

BOOK REVIEW

Abul Kalam, *Subhas Bose : Strategic Concerns and Diplomatic Thought*. Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1997, 160 Pages.

The book, **Subhas Bose: Strategic Concerns and Diplomatic Thought**, by Abul Kalam comes to the market at a significant moment in history of Bangladesh when the country is celebrating its twenty-five years of independence with renewed zeal and enthusiasm. The book is a useful reminder of the history of the nationalistic movement in India and Bengal, particularly, the prominent role of the Bengali leaders in organizing the movements against all forms of colonialism and political, social, economic and cultural subjugation. The book forms an objective and analytical reading on the liberation movement waged by Subhas Bose.

In its specific objective, the book attempts to analyse the strategic and tactical thoughts and actions of the leader as he waged a total war against the colonial power. The author ably traces the conceptual landscape of the movement right from its beginning until its demise, carefully recalling the thoughts and actions of the leader. The work is based on well documented research and is organized into six chapters that attempt to span the early life of Bose, examine his strategic concepts and philosophy of the struggle, and scrutinize his diplomatic thoughts and pursuits in the prevailing national and international environment.

The introductory chapter sets the tone of his research which, in essence, establishes the analytical framework for the book. The second chapter has a historically descriptive flavour of the early life of Bose and the process of development leadership in him, but frankly, the author does not depict the life and activities of Bose in adequate depth, which remains a major weakness of this highly analytical and perceptive work. Like a devoted scholar, the author dwells firmly within his research boundaries and in the process remains glued to the policies and actions of the leader, and only rarely does the author notice the immediate ramifications of his political programmes on the different groups of political actors.

In the third and fourth chapters, the author invests many pages on the scholarly investigations regarding Bose's philosophy and ideology and his tactical and strategic compulsions at a time when cataclysmic changes were taking place all over the globe. The clash of the great powers with accompanying ideological and political alliances and conflicts and their implications for colonial India has a great deal of significance for Subhas Bose who had grown differences with both Jawharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi regarding how the movement for the liberation of India should be modelled and set into motion. The fifth chapter is an analytical continuity from the previous chapters, but the author arrives at some interesting futuristic conclusions that merit further scrutiny and analysis. The sixth chapter is a postscript covering some contemporary development about the life and activities of the great leader.

The author has tried to relate Bose's plans, visions and schemes into analytical framework of strategy and modern diplomacy and identify his rationality, depth of vision, diplomatic acumen, and farsightedness and above all, Bose's profound longing for the independence of the country. The author admits that Bose remains an enigma, a "saga of demonstrated courage, vision and sacrifice" (p.1) and at the same time, an arrogant, uncompromising personality in ideology, thoughts and actions.

The author spends quite a few pages describing what he calls Bose's "strategic blueprint" for the liberation of India. He sketches the development for the political and ideological personality of Bose who had nourished a conviction that there must be meaning to the life and actions of a person. It was perhaps in this search for a mission and purpose of life that Bose left his bright career in the Indian Civil Service and joined the main political organization of the country, the Indian National Congress Party, to participate in the national movement. His efficiency, ardour and intelligence enabled him to rise rapidly through the ladder of leadership to become the Secretary General of the Party in 1927 and, finally, its President in 1938 when he was only forty-two years old. Widely known among the Congress circles as a person of vision and as well as actions, he soon grew differences with both pragmatic Nehru and idealistic Gandhi. Nehru believed in a gradualistic movement towards India's independence and Gandhi wanted the movement to be non-violent, based on his tactics of non-cooperation and eventual rejection of the British rule. Bose felt that while the "country was ready for battle" (p.11), its leaders failed to grasp its potential for revolution. Bose had reasons to doubt that the plans and policies of Gandhi and Nehru with many inherent contradictions, defeatism and uncertainties would ever earn India its long cherished independence from the yoke of colonialism.

