

Netaji Subhas and Odisha

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Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose was a great patriot and revolutionary, whose life was almost a total dedication to the cause of India's Freedom. He resigned from the Indian Civil Service in 1921 and joined the non-violent, non-cooperation movement of congress under Gandhiji's leadership. He worked under the over all Gandhian leadership for almost about two decades even though he was critical of him and his action on certain issues and occasions keeping in mind the onward march of India's struggle for freedom and his desire to radicalize the congress organization on the path of struggle. Ultimately, he came to believe that India's freedom could not possibly be achieved only through the Gandhian strategy of non-violence. As per his own thinking and conviction, he thought of the need of an armed struggle against British Raj to achieve India's freedom.

During the second world war, when Great Britain got entangled in a life and death struggle against fascist powers like Germany, Italy and Japan, he tried to take advantage of Britain's difficulty and actualize his idea of armed struggle through the help of those powers.

As it were, he fled from the country in 1941 first to Germany and then to South-east Asia in his quest for India's freedom.

He organized an army of liberation called Azad Hind Fauj or Indian National Army out of the Indian prisoners of war in Japanese hands and the Indians in Burma, Malay and Singapore. It was meant to free India from British bondage by force of arms. It was a well organized army and worked under the provisional government of India which he formed in Singapore on 21st October, 1943.

The Azad Hind Fauj with Netaji as the Supreme commander fought a heroic battle with the British power in India. A contingent of I.N.A. under Saha Nawaz Khan even unfurled the Tricolour in Imphal after overpowering the British. He of course lost the battle and his I.N.A. was not successful in winning the freedom of the country through armed struggle. However, as has been said, his I.N.A. certainly hastened the dissolution of the British Empire in India". We are aware of the famous trial of the I.N.A. generals at the end of the war which led to a nation wide stir unnerving the British. "It goes without saying that the role of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and I.N.A. outside India and its influence on Indian mind hastened the process of the Transfer of Power".

It is matter of glory and pride to us that Netaji Subhas who was "a hero of India's

Freedom struggle in the true soldierly sense of the term Hero during the closing chapters of that struggle and that too in distant war fronts far outside the frontiers of India” belonged to Odisha. As we know, he was born and brought up in Odisha and spent the first sixteen years of his life on the soil of Odisha. In a way, the seed of transformation from Subhas to Netaji, Subhas was sown in the soil of Odisha. He never forgot his birth place and his love for Odisha and Odias continued till the end.

This article entitled “Netaji and Odisha” seeks to bring out the evolution of his personality in Odisha, his love for Odisha and connection with Odia luminaries throughout his political career in his quest for India’s freedom.

Subhas's Childhood and Formative Years

Subhas Chandra Bose was the son of Janakinath Bose who had migrated to Odisha in the eighties of the 19th Century and had settled down at Cuttack as a Lawyer. He was born on Saturday, the 23rd January, 1897 at Cuttack.

In Cuttack, he spent 16 years of his childhood and formative years from 1897 to 1913 till he passed his Matriculation Examination from Ravenshaw Collegiate School, Cuttack.

In his early life he had deep longing for Odisha, in his Unfinished Autobiography “An Indian pilgrim” he writes: “Though a comparatively small town with a population in the neighborhood of 20000, Cuttack had an importance of its own owing to a variety of factors. It had an unbroken tradition since the days of early Hindu Kings of Kalinga. It was the de facto capital of Odisha which could boast of such a famous place of pilgrimage as Puri (Or Jagannath) and such glorious art relics as those of Konark and Bhubaneswar”.

Subhas Bose’s father Janakinath Bose was a nationalist at heart and humanitarian to the core with immense love of his country and people. Janakinath did not hesitate to resign the post of Government pleader or even renounce the title of Raibahadur in protest against the repressive policies of the British Raj.

In spite of his professional life as a Lawyer, he was closely connected with all the philanthropic institutions and activities in Odisha. He was, as it were, connected with the first nationalist educational institution of Odisha established by Gopabandhu Das called “Satyavadi Vidyalaya” and tried his utmost for the up-liftment of that institution. This foreshadowed the love and regard of Subhas towards Gopabandhu and his correspondence with him from Mandalay jail.

