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Subject : **Spirit and Form of Indian Unity : Lessons for Today from the Freedom Struggle**

Lecture by : **Prof. Sugata Bose, Gardiner Professor of History, Harvard University, USA**

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(a1/0910/sh)

SHRIMATI MARGARET ALVA: Hon. Members, our hon. Speaker is not going to attend today's Lecture due to unavoidable reasons and, therefore, I will be chairing today.

Hon. Members of Parliament, Prof. Sugata Bose, Noted Historian and the Gardiner Professor of Oceanic History and Affairs at Harvard University, Secretary-General, Lok Sabha, friends

It is a matter of immense pleasure for me to extend a warm welcome to each one of you today, to this Lecture on the *Spirit and Form of Indian Unity: Lessons for today from the Freedom Struggle*, organised by the Bureau of Parliamentary Studies and Training of the Lok Sabha Secretariat. This is the seventeenth in the series of such Lectures on topical issues.

Our Speaker had taken the initiative in starting this Lecture Series with a view to facilitating a meaningful exchange of views between the Members of Parliament and experts on various issues of socio-economic and current interest.

It is a matter of great satisfaction to us at BPST that hon. Members despite their pre-occupations with their parliamentary duties, and 123 Agreement these days, find time to attend these lectures. We do feel encouraged by the valuable feedback that we receive from you and are grateful to you for your encouraging response. I warmly welcome each one of you.

Today we have here with us, Prof. Sugata Bose, a renowned historian - an authority on South Asian history, and a Professor of eminence at Harvard University, at whose invitation I have had the honour of participating in a Seminar on "Religion and Politics in South Asia". I saw then how respected he was in the circles around Harvard University. He is the grandnephew of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, and grandson of nationalist leader Sarat Chandra Bose. His mother was also a Member of the last Lok Sabha. Best known as an economic historian of South Asia, Prof. Bose, also has, to his credit, several books on social and political history of modern South Asia. However, his pioneering work has been in historical studies emphasising the centrality of the India Ocean. In his Book, "*A Hundred Horizons, the Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire*", Prof. Bose has focused on India's economic, cultural and political connections

with the wider Indian Ocean communities in the 19th and 20th centuries. Complimenting the work, Prof. Amartya Sen said and I quote: “*Sugata Bose has given us an excellent historical study, which is both interesting in itself and full of contemporary relevance for understanding an important ancestry of present day globalisation.* In yet another work, ‘*the Indian Ocean Rim: An Inter- regional Arena in the Age of Global Empire*’, I am told, Prof. Bose has explored the possibility of bridging the domains of political economy and culture by tracing the political, economic and cultural interconnections of South Asia and countries along the vast Indian Ocean Rim, from Africa in the west to Indonesia in the east”.

Prof. Bose, I offer my felicitations to you on your achievements. I am sure that your talk today will help all of us in having a greater understanding of the subject.

We recall with reverence the supreme sacrifices made by our freedom fighters. Their immediate goal was India’s Independence, but their persistent struggle was to actualise the lofty aim of attaining liberty, and freedom for the suppressed, not merely of India but of the world at large, without narrow considerations of caste, creed, religion, ethnicity or nationality. The most remarkable aspect of our freedom struggle was the unity displayed by all sections of the people. It was a shining example of peaceful co-existence and inclusiveness, which we need to cherish and preserve. During this year, in particular, when we are observing the 60th anniversary of our Independence, we need to introspect and see to what extent we have been able to realize the dreams of our Founding Fathers, and the Martyrs of our Freedom Movement. Let us as a nation solemnly pledge that we will follow their great example and work to protect our national unity and integrity.

With these words, I once again welcome the, hon. Members of Parliament, the Secretary-General, Prof. Sugata Bose, all my colleagues at the BPST and all those who have helped to bring you here this morning.

PROF. SUGATA BOSE, GARDINER PROFESSOR OF HISTORY, HARVARD UNIVERSITY, USA: Right hon. Margaret Alva, Mr. Secretary-General of the Lok Sabha, Additional Secretary of the Lok Sabha Secretariat, hon. Members of Parliament, it is truly a great privilege to be invited to address you during the month of the 60th

Anniversary of India's Independence. I am deeply grateful to Shri Somnath Chatterjee, the hon. Speaker of the Lok Sabha for giving me this wonderful opportunity.

