

Bir Kanya Kalpana

An Undaunted Freedom Fighter

by Binode Dasgupta



HE district of Chittagong due to its unique contribution in the war of independence of the Greater Indian Subcontinent was awarded a brilliant title of Biplobi Chattala (Revolutionary Chittagong). This award of honour was given not by any individual but by the history as a whole — because of its remarkable and pioneering role in our war against the British Imperialism that subjugated and ruled this vast land of unending beauty, culture and wealth and reduced it to one of the poorest territories of the world. The role of Chittagong was so much important and unparalleled that Mahatma Gandhi himself, not at all known to be very soft and impartial towards Bengal could not but highly praise the district for its wonderful deeds in anti-British War.

In this glorious war the district of Chittagong produced an innumerable number of heroic sons and daughters only one or two of whom could have radiated like the sun for centuries together to enhance the honour of a nation. The names of some of the freedom fighters such as the great nationalist leader Moniruzzaman Islamabadi, Master Kazim Ali, J M Sengupta, Masterda Suryasen, Birkanya Pritilata and Kalpana Joshi (Datta) etc. may be cited from among those unlimited number of brave people who sacrificed their lives smilingly in the gallows.

Masterda Suryasen should not be considered an individual only as he was indeed a revolution or history in himself. He had a small armed and unarmed army of his own and with a team of about sixty armed cadres he paralyzed the British Administration at Chittagong district and raised high the flag of independence here for four days after which he and his team had to suffer a great loss in a bloody battle to face battle with the enemy army. He was then compelled to retreat from the main battlefield (i.e. Jalalabad Pahar, not far away from Chittagong Town) with his surviving comrades.

But his armed struggle

against the British ruler could not be stopped by any brutal repression or tactics of the then greatest power of the world. Masterda of course had to hide himself and continued his armed fight for independence from underground. After the great Jubo Bidroha (Youth Revolution) of Chittagong held in the month of April 1930, Masterda didn't stop his revolutionary activities even for a day and carried on so many armed operations against the imperial administration for about four years until finally caught by the enemy in 1933 due to betrayal of a traitor, Kshetramohan Sen. During this long period of three to four years only a very few people were closely related to Masterda. Among these illustrious sons and daughters two and only two were women — Bir Kanya Pritilata and Kalpana Datta, the two pride ladies in the Indian war of Independence. Today we intended to tell only a few words about Kalpana Datta (Subsequently married to P C Joshi, to earn the sur name Joshi).

We are proud that both of the above mentioned great ladies were the daughters of this soil. But the present writer is sorry to state that he did never come across any biography of Kalpana Datta, if, of course, published anywhere. She was born at a village known as Sripur under Boalkhali PS of Chittagong district. This writer also could not trace her date of birth from any published or unpublished records, but from different reports published so far after her death and her statement, quoted here and there by many people it seems that she was born in 1912 or 1913, as most of the reports suggest that she died at the age of 83. In one of her statements made to some political ladies she asserted that she was junior to Pritilata by two years in age and one year in academic life. She was born in a solvent middle class family and her grandfather was a Roy Bahadur, one of the very prestigious titles at that time given by the British Administration. She passed her Matriculation Examination in 1929 from Chittagong town and proceeded to Calcutta to get her admitted in Bethun College where from she passed I Sc. in 1931. After that she was seriously involved in the revolutionary activities of Masterda for which she couldn't complete her Degree studies. In 1933 she was arrested with two great revolutionary leaders Masterda Suryasen and Tarakeshwar Dastidar.

She was influenced by the revolutionary ideas as one of her uncles was closely associated with Masterda's Revolutionary Party. From her school life she performed many assisting jobs for this revolutionary group. In Bethun College, particularly as a student of Science she played a very active part in doing some technical jobs for her party. She along with some other girls of the same college supplied many essential items for the preparation of bombs and other ammunitions etc.