A man of very broad outlook and vision, Janakinath felt completely at home in his new domicile Cuttack. He never thought in terms of narrow parochialism or provincialism. Subhas and his family members took active part in Muslim festivals like Moharrum and enjoyed their Akhra. Subhas’s early play mates were not only Odias but Muslims too. This broad mindedness of his father went a long way in enthroneing the ideal of a broad and integral nationalism in Subhas which was neither limited by region, religion or community. It foreshadowed the miracle of national unity in Bose’s Indian National Army which Gandhi praised in clear-cut words.

Subhas’s early schooling started in the protestant European School. Subhas joined the Ravenshaw Collegiate School in 1909 and spent four years there till he completed his Matriculation in 1913.

The headmaster of the Ravenshaw Collegiate School Mr. Beni Madhav Das greatly shaped and moulded the mind of Subhas. He

raised in Subhas the feeling that in human life moral values should count more than anything else. However, what is more important, he instilled in him a sense of patriotism and nationalism. He used to teach that “the most important thing in the world is to serve the interest of the fatherland. This made Subhas dream of liberation of his motherland that was then in bondage even from the formative years of his school days.

Odisha, in fact, became a nursery of his nationalism and patriotism of which he became a burning symbol in subsequent years of his life.

It was also here during his school days that he became inspired by Swami Vivekananda’s ideas which laid the foundation stone of his patriotism and nationalism. As it were, the queen of adoration of this great patriotic saint Swami Vivekananda was the motherland which inspired Subhas greatly. His days in Cuttack also inspired him into the mantra of social service. That apart, it was nature in Odisha which too inspired him. It was the river Mahanadi which appeared to have inspired him to be optimistic and go ahead and ahead in his quest for freedom. He learnt lessons on the nature and course of a revolutionary struggle for freedom which undergoes ups and downs.

Recollections of Radhanath Rath

In a special issue of the Samaja, late Radhanath Rath, Editor of the Samaja stressed upon an important trait of Subhas’s character. He writes ‘Subhas was one year senior to him in the Ravenshaw Collegiate School, Cuttack. From those days, Subhas Babu had an innate quality to help and serve others as far as he could.

When on every Saturday inmates of Ramkrushna Kutir, one of the oldest hostels of Bangalisahi begged handful of rice from door to

door and deposited in the Kutir, it touched Subhas to the innermost core of his being.

Hence forward, whatever pocket money, he was getting from home he did not spend them but gave away in some philanthropic work.

Subhas Bose and Dr. P.K. Parija

After passing Matriculation from Ravenshaw Collegiate School in 1913, he proceeded to Calcutta for higher studies. In 1919 when Subhas passed BA examination with a first class honours in philosophy, his father sent him to England to sit for the ICS examination.

He joined the Cambridge University and there came in contact with reputed and eminent Odia scientist Dr. Pranakrushna Parija.

In his book “Mo Chhatra Jibana” Dr. Parija refers to Subhas Bose about whom he had heard in connection with his protest against professor Oaten of Presidency College for his ill behavior towards Indian students.

Dr. Parija writes, “When he came to Cambridge I met him and requested that he should stay with me until he gets accommodation else where. Subhas stayed with him for a few days. Almost everyday, they met each other. Undoubtedly, he was a brilliant student and nine months after he joined the Cambridge University he was selected for Indian Civil Service. Before his training was over, he resigned from the Indian Civil Service to join India’s struggle for freedom and met Dr. Parija on the same day.

Dr. Manmath Nath Das writes about his conversation with Dr. Parija regarding Subhas Bose. As he writes : One day in 1963, I was travelling with the then vice-Chancellor of Utkal University Dr. Parija from Bhubaneswar to distant Gopalpur when he recollected his early life vividly. In course of his narration, he described his

intimate friendship with Suhhas Chandra Bose during their London days and of their correspondence for about a decade or more “Born, brought-up and educated at Cuttack, Subhas loved his place of birth so much that in many of his letters he used to enquire about places and persons of his childhood and youthful days and remembered even the lanes and by lanes of Cuttack”. One constant query from him was about the economic condition of the people as if he did not forget the picture of poverty he had seen. I used to reply in detail about all that he wanted to know' said Dr. Parija. When I questioned if the letters of Bose were still in his possession, his prompt reply was “Oh ! no. How could I have known that Subhas of those days would become a Congress President in future and finally the Netaji ?”.