(b1/0920/kmr)

I chose the topic for today's discussion because it is the Diamond Jubilee of India's Independence. I know that you have other subjects on your mind. Even over breakfast we were discussing the Indo-US Nuclear Deal. As Mrs. Alva has pointed out, I have written quite a bit on India's relations with its neighbouring regions, with South East Asia, the Middle East and Africa. Even though I will be speaking about the conceptions of Indian unity, during the discussion time I would be happy to answer questions on a wider array of topics. I hope I shall be able to convince you today that the history of our anti-colonial struggle and its quest for unity does have some relevance to the present and the future of our republic.

A prize I got for good work at school, Jawaharlal Nehru writes in his autobiography, was one of G.M. Trevallion's Garibaldi books. This fascinated me and soon I obtained the other two volumes of the series and studied the whole Garibaldi story in them carefully. Visions of similar deeds in India came before me of a gallant fight for freedom, and in my mind India and Italy got strangely mixed together. To the young Nehru, Harrow seemed a rather small and restricted place for these ideas. So, it was that at the beginning of October, 1907 inspired by the first of Trevallion's Garibaldi Trilogy, he arrived at Trinity College, Cambridge where he felt elated at being an undergraduate with a great deal of freedom.

When freedom came to India at the famous midnight hour of 14th/15th August, 1947, Trevallion, who was then Master of Trinity College, rejoiced. It was quite fascinating for me that Trevallion's successor in the late 1990s was in fact our own Amartya Sen in that particular position. Trevallion had remained equivocal and uncertain about the British Empire which he always thought a far more formidable instrument of aggression and domination than any of Italy's colonising endeavours which seems small-scale by comparison.

Nehru's Cambridge years represented the climactic moment of triumphant liberalism in the domestic politics of Britain. In Europe these were the last days of liberal nationalism before Italy launched its own imperialist expedition in 1911 and the nation

states of the European continent as a whole moved recklessly towards the precipice of total war.

The high tide of liberalism did not, however, reach the shores of Britain's colonies where this was a period of political denial and repression. India was showing fight for the first time since the Great Revolt of 1857, and was seething with unrest and trouble. News reached Indian students in Cambridge of *Swadeshi* and boycott of the activities and imprisonment of Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Aurobindo Ghosh. Almost without exception, Nehru recalled, we were Tilakites or extremists as the new party was called in India. Yet, looking back from the 1930s, he also believed that in social terms the Indian national renewal in 1907 was "definitely reactionary". Inevitably, Nehru commented gloomily, "a new nationalism in India, as elsewhere in the East, was a religious nationalism".

After graduating from Cambridge, he visited Ireland in the summer of 1910 where he was attracted by the beginnings of Sinn Fein, the radical anti-colonial movement there. What Nehru neglected to note in Britain and Ireland was that a religious tinge to nationalism was not a monopoly of the East. At the end of the day, the nationalist leaderships in both India and Ireland, quite as much as their departing colonial masters, failed to negotiate a satisfactory solution to the problem of religious difference.

If there was much cause to rejoice at the end of the Raj in India - 200 years of colonial rule was coming to an end - the celebrations were marred by a tragic partition ostensibly along religious lines which took an unacceptable toll in human life and suffering. Sixty years ago, Mahatma Gandhi had stayed away from the celebrations in New Delhi to quietly mourn the human tragedy of partition in Calcutta. The father of our nation chose to abjure the lights of the capital to light up the darkness engulfing the lights of those who were poor and obscure.

Yet, our freedom struggle, since 1857, had made determined efforts to achieve unity, and our anti-colonial thinkers and leaders propounded some of the most creative ideas on how best to craft unity out of a multitude of differences.

1857 had witnessed a series of patriotic rebellions in many regions that brought together Hindus and Muslims under the symbolic leadership of the last Mughal sovereign. After defeating the rebels, the colonial power solemnly announced in the form

of the Queen's Proclamation of 1858 that none of her subjects would be molested or disquieted by reason of their religion, faith, or observances. This formal separation of religion and politics in the colonial stance was however breached almost immediately as the British took the momentous decision to deploy religious enumeration to define majority and minority communities.

