

A man without peer

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In 1947, Bhulabhai Desai, a Congress leader and a renowned lawyer who was one of the INA defence counsel at the Red Fort trial, said at the reception of Netaji's close friend, Dilip Kumar Roy, that when he studied various documents on Netaji's achievements, he became convinced that "when the history of the Indian Independence movement would be written, he [Netaji] would rank as a king among men".

Desai was awe-struck when he came to know how Netaji developed an army, set up a bank, formed a hierarchy of officers, lawyers, legislators and organised different departments of his government in an alien land. He confessed that he "rubbed his eyes to be reassured that the documents were genuine". He said, "Yes Dilip Babu I...bow to him [Netaji] and shed penitent tears that I had traded him along with a few others as blind as myself..." [Amrita Bazar Patrika, 23 January 1961]. Who is Netaji? What is his vision?

We know that Netaji was greatly influenced by the teachings of Swami Vivekananda and Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Vivekananda instilled in us the power to do away with servile existence and Ramakrishna disseminated the spirit of renunciation. All these inhered in Netaji's struggle for freedom. But we hardly pay attention to the fact that the man always was inclined towards spiritualism.

The biography of the saint Shyamacharan Lahiri informs, "Netaji was initiated in the Kriyayog by Babu Barada Charan Majumdar on 12 June 1939." Aurobindo Ghosh called Barada Charan Majumdar a Great Yogi of Bengal. Barada Charan's biography confirms that Bose visited him.

S A Ayer, the Minister for Publicity and Propaganda in the Azad Hind government, recorded in his book 'Unto him a Witness' that in Singapore, Netaji used to send his car to the Ramakrishna Mission to bring Brahmachari Kailasan to 'spend a good two hours or so in spiritual communion'.

Such spiritualism coexisted with a pragmatic approach. This is revealed from his analysis of different schools of Indian and Western philosophy. He distanced himself from all abstruse ideas of the Absolute and stated in his autobiography [An Indian Pilgrim] that the world was real and not an illusion.

He also pointed out that our knowledge of reality came through our own spectacles - "whether these spectacles be Bacon's 'Idola' or Kant's 'forms of the understanding'..." He finally arrived at two significant conclusions - Reality is relative to varying perceptions, and it is changing constantly. Nevertheless, it was emphasised that the reality of the world had an objective existence in specific time and space. These notions brought him close to concern about what was happening around him. The first signs of it were witnessed when he faced the wrath of authorities at Presidency College in 1916.

It all began when Prof. Oaten, in January 1916 manhandled some Indian students of Subhas's class. As class representative, Subhas, met the Principal and demanded Prof. Oaten's apology. But the Principal refused to accept that Oaten had manhandled the Indian students. This triggered a general strike leading to imposition of a fine on absentee students.

The anger of students reached a boiling point about a month later when Oaten, once again, manhandled a student. Recount-



ing the explosive situation, Bose said in his autobiography that since constitutional protests like strikes failed and appeals to the Principal proved futile, some students decided to take the law into their own hands. It resulted in a physical assault on the racist Professor.

The widely circulated story is that Oaten was beaten by Subhas. But, Subhas's own account confirms that he did not beat Oaten. Subhas said, "His [Oaten's] assailants - who felled him - were all in front of him and on the same level with him." He said that he was an eye witness, but he never said that he was one of those who felled Oaten. Later, the Principal told Subhas, "Bose, you are the most troublesome man in the College. I suspend you." Subhas said, "Thank you."

Appearing before the government's enquiry committee as a representative of the students, Subhas said, "though the assault was not justified, the students had acted under great provocation." The 'wiseacres' thought that he had ruined his case by not unconditionally condemning the assault on Oaten. But he felt that he had done the right thing no matter the consequences.

He rose against British teachers' racist attitude and owned up what was done by others. A leader was thus born, who eventually plunged into the freedom struggle leaving the ICS. He refused to toe the Gandhian line. He chose an alternative course for his mission. This was against some people's politics of adjustments. They found his path too dangerous to tread on and as such, spread disinformation to legitimise their position.

