Subhas Chandra Bose: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Press Reportage

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Abstract

There is a growing disenchantment in heroes of the Indian Freedom Struggle. The Indian National dailies have been contributing in re-writing of their narratives. The year of 2014, was monumental in writing a new saga for Subhas Chandra Bose. The paper investigates the treatment of news stories of Bose produced in leading English dailies, Times of India and Statesman. The research employs Critical Discourse Analysis to understand media trends, their ideological affiliations, and overtones. The paper examines the newspaper archives of the year to identify the representation of Bose against the socio-political context of the time. The research borrows the framework of Anabela Carvalho (2008) Critical Discourse Analysis. There is extensive research on press effects and impacts but there is a need to study the influences on press content that positions to govern our everyday susceptibilities, especially because it stands a chance to put at jeopardy the nation that prides itself of its history. The newspapers appear to portray Bose in the light of the political disposition and draw dividends from the continued mystery surrounding his disappearance.

Key Words: Subhas Chandra Bose, Press, Critical Discourse Analysis, Times of India, Statesman, Representations.

I- Introduction

A dead hero is always a more convenient prop than a live one (Leonard Gordan).

Subhas Chandra Bose has been a topic of debate for as long as he lived and beyond. More than 70 years have been spent in deliberating, Netaji: Dead or Alive? During this period, changes in the political climate would unmistakably result in a bass or treble in the discourse. The year of 2014 was particularly monumental. The year saw a proposal to award a posthumous Bharat Ratna to Subhas Bose, which met with stiff opposition from his family...
members. A large section of his family opposed the move as it would involve an acknowledgment of his death. In fact, even those who believed in the air crash theory opposed the move for other reasons such as it being long delayed and not commensurate to his stature. The objections closely mirrored those raised in 1992 at the similar recommendation of the then government of PV Narasimha Rao.

The Government of India’s reluctance to de-classify files on Subhas Chandra Bose that could possibly give closure regarding his disappearance post-1945 continued even after a change in government and coming to power of the BJP government lead by Mr. Narendra Modi. In response to an RTI query in 2014, Home Minister Mr. Rajnath Singh maintained that the government did not intend to declassify the files as they contained sensitive information and could prejudicially affect relations with foreign countries, a re-iteration of the stand of the previous governments. However, the debate gathered momentum and events were to soon lead up to the announcement the very next year by Prime Minister Narendra Modi of the declassification of 150 files of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose.

Politics is both intrinsic and inseparable from any assessment on the life and legacy of Subhas Chandra Bose. There are considerable research and viewpoints on how different political actors did him wrong. A variable that has often been overlooked is the role of the press. Writers and researchers have relied on the documentation of the press in understanding the history of the times better. Despite this, Subhas Chandra Bose has never been significantly explored solely through the eyes of the press. The treatment of the press towards the freedom fighter has altered over the years. Thus he has been variously described and framed as mythical, revolutionary, unparalleled, martyr, hero, farsighted, authoritarian, traitor, puppet and quisling. Different political actors such as the ruling party and the opposition, influence press reports. The scholar will look into the articles published in the Times of India and Statesman of 2014 to understand the underlying role press plays in writing of commonly accepted narratives. The period has been selected as, it is ‘determining in the construction of an issue and therefore call for an integral analysis’ (Carvalho, 2008, p 166). There is a need to examine if politics has played a major role in deciding press content. In an era where there is a growing disenchantment with the heroes of the freedom struggle, the paper will try to identify the role press has played in contributing to it and question its ethical boundaries.

The approach of Critical Discourse analysis will be instrumental in understanding ideology reflective in the text. It will also help cognize the intentions, representation, and ideas conveyed by the author/publications. The conceptual tool for the analysis of the newspaper articles is taken from Anabela Carvalho’s approach to critical discourse analysis.

II- Conceptual Framework

What is involved, then, in that finding of the "true story", that discovery of the "real story" within or behind the event that comes to us in the chaotic form of "historical records"? (Hayden White)

Norman Fairclough in the chapter written in the book, Discourse as Data, has emphasized on how ‘language is involved in social relation of power and domination and in ideology’ and that
it can be used in combination to other relevant social changes such as shifts in governance.