On the key questions of relations between the overarching Indian nation on the one hand and religious communities and linguistic regions on the other, anti-colonial thought and politics of the late 19th and early 20th century have left fascinating legacies. The anti-colonialism of both Hindus and Muslims and other religious communities was influenced in this period by their religious sensibilities, but that did not necessarily lead to conflict. It was religiously based notions of majority and minority that were beginning to pose a challenge for a unified Indian nationalism. But, as yet, there appeared to be little contradiction between, say, Bengali or Tamil linguistic communities on the one hand, and a broader diffuse Indian nation on the other.

Few, if any of our nationalist ideologues were thinking at this stage of the acquisition of power in a centralised nation state. In fact, India's great poet philosophers – whether you think of Rabindranath Tagore writing in Bengali; Iqbal writing in Urdu; Subramaniam Bharathi writing in Tamil – they all celebrated patriotic sentiment but they were also critiques of the western model of the territorial nation state which could be over-centralised machines in their view.

The Indian Constitution, to which we all swear allegiance, refers in its Preamble to the name of our country as “India, that is, Bharat”. The Swadeshi nationalist Bipin Chandra Pal in a book called “The Soul of India” had delved back into ancient history in attempting to question the western definition of India. While the stranger called her India, or the land of the Indus, thereby emphasising only her strange physical features; her own children from of old have known and loved her by another name. That name is Bharata Varsha. Of course, the name Hindustan was also internalised and there was a lot of emotional poetry about our country as Hindustan as well. But this name Bharata Varsha, the name deriving from the ancient King of Kings Bharata, Bipin Pal claimed, was not a physical name like India or the Transvaal; nor even a tribal and ethnic name like England or Aryavarta, but a distinct and historic name like Rome.

Bipin Pal pointed out that the legendary King Bharata had been described in ancient texts as Raj Chakravarti. He took some pains to explain that the literal meaning of the term is not Emperor but a King established at the centre of a circle of Kings. King Bharata was a great prince of this order. His position was, and I quote Bipin Pal, “not that of the administrative head of any large and centralised government but only that of a recognised and respected centre”; which was the general character of all great princes in ancient times. Under Muslim rule, according to Pal, Indian unity always more or less of a federal type became still more pronouncedly so. He left his readers in little doubt about the type of state he would prefer “One *Swaraj*, was one.”

Another early 20th century nationalist Aurobindo Ghosh wrote an insightful tract called “The spirit and form of Indian Policy” from which the title of my lecture takes its inspiration. The ancient Indian polity propounded an idea of unity that was at sharp variance with a mechanical western rule that had crushed out all the still existing communal or regional autonomies and substituted the dead unity of a machine. Aurobindo touched upon the secret of the difficulty in the problem of unifying ancient India. It was that the easy method of centralised empire could not truly succeed in India. The *Rishis* from the Vedic age onwards, therefore, propounded the ideal of the Chakravarti, a uniting imperial rule uniting without destroying the autonomy of India’s many kingdoms and peoples from sea to sea.

(c/0930/spr)

The Dharma of a powerful king was to set up a suzerainty. The full flowering of this ideal, Aurobindo found in the great epic, the Mahabharata narrates the legendary and the historic pursuit of this ideal, which even the turbulent Shishupala is represented as accepting in his attendance at Yudhishtir’s Rajasuya sacrifice. The Ramayana too presents an idealised picture of such a Dharma Rajya, a settled universal empire. It is in Aurobindo’s words, “Not an autocratic despotism but a universal monarchy supported by a free assembly of the city and provinces and of all the classes that is held as the ideal.”

The ideal of conquest in those days was not a destructive and sedatory invasion but a sacrificial progression aiming at a strengthening adhesion to a suzerain power. According to this ideal, I am quoting Aurobindo again, “Unification ought not to be secured at the expense of the free life of the regional peoples or of the communal liberties

and not, therefore, by a centralised monarchy or a rigidly Unitarian imperial state.” The closest Western analogy that Aurobindo could find for this conception was a hegemony or a confederacy under an imperial head.

