Subhas Bose, The Silent Other: Fault Lines In Indian National Congress And The Skewed Reportage Of The 1939 Election By The Statesman

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Abstract: The present times have witnessed, an enthusiastic and high decibel debate on the leading actors of the national movement. Newsreels and newsmoons have run amok with a never seen before joust over the historical role of the Congress Party and its leaders in the national movement. There has been a significant effort to appropriate or to do justice to significant individuals who pose an alternative to the hegemony of Gandhi and Nehru in the story of India’s attainment of national independence. One of the leading polarizing figures in the current debate is Subhas Chandra Bose. The process of aligning the idea of Subhas Chandra Bose with desecration of Nehru is witnessed in the Indian political scene and endorsed in the pages of important national dailies. The paper scourges to the beginning, the year of 1939 to understand the phenomenon of political inquiry and populism that brings Nehru and Bose face to face, creating newer myths and shattering old icons. Employing Anabela Carvalho’s (2000: 2008) framework of Critical Discourse Analysis, the paper examines the 1939 archives of The Statesman, the “great success story Victorian India” (Hirschmann 2004). The daily’s substantial historical presence plays catalyst in analysing the treatment levied to Bose as he rises to become a controversial political actor. The paper also reflects upon the Gandhi, Nehru, and Bose equation from the prism of the pages of the Indian press.

Index Terms: Critical Discourse Analysis, Indian History, Jawaharlal Nehru, Press, Politics, Subhas Chandra Bose, The Statesman

1 INTRODUCTION

The present study delineates the stance taken by the predominant English language daily of the time, The Statesman while reporting the historic moment of Subhas Bose winning the election for president of Indian National Congress in 1939 against all odds creating an unassailable rift with the ruling ideologues especially Gandhi and Nehru. The paper employs Anabela Carvalho’s (2000:2008) framework of Critical Discourse Analysis to investigate this Critical Discourse Moment of the 1939 election on the pages of The Statesman and lay bare the marginalisation of Bose vis a vis Nehru, relegation of his triumph to the periphery, and most importantly silencing of the dissident voice exposing the fault lines in Indian National Congress that might have signalled the beginning of an end culminating in the events of 1947. The Indian National Congress had given up its pretence of working as a united front against the imperialist government. Subhas Chandra Bose, the left radical, wanted to contest for the position of President, for the second time, but Gandhi wasn’t in agreement (Gordon 1990). During the election campaign, Bose tooled with a statement made by Lord Lothian, a politician and newspaper editor alleging that Congress is negotiating with the British on the Act of 1935. The other issue was that of the federation. Bose was of the view that the right wing was in talks to compromise with the imperialist government on the issue of federation (Bhalia 2016). Nehru denied the claim. On 29th January 1939, Bose won the Congress Presidential Election polling 1580 votes against Gandhi’s candidate Dr. S. Taramayya with 1377.

Gandhi two days later issued a statement: “...the defeat is more mine than his”. This marked the commencement of a strenuous affair in the Indian political scene. Nothing strained Gandhi, Nehru and Bose’s relationship like the election results of 29th January 1939 (Ghosh 1992). As the Bose and Gandhi divide widened, twelve of fifteen members of the Congress Working Committee resigned. However, Nehru did not resign. The tensed political situation kept the newspapers of the country busy as late as April 1939. Some of the “extremist papers” such as Amrita Bazar Patrika, The Servant, Liberty (Gordon 1990) had well marked out their support but one of the most widely circulated English newspaper in India, The Statesman, “leading newspaper of the British in India” (Hirschmann 2004) portrayed the brewing tension between the right and the left wing of the Indian National Congress with understated demeanour. During the time, The Statesman published only twelve reports, never on the first page. Thematically, the articles framed the ideological differences between Bose and Gandhi. Gandhi’s uncomfortable position within the Congress after Bose’ victory lead to drafting of the Pant Resolution, which allowed formation of the Working Committee members in accordance with the wishes of Gandhi (Chakrabarti 1990). As Bose resigned, Nehru appealed to him to take back his resignation and also reasoned with Gandhi, but there was no consensus that any of them could reach upon (Gordon 1990).