When Subhas formed the Forward Bloc in 1939, he once came to Cuttack. He stayed as a guest with Sudhansu Mookerjee, son of reputed lawyer Sarat Chandra Mookerjee. When he came in a procession riding an elephant and reached Sudhansu Babu's house “I went to meet him and invited him to come for dinner. Subhas accepted the invitation.

This shows Subhas's love and attachment towards Odisha and his association with an eminent Odia luminary like Dr. P.K. Parija.

Netaji Subhas and Pandit Gopabandhu Das

In the twentieth century Gopabandhu Das played a significant role in the Calcutta labour movement relating particularly to Odia labourers. To save them from any exploitation and injustice, he formed an organisation called Odia Prabasi Shramajibi Sangathana”.

Subash who respected Gopabandhu Babu was well aware of his work to guard the interest and rights of Odia labourers in Calcutta.

He extended his full support to Gopabandhu Babu and in fact, the working committee of Odia Shramajibi Sangathan had its meeting in Subhas Bose's Calcutta residence on August 15, 1924. In the meeting Gopabandhu Babu presided.

In the month of September 1924, in a meeting in Harish Park, Subhas addressed the Odia labourers. He spoke in Odia amid loud cheers and clappings and assured to give all help and cooperation on behalf of the Calcutta corporation.

According to newspaper forward, he appreciated the activities of Pandit Gopabandhu Das, who as he said, 'might be called the uncrowned king of Odisha'. The Odia labour union, he said, was a necessity as it would prove beneficial to the labourers themselves and their masters. If the movement proceeded steadily he would try to secure help for it from the Calcutta corporation to establish night schools and to provide medical aid.

It gives an unmistakable evidence of Subhas's love and regard for Gopabandhu Babu and concern for Odia labours in the twenties of twentieth century.

Subhas Bose regularly wrote letters to Gopabandhu from Mandalay Jail enquiring all about Odisha, its problems and the Odia movement and Utkal Gaurav Madhusudan Das.

The first letter dated 24.12.25 is a remarkable masterpiece showing his love for Odia language, his clear-cut views on the Odia movement for amalgamation of Odia speaking tracts and his personal love and regard for Gopabandhu and his sense of concern regarding Gopabandhu's desire to retire from public life.

Subhas was keen on picking up Odia and requested Gopabandhu Babu to suggest a recent

Odia grammar book or preferably an Anglo-Odia or Bengali-Odia grammar.

Regarding amalgamation of Odia speaking tracts he writes; 'I have been following the development of Odia amalgamation scheme and only hope that before Lord Reading departs he will make some announcement favourable to Odia popular opinion'.

Sylhet has been transferred to Bengal I do not see any reason why Ganjam should not be restored to Odisha.

The floods in Odisha, it's poverty and misery greatly concerned him. He also showed his interest to Gopabandhu Babu to study the life of Odia saints and Sadhus and their methods of Sadhana if any such book could be available.

In his second letter dated 7.4.26, he requested Gopabandhu Babu to please provide him information on (1) Name of some suitable and interesting Odia books which he can commence studying, (2) name of any history of Odia literature book in Oriya, English or Bengali and (3) Names and addresses of bookshops in Calcutta, Cuttack or Puri where Odia books are stocked.

Regarding Utkal Tannery of Utkal Gaurav Madhusudan Das, he had a very positive opinion. If properly worked it will not only become a financial success but will be a glory to Odisha. Poor as Odisha is from agricultural point of view, without industrial development it will be impossible to find work and food for her children.

The problem of Odias emigrating to distant and far off places concerned him greatly which continues even now.

Subhas had also clear-cut views on two problems confronting Odisha and Bengal namely

river problem and the problem of cooperative development.

In his last and third letter dated 26.7.26, he intimates Gopabandhu Babu about the receipt of the books which he sent to him last year to facilitate his learning of Odia. He was in a way frantic to get Odia books through Gopabandhu Babu and read them to his satisfaction.

At the end, he tries to know from Gopabandhu Babu whether he has received and read S. Bijoy Mazumdar's book "Orissa in the making and if so, his opinion about it".