The study of written text used by the media and the process involved in producing press text has been negated over the years (Schiffrin, Tannen, Hamilton, 2003). The paper aims to study the position taken by the publications and unearth the bias predominant in press discourse.

Media tends to portray in a way that is ideologically influenced (Fourie Pieter, 2001). Its workings have been questioned over the years, with research showing that media, along with the government ‘are intertwined in a vicious circle of mutual manipulation, mythmaking, and self-interest’ (Vanderwicken Peter, 1995). Media ownership and affiliations have become detrimental in the news making the process. It channels either political influence or fame (Djankov, 2003). Coverage of an issue and the treatment given to it is largely reflective of dominant political forces (Parenti, 1993). ‘Media reports are selective and generally do not present arguments or interpretation from competing perspectives. Instead, mainstream media has a tendency to portray news in a manner, which reflects the official views of the government’ (McElrath Karen, 2000). It is ‘shaped, pounded, constrained, encouraged by a multitude of force’ (Shoemaker, 1996). Critical Discourse analysis allows ‘deconstruction and reconstruction of texts’ which ‘can give important indications about issues like the intentions of the author of a text or utterance, politically dominant ideologies’ (Anabela Carvalho 2001). It also explores ‘discursive sources of power, dominance, inequality, and bias’ (Buhkhari, Xiaoyang, 2013). Discourse, also ‘plays a dominant role in historical research as it encourages the systematic process of searching for the facts and then using the information to analyse, and interpret the past’ (Buhkhari, Xiaoyang, 2013). The paper follows the step-by-step process of reading newspaper discourse laid out by Anabela Carvalho (2001), along with the socio-political context in which the text was produced.

Narratives of over 70 years show that the contributions made by Subhas Bose during the freedom struggle were andare overlaid with myths, myths carefully spun to meet vested interests (Gordon Leonard). Nanda Mookerjee(1981) notes that Statesman, describing it as the leading Anglo-Indian daily, ‘disparaged’ Bose’s image. Statesman, Leonard Gordon (1990) mentions, was closely allied to the colonizer and represented the imperial press of the country. The English daily had classified Bose as a ‘Nazi’, while Catholic Herald, announced that Bose was the brain behind the revolutionary conspiracy, an idea which was quickly imitated in the writings of Englishman and Statesman. With reference to the Indian Press, Gordon comments that after the war, Bose was shown as a man who declared, ‘Give me blood and I will give you freedom’. The author studies Subhas Chandra Bose as the subject of the media and the differences in the manner of media’s treatment of Subhas, depending on the underlying political affiliations and ideologies. In fact, G.C Jain(1946) discredits the press for injecting the question into popular narrative of whether Netaji is ‘dead or alive’. The press has also been questionable in its stand towards the INA men, framing them as ‘misguided’ pre-1945 and ‘patriot’, ‘hero’ post 1945 (Mahjan Sucheta, 1987). A study of British newspapers (Nanda Mookerjee) from 1933 to 1935 illustrates Bose as the man who ‘the British authorities are scared of’, a ‘notorious extremist’, ‘Congress leader in place of Nehru’, ‘nationalist leader forbidden to land in Britain’. The portrayal by the media can either develop or destroy the reputation of political actors (Hasim, Tiung 2009)
Research on Bose has primarily been biographical, each claiming to have set the history right. In all of the work, the press has played the role of a record bearer, with authors referencing to understand socio-political contexts. Its authenticity remains unquestioned; scholars have presented news articles without examining it on various parameters, such as textual analysis, themes, social agents, rhetoric and language, discursive strategies and ideological standpoints (Carvelho Anabela, 2008). This paper will study the role of political power in the shaping of press content.