The two great leaders as we mentioned earlier, arrested with her were hanged in Chittagong Jail when she was also supposed to be hanged. But as a woman she was not given that punishment and sentenced to life imprisonment. Due to a great movement for the release of political prisoners and particularly

due to interference of Rabinranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi she and many other political leaders were released from Jail probably in 1937. Immediately she joined the Communist Party of India which was officially banned up to 1942. In engaging herself deeply in political activities of the party she was also getting prepared for her Degree examination and had her B Sc. Degree in 1940. As a leading Communist worker soon she came close to P C Joshi, the then Secretary (also the first Secretary) of the Communist Party of India and in the short time they were married. Though married to a non-Bengali person she was out and out a Bengali through out her life and passed a greater part of her life in Calcutta where she served long years in the Statistical Institute of India, founded by P C Mohanbosh, one of the greatest Statisticians and Economists known throughout the world. She also died that day (February 8) in a Calcutta Clinic.

It is great shame for us that we failed to show her a due respect which a great daughter of this soil deserves. The history that is taught to our student community has nothing to say about these great leaders without the wonderful contribution of whom we might not have as yet enjoyed the light and air of independence. So ungrateful we are that it is hard to imagine what the world community thinks about us. Not only the Government or so many political parties but the Universities, Bangla Academy, Asiatic Society and similar other organisations are totally mum about all of them.

What they are teaching our children? Do they think our independence was achieved only on 16 December, 1971 like a ripe fruit of a tree? They may try to please Rajakars and Albadars in this way but one day they must face the consequence as they tried to destroy our tradition and the glorious history of this land.

The writer is associated with the Shiksha-O-Sanskrit Charcha Kendra

Travelling by the Dead

AS dead bodies these days have started travelling from one place to another. I have told my inward-looking consort not to book any final resting place in advance. Disposal of our own dead bodies in not our responsibility King Frederick the Great of Prussia who wanted burial by the side of his dogs changed his burial place twice. Napoleon whom the British denied his choice of burial eventually returned to Paris from St Helena. King Nicola of Yugoslavia who was buried in Italy because of disagreement with Karl Marx's theory came back home for another burial. Imre Nagi, the Hungarian leader, whom the Soviet Communists hanged and buried unceremoniously was taken out of his original burial place and was re-buried with honour. These changes of burial places by dead bodies have convinced me of the futility of having pre-fixed burial plot.

My wife desires to buy out of her own fund a small piece of land which may contain her mortal remains after death. Before she finally settles down six feet below the surface, she likes to visit the place occasionally when alive. She believes that these visits to the proposed final resting place will burn out her desire to acquire earthly things through fume. Moreover, it would also teach her humility which graveyards alone can do.

While rich people are making frantic efforts to acquire residential plots in posh model towns and some are pushing their husbands off to Middle East the grow rich overnight and to build as many houses as possible, my wife intends a single-sized burial plot for her in advance. I am little annoyed at this uncharitable retrogressive thought for the next world for this simple reason that, so far I have not been able to buy a suitable plot of land to build a house wherein we could huddle up ourselves and gasp out of breath to the next world. To add to my depleted resources, the Dhaka City Corporation has recently raised the cost of burial plots on the pretext of rising cost of living although the plots for dead persons hardly need any after burial maintenance.

I have persuaded my wife to defer her proposal for acquisition of the burial plot on the ground that if she buys it in her life time, either of us has to bear its cost. In case we do not own any such plot, we may

not remain unburied or graveless. The living humanity will have us buried at their own cost in order just to save them from what others call environmental pollution. We can afford to postpone this advance planning.

Moreover, no one can guarantee that she may be buried in her own plot. Some one may occupy her plot illegally. In that event those responsible for her burial will require to eject the illegal occupant who may not be available alive to respond to legal question. There are instances when the daughter's grave, dug and constructed in advance, was occupied by her father, Emperor Mohammad Ghor's daughter constructed a grave for her in advance in Ghazni. After his assassination by the Khokars, Ghor's mortal remains were taken to Ghazni for burial. As no other grave was available for immediate use, the emperor was buried in the grave which his daughter had dug in advance for her own mortal remains.

lavish graves. Yet, some of their women preferred austerity in their return journey. Emperor Noor Jahan a pacesetter or face-lifter in womanly fashion, preferred a final resting place near Lahore, bereft of any beauty, let alone the traditional grandeur which characterised the mausolia of the Mughals. In the suburb of Lahore, her tomb casually finished with exposed bricks, mocked at the lavishness of other imperial graves. The epitaph on her grave reads:

Bar majare ma garba na cherege na guley
Na parey parwana shuhat na sataye bulbulay
 None should burn a candle
 Nor one should place a wreath on my tomb
 Lest the candle burns an insect
 Or the flower is stained.

