



SOUTH INDIAN HISTORY CONGRESS

Proceedings of the South Indian History Congress
Journal of the South Indian History Congress since 1981
ISSN No.: 2229-3671
UGC CARE Listed Journal

The Role of Surya Sen in the Freedom Movement of India

Author(s): M. Thangaraj

Source: Proceedings of the South Indian History Congress 38(2018), pp. 249-251

Stable URL: http://journal.southindianhistorycongress.org/journals/articles/2018/SIHC_2018_063.pdf

Published By: South Indian History Congress

© 2022 South Indian History Congress. All rights reserved.

THE ROLE OF SURYA SEN IN THE FREEDOM MOVEMENT OF INDIA

M. Thangaraj

Surya Sen was an Indian independence activist who was influential in the Indian independence movement who is noted for leading the 1930 Chittagong armoury raid in Chittagong of Bengal in British India (now in Bangladesh). Sen was a school teacher by profession and was popularly called as *Master Da* ("da" is a honorific suffix in Bengali language). He was influenced by the nationalist ideals in 1916 while he was a student of B.A. in Behrampore College¹. In 1918 he was selected as president of Indian National Congress, Chittagong branch. He was known for his brilliant actions and effort in Indian history by taking young teenagers and turning them into revolutionaries against the British stationed in Chittagong with this bold step of recruiting in teenagers then fought against the British Cantonment and in the mountainous regions of Chittagong like Jalalabad hills, but then separated and went their separate ways still trying to get the British out of Chittagong, various attempts were successful in the beginning but many failed as well and many revolutionaries were arrested which broke movement.

EARLY LIFE

Sen was born on 22 March 1894² at Noapara, under Raozan Upazila in Chittagong. His father Ramaniranjan Sen was a teacher. In 1916 when he was a B.A. student in Behrampore College he learned about Indian freedom movement from one of his teachers. He felt attracted towards revolutionary ideals and joined a revolutionary organization *Anushilan Samity*. After completing his studies he returned to Chittagong in 1918 and joined as a Mathematics teacher at National school, Nandankanan . At that time, Indian National Congress was the most prominent political party there.

EXTENSIVE PLANNING AND A WELL CARVED STRATEGY

He participated in all the freedom movements and activities of Indian National Congress and highly admired the principles of Mahatma Gandhi. But his dreams were short lived. The violent Chauri Chaura Incident not only hurt Gandhiji, but also compelled him to

withdraw the non co-operation movement. With the coming times, Surya Sen realized that revolutionary action is only the way to resist the British force. Such was his fervour for freedom struggle that he even sacrificed his marital happiness for cause of independence. Masterda's troops known as "Indian Republic Army".

The siege at Chittagong was well planned and well-orchestrated. Surya Sen took learnings from experiences of various revolutionaries around the world to create a strategy which could bring British administration to its knees. It wasn't only an armoury raid but a revolutionary insurrection which left the British running for cover.

CHITTAGONG ARMOURY RAID

Sen led a group of revolutionaries on 18 April 1930 to raid the armoury of police and auxiliary forces from the Chittagong armoury. The action was carefully planned and was put into execution at 10 o'clock on the night of 18 April 1930. A group of six revolutionaries, led by Ganesh Ghosh, captured the Police Armoury, shouting slogans such as *Inquilab Zindabad*, *Down with Imperialism* and *Gandhiji's Raj has been established*. Another group of ten, led by Lokenath Paul, took over the Auxiliary Force Armoury along with its Lewis guns and 303 army rifles. Unfortunately they could not locate the ammunition. This was to prove a disastrous setback to the revolutionaries' plans. The revolutionaries also succeeded in dislocating telephone and telegraph communications and disrupting movement by train. In all, sixty-five were involved in the raid, which was undertaken in the name of the Indian Republican Army, Chittagong Branch.

All the revolutionary groups gathered outside the Police Armoury where Surya Sen, dressed in immaculate white *khadi* dhoti and a long coat and stiffly ironed Gandhi cap, took a military salute, hoisted the National Flag among shouts of *Bande Mataram* and *Inquilab Zindabad*, and proclaimed a Provisional Revolutionary Government.

The plan was elaborate and included seizing of arms from the armoury as well as

destruction of communication system of the city (including telephone, telegraph and railway), thereby isolating Chittagong from the rest of British India. However, although the group could loot the arms, they failed to get the ammunition. They hoisted the Indian National Flag on the premises of the armoury, and then escaped. A few days later, a large fraction of the revolutionary group was cornered in the nearby Jalalabad hills by the British troops. In the ensuing fight, twelve revolutionaries died, many were arrested, while some managed to flee, including Sen.³

EXTENSIVE AND ENTHUSIASTIC WOMEN PARTICIPATION

Another novelty of the uprising was the active participation of women. This legacy later continued with 'Azad Hind Fauz' created by Subhash Chandra Bose. Until then, freedom movement had been a limited affair of men but this revolution brought a positive change on this front. Masterda encouraged women to actively participate in the movement and fight alongside men.

GUERRILLA WARFARE

The revolutionary corps formed by Surya Sen achieved victory twice in face to face battle against the British forces. But, they knew in order to prolong their fight, they would have to resort to guerrilla warfare. The troops went into hiding in the adjacent hills in the rural areas and continued their fight for four years from 1930 to 34.

SOCIAL INCLUSION

Surya Sen was not only a great commander but an accomplished social leader too. He took the movement to the masses instead of secluding it to a particular class of society. This mobilised more people for the cause.

