



POPULAR MOVEMENTS IN WEST BENGAL AND BIHAR

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Introduction

Postcolonial India has witnessed many occurrences of popular movements. Both Bihar and West Bengal are known for radical peasant and student mobilizations during and after the struggle against the colonial rule. While Bihar has also experienced spates of identity based (chiefly along the axis of caste) political movements, which raised the issue of social justice as the core of popular politics, West Bengal is yet to witness any mass-based popular movement against caste hierarchies, while giving birth to huge popular movements on issues of refugee rights, price rise, inflation, civil liberty, land rights, workers' rights, etc. The Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung–Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group research project on *Popular Movements in West Bengal and Bihar* (2016-2018) highlights and explores many such differences and similarities between the forms and trajectories of some of the popular movements that had taken place between the early fifties and the early nineteen-eighties in Bihar and West Bengal. The research was formulated in keeping with a three years' time frame in mind. In the first year (2016), the themes which were covered included the refugee movement in West Bengal, tram and teachers' movement in West Bengal, food movement in West Bengal, J P Movement in Bihar and Marxist Literary Discourses.

The paper on refugee politics in West Bengal in 1950s (*Refugee Movement: Another Aspect of Popular Movements in West Bengal in the 1950s and 1960s* by Sucharita Sengupta and Paula Banerjee, *Policies and Practices, No 80*) discussed in details how refugees became central to the Left politics of the state. The refugees did not see themselves as refugees waiting for government's charity. They saw relief and rehabilitation as their rights as citizens. Their fight for their rights was led by various Left parties. The paper studied the role of various Left parties in mobilizing the refugees staying in camps and colonies. While studying refugee politics in West Bengal, it highlighted the heterogeneous character of this group along the lines of class and caste.

The research on the tram and teachers' movements (*Tram Movement and Teachers' Movement in Kolkata* by Anwesha Sengupta, *Policies and Practices, No 80*) complemented the research on refugees in many ways. When the refugees took to the street under the leadership of UCRC in demand for rehabilitation, the students and labourers came out in large numbers in their support, turning their movement into a "popular" one. The refugees reciprocated by participating in large numbers in two great urban movements of '50s, namely the tram movement against a decision to increase the second class tram fare and teachers' movement demanding a pay hike for the secondary school teachers. The Tram Movement and the Teachers' Movement were extremely violent yet they witnessed massive support from the residents of Calcutta. The movements revealed the discontent among the common people. That there could be such uproar over a 1 paisa hike of the tram fare or the city would come to a standstill for the teachers, point towards the politically vulnerable atmosphere of the period. This would be manifested further during the food movements towards late 1950s and 1960s.

Food scarcity in Bengal had been a continuous feature since 1940s. The famine of 1943 perhaps marked the epoch of such crisis in colonial Bengal. But the situation did not improve with independence, rather scarcity of food grains and high prices became a constant point of criticism of the Congress party in power. People were mobilized across the state in demand of food and West Bengal witnessed two massive movements on this issue – one in 1950 and the other in 1966. Going beyond the city of Calcutta, the protests now engulfed the rural spaces and made it a state-wide affair. Participation came from all quarters of the society. Once again, the movements witnessed massive participation from the students, including school students. A shift was also evident in the nature and contour of popular movements in West Bengal. It was no longer refugees as refugees who formed a crucial support base for such movements; rather they participated as peasants, urban poor, agrarian workers, informal labourers and disgruntled middle class. The effect of the Food

Movements in West Bengal was so intense that it changed the political complexion of the state. In 1967, the United Front (a political front of 14 non-Congress and Left parties) replaced the Congress Government. It also paved the way for Naxalbari, the next militant phase of political movements in West Bengal (*The Defining Moments of Left-Popular Politics in West Bengal: The Food Movements of 1959 & 1966* by Sibaji Pratim Basu, *Policies and Practices*, No 81).

A paper focused on the Bihar Movement under Jayaprakash Narayan, popularly known as the JP Movement. JP movement has been in equal measure celebrated for its stand against a repressive state and vilified for its lack of coherence in ideology, strategy and tactics and even a positive political programme. What cannot be denied though is the fact that it did capture the imagination of a large section of society and more importantly was able to mobilize them across various divides so that the movement could be called for a brief political moment as constituting the 'people.' The paper demonstrated that Bihar Movement was an event that reflected all the contradictions of contemporary times and by rearranging those contradictions changed the structure of democratic politics in India. It also noted the need to reappraise the role of JP. There is a long held belief of JP being a confused popular leader, but the paper has showed him as a tactical leader who always came up with contingent ideas as a response to the events of the popular movement (**From Insurrection to Popular Movement: Bihar Movement, its Possibilities and Limitations** by Mithilesh Kumar, *Policies and Practices*, No 81).

The paper on Marxian aesthetics reflects the culture of debating and discussing Marxist philosophy and politics in Bengal in the decades after independence. The Bengali intellectuals based in Calcutta and Dhaka had always been sympathetic to and informed about various shades of left politics. They had engaged with Marxism both at the levels of discourses and practices. Intense debates regarding Marxian aesthetics have shaped the literary, cinematic and other art forms in West Bengal in '50s, '60s and '70s when the politics of the streets, factories and fields were being shaped by Communists of different shades (**Marxian Literary Debates and Discourses** by Subhoranjan Dasgupta, *Policies and Practices*, No 81).

By way of a theoretical exposition of the concepts of class, people, citizens, multitudes, and the political moment in popular struggles/revolutions in terms of an analysis of Marx's *Class Struggles in France* and *Civil War in France* along with the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, an essay by Ranabir Samaddar entitled *Class, People and Populism* has been published as part of the *Policies and Practices*, No 75.

Naxalbari Movement that shaped the West Bengal politics of late '60s and '70s was examined in 2017. Since 1967, peasants' struggles in Naxalbari, Debra, Gopiballabhpur and other areas in West Bengal started to take shape inspired by the ideal of the peasant revolution in China. It also included the wave of students' movement which, inspired by the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (GPCR) of China, launched anti (prevailing) education system and movement against icons of the established culture. A section of these students also went to villages to organise/strengthen peasants' struggle in different pockets of the state. These mobilizations were countered by the state machinery with brutal police operations including arrests under special laws, torture, and killing. What is once again worth studying in this case is the overwhelming response from people of different social, political and cultural backgrounds to these mobilizations ranging from silent support and sympathy to active participation in militant struggle. Undoubtedly, through these movements a notion of people came into being. And hence, the question to be asked is: What constitutes the *people* in popular movements. This had been one of the major research questions in all the papers written in the first year of the project and this will also shape the research on Naxalbari movement in the second year (Ranabir Samaddar's work in *Occupy College Street: Notes from the Sixties*, contends with, elaborates upon and analyses the insurgent movements in the

decade of the sixties of the last century in Kolkata, wherein the tactic of ‘occupation’ was employed for purposes of mobilisation - ***Policies and Practices, No 89***).

Naxalbari Movement inspired multifaceted creativity; from propagandist poetry to reflective verse; from novels or prose narratives hailing the movement to stories and novels severely criticizing the theoretical ballast and its related activism; from revelatory plays transcreating the most decisive moments of the movement on the stage to cut and dried one act plays serving as slices of the experiential truth; from gripping films like Hajar Churasir Ma and Herbert to full-throated songs which exhilarated hundreds. While in the first year debates around Marxian aesthetics in '50s and '60s have been studied, in the second year special emphasis will be given to the world of literature, films and art that were inspired or were produced as criticism to the Naxalite Movement. Particular importance will be provided to the theatre activities of the time as this was one site where Naxalbari emerged as a major theme. Utpal Dutta's *Teer*, Anal Gupta's *Rakter Rang* or Amal Roy's *Aat Jora Khola Chokh* are but few examples of the theatres of the time (Subharanjan Dasgupta explores the subject in his current work entitled, ***The Cultural-Creative Dimension of the Naxalite Movement (Policies and Practices, No 90)***).

Calcutta was the major site of the refugee movement or tram and teachers' movement. But with food movement and Naxalite movement, suburbs and districts of West Bengal became major epicentres of protest. There were other intense and popular mass movements outside Calcutta as well in '50s, '60s and '70s. Labour movement in Burnpur steel factory (near Asansol in Burdwan district) in 1950s, peasant agitation in Durgapur against their displacement for establishing the steel plant, strikes and labour protest in jute belts of Hooghly and Howrah, refugee agitation in Nadia or demands raised in various parts of Bengal for merger of Bengali speaking areas of Bihar with West Bengal require closer focus in order to understand the nature and extent of popular politics beyond the metropolis. What constituted 'people' in these protests, did it go beyond the groups of labourers/peasants/refugees to draw a wider section of the society, which movement drew attention of the city elite and what remained invisible to them, was the student groups, left sympathizers and city intellectuals equally quick in responding to these movements? (Anwasha Sengupta and Atig Ghosh focus on the aspect of popular protests in the districts of West Bengal in their paper entitled, ***Popular Movements in the Districts of Bengal, Birbhum, Nadia and Midnapore, 1950s-1970s in Policies and Practices, No 92***).

The Left Front's coming to power in West Bengal (1977) as a possible moment of culmination of the decades of popular movements in this province was explored in Atig Ghosh's research entitled, ***Long March Or Garden Path? The Left Front's First Term in West Bengal (1971-1982)***. How did the new government under the leadership of Jyoti Basu address the demands that had been raised through such movements, how did it cater to the needs and expectations of the "peoples" that were created in the course of such movements and what spaces for new protest movements were created are important to understand. While the new government implemented radical land reforms and freed the political prisoners immediately after coming to the power, in 1978 they tortured the Dalit refugees in Marichjhapi, killing hundreds of them, in the name of protecting a tiger reserve. Examining the early years of Left Front government - popular measures that they took as well as state oppression that they unleashed - is important in order to understand the history of the popular politics in West Bengal in the decades after independence (***Policies and Practices, No 93***).

Coming to Bihar, the focus was on the backward classes' movement led by Karpoori Thakur, a close aide of Jayprakash Narayan. Popularly known as 'jana-nayak' (peoples' leader), Thakur had been chief minister of Bihar twice (between 1970-1971 and 1977-1979). The Karpoori Thakur government introduced reservation in government jobs for the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in 1978. A year later, B P Mandal submitted his recommendations on OBCs and affirmative action to the central government under Morarji Desai. This twin move brought in its wake seismic changes in

the politics of Bihar as well as India. The objective of this research project is to study the implications of these moves on the popular politics and mass movement of Bihar. The project investigates the entire process of defining caste, the debates around the parameters and political maneuver of inclusion and exclusion. The question of social justice also emerged in the background of the contingent defeat of the left movement in general and the Naxalite Movement in particular. This meant that the issue of *izzat* (dignity) and land for the dalits were also relegated into the background. The research project investigated if the rise of politics of social justice in Bihar meant a suppression of radical and revolutionary politics and premature end to dalit politics. Also, how the government played a decisive role in the suppression of these alternative politics (Manish Jha and Mithilesh Kumar give further details about the *Backward Classes Movements led by Karpuri Thakur* in their respective papers - *Policies and Practices: No 91*).

The research agenda for 2018 was to organise collaborative workshops and conferences for the purpose of dissemination of knowledge beyond the confines of Kolkata. A Collaborative Workshop was organized on June 22, 2018, *Of Resistances and their Interfaces*, which contended with populism, popular movements, popular/populist politics and figures. The workshop explored various dimensions of social and popular movements as well as insurgencies in different parts of India. The International conference in August-September *Who are the People? Populism and the Populist Movements*, sought to explore the hitherto unexplored areas in the context of this project with the following themes in mind: Populism as a global phenomenon: ideology, dialogue, political approach; Populism and its attitude to law; Populism and Gender and Institutions, Immigrants and Populist Politics.

The section on popular movements of the Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group website http://www.mcrg.ac.in/RLS_PML/RLS_PML_Home.asp may be visited for greater details on the aforementioned subject.



Posters of the events organised by CRG in association with RLS during the course of the 3-year project titled 'Popular Movements in West Bengal and Bihar'

2016

RESEARCH BRIEFS (2016)

Refugee Movement: Another Aspect of Popular Movements in West Bengal in the 1950s and 1960s

Paula Banerjee & Sucharita Sengupta

By now it is common knowledge how Indian independence was born out of partition that displaced 15 million people. In West Bengal alone 30 lakh refugees entered until 1960. In the 1970s the number of people entering from the east was closer to a few million. In the last sixteen years there is however a burgeoning literature on the partition refugees in West Bengal. The literature on refugees followed certain familiar terrain. I will endeavour to explain through broad sketches how that narrative evolved. To begin with it was a literature of victimhood in which the refugees were portrayed only as victims. It cannot be denied that in large parts these refugees were victims but even as victims they constantly tried to negotiate with powers that be and strengthen their own agency. By fixing their identities as victims and not problematising that victimhood the refugees were for a long time displaced from the centre stage of their own narratives. With the ascendance of cultural studies in West Bengal the refugee experience was reduced to the memory of the refugees. Authors such as Dipesh Chakravarty, Manas Ray etc. discussed the imaginative mappings of the refugee lives through memories. The understanding was that a refugee lived in his/her memories whether they be of pre-partition belongings or of post partition localities. These writings did not contradict the victimhood narrative but added a new dimension to it. Such narratives were often anecdotal and reductive challenging the understanding of refugee experience not through multiplicity but through singularity. Often it was the author's own experience that was privileged over group experiences and it is through such discourses that the author reclaimed agency. Following these appeared a number of writings that discussed institutional responses to the arrival of forced migrants from both the west and the east. These writings by authors such as Samir Das and Monica Mandal discussed how the newly born governments operating within the imperatives of the state and nation building exercise came to terms with the influx of such huge population groups. The measures that were taken by these governments could be categorised 2 under relief and rehabilitation. These authors critique how that state viewed refugees not as individuals but in terms of numbers, shelter, food, health, hygiene etc. By doing so however these administrative agencies made it possible for these huge groups to survive and prosper. These authors often conclude that given the challenges and obstacles the administration worked creditably. These authors therefore shifted the spotlight from the refugees to the administrators thus once again displacing the refugees. Apart from these there are other authors who have tried to understand refugee experience through experiences of particular communities. Shekhar Bandyopadhyay, Joya Chatterjee and others belong to these schools of thought. These authors feel that by generalising much of refugee experiences are lost. Also they feel that each population group had experiences that were unique to that group and cannot be reducible. Although there is much that can be applauded in these writings but perhaps there is another way of looking at refugee experiences that has been undertaken by authors such as Dipankar Sinha who talks about the self help initiatives of refugees who set up colonies and markets and strategize on their lives and lived experiences of their neighbours for sheer survival. The authors who have either dealt with communities of displaced or refugee activities in building localities have seen refugees as agents of their own lives. It is true that their own lives were sometimes torn apart by greater forces than their own selves. But it is not to be denied that they were agents and through their agentive and communitarian struggles they emerged as empowered communities. Although partition refugees in West Bengal have now become a favourite topic of research for many scholars and a number of research scholars in different universities in West Bengal are doing their PhD in this topic but still there are aspects that have not been studied adequately. One such aspect is how the refugee movement became part of the popular movements

in West Bengal in the 1950s and 1960s. Refugees fight for land titles and the role of UCRC has been studied by a few authors but has not been adequately connected to the larger popular movements. Most of these authors have not tried to portray its connections with movement against eviction, land riots, food movements or the women's movement. In this section I will endeavour to explore that connection. However, this will not be in the form of a research paper. I intend to do a collection that will contain documents that will address the history of how refugees became leading actors in the popular movements in West Bengal. For starters the refugee women changed the notion of who can be considered as *bhadramahila* in the post partition days. This collection will contain speeches of leaders and politicians on the issue and all documents that are in the public domain, albeit hidden from our everyday visions. It will also contain newspaper reports, government documents and these documents will have an annotated bibliography pointing to the archival materials that contributes to this narrative. In the introduction I will point out how refugees became part of the larger political protests followed by a collection of documents and an annotated bibliography.

For Full Paper visit: <http://www.mcrg.ac.in/PP80.pdf>

A Study of Anti-Tram Fare Hike Resistance and Teachers' Movement

Anwasha Sengupta

My research focuses on two significant political movements that took place in West Bengal in 1950s – a) tram fare enhancement resistance movement of 1953 and b) teachers' movement of 1954. '50s was a turbulent decade in the history of West Bengal. If the previous decade was marked by war, famine and riots, this was a decade of crisis too. This decade witnessed intense political mobilization on issues of refugee rights, second class tram fare enhancement, revision of salary and dearness allowance of school teachers, proposed merger of Bengal and Bihar and food shortage. Despite a national government in power, in '50s "Calcutta constantly appear[ed] to be on the brink of the violence". Or was it because of a national government that the politics of mass agitation gained increasing currency, as people became more and more restless when their own independent government failed to deliver? Among other crucial enquiries, I put forward this question as an entry point towards understanding the "popular" politics of West Bengal in 1950s. But before elaborating my research questions, let me discuss briefly the two aforementioned political movements.

In 1953, when the British owned tram company decided to hike the second class tram fare by 1paise, the city witnessed one of the most violent protest movements of the decade that continued for almost a month marked by repeated confrontation between the protesters and the police. The leadership of the movement came from a hurriedly formed Tram and Bus Fare Enhancement Resistance Committee presided by Hemanta Kumar Basu of Forward Block. Important members of this committee included Jyoti Basu (CPI), Subodh Bannerjee (SUC), Suresh Banerjee (Praja Socialist Party) and Satya Priya Banerjee of Marxist Forward Block. Calcutta Tram Workers' Union also opposed the move. They argued that the fare hike was unethical particularly because the Tram Company had already been making huge profit.

The struggle began on July 1 when the Committee urged the commuters to keep paying the old fare. The modes of protest kept changing. If initially the protesters boarded the trams in large numbers with the exact old fare in their pockets, a few days later the Resistance Committee called for boycotting the trams altogether. Hence, from July 7, the city witnessed almost empty trams running from one depot to another. Consequently, the company suffered from serious monetary loss. Barricading the tram lines, organizing demonstrations and putting up posters to mobilize people

became the main strands of the movement. Another development intensified the struggle against the government further. A strike was going on in Burnpur where the police opened fire on July 5 and killed at least 7 workers and injured many. Several trade unions, except for Congress led INTUC, came together in protest against the police terror and a Joint Struggle Committee was formed. They, along with the Resistance Committee, called for a state wide strike on July 15. Among various agendas, the fare hike was a crucial point against which the strike was called. This strike was one of the most successful strikes of this period. Despite repeated police action, “about 10 lakh people struck work, affecting practically every industry, including jute mills, collieries, engineering works, bus transport and offices. Shops and markets remained closed even in the Congress strongholds like Burrabazar area dominated by Marwari business magnets.” The tramway men initially stayed away from this strike. But from July 17 CTWU and Calcutta Tram Mazdoor Panchayat went for an indefinite strike in support of the demands raised by the Resistance Committee. Violent clashes between the protesters and the police from across the city were reported, reporters of leading dailies were attacked, people were killed, many were injured and properties were destroyed in the course of this one month, particularly till July 22. The movement ended in a victory for the protesters as the older fare was reintroduced.

The government was certainly taken aback by the magnitude of the protest, so were some of the later commentators of this movement. B.C. Roy, who was in Europe when the movement gained currency, on his return expressed regret “that so much trouble had arisen over a matter “which could have been settled without any difficulty across the conference table.” He insisted that the “root cause” of the movement laid elsewhere: “economic situation of the country was largely responsible for the agitation against the government and that situation was further aggravated by the ever increasing unemployment problem.” Thus, in his analysis, the enhancement of tram fare by 1 paisa, provided the already agitated and frustrated people of the city a reason to erupt. Perhaps, Bidhan Roy was indicating towards the refugees. The city had by then received several millions of refugees and they were being continuously cited as the reason behind the economic crisis and the problem of unemployment in West Bengal. Bidhan Roy’s plan of refugee dispersal, i.e., sending away the refugees to scarcely populated areas within and outside West Bengal, was at least partly to dilute ‘the political impact of these unwelcome “trouble-makers” [i.e., the refugees] by scattering them in far-away districts.’ In this context, “overpopulation leading to unemployment leading to frustration leading to violence” seemed easy logic. Indeed, as some of the existing works indicate, refugees played a crucial role in this movement. For instance, in the words of Prafulla Chakrabarty, “...the movement demonstrated that the workers, the students and the lower middle class had been brought together and behind them all lurked the ubiquitous figure of the refugee.” Such a statement is corroborated by memoirs like that of refugee activist Tejendralal Dutta. He describes vividly how the refugee youths, both men and women, of South Calcutta colonies participated in this “completely political movement”. He further writes that “because of this movement, the squatter colonies of this area got their political character.” In other words, through this movement the colonies were mobilized against Congress and were brought together within the rubric of Left politics. Majumdar’s description of the movement is significant as it illustrates the role of various sections of the society in this movement. He writes about Haren Roy, a tube well mechanic who was given the responsibility of uprooting the tram lines near Gariahat as he had many helpful tools. Then there were local women who supported the movements in various ways – if two Punjabi ladies poured water from their first floor flat on a police team rounding up some of the agitators, a Bengali working woman gave protection to the author when he was fleeing from the police. Thus, in the refugee dominated areas - women, working class and youths all seemed to participate or to sympathize with the movement. But the question that needs further probing is whether the participants and sympathizers were protesting as refugees or as students, workers and common

people disillusioned by the “national” government, its police and its administration? The violence that marked the movement needs to be understood further as well. It has been repeatedly said that the agitation against tram fare hike was extremely, and according to many, unnecessarily violent. The government insisted about the involvement of the hooligans and “anti-socials” in this agitation. Sandip Bandyopadhyay has argued that part of the reason behind such a violent movement resided with the fact that many among the leaders were “revolutionary terrorists” of colonial India. Moreover, even though the Communist Party had done away with its “ultra left” line, Bandyopadhyay thinks that some of the party supporters and other Left leaders pursued a radical course of action during the tram fare movement. What were the various forms of police violence and that of the participants’ violence, whether there were any internal debates about the way the movement should move forward, did violence deter certain sections of the population from the movement – are some of the questions that this research will address.

The tram movement was only the beginning of a long decade of anti-establishment mass movements. In less than a year’s time, West Bengal witnessed one of the biggest movements by the teachers under the leadership of All Bengal Teachers’ Association (ABTA). Since independence, there had been a continuous demand from the secondary school teachers for an increased dearness allowance. As early as on September 1, 1948, a strike was observed by them on this issue. But since their demands were not met by the West Bengal government, ABTA launched a sit-down strike in early 1954 asking for a salary of Rs. 180 per month (instead of Rs. 75) with a dearness allowance of Rs. 35 per month. An All Parties Teachers’ Struggle Coordination Committee was formed that provided the leadership to the movement. From February 10, the teachers began their indefinite sit-in demonstration near Rajbhavan. At least 3000 teachers participated. On 15th when, despite requests from the Opposition, the governor refused to meet the protesting teachers, the members of Opposition boycotted the session and joined the protesting teachers. Teachers’ movement turned violent on February 16 when there was a direct confrontation between the police and the participating teachers on their way to the Assembly to disrupt the ongoing budget session in order to draw attention of the House to their demands. The confrontation was severe, claiming 4 lives and injuring 65 others. Throughout the day there were several instances of burning down the buses and trams, smashing street lamps and traffic signals, barricading roads etc. even shops were looted at various parts of the city. As the ABTA narrative goes, earlier the “leadership suffered from hesitation of wielding the tools of the working class-street demonstration with shouting slogans, strike, mass squatting, courting arrest etc, against injustice, for winning rights and privileges. In 1954, under the new leadership A.B.T.A. broke down that barrier and decided firmly to wield those tools. Street demonstration, strike, squatting, courting arrest were taken up as in the teachers’ movement in 1954. Doubt about its propriety was dispelled. A broad alliance was forged with students, guardians’ all other working people and the left political forces.” To combat such a movement, military was brought in. However, given the fact that the teachers were paid a pittance, their struggle received sympathy from the wider society and the media. Students and labourers came out in support. As Sandip Bandyopadhyay quoted an eye witness, “when the teachers sat down on the roads in protest, almost a drama began to unfold. People from all over the city came out in thousands to show solidarity to the teachers. Someone sent a basket full of oranges for the protesters. Dwariks, the owners of a famous sweet shop in Bhowanipore, sent Luchi and sweets to the teachers.” Jugantar noted that “if the teacher is starving, education system will never improve.” The same report also harshly criticized the government’s attitude towards education: “the government is saying that it has no money – fine, but then how is this government spending so much money in deep sea fishing, underground railway system, manufacturing gas from waste, automatic Finish machine to count votes etc; how is it spending so much money for the expansion of the police and administration? Education and health is of pivotal importance in the making and

the progress of a nation. And the government lacks money when it comes to these sectors. Actually, the West Bengal government does not even think that health and education should be their topmost priority.” How and why did a movement of the teachers attract other sections of the society to such an extent? What was the role of the Left parties in this movement? To what extent women, refugees and religious minority took part in the teachers’ strike? These are some of the research questions that the project seeks to answer. More importantly, my research tries to understand the decade of 1950s as a whole. The new born national government continuously faced violent protests on several issues. Was it because people expected much from their own government but the later failed to deliver. Why was ’50s such a turbulent decade? Was it because of the refugees? But partition and its consequences may not have all the answers for the questions that I raise. Sekhar Bandyopadhyaya has already warned us that too much emphasis on partition “excludes endless complexities of decolonization as an experience.” Answers need to be sought in peoples’ expectations from a national government, in long tradition of political protests in colonial times, in involvement of people in violent forms of mass action (like communal riots), in particular Left political thoughts and traditions, in labour unrest, unemployment and food shortage, in the behaviour of police, bureaucrats and the government in handling popular protests, and of course in refugee crisis.

For Full Paper visit: <http://www.mcrg.ac.in/PP80.pdf>

West Bengal: The Food Movements of 1959 & 1966

Sibaji Pratim Basu

In the turbulent courses of the history of people’s/popular movements that largely shaped the politics of the first two decades of the Indian State of West Bengal, the Food Movements 1959 and 1966 have a very distinct and glorious status. The end of the World War II saw the beginning of a wave of popular protests in Bengal. Initially organised (in most cases) by the left in general and the Communist Party of India (CPI) in particular, these protest movements took almost ‘spontaneous’ shape, as common masses, without party affiliations or discipline, also joined these movements in great numbers. Mainly city/town based, these movements witnessed many street fighting between the masses and the police, ransacking/destruction of official properties/vehicles: in a word, a severe deterioration in law and order situation. This kind of partly organised but vastly participated movements of radical nature (which often crossed the boundaries of ‘lawful’ movements) marked the first phase of left politics in West Bengal till they came to power in 1967. In another context, Charles Tilly has called this sort of protest movement based politics as ‘contentious politics’. (Tilly and Tarrow 2006) After this phase, the left politics itself got divided between the ‘official’ parties (who were in favour of ‘using’ parliamentary means to further the cause of revolution) and the ‘revolutionary’/Maoists (who believed in immediate peasant revolution on Maoist line). In these movements we find many features, which Tilly has associated with ‘social movements’, which according to him, first came into being in Europe in the 18th century and spread throughout the world through colonialism, trade and migration. (Tilly 2004: 53-54) At the same time, one may also find that in many respect it was ‘rhizomatic’ (the term is borrowed from Deluze and Guattari 2004: 3-28) – created its own structures and functions, without caring much about the vertical leadership.

1959

Intensity and impact-wise, the Food Movement has its unique existence yet, it can be seen as a continuum, a legacy that started in the post-1943-famine left movements and passed through the Tebhaga movement during the last years of the Raj, and the movements over the corrupt and

inadequate Public Distribution System between 1956 and 1958. It continued through the first half of 1960s and reached its zenith in 1966, when, besides the old urban support base, it gradually engulfed the rural spaces and made it a state-wide affair. The PDS had steadily declined in the 'new' state of West Bengal, which came into being since the simultaneous Independence of India and Partition of Bengal. The new state in the Indian Union roughly comprised 1/3rd of the land of the united Bengal (before Independence) but had to bear the pressure of a huge number of (mostly Hindu) refugees from the eastern side of Bengal (which then became East Pakistan and since 1971, Bangladesh). The new Congress government in the state followed the old World-War II-time restrictions over the inter-state and inter-district movement of food grains without reforming the existing malfunctioning PDS. However, the problem did not lie with West Bengal alone. If we go by the official statistics, from the early-1950s to the mid-1960s, we will find a huge gap between production and procurement of food grains, which in turn also affected the PDS in a great way. The situation in West Bengal, mainly because of Partition and population pressure, was perhaps worse. In 1948, the state government could reach only 50% of its target (11.6 lakh tons approximately) regarding procurement and distribution (through PDS) of food-grains. The scenario further deteriorated between 1950 and 1952. In these years only 1, 35,000; 1, 70,000 and 2, 70,000 tons had been distributed through ration-shops: though in these years, population escalated steeply owing to fresh flow of refugees. But the surprise came in the year 1952-53. In this year, Bengal saw a good harvest but the provincial government, without making attempts to stock food-grains (mainly rice) for future needs, decontrolled the supply and distribution of food, which in turn encouraged the hoarders and black-marketers to create an artificial scarcity of rice. The consequence of these events began to be felt shortly. The price-index of rice rose from Rs. 382 per ton in December 1955 to 532 in December 1956. The situation worsened in early 1959. In Kolkata and in some Southern Bengal districts, rice was sold between Rs. 28 and Rs. 30 per maund (1 maund = 37.324 kg). Hoarding and black-marketing became rampant in the state, creating a near-famine like situation in rural Bengal. The left leaders took a twine policy in this regard. They brought the issue of food-scarcity inside the State Assembly and thereby, drew public and media attention. Secondly, as a strategy of organising anti-government mass movements, they formed various issue-based committees to draw popular support beyond party-line. The Price Increase and Famine Resistance Committee (PIFRC) was one such committee, which played a historic role during the food movement. But in the Assembly House the left/opposition members also raised the debate over the scarcity to such a pitch that the government side seemed, at many times, almost stumbling. From the beginning of 1959, the government and the opposition were (as if) warming up for a forthcoming battle which would actually take place between the end of August and early-September. The preparation for the 'big fight' was on within and outside the Assembly. After the tumultuous 5-days of violence (between 31 August and 4 September), counter-violence and uncertainty, three main kinds of assessment emerged in the discourse of civil society, media and political parties. The first kind was an angry reaction against the police action/government's handling of the situation. The second kind blamed the left/organisers of the movement for indulging in "lawless anarchy", which resulted in loss of life and property, and saw the "communist conspiracy" in it. The third kind preferred a middle-road of assessment, while criticising the government's food policy and also its handling of the situation, it also criticised the left leadership for having no control over the situation. The left/opposition parties, which initiated the movement under the PIFRC, naturally belonged to the first section, which squarely held the B.C. Roy government responsible for the "police atrocities" and "mass killings". In the heated Assembly debates between 21 and 28 September and again on 4 December, allegations and counter-allegations followed. All non/unparliamentarily behaviour occurred between the treasury bench and the opposition blaming each other. The members used slangs and

abusive language (which had been “expunged” from the proceedings), “called names”, and even, on occasions, allegedly showed shoes to each other and threw them on one another.