Another Mughal woman, Jahanara, a poet and an accomplished connoisseur of art, lived a tormented personal life. She spent the last days of her life as a prisoner in Agra fort across the Jumna river and

ordained to keep the couples side by side in the Tajmahal. Tajmahal incited many wives into jealousy and caused many husband to envy or to laugh at. Momtaz, of course, indented in her life time a monument on her mortal remains. But she did not know that it would need twenty thousand workers to work for twenty-two years at a cost of thirty million rupaya.

Besides narrating the story of the above royalties some of whom preferred humility in their return journey to the Creator, I also relate the story of a popular benevolent public leader who had forsaken his own religion in order to please his multi-religious electorate. After his death, he was taken to a Muslim cemetery for burial. The caretaker of the cemetery wanted to know the religion of the deceased. On being told that the deceased was secular, the caretaker politely refused him entry on the ground that the graveyard was only meant for the Muslims. He was then taken to the Christian cemetery. They also refused to bury him there on the same plea. Then he was taken to the Hindu burial place. They too refused to accept him on similar ground. The bier bearers then got annoyed with the deceased for his having belonged to secularism which provided no separate burial ground. In disgust they threw the dead body into the secular flowing river and returned home.

Distant Drum

M N Mustafa

Even after burial one may not remain in the same burial plot. Jawaharlal Nehru's body was cremated at the outskirts of Delhi. But Nehru, in a will, desired that the ashes of his mortal remains should be taken out and spread from sky at the confluence of the Ganges so that they mixed up with the soil of India beyond recognition.

His daughter, Indira Gandhi's body ashes, after cremation, similarly were spread over the Himalayas as she wished. The body cannot now be located at one place.

At times Providence also kept mortal remains asunder. Hazrat Imam Hussain's body remained buried at Karbala but his head, cruelly severed from the body, travelled to Damascus en route to Cairo for burial at the Al-Hussaini Mosque at Cairo.

Lady Mountbatten, the wife of the last Viceroy of India, was not known to have faced any shortage of burial ground, yet her mortal remains were **sunk in the deep Atlantic ocean** in fulfilment of her desire. Her burial on land could have cost her family much less.

The Mughals, after Pharaoh of Egypt, gave them equally

overlooking the Tajmahal where her mother lay buried in the majestic tomb. Jahanara preferred a humble grave near that of Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulia. On her tomb is inscribed a poem composed by herself:

Begair Sabza na poshad kase majare mara
Ke kabar poshe gariban hamin zia hashash'

Nothing should adorn my grave except the green grass which is the only befitting cover for a poor helpless person of my kind.

Geeti-Ara, another daughter of emperor Shahjahan, now lies buried in Ajmir, by the side of the spiritual *Sultanul Hind*, Khawja Moinuddin Chisti.

But her mothers? Nowhere in the world any husband gave such an eloquent and elegant expression of conjugal love in white marble after the death of his spouse. Poet Tagore called it a 'drop of tear on the cheek of time'. Others condemned it as squandering of public money for private love.

Emperor Shahjahan wanted to build two mausolia — the white one to contain mortal remains of Mumtaz and the black one, on the other side of the Jumna, his own. But God

The Pharaoh of Egypt, Marnepta, son of Ramesis II drowned in the river Nile while chasing Moses, his dead body was salvaged and buried in the royal graveyard at Thebes. The dead body was discovered in 1898 by one archaeologist, named Loret. The French Academy of Medicine examined the dead body of Marnepta and found that the cause of his death was drowning. The body is now lying for public viewing in Cairo Museum. In *Sura Yunus* in the Holy Quran Allah says: *Fal yatumu nunajjika bebadaneka letakuna khalifaq ayatan* — we shall preserve your body as a sign for the posterity.

At last my wife was convinced that since we believed in God and belonged to a faith, it is His duty to provide us a final resting place in His limitless munificence, no matter the cost of burial plots is less or more. And we do not require to foot the bill for maintenance of the grave.

asian diary BY ARJUNA

Jack (Fruit) of All Trades

In south India, the fruit is the favourite of most households for its strong, sweet and aromatic odour, fine texture and rich and appetizing taste. Shredded, jackfruit is eaten fresh or used in ice cream, candies and other desserts.

