

Paper: "First Five Years of Left Front Rule in West Bengal" Atig Ghosh

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According to Prof. Bhattacharyya, Atig Ghosh's proposal was offbeat, loaded with many possibilities and he tries to discuss those one by one. To begin with, Prof. Bhattacharyya talks about the periodization of the Left Front Rule that is bound to give some new food for research. He says that whenever scholars discuss Left Front, they more or less tend to concentrate on the 'misrule' of that political regime in Bengal as the general trend is to homogenize. Prof Bhattacharyya feels that Atig Ghosh's paper is different here as it brings out layers, plurality and heterogeneity in the rule of Left.

The second issue that Prof Bhattacharyya highlights is the refugee problem. In fact he found it very fascinating, how the proposal talked of the myriad ways to think about the refugee problem. He notes how Atig Ghosh's paper mentioned the massacre at *marichjhanpi* and that and certain other related pointers make him wonder in what aspects Atig Ghosh's paper is different from Debjani Sengupta's 'The Partition of Bengal' take on the same issue. Prof Bhattacharyya feels that a key question that has been raised by this paper already is how does a government look at the refugee issue and was there any kind of calculus at play or not.

At this juncture, Prof. Bhattacharyya introduces a caveat by commenting that It is not unprofitable to look at the Left Front period as a vestige of the Nehruvian period because when one comes to imagine what was happening in the 1960s, especially the mid 1960s, the Congress was collapsing. It was a crisis for sure but nobody was anticipating a complete collapse. It happened eventually through the 1980s and in a pronounced way in the 1990s. Probably the Left was actually offering an alternative system in governance but, according to Prof. Bhattacharyya, it was using some Nehruvian tropes like public sector industries, health etc. In a way, Prof. Bhattacharyya argues, the language used by the established Left was not very different from language of debate used by the political Nehruvian leadership of the times.

The third aspect with regard to Atig Ghosh's paper that Prof Dwaipayan Bhattacharyya comments on is the idea of democracy. He observes that the idea of democracy that was proposed by the Left Front in West Bengal was positioned and formed by anti-emergency rhetoric as it tried to contrast its democratic philosophy with the regimented, hyper state activities going on at the national level at that time. He feels that in this regard, it will be of some interest to review whether the panchayati raj that set up was about decentralization or not.

The fourth thing that Prof. Bhattacharyya points out is the kind of contrast that is drawn in Atig Ghosh's paper between Reform and Revolution. Ranabir Samaddar's work on 'Passive revolution' definitely offers a fine reference point here. Atig Ghosh's paper argued that there was no dialogical relation between the two; as if they habituated two mutually exclusive worlds. By contrast, Professor Bhattacharyya prefers to view this more in terms of a dialogical relation. He suggests that the Left Front

operated at a time when to engage in class dialectics, it was bound to engage in 'block dialectic', to quote political scientist Sudipta Kaviraj.

The fifth thing about Atig Ghosh's paper that Professor Bhattacharya comments on is the institutionalization impulse. He discusses that as a political party gets a form, it becomes given. No questions are then asked. The crisis of leadership was apparent in this as no one thought about how to socialize the party or to mobilize a new leadership. These were critical issues which are coming back to haunt the Left leadership. Without resolving these questions, Prof Bhattacharyya feels, it is virtually impossible to imagine a new Left.

The last observation that Prof. Dwaipayan Bhattacharyya made on Atig Ghosh's paper point is about the instrumental use of the Refugees. He argues that that the Left definitely benefitted from the Refugees as a resource or as a prop that government can't entertain within the state apparatus. He elaborates on this saying that being in government implies various ramifications of earlier stands and philosophies. Thus late 19th century's peasant struggle's momentum was used in carrying out reforms of late 1970s and 80's and then, those were completely deleted from the Left annals. Citing this, Prof Bhattacharyya concludes that this is how probably the relation between movement and government got fractured as the government became extensively bureaucratized.