1966

The PIFRC formally announced the withdrawal of the food movement on 26 September, 1959, on the day, in which the foundation of a permanent Martyrs’ Column was laid at Subodh Mallick Square. But the spirit of the movement did not die. Its echoes could be heard in near and distant future. The February March of 1966 witnessed again a fiercer food movement in the state. This time the source-place of the movement shifted from Kolkata to districts – involving a greater number of rural people than before and making the small towns and villages, the theatre of an exciting and gruesome drama. Unlike, the movement of ’59, the ’66 movement was more spontaneous and popular. The price of rice reached Rs. 5/ per kg that year. Kerosene, the main domestic fuel for the village people and the city-poor became more and more scarce. To cap it all, Prafulla Sen, the new C.M. after the demise of B.C. Roy, made a unique suggestion in a speech. In view of growing scarcity of rice, he advised the people of state to change their food habit. He suggested that people should shift in their choice: from rice to wheat/flour. He also argued that they could also live on “green-bananas” because it had more nutrition value than potatoes. On the 16th, the police again fired on the agitators at Swarupnagar, killing a 15- year-old school-boy, Nurul Islam and severely injuring his schoolmate, Manindra Biswas during a demonstration against the scarcity of kerosene and the steep prices of essential commodities. The news spread like forest-fire. And unlike ’59, this time the people from districts/villages did not assemble in Kolkata to meet their demands but they fought back the police and administration in their different localities. Towns and villages of the southern parts of the state like Bashirhat, Swarupnagar, Habra, Krishnanagar, Ranaghat, Chakdah, Hind Motor, Uttarpara Asansol, Dhubulia, Plassey, Beldanga, Berhampur and many other places saw incessant processions, demonstrations, blockades of roads/railways, destruction of electric points of railways, closure of schools and clashes between the agitators and police, during the month-long movement, spanning between 16 February and 14 March. The Immediate Effect and After Effect of the Food Movement were so intense that it changed the political complexion of the state. It did not only ensure a steady decline in Congress support in the state but also became one of the factors that led to the split of the CPI. Marcus Franda, the US scholar on the state politics in West Bengal, also held that the 1959 food movement had an impact on the internal debates with the CPI in West Bengal. (Franda 1971) According to him, the militant campaign against the Congress state government was used by the leftist, anti-Congress sections (known as the ‘let-wing’) within the CPI to subdue those sections (popularly known as the ‘right-wing’) that sought tactical cooperation with Congress. The saga of popular social movements had their traces here and there, even after the United Front government came to power in 1967. But gradually the left parties, especially CPI(M) appropriated this space. They could do it more easily, after the virtual “smashing” and “elimination” of the left-radicals, the main forces behind Naxalbari movement. When, the left-parliamentarians came to power again in 1977 under the new avatar called the Left Front (LF), the flow of spontaneity gradually became a matter of routine-ritual under the absolute control of the “party”, i.e. CPI(M).... Then, in 2007, almost five decades after the Food Movement of 1959 and four decades after 1966, a mass outrage over the malfunctioning of PDS burst out in many districts of the state. (Banerjee in Basu and Dasgupta ed. 2010:91-107) Popularly known as “ration riots”, this apparently anomic movement in three southern and one northern district shook the foundation of LF in the panchayat (three-tier rural self-government) elections in 2008 and proved once again that the ‘rhizome’ of 1959 could surface at any moment and take any shape even in distant futures.

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JP Movement in Bihar

The Nonlocal Entanglement of Violence and ‘People’: A Study of Bihar Movement, 1974

Mithilesh Kumar

Sadiyon ki thandhee-bujhee raakh sugbuga uthee,
Mittee sone ka taaj pahan ithalaatee hai;
Do raah, samay ke rath ka gharghar-naad suno,
Sinhaasan khaalee karo ki janata aatee hai.
Phaavade aur hal raajadand banane ko hain,
Dhoosarata sone se shrrngaar sajaatee hai;
Do raah, samay ke rath ka gharghar-naad suno,
Sinhaasan khaalee karo ki janata aatee hai.

Ramdhari Singh ‘Dinkar’

The justification of the rather unwieldy title for the proposal is necessary. The two terms ‘nonlocal’ and ‘entanglement’ come from quantum physics. These concepts are extremely complex and mathematical and are objects of intense debate in physics. What we are interested in here is the popular definition of these as given by the physicists and that which eminently suits our purpose in the analysis of popular movement. Albert Einstein called non-locality “spooky actions at a distance” and it is defined “as the apparent ability of objects to instantaneously know about each other’s state, even when separated by large distances (potentially even billions of light years), almost as if the universe at large instantaneously arranges its particles in anticipation of future events.” Entanglement is a phenomenon whereby “particles that interact with each other become permanently correlated, or dependent on each other’s states and properties, to the extent that they effectively lose their individuality and in many ways behave as a single entity.” We are using these two concepts integrally for our analysis of popular movement and violence. The hypothesis of the research project is that what we understand as an upsurge of a singular moment of popular movement like the Bihar Movement is, in fact, informed and fundamentally shaped by various small, local, sporadic yet sustained and most importantly violent struggles that first articulates the demand and, to a large extent, the tactics of a popular movement. However, a popular movement like the Bihar Movement is not simply a sum total or the grander version of these small but varied struggles. It also signals a great schism, a break and a leap, spatially and temporally, between the local struggles and the emergent popular movement. It is in the moment of the schism and within that schism that ‘people’ which go on to make the popular movement are formed. This schism, break and leap is necessary to make a popular movement. Also, this break will necessarily be violent and hence it can be said that a popular movement, in this case the Bihar Movement, is reordering and reconfiguring violence. The terms non-locality and entanglement then make perfect sense as analytical too. Violence effects, at large distance (from Nav Nirman Movement in Gujarat to Bihar Movement, from Musharai to Patna) the formation of the people and also that their political destinies are inextricably linked. The objective is to study this relationship between violence and ‘people’.

Lalan Tiwari in his exhaustive work Democracy and Dissent: A Case Study of the Bihar Movement 1974-75 begins his narrative from March 6, 1974 when students and youth started to protest against unemployment, rising prices, corruption and black marketing. The protest spread and by March 18 it had engulfed almost whole of Bihar and on that day clashes broke out between police and the

students which resulted in opening of fire by the police and several students dead. It was here that Jayprakash Narayan entered the fray on the invitation of the students and took the leadership to the extent that the whole movement became synonymous with him. It was now also known as the JP Movement. This, according to Tiwari, was the beginning of the tumultuous popular movement which was going to redefine politics and democracy in post-independent India. This might well be true and it is for the historians to come to a conclusion on that but it is important to analyse what this movement had as repertoire (in the sense of Charles Tilly) available to itself and what it added to it. Tiwari mentions some of the most exemplary experiments by the Bihar Chhatra Sangharsh Samiti especially in organizing at the grassroots level to stridently asking the legislative members for their resignation as an act of protest. When JP entered the movement to lead with the call for a 'Total Revolution' the template was almost set and the challenge for him was to construct a people who will bring that total revolution. Before, we set out to investigate how JP created the people of the movement it is essential to examine what this movement had at its disposal in terms of strategy and tactics. It will be fruitful to trace one strand of JP movement in the peasant movement led by Sahjanand Saraswati. This is important because the question of land and peasant will be at the heart of politics in Bihar for the entire post-independent period. To this what was available to the Bihar Movement was the experiment of Vinoba Bhave's Bhoodan Movement. The split between Bhave and JP is one of the more interesting moments in the politics of Bihar Movement. Finally, the spring thunder of the Naxalbari movement provided another articulation for the movement. One should bear in mind that JP came back to active politics in late 1960s with his intervention in the violence of Musahari and more importantly understood the futility of the Bhoodan/Gramdan Movement. JP in the instance of Musahari must have acutely realized the importance of calibrating violence to solve the problem of agrarian unrest in Bihar. As a proponent of non-violence his greatest dilemma must have been to make clear distinctions between force, violence and non-violence. It is thus no surprise that in the later stages of the movement JP gave a call to the soldiers to refuse to follow the orders what they thought was wrong, unjust and against their conscience. Clearly, the Total Revolution was a break from the Gandhian non-cooperation and civil disobedience. However, even here the template was already provided by the mutiny of the PAC in UP in 1973. At the heart of this mutiny was the demand of better working conditions and stopping the humiliating behaviour of the officers. The demand to not follow unjust order has already been raised and with violence. We see, thus, that there were competing political forces and movements which were already present in Bihar. In fact, according to one estimate, there were around 700 agrarian agitations in 1970 alone in Bihar. One should also keep in mind that Bihar was still coming to grips with the famine of 1966-1967. Paul Brass in an excellent study has shown the calculations of electoral politics, factionalism in Bihar and famine. In a telling observation Brass says that the crisis of famine was not only politicized from the onset but that it was democratized. It was democratic in the sense that politicians, press, people, the central government as well as the state government were in confrontation with each other to define the crisis. This leads us to investigate the more obscure arena in the study of popular movements: political economy. There is a link between political economy and the formation of the people that this research project wants to investigate. One has to ask the question as to what were those material conditions that made it possible for several classes and identity groups to form political alliances, howsoever contingent, unstable or fluid. One needs to keep in mind the imposition of professional tax in 1973 which bristled the middle classes at the time when unemployment, price rise and hoarding were rampant. Coupled with the agrarian crisis on the edge it is hardly a wonder that such an alliance could be forged. Few things are clear from the brief narrative above. There were material conditions for a popular radical political alliance, the situation of political economy made that condition possible, there was enough violence to concern the state and allow it to use repressive violence (the movement had entered in the realm of

forbidden claim-making to invoke Tilly again), and there was the emerging vanguard to lead the movement and that vanguard was not only JP but the new forms of organization that came up during the movement. In any analysis of the Bihar Movement it is necessary to meticulously investigate the emergence of these new forms of organization because it is a contention of this research project that the structure, politics and ideology of electoral parties will never remain the same. It is in these organizational apparatuses that new forms of political networks and patronage were formed for the new brand of socialism in India. However, all this still does not explain the event of Bihar Movement. As mentioned earlier, the attempt of this research project is to analyse not only as a continuity of the past and contemporary movements but as a break from them and this hypothesis will inform the research questions and the research method of the project.

Research Questions

Principal research question: How did Bihar Movement produced the 'people' by galvanizing the competing and collaborating movements and demands and making a break from them to propel it as a popular movement?

Secondary research questions:

- a) What role did violent movements played in the making of the Bihar Movement?
- b) What were the organizational innovations of the Bihar Movement?
- c) What were the political ideologies that emerged which gave it coherence, Total Revolution, etc.?
- d) What were the inherent contradictions of the Bihar Movement especially around caste mobilizations?
- e) How did Bihar Movement and its populism form the processes of governance?
- f) How did it informed other movement such as the All India Railway Strike of 1974 which began just a few months later than the Bihar Movement? Ranabir Samaddar in his study has already shown the complexity of struggles between the rank and file workers, leadership of the union and governmental bureaucracy. It is important to see the link as well as the discontent between a popular movement and a working class movement.

Research Method

The research method will revolve around collecting instances of violent and non-violent movements from local newspapers. The period that will be looked will be 1973-74. It will also require an intensive reading of speeches and works of the leaders of the time especially, JP, Ram Manohar Lohia, George Fernandes and Vinoba Bhave. This is required to understand the political philosophy and theory of the vanguard of the movement. A close reading of available records of the various grassroots organization will be studied to investigate its political dynamics and programmes. In exceptional cases, structured interviews will be conducted with some participants and leaders of the movement.

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Marxian Literary Debates and Discourses

Subhoranjan Dasgupta

[I am immensely grateful to Dhananjay Das and Anuradha Roy for providing the essential material on the subject, and on which my short and tentative abstract is based] In his classic text *Considerations on Western Marxism*, Perry Anderson pointedly referred to the efflorescence of literary theories and aesthetic texts, based on the basic principles of Marxism, in the interwar years

and after the war. In fact, he specifically mentioned the names of Georg Lukacs, Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin and, above all, Antonio Gramsci who published – to use his adjective – ‘dazzling’ texts which examined brilliantly the social moment of a work of art as well as its indispensable autonomy. Lukac’s study of Thomas Mann and Kafka, Gramsci’s critique of contemporary Italian theatre, specially the productions of Pirandello’s plays, Adorno’s pathbreaking analysis of the music of Beethoven and the lyrics of Goethe; and, last but not the least, Benjamin’s evaluation of Charles Bandelaire’s poetry --- all these, along with many other texts written by other fellow-travellers belonged to this gamut of multifaceted efflorescence. In the same essay Perry Anderson tabled an important theoretical postulate by stressing that the more the communists lost in the two crucial spheres of economics and politics, the more they submerged themselves in creative texts and theories as a compensatory venture. I personally think that there is a link or similarity between Western Marxism and Bengali Marxism in this particular context. Marxists and Communists of Bengali, and their fellow-travellers, also wrote at times ‘dazzling’ ‘critiques of creativity and the quantum of these texts increased appreciably when their direct influence on the state and nation’s politics waned. However, even after appreciating this intense engagement with creativity and aesthetic principles, we need to note that Bengali Marxism failed to produce its Benjamin or Adorno. The best example of this Bengali creative commitment is the poet and scholar Bishnu Dey who not only wrote inspiring poems but also breakaway critical texts on Tagore, Michael Madhusudan Datta and Boris Pasternak. He enunciated a Bengali sociology of literature and creativity with the help of his seminal essays. Two specific examples of his critique-oeuvre underline his profound importance. He was the very first in Bengal to point out definitively the clear limitations of the so-called Bengal Renaissance. Indeed, he posited the creativity of Michael Madhusudan in the particular colonial context and declared that it was not possible for Michael to proceed even further in a colonized and socio-politically constrained set up. The second example is still more illuminating. His redemptive politics received an explicit expression when he stated at the end of his long essay that the circle drawn by Tagore was completed by Bertolt Brecht, especially in the latter’s poems. It is worthwhile to note here that Adorno, Marcuse and Bishnu Dey chose the same poem of Brecht describing the soaring flight of cranes as the ultimate marker of absolute creative freedom. There was, therefore, a union of minds. Bishnu Dey had some, though few, genuine friends on his side like Hiren Mukherjee and Asok Sen. But the weight of his detractors was certainly more. In point of fact, the internecine war that is the cultural debate rose to such a pitch, that the poet and critic had to start his own magazine Sahityapatra which was guided by the following fundamental principle: place the creative act or writing within its ‘social moment’ and after that wrench it out free to evaluate its autonomy. Those who belonged to the opposition, to name only two – Pradyot Guha and Saroj Datta, were neither influenced nor moved by Bishnu Dey’s poems and critical texts. Indeed, this Bishnu Dey bashing percolated down to the seventies when Diptendu Chakravarti and Iraban Basu Roy severely criticized the poet’s creative output as “far too esoteric, erudite and bafflingly complex”, hence out of the reach of the simple middle class, workers and peasants. This estimate clearly proves that Marxian cultural debates and discourses which began in the thirties of the last century and which recorded its apex in the forties and the fifties, did not die out later. That is, it continued till the seventies, though with less vigour. In short, Bengal had and still has its fair share of Lunacharskys and Zhdanovs who engaged and still engage in razor-sharp polemics. Dhananjoy Das has done the admirable task of compiling these texts and arguments into one, massive volume (previously it had run into three volumes). When one delves into this book one receives a clear picture of the entire history of literary debates that began in the thirties and reached its apex in the forties and fifties; divided into four sections, the latter criss-crosses into the other in the book. The range and depth of this volume is truly outstanding. I have deliberately included the names of Buddhadev Bose and Abu Sayeed Ayub – both non-Marxists. In

order to underline the broad and non-sectarian nature of this publication, Anuradha Roy, on her part, has written an excellent and rigorous commentary on the book, which is titled 'Bengal Marxism: Early Discourses and Debates. I shall be referring repeatedly to these two seminal texts while writing my paper. What do I propose to do: (1) Write a summary of this entire history of literary debate and discourse. (2) Choose the preponderant themes that mark out this debate and deconstruct them as they are found in the two books, one edited by Dhananjay Das and the other by Anuradha Roy. In other words, I shall single out the thematic patterns and deconstruct them. (3) Select appropriate quotations from the texts and organise these according to the thematic patterns. These quotations, in fact, will serve as an index to the total debate and its branches as well as sub-branches. (4) Concentrate on the texts of dramatic production in order to pinpoint the differences of means and methods. For example, I shall compare Utpal Dutt's Towards a Revolutionary Theatre and Sambu Mitra's Prasanga Natya in order to cast light on their contrasting and different dramaturgies. Violence in the Seventies Marxian cultural debates have not always been peaceful exercises of the mind, attitude, vision and weltanschauung. In the early seventies of the last century, a new dimension was added to these by acts of 'cultural revolution' indulged in by the Naxalites. Debunking the so-called Bengal Renaissance as a thoroughly retrograde movement, the over-zealous Naxalites also debunked the illustrious figures of this so-called Renaissance as a corollary. Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, Rammohan Roy and even Rabindranath were denigrated as compradors and their statues were beheaded or smashed. Nevertheless, a few senior Naxalite politicians like Sushital Roy Chaudhuri condemned and questioned this destructive zeal. Comrade Saroj Datta, on the other hand, who had held a sectarian view right from the forties, supported the move. There is no doubt that the middle class Bengali roundly criticized this act of destruction. Their sympathy for the Naxalites waned to a large extent who were seen as irrational iconoclasts indulging in senseless violence.

The last section of my essay will highlight this violence cum debate that raised its clumsy head in the early seventies.

Addressing Queries

While evaluating the texts and documents, I shall be prompted to address queries raised by the texts themselves. The following could be the relevant queries: 1) To what extent and in what ways creativity inspired by the party differs from creativity which is also committed but not directed by any political party? 2) Should the political party, communist party in this context, grant sufficient autonomy to the creator and his creativity? 3) What is the dividing line between party-dictated literature and autonomous creativity which is also committed and salvational? 4) Like Lenin and Lunacharsky, should the leaders of the party also concentrate on the fusion between form and content or should it stick to the narrow view that hails propaganda literature only, underlining thereby merely the content and not style or form? 5) How should the committed writer view and estimate his literary tradition? Here again, should he take the cue from Lenin's evaluation of Leo Tolstoy? 6) Is it wise to seek or depend on patronage extended by the ruling left? 7) To cut the long story short, should the writer cherish his autonomy as the sine qua non of genuine creativity? Conclusion This abstract could well nigh end by quoting from two poems which spontaneously raise the wall between overtly political, party-dictated even propaganda literature, on the one hand, and genuine committed poetry where the 5 form and content are held in an artistic and also dialectical embrace, on the other. I do not intend to disparage one at the expense of the other because any communist party and its agenda need propagandist poetry; but at the same time I would like to draw your attention to the basic distinction between elementary, propagandist poetry and remarkable committed verse. The first quotation goes back to Gurudas Pal, a folk poet. It was championed by Pradyot Guha who adopted a Stalinist stand and who has been well represented in

Dhananjoy Das's collection. Indeed, Pradyot Guha challenged Bishnu Dey to write poetry like that of Gurudas Pal. The second quotation is from Subhas Mukhopadhyay who was at that point of time a member of the Communist Party and also an autonomous creative being. We need not dissect the language and rhythm of these two poems to pronounce which one is better poetry. It is self-evident that even left cultural practice, no matter how one-dimensional it appears to be, would raise its hand to applaud Subhas Mukhopadhyay's stanza. It would not ignore or belittle Gurudas Pal's verse because it has its political importance, but the Marxian cultural debate and discourse would surely choose Subhas Mukhopadhyay's poem for its anthology. Pradyot Guha, on the other hand, will be remembered for his biting essays in which he castigated Bishnu Dey, Samar Sen and others as thoroughly bourgeois and even decadent. With the advance of time, however, Pradyot Guha softened to a marked extent and regretted what he had said earlier.

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From Outspoken Admiration to Incisive Critique

Subhoranjan Dasgupta

“The Naxalbari Uprising was by far the most far-reaching and meaningful event in the post-1947 period of Indian history”

Mahasweta Debi

“The aesthetic moment emerges when the flow of history with all its ramifications is broken decisively by the *Jetztzeit*, that is, by the immediate moment of rebellion”

Walter Benjamin

The more I am delving deep into the multifaceted creativity inspired and incited by the Naxalite uprising, the more I am struck, nay, baffled at times, by the sheer quantum and quality of this outpouring. From propagandist poetry to reflective verse; from novels or prose narratives hailing the movement to stories and novels severely criticizing the theoretical ballast and its related activism; from revelatory plays transcreating the most decisive moments of the movement on the stage to cut and dried one act plays serving as slices of the experiential truth; from gripping films like *Hajar Churasir Ma* and *Herbert* to full-throated songs which exhilarated hundreds, the surfeit of this many-faceted creativity is - to put in one word - dazzling. Indeed, scholars and critics can churn out several doctoral dissertations from this specific genre. For example, one topic could be the evaluation of mainstream literature engaged with the uprising which would concentrate on the creativity of Samaresh Bose, Sunil Gangopadhyay and Samaresh Majumdar. Yet another could be the examination and estimate of actual activists who also wielded the pen like Swarna Mitra and Dronacharya Ghosh and their ardent supporters like Mahasweta Debi.

Only one aspect of the genre has not received adequate attention so far, and, that is, memoirs or *Öö,Ê×Tö%çã_Fî** It is however true that Swarna Mitra's *Grame Chalo* is based on personal experience, but even after this intervention, it remains primarily a novel. This huge gap is only partially filled by Radhanath Chattaraj's "*%ç±ÁÖö,Ê×Tö'* and Raghav Bandyopadhyay's *LçXîç_70*. In this context, it needs to be emphatically stated that *LçXîç_70* is a masterpiece. Shot through with powerful reminiscences, both inspiring and agonizing, this memoir first published in 'Desh', on the one hand, dissects the entire movement with a hawk's eye, and, on the other, recalls the redemptive moments with clarity and insight. But why does this specific branch of literature, namely *Öö,Ê×TöEöUX* or memoir, suffer from this marked paucity? One reason could be that the

activists who operated in Kolkata and also in the villages preferred to remain silent after the collapse of the movement. They did not want to transcreate the defeat and breakdown of the movement in literary-creative terms. They regarded the entire experience as far too palpable, immediate and even, intimate to call for an autobiographical record. One could also apply the brilliant verdict of Thomas Wiesemgrund Adorno who said in a related context that invigorating poetry could not be written after the horror of Auschwitz. That is, some experiences – be it the Auschwitz or Baranagar mayhem - defy the process of creation and remain searing, raw, wounded and therefore unsung. In my final paper I shall concentrate on Raghav Bandhyopadhyay's brilliant memoir to examine the tormented dialectic between intrinsic silence and irresistible sound.

As I have already said, the 8 to 10 thousand spatial limit of my paper will compel me to be highly choosy and selective. I have just begun my journey, hence I cannot offer a complete and comprehensive list of the texts that will be analysed and deconstructed. But, at this early moment, I can certainly pinpoint the creative constructions that would secure their deserving places in my study. These are:

NOVELS: Mahesweta Debi's Basai Tudu and Hajar Churasir Ma. In order to substantiate the overarching dialectic between 'outspoken admiration' and mainstream 'Incisive Critique', I shall also dissect Samaresh Bose's Mahakaler Rather Ghora and Manushi Saktir Utso. To be candid, I have not yet decided on Samaresh Maumder's Kalbela, whether to include it or not. This mainstream novel is perhaps the most popular in its genre and has been extensively commented upon. I am not keen to repeat what has been said already.

PLAYS: I shall certainly shed light on Bijan Bhattacharjee's masterpiece Debigarjan and Utpal Dutt's Teer. If space and time permit, I shall include one or two one act plays; one of them could be by Amal Roy which transcreates the massacre that took place in Barasat on 19th November, 1970. I have a particular word of praise for Debigarjan whose conclusion is much more radical and decisive than Nabanna's and is a direct descendent of Dinabandhu Mitra's 'Neel Darpan' and Mir Mosharaf Hossain's 'Jamidar Darpan'. The last elaborate stage direction in Bijan Bhattacharjee's play is a prevision, or if I may use the aporial term 'pre-echo' of what took place three years later. The stage direction, in chiselled and inspired prose, recreates the killing of the tyrant jotedar Pravanjan and is a forerunner to identical reports published in Deshabarati sometime later. The first staging of Debigarjan was on February 21, 1966 while the jotedarjamidar 'Khatam' programme was directed in 1969-70. In other words, the aesthetic dimension (Herbet Marcuse's favourite term) was enacted before the actual event. Adorno's celebratory 'Utopian moment' was transmuted before the actual existential intervention. Passages such as these which underline Carlyle's role of the poet or the creative being as 'Vates'(Prophet) and inspire him – to use the Shakespearean phrase in Macbeth – to look into the seeds of time bring together the Utopian and actual moments of time in a seamless, unbroken continuum.

POEMS AND SONGS: Young, idealistic Naxalites were not only rebels. Some of them were poets and quite talented ones at that. Rahul Purakayastha is bringing out a comprehensive volume of Naxalite poetry and poetry written during the Emergency. Due to be released on Poila Baishak it should act as an unerring guide to the poetic output of the Naxalites which reverberates with hope, ardour, unflinching commitment and also heartfelt self-interrogation and profound regret. For the present, we have the Thema Book of Naxalite Poetry edited by Sumanta Banerjee who was also an activist. Indeed, Sumanta Banerjee's The Simmering Revolution is the most objective and authoritative account of the Naxalite revolt. In this selection we read the poems of Bipul Chakravarti, Partha Bandyopadhyay, Saroj Dutta, Murari Mukhopadhyay, Dronacharya Ghosh, Srijan Sen and others. Quite a few poems are abiding examples of literary excellence where the form and the content converge to give to the rebellious thought, idea or feeling the appropriate aesthetic form or the desired objective correlative. Consider, for example, the following poem

written by Bipul Chakravarti, a rebel, who had to suffer inhuman torture inside the prison: “Whip me / So that the scars / Remain embedded / For days together. Whip me again and again, / So that, / When you are finished with your whipping / I rise up / Looking like / A striped tiger”. Even the most diehard disciple of Stefan Mallarme (the most devoted apostle of pure poetry) would have to agree to the claim that this poem has more than adequate literary or poetic value.

Yet, at the same time, one has to admit that many, so-called poems were primarily propagandistic – that is, they do not qualify as poetry proper. In these efforts the sharp content of resistance and revolt attained the foreground and, as a result, the poetic dimension was often ignored and belittled. Even a thoroughly partisan critic like Nirmal Ghosh commented that these efforts do not culminate in genuine poetry. He advocated that the spontaneous union of form and content was the lowest common denominator of poetry and this crucial denominator was missing in many poems. Along with the activist poets mentioned earlier lyricists and poets who cherished a deep sympathy for and even fellow-feeling with the uprising, penned poems of imperishable worth, though they belonged – to use the common term - to mainstream literature. Foremost among these poets were Birendra Chattopadhyay, Subhas Mukhopadhyay, Sankha Ghosh (elegy for Timir), Alokranjan Dasgupta. They saluted the bravery and sacrifice of the young Naxalites, condemned the torture and killings and dreamt of the day when they would be victorious. A cross section of these poems declaring a communion will also be deconstructed and analysed. In an animated conversation, my friend Ranabir Samaddar drew my attention to the songs and dirges that accompanied the uprising. His logic was quite simple. He said, “While prose and drama were meant for the consumption of the literate and educated middle class, songs sung from the rostrum or during the action reached the ears of hundreds”. Detailing the tradition of these rousing songs, which reached the apex during the IPTA days and nights and recalling the contribution of the unforgettable like Salil Choudhury and Jyotirindra Maitra, he said that the songs sung by the Naxalites also inspired hundreds of rebels and activists. These songs (i) broke the dramatised narrative, as in the case of Debigarjan, (ii) were composed by poets like Srijan Sen, (iii) were adapted from the folksongs presented by village bards to focus on the onrush of the revolt. Incidentally, the most glorious example of songs juxtaposed with the creative narrative is to be read in Akhtaruzzaman Elicis’s *Khowabnama*. An appropriate example of a revolutionary song was written by Bipul Chakravarti:

They are the brothers of Bhagat Singh
They are the brothers of Khudiram
We want the release of all political prisoners

While these songs rouse and inspire, they coexist with the lone, lyrical voice reflecting or ruminating on the existential condition of the rebels. Their doubts, dilemmas, questions and sorrow receive a poignant treatment in these poems. Srijan Sen has written inspirational songs, on the one hand, and enquiring lyrics, on the other, which detail his personal condition, afflicted and injured. Titled appositely *The Return* one such poem by him reads: “The air became heavy/ Memories suddenly became pedlars of flowers / I found only stairs before me / stairs of the overbridge / laying themselves bare in the darkness”.

FILMS: Quite a few films have been made where the uprising has been treated with sympathy and concern. At this moment, in the preparatory phase, I am thinking of concentrating on two films – *Duratwa* by Buddhadev Dasgupta and *Herbert* by Sumon Mukhopadhyay. Instead of evaluating these films like a professional film-critic (I am not one), I shall interview these two directors, who are my close friends. The thrust of the interview will be on their attitude towards the uprising, and why they made these two films which obviously do not belong to mainstream cinema. Examples of other films which treat the Naxal uprising diligently and artistically are Mrinal son’s *Padatik* and Kolkata Ekatoor Utplendu Chakravarti’s rousing documentary *Mukti Chai* and Gautam Ghosh’s

Kalbela. MEMOIRS: As stated earlier, I shall read Raghav Bandyopadhyay's Journal Sattar meticulously and examine the spotlight of memory as it falls on the turbulent '70s.