In the Philippines, the young or immature fruit is also used as a vegetable. Industrial processors utilize the young fruit as an ingredient in the manufacture of a fish sauce known locally as *patis*. Immature, overripe, and fallen fruits from a tree are given to hogs and cattle.

Aside from its food value, the jackfruit is also valued for its medicinal properties. In China, the *artil* is considered a cooling and nutritious tonic.

In Sri Lanka, the leaves are widely used to treat diabetes, particularly among the elderly. Mature or ripened, fallen leaves are collected, boiled,

This must be the reason why palaces in Bali and Macassar were built of jackfruit wood and the limited supply in Indo-China was once reserved for temples.

In Malaysia, jackfruit is intercropped in durian orchards to provide shade. It is similarly used to shade coffee and orange trees, and in India and Sri Lanka, it is grown to provide shade and living support for black pepper.

In Africa the trees are utilized for yarn support. In Australia, they are used as windbreaks at close spacings. In Bangladesh, jackfruit is an important reforestation species.

But despite its varied uses, jackfruit is still considered a backyard crop in most parts of Asia.

A native to the rainforests of the western Ghats of India and Malaysia, Arabs took it to the east coast of Africa, and eventually it arrived in the whole of tropical Africa and America. Today, it is an important fruit crop in India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines, and many other tropical countries.

As a timber, experts say the jackfruit is superior to teak.

—Depthnews Asia

Shedding Light on the Sunset Rule

by Schrezad Joya Monami Latif

Now that they are accustomed to the purdah system and have ceased to grumble at their seclusion... But how do you manage to do without the Police or Magistrates in case of theft or murder? ... Since the Murdana system there has been no more crime or sin...

—Sultana's Dream by Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain

mands, also are very much constitutional, which the Sunset Rule itself is not for the simple reason that it does not treat male and female students equally. The equality between the sexes is an undeniable and basic fundamental right.

What exactly is the Sunset Rule? There is actually no such thing as the Sunset Rule in name, it is simply a coinage given by the students to Dhaka University Ordinances for female students living in any of the three campus halls. In 1973, under the Presidential Order, Section 38 and 39, the University Syndicate made the University Ordinance and Regulations, still being used today as law on University campus.

The ordinance for female students for resident housing states clearly, "the gate of the hall shall be closed at 6-30 PM in Winter and 7-30 PM in Summer and it shall not be opened again before 6 AM except with the permission of the Provost." There is strict visiting hours that are main-

female students must all, within half hour appear at the room of the house tutor to give their attendance. To picture 1200 (number of students in Rokeya Hall) or even 393 (number of students in Kuwait Moitri Hall) women converging/ lining up, or pushing and shoving their way to make sure their attendance is noted, is absurd, simply ridiculous. Wouldn't it be simpler or even more efficient if the house tutor's went to each room and took attendance instead? One of the demands in the memo sent to the VC is that attendance be either taken by the house tutors or only two to three times a week instead of everyday. The women in the halls have also seized all bells.

To stay out later than the gates closing or to spend the night in a relatives home, a woman has to submit an application that needs to be signed by the house tutor, the Provost and the local guardian. "Sometimes the amount of time it takes to get signatures from our local guardians makes it pointless for us to venture out at all, many girls forge the signature of their local guardians", says Shumi. One of the demands of the movement is that this bothersome motion of having applications signed by three people be stopped and instead, students note down in the log book where they are going and for what

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From Farmers to Ministers, Mix 'n' Match is in

Second-hand clothes have become big business in Kenya, where a perfectly good European cast-off can sell for a fraction of the price of a locally-made suit. Gemini News Service reports on the controversy *mitumba* has created in Kenya's textile industry.

Robert Okinyi Otani writes from Kisumu, Kenya

LET ladies shine today! roars a trader, holding aloft a dress which looks as good as new.

Another at the next stall hollers, "Impress your boss tomorrow in a three-piece woollen suit!"

It is 7 am and already the traders at Kibuye, the largest open-air market in East and Central Africa, are raucously trying to out-shout each other in touting the virtues of their wares.

Rows of 15-ton lorries, parked closely side-by-side, have disgorged their contents: bales of *mitumba* — second-hand clothes — which retailers sell to avid customers throughout the week.

The market, on the outskirts of Kisumu, Kenya's second-largest city, located on the shores of Lake Victoria about 400 kilometres west of Nairobi, draws dealers from all over the country and even beyond.