2 FRAMEWORK

Indian press, an important “instrument of political education” (Mani 1952) has assisted in building popular discourse. The language of the press has been debated upon and often reflected dominant ideology (Philo et al 2013, Shoemaker 1994). Scholarly work on news has primarily been restricted to understanding the influence and impact it has on its reader, invariably neglecting the process of news production (Dijk 1988). Press discourse is an account of language being structures in dominance and by power positions. Critical Discourse Analysis concerns itself with the “structural
relationship of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language” (Wodak 2001). The paper employs the framework of Anabela Carvalho’s Critical Discourse Analysis (2000:2008) to understand the press text of 1939 dealing with Subhas Chandra Bose. The research identifies the ‘hard news’ items for factuality, objective and impartial style of reportage (Conboy 2007). An important characteristic of hard news is the eminence it gives to its “headline” and “lead” (Ventola 2000). Both, headline and lead in a hard news story reveal the crux of the event and are its most important elements (Ulum 2016). The paper thereby adopts an extensive examination of the 1939 article’s headline and lead. The text is analysed in two stages. Firstly, textual analysis that investigates in six different parameters the elements in the text with has contributed to its “overall meaning”. In the second stage of contextual analysis, there are two important enquiries synchronic which identifies various other press representations of the same issue and diachronic which traces the development of the issue along with its socio-political context. This stage focuses on “overall coverage” of the issue (Carvalho 2000: 2008). The conceptual tool of Critical Discourse research allows an exhaustive exploration of a given “critical discourse moment” in history. In this context, the 30th January reportage of The Statesman announcing Bose winning Congress Presidential Election has been chosen for its characteristic to challenge a set discourse

**3 TEXT AND CONTEXT**

**MR. SUBHAS BOSE WINS CONTEST**

Mr. Subhas Chandra Bose polled a majority of votes at the Congress Presidential election held simultaneously in all the 21 linguistic Congress provinces yesterday and he will thus share the honour with Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru of having been the Congress President for two successive terms. (The Statesman article of 30th January 1939, Page 9)

**3.1 Textual Analysis**

**Layout and Structural Organisation**

The examination of surface elements of a hard news article such as the section in which the article was published, page number, size, tone of the headline and leads, assists in examining the valuation and categorization given to the issue by the publication has been carried out. The mentioned article was published on page nine of the newspaper The Statesmanon 30.01.1939. The newspaper placed the story on the top left of the page and dedicated two columns to it. The placement of the story is not prominent nor does it stand out significantly in size and nobility. The lead is just a single sentence with a valuation of just forty-five words. The headline and the lead of the article highlight Subhas Chandra Bose’s win in the presidential election.

**Objects**

In this section Carvalho (2000: 2008) enunciates the importance of analysing the constitution of the reality at stake beyond an optic reference. The main theme and object of the article is political climate of elections that resulted in Bose’s victory as the President of the Indian National Congress. Another important object of the article is Bose sharing the same stature as Nehru by becoming the President for a second successive term, sidestepping the fact that Bose’s was a contested election and that too against a nominee of Gandhi and against his wishes.

**Actors**

Examination of the individual represented, referred and quoted in the article that “shape the overall meaning of the text” (Carvalho 2008). The actors represented in The Statesman article are Bose and Nehru. As the story revolves around Bose, it is Nehru’s placement that becomes significant here. The choice to draw parallel with Nehru is an indicator of the newspapers skewed framing of the issue. It is worth noting here that the depiction of Nehru in the article suggests the fact that the newspaper’s account of the reality reflects a slanted reality.

**Language and Rhetoric**

Invigoration of the choice of words, syntax divulges, “underlying ideological presuppositions” (Carvalho 2008). The syntax construction in the headline and beginning of the lead reflects a dispassionate reportage that can be identified as a character of hard news. The choice of words such as “wins”, “majority” and “in all the 21 linguistic congress province” are the only hints of the magnanimity of the event. The importance of the event is completed negated by refraining from elaborating that the win was not just “contest” but a presidential position of the Indian National Congress. The article also does not mention the candidate against who Subhas stood and won the election. The linguistic aspect important here is the emphasis on the positive framing of Nehru. The sentence construction of the meaning of Subhas’s win is dressed in the subsequent elevation of him sharing the same stature as Nehru. The words such as “honour”, “two successive terms” emphasize greatly of Nehru’s contribution. The important element to note here is the use of honorific “Pandit” for Nehru, which hints subtly towards the newspaper’s valorisation.