SHORT STORES: This is another fruitful section. Mahasweta Debi herself has written more than a dozen stories. Sunil Gangopadhyay, Nabarun Bhattacharya, Amal Chakravarti, Dutiman Chatterjee, and others have also contributed. These stories constitute - to use Mahasweta Debi's expression - 'the documentation of the time'. The final selection of short stores for deconstruction will be done after some time. Following are the self-imposed guidelines which I would like to follow to the best of my ability when writing the paper on Naxalite creativity:

- (i) To adopt a strictly non-partisan approach while evaluating the creative texts and expressions. In other words, my own political predilection will not cast a shadow on the estimate.
- (ii) To remain always aware of the aesthetic precondition whose fulfilment conveys a timeless dimension to the creative text.
- (iii) To separate the truly creative from the primarily propagandistic. At the same time, take it for granted that the propagandistic has its own role to fulfil in such a political uprising, and hence it cannot be thrown overboard-lock, stock and barrel.
- (iv) To trace the movement from the political voice to the personal voice and vice-versa. Both voices have been explored by poet-activists like Srijan Sen and they weave a dialectical relationship between the private and the public.
- (v) To stress the quality of inner doubts, queries, torment of the protagonists, as is evident primarily in the novels. Ratan Khasnobis has drawn my attention to this aspect which has been explored by, say, an author like Samaresh Bose.
- (vi) Finally, to weave a thesis-antithesis relationship between creativity engaged in by Naxalites and by non-Naxalites as well, who also have something to say on the pathbreaking uprising. As I have already said, my paper will be an overall critical review of Naxalite creativity in which the leading theme-patterns will be analysed and the aesthetic dimension examined. It has to be necessarily, selective in nature. But after the completion of this paper, I would seriously consider bringing out a full-fledged monograph on Naxalbari-creativity. This monograph would attempt to do full justice to the quantum and quality of this genre. Till date, not a single non-partisan book has appeared on this important subject. I shall be grateful if RLS extends its helping hand to this fruitful, future engagement.

For Full Paper visit: <http://www.mcrgh.ac.in/PP82.pdf>



Researchers in 2016: Paula Banerjee, Sucharita Sengupta, Anwasha Sengupta, Sibaji Pratim Basu (from left to right)

REPORTS (2016)

Consultative Meeting

Popular Movements in West Bengal and Bihar

28 February 2016

Session 1

Paula Banerjee spoke on the *Refugee Movement in West Bengal*. Her work engaged with the narratives of partition refugees journeying through sixteen years. Literature on refugees portrays them as victims. In large part of the country, refugees while trying to negotiate with power structures fall prey. Authors often critique how that state views refugees not as individuals but in terms of number for providing them with shelter, food, health, hygiene etc. Apart from these, there are other authors who have. Authors like Shekhar Bandyopadhyay and Joya Chatterjee belong to the school of thought that tries to understand refugee experience through experiences of particular communities. Ranabir Samaddar's *Marginal Nation* was mentioned as a paradigmatic shift in the entire study of refugee discourse in West Bengal.

There are aspects of the lives of partition refugees in West Bengal that have not been studied adequately. Banerjee's work tries to bridge the gap between efforts of refugee organisations for protection and provision of secure life for refugees and popular movements. The other objective of her research is to build up a collection that will contain relevant documents regarding the refugee movement in West Bengal and the role that the refugees played in other popular movements in the state. The work will also contain newspaper reports, police reports, government documents and these documents will have an annotated bibliography pointing to the archival material that contributes to this narrative.

According to **Meghna Guhathakurta**, Paula Banerjee's proposed study bases itself on the need to study refugee movement in West Bengal as part of the popular movements of 1950s and 1960s in West Bengal. It would be an interesting and innovative take on a topic that is becoming popular as part of the contemporary trend of partition studies. The analysis that Paula Banerjee will seek to elucidate through an archival research has a socio-economic context that actually spans the period from pre-partition to post partition days in West Bengal.

Dipankar Sinha's take on the abstract focused on the methodological part since the work is at the initial stage. He reflected that the abstract highlights a prolific literature on partition and refugee movement. However, he commented that there remained scope for situating research methodology as a constitutive element of popular movement. The most interesting area of the abstract is when Banerjee talks of victims coming in terms with victimhood and, at the same time, struggling to get rid of it marked by resistance, negotiation, conflict, and generating a new kind of everyday commonsensical reasoning while coming in terms with a sense of dispossession and seeking to overcome it.

The presentation by **Anwasha Sengupta** was titled *A Study of Anti-Tram Fare Hike Resistance and Teachers' Movement*. Her presentation focused on two particular movements of 1950s – the popular resistance against the second class tram fare in 1953 and the teachers' movement of 1954. Short lived, extremely violent and successful in various ways, both these movements witnessed participation from various sections of Calcutta's population. In her presentation, she shared her initial findings which showed that the Tram Fare Resistance Movement witnessed significant participation of the city's youth population, particularly from the refugee section, with sympathy from women of refugee areas towards the tram movement. The teachers' movement also drew support from various sections of the society including the print media. Street demonstration, strike, squatting, courting arrest became forms of teachers' protest for the first time. Sengupta proposed to

analyze the forms of protest, the reason behind the violence that was associated with this movement and popular and governmental reaction towards it.

Some of the comments by **Sandip Bandyopadhyay** on Anwesha Sengupta's work were as follows: i) the Tram Fare Movement had many layers. It became stagnant around the middle of the July (1953) and then again gathered currency soon after. It was important to keep that in mind while exploring the possible reasons for the ups and downs in the movement; ii) media's reaction to both the movements require elaborate study and separate sections should be dedicated to it; iii) regarding teachers' movement, a crucial question was, why All Bengal Teachers' Association mobilized only the secondary school teachers and not the primary school teachers, even though the primary teachers were much less paid? iv) role of the 'anti-social' elements in teachers' movement needs to be studied. Why did this movement turn violent?

Siddhartha Guha Roy commented that there has been a long history of tramway men's struggle in colonial Bengal. The long history of why in 1953 the tramway men remained indifferent towards the movement would be a question worth probing. Guha Roy suggested that the relevance of popular movements of 1950s, particularly the tram movement, in contemporary times needed to be understood.

During the general discussion of Session 1, **Ranabir Samaddar** suggested the researcher to look into the significance of Calcutta as an urban space in shaping these popular movements like the tram movement and the teachers' movement.

Session 2

Sibaji Pratim Basu's work looked at the *Food Movements of 1959 and 1966* as one of the most remarkable instances of popular movements in West Bengal. Drawing attention to the 'spontaneous' nature of popular protests in the early decades after India's independence and partition of Bengal, Basu compared these movements – especially in the context of his proposed study – with Charles Tilly's conceptions of 'contentious politics' and 'social movements' which originated in Europe in the eighteenth century and spread all over the world in the following centuries through colonialism, trade and migration. He also found certain 'rhizomatic' tendencies – a term borrowed from Deluze and Guattari – in these movements as they evinced creation of their own structures and functions without much contribution from the 'vertical leadership.'

Sanjeeb Mukherjee while appreciating Basu's attempt to contextualize the movements in the broader political environment of that time and their impacts on movements in the future, requested him to talk about the form of the popular protests as a form of communication – its aesthetics and ethics, especially keeping in mind the 'violent' nature of the movement. He also requested Basu to explore how the Left parties earned people's trust and emerged as their representatives by creating 'political hegemony' in the state.

Manabi Majumdar highlighted that the paper talks about the rhizomatic and autonomous character of the movement, focusing on its relative autonomy from clearly identifiable leaders who usually steer movements in a vertical manner. The amorphous and de-centered nature of the movement, thus, simultaneously had at least the seeds of some integrationist counter-currents; b) also, this movement, and several such mass movements, cannot be understood simply as anarchic, undisciplined, uncontained 'mob' behavior. Rather, it was 'disciplined' in the sense that it was guided by clear objectives and informed by a notion of legitimacy.

Mithilesh Kumar in his research paper titled *The Nonlocal Entanglement of Violence and 'People': A Study of Bihar Movement, 1974*, introduced two terms, namely 'nonlocal' and 'entanglement', in order to study and understand the Bihar Movement in 1974 led by Jayprakash Narayan. According to him, the two terms borrowed from quantum physics may explain the exclusivity of a popular movement of such magnitude. Based on this framework, Kumar argued that

the Bihar Movement of 1974 could not be understood as a singular moment of political mobilization; rather it was informed and fundamentally shaped by various small, local, sporadic, yet sustained and most importantly violent, struggles that first articulated the demands and the tactics of a popular movement. One objective of his study was to explore the relationship between violence and popular struggles.

Pushendra Kumar Singh while discussing Mithilesh's paper raised questions on the title which used the words 'nonlocal' and 'entanglement.' He said that by nonlocal could be understood as resonance of one event on another. He also then made the suggestion that the word entanglement needs more elaboration before it could be used as a concept. He further added that if entanglement has to be investigated one needs to take into account the events in present day Jharkhand which was part of Bihar during the Bihar Movement. Also, his suggestion for the research project was that the study of student movement should begin from 1965.

Samita Sen as Chair concluded Session 2 by pointing out the fact that the popular movements in Bengal have had massive participation of women, which in itself serves as a sphere of further research.

Session 3

In this session, **Subhoranjan Dasgupta** presented two abstracts. The first abstract was on *The Evolution and Progress of Marxian Cultural Debate from Late 40s to late 70s, especially Debates on Dramatic Production*. The author began with the analysis of Perry Anderson on the topics of literary theories and aesthetic texts based on Marxism; and brought out similarities between Bengali and Western Marxisms. Dasgupta exemplified Bishnu Dey as the best example of creative commitment from the Bengali community who enunciated Bengali sociology of literature.

Subhoranjan Dasgupta's presentation on *The Creative Accent on the Naxalite Uprising - Drama, Film, Prose, and Poetry* delved into the multifaceted creativity inspired by the Naxalite uprising which included propagandist poetry to reflective prose, especially in the works of Samresh Bose, Sunil Gangopadhyay and Mahasweta Debi. Dasgupta speculated that the activists preferred to remain silent after the disintegration of the Naxalite movement as they didn't want to convey the 'defeat' through creative outlet. The author's assessment concentrated on Raghabh Bandhyopadhyay's memoir to examine the tormented dialectics between intrinsic silence and irresistible sound.

According to **Anuradha Roy** the cultural reconfiguration of Bengal by communist cultural activism necessitates research in the genre. She also pointed out that it was important to highlight the relation between content and form as well as to explain the differences between various Marxist theorists of the time. Influence of the Chinese struggle and Mao Tse Tung must also be considered.

Moinak Biswas suggested that the author focussed on the alternativeness of the magazine 'Sahitya Patra'. Bishnu Dey, he argued, found it difficult to express the Marxism he professed in his journal, and that rendered some of his works complex and inaccessible. Biswas also drew parallel between the works of Bishnu Dey and Subhash Mukhopadhyay, a major leftist activist poet of that time autonomy.

Ruchira Goswami observed that the available seamless narratives about these works emanated from the less use of memoirs. She mentioned the political and gender perspectives in Minakshi Sen's Jail er Bhetor Jail [Jail within a Jail], a memoir of a woman left activist. Goswami opined that drama and song might not always reach the masses, as a critique of 'ganasangeet' (mass songs of protest) is that they were non-simplistic and imposed the propagandist agenda. Beside the form and content, transcendental quality in these works can be considered as the lowest common denominator of fruitful work.

For Full Report visit:

http://www.mcrg.ac.in/RLS_PML/RLS_PM/RLSConsultativeReport_PM.pdf

Panel Discussion

Women in Movement: West Bengal

19 September 2016

The Panel discussion on *Women in Movement: West Bengal* was held on 19 September, 2016 as a part of CRG-RLS project on Popular Movements in West Bengal and Bihar. The School of Women's studies, Jadavpur University also collaborated with CRG and RLS for this programme. The venue was Anita Banerjee Hall at Jadavpur University.

The discussion was moderated by Indu Agnihotri. The speakers for the day were: Mallarika Sinha Roy, Panchali Ray, Ilina Sen, and Sujato Bhadra.

Mallarika Sinha Roy initiated the discussion. She highlighted that there have been a recent spurt of discussion about gender issues, particularly women's issues in popular media, policy studies and development debates. Planners and economists have started being concerned about issues of gender. Noted personalities like Amitabh Bacchan has also began to participate in the ongoing trend through mediums like letters to their granddaughters. Even the police had started writing 'survivors' rather than 'victims' in cases related to rape. However, 'Feminism' is still an uncomfortable term with the middle/upper class of the society. It is important to understand the genealogy of the recent gender discourses as well as how contemporary politics is addressing the questions of gender/women. The massive public reaction and outrage after the 'Nirbhaya' case in Delhi started a wave of gender specific discourse which connected emotion with actions. The means to achieve goals became emotionally charged. This was a landmark moment to which many of the contemporary debates/movements and policies are linked. In this context she revisited her own research on the questions of gender in Naxalbari Movement. The metaphor of magic becomes an important prism of analysis, as to for many women participants of the movement it was "magical moments" of their lives. However, "magic" might not always have positive connotations and their male comrades did not always have radical outlook on issues of gender. Here it becomes important to understand women in movement specifically, apart from women's movement in general. Gender is a necessary analytical category to understand political movements and politics. The perception of difference between men and women needs to be critically examined.

Ilina Sen focused on the figure of Lila Mazumdar to understand the space and scope of women in left radical politics like Naxal Movement. Lila Mazumdar, the wife of legendary leader Charu Mazumdar had a shadowy presence in the Naxalite movement. She was an active member of the communist party and played an active role in the Tebhaga movement in Bengal prior to independence. She came from an enlightened family where members participated in diverse political activities. As a member of the Communist Party of India (CPI), Lila worked in the districts of Jalpaiguri and Rangpur. She was keen to form a new model of education. Later she became an insurance agent as she couldn't take up teaching job due to being on the police lookout list.

The CPI was split in 1964 and in 1967 it was further divided to form CPI (Marxist-Leninist). Lila Mazumdar didn't take membership of the CPI (Marxist-Leninist) and gradually became marginal figure in the politics. Lila was active in the party activities till the second split in 1967 as a member of the Darjeeling district committee. Lila had to take charge of the family when Charu Mazumdar was arrested. All the properties in the name of Charu Mazumdar were taken away under the 'enemy property act'.

Lila believed in and practiced in socialism as she distributed the family lands in the name of the tillers. Lila had several differences with Charu regarding his political line, especially with regards to students leaving educational institutes to join the Naxalbari movement. However Lila made sure that their own children were continued with their education. This became a source of contention.

Supervision of Lila enabled their daughter Anita to pass the medical entrance exam in turbulent times.

Lila, a prominent face of left politics of a time, gradually moved away from the limelight and became the principal bread earner of her family in absence of her husband. Many other women in left politics have moved away from their political lives and had focused on family/ became spiritual or had focused on earning for their families. They have been largely forgotten by the chroniclers of their politics. The reasons for such exclusion and gradual disappearances need to be understood for a better understanding of how left politics addresses the issues of gender inside the party structure and outside it.

Panchali Ray

The complex links between women and the nation has occupied much academic attention, particularly for feminist scholars. Women provide legitimacy to the political projects of the nation in particular social and historical contexts. This presentation focused on the contradictions between the women's movements in conflict zones (Manipur), particularly mother's movements and feminist ideologies and practices to argue for coalitions rather than identities, struggles rather than shared oppression. Drawing from the nude protests of twelve members of the Meira Paibis at the Kangla fort in 2004, Irom Sharmila Chanus's breaking of her 16 year fast and its consequent backlash from those fighting for Manipuri nationalism and Mahasweta Debis' fictional character, Dopdi/Draupadi, the presentation argued against conflating femininity with feminism. On the contrary, rather than focusing on congealed universal narratives of victimhood, it could possibly be more productive for feminist politics to locate multiple- singular moments that displace norms.

In drawing parallels between the different ways women have responded to sexual violence and state repression, the paper raised more questions than answers: can popular movements be feminist in terms of challenging fundamentally patriarchy's agenda for women. Can women function within broader movements in languages that are completely new, without drawing on existing patriarchal constructions of ideal femininity? Will this new language eat into their popular base, as members will refuse to challenge the norms of 'reproductive heteronormativity' that almost always inflect and saturate mass movements? Will popular movements remain popular or will it dwindle down to very few men and some women who identify themselves as feminists? Without trying to posit a binary, the paper asks whether popular movements can be feminist or if they are feminist, do they then remain popular?

Sujato Bhadra – As a human rights activist Bhadra expressed his displeasure with the current trends in the feminist movements. No one, he pointed out, that none of the women's organisation has raised the issue of women with kids are being detained after the Khagragarh incident in West Bengal. Similarly, there has been no consistent feminist movement against state/ police atrocities on women in disturbed areas like Kashmir. Parents of disappeared people are asking for collective justice, from Kashmir to Argentina. Feminist scholars hardly write about such issues, the brutality of army actions which led to the 16 year long fast of Manorama in Manipur reminds us of the inexcusable execution of state's power. In Kashmir we are seeing that children of suspected terrorists are ostracized from school.

The colonial British administration made laws like AFSPA, which were further made punitive in nature by Jawaharlal Nehru during his tenure as India's prime minister. Such draconian laws have perpetuated gross violation of human rights and women's rights. Unfortunately, no women organization is covering these issues. Nirbhaya's offenders were given capital punishment by the same state which conducts similar acts in other parts of the nation in the name of law and order. The way the main-stream left parties have dealt with the gender questions is also often deplorable. Singur, Nandigram and Haripur had shown how women came forward in resistance of land acquisition. But the CPI(M) projected these women in negative light and cooked wrong narratives

about Tapasi Malik's rape. In JNU, Bonojyotsna raised the issue of patriarchy within the Maoist ranks. Feminist scholars should address these issues.

For Full Report visit: http://www.mcrp.ac.in/RLS_PML/RLS_PM/Report_round_table.pdf



Experts and discussants in the year 2016: Sandip Bandyopadhyay, Pushendra Kumar Singh, Dipankar Sinha, Mallarika Sinha Roy, Manabi Majumdar, Ruchira Goswami, Moinak Biswas, Anuradha Roy, Sanjeeb Mukherjee, Meghna Guhathakurta, Siddhartha Guha Roy, Iina Sen (from left to right)

PUBLIC LECTURES
(2016)

Core and Contours of Popular Movements in India in the Coming Future

Speaker: Sumanta Banerjee, *Independent Researcher*

Chair: Samita Sen, Professor, Department of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University

Date: September 20, 2016

Venue: Jadavpur University

Sumanta Banerjee underlined the need to distinguish between the nature of political movements on the one hand and popular movements on the other. The former are generally hegemonic led by political parties with specific objectives that are oriented by their respective ideologies and shifting strategies. At times, leaders of such political movements can compromise their basic ideological commitments and frame instead a political strategy that would suit their immediate interests. They thus sacrifice the original demands of their supporters from among the masses who brought them to positions of power as their representatives. There is a need therefore again to discuss the complex relationship between ideological commitment and realpolitik. Popular movements, in contrast, spring from spontaneous ground swelling of discontent at local levels. However, at times, sections of the mainstream political leadership and those of popular movements converge on certain issues, such as public demands for basic needs like land, food, shelter, medical facilities, education and democratic rights; public opposition to the states demand from its citizens to obey its coercive laws; public protests by villagers against their ouster from their lands by the state for the sake of industrialization and other development projects. All these three issues have at various times interlocked with each other in the public domain of political as well as popular movements in Indian history but the relationship between the organized political and the spontaneous popular have always been fraught with tension. Banerjee then traces the history of the disconnect and discontent between the popular and the political from the times of the Chauri Chaura incident (February 5, 1922) till contemporary times. He elaborated upon the evolution, causes and nature of spontaneous popular movements from the time of the tribal, peasant rebellions and linked it to present day tribal protests in the states of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Andhra Pradesh. The pre-independence movements were akin to the current protests in myriad ways and forms as the state apparatus continues to wield power in similar fashion.

For details, visit: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YsWDt5YhUXU&t=372s>



Public Lecture in 2016 delivered by Sumanta Banerjee (left); with Samita Sen (right) chairing the session

Bright Lights and Shadows: Histories and Politics of Labour and Law in the Indian Film Industry

Speaker; Lawrence Liang, *Legal Researcher and Co-founder, Alternative Law Forum*

Chair: Prasanta Ray, President, Calcutta Research Group

Date: May 04, 2016

Venue: Vivekananda, Hall, Kolkata

Lawrence Liang highlighted the absolute lack of material and scholarship regarding Labour and Law with respect to the Indian film industry to the extent that he is compelled to term it “scandalous.” The ordinary stories of labour and ordinary stories of work, conditions of labour and undramatic everyday existence tend to be ignored while the sensational or news worthy incidents such as accidents and death of an erstwhile star due to poverty receive coverage. Liang in the course of his presentation cites various film critics to elaborate upon the interplay between the bright lights of cinema and the shadowy world of everyday cinematic labour, which in fact can be perceived as an apt metaphor that explains the relationship between the image and the labour that goes into the making of the image. He contends that film studies while obsessed with the image, shed very little light on how images are actually produced. At the same time, he admits that there are notable exceptions such as Upendra Chandana’s exhaustive report that dwells upon what is referred to as the missing three, “Safety, Security and Shelter”. Liang then explores and deconstructs a series of attempts at legislation and articulation of grievances as well as demand for rights that in actuality reveal the invisibility of labour in the Indian film industry. The background and history of three pieces of labour legislations enacted for cinema works in the 1980s and the battle behind them serve as the starting point. The motive is to reveal the frustrations behind the glamour where a structure of informality had become the norm. Liang concluded his talk with Stanley Cavell’s quote from *Reflections on the Ontology of Films*, “Cinema screens the world to you even as it screens you from the world.”

For details, visit: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_yx2EJNnaio&feature=youtu.be



Lawrence Liang delivering the Fifth Jayanta Dasgupta Memorial Lecture in 2016

PUBLICATIONS
(2016)

1. Policies and Practices

People, Politics and Protests I: Calcutta & West Bengal, 1950s – 1960s: Issue 80 (December 2016)

- **Refugee Movement: Another Aspect of Popular Movements in West Bengal in the 1950s and 1960s**

Sucharita Sengupta and Paula Banerjee

- **Tram Movement and Teachers' Movement in Calcutta: 1953-1954**

Anwasha Sengupta

Full Papers available on: <http://www.mcrgh.ac.in/PP80.pdf>

2. Policies and Practices

People, Politics & Protests II: Bengal and Bihar: Issue 81 (December 2016)

- **The Defining Moments of Left-Popular Politics in West Bengal: The Food Movements of 1959 and 1966**

Sibaji Pratim Basu and Mithilesh Kumar

- **From Insurrection to Popular Movement: Bihar Movement, its Possibilities and Limitations**

Mithilesh Kumar

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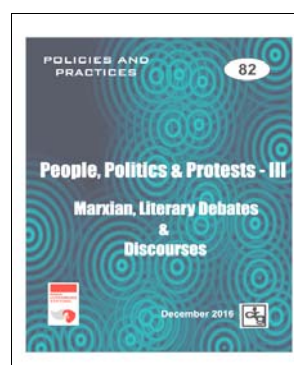
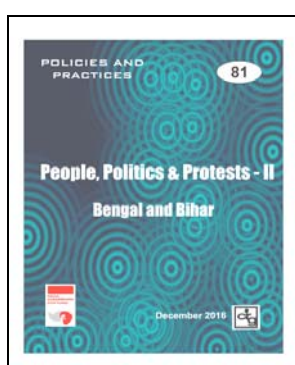
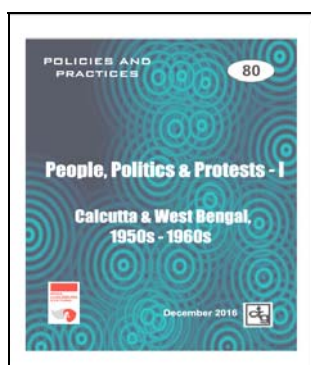
3. Policies and Practices

People, Politics and Protests III: Marxian Literary Debates and Discourses: Issue 82 (December 2016)

- **Marxian Literary Debates and Discourses**

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Popular Politics, Popular Upsurge, and the Revolt in the Sixties and Seventies of the Last Century

Ranabir Samaddar and Sucharita Sengupta

Popular Roots of 1967

1. This note prepared on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Naxalbari movement does not aim to present a comprehensive political analysis of the left wing radical movement known as the Naxalite movement in India and particularly in West Bengal. The paper is about the nature of the movement as it drew its strength from popular protests and popular politics of the time, and became unique as a popular revolt. Hence this paper does not discuss specifically the Naxalite ideology or their doctrine (especially as an independent phenomenon) unless the context calls for such reference.

2. What happened in West Bengal from the mid-sixties of the last century, particularly from 1967, is inconceivable without taking into account what happened in the preceding years and the decade. Briefly speaking, there were increasing street revolts, spread of protests to small towns and villages particularly from 1965, industrial unrest, food movements, youth and student upsurge, civil liberties movement against suppressive policies like the DIR in the wake of the border war of 1962, and a massive radicalisation of popular mood against the ruling Congress government. Thus what happened in 1967 may not be considered as “spring thunder”, if that means a sudden event, though the fury of the response of society to events of 1966-67 took many by surprise. The events were also clarifying by nature, they clarified the points of contention, they forced political forces to define their respective stands, who stood where, who were “friends, and who were enemies”, and which way the path of movement lay. In this sense, of course, 1967 was “spring thunder”.

3. For a study of the popular protests and popular revolt in the latter half of the sixties, the popular context is important, because it indicated the flexible nature of the unrest, which spread quickly through the state. There were many actors, many organisations, and many modes. Participation of small peasantry in the villages, slum dwellers and lower middle class in the towns, and students and youth in colleges, schools and universities, were features of popular participation. As preceding researches show, it was not a unique and singular show by any party. Indeed, this plurality was crucial for the unrest to spread and engulf entire West Bengal.

4. In another way, the popular context characterised the nature of the revolt. The upsurge was not centrally directed, it occasioned the emergence of plural subjects, and its flexibility and creativity in modes of articulation had much to do with the context of popular movements in the preceding one and half decade. In fact, to anticipate the history a little, the untimely centralisation of the radical forces after the peasant struggle in Naxalbari, and undue haste in ideological framing of the movement and formalising it on the lines of an established doctrine of party organisation (such as the formation of the CPI-ML) bore the death knell of the upsurge.

Radicalisation

5. The radicalisation in the second half of the decade of sixties was also extremely republican and egalitarian in an odd way. It erased all distinctions, hierarchies, and inequalities from the map of revolution. There was no caste, no gender, no occupational distinctions; all were Red Guards in the service of Revolution. Workers were to go villages, peasants were to be educated in the ideals of political education, jails had to be transformed into universities, students had to declass, and all these were to happen not in an isolated or exceptional way, but generally, en masse, as movement - in the form of a movement. The nation was to have no nationalism; it called for the Chairman of China to be “our Chairman”. As if the distinctions that could not be eradicated from society, could be made to vanish away from the landscape of revolution. Radical subjectivity was the main mark of the movement of the time. In some sense we can say that the movement of the sixties gave birth to the political subject.

6. In the course of the upsurge issues of property relations were raised directly. The land question became the most important issue in the radicalisation of the movement. Likewise, in factories workers led councils and solidarity platforms became a dynamic idea. Autonomy of the mass movements became the guiding principle.

7. Questions asked on the streets in the Sixties were those that in ordinary political history require decades, at times centuries of thinking, to emerge as questions, namely, what does it mean to act in the name of freedom, what does it mean to act politically, what does it require to act for social transformation? The extremely contentious politics of the time forced the people, in particular the street fighters, to ask the rulers: Who are you to rule? What are our roles then? Who is the ruler and who is the subject? In short, the issue of the political subject emerged directly under specific conditions cutting many philosophical/ideological knots. Political necessities led to new thinking, political subject hood became a 3 practical question of society. This was a great transition, whose significance unfortunately is still not fully understood by social theorists and political thinkers in India. These questions did not present theories (except in extremely distorted way in party doctrines and programme of the Revolutionaries, which mostly echoed Chinese experience of revolution). These questions presented not theories but non-conformist “thinking”, not philosophy but rebellious “thought”, and not ideologies but “subjugated ideas”.

8. The movement was quickly dubbed as fanatic. It is important to understand today how the emergence of the political subject was seen by established society as the fanatic’s appearance, unruly, violent, and unpredictable. Who is a fanatic? Who calls the subject a fanatic? What precisely is this fanaticism? This again speaks of a situation characteristic of a popular upsurge, and that calls for deeper study and engagement. At least we can say this much: The political subject exceeds the standards set by the regime for permissible violence, and displays determination in the pursuit of a goal - hence its unruliness, its fanaticism. Fanaticism is the readiness to go to war discontinuing the prevailing mode of politics; it is the voice of the underground sects, it breaks the myth that politics is the product of E/enlightenment; it is unruly because it is still beyond the given formula of the time on the war/politics copula. Political subject exceeds rules of politics. In this way, the unruly subject in India not only repeatedly exceeded the overwhelming legal realities, but demonstrated by its life experience that the emergence of the political subject is fundamentally a matter of non-correspondence with the dominant thinking of the time. In short, if politics has to set its face at times against given legal rules and codes, and given political mode, how will it act? The inquiry is thus in one sense about the autonomy of politics: What can be the enabling or debilitating conditions affecting the autonomy of politics, of the subject that claims and gains political agency?

9. As with several other political climactic periods, the period of the Naxalite movement had a plural composition, even though it left in the minds of people and on society a singular impression of extremism, unbridled radical attitude, and youth upsurge. While these impressions were not pure myths, and even if these were myths they had elements of reality in them, the movements had the participation of peasants, students, youth, sections of lower middle classes, and workers. In this sense the popular movements of the decades of fifties and early sixties culminated in the radical upsurge of late 1960s and early 1970s. However, it will be important to see how these sectional participations played out in the upsurge as a whole, how specific class participations varied, and how the workers’ movements, particularly the Great Railway Strike of 1974, was the moment of climax. After that came the imposition of the Emergency bringing the curtains down on the decade of the upsurge, though in Bihar and Andhra Pradesh the radicalisation of the movement continued, and the movement spread there. Thus, what kind of generality was produced, and with what limits built in the general upsurge?

Legacy

10. This takes us to the issue of legacy – political, organisational, and ideological. Whenever we invoke the memory of the sixties of the last century, we may ask: Can we compare this with other epochs of radical upsurges – in India in the 1940s, elsewhere in Europe in the 1960s, or more classically in the European revolutions in the 1840s? We have to explore some of these questions in

order to understand more comprehensively the historical significance of the upsurge of the Sixties. How did Marx for instance view the European revolutions in 1848? With the defeat of the upsurge, imposition of the National Emergency in 1975, and mainstream politics swinging back to parliamentary mode, did the following epoch usher in an age of passive revolution? What general lessons does this carry for a chronicle of popular movements and popular politics?

