

## Azad Hind Fauj : A Saga of Netaji

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"I have said that today is the proudest day of my life. For an enslaved people, there can be no greater pride, no higher honour, than to be the first soldier in the army of liberation. But this honour carries with it a corresponding responsibility and I am deeply conscious of it. I assure you that I shall be with you in darkness and in sunshine, in sorrows and in joy, in suffering and in victory. For the present, I can offer you nothing except hunger, thirst, privation, forced marches and deaths. But if you follow me in life and in death - as I am confident you will - I shall lead you to victory and freedom. It does not matter who among us will live to see India free. It is enough that India shall be free and that we shall give our all to make her free. May God now bless our army and grant us victory in the coming fight. Inquilab Zindabad ! Azad Hind Zindabad !"

This was the concluding remarks of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose on the 5th July, 1943 at Singapore after taking over the charge of President of Indian Independence League from



Rash Behari Bose on July 4, the previous day. The speech he delivered that day was in fact one of his greatest speeches which overwhelmed the entire contingents of Indian National Army (INA) gathered there under the scorching tropical sun of Singapore. There was a rally of 13,000 men drawn from the people of South-East Asian countries. Then Netaji toured in Thailand, Malay, Burma, Indo-China and some other countries and inspired the civilians to join the army and mobilised public opinion for recruitment of soldiers, augmenting resources and establishing new branches of INA. He promised the people that he would open the second war of Independence and set up a provisional Government of Free India under whose banner three million Indians of South-East Asia would fight the enemy. He made a clarion call

to all Indians - Karo sab nichhabar bano sab fakir - sacrifice all and be penniless mendicants for the sake of the motherland.

Under blazing sun and heavy rains Netaji used to deliver his fiery speeches and to appeal

the masses to make donations, join the INA and to give arms whatever they had. After the speech, his garlands were put to auction, each garland fetching such a fabulous amount as ten or twenty thousand dollars at that time and this money was earmarked as the fund of the Provisional Government. People also vied with one another to hand over donations to Netaji personally.<sup>2</sup>

Netaji favourably influenced the Governments of Germany and Japan and enlisted their support for the fight for freedom of India. During World War II Burma was captured by Japan and British armies were defeated and INA marched up to Imphal of Manipur through dense forests and hills, incessant rains and inclement weather. The patriotic slogan "Delhi Chalo" (March to Delhi) reverberated the vast areas once occupied by the British.

The tide of the Second World War turned against Japan and Allies tried to recover Burma. Tokyo felt the need to appease the Burmese people in order that they might help in the country's defence against the Allied invasion. On August 1, 1943 power was transferred to Burmese hands and Independence though doubted to be shortlived, was celebrated in Burma. As the Guest of Honour of the ceremony, Netaji praised Japan profusely and eulogised Burmese and Indian people living there. He said, "The Independence of Burma in this momentous crisis has a two-fold significance for us. It shows in the first place, what a nation can achieve if it knows how to seize an opportunity which history has offered. Secondly, just as the conquest of India supplied the British with jumping off the ground for their attack on Burma in the nineteenth century, similarly, the emancipation of Burma has supplied the Indian Independence Movement in East Asia with a spring board for its attack on Britain's Army of occupation in India during the twentieth Century..."<sup>3</sup>

Dr. Ba Maw became the head of Independent Burma and declared war against Britain and the USA. Netaji required his help in providing bases of military operation against the occupying force in India and getting seat for his provisional Government of Free India then under contemplation in Rangoon so as to be close to his military target. But Japanese historians have written that Dr. Ba Maw was unwilling to oblige him on two grounds : (i) there was a feeling of animosity among the Burmese towards the Indians because the latter were occupying a predominant position in Burma everywhere and (ii) the Azad Hind Movement which was being backed by affluent Indians in South-East Asia might influence the economy of Burma greatly. But Ba Maw mentioned in his memoirs, inter alia, "I openly welcomed him (Netaji); and so on January 6, 1944 and the days following. Netaji Bose and his army arrived in Burma and remained there till the final defeat of the Japanese in 1945."<sup>4</sup>

It was, however, the fact that Netaji, after months of negotiations with Japanese Government for support could get the concessions with the assurance that the provisional Government or its army would never interfere in the internal affairs of Burma. He then moved to Bangkok on August 4 to meet the Thai Prime Minister and succeeded to secure his consent to the passing of the INA troops to Burma through Thailand. Then he ran to Saigon to meet the Japanese army officers for discussing some strategic military issues. Netaji then returned to Singapore on August 14 and spoke at giant rally of Indians about the "Quit India" movement and renamed INA as Azad Hind Fauj or the Army of Free India. The number of soldiers rose to 30,000 and it arranged to recruit 20,000 more with Japanese support, particularly from among the British Army who were taken as prisoners of war by the Japanese.

Netaji also raised a women's regiment as a part of the Azad Hind Fauj" who will wield the sword as the brave Rani of Jhansi wielded in India's First War of Independence in 1857."

Netaji declared the formation of the Provisional Government of Azad Hind and the names of the Cabinet members who signed the proclamation. Bose was the Head of the State, Prime Minister and Minister for War, Foreign Affairs and Supreme Commander of the INA, others were Capt. Miss Lakshmi, Women's Organisation, S.A. Ayer, publicity and Propaganda, Lt. Col. A.C. Chatterjee, Finance, Lt. Col. Aziz Ahmed, Lt. Col. NS Bhagat, Lt. Col. Shah Nawaz and so on. The Proclamation of the provisional Government of Azad Hind 1943 provided fillip to the freedom struggle and it claimed and allegiance of every Indian irrespective of caste or creed and all were to be treated as equals with equal rights in all respects. It ended with a stirring appeal :

"In the name of God, in the name of by gone generations who have wielded the Indian people into one nation and in the name of the dead heroes who have bequeathed to us a tradition of heroism and self-sacrifice - we call upon the Indian people to rally round our banner and strike for India's Freedom. We call upon them to launch the final struggle against the British and all their allies in India and to prosecute that struggle with valour and perseverance and with full faith in Final Victory - until the enemy is expelled from Indian soil and the Indian people are once again a Free Nation."<sup>5</sup>

Then the ceremony of taking the Oath of Allegiance took place in an emotionally charged atmosphere. Amidst cheers, Netaji read out the oath, "In the name of God, I take this sacred Oath

that to liberate India and 38 crores of my countrymen, I, Subhas Chandra Bose, will continue the sacred war of freedom till the last breath of my life ...." His voice failed and he wiped his eyes with his handkerchief. He tried to overcome his emotions and with difficulty resumed in a steady voice "I shall always remain a servant of India and look after the welfare of 38 crores of Indian brothers and sisters. This shall be for me my highest duty. Even after winning freedom I will always be prepared to shed the last drop of my blood for the preservation of India's freedom."<sup>6</sup> Then other members of the Provisional Government took holy oath to liberate India and to remain absolutely faithful to their leader Netaji. Actually, these martyrs remained committed to this oath till the end of their life and their immortal life will remain an eternal source of inspiration and enlightenment to all.

#### References :

1. Saito and Hayashida in *A Beacon Across Asia*, NRB pp.177-80.
2. Pandit, HN. *Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose*, p.186.
3. Maw Ba, *Break Through in Burma*, p.312.
4. Ibid p.352.
5. Pandit, HN. *Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose* Sterling Publishers, New Delhi, 1988, p.331.
6. Ibid pp.203-204.

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