Aurobindo doubted whether this ideal was ever executed in practice with full success even though he regarded the empire created and recreated by the Mauryas, the Sungas, the Kanvas, the Anhads, and the Guptas as among the greatest constructed and maintained by the genius of earth’s great peoples. That contradicted the hasty verdict that denied India’s ancient civilization a strong practical genius or high political virtue.

With the benefit of more recent historical evidence Aurobindo might have found that the actually existing polities in ancient India was not that far removed from the ideal as was commonly supposed in the early 20th century. I should also add that the periods of relative decentralisation between the age of great empires did not necessarily see economic decline or loss of cultural vitality. If you think about the period when our influences were spread in cultural terms to South East Asia, that happened largely during the centuries between the Maurya and the Gupta empires when there was relative decentralisation.

The Muslim conquest, in Aurobindo’s temporal scheme, occurred at a moment when India needed a breathing space to rejuvenate itself by transference from the Sanskrit to the popular tongues and the newly forming regional peoples. The early Muslim sovereigns generally respected this process of vernacularisation so that in Aurobindo’s terms the Musalman dominations ceased very rapidly to be a foreign rule. “The vast masses of the Musalmans in the country were and are Indians by race”, he wrote, “and even the foreign kings and nobles became almost immediately wholly Indian in mind, life and interest.” Aurobindo had no doubt that the British is the first really continuous foreign rule that has dominated India

The Mughal emperor was - in Aurobindo’s very positive assessment, and this is sometimes lost sight of, he after all became Rishi himself but look at his assessment of the Mughal Empire – a great and magnificent construction and an immense amount of political genius and talent was employed in its creation and maintenance. It was as splendid, powerful and beneficent – and it may be added, in spite of Aurangazeb’s fanatical zeal – infinitely more liberal and tolerant in religion than any medieval

contemporary European kingdom or empire. India under its rule stood high in military and political strength, economic opulence and the brilliance of its art and culture. And he presaged at least in part the current historical thinking on the 18th century.

The 18th century was regarded by British historians as just a dark century but in fact there was great deal of economic prosperity and cultural vitality at least in the first half of the 18th century, most historians are telling us. Aurobindo wrote that in that century although a new life seemed about to rise of the regional peoples, the chance was cut short by the intrusion of the European nations. The lifeless attempt of the last generation, he concluded, to imitate and reproduce with a servile fidelity, the ideas and forms of the West has been no true indication of the political mind and genius of the Indian people.

During the Swadeshi era, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was away in South Africa. Mahatma Gandhi's South African phase helped clarify his own conception of Indian nationality and its constituent parts. This was in important ways the formative stage of Gandhi's emergence as the leader of the nationalist movement in India from 1919 onwards. The conceptualisation of Gandhian nationalism in South Africa was of critical importance to Indian history. Mahatma Gandhi brought back from South Africa not just new techniques of struggle but an approach to the crafting of Indian unity that was respectful of internal cultural differences and yet was able to transcend them to rise above them.

I was recently in South Africa earlier this month and I paid a pilgrimage to all of the Mahatma Gandhi-related satyagraha sites in the Johannesburg area. The South Africans have now built a very beautiful museum to Mahatma Gandhi in the Fort Hill Prison where he had been kept in 1907-08 when he was opposing the Asiatic Registration Ordinance of the South African racist regime.

It required Mahatma Gandhi's genius to fuse the love for a territorial homeland with even the extra-territorial loyalty of religion in the mass nationalist movement of 1919 to 1922. Without detracting from his distinctive qualities – and Gandhi was special, he is unique in many ways – yet Mahatma's reason needs to be rescued by historians from the rather mystical haze that is created by some writers who claim Gandhi to have been staunchly anti-rational, that he was opposed to reason.

Urged by C.F. Andrews to publicly clarify his position on the Khilafat, Mahatma Gandhi wrote in *Young India* in July, 1920, “I should clear the ground by stating that I reject any religious doctrine that does not appeal to reason and is in conflict with morality. I tolerate unreasonable religious sentiment when it is not immoral. I hold that Khilafat claim to be both just and reasonable and, therefore, it derives greater force because it has behind it the religious sentiment of the Musalman world.”