11. From the point of legacy, we can ask one more question: If the years of the mid-sixties carried the imprint of a crisis, was it also not a crisis of the radical form, crisis of the transcendent nature of popular protests that were to culminate in an upsurge? The crisis of organisation, decimation of cadres and leaders, the vanishing or the indefinable point of retreat, the decline of plurality, doctrinaire despotism, and multiple splits – all these raise the question: Was this the fate of the movement? Why and how was the source of popular protests and revolt exhausted in the process of radicalisation and organisational transformation? Why did the fountain dry up? Yet, while we may ask these questions now, there is no escape from the fact that the entire movement notwithstanding its diversity was finally framed (or shackled if you like) in the organisational form of a party, which while carrying the mantle of the revolt, did everything required to destroy the spontaneity, multiplicity, and diversity of the movement and the participants. What dialectical irony lay in this?

12. While radical theory tells us of the dialectics of constituent power and the constituted power (thus the power of movement as the symbol of the former and the power of the party of the ML as the symbol of the latter), one of the great questions, counter-factual much as it may appear, will be concerning the political-organisational strategy of the time. The upsurge of the sixties and early seventies had many paradoxes: spread of the movement in the country and limited epicentres, autonomy of the movement and the desire of the leaders to centralise, dominance of urban youth activism and the centrality of the peasant question, spontaneous participation of various organisations, associations, and forums in the movement and withdrawal from all existing institutions (such as elections, trade unions, etc.) in order to be pure revolutionaries, brutal pacification methods of the state and the primitive modes of the rebels, international fervour of the time and the extremely local engagement of the revolutionaries, reliance on China for ideological-theoretical guidance and the overwhelming national specificities of India that had given birth to the movement, and finally the lower class basis of participation in the movement and the middle class doctrinaire leadership. What political organisational strategy in place of the one that had focused so much on Mao's ideas (commonly known in those days as Mao Tse Tung's Thoughts or today as Maoism) could have coped with these paradoxes and taken popular struggles as the basis of going forward for social transformation? What kind of federalisation of radical politics was the call of the hour? Perhaps a new history of Indian radicalism will one day provide us with a possible answer.

Political-Organisational Line

13. Readers will notice that while at the outset this note promised to eschew questions of Naxalite political line, political strategy, etc., and stick to the theme of popular context, yet it has ended with facing precisely those issues. The line between popular protest and radicalrevolutionary movement is porous. The years of 1966-74 proved that historically it is difficult to keep the two categories – the popular and the revolutionary – separate, though we may and perhaps need to make analytic distinction. One important question therefore may be raised: How important or influential were the inner party struggles in the Indian Communist Party (think of the CPI split in 1964 or the Burdwan Plenum of the CPI-M in 1968) in the developing popular upsurge of the time? At one level we may say that intellectual struggles reflect in a particular way the ongoing class struggles. Yet, if this statement is not to become a banal declaration, we have to enquire the historical connections between the inner party political debates and the ongoing popular movements of the time, the ongoing struggles against the Congress government at the Centre and the states at that time, the particular nature of the peasant movements and the workers' movement, and their relation with the political formulations of the party, and more fundamentally the question: what was the relation between the popular upsurge at that time and the particular political formulations by the CPI-ML (for instance, India was semi-colonial and semi-feudal, the city has to be surrounded by the

countryside, peasant revolution's centrality in a revolutionary strategy, etc., etc.) that aspired to lead the people? If we compare this epoch with that of 1946-50, we can see striking similarities. Then too people were in revolt, and then too, the revolutionaries wanted a universal line/model that could help Indian transformation. And as we know the revolutionaries had failed, with the popular upsurge finally stymied by the parliamentary framework of rule. This time Chinese experiences and Mao's teachings were to provide the universal framework. And this time too, the revolutionaries failed with the popular upsurge finally stymied by the parliamentary framework of rule. What is this bind of universality that has repeatedly inspired only to fail the cause of social transformation?

14. Perhaps we need to review the history of popular politics, popular upsurge, and the revolt in the sixties and seventies of the last century in the way Marx repeatedly went back to the history of 1848 or the way Lenin repeatedly drew the link between the developing unrest of the Russian society of his time and the work of the Bolsheviks. This calls for a greater dialectical understanding of the relation between autonomy of popular movement and popular unrest and the political-organisational strategy of the party of the upsurge.

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The Cultural-Creative Dimension of the Naxalite Movement

Subhoranjan Dasgupta

When in love, Do not become a flower.
If you can, Come as the thunder
I'll lift its roar to my breast
And send forth the battle-cry to every corner.

Murari Mukhopadhyay

Each and every important socio-political movement and its concomitant, uprising or upheaval, either triumphant or abortive, has its own and distinctive cultural-creative dimension. This dimension, in fact, serves-to use T.S. Eliot's expression - as the 'objective correlative' of the movement itself. The unforgettable Naxalbari uprising, which began in the late sixties of the last century and continued till the early seventies, was also marked by vibrant and multifaceted cultural-creative engagement. Indeed, this entire creative output led to a cultural efflorescence and it left indelible footprints in almost all sections of creativity, namely, poetry-novels-dramas – short stories-films and autobiographical journals. In point of fact, this variegated cultural output, both in terms of quantity and quality, far surpassed other creative endeavours related to other political movements that emerged in post-1947 India. Bearing in mind this abundance, Mahasweta Debi, the greatest chronicler of the Naxalbari upheaval, termed the movement as "the most fecund and inspiring political upsurge" that flowered and then withered in post-independence India.

A brief statistical documentation will bear evidence to the claim made above. No fewer than 100 poems and songs were written and sung to applaud the Naxalbari upsurge. A selection out of this branch of creativity is available in Sumanta Banerjee's excellent compilation titled '*Thema Book of Naxalite Poetry*'. The focus will be on poets like Dhurjyoti Chattopadhyay, Dronacharya Ghosh, Srijan Sen, Monoranjan Biswas and Murari Mukhopadhyay. Again, no fewer than 100 short stories were penned to record the evanescent victory and progress as well as the final decline and dissolution. Both these pathbreaking poems and stories have been collected in a masterly anthology edited by the journalist activist Dipankar Chakravarti.

At least-to give an approximate estimate – 30 novels were written by the famous and the not so famous to analyse and picture the upsurge which sped like lightning and then eclipsed as a falling meteor. Expectedly, Mahasweta Debi with her novels like *Basai Tudu* and *Hazaar Churasir Ma* occupied rightfully the central place in this specific creative region. On the other hand, the talented

as well as popular novelist Samaresh Bose wrote severe critiques in novels such as *Manushi Saktir Utsa* and *Mahakaler Rather Ghora*.

In the sphere of drama, including one-act plays, the figure crossed 30. In fact, the figure would rise if one takes into account the innumerable streetplays that were staged to spread the message of the movement and to stir the bystanders. By far, the most significant plays were written by the doyen Bijan Bhattacharjee. What is particularly noteworthy in this context is the timing and chronology of Bijan Babu's play *Debi Garjan* which enacted the annihilation of a cruel and merciless landowner by rebellious peasants. While the play was published and produced in 1966, the programme of annihilation implemented by the Naxalites began in 1969. In other words, Bijan Bhattacharjee's play served as the forerunner to the actual *Khatam Abhijan*. One could well-nigh claim that the final stage direction in the play detailing the annihilation of the crooked exploiter leads directly to reportage on the same subject in *Deshabrati*, the mouthpiece of the Naxalites. His other creation *Chalo Sagore* is equally intense and moving. The other Thespian Utpal Dutt wrote and staged his classic *Teer* during the height of the Naxalite movement. There were others as well – Amal Gupta, Manoranjan Biswas, Amal Roy, Jhochon Dastidar, Lokenath Chattopadhyay, Samar Datta and Indranil Sen who kept the slogan alive and the red flag fluttering on the stage and in street corners.

One has to admit however that the genre of autobiographical journals did not turn out to be a rich fare. The prime reason for this is the fact that activists like Utpalendu Chakravarti and Jayanta Joardar utilized their personal, militant experience to frame novels like *Grame Chalo* and *Ebahbe Egobe*, respectively. They wrote autobiographical novels to depict the upheaval. Nevertheless, it needs to be stated that the writer Raghav Bandyopadhyay not only wrote the searching novel *Communis* but also a remarkable autobiography *Journal Sattar* to fill the gap. Sharp, incisive and soul-seeking, this journal is a must read for all who are interested in the Naxalite movement. Doubts and queries, questions and confessions, bravery and hesitation – indeed the whole gamut of emotion which shrouds the entire movement has been explored with consummate finesse in this slice of autobiography.

Now we come to the world of films. We can claim without exaggeration that no other political movement and uprising has stirred or inspired so many films as the Naxalbari upsurge has. Ritwik Ghatak's *Jukti Takko Gappo*, Gautam Ghosh's *Kalbela*, Govind Nihalni's *Hazaar Churasi Ma*, Satyajit Ray's *Pratidwandi*, Mrinal Sen's *Padatik*, *Kolkata 71* and *Chorus*, Sumon Mukhopadhyay's *Herbert*, Buddhadev Dasgupta's *Duratwa* – all these films, where aesthetic excellence and political message have been deftly interwoven, capture the electrifying phase with beautiful and inspiring exactitude. One recalls in this connection the tormented scene in *Herbert* where a merciless police officer interrogates a severely injured Naxalite, the rebellious scene in *Kolkata 71* where the inflamed hero destroys a mannequin in rage and the moving scene in *Jukti Takko Gappo* where a Naxal rebel engages the police in a do-or-die firing combat. *Herbert*, incidentally, written by Nabarun Bhattacharjee is a singularly satisfying novel laced with irony, cynicism and valour.

What is the point-counterpoint or dialectical essence of this cultural-creative efflorescence? The answer to this query is simple though far-reaching and meaningful. On one side of the frame, we are roused by soaring hopes or dreams, steely resolution and rockhard commitment of the activists while, on the other, we are lashed by severe introspection, limitless despair and frightening loneliness. The dialectical movement swings between these two emotional spheres and we are constantly assailed by death-defying determination as well as its antithesis, self-lacerating doubts. This searing contradiction turns eloquent in the poetic output. The martyr-poet Dronacharya Ghosh writes in propagandistic style:

The power that flows from the barrel of the gun
Shatters to smithereens
The last ruins of imperialism

Though Saroj Datta, on his part, gives poignant expression to his deepest doubts and tormenting queries in the following words:

Sometimes I feel that I am treading a dangerous path
At night at the hypnotic call of some evil spirit
On waking up I will realize with a shudder
That I have not a single fellow-traveller in this world

The undying worth of this multifaceted and variegated cultural-creative upsurge, more often than not, is strengthened by sheer artistic splendour. Slogans are transliterated into lyrics and the image of the much-utilized sun is employed to state something remarkably original. Thus the activist Bipul Chakravarti writes in an imagist poem par excellence:

One after another,
Eyes burn.
Watch then from far,
They look pale like the night stars
Come closer,
Every eye looks larger than the sun
Each a ball of fire

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Contentious Politics and Popular Movement: Enigma of Karpoori Thakur

Manish K Jha

Exactly two years after the imposition of internal emergency in India in 1975, on June 25, 1977, Arun Sinha reported in Economic and Political Weekly:

“Located on the western fringes of Patna, in the Braj Kishore memorial, 235 legislators of Janata Party had met to elect their leader...Even before the voting was completed, it was clear that Karpoori Thakur was winning. With the solid support of about 50 BLD legislators and about 68 belonging to Jan Sangh, he had a head start over the other candidates...Despite this foregone conclusion the air was thick with speculation while the voting was in process. Karpoori Thakur was a barber by caste, wasn't he?”

The caste background of Karpoori Thakur always shadowed his leadership despite his unparalleled acumen and competence to deal with the contentious politics of Bihar. The questions that continue to be argued during and after the lifetime of Karpoori Thakur revolved around his influence in shaping foundation for anti-congress politics by invigorating backward caste politics in Bihar. Karpoori was one of the foremost socialist leaders of the state who provided impetus to the idea of social justice and influenced the contours of backward caste politics that demonstrated its first electoral triumph as early as in 1967; and continue to dominate state politics since 1990. Born in a family belonging to Nai (barber) caste that constitute less than 1.5 % of Bihar population, Thakur managed to occupy the centre stage of socialist party and backward caste politics in Bihar between 1960 to 1987. Similar to other socialist leader of the time, his initiation in politics started with engagement in independence movement but his ideological moorings gravitated towards socialist party from early on in his political career. During the decade of 1960s, he emerged as a representative of the political aspirations of the intermediate (read backward) castes and thus posed a serious challenge to political parties like the Congress (I), the Congress (O) and Jana Sangh that were largely dominated by upper caste leaders. Influenced by and socialized in ‘Lohiaite’ political tradition, Thakur was instrumental in challenging the dominant conception and visualization of politics in Bihar. This challenge came in the form of setting agenda against given political tenet and system.

Though the phenomenal success of caste based mobilization and its macro implications in favour of other backward castes became much more perceptible after 1990s, the process has diverse trajectories in different parts of the country. In Bihar and U.P., a number of leaders belonging to Other Backward Classes had played crucial role in shaping the sociopolitical contours of backward

caste politics that got flourished over decades and finally emerged as governing politics since 1990s. Karpoori's politics was a serious effort towards building coalition among the caste groups for political recognition and assertion, however, the process met with numerous complexities and impediments. The personal ambitions of the backward caste leaders, demands of political career of different leaders and their ideological commitments made it very difficult for them to set aside the differences. This kept the different lower caste groups apart and they were unable to forge a stable and reliable political coalition on the basis of economic or ideological factors (Roy 1988: 62). Roy explains that the fear, distrust and recrimination among the shudra castes prevent their political coalescence and block their political ascendance. Against the odds, influenced by Lohia's politics, Karpoori Thakur emerged as a young and persuasive face of socialist politics in Bihar. Lohia's effective articulation about the relationship between the socialist political tradition and lower caste movements, recognizing "the political potential of the horizontal mobilization of lower castes on issues of social justice and ritual discrimination" became the guiding principle of Karpoori's politics. The electoral success of Thakur has been exemplary and he won all election that he contested since 1952 except the one in 1984 Lok Sabha election. His fiery and argumentative contribution inside the legislative assembly on varied issues and concerns of underprivileged section of the society was matched by his direct engagement with people and communities on margin of society and polity. The conception of social justice and the idea of development and people's mobilization around it were inextricably interlinked in his thought. Most of his political action was informed with those ideas and understanding. The paper examines Karpoori Thakur's idea and articulation about social justice. Though Thakur was the vanguard of collective mobilization and assertion through popular movements, it demonstrated the power of hitherto excluded and marginalized castes and communities in Bihar.

Karpoori's politics also require assessment of leadership conflict within Socialist block in the country. Explaining the fragmentation among socialist leaders, Fickett wrote in 1972 "The great Socialist leaders — Jayaprakash Narayan, Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia, J. B. Kripalani, and Asoka Mehta — all tended to be prima donnas, each espousing his own kind of political salvation, each indulging in the fruitless ideological abstractions so characteristic of Indian intellectual politicians and each unwilling to compromise with the others. Consequently, over a period of time, these leaders have all renounced, defected, or been expelled from the Party, each time leaving it a little weaker by taking with them their loyal supporters" (Fickett 1973: 829). In Bihar, most of the PSP cadres had long since defected in successive waves to the Congress - approximately one-third in 1964 when Asoka Mehta left the PSP with his supporters, taking with him an estimated one-third of PSP cadres. The defection in Bihar, in a way, created greater space for backward caste leaders as many upper caste socialist leaders defected to congress in 1964. In fact, since the merger of Bihar State Backward Classes Federation with Lohia's Samajwadi Party in 1957, and the subsequent adoption of the resolution by Lohia's supporters in 1959 to secure 60 percent reservation for OBCs, SCs, STs, religious minorities in the organizations and government jobs became the main agenda of the socialist politics (Frankel 1989: 88-89). Karpoori Thakur became one of the proponent of the slogan Socialist ne baandhi gaanth, pichde pave sau me saath and became the principal campaigner for the same.

However, forceful demand and insistence on preferential treatment for the backward classes had accentuated the difference among socialist factions. The SSP insisted upon 60% reservation for these groups, but the PSP opposed a rigid percentage approach. The language question also kept the Socialists apart. The SSP, reflecting its North Indian base, took a very hard line in favor of an unconditional acceptance of the Hindi language. While agreeing that Hindi should be the national language, the PSP opposed the imposition of Hindi on unwilling regions of the country (Lewis 1973: 831). Elaboration on problems with socialist politics, Brass (1976: 21) argued that the Socialist split demonstrates the complex interconnectedness of power, personal interest, and principles in politics. Defection of one section of leaders followed by merger of Praja Socialist Party (PSP) and Socialist Party (SP) in Samyukta Socialist Party (SSP) in June 1964, the question

of leadership of Lohia and issue of alliances with Jan Sangh and CPI were vigorously debated and contested within the party. The debate, dialogue and confusion around alliances have had its implications in shaping popular politics and movement as also its leadership question. Coalition of the SSP, Jana Sangh, Congress (O), and Swatantra Party for government formation in late 1960s/early 1970s remained an aspect of serious contention in socialist politics; the role, relevance and ideologies of leaders like Karpoori Thakur will be studied in this backdrop.

Navigating and negotiating through these phases, Karpoori tried to balance between the factions and emerged as most acceptable leader in the opposition bloc. He employed silence, neutrality and ambiguity as strategies during internal feud. Between 1965 and 1972 Karpoori Thakur, Ramanand Tiwari, and Bhola Prasad Singh were leading force of SSP in Bihar but they differed on question and issues around alliance. "The wing for which Bhola Prasad Singh was spokesman argued for alliance with Congress (O), Jana Sangh, and Swatantra against Congress (R), whereas the wing led by Ramanand Tiwari favoured alliance with Congress (R) and the PSP...At this time Karpuri Thakur was not identified strongly with either side" (Brass 1976: 31). The issue around coalition, the caste identity of Chief Ministerial candidates, opposition around it and the fear of split in SSP led to working out a compromise that made Karpoori Thakur Chief Minister of Bihar in December 1970. The government was a coalition of SSP, Congress (O), Jana Sangh, Swatantra, and other minor parties. Though the Thakur government was short-lived, the backward caste political leaders tested success between 1967 and 1972; SSP made 'backwardism' into a near-creed. It was able to emerge as the second largest party in the 1967 elections and again in the 1969 mid-term poll. Of the seven Chief Ministers of Bihar since 1967, four have been of backward castes and one belonging to Scheduled Caste. Though the rise of this politics was temporarily arrested after 1972 victory of Congress; the socialist strategy of people's mobilization got re-activated during the movement led by Jayapakash Narayan in 1974. JP led movement was one of the most decisive political phenomenon in post-colonial India. The outbreak of "people's agitation" in Bihar leading to call for "Total Revolution" by JP and subsequent imposition of internal emergency clearly exhibited the potential and limit of popular movement in the state/country. Viewed as challenge to the threat to parliamentary democracy and response to governmental drift and corruption, the movement led to violence and repression. Perceived and articulated as expressions of popular protests, the outcome of the movements wherein "the people," disdaining partisanship and uniting across social barriers, rose to challenge the political - economic establishment (Wood 1975: 315). Investigative the 1974 political development, Wood explains that populist agitation is a collective attempt to bring about change in politicaleconomic institutions. "It implies that much if not all of the initiative for change comes from below and from outside established political institutions...The justification for all strategy and goals is in the name of "the people", and a premium is placed on the capacity of leaders to create and placate the popular opinion" (p 315). How does one understand this politics and its leadership in the name of "people" which was different from conventional party system? During 1974 movement, hundreds of trade unions, including those of industrial workers, teachers, engineers, journalists, government and university employees, railway union, etc, participated in the demonstration. The main slogan of the procession was: Pura Rashaan Pura Kaam, Nahin to Hoga Chakka jaam (full ration to ensure full work or else all work would come to a grinding halt). Echoing the popular sentiment, Karpoori Thakur appealed to the opposition parties, intellectuals, students, and youths to declare 'jehad' (crusade) for ending "the Congress misrule" in Bihar (The Indian Nation 1974). The consolidation of admired support by leaders like Thakur needs to be seen in the backdrop of series of incidents occurred during the popular movements in Bihar. On March 16, 1974, in Bettiah, five people were killed by police firing. In next weeks, more than twenty-five people were killed in firing during riots in Monghyr, Ranchi, Deoghar, and elsewhere. The students, looking for direction and effective purpose and their organizations 'Chhatra Sangharsh Samiti' had succeeded in persuading JP to assume leadership of the movement. JP's idea was broad based and he claimed to utilize this opportunity to shift contours of policies from rajniti to lokniti. Within weeks, Students' and People's Struggle Committees were formed in every university and district headquarters in Bihar. Populism was clearly evidenced not only in the rhetoric of the "people's

struggles”, but in the broad social base, spontaneous thrust, and diffuse goals of the agitations (Woods 1975: 322). The fact that JP facilitated the two dominant youth organisations, the Samajwadi Yuvajan Sabha (SYS) and the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), the youth wings of the SSP and Jan Sangh respectively to come together added confusion about ideological contour of the movement. In February 1974 the CPI broke away from this conglomeration; the ABVP, SYS- and TSS then formed into the Bihar Chattra Sangharsh Samiti (BCSS) which adopted a dominant rightist stance. This indeed has implications for the popular movement and politics in the years to come.

In February 1974 the CPI broke away from this conglomeration; the ABVP, SYS- and TSS then formed into the Bihar Chattra Sangharsh Samiti (BCSS) which adopted a dominant rightist stance. However, as the agitation proceeded, and as its goals expanded and took on a distinctly political character, people also began to ask questions. Who would be the harbingers of the ‘total revolution’? (Thakur 1975) The confusion, contradiction and complexities of this contentious politics were greatest challenge for JP who tried to cast it within foundational issues of democracy. Samaddar (2008: 50) explains “JP was posing the problem of democracy in an age of distrust, and secondly, he was bringing forward the issue of political will with which the power of the representative sovereign was to be confronted. By raising the question of social majority vis-a-vis the representative majority, and therefore the issue of mediation, double figures and double wills, he was suggesting nothing short of a repoliticisation of democracy”. What happened to the intent of repoliticisation of democracy and what effort was made by leaders like Thakur? What were instances that need to be examined while looking at the challenges and opportunities in these processes? Some of the questions posed during the movement help us to understand the shape of things to come ‘post movement. A party functionary of the Congress (O) from Bihar wrote to Asoka Mehta, party secretary: ‘How are we to participate in the movement? Are we to function in an amorphous manner? What would be our position as a political party in the postmovement stage? Do we have to eschew politics altogether? (Ankit 2017)

Needless to say that the idiom, the signs, the symbols and the slogan of the politics during the movement galvanized a section of the society, hitherto alert vis-à-vis politics but remained at the receiving end of political processes led by dominant castes. After 1977 Janata Party victory, Karpoori Thakur, became chief minister and he attempted to build a political constituency for ensuring stability of the altered political situation of the state. To promote a pro-poor, loosely socialist agenda, he brought policy to reserve seats in government jobs and in educational institutions for members of the backward castes. In 1978, Thakur implemented the 1971 Bihar Backward Classes Commission Report – known as the Mungeri Lal Commission - which recommended affirmative action quotas in the state civil services and universities for the OBCs. In addition, the OBC category was divided into two “Annexures” with special reservations for “Annexure One” castes considered to be “backward” within the OBC category (popularly referred to as Extremely Backward Castes). This action though was critiqued as and an alternative to (politically unattainable) land reform, it turned out to be a political masterstroke for the decades to come. Two features of Taker’s program were significant. “First, his mobilization along caste lines was a tactical move informed by socialist principles. Second, he aimed to divide the benefits of government employment more fairly, not to use government programs to improve conditions for his constituency” (Clement 2005). It was rather comprehensible that Thakur was pursuing the Lohia Line of mobilization of the backward classes. Lohia’s prediction that caste-based reservations will lead to profound political transformations proved to be exact.

In order to comprehend Karpoori’s contentious politics and his contribution for popular movement, the paper would explore some aspects from past - 1) What was his engagement and contestation with contemporary colleagues from 1952-1964 (when a section of Socialist leader defected to Congress), 2) What was his articulation of socialism and its implication for the backward castes and communities that helped him occupy the centrestage of competitive socialist politics in Bihar, 3) How to understand his ideological alignment with Lohia and points of contention, 4) How did his

interaction with JP evolve and shape his political decisions in 1970s, 5) How did he engage with students' politics and movement as a form of popular politics, 6) How does one situate the evolving conception of subject-hood/emergence of political subject and citizenship among students, peasants and backward castes in urban settings through aggressive politics/popular movements, 7) How does one explore his connect with minor and major figures of phase of non-conformism, insurgency, and rebellion, 8) How did the dominant social structures deal with his 'controversial' decisions, 9) What has been his specific contribution in preparing ground for political mobilization that was capitalized during JP's call for 'Total revolution' 10) How does one understand Karpoori's politics vis-à-vis coalition of extremes and politics of pragmatism, 11) How does one comprehend the political strategies behind 'Karpoori formula', 'Karpoori matriculation' and elements of popular politics behind it?

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Making of a Populist Government: A Study of Karpoori Thakur's Regime

Mithilesh Kumar

Making of a populist government: a study of Karpoori Thakur's regime

*Papain ke paap naashai, traas yamdutan ke
Bhav-rooj-parivar nashai dhaar triveni ki.
Tihin bhaanti traas nashai, dusht anyayion ke,
Gire ko uthave neet, sangh triveni ki.
Maan o gumaan nashai, jaal dusht jaalim ke,
Sbai bhaanti sahay kare, shoshit dal shreni ki.
Desh dharm laaj raake, sabhin saman raakhe,
Yaahi hetu bahi dhaar, sangh triveni ki.*

Triveni Sangh Ka Bigul

“Triveni Sangh Ka Bigul” is a curious ethico-political document. It is part manifesto, part programmatic, and a long lesson in morality. Formed in 1933 in Shahabad, Triveni Sangh was one of the earliest voices of assertion of the middle caste peasantry in Bihar that tried to articulate their demands in contradistinction with both the Congress as well as the communists. The problem that the Sangh had to resolve was how to bring a politics of collective claim making in the arena of caste which had been firmly girdled by the reformative social program of the congress. This line of politics will culminate in the thought and politics of Rammanohar Lohia and his own version of affirmative action by the government. Thus, the backbone of “social justice” will have a content that will fuse puritanical ethics with a supple form of politics of claim making that will be more tactical than strategic. This, I claim in this research project, is how we study the transformation of “social justice” from a popular demand to a form of governmental intervention that takes upon itself the task to change the polity. The first experiment in the government of social justice in Bihar was undertaken by Karpoori Thakur in his two terms as the chief minister of Bihar. The claim of this research project is to establish that this is a moment where the *ancienregime* is weakened, the Jacobins fail to impose themselves on the centre-stage of the political theatre, and when the Thermidors entrench themselves in the polity to start a long process of struggle and negotiation which begins a political and economic transformation in Bihar. In another words, social justice is the child of the process of passive revolution.

The first question that the project concerns itself is with a Leninist investigation of the passive revolution. To extract from the messy changes in political economy the kernel of politics. It is a truism now to state that land reforms failed in Bihar; whether it was state intervention or the ethical *bhoodan* or *gramdan*. What it does not explain is that how the middle caste peasantry consolidated its political and economic power through these land reforms? The challenge is to demonstrate that “social justice” broadened property relations in the countryside but it also consciously stymied any

radical reforms in land relations for the property-less which meant pauperization, proletarianization, and migration. A study of how caste assertion was used to re-mold property relations sets the limit of social justice. The Lohiaite thought around affirmative action shifted the arena of political struggles into the urban sphere and political economy of the state built around the planned economy. It was this that provided “social justice” its intellectuals, its rank and file, and the Bihar Movement.

The Karpoori Thakur regime had to refashion the notion of citizenship that was available to the aspirations of the middle castes. This citizen had, now, already broken the limits of simply being a legal right bearing entity. The available legal rights of citizenship were not in congruence to the demands of its egalitarian ideology. It was the political moment when the legal limits of citizenship had to be supplemented. This meant that caste will no longer remain an issue of identity and socio-economic mobility but issue of governmentality. The regime of Karpoori Thakur is when the governmentalization of caste becomes an indispensable tool in the art and science of managing the population. Thus, we can see a definite rupture from the governmental processes of the *ancien regime*; colonial and postcolonial. A new definition, new enumeration of “citizens” is required which is reflected in the many committees and commissions that are formed in this period. The project will study in detail the fashioning of this new citizen.

The Karpoori Thakur regime also set itself the agenda of moral regeneration of the nation on the same egalitarian principle through which it set out to rearrange political economy and polity. The two most controversial policies was its use of Hindi as a medium of instruction and total prohibition. The doing away of English as a medium of instruction and examination was not on the basis of linguistic identity and related sub-nationalism but as providing equal opportunities. The question for this project is not whether it was successful or unsuccessful, right or wrong but how it led to the politicization of students and emergence of students as a political subject, autonomous and radical. Prohibition, similarly, should be seen as an attempt to create a new subject for the new polity. A new political subject that is aware of its overdetermined citizenship laced with moral obligations. Clearly, according to this understanding the Gandhian moralist had failed in its project of national regeneration and with the fusion of caste and morality a new ethics of politics was to be forged. The project will study in detail the government of this ethical and political practice.

Finally, one should not forget the surplus violence which was used in this new art and science of government in this period especially in the case of Naxalbari movement. How “social justice” manages violence, both state and non-state violence, becomes an important question. This will require a new conception of “just” violence. The project, in this context, will study the governmental response to Naxal violence and rise of the human rights’ movement.

The mandate of the research project is to understand the Karpoori Thakur regime as a period of transition from the *ancien regime* of the Congress to the picking up the pace of passive revolution as the promise of the revolution faded away. This will also help in understanding the complex chart of Bihar politics which, in many ways, still cannot shed its influence of Karpoori Thakur and the promise of “social justice.”

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Left Mobilisation in Three Districts of West Bengal, 1947-1977: Nadia, Midnapore, Birbhum

Atig Ghosh and Anwesha Sengupta

The nature and trajectories followed by left movements in the three post-independence/ partition districts of Nadia, Midnapore and Birbhum do not always show homology. Yet, their constellation in the same analytic field of a research article brings out the rich dimensions and varied modalities

of left mobilisation in post-1947 West Bengal. This, in turn, helps us to understand the chequered career of left activism — both parliamentary and non-parliamentary — and their wide-ranging political geographies. The research limits itself to 1977 the year the Left Front government won a massive majority in the Legislative Assembly polls and came to power.

