

Focus 80 – **Facts Versus Falsehoods: Decoding the Gandhi-Bose Relationship**

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10 January 2022 – DOI: [10.48251/SADF.ISSN.2406-5633.F80](https://doi.org/10.48251/SADF.ISSN.2406-5633.F80)



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Abstract

Indian History vehemently celebrates two particular days of the Year: 26th January and 15th August. One is Republic Day, wherein the coveted Indian Constitution was enforced: the other is Independence Day (when the country was liberated from prolonged colonial rule). The literature surrounding the Indian National Struggle particularly focuses on a few selected leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhai Patel, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, and others. Although some texts and civil society groups categorically shift the focus on others who also have contributed to the movement, these 'others' have so far been overlooked and most likely forgotten due to the several private interests at stake. One such forgotten leader is Subhas Chandra Bose, often referred as Netaji by his followers. This article intends to highlight Bose's role in Indian History and uncover his relationship with Gandhi, the Father of the Nation.

Keywords: Bose, Gandhi, Indian National Struggle, Free India, Declassify Files

Introduction

India's Struggle for Independence is a most interesting source of both introspection and retrospection amongst our citizenry. Academic articles and commentators continuously formulate new theories and ideas so as to decipher past records and offer new visions. This thought process has largely been divided into Left, Right, Centre and Subaltern sections. Yet, in spite of the diversity within these various schools of thought, some important segments of the movement remain overlooked. Most Indians (and those who know a little about Indian struggles) associate the freedom movement with a few names such as Nehru, Gandhi, Ambedkar, and others. Yet one important name missing in this royal caveat is that of Subhas Chandra Bose, often referred to as Netaji. The title of Netaji can be split into 2 words: 'NETA' and 'JI'. 'Neta' means 'a leader'; 'Ji' is suffixed to the title out of sheer respect (often used by Indians to express love and admiration for an individual who is both senior and experienced). This title of Netaji was conferred to Bose by soldiers of the 'Indische Legion', an Indian regiment of German forces and members of the special Bureau of India, Berlin, in 1940. Since then within Indian circles Bose is lovingly referred to as Netaji. It just so happens that this year India is celebrating the 125th Anniversary of her beloved son, Subhash Chandra Bose. A leader whose exceptional diplomatic and rhetorical skills speeches left many spellbound – be it friends or foes.

This article intends to counter the widespread notion of a complicated relationship between Gandhi and Bose. The two leaders were partners dedicated to the cause of a 'Liberated India'. The article shows their mutual understanding and toleration of each other's opinions and actions. The article initially explores historical highpoints such as the Jalliwallah Bagh Massacre, the Non-Cooperation movement started by Gandhi, and other instances reflecting the camaraderie shared between Bose and Father of the Nation. The second and third section focus on how the two leaders camouflaged action and words in order to create a captivating effect on the minds of the collective, encouraging massive participation in the national struggle. We also discuss the kind of nation they both visualized, wherein individuals from all walks of life would enjoy same of set of rights, responsibilities and opportunities to excel. This was important because the Indian nation suffered from a series of communal riots, inter community differences, social exclusion, gender disparity

and, certainly, racial discrimination. The article's final section focuses on the return of Subhash Chandra Bose, with declassification of files and as central authorities develop new approaches to remember this forgotten leader.

One was born in January and the other assassinated in the first month of the year

One was from the East and the other from the West

One was an extremist and the other was moderate

One garnered international support and the other called for national unity

One is a forgotten Hero and the other is the Father of the Nation

One was a Civil Servant and the other was a Lawyer-cum-social activist

Differences in perceptions and actions apart, both are clear Heroes of our Independence Struggle

Bose and Gandhi are the two most prominent names in our National struggle for Independence. However, post-independence we have developed diverse opinions on our National Heroes (Bakshi, 2019). The most common assertion to begin with is that Gandhi is the Father of the Nation, while Bose is a Localised Hero – a son of Bengal whose contributions, actions and agendas were overlooked, almost forgotten. They both are bespectacled. Their vision was the same - 'A Free and Liberal India' – however, their perspectives were drastically different. The literature affirms that Gandhi was a Moderate who believed in dialogue and stereotypical methods of action such as Nonviolence, Ahimsha (non injury or non violence) and Satyagraha (Truth Force). These terms still find structured space in education books, thought processes, belief systems and speeches. By contrast Bose's ideas, his strong speeches filled with patriotism and calls for 'Delhi Chalo (Let's Go to Delhi),' are only played in motion pictures and sound boxes celebrating his birthday on 23rd January. In fact, Bose is even often insulted through in-house conspiracy theories calling him as 'Gumnami Baba' (Anonymous Person), or a spy or intelligence bureau agent!

