



Subhash Chandra Bose and INA: Understanding Issues of Legitimacy

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This paper explores unique aspect of Subhash Chandra Bose with reference to his legitimacy as undisputed leader of India. How did he acquire undisputed legitimacy? Was it his ability to stand as leader searching for military solution for independence? Was it his ability to conduct experiment such as establishing Rani of Jhanshi Regiment and bringing women in public space to claim independence for India? This paper explores the contribution of Subhash Chandra Bose in celebrating the cultures of resistance evolved in Indian subcontinent since ancient time period as well as revisit idea of India of Subhash Chandra Bose who conceptualized Indian not in terms of Male and Female rather a human being capable of resistance against any kind of exploitative system. In a way, Subhash Chandra Bose was exploring the historical traditions of India to nurture a political consciousness among Indians to claim rights a human beings. The acceptability of Subhash Chandra Bose is rooted in the fact that the majority of people of India was freedom oriented and was always ready to sacrifice everything to protect the autonomy and independence. In this scenario, the Subash Chandra reflected immense capability of Indians to create infrastructure of State in a situation when masses were struggling for rights, fighting against the colonial system and facing epidemic and various diseases.

Obviously, understanding role of Subhash Chandra Bose is very complex issue as it challenges existing established narrative of Freedom movement and role of people. The complexity is also situated with reference to the fact how historians (Bipin Chandra¹, Sumit Sarkar² etc.) in post- independent India have conceptualized process of Independence till contemporary time period. The trajectory followed by Subhash Chandra Bose also challenges the accepted framework of struggle for independence.

Methodology – This paper is based on the latest papers release by the Government of India and is now available in Nehru Memorial library and Museum and referred as INA papers. There are various files and the papers related to the problems faced by people and medical assistance provided by INA have been consulted.

1. India in 19th and 20th century: Cultures of Resistance

Exploring the consciousness of people in 19th and century, it becomes clear cut that the Indians were oriented to participate in warfare in time of famine and in times of claiming political power. Dirk Kolf³ has argued that the Indians from Gujarat were participating in warfare of Deccan to sustain themselves during famine; he gives example of Koli community. Similarly, the revolts led by Satnamis and Banda Bahadur in 19th century speak volume about independent mindset of people in Indian subcontinent. The sacrifices by Sikh Guru again underline the fact that people of Indian subcontinent were ready to sacrifice everything to protect honour and consciousness. Again, the cultures of resistance reflected in the struggles of state and people of Assam, against the Mughal State, again underlines the spirit of independence celebrated across the Indian Subcontinent. Subhash Chandra Bose argued that “forcibly disarmed by the British after 1857 and subjected to terror and

¹ Bipin Chandra, India's Struggle for Independence(Delhi: Penguin Random House India, 2016)

² Sumit Sarkar, Modern India (Delhi: Pearson Education India, 2014)

³ Dirk H.A. Kolff, Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy(Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 1990)

brutality, the Indian people lay prostrate...”⁴ True, the British Colonial State had taken over some parts of country but the cultures of resistance has continuously evolved in different forms in Indian subcontinent and these cultures of resistance have continued till contemporary period. Subhash Chandra had created spark among these forces of India which paved the way for the organized resistance among the masses. In this scenario, Subhash Chandra’s contribution was in various forms in struggle for independence such directly by creating a structure of state and leading organized military struggle keeping the idea of equality and human rights on the top priority. Infact, the contribution of Subhash Bose as military leader has been analyzed by scholars but his role as the force that stood with people in times of crisis and also provided a ray of hope to the masses that could be reached out by INA or Subhash Chandra Bose. The masses across the country got agitated and it provided the threshold required for any country to get independence.

2. Role of INA as Welfare Sate

No doubt, the struggle for Independence had already witnessed various shades of struggles from non-cooperation to armed struggle, The remarkable aspect of struggle initiated by Subhash Chandra Bose to capitalize the cultures of armed resistance of masses of people against exploitative system. The overwhelming support of Sikh community to the struggle speaks how the traditions of resistance were open to participate in struggles against colonization. The letter of J.V.B Janvrin, Deputy Commissioner of Police, Calcutta states that “... we are bound to accept the possibility that Jathedar Mohan Singh derived his information from the Axis Radio. His reference to the prospective attendance of Subhash Bose at the conference may be based on the inference in view of the Axis claim that the Indian National Council had been formed under Subhash Bose’s guidance and