Gandhi could conceive the possibility of a blind and fanatical religious sentiment existing in opposition to pure justice. Under those circumstances, he would resist the former and fight for the latter. But since the Indian Muslims had an issue that was first of all reasonable and just and on top of that supported by scriptural authority, then for the Hindus not to support them to the utmost would be a cowardly breach of brotherhood. If the Muslim claim were unjust apart from the scriptures, there may have been cause for hesitation. But an intrinsically just claim backed by scriptural authority was irresistible. Gandhi was making a stand first of all on the ground of reason and only later on the ground of religious sentiment.

In that period, Gandhi could not have been more forthright in acknowledging the extra-territorial nature of the Muslim sentiment. He wrote, “Let Hindus not be frightened by pan-Islamism. It need not be anti-Indian or anti-Hindu. Musalmans must wish well to every Musalman State and even assist any such State if it is undeservedly imperial and Hindu, if they are true friends of Musalmans, cannot but share the latter’s feelings.”

Closer to home, Mahatma Gandhi supported the proposal of Shaukat Ali, the brother of Mohammad Ali – Mohammad Ali was his closest political colleague at that stage – that there should be three national cries or slogans. What were these? *Allah-o-Akbar*, *Vande Mataram* or *Bharat Mata ki Jai*, and *Hindu-Musalman ki Jai*. Gandhi called upon Hindus and Muslims to join the first cry in reverence and prayerfulness since Hindus may not fight shy of Arabic words when their meaning is not only totally inoffensive but even ennobling.

(d1/0940/sh)

He preferred ‘*Bande Matram*’ to ‘*Bharat Mata ki jai*’ as, I quote Mahatma Gandhi, “It would be a graceful recognition of the intellectual and emotional superiority of Bengal”. Since India was nothing without the union of the Hindu and the Muslim



heart, '*Hindu-Muslim ki jai*' was a cry never to be forgotten. Mahatma Gandhi appeared to have devised the perfect formula for harnessing the emotive power of nationalism in the linguistic regions and forging Hindu-Muslim unity based on a respectful attitude towards the fact of religiously informed cultural difference in an anti-colonial movement on an All India scale. Gandhi, it must be acknowledged, was not using religious means for political ends. For him Nation and Religion were precious ends in themselves. Both Maulana Mohammad Ali and he held *Swaraj* equally dear, he explained, because only by *Swaraj* is the safety of our respective faiths possible. The entire movement of non-cooperation was, in his view, "a struggle between religion and irreligion" because the motive behind every crime perpetrated by a Europe nominally Christian, but actually beset by Satan, was not religious or spiritual but grossly material, while Hindus and Muslims in India had religion and honour as their motive.

Now, Mahatma Gandhi's colleague Mohammad Ali emerged from prison after the end of the non-cooperation movement as President of the Indian National Congress. Jawaharlal Nehru was present at the Annual Session of the Congress in Kakinada in December, 1923, where the Maulana as was his wont delivered an enormously long Presidential Address. But Nehru thought it was an interesting one largely because it showed the historical Muslim deputation demanding 'separate electorates' in 1906 to have been a command performance engineered by the British Government itself. Nehru considered Mohammad Ali to be "most irrationally religious" but a bond of affection tied together the Congress President and the young man he appointed Secretary of the All India Congress Committee. One frequent subject of argument between the two was the Almighty. The Maulana liked to refer to God in Congress resolutions by way of thanksgiving, and when Nehru protested, he was shouted at for his irreligion. Nehru has written all this in his Autobiography. But Mohammad Ali forgave his younger colleague believing him to be fundamentally religious in spite of his "superficial behaviour". Perhaps, Nehru mused in his Autobiography, "It depends on what is meant by religion and religious".