The study investigates the articles published in two important national dailies, Statesman and Times of India focusing specifically on the month of December 2014 which stirred debates, after an unofficial word on Netaji, possibly getting Bharat Ratna started circulating and eventually led to the historical declassification of Netaji files. Both, Statesman and Times of India were ‘great success stories of Victorian India’ (Edwin Hirschmann, 2004). To understand the discourse, it is important to identify newspapers that are strongly rooted in history, as the analysis would encompass an exploration back in time, which is well fulfilled by the two national dailies.

The paper traverses through the electronic archives of the year and examines the stream of political thought that is reflective in ‘lead’ and the ‘headline’ of the news articles, as the importance of the topic given by the newspaper can also be measured by it (Dijik). Teun A. van Dijk, states that headline subjectively talks about the most pertinent information of the news story and that it is the most important structure of the news report (Dijik, 1988), while, lead is the ‘most important paragraph of the story’ (Caldas, Coulthard 1996, p 257). Lead and headline perform the role of both orientation and abstract (Thomson). Headlines also bear ‘ideologies of newspaper’ (Ömer Gökhan Ulum, 2016).

This paper will help analyze the role of political forces behind the dilution of press content and if there were or are any political dividends to be drawn from the continued debates on Bose’s legacy and death.

### III - Data and Method

**CDA-is a-critical-perspective of doing scholarship; it is, so to speak, discourse analysis ‘with an attitude’- Teun A.van Dijk**

Critical Discourse analysis does not have a framework of methodology (Dolon, Labarta, Todoli, 2006) that may be applied to a set data. CDA takes into account ‘that discourse is structured by dominance, it is historically produced and interpreted, it is situated in time and space and that dominant structures are legitimated by ideologies of powerful groups’ (Wodak, Meyer 2001). ‘CDA is the single most authoritative line of research regarding the study of media discourse’ (Carvalho, 2008, p 162). This method is instrumental to this study as Bose, has been in public debate for over a significant time span and CDA allows ‘understanding the evolution of matters’ (Carvalho, 2008, p 164). Studying of a time period also mandates looking into the issue against its socio-political backdrop (Carvalho, 2008, p 164).
The paper will adopt the framework for the analysis of Media Discourse as laid down by Anabela Carvalho (2005; 2008). The text will be analysed in two levels, Textual and Contextual. In Textual Analysis, parameters such as layout and structural organization, objects, actors, language, grammar and rhetoric, discursive strategies, ideological standpoints will be extensively explored. On the other hand, in contextual analysis; the text will undergo comparative-synchronic analysis and historical-diachronic analysis.

News Article: Times of India

Date - December 27th, 2014
Headline - Netaji almost got Bharat ratna with Vajpayee, Malviya

But his Family Refused The Honour Again
Times News Network

Lead- New Delhi: An attempt to confer Bharat Ratna on Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, alongside former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Hindu nationalist leader Madan Mohan Malviya, fell through because of his family's reservations.

I. Textual Analysis
1. Layout and structural organization- the examination of the 'surface' elements happen at a level, which is factual to the optics of the reader. At this juncture, the news discourse is observed under sections such as page number, size of the article, the section in which the article was published, whether it was accompanied by visual elements (Carvalho, 2008, p 167). With the parameter under consideration, the article was published on the 27th of December 2014, it does not specifically mention the name author. It appears on page 1, above the fold, aligned left of the page, with two of eight columns in the national daily. A prominent location is allocated to the article. The article has a 'jump', to Page 16, where four columns i.e half the page is dedicated to the story, and features in the politics and policies themed page of the newspaper. Here too it has been given a noble placement. For the purpose of the analysis, the article published on two pages on the same day will be looked into.

The lead has 81 words in total, the article as published on Page 1, 'clearly expresses a newspaper’s valorization of the issue at stake' (Carvalho, 2005, p 21). It has a ‘strapline’ or a reverse shoulder, the purpose of it being to amplify another important point of the news. The headlines and the lead highlight the role of the government and Bose’s family in respectively conferring and refusing the honour of Bharat Ratna to Bose.

