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*Subash Chandra Bose – Escape to Germany – A saga Physical and Mental Endurance*

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On Sept. 3<sup>rd</sup> 1939, the Second World War broke out. Since Britain was also involved in this Great War, it took it for granted that India would also participate in the War from Britain's side. But the great leaders of India and the Congress also demanded that India must be declared independent before this.

At this point Subhash's view was quite different from the other big leaders. He believed that India should start a big movement against the Britishers at this moment, and as the Britishers were already in great trouble due to the approach of the war, they would be forced to grant India its freedom. Not only this but in two of his letters written to Gandhiji, he also gave a proposal of a united front and also participation of the members of the Forward Bloc, in the Satyagraha campaign. At the same time he also indicated that this Satyagraha was limited in nature and thought that only mass struggle could result in victory.

Gandhiji rejected this proposal of Subhash, saying that,

"The trends of movement headed by these leaders are quite opposite."<sup>1</sup>

Gandhiji did not approve Subhash's view of organizing a mass struggle, as he thought that India was not ready for such a struggle. Subhash in his last meeting with Gandhiji, tried to pursue him to start a Civil Disobedience in India. But Gandhiji refused and told Subhash :

"If his efforts to win freedom succeeded then his telegram of congratulation would be the first that Subhash would receive."<sup>2</sup>



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After this Subhash with the help of his followers started a Civil Disobedience Movement in India. In 1940, when Subhash was organizing a movement for the removal of Holwell Monument, he was arrested by the Britishers, on July 2<sup>nd</sup> 1940, and was imprisoned in the Presidency Jail.

While in jail, Subhash thought that it would be the greatest mistake of his life if he would remain sitting idle in the prison, at this critical moment when his country needed him.

So he started a hunger strike for his release on Nov. 26<sup>th</sup> 1940. On this occasion, in his letter written to the Governor of Bengal, on Nov. 26<sup>th</sup> 1940, he wrote :

"..... Though there may be no immediate, tangible gain, no sacrifice is ever futile. It is through suffering and sacrifice alone that a cause can flourish and prosper, and sacrifice alone that a cause can flourish and prosper, and in every age and clime the eternal law prevails – 'the blood of the martyr is the seed of church'.

So the British Government released Subhash, on Dec. 5<sup>th</sup> 1940, but he was kept at his Calcutta residence under house arrest.

Slowly Subhash analyzed that Britishers would never leave India, unless a bloody fight was fought against them. For this he thought that India should take advantage of what was going on in the world, i.e. the Second World War. Now he began thinking that India should overthrow the Britishers, with the help of the enemies of Britishers, in the Second World War and so he thought of joining hands with them. He was sure that the Axis powers would win, but he was not sure whether they would help India. But he had faith in one foreign power, that was, Russia.

"Russia, he seems to have thought, Russia who still remembered the agony of her own revolution, might understand India's need. Somebody had to be the emissary, somebody well – known, who would be taken seriously".<sup>3</sup>



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### **Subhash had also told Uttam Chand That :**

To achieve his plan of escaping from India, Subhash stopped meeting everyone from a few days before his escape. His room was covered by thick and black curtains.

Nobody was allowed to go inside and everyone was told that, Subhash was observing some religious rites and so was in seclusion. He himself also never came out of his room. His room was divided into two parts. One part of the room was for sleeping and the other for worship. He mostly stayed in the part of the room that was for worship. So no one could meet him. His food was kept in the outer room, either by his niece or a servant. If Subhash needed something, he would ask for it by writing on a chit.

After forty days when his beard became big enough, then according to what Subhash told Uttam Chand, he disappeared from his house on the night of 15<sup>th</sup> Jan. 1941, in the disguise of a Maulvi.<sup>4</sup> But according to Dr. Majumdar, Subhash was last seen on 16<sup>th</sup> January 1941, and he was driven from his house in a car by his nephew Sisir Bose, and he reached Gomoh on 17<sup>th</sup> January 1941, at 1:25 pm, from where he boarded a train to reach Peshawar.<sup>5</sup> But according to Uttam Chand he reached Peshawar on 17<sup>th</sup> January, at 9:00 pm. He then left Peshawar on 19<sup>th</sup> January, in the disguise of a Pathan, and in the name of Ziauddin, through Gurhi, Addah Shawrif, Lalpura, Kabul river and Buttkhak, he ultimately reached Kabul on 22<sup>nd</sup> January, between 4:00 and 5:00 pm. This journey of Subhash was very difficult, as he at times had to travel on foot, sometimes on a cart, sometimes in a bus and even in a truck. During this whole journey he was accompanied by Bhagat Ram.

Meanwhile the whole of India shook up on hearing the news of Subhash's disappearance, as can be viewed in the reporting of the Tribune, dated 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> January :

"Tribune 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> January informs us that the Government issued an order for Bose's arrest at any place where he could be found.

Editorial of Tribune stated that Bose was disappointed by political activity and took the decision to become a monk and devote himself to religion.

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His renunciation of the world, even though everybody known him, as a fighting politician, is like a bolt from the blue for the wide public. But it is not a surprise to those who studied thoroughly the life of his impetuous character.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand the truth was that Subhash had escaped from India and had reached Kabul by the 22<sup>nd</sup> of January. When Subhash and his companion reached Kabul, on the evening of 22<sup>nd</sup> January, as they could be caught if they resided in some big and comfortable hotel, they stayed in a small room of a "Serai" near Lahori Darwaza. Their first night in Kabul was quite uncomfortable, and according to Subhash, as he told Uttam Chand:

"A cold wind raged outside and we could not let the doors remain open. Smoke filled the cell and it became suffocating. We managed to get a few dry logs for a fire to warm our frozen bodies.

