

## Gandhi and Subhas Chandra Bose

*Siddhartha Dash*

Mahatma Gandhi and Subhas Chandra Bose were two legendary personalities, gigantic in their political moral and ethical stature. Both of them were two worthy sons of Mother India. In 1915, soon after his return from South Africa Gandhiji became the unquestioned leader of India's freedom movement and Indian National Congress. He transformed 'an unarmed, politically-subjugated, dumb and illiterate mass of humanity into a fearless, non-violent, politically awakened, resurgent militia. Verily out of dust, he made Indians into men'. Subhas Chandra Bose, 'the stormy petrel of Indian Renaissance' younger to Gandhi by 28 years who had resigned his brilliant career in the much coveted heaven-born Indian Civil Service with the resolute aim and determination to devote himself entirely to the fight for India's freedom.

The saga of relationship between Subhas and Gandhi starts with Subhas meeting Gandhi on the very day (on 16th July, 1921) of his landing at Bombay. Their first meeting set the contours of the relationship over the coming

quarter of a century between these two foremost leaders of India's freedom struggle.

To Subhas Bose, Gandhi always remained 'India's greatest man'. His appreciation of the unique contribution of Gandhi was unequivocal. He recognised and admitted Gandhi as the undisputable, unrivalled



leader of the masses. Subhas had all praise for Gandhi's unflinching patriotism, firmness in character, love for truth etc. Infact, Bose bowed before Gandhi's 'single hearted devotion, his relentless will, and his indefatigable labour'. To Gandhi, Bose was like a son whose 'self sacrifice and suffering, drive, integrity and

commitment to the national cause and the capacity to bind all Indians into one people were unsurpassed.'

Both Gandhi and Bose were totally honest men. They were internationalists and humanists. They were secular in approach and anti-racial in outlook. In whatever situations they were and whatever they were doing, their minds were always diverted towards the

liberation of their motherland. The whole life of both the leaders was an epic struggle for India's independence. In fact, the life long "Tapasya" of both, ended with the ultimate sacrifice of their very lives.

In spite of all these, there were glaring differences between Gandhi and Subhas and in political life both were posed against each other. Young Netaji was a firebrand nationalist who believed in the tradition of Tilak and Aurobindo. Gandhiji, on the contrary, was a reluctant nationalist who belonged to the tradition of his mentor Gokhale and Tagore. Bose's strong revolutionary urge for the emancipation of his motherland made him critical of many of Gandhiji's techniques.

In 1920, at the age of 23, Subhas joined the Non-cooperation Movement which was going on with all its fury in Bengal under the leadership of Deshabandhu Chittaranjan Das. He took prominent part in the agitation against the Prince of Wales's visit. In protest against the decision of Gandhi in calling off the Non-cooperation Movement as a sequence to the Chauri Chaura incident in 1922, Bose felt highly dejected. In 1927, Subhas was elected as one of the General Secretaries of the Indian National Congress. A British Parliamentary Commission, known as Simon Commission was appointed, to fix up the exact status of India's Constitutional development. Indian leaders had long been thinking in terms of early Dominion Status. For Subhas, the demand of Dominion Status appeared to be too short of his dream of full freedom. To the utter astonishment of everybody he roared before the Commission. 'India shall be free, the only question is when'? For this bold statement he incurred the displeasure of the Mahatma who rebuked Bose in the sharpest language such of

which was never before heard in the public from Gandhiji.

The year 1927 brought Subhas closer to Jawaharlal Nehru at the annual session of the Indian National Congress, which was held at Madras. They formed the Independence of Indian League and under their joint effort, resolution for 'Complete Independence' was passed. In the next year due to the opposition of Gandhi the resolution to reiterate the demand for Complete Independence could not be approved. Thus Bose's proposal was defeated. In 1929 to separate Nehru from Subhas, Gandhiji nominated Jawahar as the President of Indian National Congress. The Mahatma was happy as he thought that Bose would be ineffective without support from Jawaharlal. But Subhas a different stuff altogether, despite opposition both from Nehru and Gandhi declared 1929 to be the year of preparation for a massive civil disobedience movement.

In the subsequent events that immediately followed the same sort of ambivalence in the relationship between these two leaders are clearly discernible. Subhas praised Gandhiji for Dandi March and Salt Satyagraha (1930). He wrote nostalgically 'The march of Dandi - an event of historical importance which will rank on the same level with Napoleon's march to Paris'. He particularly admired Gandhiji success in involving women into the freedom movement. At the same time Subhas severely criticized Gandhiji's participation in the Second Round Table Conference in London. Bose was much perturbed by the way Gandhiji played his cards at the Round Table Conference. Gandhiji should have spoken, he felt, at the Round Table Conference, with a firm voice. In his treatise 'The Indian Struggle' which was published in November 1934 Subhas wrote,

'If the Mahatma had spoken in the language of dictator Stalin, Duce Mussolini or Fuhrer Hitler, John Bull would have understood and bowed his head in respect'.