2. Objects- the object is closely related to the idea of a theme the text has embodied, it 'constitutes rather than just refer to realities' (Carvalho, 2008, p 167). In the mentioned article there is politics behind the highest civilian award in India, which among others, has named Subhas Chandra Bose, but doesn’t mention that it would be posthumously. Another important object is the role of Bose’s family. The conspiracy behind his disappearance 70 years back is

1 Continuation of a story from one page to another
2 a sub-heading in an article
a marginal object in the article. Most importantly the author is suggestive of the political power play behind the move, wherein the hints on the government’s efforts to honour Bose with other ‘Hindu nationalists’, in a way appropriating Bose on the same lines.

3. Actor- is the ‘social agent’ and ‘a character’. They maybe both ‘subjects’ and ‘objects’ (Carvalho, 2008, p 168). In the Times of India article, they appear in the order of Netaji, Vajpayee, ‘Former PM’, Madan Mohan, ‘Hindu Nationalist’, Netaji’s family, Government, supporters, country- as it acts as an agency in the politics. Most of the actors are Right-leaning, Government, Vajpayee, Madan Mohan, and the actor placement stems from an official recommendation of Bharat Ratna in 2014.

In the depiction, the family has been framed as ‘opposing’ the award and framing the government as ‘cautious’. Subsequently, there is a mentioning of the supporters and ‘some parts of the country’, thus framing the issue in hand as bigger than the opinion of one family. The supporters and parts of the country have been framed as believers of rumor. The family and their supporters, dominate the text, their views are highlighted, thus making them the prime definers of the represented reality.

Further, the article adds that even though Bose has not been seen in almost 70 years, his believers still hang on a thin rope, logic is presented in the text to side with governments’ effort to confer and the irrationalism projected to oppose the award.

4. Language and rhetoric- it is contributory in ‘representing certain reality’ and ‘writing style’ are important dimensions of the constitution of meaning’ (Carvalho, 2008, p 168). In the article, the construction of Language and Rhetoric paints the government in a positive image as they have made attempts, and have been considerate, enough to not offend wherein the family and others have been portrayed as a barrier with their reservations, refusing repeated attempts of persuasion and believers of an age-old tale. The use of the words ‘fell through’ projects a great sense of loss. The headlines, strongly promote the government’s good intentions consequently adding a clause to the heading, portraying the family as the barrier to those efforts. This underplays the fact that the common sentiments shared by Netaji’s supporters and some parts of the country have justified the belief of the family. The rhetoric of Bose’s alleged death has been clad as folklore. Words and phrases such as again, almost (repeated twice), 70 years, periodic rumours, alive and will surface one day, excitement adds theatre to the text.

5. Discursive Strategies- It refers to the ‘forms of discursive manipulation of reality by social actors, including journalists, in order to achieve a certain effect or goal’ (Carvalho, 2008, p 169). The Times of India’s representation of the Bharat Ratna Award to honour Netaji legitimizes the Government’s determination to take ownership of the freedom fighter, previous governments having been criticized for not championing him. The position of the family to not allow the debate to rest aids to the construction of populism as its also seen to upholds the belief of many others. The reasoning behind refusing the award is clad in dramatization by the author. The journalist receptivity to the event is imbalanced as it fails to look into the strategy of the government and over explores the family’s reservations. Further, the lead or the headline eliminates information such as the fact that even those who believed in the air crash theory opposed the conferment of the award for other reasons such as it being
long delayed. It, in a way, echoed the past because the objections raised have also been raised before, in 1992, the government lead by P.V. Narsimha Rao.

6. Ideological standpoint- It is ‘embedded in discourses’ and ‘is a central claim of discourse studies’ (Carvalho, 2008, p170). In this article, there is clearly siding with the government's efforts. As seen, the government's conscience dominates. The lead or the headline doesn’t mention that the award to be given is posthumous. The true intent of the government and receiving of the award would be an acceptance of Netaji's death and bringing an apparent quietus a debate that has long surrounded this nation. The author ignores the government's strategy to confer the award withicons of the right such as Vajpayee and Madan Mohan. A nationalistic ideology is present in the article. The idea that a discourse that has carried on for more than 70 years can be put to rest with just one act of giving and receiving of the award seems to be completely absent in the article.