All those letters provide unmistakable evidence of Subhas Babu's deepest regards and respect for Gopabandhu Babu, his clear-cut and sympathetic views on Odia amalgamation movement under the leadership of Utkal Gourav Madhusudan Das apart from his sense of concern for the problems affecting Odisha and Odias. Odisha was ever in his heart even when he was in far off Mandalay under incarceration.

Formation of Odisha as a Separate Province and Netaji Subhas

Under the leadership of Utkal Gourav Madhusudan Das there continued a struggle in Odisha for the amalgamation of different Odia-speaking tracts in neighboring Bengal, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Madras and formation of a separate Odisha province on the basis of language.

In 1928, a committee was formed under the presidency of Motilal Nehru to consider the issue of linguistic states. This committee neither showed any favour nor any sense of concern for formation of a separate Odisha province but it was Subhas who accepted and supported the scheme of amalgamation of Odia-speaking tracts and constituting them into a separate Odisha province.

In 1938, when Subhas became Congress President for the Haripura Congress session, he sent his greetings to Utkal political conference which shows his attachment to Odisha. As he wrote, I am sorry I can not attend the coming session of the Utkal Conference. Being a son of Utkal, my heart is always there. I hope, however, that in spite of my unwilling absence the conference will be a great success. Great responsibility has now developed on Utkal and especially on the congressmen of Utkal. Utkal has now a congress ministry and it is necessary that the congress organization in Utkal should be in a state of first class efficiency. For this purpose, it is necessary to have unity among the ranks of Utkal congressmen....I am looking forward to the day when I will be able to visit Odisha.

Another memorable thing during his presidentship of congress in 1938. Subhas nominated Dr. H.K. Mahtab, a young man from Odisha to the congress working committee which was a post of honour in pre-independent India. Nobody else earlier had that privileged position from Odisha. This is another act of love for Odisha and Odias.

In 1939 when Subhas contested for the post of Congress President for a second time against the will of Gandhi and also won, he was supported by Nilakantha Das, Jadumani Mangaraj and Dibakar Patnaik.

Since 1917, Subhas visited Odisha many times. However, in 1939 August Subhas visited many areas of Odisha. At the time, he visited his parental house in Odia Bazaar, Cuttack.

Coming by Puri-Howrah Express when he got down at Cuttack he was made to tour sitting on an elephant in a huge procession which passed through Ranihat, Mangalabagh, Buxi Bazaar, Naya Sadak, Choudhury Bazaar,

Nimachaudi and Lalbag. During this tour he stayed with Sudhansu Bhusan Mookerji who was a family friend.

On August 5 and 6 he addressed a mammoth public meeting on the invitation of Utkal Juba Sammilani.

Over and above, he visited Ravenshaw college and addressed the students in a meeting presided over by Dr. P.K. Parija.

Later on, he went to Ravenshaw Collegiate School on the invitation of old students of the school. At that time, Biswanath Das was the Prime Minister of Odisha. Biswanath Babu and Dr. H.K. Mahtab met him and discussed on politics of the country.

During his tour of Puri and Khurda, Pandit Nilakantha Das, Godabarish Mohapatra, Jadumani Mangaraj, Bhagirathi Mohapatra, Lokanath Mishra, Dibakar Patnaik and from the younger generation, Rammohan Mishra, Bibhudhendra Mishra, Dibyasingh Das and Ashok Das etc completely cooperated with him. All those leaders being fed up with the congress were getting attracted towards Netaji's Forward Bloc.

What deserves mention here is that when Subhas formed the Forward Bloc in 1939 following his resignation from the Congress, Ashok Das, son of Pandit Nilakantha Das was inducted as a member of all India Forward Bloc committee.

In Odisha, Forward Bloc was formed with Dibakar Patnaik as President, Ashok Das, Bibhudhendra Mishra, Balaram Mohanty, Sriharsha Mishra, Surajmal Saha, Gangadhar Mohapatra were active members.

It will not be out of place to mention that Pandit Nilakantha Das who resigned from the

Congress Presidentship and joined the Forward Bloc in 1939 was “Instrumental to the installation of a coalition ministry in Odisha as per the deliberations with Netaji. This was installed on the pretext of helping the Britishers in their war efforts but with the real intention of helping easy ingress of the proposed INA of Netaji to India in order to precipitate the attainment of independence”.

