

# BANGLA FORA

নিজের  
মানুষ

Session 2  
Remembering Resistance

9th December  
6pm - 7.30pm



## Resource Pack

## Introduction on Bangla Fora

Bangla Fora is a common colloquial term used by the Bengali community for children's education programs that were popularised in the '70s and '80s in an effort for the Bengali community to connect and link their children to their community and culture. Our Bangla Fora will include 10 online webinars available to take live and view as recordings.

The course curriculum will develop participants skills as community organisers and activists while grounding them in the historical context of wider bangladeshi activism in the UK. The course will mix deep dives into the history of the Bangladeshi diaspora and its activism in the 70s and 80s with training in modern anti racism techniques, digital campaigning and community outreach.

**Link to video session:  Remembering Resistance**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Vg5MO77RzI>

## Session Two - Remembering Resistance: Anti-Colonial Figures in Bengali History

When we think about anti-colonial struggles, we rarely think about the rich Bengali resistance in British India - and how Bengalis were among some of the first to revolt. In this session we explore some of the critical movements and individuals who led on these, considering how their tactics can connect to present day organising.

### Lesson Objectives:

- To build a comprehensive understanding of historical Bengali resistance movements
- To develop an understanding of the rich history of Bengali anti colonial resistance and 1971 resistance
- To reflect on the lessons that can be drawn to the present day

## Defining anti-colonialism

As a historical event, anticolonialism refers to the struggle against imperial rule in colonised countries, mostly during the first half of the 20th century. Revolutionary anticolonialism historically has often employed strategies of violent revolt against colonial regimes.

### Surya Sen / Masterda (1894-1934)

- Surya Sen was a revolutionary and principal organiser of the famous Chittagong Armoury Raid of 1930 against the British government.
- In 1916, he was initiated into revolutionary ideas by his teacher Shatishchandra Chakrabarti who was involved with a revolutionary party named 'Jugantar'
- On his return to Chittagong in 1918, Surya Sen became the President and leader of the Chittagong branch of the Indian National Congress
- He revived the revolutionary organisation and became a teacher of the local National School, fondly then known as 'Masterda' (teacher)
- At the time, the revolutionaries were divided in 2 groups: Anushilan and Jugantar. He tried to reunite the two active revolutionary parties in one group.
- Gradually his party became more active in Chittagong.
- In 1919, the students of Chittagong boycotted their classes and organised public meetings to protest the Jallianwala Bagh massacre
- The revolutionaries in Chittagong also continued their systematic movement by boycotting classes, courts and arranging protests, demos, possession etc.

A short video provides a summary: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FUjxgTs3Q\\_Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FUjxgTs3Q_Y)

### Chittagong Armoury Raid (18th April, 1930)

The Chittagong armoury raid led by Surya Sen was an attempt to raid two major British armouries in Chittagong and distribute weapons to other revolutionaries so they could establish an armed unit.

They failed to locate ammunition but did succeed in cutting telephone and telegraph wires to isolate the city. They also broke down the railway links between the city and the rest of Bengal.

Anticipating consequences of the revolt, they left for the Chittagong hills, searching for a safe place to stay.

On April 22, 1930, thousands of British army personnel caught up with them on Jalalabad Hill and engaged in a brutal standoff. 12 revolutionaries and 80 British Army personnel died. Sen and his comrades escaped into the neighbouring village, where they divided themselves into smaller groups conducting guerrilla raids and surprise attacks on colonial personnel and property.

The British embarked on a series of brutal combing operations around the villages where the revolutionaries were hiding. Despite ensuing brutality, the villagers did not betray Surya Sen and his comrades. Instead, they offered them support.

In 16th February 1933, Surya Sen was arrested and jailed where he was brutally tortured by the British. His bones, limbs, and joints were shattered by a hammer, in addition to having all his nails torn out.

On 12th January 1934, Sen was hung by the British forces and died.

### **Pritilata Waddedar (1911 - 1932)**

- Born in Chittagong, Waddedar was a promising student and the first Bengali woman to pick up arms against the British
- At Eden College in Dhaka, Waddedar's anti-British sentiments began to take more form as she developed connections with other women who were spearheading semi-revolutionary groups
- One group was with Leela Nag, an associate of Subhash Chandra Bose
- Bose established the Deepali Sangha, a revolutionary group that provided combat training to women.
- Waddedar came to Calcutta University as a student of Philosophy but her degree was held back by the British authorities (her first urge to resist!)
- In Calcutta, Waddedar was introduced to revolutionary leader Surya Sen
- Inspired by Sen, Waddedar soon joined his underground group.
- Some members of Sen's group initially objected to her membership, but appear to have eventually relented when they discovered her devotion to the cause for freedom, as well as her abilities to carry out assignments undetected by the police.
- During the Chittagong Armory Raid, 20-year-old Waddedar and a few others managed to escape and regroup over the next few months.
- In 1932, the group, following Surya Sen's original plans to attack the Pahartali European Social Club in Chittagong, assigned Waddedar to lead this assignment.