Mohammad Ali's stirring call for a Federation of Faiths notwithstanding, the Kakinada Congress failed to ratify Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das's Bengal Pact for an equitable power sharing arrangement between Hindus and Muslims. As Deshbandhu's

political disciple Subhash Chandra Bose noted ruefully, it was rejected on the alleged ground that it showed partiality for the Muslims and violated the principles of nationalism. It was adopted by a large majority at the Bengal Provincial Congress in May, 1924, but at the All India level, a somewhat different Punjab line advocated by Lala Lajpat Rai had won out over the Bengal line advocated by C.R. Das. When Deshbandhu died in 1925, Subhash Bose who deplored the absence of cultural intimacy between India's two great religious communities wrote from Mandalay Prison: "I do not think that among the Hindu leaders of India, Islam had a greater friend than in the Deshbandhu. Hinduism was extremely dear to his heart. He would have given his life for his religion, but at the same time, he was absolutely free from dogmatism of any kind." That explains how it was possible for him to love Islam.

The mid-1920s, most contemporary observers and historians agree, were a period of Hindu-Muslim strife. Nehru titles the Chapter in his Autobiography dealing with this phase of riots "Communalism Rampant" in which he concludes, "Surely religion and the spirit of religion have much to answer for. What kill joys they have been." Now, I think there is scope for debate about this Nehruvian diagnosis of the cause of Hindu-Muslim disunity: was religion or the spirit of religion actually responsible for the conflicts between the communities? I think it is important to make a distinction between 'religion as faith' and 'religion as a demarcator' of identity. But this particular approach had fairly large consequences for Indian anti-colonial nationalism in the last two decades of the British Raj. The discourse of mainstream Indian nationalism turned more insistent on the question of singularity, and this led to a sense of unease among those who were condemned to minority status at the All India level leading them first of all to call for safeguards and eventually to couch their own demands in the language of nationalism.

In early 1938, Nehru asserted: "I have examined this so-called communal question through the telescope, and if there is nothing, what can you see?" Now, Nehru's vision of unity was based on secular uniformity. It is understandable in that period. He wanted every Indian to begin to think of himself or herself as a citizen who would owe primary allegiance to the would-be Indian Nation State. But this question which Nehru could not see through a telescope was looked at rather differently, for example, by Rabindranath Tagore. He wrote in one of his famous essays under the title "*Bharat Varsh*

ki Itihas” (Indian History): “Where there is genuine difference, it is only by expressing and restraining that difference in its proper place that it is possible to fashion unity. Unity cannot be achieved by issuing legal fiats that everybody is one.”

Now, the colonial rules of representation in the formal arenas of politics based on religious enumeration was undoubtedly tailor-made for communitarian rivalry, especially ‘separate electorates’ and so on. But there was also a significant shift in nationalist ideology on the issue of religious difference that contributed to the fact that the Muslim masses were never as enthused by the Civil Disobedience and the Quit India Movements of the 1930s and 1940s as they had been in the years of non-cooperation in the early 1920s.

Yet during the Second World War there was a movement led by another Cambridge man and another avid admirer of Garibaldi the Italian patriotic leader which sought to forge unity in anti-colonial politics based on respect for and accommodation of religious difference. In his speech as Congress President in 1938, Subhash Chandra Bose had warned against accepting colonial constitutional devices designed to divide and deflect the anti-colonial movement, but felt that the policy of divide and rule was by no means an unmixed blessing for the ruling power. He could see Britain getting caught in the meshes of her own political dualism resulting from divisive policies, whether in India, Palestine, Egypt, Iraq or Ireland. Between 1943 and 1945, Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose made a very deliberate attempt to build unity among India’s religious communities – Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and Christians – in the movement that he led in South East Asia.

The INA’s march to Delhi had commenced with a ceremonial parade on 26th September, 1943, at the Tomb of the last Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar in Burma. Once the march to Delhi stalled at Imphal in July, 1944, the warriors and their leader gathered once more at Bahadur Shah’s Tomb. On that somber occasion, Netaji closed his speech with a couplet composed by Bahadur Shah during the 1857 revolt.

*“Ghazion me bu rahegi jab talak imaan ki,
takht London tak chalegi tegh Hindustan ki.”*

“गाजियों में बू रहेगी जब तलक ईमान की
तख्त लंदन तक चलेगी तेग हिंदुस्तान की”

(So long as Ghazis' are imbued with the spirit of faith, the sword of Hindustan will reach London's thrown.)