1. Nadia

1.1 *Partition and Nadia:*

The Radcliffe Line divided the district of Nadia and part of it fell within Pakistan. Being a border district, it had witnessed massive refugee influx since 1947. By 1951, Nadia had received more than 4 lakh refugees from various districts of East Bengal. Bulk of the migrants came from Kushtia, the district that was created by splitting Nadia. Some of the biggest refugee camps were located in this district, like Cooper's Camp and Roopasri Camp in Ranaghat, Dhubulia and Chamta and much of the agitational politics of early 1950s was dominated by the refugees. Though traditionally a Congress stronghold, C.P.I. and R.C.P.I became increasingly popular with the coming of the refugees. Gradually, C.P.I. triumphed over R.C.P.I, particularly when the latter supported the governmental policy of dispersal of the refugees to faraway places like Andaman and Dandakaranya. When in 1959, Dandakaranya plan was declared, more than a thousand refugees of Dhubulia camp used to go the district magistrate's office daily to register protest. Their protest was organized by U.C.R.C. Refugee leaders of Nadia like Dinesh Majumdar and Subhash Basu would become important face of Communist politics of West Bengal. Apart from the Communists, Eastern India Refugee Council was also formed that followed Jogendra Nath Mandal. Satyasan Majumdar was another independent refugee leader from Nadia. Nadia's refugee politics thus provides us with a space to look into the contestations among various political parties and political leaders who tried to mobilize the refugees. Refugee politics is an underexplored area, particularly at the district levels. This paper will address this gap.

1.2 *Food Movement in Nadia:*

Nadia, and particularly Krishnanagar, was one of the major sites of the food movement of 1966. Food scarcity and exorbitant prices had affected Nadia very badly. West Bengal had witnessed a food movement in 1959 when Calcutta and Howrah were the major sites of troubles. The stage was set for a widespread agitation over food at fair price. On March 4, 1966, there were two students' processions in Krishnanagar – one with the students of Krishnanagar College and C.M.S School, and the other with Krishnanagar Polytechnic. When the two rallies were about to merge in front of the Krishnanagar Post Office, stones were thrown to a nearby police van. The police reacted by firing openly that killed a seventeen-year-old student, Ananda Hait. After Basirhat's Nurul Islam, he was the second martyr of the Food Movement of 1966. This will be the second moment that will be discussed in this paper. 1966 was very significant in the contemporary history of West Bengal. The food movement spread throughout West Bengal from Basirhat and Nadia and prepared the stage for the final defeat of the Congress Government in 1967, and, in many ways, for the Naxalbari Movement. In Nadia, particularly, most of the prominent student faces of the Food Movement joined CPI (ML) towards the end of 1960s.

1.3 *Naxal Movement in Nadia:*

When the United Front came to power, conflicts within CPI(M) became apparent in Nadia. Direct confrontation occurred when the more radical section wanted to observe May Day in Congress - dominated refugee colony Shaktinagar near Krishnanagar. CPI(M) district committee objected to it. On the other hand, Nadia's food situation did not improve in any way even after the United Front came to power. In July that year, around 500 refugees from Dhubulia camp sat on rail track demanding food; on August 6 and August 8 Nabadwip Students' Federation and Democratic Youth Federation of India submitted memorandum to the B.D.O demanding food; another memorandum was submitted to minister Charumihir Sarkar. Between August 11 and 14, trains were stopped, the

district magistrate was gheraoed', the local B.D.O office was set on fire in Nabadwip. In clashes between the police and the students, 2 people were killed. A general strike was observed in Nabadwip on 12 August and Section 144 was imposed. Meanwhile, posters in support of Naxal Movement were put up in Parichara Para, Dearapara, Malanchapara and some other areas of Nabadwip. By September Naxalbari had influenced the students and youths of Shantipur as well. The Naxalite activities in Sahapara-Sarbanandipara of Shantipur Municipality area under the leadership of Ajay Bhattacharya, Kalachand Dalal, Kanai Bango, and Madhusudan Chattopadhyay drew attention of the Chinese Press. Apart from Bhattacharya, all the other prominent leaders were from very poor families of Sahapara – Sarbanandipara and had significant influence on the local population. Shahstitala of Krishnanagar emerged as another strong hold around this time. Very important role was played by the students of the district, particularly those who were studying in Bipradas Pal Chowdhury Polytechnic of Krishnanagar. Some of the bidi workers like Keshto Biswas, Robi, Mani Adhikari also participated in the movement and went to the rural areas of the districts. Over next few years Nadia would witness the rise of new leaders, sporadic yet massive violence, police violence and attacks on police. The inner tension between the leaders, ideological conflicts and confusions of the radicals would also become apparent in these years. The paper will reflect upon the nature of Naxalbari Movement in Nadia as the third moment to understand popular political movements in this district.

2. Midnapore

2.1 Midnapore had witnessed strong anti-colonial struggles in twentieth century. During the non-cooperation movement (1921-22) peasants were mobilized by the Congress leader B.N. Sashmal against taxation. During the civil disobedience movement, Midnapore witnessed several confrontations between the sharecroppers and the jotedars and the Congress leaders had to intervene often to mediate. When Quit India was launched, Midnapur (particularly Contai and Tamluk subdivision) emerged as a crucial site. The tradition of peasant resistance continued during the Tebhaga Movement (1946-47) and tebhaga rights were established extensively in this district. The radical peasant struggles continued in the years immediately after independence. The Times of India, for instance, reported on January 29 (1950) about an attack on the police station by —two thousand villagers armed with spears, bows and arrows. The reporter further noted that the attackers were all — Reds.

2.2 Midnapore remained backward and therefore conditions for peasants/subaltern uprisings were always there. The Times of India reported that around three hundred thousand persons in Khejuri, Nandigram and Bhagwanpore were on the verge of starvation in mid-1953. The same newspaper reported about — many deaths due to severe scarcity of food in Gopiballavpur area in mid-1953. During the food movement of 1959, though Calcutta and Howrah emerged as the major epicentres, — the first phase of civil disobedience movement began on 14 July 1959 when people of Midnapore town, Ghatal, Khejuri, Contai, Tamluk, Garbeta, Bhagabanpur under the joint leadership of the CPI and PIFRC picketed before law courts and Block Development Offices. During the food movement of 1966 also Midnapore remained a site of struggle. In early February of 1966 Dainik Basumati reported that one sub divisional officer and one magistrate were manhandled by the angry mob and they looted the procured food grains.

2.3 During the Naxalbari Movement, Gopiballavpur – Debra region became one of the most important sites. Towards the end of September 1969, three successful —actions took place in which jotedars and zamindars were targeted. The success of these actions and the killings of the notorious zamindars enthused local peasants and helped in strengthening CPI (ML) in this region. The leadership came from the radical students and youths, many of who were from elite institutions of Calcutta and some were locals who had been exposed to Charu Mazumdar's ideology while studying in Kharagpur, Midnapore or Calcuta. Santosh Rana, a major Naxalite leader of West Bengal who hailed from this region writes, — Between the third week of November and mid-December, 1969 in Gopiballavpur thana of south western corner of West Bengal a festival took

place – a festival to gain control over the food grain, to destroy feudal structure of land relations, to destroy the power and the influences of the zamindars and jotedars, to reveal the true colours of the revisionists in the state power. More than twenty thousand peasants participated in this struggle to take possession of the crops. As the struggle gained momentum, arms were seized from the zamindars and jotedars, they were tried in — people’s court and punished according to their levels of crime. Initially the police was taken aback by the intensity of the movement. However, soon they began to gain control over the situation, and as Rana writes, in the name of establishing law and order — the police took away whatever little the peasants owned – their cattle and poultry animals, money and utensils, paddy. The peasants who fought the jotedars bravely could not resist the huge state force. Many were arrested. At one point the number of imprisoned was twice the capacity of Midnapore jail.

2.4 Midnapore remained important as a site of peasant resistance in the political history of West Bengal even after Naxalbari. While poverty remained acute in many parts of Pashchim Midnapore (starvation deaths in Amlasole for instance), radical left politics also retained some base as the recent Maoist activities in Lalgarh area reveals. On the other hand, Nandigram (Purba Midnapore) had witnessed massive peasant resistance against state oppression in recent years. The long and almost continuous tradition of peasant militancy makes Midnapore a particularly interesting site of study. While the colonial politics of this region has received some amount of scholarly attention and the recent events of Lalgarh and Nandigram too have been highlighted extensively in the media and discussed by the journalists, political activists, social scientists and civil right activists, the crucial three decades after independence remain understudied. This paper will be a modest attempt towards addressing this gap.

2.5 While discussing the popular movements in Midnapore district, it is important to look beyond the peasant resistance and explore the labour unrests, particularly in the railway town of Kharagpur. Kharagpur, a strategically important rail head that serves the entire ore and steel belt, connects Calcutta to Mumbai and Chennai and serves the ports of Vizag, Paradwip and Haldia. It had been the major centre for railway strike in 1974. Between May 8 and May 28 the railway town witnessed repeated confrontations between the strikers and the police, secret meetings of workers and multiple arrests under MISA (Maintenance of Internal Security Act). Focusing on how the strike unfolded in Kharagpur, the nature of participation in the struggle and mobilization will also provide us with an entry point to the nature of trade unionism and labour movements in Bengal during the period under study.

3. Birbhum

Birbhum is among the least populated districts of West Bengal. Located at the north-west corner of south Bengal and sharing a long border with Jharkhand, Birbhum, even then, is home to 3,502,387 people (3.83 per cent of West Bengal’s population), most of whom live off agricultural professions. By Tapan Choudhuri’s estimate, 91.02 per cent of the population still live in villages and 75 per cent depend on agriculture. There is no industry to speak of in this district, except for scattered cottage industries mostly in the Bolpur subdivision, the stone-crushing and ceramic industries of the Rampurhat block, and the Bakreswar Thermal Power Plant— the only heavy industry— in the westernmost reaches of the Dubarajpur block. It is unsurprising, therefore, that Birbhum has been witness to continuous peasants’ movements and left mobilisation in the district has found its greatest expression through them.

Having said this, it must also be borne in mind that Birbhum— surrounded by the politically varied districts of Murshidabad, Malda and Burdwan— exhibits a curiously mixed political culture, electorally speaking. The Congress has traditionally had significant electoral successes in the northern parts of the district, whereas in the south and the west the left parties have fared better. Yet again, in the Bolpur town, the largest urban centre in Birbhum, the municipality has more or less remained with the Congress (and now Trinamool), though the eponymous Lok Sabha constituency

has consistently returned a CPI(M) candidate since 1971 till 2009. This goes to confirm what has already been hinted at: it is the rural sectors in this district where the left parties had managed to build their sturdiest constituencies. Evidence for such mobilisation is legion and this research, which is still at a very preliminary stage of collecting documents and interviewing leaders, proposes to explore the nature and extent of this organisation in the 1950s, 60s and 70s.

In 1946, for instance, we already find the Fourth Birbhum District Peasants Conference being held at Ahmedpur. Here the peasant leader Krishnabinod Roy sent out an appeal to his — peasant brothers to demand the abolition of zamindari without compensation, for the halving of the revenue demand, for the withdrawal of British soldiers and the release of political prisoners. He further appealed that a demand should be made for the distribution of all uncultivated land among landless poor peasants. He also addressed the weavers, fisherfolk, and the santals to make a range of demands for the uplift of their positions. His was not a voice in the wilderness. His appeal, like the appeal of other left peasant leaders, found deep resonance among the peasantry of Birbhum. By 1948, at a time when the Congress government at the Centre banned the Communist party, we find that the situation in Birbhum had become explosive. With the support of the Birbhum district Communist Party and under the leadership of members of the District Krishak Samiti, such as Kalipada Bashishta, Suren Banerjee, Keshab Das, Deben Roy, Sudhin Roy, Dharani Roy, Dwarik Banerjee, Sourin Mukherjee (Kumkum) and others, a powerful peasant movement spread its wings over Birbhum: in the villages along the banks of the Kopai river (Siuri, Srinidhipur, Darpashila, Khanyerbari, Srichandrapur, etc.), in the Thiba, Jamna, Mahodari areas under Labpur Police Station, in Kirnahar and other villages under Nanoor Police Station, in Mallarpur and other villages under Mayureshwar Police Station, in Damra and other neighbouring villages of the Muhammadbazaar Police Station, in Deriapur and Kanchannagar of Sainthia Police Station, in Nagari and other villages under Suri Police Station, and in the Bhabanipur and Chandrapur areas under Rajnagar Police Station.

In the Damra village under Muhammadbazaar Police Station the agitation soon reached a flashpoint. Here leaders such as Deben Roy, Dharani Roy and Turku Hansda had organised a powerful peasant movement against the local jotedars and moneylenders around the issues of wages, demands of tebhaga and against usurious practices. The leaders were joined by Lapsa Hemram, Jatil Let, Baul Let, Ram Bauri, Shyam Bauri, Satyasadhan Das and Charu Mandal— all of who dedicated themselves to organizing the agricultural labourers of the area. They also started a boycott movement against the jotedars. Terrified by the scale of mobilization, jotedar Sarojaksha Ghosal lodged a false diary with the local police station on 24 June 1949 against Deben Roy, Sourin Mukherjee and others, accusing them of theft, physical assault and other crimes. On the basis of this accusation, the head constable led a force which arrested Ruhi Das, Dukhu Let, Golab Let and Baul Let the next day from Damra. The force then surrounded the house of Turku Hansda at the Nimpahari village and from there successfully apprehended Deben Roy, Sourin Mukherjee (Kumkum) and the then state President Saroj Hajra. They were all promptly carried away to the Damra Police camp. Reacting to this instance of police partiality towards the jotedar, thousands of peasants assembled under the leadership of Turku Hansda, who then led them, armed with bows and arrows, to the police camp. The police panicked at this considerable show of strength, clambered on to the roof of Mukti Bhattacharya's house, and opened fire from the top. In the 31 rounds that were fired, many were mortally wounded and Dashu Majhi, Kudno Majhi, Habol Let and Manik Let were killed. Mukti Let, who too was seriously wounded, succumbed to his injuries a day later at the Benagariya Hospital. These are the five martyrs of Damra, whose day of martyrdom (25 June) is celebrated as the —Damra Dibas in various parts of Birbhum by the Krishak Sabha. The Mallarpur College has also been named Turku Hansda Lapsa Hemram Mahavidyalaya, honouring the contributions of these peasant leaders.

The martyrdom and the movement were not entirely in vain. Soon after the Damra incident, the District Magistrate found it politic to accede to at least some of the peasant demands. It was decided that after the seed grain had been harvested, the farmer would now get one-third of the produce

while the jotedar would retain two-thirds. Also, the peasants were promised hay for thatching. Though these were a far cry from meeting the full demands of the peasant movement, they signalled the beginning of a militant left peasant mobilization in Birbhum which would go from strength to strength with the passing of years. In the late 1950s, the district was witness to a movement against increased canal taxes and compulsory levies. There was the movement in support of the flood-victims. In 1959, the Food Movement spread to Birbhum and there was widespread civil disobedience in various parts of the district. In Suri, Turku Hansda and Deben Roy led a massive movement as a part of the Food Movement and more than a hundred agitators were arrested.

The 1960s, as we know, was an eventful decade, to understate the case. The Sino-Indian War of 1962 led to the indiscriminate arrest and detention without trial of suspected Sinophiles (read Communists). The peasant movement at this stage linked up with the burgeoning students' movement in the district. Students of schools and colleges of Hetampur and Dubarajpur raided and vandalized BDO offices demanding the release of political prisoners, food and kerosene. Hundreds, again, were arrested and injured. This was also the decade when a restlessness with regard to the methods of the CPI led to the formation of the CPI(M) in 1964 and further the CPI(M-L) in 1969, the latter group being disaffected by the parliamentary politics of the CPI(M). Both found followers in the district and violent clashes ensued, leading to many political murders. By this time, of course, the CPI(M) had already tasted power through the United Front government in 1967 and its modus operandi had started showing signs of change at the level of the district leaders. The grassroots peasant leaders, however, seemed to retain their radicalism through the 1960s into the 1970s; and we find that in 1972, the peasant leaders Deben Roy and Shambhu Mukherjee were seriously wounded in a police cane charge while organizing Shaheed Dibas at Rampurhat on 31 August.

This is only a sampling of the rich, diverse and complicated skein that is left politics and mobilisation in Birbhum. There is a wealth of documents waiting on left mobilization in Birbhum — at the level of the peasants as well as the students, though the latter became prominent only from the 1960s. This research will endeavour to weave together a narrative on the basis of these documents. At another level, these documents also reveal an overwhelming quantum of SC/ST participation, albeit the upper echelons of leadership were generally monopolized by the upper castes. Leaders such as Turku Hansda are, by all accounts, exceptions. This makes for the obviously interesting study of how the Communist parties managed to maintain its upper-caste character even when it was working with the most disenfranchised groups of the society in Birbhum. Further, woman leaders are rarely mentioned. Arun Chowdhury's formidable list of short biographies of left leaders of Birbhum (almost 50 of them) mentions less than half a dozen women; making the upper-caste characters of the parties also predominantly male. In writing a narrative history of left mobilisation in Birbhum, interesting as it will be in itself these lateral considerations may probably shine a light on how we might understand the character of communist movement in Bengal at large.

For Full Paper visit: <http://www.mcrgh.ac.in/PP92.pdf>

Long March or Garden Path? The Left Front's First Term in West Bengal (1971-1982)

Atig Ghosh

The Left Front was set up as the repressive climate of the Emergency was relaxed in January 1977. The six founding parties of the Left Front, i.e. the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or the CPI(M), the All India Forward Bloc (AIFB), the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP), the Marxist Forward Bloc (MFB), the Revolutionary Communist Party of India (RCPI) and the Biplabi Bangla Congress (BBC), articulated a common programme. This Left Front contested the Lok Sabha election in an electoral understanding together with the Janata Party and won most of the seats it

contested. Ahead of the subsequent June 1977 West Bengal Legislative Assembly elections, seat-sharing talks between the Left Front and the Janata Party broke down. The Left Front had offered the Janata Party 56 percent of the seats and the post as Chief Minister to JP leader Prafulla Chandra Sen, but JP insisted on 70 percent of the seats. The Left Front thus opted to contest the elections on its own. The seat-sharing within the Left Front was based on the "Promode Formula", named after the CPI(M) State Committee Secretary Promode Dasgupta. Under the Promode Formula the party with the highest share of votes in a constituency would continue to field candidates there, under its own election symbol and manifesto. CPI(M) contested 224 seats, AIFB 36, RSP 23, MFB 3, RCPI 4 and BBC 2. The Left Front won the election, winning 231 out of the 294 seats. CPI(M) won 178 seats, AIFB 25, RSP 20, MFB 3, RCPI 3 and 1 independent. AIFB and RSP won significant chunks of seats in northern Bengal. The combined Left Front vote was 6,568,999 votes (45.8 percent of the votes cast in the state). The electoral result came as a surprise to the Left Front itself, as it had offered 52 percent of the seats in the pre-electoral seat sharing talks with the Janata Party. Over the years, the Left Front, though joined by the Communist Party of India (CPI) in 1982, came increasingly to be controlled and micro-managed by the CPI(M), so much so that towards the end of its rule, Left Front and the CPI(M) had almost become synonymous in common use. However, the end of its rule did not come soon. Once it achieved its unexpected victory in 1977, the Left Front stayed in power for the next 34 years.

Till 2011, therefore, West Bengal had the longest ruling democratically elected Communist government in world history. Since 1977 the Communists governed a population larger than that of most western democracies. Its approximately 80 million people re-elected the Communists repeatedly, indicating a continuing popularity and longevity not found by Marxists in any other democracy. The Communist electoral victory in one of India's most industrialized (at the time of independence) and strategically important states predictably created considerable interest and controversy over its performance in office. This performance was expressed in the first five years mainly through rural development initiatives.

Though development policy implementation was not the only Left Front endeavour, it was the most critical in providing a working example for the rest of India, and in consolidating Communist power. Electorally the rural areas with 74 percent of the state population would be critical in maintaining Communist influence. For this reason, rural development had priority over urban industrial development in determining the success of the Left Front government. It was also the area where the Communists had greatest constitutional authority as agrarian reform fell largely within state jurisdiction. Rural development will therefore take up most of the present work, with industrial and trade union policies providing analogous urban examples. Since the present study will be concerned as far as possible with the Left Front's first term in government (1977-1982), special attention will be given to Operation Barga of 1977 and the panchayat elections of 1978. Land reform and decentralisation of administration were, indeed, the two key priorities in the first term. On 29 September 1977 the West Bengal Land (Amendment) Bill was passed. Through Operation Barga, in which share-croppers were given inheritable rights on lands they tilled, 1.1 million acres of land was distributed amongst 1.4 million share-croppers. On 4 June 1978 three-tier panchayat local bodies were elected across the state, elections in which the Left Front won a landslide victory. Some 800,000 acres of land were distributed to 1.5 million heads of households between 1978 and 1982.

Administrative reforms will also be covered to indicate the policy instruments available to the Left Front for reform implementation. The emphasis is on development policies that might be attempted by any provincial Third World government trying to alter socioeconomic conditions in favour of the lower classes.

The task facing the Left Front government on assuming office in 1977 was fraught with difficulties, despite its massive majority in the Legislative Assembly. The problems posed by the transition to socialism in the conditions of West Bengal were hardly amenable to easy solutions. The United

Fronts of the late 1960s, under pressure from the Maoist left, had attempted rapid radical change only to be brutally repressed. This radical activity helped gain the CPI(M) a larger base, but the party's inability to stand up to state repression exposed its weakness in the face of a dictatorial government. Only the return of democracy after the Emergency enabled the CPI(M) to show that its popular following had been enhanced during the years of "semi-fascist terror".

Though the central Janata government formed in 1977 was not hostile to the Left Front, it could hardly be expected to countenance revolutionary change in a state government, nor was a successful revolution possible in one province alone. Having won the election, the Left Front could use its power either for radical polarization of class forces, or for a more gradual incremental change designed to give longevity to the government: a longevity sufficient for its base to survive till revolutionary conditions in the rest of India caught up with West Bengal. These revolutionary conditions however would likely take decades to come if they came at all. A state government intent on remaining in power for decades could hardly be expected to keep up a tempo of popular revolutionary fervour.

Surprisingly, and as we have already observed, even the Communists never expected to win all but sixty-three of the 293 assembly seats when they ran for election in 1977. They had gone to great lengths to form a seat adjustment with the non-Communist Janata Party then ruling the central government, but when rebuffed contested on their own and won a landslide victory. Their unexpected victory left them without an articulated strategy for directing their new-found power. However, their ad hoc reactions to problems indicated where their interests lay and the groups they were most oriented to promoting. It was these policies which insured their popularity and consolidated their base in the state.

It was Jyoti Basu, a man known for his precision of articulation, who, in holding up West Bengal as an example for the rest of India, made the most revealing statement about Left Front government policy in 1985:

The Left Front Government in the State of West Bengal has limited powers. It has to operate within a capitalist feudal economy. The Constitution, contrary to federal principles, does not provide for the needed powers for the States and we suffer from a special disability because the Union Government is ill disposed towards our Government. In such a situation, we have been explaining to the people why we cannot bring about fundamental changes even though the ideology and character of our Government are different from those that characterise the Government at the Centre. But we do hold that by forming the Government through elections it is possible for us to rule in a manner which is distinctly better and more democratic than the way followed by the Congress party at the Centre and in many other States. It is also possible to give relief to the people, particularly the deprived sections, through the minimum programme adopted by the Left Front. We have been attempting to do so by motivating the people and enlisting their support and sympathy. Our objective is to raise their political consciousness along with giving them relief so that they can distinguish between truth and falsehood and friends and enemies, and realise the alternative path which will free them from the shackles of Capitalism and Feudalism and usher in a new modern progressive society. This is a difficult task and we have to traverse a long path. But we visualise success in our objective when large masses all over India will be imbued with the correct political consciousness and free themselves from bourgeois influence and ideology, particularly the working masses. They will arrive at the truth through experience and continuous struggles. The left and democratic State Governments can help and expedite this process even with their limited powers. It is with such a perspective and objective that we are functioning in West Bengal.

This Communist transitional strategy takes place in two stages. The first stage would create governments at the state level opposed to the ruling Congress, breaking its virtual monopoly of power, and enabling other popular parties including the Communists to make inroads. In such fluid conditions the Communists could eventually attain a dominant position in coalition governments at the state level. When dominance was achieved at a national level, the Communist takeover would be complete.

The first stage involving Communist participation in state governments would attempt reforms only as a means of developing a Communist political base. In its political practice, however, the reforms

would not be much different from what Social Democratic parties might be expected to deliver, but which the establishment parties had proved unable or unwilling to implement. Therefore, the Communist state governments could not be expected to implement an immediate revolutionary programme. Rather their policy implementation could only be considered on the basis of (1) whether it used all avenues for reform available within the constitutional system, and (2) whether these reforms contained a potential for further radicalization and expansion of the Communist movement towards the ultimate goal of a Communist revolution. A failure to implement reforms could be due to the constitutional system's allowing insufficient scope for reform along lines conducive to Communist growth, or because of inadequacies with Communist policy implementation. The final possibility is that while the reforms may succeed in their immediate objectives, they create interests inimical to more radical alternatives and supportive of a new status quo. This paper hopes to argue that while there was sufficient scope within the Indian constitution for reforms conducive to Communist growth in a revolutionary direction, these reforms were not undertaken. Furthermore, what reforms were implemented furthered class and group interests' hostile to more radical change, making the development of a revolutionary conjuncture less likely. As a result, reforms ground to a halt, and their continued stay in office became counterproductive from a revolutionary Communist viewpoint, but helpful to the establishment they aimed at overthrowing.

The Communist state government had limited jurisdiction over many institutions and departments, having to operate within the constitutional constraints of the central government, which had the power to remove it from office by Presidential decree. With these limitations in mind, the policy implementation of the Left Front government may be analysed to determine its success in bringing about social and economic change, and to indicate groups that benefited from these reforms. Their electoral success was due to following policies that promoted rural middle and upper-class interests, while distributing palliatives to the lower classes. In the urban areas the interests of the government clerical staff were promoted, as well as of those corporations still willing to invest in the state. The industrial and rural working class received few if any benefits from Left Front rule, and might have been better off had the Communists remained in opposition where they could have led strikes in pursuit of wage demands.

It will be argued that the Left Front failed, not primarily because of the limitations on its power and resources, but because it did not make appropriate use of the powers and resources that it had at its disposal. Rather than promoting the interests of the rural and urban lower classes, it gave primacy to the traditional rural and urban middle-class base of the Communist movement, which ultimately proved an obstacle to the further advancement both of lower-class interests, and those of the revolutionary Communist movement as a whole. The ruling CPI(M) which had been founded as a revolutionary alternative to the old "revisionist" Communist Party, became through its experience in office, no different from its parent party. It thus ceased to be revolutionary in its practice, and even to call it reformist would be overstating its achievements in office. The rural and urban vested interests which the Left Front promoted eventually made further change in both reformist and revolutionary directions more difficult, as these interests became more firmly entrenched than ever, and opposed to any change in the status quo which would threaten the newly created privileges the Left Front provided them with. While this distribution of patronage enabled the Communists to be an electoral success, it ultimately proved inimical to the advancement of revolutionary communism (an impasse out of which it is unlikely to emerge in the foreseeable future, even in its position now as opposition). By promoting various propertied class interests, it gave these groups a stake in the status quo, and made them more hostile to reforms that would benefit the society as a whole. These classes transformed from being the traditional advocates of reform, to being its most vociferous opponents.

Among the non-partisan voices, there is general consensus about this. Dwaipayana Bhattacharya, prophetically analysing the initial electoral losses of the Left Front in 2008, through the theoretical optic of 'party-society', opined: "The preponderance of the party over the social space, the

transformation of the party from a hegemonic force into a violative one and ultimately the ruptures in the ‘party-society’ have all gone on to loosen the dominance of the Left Front in West Bengal.” He has further expanded in his 2016 book that the CPI(M) was so caught up in the process of preserving power that it refused to reinvent a process of change that came about after the reforms it initiated in the 1980s. Rather than utilising the quotidian nature of its engagement with the people to further change — by expanding the benefits of land reforms to improve the status of landless agricultural workers; by organising and working towards the improvement of livelihoods in the unorganised sector; by focussing on primary education and health; by involving its cadre from the lower segments of society in a way that they could be taken into higher leadership — the party was merely reduced to an arbiter of sorts, with decisions taken in a top-down manner, leadership remaining ossified and dominated by the upper castes and the focus restricted to winning elections. On a similar vein, Ranabir Samaddar has explained the hubristic logic of the Left Front rule and the process of its inevitable collapse:

...party substituted for society, local bosses working as local barons substituted for the party, party committees substituted for government’s intelligence wing, inviting speculative and comprador capital appeared as steps towards organic industrialisation of the state and protests began to be considered as conspiracies against Left rule...

Samaddar, however, characteristically pushes the envelope and characterises the entire period of 1977-2011 as an era of “passive revolution”, and declares that this is an ongoing story of transition. In this, there is the implicit suggestion of the “lower classes” coming to power through electoral means by and in 2011 and the people practising “popular democracy in an epoch of passive revolution.” Here in lie the source of much debate among the commentators. But, for my purposes, suffice it to say that both thinkers locate the fons et origo in the initial years of Left Front rule, albeit, to my mind, the former does so in terms of a declensionist process while the latter understands it as the foundational aporia of the parliamentary left. Be it as it may, contemporary observers and commentators in the 1980s failed to descry these processual lapses and/or structural faultlines owing probably to their historical propinquity in part and hopeful over-enthusiasm in part. This paper endeavours to make possible such an analysis within the time-frame of 1977-1982. Further, to land reform and local self-government, this paper wishes to add a third plank—that of coping with the refugee situation created by the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 and severe floods. In fact, the Left Front government often credited itself with an efficient management of these “problems”. This claim could probably be put to test through a study of another momentous historical event in the first five years of Left Front rule: the Marichjhapi incident which refers to the forcible eviction in 1979 of Bangladeshi refugees on Marichjhapi Island in the Sundarbans, and the subsequent death of thousands by police gunfire, starvation, and disease.

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REPORTS (2017)

Consultative Meeting

Popular Movements in West Bengal and Bihar

March 6, 2017

The first paper was titled *Popular Politics, Upsurge and the Revolt in the Sixties and Seventies of the Last Century* by **Ranabir Samaddar** and **Sucharita Sengupta** with **Mallarika Sinha Roy** as the discussant.

The consultative meet on popular movements coincided with the fiftieth anniversary of the Naxalbari movement. The segment on the Naxalbari movement highlighted the popular protests and popular politics of the sixties and seventies of the last century, became unique as popular revolt and shaped the politics of West Bengal. Since 1967, peasants' struggles in Naxalbari, Debra, Gopiballabhpur and other areas in West Bengal started to take shape inspired by the ideal of the peasant revolution in China. It also included the wave of students' movement which, inspired by the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (GPCR) of China, launched a movement against the (prevailing) education system and the icons of the established culture. A section of these students had gone to villages to organise/strengthen peasants' struggle in different pockets of the state. These mobilizations were countered by the state machinery. The remarkable feature of these mobilizations had been the overwhelming response from people of different social, political and cultural backgrounds ranging from silent support and sympathy to active participation in militant struggle. Undoubtedly, through these movements a notion of people came into being. And hence, the question that was asked was: What constitutes the *people* in popular movements. This question was the focus of the discussions.

