in "exclusive communitarian terms" with which the Muslims would have to adjust their professed inclinations. A further, finer distinction is made with the identification of some enlightened majoritarians "selectively discriminatory to the nation's minorities"(p.54), viewing only the Muslims as "the natural other" in the wake of partition (which meant an ethnic group reluctant to leave for their new found homeland and staying back in sizeable number as a potential source of friction with unascertainable loyalty to the Hindu dispensation). Although much of these configurations rested on perceptions not entirely rational, yet they did stem from the immediate historical memory which was definitely not subjective. The relative ease with which these exponents of Hindu rashtra were ready to accommodate other minorities like Christians, Parsees or Sikhs, need not be taken as biased or motivated but as a recognition of the proven adaptability of these communities who also did not claim any roots elsewhere away from India. The extent of accommodativeness was reciprocal in their case and hence their coexistence in a Hindu rashtra was not taken as



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problematic. True, the notion of Hindu rashtra had different meanings for the different shades of opinion within the Hindu fold, which again was reflective of the loose bonding that somehow held the vastly heterogeneous constituents together. But the failure to arrive at a common acceptable denominator and its suitable articulation, in effect, deferred the idea, if not decomposed it altogether. Barring these reformulations there should be no major disagreement with the basic position of Bandyopadhyay.

He has done painstaking review of Sabha's recorded documents as well as opinions of both high and the low. Of special import was the grass roots level reaction to the debate over reorientation versus reactivation. Insofar as the idea was to provide a palpable alternative to mainstream political discourse surrounding the operation of a secular, welfare oriented democracy, the stand of the modernists could not be faulted. The power political angle of "having a strong party in opposition" (such as Govindrao Desai of Poona had in mind) could hardly get activated without clearly coming to terms with the rules of the game. You just cannot go it alone when your electoral base is devoid of the kind of social coalition which the Mahasabha was actually conceding to its main rival the ruling Congress. At the same time the urge to valorize the essential roots of the Hindu society went astray as the advocates themselves were steeped in a dated version of the Hindu ethos. Interestingly, the attempt to define a Hindu, which had important bearing on the definition of citizenship and its entitlements in a free state, became the insuperable rock on which the openly divisive working committee floundered time and again. A less stiff approach on exclusion somehow carried the day but the self-deceiving slogan of "akhand Hindustan" could not and did not move the masses and in effect failed to keep even the Mahasabha "akhand" i.e in one piece.

The electoral fiasco of the Mahasabha in the first General elections has been mentioned as a necessary fall out of this collective folly. Contrariwise it would be rather too much to expect that in the first flush of democratic participation well orchestrated by the Congress party, the aam janta which included Hindus in thousands were hardly bothered about their identity, their traditional moorings, their religio-cultural inclinations as long as they believed (or were made to believe) that it was the Congress leadership that wrested freedom from foreign rule, and wished also to believe that a constitution was in place for the first heterogeneous constituents together. But the failure to arrive at a common



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