Bose's earlier experience in military training as a University Cadet, his hostility with a white English professor, his ten month long education in philosophy at the Cambridge, his association with the prominent Bengali nationalist leaders like C.R. Das and Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore, his brief career in the bureaucracy and, finally, his tenure as the Congress President - all did their bits to create the person in Bose that greatly influenced his subsequent thoughts and actions. As far as the liberation of India was concerned, Bose saw a clear lack of perception in Gandhi and his non-violence creed, and as an alternative functional course of action, Bose advocated violence as the only means to achieve an expeditious liberation of the country.

Bose realized that the independence movement needed significant moral and material support from outside India, and the ongoing WWII provided an excellent opportunity and a "favourable international situation" for the country to align with the Axis Powers and drive the British away from India (p. 38).

The author makes a rather cryptic survey of Bose's life and focuses mainly on the thoughts and strategic objectives of Bose. The author's intellectual preoccupation with and search for finer grains of strategy and diplomacy, unfortunately, relegates many important details about the political life of Bose to the footnotes in the book, all of which should have found their places in the text for a degree of generalization and clarity. Those details would benefit a common reader, trying to discover and reassess the revolutionary thoughts and actions of the great leader. A more serious reader is, however, quick to notice the analytical incisiveness and the strengths of his arguments based on elaborate documentation and research.

The author finds some important connections between Bose's doctrine of alliance with the enemies of the British and the doctrine of mandala in classical Indian strategy. His efforts to ally with any country, irrespective of its ideological orientation, show that Bose truly belonged to the realist school where national interests readily subordinate all the norms of morality in international politics. Despite his deep-rooted belief in *syamyavada* or socialism, his wooing of the Nazi Germany and imperial Japan stems from the overriding need of strategic alliance to achieve the national goals. He transforms himself from a politician to a grand strategist, articulating not only his visions of Pan-Asian cooperation and globalism based on symmetric international order, but also the need for expedient military alliance to achieve initial goals of liberation and self-rule. As Germany and Japan eventually courted defeat, his final attempt to reach Russia was cut short by an air crash which brought a tragic end to his heroic struggles.

The author reckons Bose to be a statesman and a visionary "somewhat far ahead of his time, with supreme loyalty to the ideals of

social harmony and symmetry" (p. 113). The second phase of his revolution would ensure equitable distribution of social and economic benefits through a "comprehensive scheme of gradual socialization of the agricultural and industrial systems in the spheres of both production and distribution"(p. 52). Bose, as the author claims, was deeply influenced by C.R. Das, the great secular leader of India and the Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore. Both Bose and C.R. Das suffered imprisonment together and both grew unhappy over the congress policies and practices. It was their "shared suffering and contemplation" that helped Bose to charter a definite course of the political movement in India (p. 13). The author does not, however, explain how and in what ways Tagore had influenced Bose except for the fact that they both believed in a Greater Bengal (p. 29). Bose's idea of a "Great Bengal" remains unexamined, and to an extent, hazy and confusing. Did Bose contemplate an independent Bengal and, if so, how would he claim himself as the champion of Indian nationalism while he encouraged strident linguistic provincialism in his nationalistic movement? On a broader Indian plane, if he wanted to see Bengal playing a predominant role in a united India, would that be acceptable to the Hindi heartland, or to the martial Punjabis and Rajputs of India?

The author correctly compares Bose's doctrine of mass mobilization and direct action with the Clausewitzian doctrine of armed violence necessary for surgical cure of social and political problems. Faced with the daunting tasks that he saw for himself, Bose read Clausewitz and Napoleon carefully and tried to develop concepts of total national war zero-sum games, and rear area operations. Away in Japan or in Singapore, far removed from his own country, and without the assets necessary for a protracted regular war, how was he to follow the Clausewitzian tenets? His professed style of mobilization belonged more to the Maoist school that flourished half a decade later than to Clausewitzian style of preparing the military forces for war. The Indian National army which Bose created and led out of the captured W W II soldiers and officers, was a motley collection of soldiers with

varied training and backgrounds, and it did not constitute a decisive force to challenge the British Army seriously in the battle front and, it could, at best, take part in isolated operations like a guerrilla force. During the Japanese-Burma campaign, the Indian National Army did not figure out prominently as it lacked the resources, manpower and integrated training to fight as a cohesive force, and consequently, it was employed merely on supportive roles. They were more useful as instruments of propaganda and intelligence than fighting in the battlefield - a military reality of the INA, which the author seems to overlook. Although the author grudgingly agrees with Hugh Toye that Bose had an "incredible naivest" in his knowledge about the military affairs (p.40) the author, nonetheless, argues that Bose was gifted with Napoleonic spirits, if not knowledge, to stir and arouse soldiers to rally behind him.