- The social club had been targeted because of its racist and discriminatory practises towards Indians, especially its use of the signboard that read “Dogs and Indians not allowed”.
- Under her leadership, a group of 10 was trained in the use of arms and taught how to consume potassium cyanide if the need arose.
- They attacked the club on the night of September 23, 1932 and many members of the club were injured, while the group was shot at by the police guarding the club.
- Waddedar sustained a bullet wound that stopped her from escaping with the group.
- She consumed potassium cyanide to evade arrest and ended her life at the age of 21.

### **Kalpna Dutta**

- Kalpna Dutta was born in Chittagong and went to Calcutta to study science
- At this time, she was introduced to Chatri Sangha, the women’s revolutionary youth wing and became one of its most active members and immersed herself in the cause.
- It was here that she met and forged a friendship with Pritilata, who would later introduce her to Surya Sen.
- Sen’s ideals and principles inspired the budding revolutionary, and she was inspired enough to join Pritilata as one of few other women compatriots in Masterda’s armed group of revolutionaries.
- In 1930, the Chittagong Armoury Raid was carried out
- In 1931, Kalpna Dutta joined the Indian Republican Army, Chittagong Branch.
- Along with being assigned the responsibility of transporting explosives and other supplies, Kalpna also became an expert in preparing gun cotton, an explosive agent.
- The attack on the European club had initially involved both Pritilata and Kalpna as its leaders
- A week before the attack, Kalpna was detained by the British in male attire whilst on a scoping trip of the area.
- Dutta often wore male attire while underground to avoid getting caught.
- After being released on bail, she went underground to ensure that the plan, now taken forward by Pritilata, would continue without any obstacles.
- However British officers were on high alert, and quickly ambushed the rebels immediately after they torched the Pahartali Club.
- Even when the British managed to locate Surya Sen in 1933, Kalpna managed to escape and run for her life.

- Three months later, she was eventually arrested and sentenced to life in the second trial of the Chittagong Armoury Raid incident.
- Her cause was taken up by Rabindranath Tagore who arranged for her release from the prison.
- She was released after six years of imprisonment, and following independence, she lived a relatively quiet life until her death in 1995.

## **Rabindranath Tagore**

Poet + revolutionary

Ekla Chalo Re is one of the 22 protest songs written during the Swadeshi period of Indian freedom movement and along with "Amar Sonar Bangla", it became one of the key songs for the Anti-Partition Movement in Bengal Presidency in 1905.

"If no one responds to your call, then go your own way alone" Jodi tor dak shune keu na ashe tobe ekla cholo re <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gh47aYfPdwk>

Some of these songs were banned by the British due to the revolutionary nature of them.

At that time, the agitation against the partition of Bengal was in full swing. Tagore wrote it because he felt isolated and upset that he could not gain the attention of mainstream nationalist leaders in the anti-Partition agitation. Tagore dedicated this song to another revolutionary, Shubash Chandra Bose.

## **Swadeshi Movement: Boycotting British Goods**

- The Swadeshi Movement was formally proclaimed at a meeting held at the Calcutta Town hall on August 7, 1905 where the Boycott resolution was also passed.
- Suggestion for boycott was first given by freedom fighter, leader of the Brahmo Samaj and journalist Krishan Kumar Mitra.
- He openly called for boycott of foreign goods through his journal Sanjivani on July 13, 1905.
- The boycott movement was undertaken by Bengalis after employing different other forms of constitutional agitations including petitions, vocal protests and conferences.
- The objective of boycott movement was to cripple the British economically by boycotting British goods, especially the cotton goods from Manchester, the richest market for which in India was Bengal.



- This would result in devastating financial losses for the colonial rule and as result, applying pressure on them.
- Spontaneous and sporadic protests across Bengal gradually took shape of Swadesi (“buy Indian”) movement.
- British products were boycotted, people pledged to use Indian goods, shops selling foreign goods were picketed, western clothes and other products were thrown on bonfires and imported sugar was boycotted.
- Bombings took place in public buildings, armed robberies were staged and British officials were executed by group of young men.

### **The Liberation War of 1971**

In 1971, East Pakistan, sought to achieve fully autonomous statehood and obtain its sovereignty from West Pakistan in a war that lasted nine months.

- Most pivotal geopolitical event in the Indian subcontinent's recent history
- Accounts state up to three million Bangladeshis were killed and up to five hundred thousand women were raped

### **Chain of Events**

- Political, Social, linguistic and economic exploitation from West Pakistan
- 1952 Bangla Language Movement - Urdu Imposition
- 1970 Bhola Cyclone - killed up to 500,000 people in East Bengal
- 1970 Pakistani general election
  - Awami League, headed by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, swept up a landslide victory in the national elections on December 7, 1970
  - Largely due to the dissatisfaction over relief efforts by the national government

### **The Women of 1971**

Kakon Bibi - An indigenous freedom fighter, she belonged to the Khasia ethnic group. She used her marriage to her ex husband who was Pakistani to gather information. During the Liberation War, she was arrested and brutally tortured by the Pakistani occupation army. But finally, she was released after she convinced them that she was searching for her Punjabi husband - who was actually her ex husband. Pakistan Army then gave her a pass and requested her to spy for them what she agreed upon. She soon started providing information about the Pakistani army camps to the freedom fighters.