Mr. Nilamani Routray one of freedom fighters and ex-chief minister of Odisha met Subhas in 1939 in his Elgin Road Residence when he was reading BA in Calcutta. He shares his experience about Subhas in his book “Smruti O Anubhuti”. As he writes “Knowing that I was a student of Cuttack, he immediately called me when I sought to meet him. He asked me a lot of things about the roads, lanes and by lanes of Cuttack, about Ravenshaw Collegiate School and other educational institutions. He talked to me in Odia and asked me who in my opinion should be given the responsibility of Forward Bloc in Odisha. I said that Smt. Malati Choudhury should be entrusted with the responsibility. While talking to him in Odia, I was in a way greatly thrilled. By then he had created a commotion everywhere in the national movement as a veritable symbol of emergent youth power.

Odisha and Azad Hind Fauz

When Netaji formed Azad Hind Fauz, he enrolled many Odias as soldiers. At that time brave and valiant Odias due to their acute poverty worked in Assam, Burma, Malay as labourers. Netaji instilled in those labourers a spirit of Patriotism and appealed to them to join the struggle for freedom being launched by Azad Hind Fauz to free mother India from British imperialism. His revolutionary call "Give me blood, I shall give you freedom" electrified and inspired them.

In response to his call many Odias of Rangoon in large numbers came forward to join the Azad Hind Fauz of Netaji. Netaji enrolled them in the Azad Hind Fauz or Indian National Army. Hundreds of Odias served their motherland to free it from British bondage risking their life and limb.

Among the prominent Odias in the INA were Colonel Brajamohan Patnaik, Doctor Birakishor Bhuyan, Narasingh Charan Das, Pandit Krushna Chandra Tripathy (Kshetra Pracharak) in charge of propaganda and Amar Sahid Dibakar Parida's brother Chakradhar Parida of Ranpur.

In the women's wing in Indian National Army constituted by Netaji as Rani of Jhansi Regiment, there were three Odia girls, Rajani, Kanti and Urmila. It is a matter of regret that history is silent on this.

Apart from these three Odia women, Laxmi Panda was another Odia woman freedom fighter in the Rani of Jhansi Regiment of Netaji.

Biju Patnaik and Azad Hind Fauz

In support of Subhas's Azad Hind Fauz another Odia hero Bijayananda Patnaik (Biju) extended his help as far as possible even though he was working as a Pilot in the Royal Indian Air Force in charge of transport command. While flying his plane to Rangoon as a pilot to save the British citizens stranded there, he was dropping from the sky Azad Hind Fauz handbills and leaflets for propaganda purposes. His motive was to extend support to the armed struggle of Netaji Subhas and create a favourable public opinion and awareness. When this was known on the basis of secret intelligence report, he was arrested by the British. In 1943, he was imprisoned in Lalkila and spent three years in Jail. All this was published in the Samaja in great details. It has been rightly said

“that even while serving the Royal Air Force, he made use of the aircraft to carry the nationalist leaders to their destination. He also distributed the hand bills of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and that is why he was court martialled and sentenced to three years imprisonment”.

Odisha was proud of Subhas and his I.N.A. Dr. H.K. Mahtab who was released from Ahmednagar fort on June 15, 1945 extended warm ovation to the released I.N.A. men like Sri Mahadev Sahu, Sri Hari Tripathy, Sri Lingaraj Tripathy, Sri Udayanath Panda and Sri Bhim Nayak. In a public reception to I.N.A. men he said; I am very happy to hear from their lips that there were thousands of Odias in INA. He was also filled with pleasant surprise to hear that there were Odia women too in the INA. As he further said “The military glory of ancient Utkal was revived by these INA men”.

Conclusion

In a way, the seed of transformation from Subhas to Netaji Subhas was sown in the soil of Odisha. He loved India, our motherland, with every fibre of his being but never ever forgot his birth place Odisha. He was in close touch with Odia luminaries like Pandit Gopabandhu Das, Pandit Nilakantha Das and Dr. P.K. Parija etc. His love for Odisha, his sense of concern for its problems, issues and concerns in the twentieth century was unmistakably perceptible throughout his political career. Even when he dreamt of the freedom of the country by waging a war against the British and formed the Indian National Army, he never forgot his Odia brothers and sisters and associated them in his quest of freedom.

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