



An Indian Pilgrim : A Perspective on Subhas Chandra Bose's Autobiography

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Life is a dome of many coloured glass and only a puritan and narrow minded person will refuse to see the rainbow like variety and God's plenty in life. Hence the term like 'life writing', 'narrative turn', 'reflexivity', 'confessional culture' and 'autobiography' arrest our profound interest and consciousness in recent times. In the arts and humanities there has been a major shift in thinking about autobiography in response to debates around deconstruction and its critique of referentiality claims. According to Roy Pascal, autobiography offers a "coherent shaping of the past" and establishes a coherent consistency of relationship between the self and outside world. Autobiography engages with a profound human impulse and self conscious discourses. In the strict and narrow sense of what Auden called, 'serious and truthful self study directed at self-understanding'. It is an indeterminate mixture of truth and fiction about the person writing it. Simply put autobiography is a reckoning.



The literature of Subhas Bose is not extensive but it is considerable. Books on his biography or autobiography keep appealing with remarkable regularity. Subhas Chandra Bose has increasingly become a subject of study and research in academic and political circles both in India and abroad. It has been felt and rightly that much of the work done on him so far suffers from an inadequate assessment of religious, socio-cultural and political factors which influenced his early development. In many instances this has resulted in incomplete and imbalanced judgement of his ultimate personality. It is unfortunate that Netaji never finished his autobiography. Nevertheless this unfinished classic has undoubtedly much to offer to the historian, the research scholar, the future biographer and all others who are seeking a real insight in the making of this colossus of contemporary Indian History.

India, the land of the Himalaya, is no less truly the land of eminent men. They beckon to us from sublime heights, raising sustaining our



aspirations. But our greatest men have not remained aloof, they have been men of vision as well as wisdom, and given of their best to fellow beings. Their message, rich with life's meaning, has come flowing down like the Ganges, nourishing our varied fields of culture, and infusing strength and joy to our work. Subhas Chandra Bose's splendid autobiography, *An Indian Pilgrim* contributes to the timeless fabric of public memory. His autobiography provides valuable insights into the ways in which a self is reconstructed and popular memory is retrieved.

Subhas Chandra Bose, popularly called Netaji by his countrymen, wrote his autobiography *An Indian Pilgrim* in haste during his ten days stay in Austria in December 1937. It gives a fairly clear picture of the formative period in life of this great freedom fighter. Netaji, a prodigious child of Indian Renaissance, grew up in the midst of profound social and political changes that transformed the face of India and Asia during the first half of this century. Since his early youth he identified himself completely with fate of the country. His experiences thus truly reflect the evolutionary and revolutionary changes in the Indian society during this period. In order to correctly interpret the more spectacular and the rather controversial activities of his later years, it is necessary to understand his origin, the fundamentals of his faith and idealism and evolution of his personality through a life of relentless struggle.

When one thinks of Indian independence movement in 1930 and early 1940, two figures most readily come to our mind : Mahatma Gandhi, immensely popular and saintly frail pacifist, and his highly respected fabian Socialist acolyte, Jawaharlal Nehru, Netaji Subhas Bose as Nirod Choudhuri opines in his monumental volume, *Thy Hand, Great Anarch* "No other figure in the

Indian Nationalist movement present the stark contrast he does between promise and legend on the one hand and historic career on the other". His life is greater than fiction. The mysticism that surrounds his life has been lucidly expressed and cleared through his own autobiography *An Indian Pilgrim*.

"*An Indian Pilgrim*" takes the reader from Netaji's parentage, birth and early childhood to his Cambridge days – and what days! – when young man of 24 had to make up his mind either to take a path, strewn with roses, which promised nothing but ease, luxury and official honour, or path strewn with thorns, inviting to selfless suffering and sacrifice and promising nothing more than blood, sweat and tears. The results of struggle is known to the world. This autobiography evokes the socio-cultural environment in which Netaji grew up and the lineaments of his development. *An Indian Pilgrim* is the masterly analysis of a humanitarian, a psychologist and statesman and a soldier, looking back on the formative years of his life.

Subhas Chandra Bose's *The Discovery of India*, unlike Nehru's occurred very early in life, when he was barely in his teens. Netaji recalls in his autobiography, he feels "like a thoroughly insignificant being. My parents awed me to a degree". The zeal, killer instinct to fight against the British Imperialism is reflected in his query "How many selfless sons of the mother are prepared, in the selfish age, the 15 years old Subhas asked his mother in 1912, to completely give up his personal interests and the plunge for the mother ? Mother, is this the son of your yet ready"? As he stood on the verge of taking the plunge by resigning from the Indian civil service in 1921, he wrote to his elder brother Sarat: "Only on the soil of sacrifice and suffering can we raise our national edifice".



The autobiography is complemented with a fascinating collection of 70 letters of Bose's childhood, adolescence and youth. *An Indian Pilgrim* thus provides the materials with which to study the influences- religious, cultural, moral, intellectual and political that moulded the character and personality of India's foremost radical nationalist.

An Indian Pilgrim is richer in the autobiographical flavour in comparison to *The Indian Struggle*, which was more of Bose's interpretation and commentary on the freedom movement in India as he saw it rather than being strictly an autobiography. It is indeed an extraordinary tale.

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