In 1937, Gandhiji felt that Bose was a force to be reckoned with and hence he should no longer be neglected. He was further convinced that Subhas alone could be an instrument in the split of the Congress. Hence he decided to elect Subhas as the president of the Indian National Congress even when Subhas was not a member of that party. In the 51st session of the Congress held at Haripura in 1938, Subhas was unanimously elected as the President. Unfortunately both for the Congress and the country, the alliance between Bose and Gandhi remained precarious. Subhas not only condemned Gandhi's favourite Charakha but gave a call to modernise India. He called upon the people to get united for an armed struggle against the Britishers.

At the presidential election in January 1939, Subhas was vigorously opposed both by Gandhi and Nehru. Nevertheless, he has achieved a decisive victory over his opponent Dr. Pattabhi Sittaramayya, Gandhi's nominee by 1580 to 1375 votes. Gandhiji openly declared that Sittaramayya's defeat was his defeat. He said that Subhas's references to his colleagues were unjustified and unworthy. He remarked that since Subhas had criticized his colleagues as 'rightists', it would be most appropriate on his part to choose a homogeneous cabinet and enforce his action. At the Tripuri Congress, Bose as the president made a clear proposal that the Indian National Congress should immediately send an ultimatum to the British Government demanding independence within six months. It was opposed by the Gandhian wing and Nehru.

In the midst of the hostile situation Subhas resigned the Presidentship of the Congress on 29th April, 1939, and immediately proceeded to form a radical party bringing the entire left wing under one banner. In this connection, it would be most appropriate to mention that - Bose's innate devotion and respect for Gandhiji remained as firm even though his path was diverging. He clearly stated 'it will always be my aim and object to try and win his confidence for the simple reason that it will be tragic for me if I succeed in winning the confidence of other people but fail to win the confidence of India's greatest man'.

Subhas had his 'last long and hearty talk with the Mahatma on 20th June, 1940.' He had pressed Gandhi to launch the struggle taking advantage of the critical position of the British in the Second World War. He told that it was the most opportune time and it was impossible to think of any other situation in which India could start the struggle. Mahatma replied, 'why do you think that we cannot get better opportunities later on? I am sure we will have many such opportunities. Whether England wins or loses the war, she will be weakened by it; she will have no strength to shoulder the responsibilities of administering the country, and with slight effort on our part she will have no alternative but recognise India's independence'.

The whole nation was aroused when Subhas Bose made his spectacular escape on 17th January, 1941 (it was the day fixed for his trial for sedition) while under house detention at Calcutta and finally reached Germany in order to lead struggle for freedom from outside. Gandhi, on his part, could never endorse Subhas Bose joining with the Axis powers. Even outside India, Bose remained

unshaken in his deep allegiance to Gandhiji. His praise and devotion for Gandhi were again obvious in his broadcast on Gandhiji's birthday on 2nd October, 1943. 'The service which Mahatma Gandhi has rendered to India is so unique and unparalleled that his name will be written in letters of gold in our national history for all time'.

Even Gandhiji, while differing from the extreme methods of Subhas Bose, had utmost admiration for his unique effort for India's freedom. On one occasion Gandhiji wrote to Subhas, 'regarding your love for the country and determination to achieve freedom, you are second to none. Your sincerity is transparent. Your spirit of self-sacrifice and suffering can not be surpassed by anybody'. On another occasion in a conversation with an American journalist, on the eve of launching the Quit India Movement, Gandhiji defended Bose as 'a patriot of patriots'. Netaji's last broadcast on 6th July, 1944 addressed to Gandhiji through Azad Hind Radio, was like a brilliant report in which he described how 'the high esteem in which you are held by patriotic Indians outside India and by foreign friends of India's freedom, was increased a hundred fold when you bravely sponsored the Quit India Movement in August 1942'. Concluding his speech he fervently sought the blessings of Gandhi,

'Father of our Nation, in this holy war of India's liberation we ask you for your blessings and good wishes.'

During 1945 and 1946, Gandhiji came to know a lot about the exploits of Subhas and his Indian National Army. While addressing the INA prisoners he paid unreserved tributes in hailing Bose as 'Netaji'. He also paid unqualified tribute to the INA. 'The greatest among its achievements was to gather together, under one banner, men from all religions and races of India, and to infuse in them the spirit of solidarity and oneness, to the utter exclusion of all communal and parochial sentiments. It is an example which we should all emulate.'

It is thus clear from the above that both Gandhiji and Subhas discussed all the problems that confronted them, honestly realised their differences. Their relationship was based on truthfulness, transparency, sacrifice and suffering. No wonder, they had the deepest concern for each other till the end.

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*Hon'ble Chief Minister Shri Naveen Patnaik receiving a Bank Draft of Rs 1 crore 34 Lakh from Director, Arati Steel, Mr Rajeev Mittal for development of Khuntuni-Ghantikhal Road at Secretariat on 14-12-2004.*