The Indian National Army had altered all the rules of Britain's Indian Army as these had applied to religious and linguistic communities, caste and gender. They dined together, ate together, before they went into battle together. "No one had asked us", Abid Hassan has written – Abid Hassan was the man who travelled with Netaji during the submarine voyage and then fought as a soldier in the Indian National Army – "to cease to be a Tamil or Dogra, Punjabi Muslim or Bengali Brahmin, a Sikh or an Adivasi. We were all that and perhaps fiercely more so than before, but these matters became personal affairs." When their Netaji came to see the retreating men from Imphal at Mandalay, "Sikhs oiled their beards, the Punjabi Muslims, Dogras and Rajputs twirled their moustaches, and we the indiscriminates put on as good a face as we could manage."

I was in Singapore recently where there had been a memorial built to the INA. That was blown up by the British after the end of the War. Now, the Singapore Government has installed another memorial. But who actually built the first memorial? It was a Christian Officer of the Indian National Army called Cyril John Stacey. So, there was remarkable unity. Margaret Alva was referring to the martyrs of our movement. The Martyrs' Memorial was built by one of the finest Christian Officers of the INA.

(e1/0950/kmr)

Faced with military defeat, there could be two sources of solace. One was rational analogy with the Irish example, the other was faith drawn from India's own history. It is a strange phenomenon in history, Netaji said in a speech on 21st May, 1945, that while the British could easily crush the Irish rebellion of 1916 at a time when they were engaged in a life and death struggle, they had to acknowledge defeat at the hands of the Irish revolutionaries. For the British had emerged victorious from the World War. But he had already observed in his reply of 2nd November, 1943 to a message of felicitations from De Valera upon the proclamation of the Provisional Government of Azad Hind in Singapore, that British imperialism had brought about the partition of Ireland in the past and if British imperialism was to survive the war, a similar fate would be in store for India.

Whether due to a British error in rational decision making or in answer to the prayers offered at Bahadur Shah's tomb, India's anti-imperialists were given a last opportunity to reach an honourable settlement of the problem of religious difference when three Punjabi officers of the INA – a Hindu, a Muslim and a Sikh – were put on public trial at the Red Fort for waging war against the King Emperor. The venue was the same as on the occasion of the historic trial of Bahadur Shah; so was the sentence - deportation for life. But on this occasion, the sentence could not be carried out and the Red Fort Three were released almost immediately by the Commander-in-Chief Claude Auchinleck under intense public pressure that had built up all over India.

The whole country has been roused, Mahatma Gandhi observed, and even the regular forces have been stirred into a new political consciousness and have begun to think in terms of independence. Netaji had succeeded in his strategy to knock out the keystone of British imperialist domination over its Asian colonies by supplanting the loyalty of the Indian soldiers to their enslavers with a new loyalty to their countries freedom.

As the father of our nation said about his Prince among Patriots, Netaji's name had become one to conjure with. The lesson that Netaji and his army brings to us - Mahatma Gandhi wrote in the Harijan on February 12th, 1946 - is one of self-sacrifice, unity irrespective of class and community and discipline. There were remarkable scenes in the winter of 1945-46 when the Tricolour of the Congress, even the green flag of the Muslim League and the red flag of the Communists were tied together and flown in the streets of Calcutta and Bombay and so on. Yet, as we know, the union of hearts in the winter of 1945-46 could not prevent the tragedy that unfolded in the summer of 1947.

Division, of course, was not a foregone conclusion until the moment of the actual wielding of the partition as axe. The principle of some form of federal unity was alive as late as the Cabinet Mission's proposal of a three-tiered Constitutional structure in 1946. These kinds of plans had also been alive just before the Irish partition or before the Palestinian partition in 1948. What made Partition a decision born of short-term expediency into such a long-term feature of the political landscapes of India and Ireland was that in order to ensure rule by religiously defined majorities, the provinces of Punjab

and Bengal, and also the province of Ulster had to be divided by simply touching up numbers in Districts and Counties.