The rebel student eventually turned out to be the rebel leader of the Congress who rejected the Gandhian line of compromise and negotiated settlement. Representing the Left Wing of the Congress he argued, "When the mainstream of a movement begins to stagnate...a Left Wing invariably appears". For him, the conflict between the Left Wing and the mainstream would usher

in a higher stage of development.

It echoes his philosophy of progress. It led him to develop a political realism with an eye to the goal of realising his ideal.

Thus, he utilised opportunities as they unfolded to achieve his ideal, complete independence.

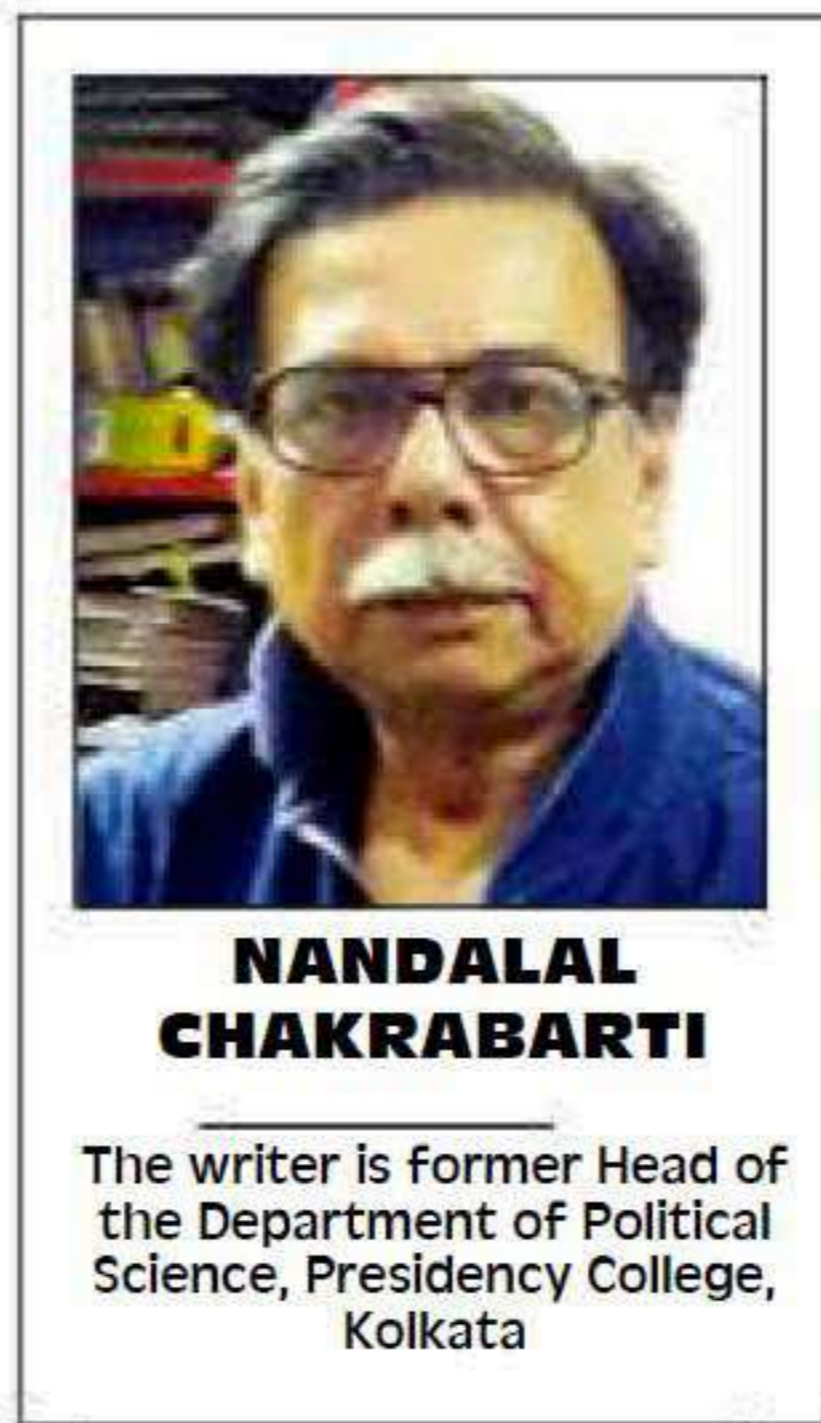
In 1938, anticipating a war in Europe, he sought to launch a nation-wide movement to take advantage of the situation. Unlike Gandhi and his supporters, he wanted to wrest freedom. He never wanted to

negotiate a transfer of power through an understanding with the colonial ruler. The Gandhian camp resented his move.