The next paper of the panel was on *The Cultural-Creative Dimension of the Naxalite Movement* by **Subharanjan Dasgupta** and the discussant for the paper was **Sandip Bandhyopadhyay**.

The Naxalbari Movement inspired multifaceted creativity; from propagandist poetry to reflective verse; from novels or prose narratives hailing the movement to stories and novels severely criticizing the theoretical ballast and its related activism; from revelatory plays transcreating the most decisive moments of the movement on the stage to cut and dried one act plays serving as slices of the experiential truth; from gripping films like *Hajar Churasir Ma* and *Herbert* to full-throated songs which exhilarated hundreds. The discussions gave special emphasis to the world of literature, films and art that were inspired or were produced as a critique of the Naxalite Movement. The works of poets such as Dhurjyoti Chattopadhyay, Dronacharya Ghosh, Srijan Sen, Monoranjan Biswas and Murari Mukhopadhyay were the focus of the discussions. Of particular significance were theatre activities of the time, as this was one site where Naxalbari emerged as a major theme. Utpal Dutta's *Teer*, Anal Gupta's *Rakter Rangor*, Amal Roy's *Aat Jora Khola Chokh* are examples of the theatres of the time that found reference in the presentations. Mahasweta Debi's novels such as *Basai Tudu* and *Hazaar Churasir Ma* were also the subject of discussions at the meet. Raghav Bandyopadhyay's novel *Communis* and his autobiography found special mention in the discussions.

Left Mobilisation in Three Districts of West Bengal, 1947-1977, Nadia, Midnapore, Birbhum by **Anwasha Sengupta** and **Atig Ghosh** and **Kumar Rana** as the discussant, focussed on Calcutta as the major site of the refugee movement or tram and teachers' movement in the fifties, sixties and seventies. However, with the food movement and the Naxalite movement, the suburbs and districts of West Bengal became major epicentres of protest. There were other intense and popular mass movements outside Calcutta during this period. The nature and trajectory of the left movements in the three post-independence/partition districts of Nadia, Midnapore and Birbhum were discussed at

the consultative meet to understand the nature and extent of popular politics beyond the metropolis and to bring forth the rich dimensions and varied mobilities of left-mobilisation in post-1947 West Bengal. The discussions aimed at comprehending the chequered career of left activism, both parliamentary and non-parliamentary and their wide ranging political geographies. What constituted 'people' in these protests, did it go beyond the groups of labourers/peasants/refugees to draw a wider section of the society, which movement drew attention of the city elite and what remained invisible to them, were the student groups, left sympathizers and city intellectuals equally quick in responding to these movements? – are some of the questions that were debated in the meet.

The paper *Long March or Garden Path? The Left Front's First Term in West Bengal (1971-1982)* was presented by **Atig Ghosh** and **Dwaipayyan Bhattacharya** was the discussant.

The Left Front's coming to power in West Bengal (1977) was the subject of discussion as the possible moment of culmination of the decades of popular movements in this province. How did the new government under the leadership of Jyoti Basu address the demands that had been raised through such movements, how did it cater to the needs and expectations of the "peoples" that were created in the course of such movements and what spaces for new protest movements were created were some of the questions which were explored in the discussions. While the new government implemented radical land reforms and freed the political prisoners immediately after coming to the power, there were elements of state oppression as well. Examining the early years of Left Front government-popular measures that they took as well as state oppression that they unleashed-is important in order to understand the history of the popular politics in West Bengal in the decades after independence and this formed the basis of the discussions at the consultative meet. Land reform, local self-government, the attempts to cope with the refugee situation created by the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 and the severe floods during that period were some of the key issues that were discussed and deliberated upon at the meet.

There were two presentations in the concluding panel: *Contentious Politics and Popular Movement: Enigma of Karpoori Thakur* was presented by **Manish K. Jha** and **Puspendra Kumar Singh** was the discussant; while *Making of a Populist Government: A Study of Karpoori Thakur's Regime* by **Mithilesh Kumar** was discussed by **Amit Prakash**.

Coming to Bihar, the discussions revolved around the backward classes' movement led by Karpoori Thakur, a close aide of Jayprakash Narayan. Popularly known as 'jana-nayak' (peoples' leader), Thakur had been chief minister of Bihar twice (between 1970-1971 and 1977-1979). The Karpoori Thakur government introduced reservation in government jobs for the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in 1978. A year later, B. P. Mandal submitted his recommendations on OBCs and affirmative action to the central government under Morarji Desai. This twin move brought in its wake seismic changes in the politics of Bihar as well as India. One of the objectives of this research project is to study the implications of these moves on the popular politics and mass movement of Bihar. The project also seeks to investigate the entire process of defining caste, the debates around the parameters and political maneuver of inclusion and exclusion. The question of social justice also emerged in the background of the contingent defeat of the Left movement in general and the Naxalite Movement in particular. This meant that the issue of *izzat* (dignity) and land for the Dalits were also relegated into the background. The research project attempts to investigate if the rise of politics of social justice in Bihar meant a suppression of radical and revolutionary politics and a premature end to Dalit politics as well as how the government played a decisive role in the suppression of these alternative politics and the debates in the consultative meeting centred round these core issues.

The Consultative Meeting came to an end with a Roundtable Discussion chaired by **Pushpendra Kumar Singh**. The discussants were faculty members from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New

Delhi, namely **Amit Prakash, Dwaipayan Bhattacharyya** and **Mallarika Sinha Roy**.

Amit Prakash argued that popular movements mostly rise because governments fail to fulfil the political demands of certain sections of the population, because a number of demands arising from the grassroots levels of society do not find reflection in the political system, which are to be catered to or preserved. Dwaipayan Bhattacharyya tried to explore the connections between popular movements and democracy. The second caveat that he introduced in the discussion was his contention that all forms of popular movements cannot lead to democracy. Mallarika Sinha Roy observed that in some ways the structure of the project titled *Popular Movements in West Bengal and Bihar* as she could make sense of by listening to the various abstracts and comments, provided a classic opportunity to bring in various kinds of disciplines by breaking their boundaries and create a new way of doing social movement research.

For Full Report visit:

http://www.mcrg.ac.in/RLS_PML/RLS_PM/Consultative_Programme%20_Report_6_March_2017.pdf



Experts and discussants in 2017: Kumar Rana, Amit Prakash, Dwaipayan Bhattacharyya, Mallarika Sinha Roy (from left to right)

Research Workshop

Popular Movements in West Bengal and Bihar

September 7, 2017

Panel I: Contentious Politics and Popular Movement: Enigma of Karpoori Thakur

Presented by: **Manish K. Jha**

Regarding popular movements in Bihar, the focus was on the backward classes' movement led by Karpoori Thakur, a close aide of Jayprakash Narayan. Popularly known as 'jana-nayak' (peoples' leader), Thakur had been Chief Minister of Bihar twice (between 1970-1971 and 1977-1979). The Karpoori Thakur government introduced reservation in government jobs for the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in 1978. A year later, B.P. Mandal submitted his recommendations on OBCs and affirmative action to the Central Government under Morarji Desai. This twin move brought in its wake seismic changes in the politics of Bihar as well as India. The objective of this research project was to study the implications of these moves on the popular politics and mass movement of Bihar. The project investigated the entire process of defining caste, the debates around the parameters and political maneuver of inclusion and exclusion. The question of social justice also emerged in the background of the contingent defeat of the left movement in general and the Naxalite Movement in particular. This meant that the issue of *izzat* (dignity) and land for the Dalits were also relegated into the background. The research project investigated if the rise of politics of social justice in Bihar meant a suppression of radical and revolutionary politics and premature end to dalit politics. Also, how the government played a decisive role in the suppression of alternative politics.

The discussant for the panel, **Priyankar Upadhyaya** suggested that the paper would benefit from a better sense of the continuum instead of limiting it self to the politics of the Backward Castes. Commenting on the presence of a leader like Ram Manohar Lohia and his influence on the socialist politics, he enquired into the nature of such politics. Further with reference to the factor of "Anti-Congressionism" he brought to attention the need to put Karpoori Thakur in hind sight and perceive the shifting discourse of present times and BJP's use of the fragmented nature of caste politics. He also opined that incorporating a detailed analysis of Karpoori's "English Hataao Andolan", his relationship with *Bhoomihars* and other castes would be effective for the paper. The discussant, while commenting on Karpoori's stages of political life, specifically probed into his last years when his popularity was waning.

In response to the last point, Manish K. Jha explained that his interest was specifically in the last phase of Thakur's life, i.e. after 1980 when he started losing ground due to the shifting loyalties of castes like *Kurmis* and *Yadavs* who wanted a representative from their own community. It was, in this stage that he started dealing with issues of *Dalits*, Buddhism and such other factors.

Panel II: Making of a Populist Government: A Study of Karpoori Thakur's regime

Presented by: **Mithilesh Kumar**

Mithilesh Kumar spoke on the rising voice of middle class peasantry in Bihar and politics that culminated into force demanding social justice under the leaderships of Rammanohar Lohia, Karpoori Thakur. Legal rights for citizenship, issues of identity, politicising of students; participation in popular uprisings and socio-economic mobility in Bihar were some of the aspects covered through Mithilesh Kumar's work.

Manoj Kumar Jha, the discussant of this paper, suggested that it is important to go beyond Karpoori Thakur's personality and towards his politics in order to discuss his role. He also poses the question of the choice of the word "populist" instead of "popular". He opined, in lieu of

personal, anecdotal insights that Karpoori Thakur's role in politics should be treated in the realm of popular. He also pointed out the need to locate Karpoori in between the conflicting trajectories of Ram Manohar Lohia and Jayprakash Narayan. Furthermore, with respect to Karpoori's politics, he explained that it is imperative to consider the conflicts that occur within the same party and organisation. Karpoori's "sub-categorisation", as Jha explained was based on hard facts and evidence and was therefore, not merely a populist tactic. The politics of "Anti-Congressionism", "English Hataao Andolan" etc., Jha opines, should be seen in the context of time and ethos of that time. Lastly, he mentions that the greatest contribution that Karpoori Thakur made was probably to make Social Democracy a lived reality more than an imagined one.

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

Presented by: **Ranabir Samaddar**

Naxalbari Movement that shaped the West Bengal politics of late '60s and '70s was the focus of study. Since 1967, peasants' struggles in Naxalbari, Debra, Gopiballabhpur and other areas in West Bengal started to take shape inspired by the ideal of the peasant revolution in China. It also included the wave of students' movement which, inspired by the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (GPCR) of China, launched anti (prevailing) education system and movement against icons of the established culture. A section of these students also went to villages to organise/strengthen peasants' struggle in different pockets of the state. These mobilizations were countered by the state machinery with brutal police operations including arrests under special laws, torture, and killing. What is once again worth studying in this case is the overwhelming response from people of different social, political and cultural backgrounds to these mobilizations ranging from silent support and sympathy to active participation in militant struggle. Undoubtedly, through these movements a notion of people came into being. And hence, the question to be asked is: What constitutes the *people* in popular movements. This had been one of the major research questions in all the papers written in the first year of the project and this will also shape the research on Naxalbari movement in the second year. Ranabir Samaddar's work elaborated upon and analysed the insurgent movements in the decade of the sixties of the last century in Kolkata, where in the tactic of 'occupation' was employed for purposes of mobilisation.

The discussant for this panel was **Prabhu Mahapatra**, who raised the question of methodology. He observed that there is an immediate transition from form to content in the paper and he enquired as to how this transition could be 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.

Panel IV: *The Cultural-Creative Dimension of the Naxalite Movement*

Presented by: **Subharanjan Dasgupta**

Naxalbari Movement inspired multifaceted creativity; from propagandist poetry to reflective verse; from novels or prose narratives hailing the movement to stories and novels severely criticizing the theoretical ballast and its related activism; from revelatory plays transcreating the most decisive moments of the movement on the stage to cut and dried one act plays serving as slices of the experiential truth; from gripping films like Hajar Churasir Ma and Herbert to full-throated songs which exhilarated hundreds. While in the first year debates around Marxian aesthetics in '50s and '60s have been studied, in the second year special emphasis will be given to the world of literature, films and art that were inspired or were produced as criticism to the Naxalite Movement. Particular importance will be provided to the theatre activities of the time as this was one site where

Naxalbari emerged as a major theme. Utpal Dutta's *Teer*, Anal Gupta's *Rakter Rangor*, Amal Roy's *Aat Jora Khola Chokh* are but few examples of the theatres of the time.

Anil Acharya, the discussant, began the discussion with observations regarding the choice of texts and authors and its implications. He noted that the paper could have talked about works that gave a new dimension, instead of the common themes of revolution and changing of the society; works that reconstructed mythological stories. He further observed that the paper could have benefitted from the discussion of the role played by Little Magazine in the propagation of revolutionary ideas. He also pointed out that the movement had shades and fractures which are glossed over by the constant glorification of present times. He brought to attention the importance of discussing and reflecting on this multifaceted nature of the movement. He also brought attention to the significant role played by visual medium of arts such as Cinema; he cited the example of Mrinal Sen.

Panel V: *Left Mobilisation in Three Districts of West Bengal, 1947-1977 Nadia, Midnapore, Birbhum*

Presented by: **Anwasha Sengupta** and **Atig Ghosh**

Calcutta was the major site of the refugee movement or tram and teachers' movement. But with food movement and Naxalite movement, suburbs and districts of West Bengal became major epicentres of protest. There were other intense and popular mass movements outside Calcutta as well in '50s, '60s and '70s. Labour movement in Burnpur steel factory (near Asansol in Burdwan district) in 1950s, peasant agitation in Durgapur against their displacement for establishing the steel plant, strikes and labour protest in jute belts of Hooghly and Howrah, refugee agitation in Nadia or demands raised in various parts of Bengal for merger of Bengali speaking areas of Bihar with West Bengal require closer focus in order to understand the nature and extent of popular politics beyond the metropolis. What constituted 'people' in these protests, did it go beyond the groups of labourers/ peasants/refugees to draw a wider section of the society, which movement drew attention of the city elite and what remained invisible to them, was the student groups, left sympathizers and city intellectuals equally quick in responding to these movements?

Dwaipayana Bhattacharyya commenced the discussion with comments on the significance of pitching locality at the focal point of the papers. He then raised some important questions in the course of the discussion. Firstly, he probed into the notion of familiarity and its effects on the revolutionary movement. In specific, he enquired into the ideological pinning of the movement and how it plays against this notion of familiarity and also, familial relationships at times; he also raises the question of class and generation in this context. Next, he made enquiries into the city-town/village binary and urged the paper to probe deeper into this centre-periphery relationship which has always had a narrative of originating in the city and moving towards the village or town. With respect to mentions of harvesting festival by Anwasha, he raised the question of dilution or contamination of the movement and if it can be seen as a Brahminical trait in the revolutionary movement. Lastly, he pointed out that the whole perspective can be turned around and seen from the light of how a particular locality or settings can affect a movement.

Paper VI: *Long March or Garden Path? The Left Front's First Term in West Bengal (1971-1982)*

Presented by: **Atig Ghosh**

The Left Front's coming to power in West Bengal (1977) as a possible moment of culmination of the decades of popular movements in this province is being explored in Atig Ghosh's research entitled *Long March or Garden Path? The Left Front's First Term in West Bengal (1971-1982)*. How did the new government under the leadership of Jyoti Basu address the demands that had been

raised through such movements, how did it cater to the needs and expectations of the “peoples” that were created in the course of such movements and what spaces for new protest movements were created are important to understand. While the new government implemented radical land reforms and freed the political prisoners immediately after coming to the power, in 1978 they tortured the Dalit refugees in Marichjhapi, killing hundreds of them, in the name of protecting a tiger reserve. Examining the early years of Left Front government –popular measures that they took as well as state oppression that they unleashed – is important in order to understand the history of the popular politics in West Bengal in the decades after independence.

Prasanta Ray, one of the discussants, started the panel discussion by enquiring into the inability of the Left Front Government to implement a radical land reform programme. The obstacles that he mentioned are – fear of a backlash by the middle-class people, the fear of opposition from the Central Government, too much dependence on bureaucracy and other governmental organs. He noted that the paper addressed the issue of such failed initiative but he also advised to put such issues in the bigger perspective of party ideology and governmental administration. He also suggested, to probe into the role of the Coalition Committee, its efforts in the establishment of a leftist Government and its inability thereafter to positively affect the lower bureaucracy; Ray noted that in order to establish this link, it would be necessary to look at labour formations.

Dwaipayan Bhattacharyya, the other discussant, reiterating the basic premise of Ray’s criticism, opined that such literature have existed for a long time now and requires a new and different perspective to facilitate a better understanding of the Left front regime in West Bengal. In the case of land reforms, he urged for a complicated and more nuanced understanding of land and power relations. The other point he raised, and asked for a detailed exploration was the issue of “middle peasantry”. With regard to the question of class support that the paper raised, Bhattacharyya stated that there are statistical evidence to show the important role played by middle peasants and school teachers in the mobilisation of the Party.

For Full Report visit:

http://www.mcrg.ac.in/RLS_PML/RLS_PM/Report_Research_Workshop_7Sep2017.pdf



**Experts and discussants in 2017: Prabhu Prasad Mohapatra, Anil Acharya, Prasanta Ray, Priyankar Upadhaya, Manoj K. Jha (top- from left to right);
 Researchers in 2017: Ranabir Samaddar, Mithilesh Kumar, Manish K. Jha, Subharanjan Dasgupta (bottom- from left to right)**

Research Workshop

Beyond Infrastructure and Logistics: Reconnecting with the Peoples and Societies in the North East

29 November 2017

Ranabir Samaddar delivered the opening lecture, introducing the theme of the CRG-RLS project “Social and Political Mapping of Popular Movements, Logistic Vision and Infrastructure of India”. He explained that the project had two segments of research— mapping logistical representation of the North East for the last two decades with special focus on the Look/Act East policy, and mapping popular movements in the first two decades post-independence in India. The questions that required thinking were whether there was an interface between the two, and if yes, then how did they interact with each other. The lecture highlighted the Northeast, and how infrastructure shaped the popular through continuities and discontinuities in earlier and more recent patterns of politics. He asserted that migration is one important aspect in the understanding of how social developments leave their impact on the popular and vice-versa. The Rohingya crisis with its many trajectories drew attention to what borders were all about, histories were all about, and how regional politics played an important role in determining the fates of communities. To understand why the Rohingya crisis broke out, the politics of the entire Southeast Asian archipelago needed to be studied and the concepts of neoliberal ways of managing economy and population to be taken into consideration.

Session I

The first session of the workshop had the discussants focussing on ‘Popular Movements and Popular Politics in the North East and North Bengal’. The discussants were Abhijit Majumdar, Chitra Ahanthem and Soibam Haripriya.

Abhijit Majumdar opened the discussion with the statement that North Bengal was fraught with many popular movements. The Naxalbari movement had a huge impact on popular movements both in North Bengal and the North East. Siliguri is the gateway to North Bengal but whether it is part of North East or not, is yet to be determined, said Mr. Majumdar. Tea is a common denominator shared by the North East and North Bengal with their significant roles in the tea industry and their tea estates. The political economy of tea had evolved over decades, and in the era of neoliberalism, several changes had been brought about in the industry. There had been a mainstreaming of the tea workers’ community, but more recently there were demands of receiving back their indigenous identity; and also the demand for minimum wages.

Chitra Ahanthem then took over, talking about popular movements and popular politics in Manipur. The questions that she looked into were – whether movements can be manufactured, the riots that were happening and the values and judgements that were being passed onto women. Ahanthem threw light on communication issues in Manipur, where communication is fractured along gender and agelines. Women do not have a voice and the younger generation is usually not lent an ear. This made the feminist question in Manipur complicated. The general assumption is that Manipuri women are very liberated, particularly with reference to the women’s markets. Since the ’90s, people have increasingly taken the law into their hands, raising the question of how popular movement can be distinguished from popular agitation or mob justice. These actions are popular, but whether they constituted a movement, was the speaker’s question.

Soibam Haripriya talked about three interrelated aspects pertaining to popular movements in the North East – through an analysis of poetry, the anxiety of representation reflected in their literature, vigilante action giving rise to psycho vigilante activism, and the governmental award constituted during the pro-Inner Line Permit activism, being given to mothers giving maximum birth. The poem that she analysed was from the translated anthology *The Valley of Lofty Hills*, and

it dealt with issues of immigration and anxiety of identity, the nation's antagonism to the local, and the precolonial's to the postcolonial. There was the depiction of the Mayang, and his language incomprehensible to the Europeans, showed how disdain for the spoken gets translated into disdain for the speaker. But the Mayang also represented postcolonial immigrant into the Northeast and working class labour, thus reflected fear of Indianisation. The self was seen as savage, but also the self that grieved the loss of nature caused by the development projects of Look/Act East policy, such as the laying of roads or building of highways. So there persisted a continuum in anxiety over immigration to anxiety about nationhood and nationalism. Many of the groups that were part of the Inner Line Permit Movement took it upon themselves to drive away the immigrants and therein lay the connect with vigilante action. Women giving birth to maximum children, and rewarded for their contribution to the 'collective identity', thus contributed to vigilante activism. S. Haripriya here attempted to caution against such vigilante trajectories of popular movements and questioned the notions of the 'collective' that came out of such fallouts of popular movements.

Paula Banerjee began by underlining the fractured condition of popular movements in Tripura. In the 60s and 70s, there had been struggle between the indigenous community and the Bengali community, and within the Bengali community, there were tensions between the Hindus and the Muslims. Tripura had been a great victory for the Left; Dr. Banerjee recounted how without military deployment of any great extent, violence in the state was controlled. Tripura is generally held up as the epitome of good governance in the North East. But there are all kinds of tensions, violence and subversions simmering under the facade of good governance and peace. Particularly in terms of the feminist movement, Dr. Banerjee talked about how there had been no women's movement in Tripura at all. There is a lot of funding available to women in Tripura, and women are encouraged to participate in formal governance. But participation in formal spheres left no informal space for movements or protests. Such spaces were subsumed within the structures of good governance. Therefore, the kind of popularity left in Tripura needed contemplation.

Session II

The discussion opened with **Bharat Bhushan** sharing his own knowledge and opinions about the Look/Act East policy undertaken by the Government of India. With reference to the name of workshop, he commented that the North East is beyond the reach of logistics and infrastructure. In terms of implementation of the policy, he enquired into the conditions on the ground. His own conversations with various people in both Delhi and the North East only served to reinforce his previous assertion. He cited several examples to validate his stand. The road from Moreh to Tamu and beyond had not served its purpose. He reasoned that sea routes would remain most important in terms of India's connectivity to the East, primarily because of lack of inland connectivity within the North East. He talked of three levels of disconnect – between North East and countries and regions of the East, between North East and mainstream India, and within North East India.

The discussion was carried forward by **Sanjay Barbora** who reminisced about his experience as a provincial academic at a Chinese conference on the One Belt One Road initiative undertaken by China. His participation at the event changed his perspective on the Look/Act East policy and he subsequently approached it from the point of view of building bridges. The question to ponder on was why, despite many initiatives by the politicians and the government, it was difficult to construct a road in the North East. Comparing Assam to apartheid South Africa, he talked about how in Assam, people had learned to live together separately. But a fact finding mission in 1998 and a conversation with a dalit *person* led him to also ponder on the question of the Northeast's desire for separation, because of the significant need for solidarity ultimately. No matter where one looks, Dr. Barbora explained, eventually what would remain most important were human relations.

Tongam Rina provided snippets into conditions of Arunachal Pradesh in the post Look/Act East era, admitting openly that she as a resident of the North East did not accord it the same significance that mainstream Indian politics did. The people have to do what the state government tells them to, and the state government in turn, is subservient to the Indian government. Arunachal Pradesh being a sensitive border state had closed almost all its border trade points: of 12, only 1 with Myanmar remaining functional. In Arunachal Pradesh, people speak Hindi fluently and converse with each other in Hindi rather than in their mother tongue. She talked about how resources had been wasted due to road constructions and repairs and washed away in landslides during monsoons. There was no recognition of the fact that the biodiversity of the region was adversely affected by infrastructural projects. The crux of her argument was that the local people had no say in any of the plans and the projects associated with the Look/Act East policy, the benefits of which were yet to be sampled. The local people should be the decision makers, argued Rina, and not be instructed on what to do with their resources.

For **Akum Longchari**, the question of language is important. Are we prepared to engage in a conversation where we try to understand each other's languages, he asked? The Look East policy is confined to meetings and conferences where experts come and talk about people and resources. Nagaland state is a result of war and has created wars. The Indian state has used structures of violence to develop infrastructure to the extent that governments created as security apparatus had become entrenched in violence. However, resolution could come only through engagement with these structures. Through the Look/Act East policy, violence is being legitimised, but there have been parallel alternate initiatives taken by the community. She stated that the village republics were reaching out to each other. Love Burma mission was reaching out to people on both sides of the border. People have been at the centre of this process, but not at the centre of the Look East policy. Akum Longchari stressed the need to transcend the framework of competing rights and engage with values of justice that pertain to all of humanity.

The final speaker to put forth her point was **Dolly Kikon**. She talked about one of her previous articles, where her anger at the Look/Act East policy was blatantly expressed, for contributing to unsettled political, economic and social conditions of life and violence in the North East region. She continued to be critical about the Look/Act East policy and keeping in line with her previous argument, she talked about how development projects in the North East are packaged as economic interventions to improve the lives of people, but are detached from militarised ground realities. These initiatives to rebuild post-conflict societies mainly focused on training entrepreneurs and promoting livelihood schemes while they overlooked how violence had transformed the very foundation of these societies. In the name of economic development, the indigenous cultures were being reduced to mere commodities and even the cultural festivals such as the Naga Hornbill Festival has come to signify the purely representational value of such a commodity.

For Full Report visit: http://www.mcrg.ac.in/RLS_PML/Report_November_2017.pdf

PUBLIC LECTURES
(2017)

Women in the Telangana Movement[s]; Then and Now

Speaker: Rama Melkote, *Author and former Professor of Political Science at Osmania University*

Chair: Paula Banerjee, Director, Calcutta Research Group

Date: July 14, 2017

Venue: Academy of Fine Arts, Kolkata

Rama Melkote's narrative mapped the participation of women in Telangana movements and the issues that have been raised, the contexts in which women participated in these movements. Participation of women in the Telangana peasant struggle of 1948-1952 led by the undivided Communist Party of India, holding arms against the landlords and the Razakars has acquired a legendary status. From those 'Magic Moments' of the Peasant struggle to the Movement for separate State of Telangana spanning more than five decades, women have been active participants in several struggles for their rights, against oppression.

The present day Telangana State has a history of integration, merger and demerger, from the Princely State of the Hyderabad State under the Nizam to the integration of the State into the Indian Union, from a short period under the democratically elected government of the Congress as a separate State to its merger into the Andhra State, the first linguistic State, to form the State of Andhra Pradesh in 1956. The story of peoples struggle for a separate State of Telangana spans a period of more than five decades until the Telangana State emerged on 2nd June 2014.

The Srikakulam and the Naxalite movements provided a context for the rise of radical students' movements in Andhra Pradesh. Student movements in Europe, Civil Rights and women's movements in the US created an ambience of rebellion against the established political order. Inspired and influenced by Marxist ideology, the Progressive Democratic Students Organisation [PDSU] emerged as the front organization of CPI [ML]. The Progressive Organisation of Women [POW] emerged in 1974 with women students of colleges and Osmania University and raised issues of dowry, rape, violence and price rise etc. When Emergency was proclaimed in 1975, the POW disintegrated as its members were either arrested or went underground. Post Emergency saw the rise of a truly autonomous women's movement. The erstwhile members of POW, university teachers and professionals grouped themselves as Stree Shakti Sanghatana [SSS] and emerged as a coherent body whose interest was to study and understand State and civil society, family and patriarchy, ideological frameworks of knowledge, history, social sciences etc. It also organized study groups to discuss various issues, patriarchy, staged street plays, held demonstrations against dowry, price rise etc. The seminal work of the group was 'We Were Making History' that raised many questions with regard to writing of history and the Left understanding of the women's question, of the specificity of women's oppression. Women's research centers were established as part of the women's studies movement. Questions of caste and community became central for much of the research as part of 'identity politics'. The eighties witnessed a proliferation of NGOs with Gender as a main component of their work and several women's groups too came up.

In the eighties the hegemony of the Congress party was questioned and a regional party, the Telugu Desam, under the leadership of the matinee idol, N.T. Rama Rao came to power in Andhra Pradesh. The nature and structures of politics underwent several changes under the Telugu Desam rule. The new economic policies of liberalization so eagerly espoused by Chandra Babu Naidu, under the auspices of the World Bank created new politics of patronage and caste politics. Welfare measures as safety networks for women under various schemes such as Janma Bhoomi, Self Help Groups, micro credit, user bodies over Panchayats created spaces for women to assert their rights. In the nineties women asserted their agency in the anti-Arrack movement in Nellore, organizing themselves and banning the sale of Arrack in several villages. In North Telangana, the POW that

reemerged as a front organization of CPI [ML] in 1985 actively organized the women in fighting the liquor contractors.

The second part of the narrative is about the movement for separate State of Telangana. The movement has a long history beginning in 1969. Safeguards assured to Telangana when Andhra Pradesh was formed were violated systematically. Socio political processes that evolved since the late seventies gave an identity to backward castes, scheduled tribes and scheduled tribes of the Telangana region which enabled them to become a political force to reckon with. However the State never responded to the needs of the marginalized groups as most institutions of power were controlled by the propertied classes of Andhra region. The socio political processes since the late sixties enabled the propertied classes [Kamma caste] of coastal Andhra to become a political force that marginalized Telangana region and its people. Total neglect of agriculture resulting in suicides by farmers, capture of most employment opportunities by Andhra migrants, exercise of hegemonic political power by Andhra chief ministers, marginalization of Telangana culture, turned Telangana into an 'internal colony.' The development paradigm of development by dispossession and Hyderabad city centered processes of urbanization, created pockets of wealth and large sections of marginalized areas.

The marginalized groups became a major force in the movement for separate Telangana State. The students of Osmania University and other universities and colleges in the State played a central role in the movement. The tragic suicides of more than a thousand students created a sense of despair and anger among the people. The Telangana movement was a democratic movement. People of every walk of life organized themselves as joint action Committees [JACs] and carried on the struggle. This was a unique experiment in democratic politics to achieve statehood through peaceful methods. The presence of women in all the more than a hundred JACs was equally unique. After a long drawn struggle The State of Telangana was conceded. The political expression of the struggle was given by the Telangana Rashtra Samiti that won the elections and came to power in June 2014.



