



NETAJI SUBHAS OPEN UNIVERSITY

School of Social Sciences

DD 26, Sector I, Salt Lake, Kolkata – 700064

Website: www.wbnsou.ac.in

Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Memorial Lecture Series

The School of Social Sciences (SoSS) of Netaji Subhas Open University (NSOU) has been organizing this prestigious annual lecture consistently since 2010, the members of the School are also engaged in publishing the lectures regularly at due time. The University authority has decided to organise Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Memorial Lecture every year to pay its tribute to the great living legend dedicated for the freedom of the motherland from the colonial shackles, and entrusted its largest academic unit at that time, the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, with the responsibility to conduct it in a rightful manner. Subsequently, however, the School was ramified and three Schools of Studies, viz School of Humanities, School of Social Sciences, and School of Professional Studies were formed in the year 2015. As such, the newly constituted School of Social Sciences, emerging from the erstwhile School of Humanities & Social Sciences, is now entrusted to hold the annual Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Memorial Lecture on behalf of the University. Thus, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Memorial Lecture has been initiated at NSOU as mark of respect to the undying spirit of "Netaji ", the great patriotic soul and an indomitable symbol of struggle against all the social oddities. Over the years, it has become one of the most prestigious and befitting annual event in the NSOU.

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The First Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Memorial Lecture was delivered on March 3, 2010 by Professor Sobhanlal Datta Gupta. He delved on Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's passionate rendition on the question of true empowerment of the Indian people and for this he chose to select, ***Democracy and Empowerment: Exploring the Cultural Dimension***, as the very theme of his deliberation. Foregrounding Bose's abiding concern for democracy throughout his life, Professor Datta Gupta rightly pointed out the undercurrents of democracy as an empowering catalyst, with sound effect. Questing for the shift from representation to participation, he has thoroughly stressed the need for further metamorphosis from quantitative to qualitative expansion of democracy. It is here that the lecture shares a cordial and relevant cord with our university since, democracy cannot even survive, leave apart strengthening itself, without the robust mission of expansion of education to the millions. Hence, although in a somewhat different perspective. This goes very well with the approach of NSOU which till date has contributed a lot towards liberalising and democratising education among the masses. The calling of the university which believes in invoking higher education among the masses definitely gels well with the tempo of the lecture.



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He takes up the notion of empowerment largely understood as a preface to the fullest evolution of democracy. Paradoxically, this issue of evolution is vital for it has been viewed in the shades of culture, a creation of the “enlightened mind”. Putting it under the nomenclature of the “cultural dimension of democracy”, Dutta Gupta believes populist measures churned out of power has little to do with cultural empowerment of the people and therefore vehemently slams the bolstered claims of panchayat institution. He wedges the gap between the objective conditions of socio-economic empowerment brought through social justice and equity and the relative conditions necessary for the cultural or ideational up-liftment of the masses. It is the latter, he believes brings out the best in each individual as a rightful stake holder in the democracy. The instance, he cites, viz. the *Sarba Siksha Abhiyan*, does not qualify of being a potent agent of cultural empowerment. What is needed is not expansion of educational opportunity for the unlettered ones, but a conscious stroke of the vibes of dignity, perseverance, pluralism, rational outlook, and abandonment of an ego-centric mind, which he believed is the mother of all evils.

Dutta Gupta thus ensures that literacy and education vaulted to sudden prominence of enlightenment. This was never possible by chanting slogans strategizing bureaucratic endeavours. In fact, Datta Gupta smells rat when he draws our attention to the much common fact that “absolutely faceless individuals in our society without necessarily any formal education quite often indulge in remarkably noble acts, driven by a sense of social and moral awareness” (pg.41). This is remarkable, yet a cutting rejoinder to the conventional attitude that the ordinary people are incapacitated of higher virtues in life. The state entrusted to operate a democratic set up in our country usually encourages mediocrity, that engages in homogenization of outlook and thus jeopardizes s all manners of creativity in the lower echelons of social order.

Evidently, the lectures rue upon the fact that what is indeed sacrificed is the quality of democracy. The state stoops down so far as to drown the voice of dissent on almost all matters of vital social choice. Datta Gupta senses in all this the ugly hue of fascism. That may sound a bit astonishing, but then there is nothing to shun out this deadly possibility either. The trend however is disturbing for it echoes much of John Stuart Mill’s prophetic assumption of “tyranny of the majority”. It represses the common man’s natural ability to distinguish between the good from the evil. He therefore retorts, “the process undermines the capacity of the ordinary people to understand complex things or access higher and better things in life it strikes at the very heart of democracy.”(pg.42). Those who can strategize such degradation of democracy make themselves suspect of their true intention, it is futile whether they do it under the garb of progressive ideology. The aftermath is a mass following that is systematically stunted in terms of any critical thinking and responsible social action.



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