

To begin with, a big thanks to the organisers for inviting me over, particularly to Anwasha, for coaxing me back to a former haunt of mine. I will speak largely on the written paper, rather than the much shorter presentation that we have had just now.

In the first place, this is a very different paper from the one I read and heard the last time. That time, the stress seemed to be on violence, drawing on the rather unrelated tradition of Sahajanand. This time, the stress is more firmly on the actual events associated with the Bihar Movement, *popularly* known as the JP Movement. The work put in since the time I heard that draft, is absolutely apparent, though he still hasn't abandoned his entanglement with quantum physics. In this paper, Mithilesh has drawn extensively on theoreticians, to which I will come back later, but also on earlier works on the movement like Bipan Chandra, Ghyanasham Shah and Aravind Narayan Das.

But it is here that my first issue with my friend's paper. While he is very clear on the where he gets which part of his analysis among the theoretical and secondary literature he uses, he is completely silent on where he gets his information on the background of the movement and the events of the movement itself. Are they drawn from these secondary sources, the traditional state archives, or from newspapers, or from papers of the movement's various organs, or from oral narratives or other places? I have no problems with any of them, or combinations thereof. But, I feel that the author should have indicated which he is using where. For drawing from different registers of sources does add different hues to how the events may be read, thus the lack of mention of the sources does create some confusion, at least in this discussant's mind.

The confusion is further enhanced by the arrangement of the paper. It goes seamlessly back and forth from the narrative of the movement, various secondary sources, theoretical writings and his own analysis. The repeated journey to and fro becomes a bit difficult to follow at times. This difficulty increases given the rather confusing chronology, but that perhaps comes from my own training in history. So, instead of dwelling on my fuddled mind, let me get into what Mithilesh does do.

In keeping with the theme that Ranabirda underlined in the morning, Mithilesh sets out to draw out what defines the 'popular' in the movement. In doing this, he marshals a formidable array of theoreticians – Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, Gramsci, Mao, Samaddar and Laclau, to name most, but not all. He uses them to map what moment can be usefully called an 'insurrectionary' moment, and what makes another moment that of a popular movement. In doing this, he gives a short, but succinct, account of various unrests and mutinies in India from 1947 to 1974. This, is in keeping with what he started the paper with, the hauntingly anguished *Subah-e-Aazadi* by Faiz Ahmed Faiz. But while he undertakes a formidable theoretical journey, I feel that he does not pay adequate attention to what makes the moment of Bihar particularly insurrectionary or allows for the popular. If the entire period between 1947 and 1974 were filled with unrest all over India, what made Bihar special? What specific elements led to create a particularly insurrectionary situation in Bihar? What about the long history from the Kisan Sabha to the Socialist Mobilisation, from the violent AICC and legislative elections of 1937 to the 1942 insurrection, from the Triveni Sangh to the Kosi Diara and Sathi agitations? What about the gathering storm in Bihar from the 1960s – the food movement, the students' agitation, the repeated police firings and the defeat of the Congress in 1967, with the SSP emerging as the largest of the parties in the SVD Government and the subsequent political turmoil? This history, prior to the Naxalite Movement, has been very thinly dealt with. I agree with Mithilesh and with Marx, that earlier events *can be speculatively distorted so that later history is made the goal of earlier history*, but without this history, a non-distorted one, how does one explain why the Bihar Movement happened in Bihar? As he himself concedes, these movements laid the basis of the Bihar Movement, without making it inevitable. So, how does one draw on the linkages,

of caste, organisations and memories that the Bihar Movement is able to draw on and that in many ways, made the Bihar Movement what it was? This, I feel, is a hindrance in fleshing out the picture he is drawing, whether that of an insurrection or of a popular movement.

Where this paper gets really interesting is when the author maps the departure from the insurrectionary to the popular. The railway strikers and other working class protests, as well as peasant unrests are sought to be sealed off by JP from *his* movement. The Chhatra and Jan Sangharsh Samitis virtually issued diktats to dissociate with these, thus destroying, or at least greatly hampering the ongoing, though putative, interactions and possible alliances between these class actions and the students' agitation. The author points out that JP consciously steers his movement away from such issues, out of the fear that taking up issues related to specific sections of society would antagonise other sections, thus disrupting the character of the people's movement or popular movement. This gives rise to two questions. The first is, where is the evidence of such a conscious analysis of a movement's character before the Owl of Minerva has flown away? Mithilesh himself argues that JP was constantly reacting to the rapidly changing circumstances of the time and his own variegated and unstable support base. And since I agree with him on this, how can a 'leader' placed in this quagmire consciously and deliberately formulate a strategy, let alone a theory of movements, as opposed to tactical lines? And if he can, then how are such theories informed by these circumstances and his support base? I would like to humbly suggest that Mithilesh add slightly to his formidable theoretical array – just one word would suffice in my view – the 'contingent', as formulated by Raj Narain Chandavarkar.

But then comes the most crucial question. Would the worker and peasant-specific demands have taken away the totality of the Total Revolution – a call that was as delightfully vague, spacious, millennial and catch-all as Gandhi's Ram Raj? If the peasant and working class issues have to be abandoned to make the JP Movement popular, what does it say about the nature of this movement? If class and mass issues, or indeed those of gender as Panchali argued yesterday, have to be abandoned to make a movement popular, what does it say of the character of the category popular? What does it say of the people itself? That undeniably is a most disturbing thought that Mithilesh leaves me with, given not only the politics he and I share, but the time we cohabit – the now. After all, have we not all been forced to ask many times, and increasingly since May 2014, what is the character of the people?

Let me finish with another, not unrelated disturbance. He starts, as I have said with Faizi's famous poem. But the script he uses it in Nagri. That, to me, is an act of violence done to something written in Urdu, given that the paper is not in Hindi, but in English. So, to my mind, it could have been written in the English script, or it could be left undisturbed. The related disturbance is this – did my friend and comrade think, consciously or otherwise, that in our time of Dadri, using the Nagri script would make the poem and the poet more popularly accessible?