

RANEN SEN

## Indian Communist History Revisited

Sankar Ray

September 26 this year was nostalgic for the veterans among communists including those who used to keep the party card literally close to the chest. They are an endangered species these days. Dr Ranen Sen, one of the three members of the first central committee (1933) of undivided Communist Party of India (CPI) was born on this day in 1909. Other two were Abdul Halim and Somnath Lahiri. Halim Saheb was dropped in 1943 while Lahirida was dropped in 1951. He was suspended for having been one of the main functionaries as a polit bureau member during the disastrous period of 'Left adventurism' under B T Ranadive who was expelled in 1951 and remained so until 1955. However, Ranenda, who became a polit bureau member in 1952 (remained there until 1956) was never dropped from the CC (later national council, when CC was rechristened as NC) until the party split in 1964. Although politically and ideologically close to the 'democratic front'(DF)-liners, who later decided to split the CPI and form a new party at the Tenali Congress (coincidentally on the 51st birthday of Jyoti Basu, 8 July 1964), Ranenda remained with the CPI although 'national front'(NF)-liners used to dominate the party after the split. But even NF-liners revered him as a party-builder. Defending his decision to stay back in CPI, Ranenda said : "Bhupesh Gupta, Sohan Singh Josh (originally belonged to the Ghadar Party-SR) subscribed to the DF line but never endorsed splitting activities and Trotskyite line of Mao and CP of China. We were against reformist understanding of NF-line, propagated by Dange, Rajeswar Rao and Bhowani Sen among others, but believed we could prevent them from pushing rightward judging from the past experience."

This writer was Ranen Sen's private secretary for about three years during his twilight hours. He loved to state two things quite often. " I have always been a sworn enemy of factionalism and disdainfully distanced myself from everything factional. And I strongly believed that inner-party political and ideological struggle could be carried out without breaking the party. History will be on my side."

Factionalism, Lahirida defined with his legendary sarcasm in an informal chat with Dasu Ray, "resembles adultery. If one submits to factionalism, alike adultery, one can't get out of it.". Ray, a rare breed political character with high level of integrity—a front-rank leader of State Coordination Committee of West Bengal Government Employees' Associations and Unions (SCC) in the very early 1960s, was secretly a member of pre-split CPI. Later, he left the SCC and formed the Yukta Committee of West Bengal Government Employees' Associations and Unions in protest against some SCC veterans as a CPI(M) satellite. Dasuda was for some years, a member of WB state executive council, CPI. He severed relations with CPI in protest against aberrant trends, sheltered by the dominant faction in CPI. Lahirida's analogy is bitterly realized by many. Factionalism is more a refuge for incompetent and disruptive political animals.

Revealing his chagrin against factional biggies, Ranenda once said, "But for the split, Promode Dasgupta, Hare Krishna Konar and even M Basavapunniah—

all climbers—couldn't be national leaders". This was when his attention was drawn to Basavapunnaiyah's characterization of Ajoy Ghosh, as "the skillful architect of Indian revisionism" in a pamphlet 'CPI(M) and the Right CP'—15 years after Ghosh's death on 13 January 1962. Ghosh who did not live to see his 53rd spring was to Ranenda , "head and shoulders above all the general secretaries before and after the split both as an ideologue and an organizer. Indeed, Basavapu-nnaiah should have criticized Ghosh when the latter was alive. At the Fourth Congress (Palghat, 1956), when P C Joshi presented an alternate draft political resolution and in his support Bhowani Sen spoke very powerfully, Basavapunnaiyah, Promode and the like remained silent. It was Ajoy who gave a point by point reply. EMS replied Sen. So whose silence helped Indian reformism, a ridiculous formulation?"

In the third week of June 2001, Ranenda and the present writer [*a member of CPI under a different name*] wrote an article 'Relevance of Ajoy Ghosh in the Indian Communist Movement' and Ranenda sent the same to the CPI general secretary A B Bardhan requesting him to publish it in the CPI weekly *New Age*. It was believed that taking lessons from Ajoy Ghosh, CPI should have initiated friendly political and ideological exchange of ideas with the CPI(M) in the background of CPI's call for reunification of communist parties in India, in contrast to CPI(M).