As we endeavour to preserve and strengthen the ideal of Indian unity today, there are lessons to be learnt from our pre-colonial history and the best traditions within our anti-colonial thought and practice. The path to a cosmopolitan anti-colonialism was forged only when our patriots were able to combat religious prejudice without making religion the enemy of the nation. It is important not to confuse religious sensibility with religious bigotry. Most people in our country have deep religious faith, but do not harbour religious prejudice or hatred against other religious communities. The brand of secularism we aspire to should resolutely combat the latter not the former.

I might add that the real problem was never with religion as faith. The problem was simply counting up how many people belong to a particular religious community and saying that one is a majority, the others are minority, and so forth. Since we now have a vibrant democracy, we need to remember that the basic feature of a democracy is that majorities have to be earned. Majorities cannot be handed out on prefabricated religious platters. So, we cannot assume *a priori* that someone is a majority based on someone's religious affiliation. We have to put forward a political programmes, social programmes, economic programmes, and then see how a majority can be earned through a vibrant political process.

In the Constituent Assembly of the late 1940s, one political party commanded an overwhelming majority. Of course, one can understand why in 1947 many of our leaders would have wanted a strong Centre. Nehru, of course, was a socialist; he wanted to carry forward radical, social and economic reforms and he felt that he needed a strong Centre to do that. Vallabh Bhai Patel believed that the Indian Princely States had to be integrated. For that too a strong Centre was a very useful instrument. Also, departing colonial powers always try to partition or balkanise in order to neutralise the transfer of power. The British tried it in India. The Dutch tried it in Indonesia. They at one point said they will hand over power to sixteen different states rather than to one republic of Indonesia. The French tried it in Vietnam. They said Cochinchina for the Cochinchinese; South Vietnam for the South Vietnamese, at one point in the late 40s. So, one can understand why nationalist leaders were always suspicious of the designs of departing

colonial powers. But at the same time, one cannot ignore the fact that there are diversities - whether of a religious kind or linguistic kind - which have to be addressed, they cannot be evaded; and it is by taking those into account that one can actually forge real unity.

Today we not only live in an age of coalition Governments, but there are a plethora of regional parties that are represented in our Parliament. It is often asked, and when I teach abroad I am always asked, whether the rise of regionalism represents a threat to Indian unity. I myself do not think so. What gives me that confidence is my own study of Indian history. Let us not forget that the position of the legendary king Bharata from whom our country derives its indigenous name was not that of the administrative head of any large and centralised government but only that of the recognised and respected centre. So, a Centre should really be aspiring to gaining recognition and respect.

Sometimes we tend to respond to regional disenchantments by offering a larger dose of autonomy or devolution of power. Equally important, perhaps far more important, is to give smaller outlying States a greater stake and a bigger voice in decision-making at the Centre. That alone can foster a deeper sense of belonging to the Indian Union. Representation in our Lok Sabha is by and large based on proportions of population in the different States. Can there not be a fresh round of discussion to see whether smaller States can be given more weighted representation in our Rajya Sabha, which was after all conceived of by our founding fathers as a Council of States?

There are other countries where the Upper House has equal representation from all States, the United States being one. Delaware sends two Senators; New York also sends two Senators, one of them being Hillary Clinton. Equal representation is not possible because of the diversity of sizes of our different States in our own country. But some degree of representation is I think a possibility. Particularly when I look at our problems in the North-East, I often feel that how about sort of giving these smaller States a larger voice in Delhi, not just thinking in terms of autonomy in the different regions.

The British often made a false and arrogant claim that they had, for the first time in history united a disparate India. The idea of India and the Indian unity, of course, has long a proud history. All that the British had actually done was to bring about a new degree of administrative centralisation while dividing Indian communities and

concentrating real power in British hands at a unitary centre. We ought not to regard that unitary centre created by the British to be our main inheritance. Instead, we need to draw on our own rich legacy of enlightened political thought and practice on how best to forge unity by being respectful of cultural differences.

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Unity imposed from above can only be of an artificial kind. But if we are prepared to learn from our own pre-colonial history and our anti-colonial history, then, I have no doubt that we would forge a free and flexible union from below and that would turn out to be a strong and very a long lasting Union.

Thank you very much. Jai Hind.



(Concluded)