⁴ Ganpat Rai, ed. Famous Speeches and letters of Subhash Chandra Bose (Lahore: Lion Press, 1946)p.223

inspiration”⁵ The mechanism adopted by Subhash Chandra Bose through Indian National Army was a ray hope for masses to get liberated from colonial system as visible through the letters of correspondence sent by army men of INA after retirement or participating in warfare. The letter of Karam Singh (Village – Palakwah, Hoshiarpur, Punjab) had written letter on 19/3/46 to the Secretary of I.N.A Relief Committee reflects how INA had been perceived by masses. After arriving from prison camp, Karam Singh was deprived of any cash source required for expenses. He stated “I beg to say that the condition of my family consisting of mother and sister is not quite good. The marriage of my sister falls shortly and I need relief or your help for it”⁶ Another letter written in Tamil Language on 12/3/46 again states the extreme conditions of soldiers in need of finance. This soldier and his brother were both serving in the INA. Even after getting released from the prison, he preferred to stay in the INA so that he could get job. He stated that “I had no means for my living and for the support of my mother and young brother.....It was our poverty that drove both of us to Malaya and we are supporting our family at the sweat of our own.”⁷

Another letter of widow women from Travancore dated 20/3/46 brings into state affair of people who were participating in the INA. Karthiyayini had written a letter to the Secretary of INA relief Committee on and the letter shows that the women and her family did not participate in the INA, but she was willing to take help offered by INA to people in need. It states that the her husband as running a sarree shop, due to unnatural death of her father in law and later on, her husband also died . This unfortunate condition forced her to seek help from INA relief committee. It says , “now I have been informed that your committee is giving some sort of

⁵ INA Papers at Nehru Memorial Museum and Library , File no.2, Intelligence Bureau, (Home Department) Government of India New Delhi , dated 20th August 1942 No. SA/528(Jap.)

⁶ INA Papers at Nehru Memorial Museum and Library , File no.2, Letter from Karam Singh to INA, Security Control Office, Pretoria Office, Calcutta dated 19/3/46, P.184

⁷INA Papers at Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, file no.2, Letter written by N Padmanathan Asan (from Kottapuram) to the Secretary, INA Relief Committee , 12/3/46

financial help to the family of deceased..” Another letter of March 1946 reflects the immense pain and agony faced by the soldier. It says that the soldier was in jail for two years at Assam and Bengal, and he got released from Nilganj Camp on 15/3/46 having RS 3 in pocket. He requested , “kindly consider my needy case to grant me help of Rs 500 only so that I may start some private enterprise and earn bread.”⁸

These latest papers of INA also reveal another side of contribution by women and also bring forth their sacrifice which supported the struggle for independence. A letter written by Annamma dated 15/3/46 again states that the husband of the lady had died even then she had allowed her son to join INA to serve the country. The letter states “ He left us with the only idea of uplifting our family.....please let me know of his whereabouts and help me in my old age with the necessary help you can provide”⁹

Subhash Chandra Bose was a man beyond his time venturing into the future and opening unexpected possibilities for Indian women. His political ideas can be challenged or approved but his ardent efforts to include women in Indian national army can only be appreciated for its significance in changing the political space for women. Mass movement of 1920s by Gandhi also brought women outside the walls of home on small intervals and in limited activities. Meanwhile, Bose altogether blurred the public private boundary for women, thus making them full time activists in independence struggle. He challenged and shaped the Indian consciousness with respect to women, public space and their mobility.

What actually made him the champion of women’s rights was feminization of army and creation of women wing in Indian National Congress. Always being a revolutionary in his visions, he trained Indian Diaspora women in Singapore,

⁸ INA Papers Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Letter, File no. 2 Written to the Secretary INA Relief Committee , page no 200.

⁹ INA Papers Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, File no.2, Letter Written to the Secretary INA Relief Camp P.212

Malaysia and Indonesia for military recruitment. His unparalleled actions and ideas reflect a visionary who fully grasped the implications of equal opportunity and equal rights for both men and women. Not only was he devoted to national independence but liberation of women from shackles of confining ideas and structures of the Indian society. He also influenced the liberation movement at world level and empowered women. His political philosophy was not only focused on achieving his end but also employing all inclusive just means throughout the process to achieve it.