Shirin was inspired by Pritilata Waddar, who we mentioned earlier. She said in an interview before she passed, “I liked the idea of being disguised as a boy. My aunt was my guardian. I went to her wearing my cousin's clothes. She said, 'Come and stand in front of me'. As I did, she looked at me and said, 'You can go. You don't look like a girl,’” she told The Daily Star in an interview last year.

Shrin, fought in battles and also mobilised public opinion in favour of the Liberation War. She was a member of the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB). She was at the forefront of the battle at Pabna Telephone Bhaban,”, adding that freedom fighters didn't have many arms and ammunition then, and so fought with koch (a fishing tool), kitchen knives, sticks and spears.

Taramon Bibi - Served in Sector number 11 during the Liberation War, and would cook for the freedom fighters, hide arms for them, gathered information from the Pakistani military, and also took part in face-to-face combat. Taramon Bibi would pretend to be not in her right mind, , in order to observe the positions of the Pakistani army in different areas of then Kurigram's Rowmari Police Station during the [1971 Liberation War](#).

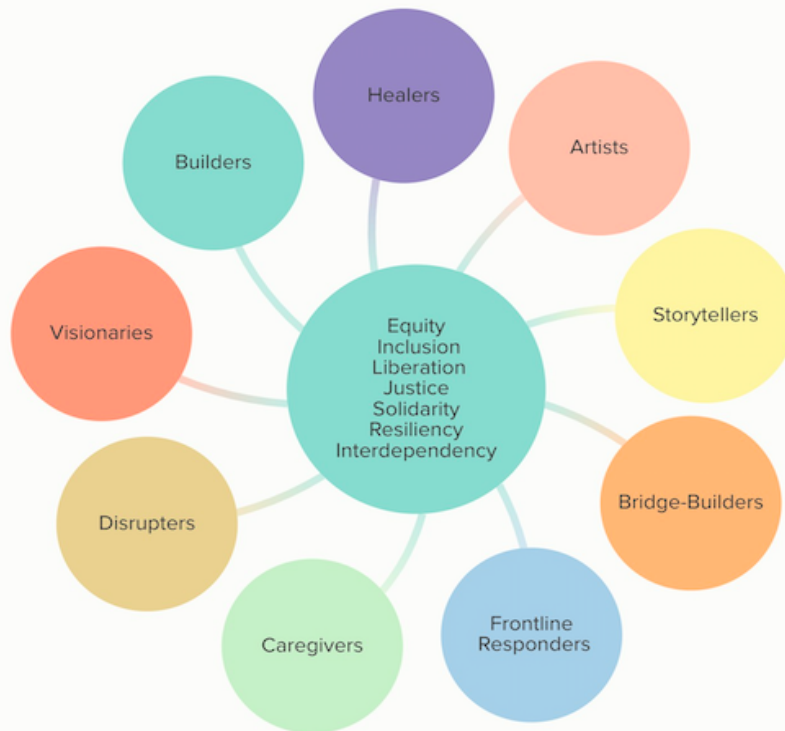
She would pass the information based on her observations to the freedom fighters for whom she worked as a cook in a camp.

### **Our Role in movements**

<https://dviyer.medium.com/my-role-in-a-social-change-ecosystem-a-mid-year-check-in-1d852589cdb1>



# My Role in a Social Change Ecosystem



## Further readings/resources

### Books:

- 1971: A Global History of the Creation of Bangladesh
- Women, War, and the Making of Bangladesh: Remembering 1971
- A Golden Age by Tahmima Anam
- The Blood Telegram: Nixon, Kissinger and a Forgotten Genocide by Gary J. Bass

### Films:

- Chittagong (2012) Directed by Bedabrata Pain
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J9vUulq4tZI&t=44s>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gh47aYfPdwk>
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FUjxgTs3Q\\_Y&t=33s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FUjxgTs3Q_Y&t=33s)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W9PZx55dayw>

### Articles:

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/feb/05/relatives-terrorist-past-women-politic-british-bengal>

<https://anushayspoint.com/2016/03/25/bangladeshs-birangonas-world-must-acknowledge-1971-rape-survivors/>

<https://www.therightscollective.com/post/the-passing-down-of-stories-bangladesh-turns-50>

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/genocide-us-cant-remember-bangladesh-cant-forget-180961490/>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-16207201>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/30/opinion/nixon-and-kissingers-forgotten-shame.html>

|