Rama Melkote (left) delivering the Public Lecture in July 2017

Peasants, Students, Insurgents and Popular Movements in Contemporary Assam

Speaker: Sanjay Barbora, *Associate Professor, TISS, Guwahati.*

Chair: Ranabir Samaddar, *Distinguished Chair, Calcutta Research Group*

Date: November 28, 2017

Venue: Swabhumi, Kolkata

Sanjay Barbora in his presentation made an effort to understand the compulsions and contexts in which popular movements have taken place in Assam since the mid-20th century. Since the turn of the 20th century, political mobilization for change and renegotiation of power in Assam has centred on the peasant. Initially emerging as an important focus of analysis for modern historians of Assam, the figure of the peasant has become important for other social scientists and politicians alike. The early intellectual scaffold of this process that emerged in the middle of the 20th century, had been the valley-based, male, Assamese-speaking, rent-paying, rural farmer, who had limited access to modern markets and whose way of life was constantly being threatened by other cultivators and the (tea) plantation industry. The peasant, as Lenin pointed out in the early 20th century, was seen to have two souls: one that craved private property and the other that dreamed of visions of equality in a rural community (Lenin 1965: 40-43). Seen thus, the peasant became an important actor in political mobilization in most parts of the decolonizing world. Although the conditions in Assam were similar to many colonized countries in the middle of the 20th century, there were several occasions where peasants in the two valleys and hills in Assam were mobilized politically only to be abandoned, because those who spoke for the peasant were also responsible for the erosion of the rural community. Barbora, sifted through a social history of contemporary popular social movements in order to understand the representative character of such movements and the milieu that they attempt to reflect. He did so by drawing on his personal involvement in the human rights movement in Assam, as well as analyzing the social and political commentaries on the contemporary political history of Assam. He then raised questions about the ability of the human rights movements to address collective claims, especially the ones raised by peasants, students and insurgents, without losing focus on universal ideas of human rights, justice and peace.

For details, visit: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GXRzT7aubg0&feature=youtu.be>



Sanjay Barbora delivering the Public Lecture with Ranabir Samaddar as the Chair, in November 2017

PUBLICATIONS (2017)

1. Policies and Practices

People, Politics and Protests IV: Issue 89 (December 2017)

‘Occupy College Street: Notes from the Sixties’

Ranabir Samaddar

Full Paper available on: <http://www.mcrgh.ac.in/PP89.pdf>

2. Policies and Practices

People, Politics and Protests V: Issue 90 (December 2017)

‘The Creative & Cultural Dimension of the Naxalbari Movement’

Subhoranjan Dasgupta

Full Paper available on: <http://www.mcrgh.ac.in/PP90.pdf>

3. Policies and Practices

People, Politics and Protests VI - Karpooori Thakur: Issue 91 (December 2017)

‘Contentious Politics and Popular Movements: Enigma of Karpooori Thakur’

Manish Kumar Jha

‘Making of a Populist Government: A Study of Karpooori Thakur’s Regime’

Mithilesh Kumar

Full Paper available on: <http://www.mcrgh.ac.in/PP91.pdf>

4. Policies and Practices

People, Politics and Protests VII: Issue 92 (December 2017)

THE RADICAL RURAL

‘Left Organization, Revolutionary Upsurge and Popular Movement in Midnapore and Birbhum, 1940s-1970s’

Atig Ghosh and Anwesha Sengupta

Full Paper available on: <http://www.mcrgh.ac.in/PP92.pdf>

5. Policies and Practices

People, Politics and Protests VIII: Issue 93 (December 2017)

LEFT FRONT GOVERNMENT IN WEST BENGAL (1971-1982)

Considerations on “Passive Revolution” & the Question of Caste in Bengal Politics

Atig Ghosh

Full Paper available on: <http://www.mcrgh.ac.in/PP93.pdf>

2018

RESEARCH BRIEFS (2018)

Collaborative Workshop

Of Resistances and their Interfaces

June 22, 2018

The Defining Moments of Left Popular Politics in West Bengal: The Food Movements of 1959 & 1966

Sibaji Pratim Basu

The food movements of 1959 and 1966 have been identified by scholars as the foremost reason behind the end of two decades' Congress rule in West Bengal and the rise of the left as the ruling power. These movements can be seen as two different movements having much uniqueness in terms of immediate organisation, location and the nature of popular participation. At the same time, they can be also viewed as two movements having strong linkages, especially in terms of spirit and some organisational methods (like oppositional struggle within and outside the legislature). Following Tilly, we may understand the organisational dynamics of these movements; while, following Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the 'rhizome' we may understand the connectivity among them, despite temporal distance of six and a half years.

Another fundamental question that the present research seeks to address is how to define the 'popular movement'. Or, in other words, what is 'popular' in the 'popular movement'? How could we distinguish it from the party-controlled 'disciplined' one? Is there any 'autonomy', may be a 'relative' one, of these movements which take us beyond the organisational boundaries political parties, and involve a huge quantity of spontaneous 'action' of the common participants/masses? Following both the Tillyian and Deleuzeian insights the present paper seeks to connect not only the 1959 movement with '66 but also the two movements with the left political extremism (popular as the 'Naxalite' movement) in the later years of 1960s.

The Political Mobilisation of Refugees in West Bengal

Tista Das

When one speaks of the refugee 'movement' in Bengal, one must remember that the main thrust of the movement was to unify different strands of refugees. In this sense, it went against the grain of government rehabilitation policies. As the government tried to categorise the refugees in terms of their dependence on the state, so that the 'ineligibles' could be 'weeded out', the refugee leaders tried to bring the demands of the refugees on stations, in the camps and in the colonies together. This paper seeks to trace the threads of identification that bound the refugees together. It also tries to note that the refugees, even in their united struggles, did not forget their differences, so that a camp refugee could refer to a colony refugee as 'colony babu'. However, as the fight to survive on this side of the border marked their everyday lives, as the refugees lived with the borders within their bodies, their politicisation was inevitable. This politics was not 'out there', so to speak. The political drama unfolded within their homes. As their homes became sites for struggles, household utensils became weapons and women with children in arms came to constitute the front lines of resistance. The colony became something akin to a fort. To protect it, one had to receive training. To warn the insiders of eviction operations, bells had to be installed at the colony offices. Even while marking the ways in which the Leftist 'infiltration' occurred among the refugees, it needs to

be recognised that a kind of politics, harping on the needs for land ceiling became relevant for the refugees. It was not a simple process of co-option by the Leftist leaders of the refugees, but also the refugees' co-option of a certain brand of politics.

The paper tries to look at the post-partition years in Bengal to understand the political pushes and pulls of the refugee movement.

Calcutta and the Making of a Popular Movement: The Anti-Tram Fare Increase Resistance Movement, 1953

Anwasha Sengupta

The presentation will focus on how Calcutta, as a city, aided mass movements and popular resistance in late 1940s and early 1950s. Eric Hobsbawm has shown in his article "Cities and Insurrections" how "structures of cities have affected popular movements". Taking a cue from this article, this presentation will discuss how the nature of the paras and colonies in Calcutta, the ways the tramlines were spread in the city, the location of the colleges and the lay-out of the houses helped in sustaining a popular movement like the Tram Movement of July 1953. The paper will further argue that the success of any movement depended on how well the participants managed to use the urban infrastructure. The paper will be based on autobiographies, newspaper reports, archival sources and photographs.

People and Spaces of Insurgency: Some Reflections on Social History of the Last Fifty-years

Kaustubh Mani Sengupta

This paper will discuss three issues regarding people's movement and insurgency as studied by historians and social commentators during last few decades. Starting with the works of the postwar social historians in Britain and elsewhere, it first recounts the tradition of 'history from below' that elaborated the idea of 'social banditry', 'primitive rebels' and 'crowd' in history. The paper then shifts to the critique of this tradition with a discussion of the works of the Subaltern Studies collective who resolutely showed that the pre-industrial insurgents were not necessarily 'prepolitical', mindless rioters. With a creative reading of the official archive, Guha and his colleagues opened up new ways of looking at the insurgents' motive and planned action against the state and the dominant faction of society. Both these tradition of scholarship illustrate, give voice and put a face to the abstract categories of 'rioters', 'insurgents', or 'crowd', and look at the reason, motive, ideology behind such actions. The third issue that the paper wants to discuss moves away from the subjects to the terrain of these movements. Critically studying the spatial logics of such insurgency, it will look at the ways in which the terrain aids or abets these movements. The paper ends with a discussion of the deep link between urban planning and military reasoning from the nineteenth to the early twenty-first century.

Popular Resistance in Kashmir

Anuradha Bhasin Jamwal

I will be tracing the journey of popular resistance movement in Kashmir beginning from the wave of insurgency in 1989-90 to present, looking at the trajectory of the popularity of the gun and its linkage with political upheavals, its wavering graph and revival. I will also be looking at the parallel

strategies of resistance – both creative and violent – and elaborate on the multiple shades of resistance in the Valley, looking at how they intersect (or not) with each other and their relevance and acceptance within a society. The lecture would essentially look at the changing trends in resistance movement, its face, shape and patterns of continuity or breakage.

Understanding an Outlier State & Society in Himachal Pradesh

Aniket Alam

Mountain societies have had a difficult relation, often breaking out into open conflict, with States, particularly those which emerged in the fertile alluvial plains. The Indian sub-continent has not been an exception. An overview of even the last three centuries will show how conflicted has been the relations of the mountain societies with the States of the plains – in the northern mountainous belt stretching from Balochistan to Burma, in the central Indian highlands, in the Peninsular highlands, etc. Even today, the insurgencies of secession, separatism, and Maoism map closely to the highlands.

The only exception to this geography of conflict has been Himachal Pradesh which has, by all accounts, integrated well with the colonial and post-colonial State of India.

There has been, by now, a rich scholarship about mountain societies spanning the disciplines of anthropology, history and politics trying to understand how and what separates the mountain societies from those of the plains. There has been an even richer scholarship of peasant and other popular movements, of which this workshop is a good illustration. However, what explains the exception that is Himachal. My presentation hopes to lay out the foundation on which possible explanations can be framed.

The Spectacle of Anna Hazare Unlimited

Manoj K. Jha

During the weeks during the last leg of UPA-2, when Anna was at the centre of an Anti-Corruption Movement, it was rather difficult for anybody wanting to engage with the ‘Anna phenomenon’ on the basis of a framework which appeared even remotely critical. Such was the hysteric waves colonizing our cognitive frames that any divergence of opinion with the ‘revolutionary upsurge of the great Indian masses (classes)’ was summarily dubbed as cynicism at best and plain act of treason, more generally. The men and the moment of the spectacle left a progression of queries which emanated out of the images and issues ‘served’ to the larger society. Needless to reaffirm that this larger society remained in fact much larger than those that team Anna claims to have paraded on the streets of Delhi and other metropolitan centres across the country. I wish to share some of my insight with respect to an episode, which was widely hailed as ‘movement’.

Contentious Issues, People’s Politics and Popular Leadership

Manish K. Jha

The presentation examines the materialization of popular politics in post-colonial Bihar. Drawing from the lineage of socialist politics that articulated the concerns of backward castes and facilitated the political assertion of the subaltern communities, the presentation elucidates the nuances of contentious issues, people’s politics and role of popular leadership. Popular politics generally refers to the presence of ordinary, non-elite subjects as the conversationist with a political action. The idea is to reflect upon the fundamental challenges that have confronted and continues to confront the shape of politics in the state. What defined popular politics, then, was not the social class of the people politicking, but rather the extent to which the governed got activated to play a role in their own governance. How has this happened in a state like Bihar? As the vanguard of the popular

politics and an architect of the policy that actualized people's aspiration, the role of political leaders like Jayaprakash Narayan and Karpoori Thakur in altering the political agenda would be explained. The discussion examines their ideas and articulation about social justice, popular politics, and the assertion by subaltern groups. The presentation also explicates how governmental route has been foregrounded to engage with the issues of the peasants, farmers, students and other groups. As a perceptible leader of popular mood, leaders invoke politics of reservation, language and leadership craftily and weaved it in slogans that aroused people's imagination and thereafter made it an agenda for public discourse. Through the figure of the select leader(s), we are exploring the facets of contentious politics, its conundrum and challenges to the received wisdom of dominant politics.

Cultural Texts and Political Orality

Badri Narayan Tiwari

Any movement gets strength by its leaders, leaders who emerge from that society only. Their understanding of the pulse of people lies in their close connection to that society. Their intense capacity to connect with people, whom they evolved through the life-struggle, is formed by their lived experiences as participant of that society. They pass through from their social locations, their roots to the various destinations through different trajectories during their political journey. The memories of their lived experiences helps them a lot to re-forge their relationships with their society, when they return as politicians to work among their own people or to pay back to their society. People search those qualities in their leaders which they themselves lack and aspire to acquire that as an ideal. It is quite interesting that they want to see their leaders who are one among them, having similarity to them and also quite different from them as a model. So these kind of contesting aspirations lie in people minds and heart, which creates a base for the acceptability and popularity of those leaders in their own society. On the one hand, their fearlessness, honesty, simplicity attracts public and on the other, their grandeur like coming by helicopter to this public fascinates them. People still remember Nehru ji and elegant personality, style of dressing, narratives like his clothes used to go London to wash. They still remember Nehru's grace that he was so fair and delicate that if anyone touches him, the blood may come out from his skin.

The orality, style of speech and communication plays an important role in creating popularity for the leaders and prepare a stronghold for them. The political orality of these leaders also evolves from the social-cultural texts of their own society in which they lived. These texts are integral part of their life-world which they heard, read, recited, remembered and lived during their formative years as a child, students and youth in the society. They derive tone, tenure and metaphorical content from their most favourite cultural texts and it appears in their speeches in various ways. They link these memories of the cultural narratives encountered during their own formation period and link them with contemporary questions and desires of the people. The resemblances of these cultural texts recreated in the lectures revive the people memories and closely connects these leaders with the heart of the people. In this way these memories produced by these cultural Texts plays important role in the formation of popular in the politics and movements.

In this Presentation I would like to explore the making of political orality of one of the popular leader of Bihar Lalu Yadav and try to identify cultural texts and cultural memories which played important role of the formation of political orality of Lalu Yadav in socialist movement and JP movement (Jay Prakash Aandolan) emerged around 1975. I will also compare the popular political orality of Naxal leader of Bihar Ramata Ji and try to identify appearance of cultural memories in the making of political orality of grassroot leaders. I would also try to see how emotional cultural contents play important role in any kind of the movement i.e. ideologically loaded movement like Naxal movement and emotionally charged movement like JP movement.

(Un)-told Stories: A study of Naxal women in Bihar (1970 -90)

Archana Singh

The interrogation of Naxalite movement, its socio economic and cultural roots, its trajectory, its politics has been dealt frequently in various academic discourses. But the significant presence of women in the armed struggle and their role in making and disseminating the culture of protest has rarely been discussed.

The women participants of this movement were from typical feudal society. This movement opened up the sky for women and they entered in it with an aspiration to get freedom from all types of social clutches including patriarchy. This 'movement space' is the place where they are not supposed to carry out their classis feminine image of 'good women'.

This naxal world too was a purely masculine world. though women participants were not supposed to carry typical feminine qualities like submissiveness, soft and delicate but still they were 'women bodies' and were given the subsidiary roles like preparing food, arranging shelters and transportation of messages and goods. The entry in this movement helped women to liberate from social patriarchal clutches, yet were victim of stereotypes against whom they rebelled.

There were traces of active participation of women in armed struggle. Women were part of Hirawaldasta and Lal sena, armed cores of naxals. There are faded memories in Bihar, (around Bhojpur and Shaha,) of songs and slogans around comrade Nirmala to commemorate her bravery and chivalry. She used to organize meetings in villages of Bihar, to mobilize women to join naxal movement.

But still presence of women comrade in the discourses, history and memories are rare. Their presence has been distorted, sometimes erased or in a faint form. History has not yet been written or analysed by gender lens, these discourses however, need to be re-looked at from the lens of gender.

In this presentation, I am trying to discuss women strategies and coping mechanism to strengthen the movement and to get a liberatory space within the movement. This is an attempt to relook naxal women within their specific location, a dominant frame of masculinity. I will also try to plug the gap by exploring the narratives of exclusion through popular/ alternative discourses. It will open up the silent zone Vis a Vis misrepresentation of women in naxal world.

International Conference

Who are the People? Populism and the Populist Movements

August 31 –September 1, 2018

Representing “My People”: Ethnicity and Populist Leadership

Samir Kumar Das

While much has been written about the populist nature of a nation and how it incorporates different ethnicities/nationalities within its fold, correspondingly much less – if at all – is written on how ethnicities/nationalities come into being and their populist articulations at the time of globalization. It will be interesting to see how such articulations at one level negotiate with a wide variety of differences (say along the lines of class, gender, sub-tribe or so forth) internal to each one of them but at another make their members equivalent to each other through these negotiations.

Such articulations defy any 'social logic' while representing the institution of the political. Because they defy any such logic, they need to be described as populist, and not popular. Ethnic articulations are populist only in the sense that they represent the institution of what may be called *purely* political.

This brief intervention aims at reflecting on this pure political moment that is not ‘determinable apriori’ and therefore calls for ‘a radical investment’. More often than not, the articulation is made to depend on the same liberal-representative institutions or even the same social logic that brings the ethnic leadership into existence in the first place. The political is also instituted by way of doing away with the mediations. Besides, ethnic unity often comes through violence with the risk that it might turn against itself.

Does popularity of a leader depend on her ability to grasp and comprehend history and/or to elicit her representativeness through the existing institutions? The two do not necessarily go hand in hand. Are ethnic leaders then destined to be populist and not popular?

Populist Policies in Contemporary India: Some Reflections on the Aam Aadmi Party and Implications for Democratic Governance

Sumona DasGupta

There appears to be little definitional clarity around the term populism. Though the use of this term has proliferated in the last decade, in common parlance there appears to be a pejorative connotation associated with it and mixed views about how populism is connected with democracy and democratic institutions. In this paper we move away from a value laden understanding of populism as an ideology and stay with an understanding that resonates the most easily with an Indian context - namely any policy that is redistributive in nature and as such favours the common person particularly those in subordinate positions over the elite typically represented by large business and financial interests. The contrast between the people and elite in terms of strategies, movements, policies, organization is perhaps the only way the term populism can retain its analytical usefulness without getting bogged down in polemical discussions as to whether populist movements/policies represent the ideological right or the left, whether it is authoritarian or democratic in its origin, whether it represents a movement or simply a discursive style. This presentation will examine selected populist policies launched in contemporary India by a party that grew out of a popular movement against corruption namely the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) which by its very name creates an implicit contrast between the ‘people’ and the elite. By focusing on some of its key populist policies we seek to gain a deeper understanding of how a movement “for the people” transitioned into a political party which then had to make policies that were seen to be pro “aam aadmi” and what this populism implies in terms of democratic decision making and longer term impacts on the economic and political front.

Political Populism in India: An Impediment in the Growth of Democratic Institutions?

Ambar Kumar Ghosh

India is often hailed as the land of “Bhakti Cult” due to its innate proclivity towards hero-worship. The greatest manifestation of this culture can be vividly traced in the realm of Indian politics. Over the years, the over-arching presence of powerful populist leaders, enjoying unquestionable authority and hysteric mass adulation, has been the modus operandi of the Indian political narrative. The deeply entrenched stranglehold of the culture of personality cult and centralization of personalized power looms large over the political party structure and inner-party democracy in India. The proliferation of the populist leadership and the habitual obedience that they command, have inevitably injected the doctrine of “infallible” leaders that is inimical to the growth of accountability in democracy. The all-pervasive prominence and towering stature of the charismatic individual leadership runs the risk of systematically superseding the structural and institutional bulwarks of democracy which is critical for its sustenance. The domineering culture of complete genuflection

before the whims of the powerful leadership throttles the scope of democratic debate, dialogue and dissent. Such a culture has the propensity of sowing the seeds of rampant nepotism, favouritism and sycophancy in the system which might have an adversarial impact on the growth of responsible and democratic leadership. The perpetual nurturing and consolidation of personality cult by uncritical mass approbation that facilitates concentration of unbridled power in the leadership might create conditions for authoritarian tendencies and impetuous decision-making. This ever-increasing trajectory of political idolatry can severely obfuscate the growth of political consciousness, informed opinion and democratic dialogue among the Indian citizenry. Despite basking in the glory of successfully practicing electoral democracy since its inception, India's conduct in the realm of participatory and substantive democracy is not much flattering. India's discouraging world ranking in the arena of democratic participation and political consciousness is symptomatic of the deep institutional impediments that have historically enfeebled the dynamic growth of democratic spirit and robust democratic institutions. This paper intends to delve into the emergence and consolidation of the culture of personality cult in politics and how it has augmented the rise and growth of populist leaders in Indian political firmament. The paper would further examine how the shackles of personality-centric populist politics and hero worship impact the growth and developments of democratic institutions, decentralized leadership, politically-conscious citizenry and accountable governance.

An Ambedkarian Movement in South Asia: A Critical Appraisal

Rajesh Kharat

In the contemporary world Dr B. R. Ambedkar did not remain merely as an ideology but it has played significant role as an instrument of socio-economic and political emancipation of those who were not counted even as human beings.

Ambedkar criticized the *Chaturvarna* system of Hinduism which has led to discrimination and social exclusion of former untouchables or popularly known as *Shudras* as well as *Ati-shudras*. His thoughts and ideology gaining recognition only in 1930s as a social movement which is basically for to attain social justice against the caste hierarchy exists in India and when he expressed his desire of conversion from Hinduism. In the process, to remove the stigma of untouchability, 'caste identity' has provided a base for the political mobilization to his followers and added political dynamics to Ambedkarian movement.

When, political mobilization of Ambedkarites led to religious conversion from Hinduism to Buddhism in 1956, it had culminated impact on eradication of untouchability. As a result, followers of Ambedkar disassociated themselves from the caste related occupation and increased their caliber with the help of higher education. Moreover, with increasing literacy and greater individual mobility Ambedkarites used conversion as a ladder of incremental upward mobility in every sphere of the social economic and political life. Predominantly their political awareness and political participation cannot be overlooked by the statesmen.

In other words, Ambedkar ideology which is based on social justice and social democracy has become inherent part of the Constitution of most of the states of South Asia. In this context the proposed paper intends to find out to what extent an Ambedkarian movement has been successful in emerging as an alternative political philosophy to most of the radical ideologies existent in these countries.

Institutions, Immigrants and Populism: A Reflection

Sudeep Basu

How can the 'Other' be included to become active citizens when subjected to historically inflicted upon indignities and other exclusionary practices of the state and society? The other could be

internal migrants, immigrants and their descendants, ethnic minorities, women, backward castes and indigenous inhabitants of a region. What are the limits of popular forms of justice in the time of rampant populism and majoritarian politics which seeks to keep the marginalized other at bay? This paper seeks to probe these questions and concerns, mindful of sociology's misadventures with concepts, which have touch upon collective life, since the time of Ferdinand Tonnies's formulation of 'Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft' and Durkheim's 'conscience collective'. How sociology or social science in its quest to establish itself as a general science of society, barely touched upon concepts such as people or masses, treating them as an excess or anathema. This neglect has had profound consequences for the politics of our times rendering the ground on which politics is enacted incomprehensible. In this conjuncture, immigrant lives and the institutions through which their lives are scripted have to be laid bare. It requires shifting our analytical focus away from structure and agency dichotomy to that of the people and masses, as a 'paramount reality', which in Laclauian terms are 'empty signifiers'. In dealing with exclusions, xenophobia, communalizations, racism, the marginals of our society and populist debates have to be brought at the centre of any discussions on the political management of society the conscience of society, while resisting the allure of mainstreaming or assimilating marginal or residual identities for the sake of unity or utopia.

The Idea of Protection and India's Refugee Conundrum: A Conversation...

Nasreen Chowdhory

The international refugee regime defines a *refugee* as "one who is outside the country of nationality (or even habitual residence) due to one of five situations as stipulated in the definition of the 'well-founded fear of persecution' on the basis of religion, race, nationality or membership of a political or social group." In India, the categories of aliens, illegal migrants, and refugees are conflated and refugee determination is not based on either an individual or a group; rather, it is viewed as a bilateral issue between the country of origin and of asylum. The paper endeavours to unravel some of these ethical considerations from the standpoint of people attempting to seek refuge and argues in line with ethics of admission.

Documenting a Genocide for a Decade: My Life with the Rohingyas

Saiful Huq Omi

It all began very casually in the summer of 2008. I had no particular story in mind and no real plan. And of course, I had no idea that I was just about to open the chapter to the next ten years of my life.

I remember my first encounter with the Rohingya very clearly. It was a terribly hot summer's day in early March. I got off the local bus, met the Officer-In-Charge of the refugee camp, showed him my official permission and walked into the camp. I felt like I was walking onto a film set. It was unreal. It was surreal. It was oppressively hot.

My first visit didn't last more than ten days. I hardly took any photographs, but I conducted hundreds of interviews. I needed to learn the story and meet the people. I had to get to the heart of the matter.

I was not prepared for what I saw or heard. My findings were shocking. The stories of persecution, rape, abduction, abuse, forced labour, displacement and killing were horrible. But perhaps no less horrible was how lonely the Rohingyas appeared to be. Other communities and nations who have faced similar deprivations and denials have had friends who stood with them. It felt however, that in the wide-open world of Allah, there were no true friends of the Rohingya. Nobody cared... or at least, not enough.

I started to work only to find out a decade almost has passed. I have witnessed the unfolding horror and genocide, travelled the world photographing them, lobbied for them in countless international forums, worked as a TV reporter, researcher, filmmaker, taught young Rohingyas around the world how to become their own storytellers by using photography and film, provided fellowships and mentored 30 journalists from Bangladesh, Thailand, Myanmar and Malaysia on the Rohingya issues.

My presentation will be about my life that I shared with the Rohingyas.

Climate Change, Women and Planned Relocation: Some Explorations in the Context of Satbhaya, Odisha

Amrita Patel

Coastal erosion is a reality in the context of changing climate scenario. The human impact of such coastal erosion is on life, livelihood and the overall existence. The area of the Satbhaya gram panchayat of the Rajnagar block of the Kendrapada district of Odisha is one such area which is subjected to coastal erosion. The area has a long history of being under the impact of coastal erosion, ingression of sea water and salination. The cyclone of 1971 washed away 4 villages. The super cyclone of 1999 was another major disaster. A planned relocation by the Government of Odisha, of the affected families of the Satbhaya Gram Panchayat district to Bagapatia under Gupti Panchayat, 9 kms away is underway. This paper looks at the impact of the coastal erosion on women, the experiences of women in the relocation process and the situation in the relocated through the lens of gender and development. The paper is based on secondary sources and the qualitative narratives of women.

Women: Victims Turned Agents of Change

Anushaya Collure

In this presentation, I will look at how women in Sri Lanka were victims of populist politics and on how they became agents of change.

In the post war Sri Lanka (2009 May onwards), the political atmosphere has been dominated by populist trends such as the majority identity politics with authoritarian leanings, prominence given to infrastructure development as solution to all socio economic issues, and promises to quick economic success by drastic measure. In such a context, democratic principles such as political equality for all and respect for human rights were drastically challenged. Women were at the receiving end as victims of both the patriarchal structure and populist politics. The regime change occurred with the Presidential elections in 2015 was perceived at that time as a victory towards a more democratic political space.

Even after 2015, issues regarding the victim families of the disappeared, communities who lost their land to government's land grabbing processes on the basis of military purposes and development projects, and indebtedness with microfinance schemes became severe to the extent that there was a considerable resistance from the affected communities. In activism against these social issues there was a growing tendency of women in these communities taking the lead in these movements. They have been able to draw public attention on their issues as a means to putting pressure on the government authorities to resolve them. This to an extent has worked and they have been able to impact the state decision making process.

Migration and Climate Change: Women Forced to Move

Asha Hans

More than a billion people could be forced to migrate because of global warming, according to recent research. This paper will present a perspective of climate change induced migration which is strongly gendered. A study of this migration carried out by the author are against the backdrop of environmental change taking place in the Indian Delta's in Odisha and West Bengal. It will however present the data and see how it fits into the Global Compact for Migration an international agreement which could only be negotiated with the contribution of women's movement globally. The compact will be linked to local communities of women and how it could facilitate their safe and orderly migration and whether the women's movement promotion of the GCM has been on the right track.

Populism: Gender-based Violence and Judicial Response

Ruchira Goswami

The December 2012 Delhi rape of Jyoti Singh, popularly known as the 'Nirbhaya' case was a watershed in feminist and women's rights activism. In many ways, this case reminds us of the Mathura rape case in 1978. The open letter to the Chief Justice of India, the birth of the autonomous women's movements and a host of 'pro-women' legislative reforms propelled violence against women squarely within the public, political sphere in India. After three decades, the Delhi rape had similar impact on civil society and legal system. Nationwide protests, continuous media attention, debates and discussions in the legislative and judicial circles led to another round of significant legal reforms. The Verma Commission gave its report in record time recommending significant changes in sexual assault laws. However, when the Criminal Law Amendment Act 2013, was passed, many of the recommendations made by the Verma Commission that reflected human rights concerns brought in by the testimonies of several civil society and human rights organizations were summarily ignored, both in the ordinance and in the final Act. The Commission recommended time bound investigation and trial of sexual violence cases, the setting up and proper functioning of fast track courts and suggested that capital punishment or death penalty was not the solution to sexual violence. This was precisely ignored and it seemed that death penalty remains as the panacea for combating sexual violence. This is reiterated in the Kathua case, this time more vociferously since the victim is a minor girl and with sexual violence against children increasing with alarming proportions. In July 2018, amendments were introduced in the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2013 with harsher penalties including death. Sustained opposition made by child rights groups clearly stating why death penalty does not deter were ignored. This paper argues that the populist legal reforms on sexual violence, focusing only on death penalty marginalizing other reasonable and effective recommendations are doing more harm than good. Gender based violence and sexual violence has become a political tool and the judiciary is not immune from playing to the galleries. The issue of sexual violence has been appropriated from feminist politics and human rights arguments are rejected for being mere rhetoric. Retributive and not reformative justice has gained ground and populist laws and policies have ensured that 'saner' voices are drowned. The current legal trend is in consonance with current populist politics on national and global levels.