Bardhan refused to publish the article, on the plea that the article "rakes up certain issues and events which will only open a Pandora's box of controversies and mutual attacks, without in our view, helping in any way to further the process of unity". Friendly polemics was strangely equated by the CPI supremo with "a pandora's box of controversies and mutual attacks". In truth, this was a reflection of Bardhan's submissive attitude to CPI(M) at the cost of CPI's identity in terms of ideology and its derivative, tactical line. Ranenda too was annoyed with Ajoy Bhavan's liquidationist subservience to mandarins of A K Gopalan Bhavan, CPI(M) national headquarters. Small wonder, then, Bardhan discovered that the article was written "subjectively and in a one-sided way".

Ranenda shot back to Bardhan : "To describe what was stated in the article as one-sided is to take an erroneous stand on the genesis of inner-party political and ideological struggle in the Indian communist movement." Dr Sen wrote in the aforesaid reply to Bardhan, "Our Party began shrinking gradually (during Bardhan period-SR). Now it is a very small party and truly speaking, under your leadership, CPI is a satellite of CPI(M), thanks to your leadership." In fact, even before that when CPI performed disastrously in 1999 Lok Sabha polls (won just 4 seats), Ranenda suggested through a WB state council CPI member that Bardhan quit the top slot of the party.

Ranenda died on 19 November 2003. Not a single central CPI leader came to Kolkata to attend his last journey. Surprisingly enough CPI(M)'s entire PB which met in Kolkata at that time offered salute to one of the "party-builders" ("The main credit for organising Communist movement in the 1930s in Bengal went to Halim, Lahiri and, Sen" wrote Saroj Mukherjee, then Left Front chairman, CPI(M) state party chief and PB member, after the Lahirida's death in 1984 in CPI Bengali daily *Kalantar*). After Ranenda's death, People's Democracy wrote in a crisp obit : "In early thirties, Ranen Sen along with Muzaffar Ahmad, Abdul

Halim and Somnath Lahiri took the initiative to form the Calcutta District Committee of the CPI. This Calcutta Committee played an important role in uniting other Communist groups in our country. It had close contact with Communist International. The first central committee of CPI was formed in 1933 and Dr Ranen Sen became its member. Latika Sen, a communist activist and women leader, was his first wife, who became martyr in police firing at Bowbazar in 1949”.

Ranenda was mal-treated by the WB CPI leadership. The state CPI quietly ignored Dr Sen’s birth centenary. Not even an article was published in *New Age* or *Kalantar*. A sixteen-year-old boy Ranenda was when he felt the magnetism of communism after giving audience to a British MP of Indian origin, Shapurji Saklatvala, then member of the Communist Party of Great Britain. He felt that Marxist path would un-shackle his motherland in fetters. He never looked back thereafter.

History is not always “a slaughter house” (Hegel) but carries refreshing coincidences to. Exactly one year after Ranenda’s birth Kangsari Halder, one of a handful of legendary leaders of historic Kakdwip uprising as an important segment of Tebhaga Struggle (1946-49), was born. His birth centenary year begins on Ranenda’s birth centenary. He was then 24 Parganas district committee secretary of CPI mass front All India Krishak Sabha. The WB government filed a criminal case against him using all it could do to prove that he was conspiring against the state, trying to dislodge the government and involved in murders or attempted murder against police etc. He had an unbailable arrest warrant against him. He remained underground since 1949. In 1957, he was elected to the Parliament from Diamond Harbour constituency and he sneaked into the lower house of the Parliament to take the oath as new MP befooling sleuths who were determined to arrest him before he entered the Lok Sabha. He was acquitted in 1960. Chief Justice of India, Chandrachud made interesting observations quoting the case : "As far back as 1960 it was said by this Court in Kangsari Halder that the proposition applicable to cases arising under Article 14 has been repeated so many# times that they now sound platitudinous. If it was so in 1960, it would be even more true in 1979." He was elected again in 1967 as a CPI candidate from Mathurapur(SC) seat.

Leaders of CPI, at home in suppressing revolutionary antecedents and sterling communists will not do anything to tell young activists on Ranenda and Kangsarida. Yet nothing can damage their inspiring life. When the party cadres hurled bombs against police in protest against killing of Latika Sen and others in 1949, Kangsarida wrote a strong letter to Nripen Chakraborty, then CPI state secretariat member. Reminiscing the episode in his last interview, he said, “Hurling bombs haphazardly don’t make revolution”.

Later on, Nripen Chakraborty (after Ranadive period-SR), dumped by the party, came to Halder’s shelter at Galiff Street and said, “Kangsaribabu, you were right. Setting fire to government property doesn’t help us make revolution”. Nripenbabu was honest unlike 95 percent of present day communist leaders. □□□