A TRIBUTE TO NETAJI SUBHAS

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During his long career, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy came to know closely many of Modern India's leaders in thought and action, and he has left written accounts of his impressions of some of them. Under the leadership of the great Deshabandhu, Subhas enlisted himself as soldier to fight for his country's freedom. Let us not forget how very young he was at that time: hardly twenty-two or twenty-three, and yet he had the courage of sacrifice to give up the 'heaven-born' service of the British Empire in India - the Indian Civil Service. Subhas was in the direct line of Bengal's tradition of self-sacrifice for a noble cause. On this auspicious occasion of Subhas's birth anniversary, I have but one appeal to make: Sons and daughters of Bengal, wheresoever you may be, whatever the walk of your life - unite and work for the good of your country.

Today is the birthday of Subhas. Fifty-one years ago, on this very day this great son of Bengal was born.

As we now remember him on his birth anniversary, we cannot but remember other great sons of Bengal who came before him and made his advent possible. Bankimchandra is the foremost among them. Prophet-like he sang to the glory of his motherland - freed from foreign domination. A time was when his clarion call Bande Mataram reverberated from the high Himalayas down to the farthest South. We remember Brahmananda Keshub Chunder who called his country to a baptism of fire so that it could emerge pure and chaste from out of its fiery ordeal. We recall also those inspiring words of Swami Vivekananda who claimed the poorest and the lowliest of Indians as his blood brother. We remember also those stirring days of Bengal Partition when Surendranath lit the lamp of freedom in the remotest corners of this land. Then there was Asutosh with a leonine heart who would not remain content with anything less than complete freedom of his country. "Freedom first", he thundered, Freedom second, Freedom always”. There was also the valiant voice of Chittaranjan who had the courage to make a public pronouncement when Subhas was arrested. “If love of my own country is a crime,” he said, “I am a criminal”.

We remember also that it was under the leadership of the great Deshabandhu that Subhas enlisted himself as soldier to fight for his country’s freedom. Let us not forget how very young he was at that time: hardly twenty-two or twenty-three, and yet he had the courage of sacrifice to give up the 'heaven-born' service of the British Empire in India - the Indian Civil Service. Subhas was in the direct line of Bengal’s tradition of self-sacrifice for a noble cause. In this, he was a worthy successor of the example so nobly set before us by Shri Chaitanya of medieval times, emulated as nobly by Chittaranjan in our own days. His act of sacrifice reminds one of the verse:

Yours is to mitigate the hurt of pain which others suffer.
Yours is to hide your own sorrow behind a smile.
All that you have is yours to wipe the tears from other eyes
So, let all your desire be to pour yourself in the service of all.

* Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy was an Indian Physician, educationist, freedom fighter and Former Chief Minister of West Bengal, Reprinted from a talk in Bengali broadcast on 23 January 1948 from the Calcutta Station of All India Radio (translated by Khitis Roy).
My memory goes back to sometime in 1927, when Subhas returned to Calcutta from his incarceration in Mandalay Jail. The prison-life had utterly broken down his physical health. But nothing could subdue his indomitable spirit and the vigour of his mind; his enthusiasm was infectious. That was when I saw him at close quarters and developed an intimacy with him.

Nearly twenty or more years have passed since then. Today, as I was going through his personal relics, I came across a piece of paper with his handwriting on it and the words were, “Freedom is Life”. This indeed was his life’s motto—all his life was a ceaseless struggle for the freedom of his motherland. When the history of India’s freedom is written and the part played in it by his Indian National Army, it will bear out how with Subhas the two words “Life” and “Freedom” were synonymous.

This is not the occasion to go into the various phases of his career. I wish only to say that Subhas created history. History is generally regarded as a chronicle of the past. But here was a contemporary hero whose achievements have indubitably passed into history—whose life was historic in the true sense of the term.

The way Subhas welded into unity men of diverse faiths and persuasions was nothing less than historic. The signal achievements of his Indian National Army in its forward march, the way the Hindus, the Mussalmans, the Sikhs and the Christians followed his lead— all of them imbued with and inspired by his example—were nothing short of a miracle. He had but one watch-word for his men— Jai Hind, Victory to India—a battle-cry which was accepted by one and all, irrespective of their cast and creed. We cannot afford to forget this noble utterance—this slogan of unity. We must cast aside all narrow considerations of caste and community and resolutely march onward to achieve India’s victory at all fronts.

Today India is passing through a series of crisis. Freedom has come, but where is our freedom from hunger? There are the hungry wailing for food—wheresoever we go. Freedom has come, but where is our freedom from suicidal hatred? The communal clashes have spelt disaster for millions of men. There has been colossal and entirely senseless loss of life and property. Hunger and death stalk this unfortunate land. It is during these dark and dreary days that we remember, all the more forcibly, that freedom is not death and destruction, that freedom is, as Subhas has said, life itself. If our political freedom fails to deliver us from our economic slavery, if freedom degenerates into a freedom to hate and kill our brethren—then it were better that we remained in chains. Let us deserve our freedom if we wish to pay real homage to the kind of freedom-fighter that Subhas had been.

The foremost task awaiting us today is to build our Bengal anew. Let us not forget that our Bengal was never destined to be a land of hunger and famine. It was no poetic exaggeration when this land was described as verdant and fruitful. We have all the wealth if we only know how to work united in heart and mind to gather it. What we need is united effort to put to use all the riches with which nature endows this fair and golden land. What is impossible for an individual to achieve is easy of achievement when we work heart to heart, hand in hand.

On this auspicious occasion of Subhas’s birth anniversary, I have but one appeal to make: Sons and daughters of Bengal, wheresoever you may be, whatever the walk of your life—unite and work for the good of your country. Partake of that great vision of freedom which Subhas had for his country. As I stand here before you, I seem to hear his sweet and sonorous voice calling upon his countrymen: “Unite and work ceaselessly, do not resort to fear”.

Editor’s Note: This is to pay our respectful homage to Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose as the whole country is celebrating 125th birth anniversary. This lecture was delivered by Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy, 72 years ago. This is reproduced here only to mention that it is still relevant in the present Indian scenario.