

Gandhi and Bose

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Abstract:

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was a lawyer and freedom fighter who employed non-violent means to fight the British during the freedom struggle. Subhas Chandra Bose was an Indian Nationalist who used military means to attain India's freedom from British rule. They are important freedom fighters that worked in India's freedom struggle and they are often cited, quoted and referenced in the course of India's struggle against colonialism. But due to their differences in approach to achieve the same, namely Gandhi's non-violent means to fight for freedom, and Bose's militaristic means, they are often considered as adversaries in all domains. The paper considers their relationship through correspondences between the said historical figures, speeches, conversations with their living family members and other historical information to evaluate if their ideologies had a meeting ground and whether their differences are exaggerated.

The relationship between Gandhi & Bose is an important one for various reasons. The two are often quoted, and remembered for their support towards the cause of the Indian freedom struggle, though they are also accepted to be different from each other as far as ideological principles are concerned. Gandhi, with an interest in fighting for freedom through non-violent means is often considered to be at odds with Subhas Chandra Bose, who was willing to adopt military means

to fight for India's freedom struggle. The conversation regarding Bose and Gandhi has been appropriated, and misappropriated in the course of India's history multiple times, and the reasons for the same have been many, but what would be a good starting point for this argument for us to endeavour on, would be to explore the ideologies of Bose and Gandhi individually first.

Subhas Chandra Bose was a radical thinker, but to form a vision towards the national goal, he needed time to reflect. That time was offered to him by the Behrampore and Mandalay jails, where he put down his observations in the form of reflections in a jail notebook.

On a National movement he wrote that Bengal needed a real national movement which is neither political, nor jingoistic. He meant a movement that affected many spheres of social and political lives and many sections of the community. He laid specific focus on the creative spirit and laid emphasis on the fields of poetry, music, painting, sculpture, and other fields of religious and commercial life. He wanted to remove inequality from society as such. His idealism extended towards the business community as well. Culturally he wanted to generate poets, historians, philosophers and economist who had the creative spirit to make India stand up and have an identity for itself in the fields of science & culture. (Bose 2016, 42)

In his jail reflections Bose developed a new ethical code for India. It drew up on a nine point code which gave emphasis on honour and self respect, love for the country, thoughts on sannyasa, importance of Brahmacharya and the ethical value of people's lives based on civic and national duty. He gave importance to the nature of truth in this code and equated it to beauty. (Bose 2016, 53)

Mohandas Gandhi on the other hand was an ardent believer in the use of ahimsa as the basis of his search for truth. He explains it in his autobiography, *The Experiments with Truth*. "I am realising every day that the search is in vain unless it is founded on ahimsa as the basis. It is quite proper to resist and attack a system, but to resist and attack its author is tantamount to resisting and attacking oneself. For we are all tarred with the same brush, and are children of one and the same Creator, and as such the divine powers within us are infinite. To slight

a single human being is to slight those divine powers, and thus to harm not only that being but with him the whole world.” (Gandhi, n.d.)

The nature of truth, he considered to be a matter of consideration, and he ruminated it initially to be “God is Truth” and later revised it to be “Truth is God”. In *The Experiments with Truth* Gandhi explains that his uniform experience convinced him that there is no other God than Truth. He emphasised on the fact that truth can only be attained by a complete realisation of Ahimsa and by no other means. (Gandhi, n.d.)

It can be observed that both Bose and Gandhi were principled men who spent time ruminating their philosophy that fuelled their fight for the national freedom struggle. For Gandhi ‘Ahimsa’ became the primary political tool to attain this, but for Bose the same was one among many tools. This was one of the points on which they disagreed. In ‘*The National Struggle*’ Bose noted that a single incident at Chauri Chaura was used to strangle a national movement. He criticised Gandhi to not consult representatives from different provinces before calling off the civil disobedience movement. (Bose 2016, 64)

Gandhi, in a letter to Sarat Chandra Bose, on 9th April 1926, wrote “I know there is an alternative to the Charkha and that is rowdyism, but I am useless at it and what is more, I have no faith in it. And as a practical man, I know that our rowdyism is nothing compared to the rowdyism of the government. I have therefore burnt my boats and staked my all on the Charkha. I invite you and all who are troubled by the knowledge of the many woes of the nation to join me in the effort. Believe me it requires all the skill, all the discipline, all the organising power that we can summon to its aid.” (Bose 2016, 70)

While these were points on which they disagreed on, they did have a healthy respect for each other. In a broadcast by Subhas Chandra Bose on 16th July 1945, Subhas was noted to say that he was no outsider to congress and that he had always given the congress his best. He classified congress as an integral component of himself and he only spoke out against it when he observed gross errors in the conduct of the congress working committee. (Prasad 2008, 77)

Maulana Azad, in his autobiography *India Wins Freedom* observed that Bose's escape to Germany had an impression on Gandhi. There were various actions of Bose that Gandhi didn't agree with, but Gandhi admired Subhas Bose for the way in which he escaped from India. (Bose 2016, 150)

In a telephonic interview with Madhuri Bose, grand-niece of Subhas Chandra Bose, she was noted as saying "Both Netaji and Mahatma Gandhi firmly believed that all the people of India, irrespective of caste, religion and gender should be able to live together in peace and harmony." Meanwhile Sugata Bose, who is a historian & grand-nephew of Subhas Chandra Bose mentioned that many differences between Gandhi and Bose are highly exaggerated and he notes that their relationship was marked by mutual appreciation and a sense of admiration for each other. (Jha 2019)

This echoes from the fact that it was Bose who gave Gandhi the title Father of the Nation. In his last radio address from Burma in 1944 Subhas Chandra Bose said, "Father of our Nation! In this holy war for India's liberation, we ask for your blessings and good wishes." And so it can be concluded, that while there were differences in the approach of how Bose and Gandhi would have liked to fight for India's freedom, they both respected each other, and wanted a secular - free India - free from British control. (Dutta 2020)

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