Contextual Analysis

1. Comparative- synchronic analysis- It looks ‘at various representations of an issue at the time of the writing of one specific news text’. It ‘compares one text with other representations of the issue’, ‘both in the same news outlet and in other’ (Carvalho, 2008, p 171) On the day that Times of India published the article, The Statesman, does not carry the story. Given that Bharat Ratna is an important announcement of the government, the silence of the Statesman allows further investigation of the mentioned article.

The Times of India article does not mention if an official announcement by the Government regarding the award has been made. The article also doesn’t carry any quotation by the actors mentioned, thus lacking in corroboration of the claims made by the author. Also by quickly delving into the moral side of the award refusal, explains the lack of authentication of the news. Publishing it on Page 1 without substantiating puts into a new perspective the political stand taken by the national daily. The fact that Statesman has not allowed frivolous mentioning of hearsay also shows the journalistic value promoted. There is a deficiency of an alternative in the discursive construction of reality, as another important national daily, Statesman, doesn’t publish related news. It is worth noting that Statesman on the 17th December 2014, carries an article of Bose, mentioning a BJD member's effort to declassify files that could unearth the ‘mystery’, as mentioned in the lead of the article, of Bose's disappearance (to be explored in Historical-diachronic analysis).

The representation of Bose by the Times of India shows either how explicitly and minutely the newspaper is facilitating every debate and discussion, or it is yielding a political objective.

