

Mohit Sen: The Candle Burns Out, But The Glow Lingers on

Although one cannot say with much justification that the demise at the age of seventy four is premature, comrade Mohit Sen's passing away in the drawing room of his Hyderabad house at dusk on Saturday comes as a painful shock to those who use to know him personally and through his regular newspaper columns. Many readers may remember his edit page article last week in the New Indian Express on the American imperialist conquest of Iraq and its ominous consequences. His highly readable auto biography "The Traveller and The Road: The Journey of an Indian Communist" appeared in the bookstalls only a few weeks ago. His usual stylistic verve and vigour, analytic and narrative powers and remarkable powers of observation and memory were in no way seem to be fading in the more than 500 page of his farewell volume and testament. So Mohit Sen was robbed from his routine work and travel before the road ended and when he was still in the bloom of his talents and ideals. The sad demise of his college mate in Cambridge, lover and wife a few years ago without leaving him a solace of siblings actually left him lonely. Doctor Vanaja Iyengar an outstanding mathematician and academician who Mohit met in Cambridge where both of them were doing their postgraduate studies rose to the position of the Vice Chancellor of Usmania University. Even though her subject was dry mathematics she also was aware of the social and philosophical ramifications of modern mathematics. When both Mohit and myself were editing the New Age monthly way back in 1950's we were able to extract some articles from her which showed her deep knowledge of modern higher mathematics. In spite of her holding high positions in the

academia she was extremely loving wife to Mohit in the traditional Brahmin milieu of South India. A typical Bengali *Bhadra Lock* who belongs to the upper echelons of high Calcutta society Mohit Sen's father was a famous judge of the high court and mother an accomplished Musician. His brother was a senior executive of the Burma Shell, which was in those days the largest British monopoly oil concern.

Mohit Sen was attracted to Communist Ideology in the immediate post war years in Cambridge and had the honour of receiving his party membership card from the hands of the redoubtable Rajani Palm Dutt himself. After completing his studies in Cambridge and before returning to India he had the good fortune to be selected as a special cadre for training in International School of Marxism - Leninism in post revolutionary China. After completing his course of intensive training in Beijing Mohit Sen returned to India and began working at the Agitprop set up in CPI head quarters which was functioning in rented apartments on Asaf Ali Road, New Delhi and continued there till 1962. I too had the privilege of working with him in the same units under the supervision first of Party General Secretary Ajoy Ghose and after his death EMS Namboothiripad who became the General Secretary of the Central Committee. Those were years of intense inner party struggle between those who later remained in CPI and others who broke away and formed CPI (M). Though Ajoy Ghose was our ultimate leader, Nikhil Chakravathy was our immediate guide. It was from him that both of us learned the rudiments of Marxist-Leninist writing and professional journalism. Along with Nikhil Chakravathy, Mohit Sen was very much trusted by the leadership that both of them were often asked to prepare the first drafts of important documents and statements.

Those were also the times when schisms in International Communist movement was looming large on the horizon and furious debates inside the party on national and international strategy and tactics. Though Mohit Sen with the background of Chinese training was a strong advocate and interpreter of Chinese experience and Mao Tse Tung thought in the 1950's in the early 1960's he veered round to the soviet position. Inside the CPI he threw in his lot with S A Dange, who was made the chairman of the Communist party. The CPI did not have a chairman before or since but in those days in order to avoid a split, chairman post was created for Dange and EMS continued as General Secretary. It was a very unlikely combination and in the cold war between Dange and EMS, Mohit supported Dange. The rest of his life is the history of the split in Communist party and the rivalry between the CPI and newly formed CPI (M). Later when a split took place in the CPI itself and Dange organised his own communist outfit offering unstinted support to congress and Indira Gandhi, Mohit Sen became its spokesman and theorist. Dange group withered away with his death and Mohit founded impossible to tolerate the arrogance of Rosa Deshpande, Dange's daughter and political inheritor. Mohit experimented with many groups and lines and finally at the fagent of his career he was the self-appointed General secretary of an outfit called United Communist Party of India (UCPI). His autobiography succinctly states the policy of UCPI as one, which visualises Indian revolution to be brought out by the unity of the communist and the congress.

In his autobiography Mohit names two communists as his heroes and role models. One is Dange and the other is A.K.Gopalan. It is but natural that Dange's revisionist and moderate politics with his scintillating

brilliance attracted Mohit Sen whose politics too was of the same wavelength. But there is nothing in common between AKG's and Mohit's politics. But Mohit Sen praises AKG's dynamism, self-sacrifice and the unequalled capacity for rousing the masses to action and his qualities as a lovable personality. Whether the admiration and affection are a tribute to Mohit Sen's world outlook or the unique characteristic of the personality of AKG has to be probe and analysed.

It is rather intriguing that along with Dange and AKG there were two other persons who captivated this Bengali Bhadra Lock communist. They were Jawaharlal Nehru and his daughter Indira Gandhi. Mohit Sen was able to see Nehru and converse with him only once or twice in the years of his decline. But still the impression that Nehru made on him almost erased the traces of his communist convictions and Maoists sympathies. The relation and friendly encounters with Indira Gandhi was more often and of longer durations till her tragic death. Mohit Sen kept on regular liaison with her and had a number of interviews.

In the dark days of emergency (1975-77) even when the pro CPI Nikhil Chakravarty whom Mohit always considered as his mentor, was disillusioned with Indira Gandhi's dictatorial administration and Sanjay Gandhi's upstartist acrobatics, Mohit remained a staunch supporter of Mrs. Gandhi. As the confession in his autobiography amplifies he steadfastly kept to this line of politics, inspite of the fact that he always claimed to remain a true and staunch communist.

There may be this and many other criticisms that one may justifiably or otherwise make against Mohit Sen but his transparent honesty and selfless

idealism can never be doubted though he was extremely close to Mrs. Gandhi and her sought of politics. He never was an admirer of erstwhile communist Mohan Kumaramangalam who sang his communist canoe mid-stream and jumped on to Mrs.Gandhi's cabinet birth. Kumaramangalam too like Mohit Sen belongs to a family with well-known ancestors and had the benefit of western education and rose up in party hierarchy quite young. Such ladders to climb up were available to Mohit Sen too but he never aspired for such easy steps towards worldly power and prestige.

It is a common saying that *The Style is the Man*. Mohit Sen's life style as well as writing style is clearly a mirror of his soul and personality. His extremely elegant style and avoidance of clichés and seemingly enemycal hatred of the jargon, to which many of us communists are common victims, show his sincerity and honest faith in himself and his convictions. Mohit Sen's departure at the height of his faculties is great loss to the public life and purposeful journalism. People like me who had the privilege of knowing and working with him for long feel the loss were severely and find it very difficult to come to terms to the fact of his disappearance. It is as if the candle had burned out but the glow lingers on.
