

THE  
RUSSIAN  
CONNECTION

WIDE ANGLE DESK

"... As the things stand today, not to enquire about Netaji's fate in Russia will be a blunder of national magnitude with far reaching consequence. Posterity will never forgive us for such a criminal negligence in the affairs of a national hero of the highest order."

The above paragraph is extracted from the 1965 book "Netaji Mystery" by Dr Satyanarayan Sinha, now deceased lawmaker and diplomat, who had played a pivotal role in creating awareness about resolving the controversy surrounding Netaji's disappearance.

On October 17, 1970, Sinha, then in his 60s, was summoned before the Khosla Commission formed by Indira Gandhi to probe Netaji's disappearance. Under oath, he told the commission that Netaji did not die in the plane crash and was imprisoned by the Soviets in Yakutsk Prison in Siberia.

Several camps were erected in Yakutsk by the river Lena to lodge prisoners of war and political dissidents. They were employed in building new shafts for coal mines, roads, dams etc. Each camp, known as Gulag, had 500 to 1,000 captives living with minimum facilities.

Very few could survive the harsh weather and primitive living conditions in this coldest city on earth. One of the lucky ones was Kozlov, a former Soviet secret police agent rehabilitated later by the Soviet government.

Sinha testified that in 1954, he met Kozlov in Moscow. The former agent told him that Netaji was imprisoned in cell number 45 of Yakutsk Prison in Siberia. The commission had received this overwhelming evidence but ultimately decided to ignore it.

Sinha was not the only one to believe this version.

Purabi Roy, a professor of Calcutta University and prominent Indian academician, found out a report written by a KGB agent in 1946 about the political situation in India. The report said, "... it is not possible to work with Nehru or Gandhi, we have to use Subhas Bose". That implies in 1946 Bose was still alive.

Purabi Roy was sent as part of Asiatic Society's three-member team to the Oriental Institute, Moscow to study Indian documents from 1917-1947. Her findings were: There are a lot of materials on Subhas Bose in the Military Archive in Omsk, where the Free Government of India in Exile (or Azad Hind Government) had a consulate during the Second world War. Just a request from the Government of India would be sufficient for the Russian authority to open that archive. Prof Purabi Roy wrote to New Delhi about it and as a result her research was terminated by the Indian government and she could not go back to Russia again.

Very recently, BJP leader Subramanian Swamy claimed that Netaji did not die in a plane crash in 1945 but was killed at the instance of Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin.

"According to the papers that

NETAJI  
DISAPPEARANCE MYSTERY

## CRASH THEORY

The official version  
a cover-up?

WIDE ANGLE DESK

"I believe Subhas is still alive and bidding his time somewhere".

This is what Mahatma Gandhi said in 1946, though already the Japanese government on August 23, 1945 announced that Netaji had been killed in a plane crash in Taihoku, now Taipei city of Taiwan.

Like Gandhi, many didn't believe the crash theory, which has become India's official version on Netaji's disappearance.

The Indian government till date maintains that after the defeat of his ally Japan in World War II, Netaji sought safe haven elsewhere. As part of this journey, Netaji flew out from Formosa on August 18, 1945.

The plane broke into two while taking off and Netaji was badly burnt in the crash. He died a few hours later in a local hospital and his body was cremated within two days. His ashes were taken to Tokyo and handed over to the Renkoji Temple where they remain to this day.

Bose's companion Colonel Habibur Rahman mysteriously survived the plane crash.

There are several things wrong with this story. First, there was no plane crash at the airport on that day or during the weeks before or after August 18. The nearest was the crash of a US transporter in

September, that too 200 miles from the airport.

Next, there is no record of Netaji or any of his companions on the plane being cremated on that day. Most seriously, several people saw him alive after his supposed death, with one American reporter Alfred Wegg noting Netaji was still in Saigon where he saw him three days later.

All these loopholes lead to a question that was the death of Netaji faked so that he could escape possible execution by the British as a traitor and take his fight for Indian independence unimpeded to Russia?

Rejecting the official version, many researchers and activists kept demanding all the secret papers relating to Netaji mystery be classified.

But successive governments were reluctant to solve the mystery haunting India since the 1947 partition. Like the previous UPA administration, the NDA government has refused to make public the files on Netaji's disappearance/death, saying the revelations would "prejudicially affect" relations with foreign countries.

There are 41 files on Subhas Chandra Bose, created between 1953 and 2000. Of them, four are "Top Secret", 20 "Secret" and five are "Classified"

Two of the four "Top Secret" files are about the transfer of Netaji's ashes to India and the official correspondence with, and about, his widow and daughter. The other two are titled "Death/Disappearance of Netaji SC Bose Justice Mukherjee Commission of Inquiry".

Most of the 20 "Secret" files pertain to Bose's disappearance, while one of the "Classified" files is on Bose's mortal remains "kept in the Rankoji Temple in Japan on behalf of Govt of India".

In all, 21 files pertain to disappearance or circumstances of Netaji's death, and the appointment of inquiry committees.

Those asking for the files to be declassified hope those documents will reveal the truth behind Bose's disappearance. At least three judicial commissions have probed the matter, but their reports were never accepted by the Centre. The Justice Manoj Mukherjee Commission of Inquiry set up in 1999 said Netaji was indeed dead, but he did not die in a plane crash over Taiwan, and the ashes in a Japanese temple were not Netaji's.

But the government did not accept his report. As the mystery continued, demands for the files to be made public kept coming.