Imagine one undertook a case study on the relationship between Gandhi and Netaji as portrayed in the mind of the Indian citizenry. Some respondents would categorically assert a difficult/complicated relationship; a belief justified by half-baked facts claiming that Netaji left Gandhi in the middle of the movement, that

there was a serious confrontation with Gandhi, that Bose was follower of Extremism who had good relations with dictatorial leaders, that consequently he must be seen as a bad omen to India's ethics and values. Other respondents would simply wonder who is Netaji to start with.

In a democratic country like ours, where we do enjoy Freedom of Speech, we are bound to have differences of opinion on heroes, their actions and on the overall National Struggle. Let's acknowledge the difference between the two Independence leaders rather than weighing who was more patriotic, important and representative of the people. I believe that the relationship between Gandhi and Bose was not like Chalk and Cheese – more one of mutual trust, affection, companionship and comradeship. one can imagine that if one fell short of attaining their common objective, the other would take the torch/baton and reach the finish line. That's comradeship among leaders. A deep relationship, wherein personal and national issues were discussed on the same breadth (Bakshi, 1999). One was a lawyer returned from South Africa; Mr Gandhi; another was a Civil Servant who resigned on his 1st day of work to promise India the glory of freedom. Gandhi had a difficult relationship with his son; numerous letters between the leaders discuss these complex relations in simpler tones of persuasion (Jha, 2019). Keeping their personal issues at bay, our heroes focused on a larger issue: 'How to free India from the chains of the British Empire?' The journey was tough and complex; however, from every challenge our leaders returned with still greater determination.

1. The Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, 13th April 1919, Amritsar, Punjab

A nerve-wrecking massacre that makes Indians anxious and fills their heart with hatred for General Dyer, who killed innocent citizens indiscriminately (Wani, 2019). As much as Gandhi was disheartened with the event, he received immense support from Indian leaders for initiating the Non-Cooperation Movement. Interestingly, Subhash Chandra Bose also strongly supported Gandhi's movement. He, too, encouraged people to participate and voice out strong opinions against the British. The process of building negative opinions against the British was derailed when the Chauri Chaura Incident.

The Chauri Chaura incident took place on 4 February 1922 at Chauri Chaura in the Gorakhpur district of the United Provinces (modern-day Uttar Pradesh) in British

India, when a large group of protesters participating in the non-cooperation movement, were fired upon by the police. In retaliation the demonstrators attacked and set fire to a police station, killing all of its occupants. The incident led to the death of three civilians and 22 policemen. Mahatma Gandhi, who was strictly against violence, halted the non-cooperation movement on the national level on 12 February 1922, as a direct result of this incident. This hurt Bose's soul to a great extent, as he believed that the objective of a Making Free India may be postponed or even derailed (Bose, 2016).

2. Actions Speak Louder than Words

After the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920), the Civil Disobedience Movement (1930) and Gandhi both arrived at the national scene. Gandhi was held as a great leader. A leader that connects with the masses by discussing common issues such as untouchability, fragmentism in Indian society, unemployment, woes of the young generation, the use of national products, etc. He had great affinity with the common man on simple issues, as well as a great talent in making him understand complex issues in a simple way. The best example of these facts is perhaps his famous book 'My Experiments with Truth'. A docile leader explaining us how to lead a good and values-based life. By contrast, Netaji never really wrote an article on Truth or spoke on common problems. In fact, Bose was more of a Soldier – who said 'You give me blood and I will give you freedom' and called for 'Azad Hind Fauj' (Free India Soldiers) (Chakravarty, 2003). Gandhi, as we all know, focused on being calm and patient leader who advocated the idea of Ahimsa, Truth and Non-Violence until the declaration of the famous slogan 'Do or Die'. This slogan helped in infusing deep spirits of nationalism amongst masses and at the same accelerated the intensity of the Freedom movement towards its final objection, Free India!