The culture of sacrifice infused by the INA among the people and its role as institution of help to masses in times of crisis also paved the way to culture of immense sacrifice among the masses. This culture of sacrifice among the soldier of INA is visible in times when the soldier himself is in need of financial support. The press note of INA¹⁰ dated 5/3/1946 states the there were innumerable examples where soldier of INA getting released from detention centers were getting due amount and they were donating most of received amount to the INA inquiry and Relief fund. It states that Kishan Lal son of Late Rati Ram got released from Lucknow detention camp on 28/2/46 and received RS 1200 from the authorities, but he submitted RS 800 hundred to the INA Enquiry and Relief Fund. L/NK. Chunilal of Jammu State got released from Lucknow detention camp on 1/3/1946 and got Rs 1870 and submitted Rs 500 to INA Fund. L/Nk Shispal Singh got released from Lucknow camp on 1/3/46 and got Rs 2000 from the authorities he submitted Rs 1000 to the INA fund.

There are innumerable examples showing the desire of people to contribute for the continuous functioning of INA in the larger interest of people and for independence of India. INA was perceived as equivalent of second home and its presence ensured safety and security of home and motherland. The legitimacy of INA was highly

¹⁰ INA Papers at Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, File no.2, Press Note of INA 5th March, 1946. P.177.

visible in India and abroad in 20th century. Unlike the movements of independence led by army in various countries of world such as Latin America in 19th century, the movement for independence led by Subhash Chandra was unique and largely people oriented. Taking care of pain and agony of people was first priority of Subhash Chandra Bose. It is in this context that the popularity of Subhash Chandra was unparalleled as leader of masses committed for independence of India.

3. INA as Space of Emotions and Shaping Gender Relations

Another important role of INA not explored till now is that it not only provided the medical help to the officers and family of army men who served in the INA. Beyond this space of INA as unit of army, the letters provide another shade that it provided the space required by masses in times of illness and health related issues. The papers of File no. 2 states “In all there were 160 medical officers and 120 medical assists in the medical service. The medical personnel included nursing sepoy, Ambulance, clerks, store keepers, Dhobies, Water carriers, carpenter... But some day somebody may write the medical history of INA which will bring to light clearly as to how various problems of epidemic diseases were tackled, how epidemic dysentery and how the out beds of cholera, typhoid were prevented.”¹¹ There were four general hospitals designated 1,2,3,4. The accommodating space of these hospitals was around 5000 beds. The hospital number 1 & 2 were established in Burma and the hospital number 3&4 were established in Malaya. To ensure the continuity of medical facility, INA had established a medical school under the directorship of Co Kalsiwal in Bedadam.

It is crystal clear that the help provided by INA and forces of Subash Chandra Bose was outstanding in various ways in both spaces of battle as well as civil affairs. It provides new perspective that Subhash stands as a symbol of capability in times of

¹¹ INA Papers Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, File no.2, P.194.

colonization and also a ray of hope for masses. No doubt the struggle for independence continued in various modes but the acceptance of INA and its team as space to depend upon in times of crisis such as financial or medical, and involving women these fronts shows new aspect of Subhash Chandra Bose. Also this papers also shows how women contributed indirectly in the best possible to motivate man to participate in war against colonization. At the same time, Subash Chandra Bose facilitated progressive changes in Gender relations by bringing out women in public space. The establishment of Rani of Jhansi Regiment was a very innovative idea and was of ahead of time in the light of social conditions prevalent in India during 1940s. The Unit was organized into two categories, the first on purely for fighting purpose and the second was for nursing purpose. It was not a simple idea as evident from the fact that the initial training was organized in much protected space. “High ranking officers of I.N.A., from the supreme command, then decided to fence the parade ground with matting about six feet high to avoid the vulgar gaze of spectators.”¹² Most importantly, INA changed the meaning and perception of gender relations in Indian subcontinent by establishing women unit in Army for fighting and medical purposes. It set a new benchmark to carry forward the journey of gender relations in Independent India.

Thus, it can be argued that the legitimacy of Subhash Chandra was rooted in his capability to get connected with the cultures of Indian Subcontinent and ability to perceive India progressively in totality paving way for a Nation made by sense of belonging among the masses. It was this sense of belonging that had made Subash Chandra Bose as undisputed leader of Freedom Struggle.

¹² Ganpat Rai, ed., Famous Speeches and Letters of Subhash Chandra Bose (Lahore: Lion Press, 1946) P.254