**Discursive Strategies**

Manipulation of reality tactically using tools to legitimise, politicise and position a discourse construed by social actors or journalists is observed in the step (Carvalho2008). The Statesman’s representation of the election is a legitimization of the political stance taken by the newspaper on the treatment of Bose. Positioning of the presidential election of the Indian National Congress aids to the construction of normalcy and suggests its un- affecting quality for the imperialist government. Thus a coalition of the government’s dogma with that of the journalists can be easily identified. A critical look demonstrates a gap in the enunciation of the event and it is worth noting the extremely summarized report to an extent of eliminating information from the reader. The reference to Nehru on the implication of the win is worth noting.

**Ideological Standpoint**

This step is most fundamental due to its influence in shaping of the text (Carvalho 2008). Ideologically the article is clearly siding with the Imperialist government, closely followed by siding with Nehru-Gandhi who was considered to be less radical and less intransigent in comparison to Bose, the left radical. The lack of complete presentation manifests a link to the newspapers impassivity towards the story.

**3.2 Contextual Analysis**
Comparative synchronic analysis
The analysis entails examination of simultaneous representations of the issue in either the same news outlet or in others (Carvalho2008). This assists in discursive construction of reality. On 30.01.1939 when The Statesman published the story, Times of India did not publish any article on the election. The day after, 31.01.1939, Times of India published two articles, in page eight and page nine.

MR. BOSE’S VICTORY
The election of Mr. Subhas Chandra Bose as President of the Indian National Congress for the ensuing year is as significant as it is surprising. Few people expected that he would win the contest; still fewer that he would do so with such a comfortable margin. Nearly ninety per cent of the elected delegates exercised their franchise. Out of a total of 2,977 votes polled, Mr. Bose secured 1,580, a little over two hundred more than his rival. Although Mr. Bose has a good handicap in his favour in the shape of four hundred odd votes in his province, he obtained unexpected support from other big constituencies. The result, we imagine, exceeded even Mr. Bose’s optimistic calculations. [Times of India article of 31st January 1939, Page 8]

MR. BOSE ELECTED CONGRESS PRESIDENT
Mr. Subhas Bose has won the contest for the president-ship of the next Congress by a margin of 203 votes. There were several surprises in the election, the voting having upset confident circulations in many provinces. [Times of India: 31st January 1939, Page 9] The reportage is a stark difference with that of The Statesman’s. It presents a useful alternative to the construction of reality by The Statesman. The difference in headline points to the opposing treatment towards Bose. The lead of the article is of approximately one hundred and twenty words, it is extensively reported. Bringing attention to the number by which Bose has won, the significance of the win and what the election entailed. His achievement is highlighted by drawing attention to the obstacle and the support he received from unexpected fronts. Herein too the newspaper does not reveal his opposition but terms him as “rival”. It stirs clear of the ideologic difference and tension that was brewing in the Congress during the time. The Times of India article is elaborate and clad in theanics with choice of words such as “significant”, “surprising”, “comfortable”, “handicap”, “unexpected”, “upset”, and “confident”. Ideologically it evades the complexities of the election, the hindrance and the death of approval of Bose’s candidature by the Congress old guard. This comparison indicates the difference in representation of the issue and bias in framing of Bose.

Historical diachronic analysis
Assessing of historical context and production of the “mediated texts” (Carvalho, 2008). The analysis will be looking at the articles published before the results announced Bose’s win. This will help understand the discourse that surrounded Bose and the election as it lead up to the day. On 27.01.1939 The Statesman published two articles on page nine and page ten.

PANDIT NEHRU ON CONGRESS DISPUTE
“FEDERATION NOT AN ISSUE IN PRESIDENTIAL CONTEST”

MR. BOSE’S REPLY TO SARDAR PATEL
Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru yesterday issued a statement on the forthcoming Congress Presidential contest and said that Federation could not be an issue in the election, as it seemed to him to be “monstrous” for any Congressman to think in terms of a compromise on that subject. [The Statesman of 27th January 1939, Page 9]

MR. BOSE’S REPLY TO “APPEAL”
Mr. Subhas Chandra Bose announced in Calcutta early this morning that the real issue in the forthcoming Congress Presidential election was Federation. “It is widely believed”, he said that there is a prospect of compromise on the federation scheme between the Right Wing of the Congress and the British Government during the coming year. [The Statesman:27th January 1939, Page 10] The lead of the article quotes the statement issued by Nehru to clarify his stand on the issue of federation. The article highlights Nehru’s reply to Bose on his allegation that the imperialist government and the right wing Congress would settle on the issue but without giving any context i.e there is no direct mentioning of Bose and his attacks. It is easy to draw inference of the accusation from the article as it mentions that it is “monstrous” for a “congressmen” to think on those lines. The article promotes Nehru’s point of view and is precautionary in its writing on Bose. The second article published on the same day on the next Page reflects on the ideological stand by its careful positioning. In this article the lead discusses the politics of the federation. There is a concrete direction taken by the newspaper as the indirect claim in the previous article is made clear here. The framing of Subhas Bose as the “monster” is sustained by announcing that Subhas Bose issued a statement mentioning the federation as the real issue. The same day Times of India too published an article, headlined “Mr. Patel replies to Mr. Bose”.