MASTER OF DISGUISE

Surya Sen was a fugitive for the British police and hence they constantly followed the revolutionary. While hiding at the house of Savitri Devi, he was surrounded by military force under Captain Cameron. A gun battle ensued in which captain Cameron was killed and Masterda along with Pritalata Waddader and Kalpana Dutta escaped without being hurt. Later he frequently changed his place of stay and

disguised himself as farmer, milkman, worker, priest etc. to avoid being captured.

ARREST AND DEATH

The gallows in Chittagong Central Jail, Bangladesh, where Sen was hanged. The Government of Bangladesh has designated it a historical monument.

Sen stayed in hiding, and kept moving from one place to another. Sometimes he took up a job as a workman, a farmer, a priest, a house worker or even as a pious Muslim. This is how he avoided being captured by the British. He once hid in the house of a man called Netra Sen. But Netra Sen informed the British of his hiding, and the police came and captured him in February 1933. Before Netra Sen could be rewarded by the British, a revolutionary came into his house and beheaded him with *da* (a long knife). As Netra Sen's wife was a big supporter of Surya Sen, she never disclosed the name of the revolutionary who killed Netra Sen. Before Sen was hanged, he was brutally tortured by the inhuman British rulers. The barbaric British executioners broke all his teeth with a hammer, and pulled out all his nails. They broke all his limbs and joints. He was dragged to the rope unconscious. Another revolutionary named Tarakeswar Dastidar was also hanged with Sen. After his death, his dead body was not given any funeral. The prison authority, it was found later, put his dead body in a metallic cage and dumped into the Bay of Bengal.

His last letter was written to his friends and said: "Death is knocking at my door. My mind is flying away towards eternity...At such a pleasant, at such a grave, at such a solemn moment, what shall I leave behind you? Only one thing, that is my dream, a golden dream-the dream of Free India... Never forget the 18th of April, 1930, the day of the eastern Rebellion in Chittagong.. Write in red letters in the core of your hearts the names of the patriots who have sacrificed their lives at the altar of India's freedom."⁴

Though his efforts didn't succeed, his dream to free India finally came true on 15th August 1947. It is very sad to know that the effort of the Chittagong martyrs hasn't been told to young generation in detail.

Literary Adaptations: The Chittagong armoury raid was been retold into a novel called

– Do or Die : The Chittagong Uprising, written by Manini Chatterjee. Even India Book House published a graphical story book on life, struggle and martyrdom of Surya Sen.

IN POPULAR MEDIA

Indian film director Ashutosh Gowariker directed the film *Khelein Hum Jee Jaan Sey* (2010) about Sen's life. Actor Abhishek Bachchan played the role of Sen.⁵ Another film *Chittagong* (2012) directed by Bedabrata Pain was about Sen's armoury raid. Manoj Bajpayee played the leading role.⁶ Though Bollywood has come up with movies on Chittagong Uprising, a full fledged biopic on 'Masterda' Surya Sen is yet to be made. Kolkata Metro named the Bashdroni station as Masterda Surya Sen metro station. Some roads are also named after him, for example, Surya Sen Road, near Dakshineswar, Kolkata. The Government of Bangladesh designated the Chittagong Central Jail's gallows as a memorial to Sen. A student resident hall at the University of Dhaka has been named after him. There is a large park in Siliguri, India called "Surya Sen Park" in the middle of it is a bust of the revolutionary hero.

References

1. Islam, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh. Chief ed. Sirajul (2003). "Masterda" Surya Sen (1. publ. ed.). Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh. ISBN 9843205766. Retrieved 28 June 2015.
2. Mrinal Sen (2002). *Montage: Life, Politics, Cinema*. Seagull Books p. 7. ISBN 978-8170461647. Retrieved 17 December 2012.
3. Chandra, Bipan (1989). *India's Struggle for Independence: 1857-1947*. Penguin Books India. pp. 251–252. ISBN 978-0-14-010781-4.
4. *Last Letter of Master Da*
5. "Ashutosh Gowariker's *Khelein Hum Jee Jaan Sey* to be released on December 3". *Daily News & Analysis*. 22 April 2010. Retrieved 11 October 2011.
6. "'Chittagong': Manoj Bajpayee took no money for the film". *The Times of India*. 28 September 2012. Retrieved 28 September 2012.

Chattal Seva Samity, Brasat (10 km north of Dum Dum airport & district HQ of 24 Parganas) erected a full length (15' high) bronze statue of Masterda Surya "Bharat Gourav Masterda Surya Sen". It was inaugurated by the 100+ year old Sen at the gate of Barasat Stadium on the 18th April 2010 where engraved legend & Masterda's associate & follower Shree Binod Bihari Chowdhury in presence of Dr Asim Dasgupta, Finance Minister of West Bengal & other dignitaries. On March 6, 2011 a talk has been arranged on "the role & effect of Surya Sen & Preetilata in the Indian Independence Struggle" in the Preeti Sammelan (yearly get-together of Chittagong Language speaking residents of North 24 Parganas) of Chattal Seva Samity at Barasat Stadium.

ESTIMATE

Surya Sen followed the policy of non violence. But, after Chauri Chaura incident he changed his protests to revolutionary methods. He fought against British rule in Chittagong. He even sacrificed his life to the Freedom of our Nation.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH PANCHAYATS IN KARNATAKA

Dr. P. Thoufeeq Ahamed Teepu

Political participation has been defined in various ways. Political participation means not only exercising the right to vote, but also power sharing, co-decision making, co-policy making at all levels of governance of the state.¹

Women constitute more or less than half of the population of any country. But their involvement in politics is insignificant compared to men. Many psychological, social and physical

factors hold women back from active political involvement. This is true as far as the state and national level politics is concerned. A democratic country cannot progress if energies of its half population are concerned in the kitchen only. After attaining independence Indian constitution ensured gender equality through various provisions and regulations. It was presumed that these rights would automatically get translated