



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 Fourth Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Memorial Lecture was delivered by Professor Sabyasachi Bhattacharrya on 16 March, 2013. Professor Subha Sankar Sarkar, Honorable Vice Chancellor of Netaji Subhas Open University (NSOU) presided over the occasion. The lecture was entitled as "The End-Game of The Raj and Subhas Bose's Political Strategy 1943-1945".

The eminent historian, Professor Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, brings out the unique significance of Bose's strategy to hasten the "end game" of the raj by means of a surgical operation which took the form of three inter-related initiatives, namely, an unsparing and premeditated political diplomacy, institutionalising the visibility of a free Indian government in the offing and forging of an extended Indian community abroad. Bose capped them with a new found militancy that the mainland Indians were dissuaded so long from developing by a hesitant and procrastinating leadership at home. Bose wanted to give substantive content, complete in every respect, to a battle ready armed outfit whose intrepidity no one, not even the British raj, could ever anticipate.



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In political diplomacy Bose's objective was to take the Indian question out of its domestic confines and find for it an enlarged international audience that was conveniently available in the European mainland. Europe at that time was experiencing the new phenomenon of national-socialism which caused an ideological bewilderment that made a large number of people uncomfortable toward both the cloistered advances of Sovietism and the unsure positioning of liberal democracies. It pre-supposed a deep seated conflict which tore Europe apart since it was necessarily fuelled by the unequal sharing of colonial bounty that needed reapportioning. And that necessarily meant the inevitability of an armed showdown. Somehow the national leaders in India still hoping to shoo colonial rule away all by gentle internal pressures were not inclined to see any advantage the brewing European crisis held out for the anti-colonial struggle. This state of mind was sought to be rationalised by an assumed responsibility to defend the western liberal order as though that was a necessary obligation of the colonial people in spite of the unrelenting stranglehold of foreign rule. Contemporary, and more so subsequent, political discourse fudged the essence of the crisis by posing a binary tussle of fascism versus democracy whereas to Subhas the issue was simply one of an impending war between liberal and statist structures of the same genre of capitalism and there was little urgency as such for leaning towards either except for the expediency of intensifying the crisis for the more dominant of the European imperialists—a perception widely and simplistically formulated as enemy's enemy being a potential friend. As the unofficial emissary of the struggling Indian masses Subhas was doing much more than just pushing the Indian question into the announced or hidden war agenda of the Axis powers; he was trying, with no mean success, mainly to condition the European public opinion towards the long term benefit of divesting Britain of its vast imperial estate. At this point my imaginary dialogue with the speaker/contributor may perhaps evoke a question: what distinguishes this initiative of Subhas in internationalising the Indian question from earlier attempts to draw international attention by Indian revolutionaries?

Simply stated, the answer would be that the latter were sporadic, intermittent, unconnected and perhaps lacking any long term projection. Barring M N Roy whose spectacular sojourn to Soviet Union from Mexico via Berlin only to have his original revolutionary project cut to size after his relocation in China, the efforts of other Indian revolutionaries in Europe and elsewhere were not predicated upon the kind of grand standing that Subhas deliberately attempted



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for mustering multiple support against Britain at State level as also at the public level, which could happen, meaningfully, only in the run up to World War II. Then comes Bose's no holds barred approach to realize a security alliance initially with Germany and Italy and subsequently with Japan in Asia, the Axis powers unfortunately castigated as fascist owing to their internal authority structure. It is not clear why anti-colonial struggle would necessarily mean an obligation not to align with the enemy camp of colonial powers because of the domestic ideology of the former and be enamoured of the political values imperialists practise at home but ruthlessly deny to the subject races.

Ultimately the desired ideological face of a political community is a matter of independent choice and need not prejudice its security alliance deemed to be indispensable for its anti-colonial struggle. Professor Bhattacharya is absolutely right to point out that no one could hazard a forecast about the final outcome of the World War, at least not until the D-day or months after Pearl Harbour. And hence any alliance of convenience need not be seen, for it did not, as asking for any commitment in favour of this or that ideology the others might have adopted. Even Churchill was the last person to budge an inch over the perceived value of decolonization until Roosevelt pressured him into the Atlantic Charter. Also, western alliances that sprang up post war were anything but homogeneous and had enmity against communism as their sole binding force. Above everything else, one cannot overlook the fact that this alliance for India's struggle for independence was born of Subhas's sustained and unfailing interaction over the pre-war years not merely with political leadership but with important public figures, civil society and media forces all over Europe. And so far as Japan was concerned it was an Asian power to reckon with and a country where revolutionaries like Rash Behari Bose were already honoured guests. In short Subhas was morial Lectures Series (Vol. I) 19 not naive to make a gamble on the capabilities of the Allied powers but was leaning more on the predictable outcome of his own struggle once the news of it reached the ears of his countrymen. This the top echelon of national leadership was not ready to let happen. The manoeuvred disinformation spread by British government about Japan's aggressive design over India was mouthed by them as well as local media. They sat pretty in the standard confabulatory sessions of the Congress and left the long overdue Quit India movement to the shoulders of the common men who surely proved more than equal to the challenge. The irony lay in the fact that it was decoupled from the full-blooded military advances of the INA.



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Or else any synchronisation would have caused a mightier explosion far beyond the power of the British rule to survive. Formation of Azad Hind Government definitely presented the complete institutional face of the upcoming independent India—a necessary step in line with international law and practice, which obtained recognition of no less than seven or eight independent States. That clearly entitled it to reciprocal legal treatment as was permissible to a belligerent State, as distinguished from local insurgency. Needless to add the Red Fort trial was no more than a farce, a travesty of international jural dicta, (consecrated in the Geneva Conventions on Warfare).

Readers must derive a lot of insight from this particular section of Bhattacharya's lecture where he cites the contending versions of law used by the counsels on either side. Perhaps the most strikingly original proposition that this lecture has advanced is that Subhas, by then Netaji, was able to create a solid community out of the disparate Indian diaspora of every description irrespective of their sex, creed, language or profession. This came up as the most invaluable demographic foundation of independent India then in embryo, to which each of these communities owed instant and unstinted allegiance so much so that their voluntary financial contributions were huge enough for the Azad Hind Government to print its own currency. They also joined the liberation force in hundreds and thousands. This is an achievement no other Indian leader had ever thought of venturing. Let me add that this also placed an undeniable responsibility on the part of any government in New Delhi post independence to defend and promote the legitimate interests of overseas Indian diaspora particularly in Southeast Asia and adjoining region. Even though India was granted a transfer of power on the basis of a short sighted and hasty bargain of unsavoury consequences, the fact remains that the INA route, hazardous and falling short of success, at least made the Indian struggle a memorable saga of patriotic heroism and could legitimately be taken as the penultimate push that was needed to eject the British rule within two years of the end of the war.

- All citations taken from *Debnarayan Modak and Chandan Basu Edited Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Memorial Lectures Series A Compilation (Volume I), Published by The Registrar, Netaji Subhas Open University DD-26, Sector I, Salt Lake City, Kolkata - 700 064 & Alphabet Books 5/1, Ramanath Majumdar Street, Kolkata - 700 009, 2017.*
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