2. Historical-diachronic analysis- It ‘takes place two levels’, ‘at a first level, it involves examining the course of social matters and their wider political, social and economic context’, ‘at a second level, it is important to examine the temporal evolution of mediated discourses and to produce a history of media constructions of a given social issues’ (Carvalho, 2008, p 172). Articles published in the Times of India and Statesman gives a wider picture of each newspapers' discourse on Bose. On 01.12.2014, the Times of India carries an article headlined 'PMO’s UPA line: Netaji files to remain secret'. This points at the similarity of the position adopted by previous governments. The article takes a strong position of calling out the hypocrisy of BJP. It takes a critical view of keeping the files a secret from public view. The
author mentions the inconsistency between the stand taken by BJP after coming to power with the stand taken on the issue when it was in opposition. The author uses strong language, such as ‘declined’, ‘sharp contrast’, ‘remain secret’, in the report. On 16.12.2014, the Times of India carries one article titled, ‘HC issues notice to govt after man offers to produce Netaji’. There are two important components in the discourse; first, that the author doesn’t mention the identity of the man in the headline or the lead, who claims that he could bring Bose to the open, thus a continued need to extend the secrecy around the issue. The author also projects his opinion on the claims, stating it as ‘incredulous’, thus rhetoric swathed in the pun. Second, a narrative that Bose is in the hiding because of tensed political equations is once again visited in this article. It has been well documented by disbelievers of the crash theory that Bose is alive and has not surfaced because powerful political actors may not do justice by him, that he may be tried as a war criminal or handed over to the imperialist. The author of the article enunciates the theory that politics is the decider of Bose’s fate. It is important to note here that on the given dates, Statesman doesn’t produce any similar story, even though, regionally Subhas Bose would be more relevant for a newspaper daily whose circulation is greater on the Eastern side of India, the birthplace of Bose. In December 2014, Statesman publishes an article on 17.12.2014, title ‘DE-CLASSIFY DOCS RELATED TO NETAJI’S DISAPPEARANCE’. The headline was in full capital and the tone of the headline is authoritative. The purpose is to draw attention to the article and also command an opinion the article wants complied to. In the lead the article clarifies that it’s the opinion of a BJD member, like the previous TOI article, this too doesn’t mention the identity of the actor in the lead or the headline. The article plays with words commonly associated with Bose, ‘mysterious’, ‘disappearance’, ‘truth’, ‘conspiracy’. Throughout time, in comparison to Times of India, the Statesman has kept their stories of Bose numbered but their opinions widely circulated. On 3.2.2013, Statesman wrote ‘ “Netaji mystery” is a deliberate creation of our rulers at the center. Instead of searching for the truth, they have sustained the mystery in their own interest. The attitude reflects political selfishness and personal opportunism’. The standpoint taken in the article has a concrete commitment to making Bose an actor clad in political propaganda. What is prevalent in the article is its fearless stand to blame the center, which happened to be Congress at the time. It is important to note here, that with the change in power a similar treatment of wrongdoing was not extended to BJP. Infact, 2014 did not see any cry for justice for Bose by the publication. Absence of information in the said period is in itself, an ideological stance taken, ‘silence can be as performative as discourse’(Carvalho, 2008, p 171) On 25.01.2013, Times of India published an article titled, ‘Netaji’s family livid after Didi announced memorial’. In the lead of the article, the author doesn’t mention the reaction of the family instead explains that a memorial would mean that the chief minister of Bengal supports the plane-crash theory, that Bose has in fact died in 1945. The narrative sees the memorial as a hindrance and not an honour, unlike intended by Mamata Banerjee as it was announced on his birth anniversary, thus flowing with the popular sentiments. The article is steeped in skepticism and discounts the alternative viewpoint of Mamata Banerjee’s effort to honor the legend of Bose. It should be noted here that in January 2013, the Lucknow Bench of the Allahabad High Court found a link between Bhagwanji, a saint and Bose. The court further
directed that for the purpose of research and rightful use by the future generations Bhagwanji’s personal belongings must be kept either scientifically or in a museum in Faizabad or Ayodhya. Further, the state government was directed to hold an inquiry, headed by a retired judge of the High Court regarding the true identity of Ghagwanji or Gumnaami baba. None of the newspapers had reported the story, though it screamed banner headline in 2015, just before the declassification, Times of India on 7.09.2015, titled ‘IT’S ONE OF THE GREATEST MYSTERIES OF MODERN INDIA: WAS GUMNAMI BABA, ALSO KNOWN AS THE ASCETIC OF UP’S FAIZABAD, ACTUALLY NETAJI SUBHAS CHANDRA BOSE? SUBHRO NIYOGI, SAIKAT RAY AND A TEAM OF REPORTERS TRACK DOWN SOME PEOPLE WHO ACTUALLY INTERACTED WITH HIM AND ARE CONVICTED THAT IT WAS NONE OTHER THAN THE CHARISMATIC LEADER HIMSELF, LIVING UNDER AN ASSUMED IDENTITY. READ ON TO FIND OUT WHAT THEY HAVE TO SAY’. Sporadic doses of Subhas Bose can be seen in the years leading up to the historical announcement to declassify Bose files. All of the articles clearly elaborate political agendas at some point, not a single article draws dividends by exploring Subhas Bose, the freedom fighter, whose fate sustained in continued political debates.

Conclusion
‘...the mask of balance and objectivity is a crucial part of the propaganda function-
Naom Chomsky’
The survey of newspaper articles in the Statesman and the Times of India lead to the following conclusions:

(a) Both newspapers reflect their definite ideological and political affiliation at relevant points of time.

(b) They also reflect a certain regional sensitivity to local sentiments shown by the Statesman which is widely circulated in Eastern India.

(c) However, the tone and tenor of the reportage has been too strong to wear a mask of either balance or objectivity. This has resulted in a failure of the propaganda on either side in the sense that an objective reading of the articles would not make one gravitate to either pole.

(d) This has resulted in the two polar viewpoints on Bose’s legacy and dis-appearance survive even post declassification. The controversy, therefore, is far from resolved this way or that.

(e) But this lack of resolution is also self-serving for the two viewpoints and the media itself as the mystery and suspense will continue to make for a good story in times to come.

The mystery of “Netaji Dead or Alive?” thus continues to live on for the wonderment and deliberation of the media and the people of this country.
Bibliography