Mr. Patel Replies to Mr. Bose
Mr.Vallabhbhai Patel has issued a statement replying to the statement made by Mr.Subhas Chandra following the appeal made by seven members of the Congress Working Committee to Mr. Bose to withdraw from the contest for the election of President of the Congress, Mr. Patel says: [Times of India article of 27th January 1939, Page 10] The article implies the political tension in the Indian National Congress. It represents the statement issued by Vallabhbhai Patel who belonged to the Gandhi clan. The lead draws an unclear picture of the event wherein the reason for Patel to request Bose to step down from the election is not mentioned. To show the benevolence of the appeal the author states that not only Patel but “seven” other member too are of the same opinion. There is again no mention of Gandhi, his candidate who stood against Bose and the difference between the right and left wing congress. On 28.01.1939, The Statesman on its ninth Page, in an insignificant position headlines its article “UNITY APPEAL BY MR. SUBHAS BOSE”.

UNITY APPEAL BY MR. SUBHAS BOSE
Mr. Subhas Bose issued another statement last night, giving his version of the issues involved in to-morrow’s Congress Presidential election, in which the other candidate is Dr.Pattabhi Sitaramaya. [The Statesman article of 28th January 1939, Page 9] The lead mentions the election that was to be
held the next day and the candidate against whom he was standing. There is a vagueness and lack of connectivity between the lead and the headline. The appeal of unity mentioned in the headline is not revisited in the lead; instead it conservatively builds on the statement made by Bose. The article is non-conclusive and does not reveal any significant information. Times of India does not publish any story on the day, thus there is a gap in understanding the “discursive strategies” (Carvalho 2000: 2008) in the construction of reality. The analysis of the historical context of the election gives an understanding of the discourses constituted by the press for different actors. The Statesman clearly reflects on the ideological stand it has taken along with the disqualifying and sceptical treatment towards Bose, while the Times of India had stayed clear of exploring all angles and was conservative in their treatment.

4 CONCLUSION

The conceptual tool of the research allows an exhaustive exploration of the “critical discourse moments” in history. In the larger context is the history of Gandhi, Nehru, Bose and their parallel lives. Also revealed is the ideological predilection of the newspaper i.e. The Statesman. Such ideological bias operates at two levels. First, where the newspaper acts as a mouth piece for the imperialist British Government and hence explains the understated manner of reportage on a significant event as Bose's election as President at the 1939 Tripuri Congress session. Second, its preference to Gandhi and significantly to Nehru over Bose which is evident from prominence given to Nehru in the news story (concerning the 1939 election), where objectively viewed, in the context of the election, Bose and Gandhi were the actors and Nehru, at best had a subsidiary role to play. This explains how Bose's victory is measured against and purportedly exalted as an achievement in equating the same with Nehru’s successive election as Congress President, sidestepping the fact that Bose was a contested election and that too against a nominee of Gandhi and against his wishes. The critical discourse becomes all the more distinct when the treatment is compared to that of another leading daily The Times of India, whose treatment of the same historical events is significantly different though not a polar opposite. The essay through the method of Critical Discourse Analysis framework proposed by Anabela Carvalho (2000:2008) analyses the reportage of The Statesman on the 1939 election to lay bare, what one may conclusively state, the beginning of a complex discourse of Indian nationalism surrounding Bose. The study uses the phrase ‘critical discourse moment’ as a composite idea that identifies and brackets a historical moment—the event of 1939 election—as a point of departure, ripe with the possibilities that is known in retrospect, defined the journey of Bose becoming Netaji. The 1939 Presidential election of Indian National Congress is symptomatic of the beginning of a journey of Bose from a radical leader with Left leanings working under the rubric of Indian National Congress to a maverick persona with the honorific Netaji to be bestowed upon him in due course, attaining a mythic status with his exploits in Japan and Germany and eventual disappearance shrouded by mystery and speculation till date. The journey continues to this day in the pages of our national dailies, in literature, cinema, the ever-raising pitches of our television news debates.

5 REFERENCES