

Panel III: Occupy College Street: Notes from the Sixties.

Presented by: Ranabir Samaddar

Discussant: Prabhu Mahapatra is Professor at the Department of History, University of Delhi.

The discussant for this panel was Prabhu Mahapatra raised the question of methodology. He observed that there is an immediate transition from form to content in the paper and he enquires as to how this transition is mediated. To this, Professor Samaddar replied that in his view, this division of form and content is banal to the extent that they both occur simultaneously; no analysis of the form can take place without commenting on the content. The process of mediation, he further opined, negates the immediacy of such movements and usurps the transformative moments of form into content and vice-versa.

The first observation was made by Atig Ghosh whose study of Left front Government in Birbhum from 1947-67 has found that the earlier period of CPI/CPI(M) regime had a base in the middle class/caste peasant group. In the wake of Naxalbari revolution, it shifted to a lower class/caste, agricultural labour group. The second observation that he made was in relation to role of women in the revolutionary movement. He states that unlike Kolkata, women had a very different role to play in the districts. In participation, there was a division of revolutionary labour and women played the role of “carriers” of arms, letters etc. Professor Samaddar responded by saying that women’s participation in the movement was seen as natural and thus, belonging to the realm of utopia that underlies such movements. As far as participation of other class/caste people, such as slum-dwellers were concerned, it was not a deliberate act of gaining members or supporters. Iman Mitra commented that with regard to form and content, any boundary-making exercise must also consider the concretised history of space. Can this be viewed as rereading/ revisiting such history? Prabhu Mahapatra here observed that the term “concrete” does not just signify form; rather it implies a relationship between form and content. Professor Samaddar, with reference to phenomenology, stressed on a deeper understanding of the word concrete where a superficial description is done away with and questioning of form is a way to understand the specific.