

AJOY GHOSH

A Forgotten Communist

Sankar Ray

It was mid-April 1961 when the Sixth Congress of Undivided Communist Party of India—the last congress before the split—took place. “At this Congress”, wrote Jolly Mohan Kaul, a delegate, to this writer, “a virtual split took place. A soviet delegation headed by Mikhail Suslov was there and had it not been for his intervention the split might have taken place then itself. Ajoy Ghosh was woken up well past midnight -he had gone to sleep early as he was having heart problems - and after conferring with Suslov and other members of the CPSU a patch up was arranged. I knew that the split was coming and this confirmed my decision to leave the Party which I did towards the end of 1962/63.”

Jolly Kaul is one of the last three living members of the national council (NC) of undivided CPI-other two being Jyoti Basu and V S Achutha-nandan. However, whether the party-split was averted through a ‘patch-up’ is debatable. Apart from cardiac troubles, Ajoy Ghosh was in a very advanced stage of tuberculosis and the party congress adopted a single document : Ghosh’s historic speech—*New Situation and Our Tasks*. Defying his illness at midnight, he told delegates with confidence that he would deliver a speech and comrades would accept it. Excepting S A Dange on the right and B T Ranadive on the left, nobody objected to the speech. Words 'left' and 'right' should not be misread as both the sections were confirmed Leftists. It was an intra-Left dichotomy. History and posterity will decide who and which party or group did stick to canons of Marxism.

However, the split-syndrome in CPI was manifest conspicuously with factional zeal at the Vijaywada Congress. The Left-leaning group put pressure on the leadership in a concerted way a day before the penultimate day. Suddenly, Left-wingers, one by one, withdrew their names from the proposed panel for the new NC. Actually, they wanted more Left-adherents in the NC. It was a provocation for a split. Ghosh did smell it and proposed to increase the number of NC members to accommodate them, perhaps in consultation with Suslov. But he had in mind Lenin's Letter to the Congress - known also as his *Testament* - before he became totally crippled. The Russian Social Democratic Labour Party - later CP of Soviet Union- was too on the verge of a split into factions of Stalin and Trotsky. Lenin suggested that the size of central committee be enlarged from 50 to 100. (Some 'pundits' in CPI(M) still maintain that Lenin never wrote the letter, but E M S Namboodiripad never questioned the veracity of it. In his fortnightly column in *Frontline*, he reiterated this in a piece on Rosa Luxemburg - An Eagle of Revolution , 24 Feb, 1995 issue. In his last letter to the central committee, he warned of the danger of disunity of CC, leading to the establishment of an authoritarian leadership”). It was not a patch up. Nonagenarian Marxist historian Narahari Kaviraj described Ghosh's decision to enlarge the NC as a “genuine commitment to proletarian internationalism and against the prevailing splittism”.

Ajoy Ghosh was born on 22 February 1909. The CPI says he was born on 20 February, but S G Sardesai who drew him to Marxism in jail in the early 1930s

endorsed the 22 February (*Preface : Marxism and Indian Reality: Speeches and Writings*—Ajoy Ghosh, Patriot Publishers, 1989). He died quite prematurely on 13 January 1962. Hiren Mukherjee in his memoirs *Tori Hotey Teer* (From Boat to the Shore) lamented that for over two decades, Ghosh suffered from tuberculosis. Pity is that slanderers go on telling that CPI used to get thousands of dollars from the CPSU.

He was thrown into jail by the British rulers as he too was involved in the Lahore Conspiracy Case as a junior activist of Bhagat Singh. Boris Ponomarev, alternate member of the now-defunct Communist Party of Soviet Union for about two decades and a historian on the Communist International (Comintern), described Ghosh a 'sterling leader' of Comintern era, colinearly with Ho Chi-Minh, Dolores Ibaruri, the legendary leader of Republican struggle of Spain, French communist stalwart Maurice Thorez, Antonio Gramsci's comrade-in-arms Palmiro Togliatti, German communist leader Walter Ulbricht and the British scholar-communist Rajani Palme Dutt.

Like Bhagat Singh, his mentor in the freedom movement, Ghosh too opposed both Hindu and Muslim communalism but agreed that the Hindu variant was a much bigger threat to the democratic polity. A few days before he breathed his last in an article, *For the Unity of our Motherland*, in CPI weekly *New Age*, he wrote, Hindu communalism was permeating India's 'social and political life' and 'is even more dangerous', but he did not spare other communal variants. "When I say communal parties, I have in mind all communal parties, whether Hindu, Muslim or Sikh". He categorically said, "any opportunistic association or alliance would be a positive disservice to the cause of national integration". In contrast, CPI(M) is often silent about Islamic communalism. In an editorial, its central organ wrote on 7 October 2007, "We had continuously exposed the illegitimate nexus between imperialism's trimurti—the World Bank, IMF and WTO—and the communalism's trishul."