3. Vision of a Secular, Liberal and Free India

The fact is that both leaders were great orators – which is why their rallies and sabhas had very large audiences. It's a fact that Bose walked out of the National Struggle with the hope of garnering international support from Axis Powers able to pressure the British to give up India. By contrast, Gandhi focused on strengthening numbers with participation from the Public in the Quit India Movement which pushed India towards Freedom. Gandhi was very open about his ideas and methods;

he affirmatively believed that women must participate in the struggle and surpass their roles in the private space and their solely household chores. In the same breadth Bose believed that women should not just be categorized as care givers, their physical strength must be used as part of the Indian National Army, Rani Jhansi regiment (the only women regiment to have been created by Bose). We are grateful to such thinking, for women in India enjoy their rights, fly fighter planes, become national/regional leaders just as often as men do. Our leaders have scripted a history by creating a country which continues to fulfill the promise of a Secular, Liberal and Equal India (Joshi, 1992).

4. Netaji's Return on the Indian Scene

His surprising death (1945) in a plane crash sent shock waves throughout India. His ashes are kept in Renkoji, A Buddhist Temple in Japan. The Gopal Das Kholsa Commission states that his ashes are kept safely in a small golden pagoda. The temple has seen visitors such as Nehru, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Indira Gandhi, Vajpayee, and others. Yet, interestingly, once these leaders came back no one demanded a DNA test to be conducted on the ashes, confirming them to be Bose's. The Bose family has raised numerous requests to undertake such analysis; in fact, this family was under intensive surveillance for a long time (Elangoban, 1969). Interestingly enough, Tushar Gandhi, great grandson of Gandhi and Chandra Kumar Bose, Grand-nephew of Bose, also demanded the Government of India to declassify the 100 files associated with Netaji. And on 14th October 2015, the Government of India decided to declassify these files relating to Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and make them accessible to public. Such files can completely change India's history and views on Bose's contribution to the struggle.

5. Remembering Bose and Gandhi Today

One of the most significant things about India's history and contemporary trends is that we celebrate the birth and death anniversaries of our great leaders. However, in modern times Indian Governments have taken cognizance of their contribution and established education institutes in the field of Science Technology Engineering Mathematics (STEM), converted homes into museums, named streets after them. School history books need to be written so as to appropriately honor all leaders of the Indian National Struggle. Prominent production houses can produce videos,

web series and documentaries explaining the relationship between Bose and Gandhi. Governments can fund research institutes to carry out research and surveys on Bose based on the primary and secondary data available. Exclusive reports must be shared with both the public and international media. One must remember that a leader's promotion or even reclaiming a public space (or mind) cannot rest upon only a section of civil society. It's a mutual effort with to rewrite and rephrase Indian History. Very recently, the Central Government has rejected the tableau of Bose prepared by the West Bengal Government and intended to be on display during the Republic Day celebration, 2022 (Venugopal, 2022). Rather than restricting the importance and presentation limited to a particular Indian state, both Government and civil society groups must encourage other Governments to participate with the same enthusiasm and focus on different sections of Bose's life and contribution, catering towards building a wide array of different viewpoints.

Final Thoughts:

The newly disclosed files will usher a new change in the Indian citizenry's thinking patterns towards Bose. Subhash Chandra Bose through his last radio address aired from Burma in 1944 considered Mahatma Gandhi as the 'Father of the Nation'. Bose was the 1st to give Gandhi such a title (which has become Mahatma's core identity) is surely not to be considered as Forgotten, much less a Coward Hero of Historic Times. A man who excelled in networking and diplomacy skills, who established good relations with many nation-states, is certainly not a localized hero but a National one. Interestingly, from this year onwards the Government of India has decided to prepone the celebrations of 26th January from 23rd January onwards (Soni, 2021). The latter date coincides with Subhash Chandra Bose's birthday, a small step but big a difference in rewriting India's history by giving due credits to all leaders who participated in the Indian Struggle for Liberation. Also, one must not associate Bose with India's Freedom Struggle, he was a leader with out-of-the-box ideas helping India develop a new image against colonialism and imperialism. His life, his thoughts and actions are a huge reference point for those who wish to reinvent Freedom through a modern lens.

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