His uncompromising stand led to his resignation from the post of Congress President. Eventually, facing repeated incarceration, he decided to leave the country for outside assistance to launch an armed campaign against the Raj.

When he established contact with the Axis powers, it was blown out of proportion ignoring his constant endeavour to secure Russian help. The Indian Communists, called him 'Quisling'. It is noteworthy that during World War II, these Communists supported the British.

Britain, on the other hand, unleashed a vicious campaign of lies against Bose. A glaring example of this is Hugh Toye's comments in The 'Springing Tiger'. Toye was a British Army Intelligence officer, who said, "someone asked Bose in Kabul how in the face of religious and communal dissensions in India, the country could be united... Bose replied: 'They will disappear only when an iron dictator rules India for twenty years'..." Neither in his Kabul thesis nor anywhere else did Bose ever mention anything about the rule of a dictator in India for twenty years. Besides, who was that 'someone'? Still, some people, instead of discarding this brazen disinformation, tried to create confusion about his political objectives. In a deviant way they sought to legitimise



Toye's view.

Subhas's goal took shape in the context of a turbulent domestic and international situation. On the domestic front, he had to formulate his policies keeping in view the growing divisive tendencies in the country. Insofar as international relations were concerned, he made multiple alliances, but never surrendered to any power. Let us first refer to the political objectives of the organisation that grew out of the Left-Wing revolt.

This organisation would stand for the masses i.e. for the peasants, workers, etc. It would not represent the interests of the "landlords, capitalists, and money-lending classes." The organisation would strive for the complete political and economic liberation of the people of India. He made it clear that the organisation would stand for a federal government for India as the ultimate goal.

But there would be a strong central government with dictatorial powers for some years. This was a unitary system of government which he conceived of in the context of a chaotic social and political situation.

A strong central government, temporarily exercising dictatorial powers, cannot be described as dictatorship. The framers of our Constitution envisaged a combination of unitary and federal features.

It was necessary because of the rise of various disintegrative forces. Can we say that the Founding Fathers willy-nilly sought to establish a dictatorship?

About his concept of 'Synthesis between Fascism and Socialism', he told Rajani Palme Dutt that the expression he used in "The Indian Struggle" was not a happy one. What he meant was that India wanted national freedom.

After achieving it, the nation would move towards socialism. This socialism, however, would not be developed imitating the Bolshevik experiments. He clarified in his speech at Naujawan Sabha in Karachi in 1931 that he wanted a totally indigenous development of socialism.

In August 1942, he put all doubts to rest in an article published in German. He said that initially, there would be a strong central government to safeguard order and public security, but when the state-machinery would start functioning smoothly, power would be decentralised, and the provincial governments would be given more responsibility. In short, he wanted to emphasise that his ultimate goal was a federal structure.

The strong central government would be necessary to crush all anti-national forces including secret British agents who might still be in the country. Clearly, he dreamt of a national unity so very necessary to assert a strong and independent identity of India. If this is called dictatorship, perhaps those who had instigated fragmentation of the nation would have been the greatest democrats.

He challenged Gandhi, sought German help, but did not hesitate to condemn the German attack on Russia and sent his INA men to unfurl the tricolour on Indian soil going against the Japanese Army's plan to lead the INA to India.

He stood his ground in all adverse situations fearlessly. With only five per cent chance of survival, he took a perilous submarine voyage for 90 days to reach Southeast Asia.

He pursued his goal ignoring his personal safety. Truly, the man has no peer in India's freedom movement.