African Marxist economist Samir Amin in an essay in *Monthly Review* (December 2007)—"Political Islam in the service of imperialism"—wrote that 'radical secularism' is a contribution of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. "Atheist or agnostic, deist or believer, the individual is free to choose, the state knows nothing about it", he added. Ghosh's position, unlike the CPI(M)'s, was identical with Amin's. Long back in 1939, he wrote in the CPI mouthpiece, exposing the entente between the 'reactionary Hindu landlords and Muslim League biggies' (allies of imperialism) in opposing the pro-ryot Tenancy Bill of the UP government and asked the Congress government to help Muslims rid of 'cultural and general backwardness'. [Communal Unity, *National Front*, 1 January 1939].

Ghosh fought against both the lines inside CPI in the 1950s and until his death—national front-liners (those who remained with the CPI) and democratic-front-adherents (those who split and formed the CPI(M)). EMS Namboodiripad and A K Gopalan were with Ghosh until his death. But CPI(M)'s founding polit bureau member M Basavapunniah characterized Ghosh, 15 years after his death as "the skilful architect of Indian revisionism" in a pamphlet *CPI(M) and the Right CP*. Dr Ranen Sen, a CPI polit bureau member between 1952-56 and the only leader who was a CC member from when it was first constituted in 1933 ,

until the CPI split without break, refuted MB's acrobatics in verbiage. "Comrade Surjeet, Comrade Sundarayya, Comrade Basavapunnaiah all voted for the draft political resolution moved by Comrade Ajoy at the Palghat Congress in 1956. An alternate draft was placed by Comrade P C Joshi on behalf of NF-liners. If Ajoy were a revisionist, why was MB silent? Why the rebuttal came from Ajoy? EMS of course gave a sober and solid reply to Comrade Bhowani Sen who spoke in favour of PCJ", Dr Sen told this scribe who served as his private secretary in his twilight years. Sen was in the NC - the rechristened form of CC - before and after split in CPI until 1972 when he himself wanted to be excluded as he couldn't endorse the CPI tactics of tailism towards the Congress - rather Indira Gandhi. Very fond of Ghosh, he used to say often quite nostalgically "Ajoy was head and shoulder above all the general secretaries before and after split, even in the CPI(M), as an ideologue specially in inner-party politico-ideological struggle."

The CPI brass, unparalleled in wooing the CPI(M) under A B Bardhan who keeps mandarins of A K Gopalan Bhavan, seat of CPI(M) CC, unflinchingly in good humour, has practically sent Ghosh to the recycle bin of history . The vast majority of rank and file who joined the party after the split in CPI (1964) knows very little about such an outstanding Marxist.

Bardhan did not care to humiliate Dr Sen in his twilight years. Nonagenarian communist requested Bardhan in June 2001 to publish an article—*Relevance of Ajoy Ghosh in the Indian Communist Movement in June 2001* in the CPI central organ *New Age* (incidentally, with this writer as his junior co-author). The article suggested initiation of friendly ideological debate with the CPI-emulating Ghosh to pave the way for reunification of Indian communist movement. The Shah-en-shah of CPI wrote to Dr Sen to say that the article would "open a pandora's box of controversies and mutual attacks, without, in our view, helping in any way to further the process of unity" and gave it a pass. Dr Sen, former AITUC president shot back, "Our Party began shrinking gradually. Now it is a very small party and truly speaking, under your leadership, CPI is a satellite of CPI(M), thanks to your leadership." The article remains unpublished.

Ghosh was a CC member from 1933 and took up the mantle from C Rajeswar Rao after the party structure was deeply affected due to the 'sectarian' line of B T Ranadive period about which much has been written—may be much remains unknown too.

The Left Front government in West Bengal did very little for the Muslims. Only 2 per cent of government employees in the state are Muslims who account for over 21 per cent of state's population. The sham sympathy for the Muslim community is evident in CPI(M)'s national outlook. In 43 years, no Muslim could find a place in the PB. Even Mohd Ismail who was for sometime West Bengal state committee secretary of CPI in the very early 1950s was ignored.

Moscow, not CPI, published *Speeches and Writings* of Ajoy Ghosh, after his death. Cynics inside the CPI used to say that the party headquarters was named after Ghosh to please Moscow. But he never wooed the CPSU leaders. In 1956, *New Times*, carried a piece 'A non-capitalist path for underdeveloped countries' by Modeste Rubinstein who found elements of socialism in Nehruvian concept of democratic socialism (Avadi resolution). CPI organ *New Age* reprinted the article alongside Ghosh's rebuttal. □□□