In the evening Bhagat Ram brought some candles from the bazaar for a light, and some dry bread and kabaabs. When I could not eat the bread, he brought me a cup of tea. I dipped the bread into it and ate it."<sup>7</sup>

Here an Afghan C.I.D. man started troubling and blackmailing them. To escape from this difficulty, they now took shelter in Uttam Chand's house, who owned a shop in Kabul, and whose brother was an acquaintance of Bhagat Ram. Uttam Chand describes his feelings, after he agreed to give shelter to Subhash, in the following words :

"After Rehmat Khan's departure I felt a sense of weakness creeping over me and there was a battle royal in my mind about the consequences in case of the discovery of Subhash Babu in my house. A veil of darkness about the fate of my children and wife hung heavily before my eyes, but soon this weakness passed away..... I had to pacify my wife who had grown more suspicious..... so I had to take her into confidence. I told her the whole story, with the result that her agitated mind took a new turn. Fear and suspicion gave place to trust and responsibility and she considered it her moral duty to help me and Subhash Babu in our project. It would not have been possible to give such a safe shelter to Subhash Babu without her meticulous care".<sup>8</sup>



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After this difficulty of safe shelter was solved, the fight for Subhash's escape from Kabul started. Up till now, Subhash was not very sure about the country he wanted to escape to, i.e., whether he wanted to go to Germany or Russia. Rehmat Khan tried all methods to contact the Russian Legation. In fact on one day he even stopped the Russian ambassador's car near the Legation, but he failed to convince him that Subhash Chandra Bose waqs with him out here, at Kabul. Uttam Chand has confessed:

"It will not be out of place if I were to state very frankly that Subhash Babu was greatly handicapped on account of very bad arrangements his friends made for him to contact the Russian Legation".<sup>9</sup>

After failing to contact the Russian Legation, Rehmat Khan somehow managed to enter the Italian Legation and achieved great success when Signor Karoni, of Italian Legation was extremely delighted to hear of Subhash's presence in Kabul and he promised to send him to, either Rome or Berlin.

But this happiness soon fader when nothing much happened very soon, from the side of Italian Legation. On contacting the Italian Legation, Subhash came to know that the problem lay in Russia, where there was some sort of problem in issuing his passport.

When the delay extended, Subhash became highly depressed, due to which his two supporters, Rehmat Khan and Uttam Chand, planned to smuggle him across the Afghanistan border, into the Russian border through a man who had a great knowledge in this field. But soon Subhash decided to wait for the help of the Axis powers or Russia for his escape, as he thought that :

"He should go out of Afghanistan safely and would not like the idea of being arrested before crossing into Russia".<sup>10</sup>

Soon Subhash's patience was rewarded, when Signora Kanori reported to them about the successful arrangement of the passport of Subhash Chandra Bose. So ultimately, Subhash left Uttam Chand's house on 17<sup>th</sup> March 1941, at 10:00 am. After Subhash's departure,



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Uttam Chand was arrested in May 1941, at Kabul, an many atrocities were conducted on him. But it is true that Subhash could never have been successful in his plan of escape, without the help of Bhagat Ram and Uttam Chand. In spite of the sufferings that Uttam Chand received after Subhash left, he still said:

" Subhash Babu stayed with me for forty-three days. I feel those hectic days were really the happiest days of my life. I am glad that I was able to render some service to that illustrious an great son of India whose very life-breath was the liberation of our Motherland".<sup>11</sup>

Subhash left Afghanistan on 18<sup>th</sup> March, at 9:00 am, for Russian border, along with two Germans and one Italian. In the passport given to him by the Italians, his name was Mozatia. On 20<sup>th</sup> March, from the Russian border he travelled by train to Moscow, where he reached on 27<sup>th</sup> March. He stayed there for one day and ultimately reached Germany on 28<sup>th</sup> March. All this while he was accompanied by Dr. Weller, who was a German.

While Subhash Chandra Bose was in Kabul, someone had asked him how India could remain united, in spite of so many religious and communal dissensions. At this question Subhash replied.

"So long as there is a third party in the country, that is the British, these dissensions will not end. They will go on growing. They will disappear only when an iron dictator rules India for twenty years. For a few years at least after the end of British rule in India there must be a dictatorship. No other constitution can flourish in the country. And it is to India's good that she should be ruled by a dictator to begin with. None but a dictator can wipe out such dissensions. India does not suffer from one ailment. She suffers from so many political ills that only a ruthless dictator can cure her ..... Indian needs a Kamal Pasha".<sup>12</sup>

Thus the story of Subhash's escape from India to Germany, is full of determination, patience and bravery. His escape can only be compared to the escape of one of the bravest personalities in Indian History, i.e., Shivaji. Just like Shivaji had escaped from the



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clutches of Aurangzeb, similarly Subhash also successfully fooled the Britishers and managed to escape right from under their nose. So in a way history had repeated itself.

**Thus S.A. Ayer has truly written :**

"When he escaped from his home in Calcutta according to an elaborate secret plan, and tried to reach Germany via Peshawar, Kabul and Moscow, it was a saga of extreme physical hardship and mental agonies, especially in Kabul. Any other mortal man would have either died somewhere on the way or would have given up the attempt in sheer despair. But "despair is not a word found in the dictionary of Subhash".<sup>13</sup>

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