Their success has had a direct impact on the day-to-day life of many Kenyans by widening the range of clothes available to them.

Mitumba are imported, mostly from Europe and the United States, in 100 kilogram

bales, each containing an assortment of garments, from children's clothes to men's suits. Most importers are senior figures in the governments or civil service. Others are wealthy Kenyans known here as "PCs", or politically correct citizens.

Mitumba have dramatically reduced the average family's clothing bill, in a country in which the inflation rate has only recently come down to 13 per cent from more than 100 per cent two years ago, and where the gross national product per head is only \$310.

Mitumba have also become a welcome means of livelihood for many families. Often both husbands and wives are in the business.

Jane Akinyi has been selling — and wearing — second-hand clothes for six years. "I do not know what I would be wearing now if it were not for the *mitumba*. My kids would not be eating or going to school either," she says.

A bundle or bale sells for 7,000 Kenya shillings and since there is no fixed price on items of clothing, retailers can make up to 400 per cent profit on each bale.

A used woollen suit may sell

for as little as Sh700. With a few adjustments and proper washing, the used suit is as good as a brand-new imported one, which costs as much as Sh105,000 in an exclusive shop in Nairobi.

The advent of *mitumba* in the late 1980s has made Kenyans more conscious of fashion, especially of the mix-'n'-match kind, for the used clothes can be afforded by almost anybody.

Their arrival on the scene could not have come at a better time — just when the inflation rate was going up by leaps and bounds.

But like most good things the *mitumba* have also had a negative effect. The local textile industry is going through a rough patch, aggravated by the arrival of *mitumba* and other cheap goods from the Far East and now further worsened by the liberalisation of the Kenyan economy which has pushed the imports door wide open.

The industry raised a hue and cry about *mitumba* as early as 1990. The uproar was so loud that President Daniel Arap Moi decided to intervene. He slapped a ban on dealing in second-hand clothes, including importation and retailing.



The ban, ordered in January 1990, gave the dealers until May of that year to dispose of their wares.

But if the President thought he had made a political score, he had a re-think coming. Before the ban could take effect, he beat a hasty retreat. He realised that he had not only stepped on the toes of power-

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Quit Dhaka Master Plan

The Passing Show

by ANZ Zahr

OVERWEIGHT metropolitan Dhaka needs a regime of aerobic exercises to contain the city to reasonable dimensions (and impart cosmetic attractiveness) to be able to control its administration; which has gone beyond the capabilities of DCC and RAJUK. Unless new regulations are enforced now, improvement of the existing conditions would be like the beating about the bush.

The City planners (with the existing UNDP project team) must be carrying out, it is presumed, exercise to find out how a diversification master plan could be mounted for the transfer of assets and technology to the other divisions of the country, to check the unmanageable migration to the metropolis. To cite a small example, there are too many head offices here (and too few office accommodation), resulting in too many trips.

The muffed had always

been getting a step-motherly treatment as far as the concentration of offices, projects and development activities are concerned, compared to Dhaka. The proposed Plan is quite different from the existing rural enrichment projects under the 5-Year Plan for circulation of more money in the rural areas and for raising the average standard of living of the rural population.

Our planners and political leaders are not paying much attention to the check and balance aspects of the urban problems due to rapid development resulting in

urban migration at too fast a rate. The over-crowding and traffic jams and vertical building congestion will soon overtake the other divisional headquarters (within a decade), if the discouragement brakes are not applied from now on.

With the decision to shift the garment factories from Dhaka city, the next phase should be the shifting of the light industries from the city core area, and the immediate ban on the setting of new light industrial units in the greater Dhaka area, as such areas would be needed for business

and commercial offices, educational institutions, more residential units, and road diversions and dispersal projects. Nobody is talking about more satellite towns around Dhaka (first the mass transit system).

At present the development in the greater Dhaka zone is going on in a haphazard manner, and the supervision and control are very lax, not only due to shortage of supervisory staff (infrastructure) but also due to graft and corrupt practices. The basics of good urban practices are being ignored in spite of the architects' models in the blueprints. There is hardly any protest as the vast majority are involved in the game. Psychologically, this state of affairs is to be expected in a have not society riding a development boom.

The adverse implications are well known.

Can we hear more from the experts?