Sources: *Historytoday.com*, *outlook India*; *Indian Express*, *Swarajyamag.com*, *dailyioneer.com*



## A SAINT WITH NO NAME

WIDE ANGLE DESK

Thirteen people were present during a cremation at Guptar Ghat on the bank of Saryu River flowing through Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh. It was on September 18, 1985. When the pyre was lit, one of the 13 cried out, "...there should have been 13 lakh people here!"

This is the story of Gumnami Baba, a saint with a lost name, also known as Bhagwanji of Faizabad. He was reported to have come to Faizabad in the 70s and was first reported to the police by a local in 1977 for his "suspicious" activities.

He started living as a lodger at Rambhawan in 1983. Gurubasant Singh, his landlord, remembers the day when a physician, Dr RP Mishra, walked in and booked two rooms of the house for his "grandfather" and two caretakers.

Bhagwanji was very secretive in his ways. His rooms were to the back of the main house and could be reached through a narrow lane next to the main pathway. Another passage led from the rooms through the backyard and towards the cantonment. People, including army and police officials, who used to visit him at night, could walk in without being noticed.

Even Gurubasant never met Bhagwanji face-to-face. "I heard him speak... His voice was heavy and crisp, like that of a military general... But he was always behind a curtain."

The saint, aged over 80, needed medical care. Dr Mishra and two other physicians -- Dr T Banerjee and his son Dr Priyabrata Banerjee -- were always there for him.

Priyabrata in an interview with *HindustanTimes.com* recalls that the mysterious saint once said, "Dekho to, kahi main Subhas Chandra Bose to nahi hoon?" (Look, am I not Subhas Chandra Bose?)

On another occasion, the old man said, "Despite having a nation I have none, despite having a home I am homeless, despite having a people, I have no one..."

Durga Prasad Pandey, who was Netaji's companion for many years, also recalls a meeting when Bhagwanji said: "Take me to be Netaji if you will."

Srikant Sharma, who was among the few to have met Bhagwanji face-to-face, says the saint said told him many personal things about Netaji and also about the great escape from Kolkata to Berlin in 1941.

The UP government has 24 big boxes that

contain Gumnami Baba's personal belongings. All these boxes are secured under double locks put by Faizabad Treasury.

The articles include round frame spectacles, Belgian typewriters, many newspapers of pre-independence and post-independence time with Baba's comments scribbled on them, boxes full of books of international relevance, several books gifted by 'sister', cigars from Germany and Italy, and some huge-size family photographs.

One of the items was a letter addressed to a man called Prasad. In the seven-page letter, Bhagwanji refers to the commissions formed to probe Netaji mystery, saying there is "no point in constituting loaded dice commissions

death in 1985, the stories were splashed on the first pages of many local newspapers. The news even travelled to Parliament, although soon after - and quite strangely - the stories got spiked.

Of many questions, the big one was about his cremation. After his death on September 16, 1985, people were physically prevented from entering the house by his followers. Even Gurubasant was stopped at the door. The body was kept in the house for two days after which his confidants draped his body in a tricolour and took his body in a van to Guptar Ghat.

There was an interesting development in 2010 when Justice Mukherjee's comments made off-the-record to independent filmmaker

possibility cannot be ruled out. For example, the handwritings of this man in English and Bangla matched with Netaji's and that constitutes -- like it or not -- a direct evidence of Bose's remaining alive decades after his reported death," he said in an interview with *Zeenews*.

"If the counter argument is that the Faizabad holy man's DNA test was negative, I have explained in the book that the same cannot be relied on as the test was conducted in a lab controlled by the Government whose agenda from the day one was to cover-up the matter."

Bhagwanji reportedly claimed he spent some years in a gulag and left Russia in 1949



to find out what happened to him... his death is ...an impregnable mystery..."

Leela Roy, freedom fighter and social worker, was in constant touch with Bhagwanji from 1963 to 1970 till her death. On 25 March 1963, Bhagwanji asked one of his trusted men to convey Leela: "My coming out is not in country's interest. It would not do anyone any good if I emerged now."

After her death in 1970, Bhagwanji paid her homage through a letter; its handwriting reportedly matches with that of Netaji.

Many such stories (for example, he used to mention Sarat Bose, Netaji's elder brother, as 'mejda') do round even today. After his

Amlan Ghosh. The former Supreme Court judge, who led a commission to probe Netaji mystery, said he was "100 percent" sure that Bhagwanji was Netaji.

On January 31, 2013, a new chapter was opened with the Allahabad High Court directing the Uttar Pradesh government to consider constituting an inquiry headed by a retired judge into the Bhagwanji episode.

"It is not my claim that Bhagwanji of Faizabad was Netaji," said Anuj Dhar, who has recently released his book on Netaji, "India's Biggest Cover Up."

"All I am saying is that I probed the matter as a journalist and have found reasons that the



and got engaged in covert activities to counter world powers, especially America's, clout in Asia.

He might have feared that if he came out in the open, the world powers would go after him and Indians will be caught in crossfire. If there is any truth in Bhagwanji's claims, several governments and their intelligence agencies would have files on him, added Dhar, also a well-known Indian journalist.

"But we cannot expect to get these files so long as our own government continues to sit on its own pile of secret files on Netaji."

Source: *Indian media reports*, *Anuj Dhar's articles*, *missionnetaji.org*

exist with us, Bose had faked his death and escaped to Manchuria in China which was under Russian occupation, hoping Russia would look after him. But Stalin put him in a jail in Siberia. Somewhere around 1953, he hanged or suffocated Bose to death," said Swamy.

Swamy also claimed that the then Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was aware about Bose being held captive in Yakutsk Prison. Sources: *The New Indian Express*, *Times of India*, *Ivarta.com*, *Russia & India Report*