The author draws at some remarkably penetrating analogies and comparisons at the end of his research on Bose's political and military strategy. He sees a bond of continuity that flows from Desbandhu to Bangabandhu, from *Joi Hind* to *Joi Bangla*. He credits Bose for being the political guru of the architect of the liberation of East Bengal, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, but somehow perplexingly, he draws similarities between the concept violence against the enemy as advocated by Bose and the pioneering actions of General Ziaur Rahman who led his men in uniform and took up arms to liberate the country in 1971. He compares Bose's ideas of direct action with Mujib's non-cooperation movements with the Pakistani regime and portrays Zia's fight for independence to be extension of Bose's idea of military action against the occupation forces. Zia mooted the idea of SAARC and saw merits in regional peace and co-operation which are premised on the broader concept of peace and regional harmony, and an international relations based on the symmetric order as envisaged by Bose. Both Mujib and Zia, as the author claims, "owe a great deal to Bose for ideas and inspiration" (p. 117).

In the postscript, author punches in many contemporary developments relating to Bose's reappraisal and recognition as a nationalist

leader in the post-liberation India and Bangladesh. This section obviously deviates from the analytical thrust of the book and, in an effort to catch up with the latest socio-cultural events surrounding the leader, the author introduces many trivial details which tend to whittle down objectivity and incisiveness of the research.

Despite these limitations, the book is a useful piece of research for any serious scholar on India's nationalist movement. He offers an elaborate appraisal of Bose as a leader, planner, organiser, and a diplomat and the author's fascination with Bose's thoughts and actions, particularly his secular posture remains obvious throughout the text. Bose, unlike many of his Congress colleagues, was thoroughly secular in thoughts and actions. He had political interactions with the Muslim ulemas and supported his brother, Sarat Chandra Bose, in forming a coalition government in Bengal with the Praja Party led by A.K. Fazlul Huq (p.48). Later, as the head of the Provisional Government of India in exile, he selected many of his top military and political lieutenants like, Shah Nawaz Khan, M.Z. Kiani and Karim Giani from among the Muslims.

The author tends to overlook some aspects of Bose's leadership which many informed observers would be reluctant to view as kindly as the author does. Bose was uncompromising and often stubborn; many analysts like Nirad Choudhury would say that Bose lacked a through understanding of the domestic and international play of events and forces when he set himself to achieving something quite impossible within geo-political matrix prevailing at that time. He, therefore, misread the major currents of history and made some basic error of judgement, quite unexpected of a rational and educated observer of international politics. Such strands of argument do not, however, undermine the sublime patriotic fervour Bose possessed, his supreme sacrifice to create an independent, exploitation free society based on social justice and equality. Bose stood clearly above all religious and sectarian parochialism. His uncompromising stand against all forms of hegemony, domination and colonialism left an indelible mark on

national movements in South Asia which saw its reincarnation in 1971 through the War of Liberation in Bangladesh.

The author deserves congratulations on three counts. First, he does a great service by introducing the legendary Bengali hero of the independence struggle to the Bangladeshi readers whose memory of Subhas, is at best hazy and obscure. Second, he portrays a rare leader of Bengal who rose distinctively above petty sectarian and factional interests and prejudices. Such example of leadership should help to educate and influence those with the political reins of the country today, and thus help to generate a breed of dedicated, selfless and erudite leaders who would avoid the narrow partisan, group, and factional quagmire, and see our national goals and interests from a secular, functional and humane perspective. Third, he offers us a critical, objective glimpse of some of the popular leaders of India in the nineteen thirties and forties, at a time when India tread a torturous course towards its independence; the leaders, whose personal ambitions and political machinations locked our peoples in political boundaries of historic misgivings and hatred.

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