Enforced Victimhood: Women in Refugee Movement

Paula Banerjee

The presentation focuses on the issue of gender and power structures in refugee movements wherein the leadership remains exclusive to men. Women, be it single women travelling alone or with children, expecting women, adolescent girls, unaccompanied children or early-married girl children, at times themselves with new-born babies, do in fact constitute the most vulnerable category among refugees, susceptible to gender based violence that is, in turn, intensified by the uneven gender relations within the community of origin and continues unabated through the course of the displacement experience. Separated and without the support of families, a sense of isolation and consequent lack of visibility characterises women in refugee movements.

The author on the basis of her fieldwork among women refugees in New York City contends that while women as refugees often emerge as passive objects awaiting assistance, there is another equally important facet to the complex issue of women in refugee movements where they are often compelled to act as victims to seek asylum. Vulnerability and lack of agency are perceived as qualities that facilitate and expedite the provision of asylum. The presentation will attempt to throw light on this aspect of women as refugees.

Being Women, Becoming Students: Students' Movements and the Question of Gender

Samata Biswas

Can students' movements be called popular movements? In 2014, the culmination of the #hokkolorob movement at Jadavpur University, (against police brutality on protesting students inside the university) saw a massive and unprecedented procession in Kolkata, which brought together people from various walks of life, activists and supposedly 'apolitical' citizens alike. In 2016, the institutional murder of Dalit research scholar Rohith Vemula became a rallying call for anti-caste activists across the country, and many allege, was the impetus between the Delhi police's arrest of 'anti-national' student activists, to take away the glare from casteism in educational institutions. Needless to say, the increasing incidents of caste violence, caste atrocities, and attacks on people on the margins, and their food habits, found resonance in the student-led opposition to continuing practices of casteism in the sphere of higher education, a supposedly democratic space. It has increasingly become difficult to consider students' movements in isolation from others in the 'civil society', even more so with the advent of social networking sites, where much of the mobilisation is carried out, across student communities, universities and concerned groups. Within the context of students' movement then, I seek to raise the question of gender, one that has been raised many a times, but not always in a sustained manner, in the Indian context, and hardly ever intersectionally, except by individual activists, in memoirs and interviews.

The attempt here, then, is to ask the crucial question of gender: not only in terms of who participates in and leads which protest, but also, which issues are raised in the movement and which gather momentum. Other identities complicate this: religion, caste, access to English or Hindi education before reaching the university, femininity and sexuality. This presentation, in its brief span, seeks to locate these questions and concerns within students' movements of recent times in India.

People's Struggle for Freedom of Information in India

Sabir Ahamed

There has been an incredible boom in big data - data is everywhere - yet there is shortage of relevant and timely information when it comes to determining effective public policy, accountability and governance.

In India, the culture of secrecy originated in with the enactment of the Official Secret Act 1923, a complete prohibition on sharing information about the running of the governance, a powerful tool to perpetuate the colonial control over the subject. The trend continued many years after the Independence in 194. In 2005 the landmark legislation titled the Right to Information Act was enacted, with some ostensible objectives of ensuring citizen's right to information, building accountability and transparency in the governance.

A series of incidences since the very beginning of Independence led a popular movement, demanding the right to information. As the 'asymmetry of information' had curtailed their basic rights and entitlement. The experiences of The Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan, for example, public hearing and social audits, for examples exposing the corruption at different administrative levels spread to a few other states, and the demand grew into a popular movement.

The paper traces the milestones in the journey of the Act, and the role of civil society organization and medium used to engage people in the movement. In the conclusion, the paper points to the fact that the RTI Act was one of the most people friendly Acts as it initiated with the people's involvement.

Popular Movements in Tamil Nadu with Focus on Sterlite Protest and Shoot-out Incident

Parivelan K.M.

In the recent years, Tamil Nadu has been witnessing several people's movement ranging from Koodankulam anti nuclear protest, Jallikattu protest, Enayam port protest, Salem-Chennai Highway protest to the recent anti-sterlite (copper smelting) protest. The anti sterlite protest is significant for culminating in to the Thoothukudi shoot out incident wherein twelve persons were killed and several injured. The people in and around Thoothukudi are in state of shock and trauma. It raises several questions like: was the protest peaceful, if so why this killing, was the killing by police pre-meditated action, is it to suppress popular movements. Is it also a ploy to extend the support to corporates, which are destroying and polluting the environment? Is it a sign of decline of good governance or a complete collapse of democracy where people have no right to participate in peaceful protests?

We need to look on to the environmental and health hazards such plants may be causing. We have to speak to the women of Thoothukudi about their experiences with the Sterlite plant, the health problems that have grown including concerning the health of their children, the polluted water and the increased incidence of health risks.

In the absence of any law and order problem in the area there is no need for continuing an enhanced police presence at Thoothukudi. Its continuation affirms public fears that the police and the administration are motivated in their actions by an intention to break the movement against polluting industries wherein Sterlite is a prime contributor. Finally, how do we bring in accountability and transparency for such police actions suppressing the popular social movements will be explored in this paper.

Populist Politics Speaking to the Law: The Case of Assam Sanmilita Mahasangha v Union of India and Ors

Sahana Basavapatna

The Supreme Court of India has, over the last several years, increasingly stepped into the realm of policy making and governance, notably in the longest heard continuing mandamus case of *Godavarman Thirumalpad v Union of India and ors*, WP(C) No. 202/1995. This presentation considers the case of *Assam Sanmilita Mahasangha v Union of India and ors*, WP(C) No. 562/2012, currently pending before the Supreme Court of India. The case, whose primary concern is with illegal Bangladeshi immigration into India, attempts to resolve India's old disquiet with the problem of the foreigner. If the *Assam Sanmilita Mahasangha* case can be called a third act in the illegal Bangladeshi immigration saga, what we now have is a Court that has assumed jurisdiction under Article 142 and concerned with the social, cultural, religious and economic rights of the citizens of Assam. The attempt in this presentation is to examine, in the light of the ongoing developments [notably, NRC and the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2015] what it means for the Supreme Court to consider the constitutional validity of Section 6A of the Citizenship Act, 1955, among others, under Article 142 of the Constitution of India. The Supreme Court practice of taking on the role of the executive in matters that reek of populist politics such as this case requires to be reviewed.

For details, visit: http://www.mcrg.ac.in/RLS_PML/RLS_PM_Researchers.asp



Participants in 2018: Priya Singh, Badri Narayan Tiwari, Tista Das, K.M. Parivelan, Sudeep Basu (from left to right)



Participants at the Collaborative Workshop, June 2018



Participants and Experts at the International Conference, August 2018

REPORTS (2018)

Of Resistances and their Interfaces



Calcutta
Research Group,

Rosa Luxemburg
Stiftung,

West Bengal
State University,
Barasat

Date: 22 June, 2018

Venue: West Bengal State
University, Barasat



Of Resistances and their Interfaces: A Collaborative Workshop

June 22, 2018

Ranabir Samaddar

The project began with Bengal, mainly because it was found that political writings on the popular movements that have taken place in Bengal were not many in number. For some reasons historians had refrained from writing about popular resistances in Bengal. The period starting from 1967, is considered as an exception in independent Indian history and this is known as the “Naxalite period” which was seen by some Leftists as an aberration and by the Congress as Leftist frenzy and extremism; possibly the Naxalites also thought that they were an exception. That is why researchers of CRG set out to find, what it was in the dynamics of the 1950s and 1960s that led to the “Naxalbari Uprising”. Which is when colleagues at CRG from Bihar questioned, why was only Bengal being looked at? It was then decided that if there were proper resources, popular movements in Bihar would also be looked into. Prof. Samaddar admitted that when the programme was conceptualised, analytical problems were not thought of. People got engrossed in the details and the larger questions which arose during the course of the study got ignored. He believed that the research done and the enormous inputs, details and realities that have been discovered are still not sufficient. One of the things that had struck Prof. Samaddar was that, in trying to map the development of the movement, it became apparent that these movements were changing in form as well as changing in the organic structure and composition.

One of the challenges that were present in the theme was to understand the starting point. While in certain cases movements started in Calcutta and have journeyed their way to other cities, in certain other cases movements have originated in small towns due to the prevalence of some issues. Therefore, major theoretical questions which arose while studying popular movements were the continuities and the discontinuities of the movements which the historians as well as other scholars needed to address.

Sibaji Pratim Basu

What is the “popular” in popular movements? In earlier days, we used to call these movements “mass movements”, so what is the difference between the popular movements and the mass movements? Do we consider these movements as autonomous movements having no connection with each other or are there continuities? The food movements of 1959 and 1966 are often considered by the scholars as one of the best examples of Left popular movements and these became the foremost reasons of the overthrow of the 20 year long Congress rule in West Bengal and the starting point of United Front politics in West Bengal. Basu starts with a very basic question of what does a popular movement do? A very general definition is that the distinguished feature of social or protests movement is based on changing grievances which create a relatively autonomous space for people’s actions, sometimes peaceful but mostly violent and which cannot be controlled by any leader, vertical leadership or vertical party organisation no matter how powerful they may be.

Coming to the scenario in post partition Bengal it was important that the sea of refugees who were coming into the state were included; at the same time there is a shortage of food due to various reasons such as failure of procurement of paddy and other foodgrains. In 1948 the government could reach only fifty percent of the target food production and distribution and price of paddy per 3.5 kg had risen. This was a very high price at that point of time and hence hoarding and black marketing became rampant, creating a near famine-like situation in Bengal. In this background a new mass organisation was formed namely the Price Increase and Famine Resistance Committee (PIFRC). This came into being in early 1959 by the Leftists with special initiatives by the CPI, the main opposition at that time. In 1959 the Food movement started from Kolkata and reached the districts later while in 1966, the problem started in the districts and travelled to Kolkata. In 1966 there was hardly a differentiation among the indigenous Bengali participants and the refugees. There was hike in rice price and also in the price of kerosene. In 1970 when the Left Front came to power

the continuity of popular movements was under the absolute control of the CPI(M). In 2007, a vast movement broke out in protest against the failure of the ration system known as the ration riots. These movements in various districts of Bengal shook the very foundation of the Left in the 2008 Panchayat Elections. And this proved once again that the rhizome of 1959 could surface any moment and take shape even decades later.

Tista Das

Tista Das spoke on the manner in which in 1950s the conspicuous presence of the refugees on the streets with bags, baggage, clothes and children had changed the cityscape of Calcutta. As categorization became an important tool for identifying who was or was not eligible to receive government charity, the refugee leaders needed to unify all kinds of refugee problems and fight for government recognition. How the refugees became a basis for political party activities turned out to be an exciting narrative. Refugees chose a kind of politics that was relevant for their purpose; it was through the process of political mobilisation that the lazy, co-dependent refugee came to his or her own. Das brought together strands of this process through a brief history of the organisations that worked on the fabric of refugee resistance. Establishment and recognition of refugee organisations representing the refugee interests became an important task for political parties which started as colony committees. She stressed that the preservation of refugee colonies which were the homes of refugees was very important as the threat of attack was ever present and the preservation of the colony was a political process. The organisation which strengthened the communist stronghold on the refugees was the MARS which was a CPI dominated organisation. It was an organisation for social work among women; their objective was to safeguard the prestige, interests and rights of the women. The MARS repeatedly spoke of the need to open primary schools in the colonies. The committees of these schools were used for recruiting members. The MARS women members acted as teachers in various colony primary schools. It is evident therefore that the process of mobilisation happened across colonies and the Communists could create a definite stronghold. These schools held certain “study” classes in which the policies of the Congress government towards refugees were criticised and appeals were made to join the alternative movements initiated by the Left. The formation of the UCRC was the culmination of a process that included coordination among various colonies and establishment of a hierarchy of control. Apart from the CPI, the representatives of other communist parties were also present in the UCRC. The central objective of UCRC was bringing the refugees together and making the government feel their presence. It was suggested that the refugee rehabilitation programmes of government be assessed by asking how far the displaced peasants, workers, artisans have been rehabilitated and given gainful work in addition to basic facilities of education, shelter, healthcare etc., so that they could build up their lives in their own natural ways.

Anwasha Sengupta

Anwasha Sengupta focused on some of the movements that Calcutta had witnessed and how the cityscape and infrastructure helped in the growth of mass movements and demonstrations. The paper drew from Eric Hobsbawm’s famous article “Cities and Insurrections” where Hobsbawm spoke about “how structures of cities have affected popular movements.” Hobsbawm had considered Calcutta as a city where mass agitations could take place and this showed that he was aware of the political climate of the city. Calcutta had always been an ideal city for riots and brigades with the appropriate urban structure, the high population of workers and students etc. The city since 1947 had been politically volatile. On the one hand it had witnessed massive communal riots in 1946, 1947, 1950, and 1964; in addition to the refugee movement of the 1950s, the tram movement of 1953, the teachers’ movement of 1954, food movement of 1959 etc. However, the participation, the scale of violence and the government’s reaction differed from one movement to other.

During the Tram Movement of 1953, colonies and the *bastis* occupied by the refugees emerged as

centres of bomb manufacturing and other weapons and explosives. What went on in these areas was only visible to those people who actually lived there and not to the outsiders. The teachers' movement of 1954 also witnessed similar attacks on the trams; during the food protests also, trams were attacked by the protestors. Similar scenes were depicted in the 1960s too when along with trams, buses were set on fire by the protestors. What made the tramlines more vulnerable was their widespread network (unlike today), functioning in politically operative localities of the city, proximity to schools, colleges and universities. For example, if we think of College Street, Presidency College, Medical College, Calcutta University, all are adjacent to tramlines. Sengupta attempted to explain why certain features of the city enhanced the protest that was taking place in Calcutta, but cautioned that these features could not alone explain how or why these movements took place. One of the reasons was the massive presence of refugees in the city who helped turn crowded localities into a battleground against the policy of driving them away from densely populated areas of the city.

Kaustubh Mani Sengupta

Kaustubh Mani Sengupta's paper was titled 'People and Spaces of Insurgency: Some Reflections on Social History of the last fifty-years'. The paper critiqued and discussed the works of the Subaltern studies which resolutely showed that the pre-industrial insurgents were not necessarily 'pre-political', mindless rioters. The other issue that the paper wanted to discuss moved away from the subjects to the terrain of popular movements, critically studying the spatial logics of such insurgency; it looked at the ways in which the terrain aided or abated these movements. The paper ended with a discussion of the deep link between urban planning and military reasoning from the nineteenth to the early twenty-first century. The people's movements were reformist not revolutionary, and their ambitions were modest. There was a survey of 110 cases of insurgency in colonial India to show the ways through which the subalterns as well as the *Adivasis* acted. The insurgents present were clear about their opponents and the use of symbols of authority was almost evidently an act of rebellion. The subalterns had their own political practices and this was often not necessarily in opposition to the previous order. John Wilson recently argued that the violent peasant uprisings in North Bengal during the earlier years of Company rule can be studied against the break down of social order of mutual relationship between the Zamindar and the peasant. The peasants reminded the authorities that power comes from having a subject but if the subject migrates to other areas then the ruler would be left in a void. The forms of mutual dependency of the society of rural Bengal led to coercion and violence but more than physical violence, it was the restriction on peasant mobility that turned out bitter. Forceful selling of the cattle of the peasants was more harmful than any physical violence. It was this restriction on their choice of landlord and mobility that the peasants complained against. The restriction on mobility was a crucial factor in the uprising by peasants.

Previously it was the ability to move beyond the local setting. Today, the urban warfare has entered a completely new zone as is evident from the recurrent destruction of Middle Eastern cities.

Anuradha Bhasin Jamwal

Kashmir is a place which has had a history of resistance against power. Post-partition in Kashmir, there were control mechanisms of power structure and this power spoke through manipulation, brutality and is the power that Kashmir has been resisting for the last many decades. Kashmir is a political dispute, a legacy of the Partition of 1947. Since the last 7 decades, Kashmir has had a lot of history of broken promises, deposed government, jailed leaders, rigged elections, erosion of autonomy and remote controlled politics. Since the Delhi agreement in 1952, India placed ill-fate upon Kashmiri affairs through encouragement of puppet regimes kept in check through strong tactics like arrest of elected leaders, manipulation of their position in governments, and by injecting corruption, in turn managing to erode the special status of the state as enjoyed under Article 370;

the main explanation being pathological insecurity on the part of Central Government with respect to the only Muslim majority state in India.

The excessive militarization by the state has led to excessive human rights violation which further drew international attention and gradually engendered a response among civil societies and victims to begin structured campaigns for justice. Political lethargy on part of the Central Government and hesitation to go ahead with meaningful peace process was making the people impatient and restless between 2002 and 2007. In 2008 when people poured out on the streets, it carried forward the residue of that growing impatience. It was a new form of resistance, people coming out in peaceful marches.

Anuradha also talked about some other resistant struggles going on side by side and these are more organized, peace oriented struggles. In any peaceful setting, it's a normal course of thing for people to not invite some brutal action. But in Kashmir, peaceful protests can invite brutal force. Poetry, writings, narratives are being used as an important means of creative resistance in various ways. Creative resistance is opposed to violent resistance. It is artistic and creative resistance that unnerves the government more than the violent resistance. Therefore television channels only project the violent resistance going on in Kashmir, the stone pelting, the militants, because they want to project Kashmiri Muslims as demons, villains. People in Kashmir still await peaceful dialogues with government and for their true intentions and voices to be heard.

Aniket Alam

As a general assumption for historians and social scientists, people's movements can be constitutional, insurgent, creative, oppositional and constructive. Peoples' movements get the public their rights and better future prospects sometimes. What is very interesting about Himachal Pradesh is that it is a state where peoples' movement cannot be found since independence; the peasant movements ended in 1947, 1948-49. Himachal Pradesh as a state is a creation of the in grown class politics within the praja mandal movement, but since then there hasn't been any. The difficulty of doing agriculture in the steps and creating steps, maintaining them, ploughing them, etc is why in all these mountain societies, agriculture never became the single biggest source of income. The social conditions depend upon pastoralism, gathering and forging. Till the 19th century, there is an absence of the institution of caste in Himachal Pradesh. In Himachal and Uttarakhand there is 50 to 70% Brahmins and Rajputs and the rest are Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. There is enough documentary evidence and anthropological evidence that suggests that it was basically in late 19th century to early 20th century that what became the OBCs else where, became Brahmins and Rajputs in Himachal. With colonial intervention, new kinds of settlements (land and forests), markets and networks of circulation came up and there was increasing commodification of almost everything - land, labour, forests, agricultural produce, even bride price. The following is a list of rebellions prior Indian independence from British rule, in the Sutlej Beas valley - at Jubbal, Bushahr, Mandi, Suket, Dhami, and Koti. Praja Mandal agitations were big because they were not only asking for the end of commodification but also for a separate Himalayan *pranth*. Since independence, there has been no rebellion. Himachal Pradesh is one area where there is complete integration with the market; commodification did not lead to dislocation. The kind of friction that is seen in other caste societies is missing. There has been successful integration of religion. There is just no insurgency in Himachal Pradesh or any rebellion of sort.

Manoj K. Jha

During the weeks of the last leg of UPA-2, when Anna was at the centre of an Anti-corruption Movement, it was rather difficult for anybody wanting to engage with the 'Annaphenomenon' on the basis of a framework which appeared critical. Such was the hysteric waves colonizing the cognitive frames of people that any divergence of opinion with the 'revolutionary upsurge of the

great Indian masses (classes)' was summarily dubbed as cynicism at best and plain act of treason, more generally. Manoj Kr. Jha shared some insights with respect to an episode, which was widely hailed as 'movement'. He mentioned that having been a student of movement, he knew that the Hazare movement was like a package and people knew what the package contained. 3 to 4 days after the protest started on 5th of April 2011, on visiting the protest site he had seen the visual imageries and the language of movement was political hypnosis. Most of us have the habit of remaining in the magical spell as a nation or national leader, as a community. Ambedkar in 1949, while drafting the constitution had warned people, to guard oneself against hero worship. The entire Anna Hazare movement necessitated socially drugged dreams become reality and they build on it and as a result of which what we see today is that throughout the Anna Hazare movement nobody ever raised the question 'what is the ideology of the movement?' Some opined that the movement represented the end of ideology in politics.

When examined closely, it is found that nobody asked for ideological organisation or even leadership and the movement was placed under media glare as if it was a crisis period. During the Anna Movement commercials were stopped, there were no ad breaks, with a guess that people running the media houses got paid for ad-free news coverage and those who had paid-up could be enjoying the relevance now. The Anna movement proved to be an attempt to prepare society for a fascist state.

Manish K. Jha

What is street fighting? When does it become resistance? When does it transform into mass movements? Why do mass movements happen? Is it because of some kind of conflict in the society? Do all kinds of conflicts lead to mass mobilisation and mass movements or only some kinds? In Bengal the project looks at specific cases of movements – were a few questions that Manish Jha's research tried to pin down. In the case of Bihar, we look at resistance and movements through the strategies and tactics of leaders.

Jha portrayed an account of Jay Prakash Narayan's movement, where popular ideology including caste, social justice and mass movement, was what had helped in bringing together different people. Mass large scale resistance was happening in certain parts of Bihar which was at that time central Bihar and now is southern Bihar, but the political discourse where an opposition made a ruling party, was not yet demonstrated in large scale mass movement of that time. It was very successfully demonstrated by Karpoori Thakur between 1977 and 1979.

Bihar is also a solid laboratory to understand that how in certain pockets of Bihar the left movement continued for very long and still continues and has its own mobilisation. That which was being thought and was being demonstrated by Karpoori Thakur was very forcefully followed and forwarded by leaders like Lalu Prasad Yadav. Thakur came from a community where the dominant backward class were very suspicious about Karpoori Thakur's politics; so he was not only dealing with trying to bring backward class politics to the forefront, he was also dealing with the suspicion of the dominant backward classes which was not the case with Lalu Prasad Yadav. So then his acumen, his strategy, and his confidence became much more about a sense of justice.

Badri Narayan Tiwari

Badri Narayan Tiwari speaking about cultural texts and political orality referred to two aspects; first was the linking of Bihar and Bengal and second was linking resistance in social movements. Music, the harmonium and literature have travelled from Bengal to Bihar. There is a clear link between Bengal and Bihar, he stated and hence, resistant movements in Bengal and Bihar can also be linked. Anti-democratic activity is the root cause of resistance.

In the Nehruvian era, when folk artists would perform on stage, their speech and political orality evolved through the socio-cultural ambience of society. Folk artists used proverbs,

metaphors and symbols in their song compositions. Resistance through orality is difficult to understand because there is no documentation of the events. They take place mainly underground and they are not easily available in the form of documents. Emergency period also produced many leaders like Lalu Yadav. He was also a theatre artist who took part in *nataks*. At that time every performance was not easily available to commoners, so thousands of people would gather around a radio to listen to *nataks* and that is how Lalu Yadav became very famous in Bihar. He used 2 languages, Hindi and Bhojpuri. His language and Bhojpuri satires and his aggressive attitude of narrative in his shows made him famous in Bihar. Whenever he delivered his lecture, he would use both languages and use satires to make his speeches interesting and this made him a popular leader. Many Bihar youths became famous because of this ability to mesmerise the listeners or onlookers with the power of oration. This makes leaders famous in society and then the state as well. The resistance through oratory excellence also has to be able to meet the needs of the state and market led aspirations as day by day people become part of resistance.

Archana Singh

Archana Singh spoke on the Naxal women in Bihar. She said, “Most Naxal women are undocumented and unheard of and not seen by anyone. Whatever data is available is disrupted or misinterpreted in some way. Most scholars who have taken up studies of Naxal women want to know their contribution to the Naxal movement in Bihar. Most Naxal women in Bihar belonged to lower castes as caste is the main feature in Bihar. Women were a part of peasant movements and they picketed shops and liquor shops and death and deportation was awarded to them if they were caught. Most of these women formed rebellion groups that changed the grassroot scenario in Bihar; they formed groups and protested against the feudal system. The main aim was to make the men folk and other people conscious of their problems. These groups developed consciousness among themselves and also within other groups. The women tried to mobilize other people to retain their respect or “izzat” due to various cases like rape etc. Several factors such as cultural factors like patriarchy and social factors like division between genders also provoked Naxal women in Bihar to fight for their rights. One of the examples is Amrit Sonavati from Bhojpur. She fought for the rights of women who were widows and daughters. These women who became a part of the popular movements resisted their families and organized the movements. Another example of such a woman is Nirmala, who was not from Bhojpur but Bihar. These women became heroes and all other women in Bihar worshipped them as Naxal heroes.

For Full Report visit:

http://www.mcrg.ac.in/RLS_PML/RLS_PM/Report_Collaborative_Workshop_Programme_Popular_Movement_2018.pdf



Participants in 2018: Kaustabh Mani Sengupta, Anuradha Bhasin, Aniket Alam, Archana Singh (from left to right)

Who are the people?

*Populism and
the Populist
Movements*

An International Conference

**organised by
Calcutta Research Group
Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung**



**Swabhumi, Kolkata
Aug 31 - Sep 1, 2018**



Who are the People? Populism and the Populist Movements

August 31 –September 1, 2018

Inaugural Session

The introductions were made by Apala Kundu, Research and Programme Assistant, CRG. The welcome address was given by Anita Sengupta, Director, CRG. A background note on the research project and conference was shared by Priya Singh, Research and Programme Associate, CRG. The inaugural lecture was delivered by Ranabir Samaddar, Distinguished Chair, CRG. Ranabir Samaddar shared with the participants the main reason for designing the theme of the project. It was to work on the history of popular movements in Bihar and Bengal. The volume on the popular movements in Bihar and Bengal will be published by the Social Science Press. R. Samaddar emphasized on the fact that there was a gap in connecting the history of Naxalbari and popular movements and more questions arose than were answered, while preparing the framework of the project with RLS. The research may be led forward through an inquest of the history of populism in India among others.

Panel Discussion I- **Populism as a Global Phenomenon: Ideology, Dialogue, Political Approach**

Moderator and Discussant: Bishnu Mohapatra, Independent Researcher

Panelists:

Samir Kumar Das, University of Calcutta, Kolkata

Sumona DasGupta, Independent Researcher

Ambar Kumar Ghosh, Siliguri College, Siliguri

Rajesh Kharat, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

Bishnu Mohapatra introduced the panel theme and the speakers stating that populism as a global phenomenon resonates with the multiplicity of ideologies, dialogues and the path construed by them. Samir Kumar Das observed that the populist nature of a nation and its incorporation of different ethnicities or nationalities within the social tiers find mention in a number of literatures; however the varied ways in which nationalities or ethnicities commence their existence with their populist expressions is a much lesser pursued theme of study which needs to be explored. Sumona DasGupta focussed on the role of Aam Aadmi Party in the establishment of popular, democratic governance by emphasising that populism is a confounding term. She contended that how one arrives at the meaning of populism, despite the fact that it has been used with increasing frequency in the last few decades is questionable. She concluded with the observation that AAP has managed to signal at a politics that was representative by way of involving common people. Ambar Ghosh in his presentation emphasized that over the years, leaders in Indian politics have enjoyed indisputable power and audience from the masses bordering on hero-worship. Personality cult and personalised power often injects ideals of infallibility of the leader among the followers which sometimes supersedes institutionalisation. Rajesh Kharat presented the participants with an interesting account of the instrumental role that Dr. B.R. Ambedkar had played in etching out a respectable position in the society for those belonging to the marginalised communities in a Hindu orthodoxy bound society. Bishnu Mohapatra concluded the panel discussion with the proposition of analysing the use of knowledge through language while understanding the concepts of popular, populist and populism. He stated that conceptual agility needs to be questioned and discussed through multiple dialogues.

Panel Discussion II- **Institutions, Immigrants and Populist Politics**

Moderator & Discussant: Ranabir Samaddar, Distinguished Chair, MCRG, Kolkata

Panelists:

Sudeep Basu, Central University of Gujarat, Gandhinagar

Nasreen Chowdhory, University of Delhi, New Delhi

Saiful Huq Omi, Photographer and Filmmaker, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Amrita Patel, State Project Co-ordinator, Government of Odisha

Sudeep Basu questioned the inclusion of a person into citizenship when the person is historically inflicted with indignities and other exclusionary practices of the state and the society. He also questioned the limits of popular forms of justice in the time of rampant population agitations and the majoritarian politics which seeks to keep the marginalised immigrants at bay. Nasreen Chowdhory spoke about the addressal of the issues and conventions for protection of refugees. She talked about statelessness of refugees and the idea of their protection in India. Saiful Huq Omi began the discussion with the trailer of his documentary film on Rohingyas, which previewed glimpses of regular life of Rohingya people, the kind of work they are engaged in, their struggle and hardship and the ‘unnatural way of living a natural life.’ Amrita Patel discussed about a planned relocation of five villages which took place in Satbhaya, Odisha because of climate change and its effect on the life, livelihood and overall existence of the villagers. She concluded that this is definitely one instance where women have been left behind and their livelihood affected, although they have gained in terms of infrastructural development. Ranabir Samaddar initiated a discussion with the panelists and those amongst audience on the issues of Institutions, Immigrants and Populist Politics, leading the way to several interesting questions being raised for the panel. Samaddar raised the question of what happens if populism is not thought of or placed as an ideology but as a problem of language, as a body of political practices and wrapped up the session with the hope that each discussion would lead the way forward to profound thinking and quest for seeing beyond the boundaries of home.

Panel Discussion III - **Populism and Gender**

Moderator & Discussant: Ritu Menon, Women Unlimited, New Delhi

Panelists: Anushaya Collure, South Asians for Human Rights (SAHR), Colombo, Sri Lanka

Asha Hans, Sansristi, Bhubaneswar

Paula Banerjee, Sanskrit College and University, Kolkata

Ruchira Goswami, National University of Juridical Sciences, Kolkata

Samata Biswas, Bethune College, Kolkata

The panel was initiated by moderator and discussant for the session Ritu Menon, who, after a brief introduction of the speakers requested the first speaker, Anushaya Collure to present her paper and deliberate on the theme women as agents of change. Anushaya Collure spoke on how a section of marginalised or minority women were victimised by the populist policies of the two governments, the previous govt of Mahinda Rajapaksa and the present govt of Maithripala Sirisena. Anushaya Collure elaborated upon the popular history of the government and the incidents that occurred in Sri Lanka. Asha Hans commenced her discussion raising questions on populism and populist. How people in the country consider the concept of vulnerability and look at the issues faced by children and women, which in turn open up multiple dimensions of discussion. Asha Hans brought her discussion to a close portraying the contrast that exists between the studies of climate change being scientific and gender studies being inherently grounded in the practices of society, thereby becoming difficult to fit gender issues into climate change. One hence needs to shift from science to people. Paula Banerjee in a few words introduced the concern of women among refugees being forced into the mires of victimhood encapsulated by the whims in some cases and neglect in other

cases on the part of society. She signalled caution in highlighting that there is lack of theorising of victimhood of women because when feminists entered the debate they entered through the sphere of narratives, and talked for years of discovering, iterating, and reiterating narratives. Paula Banerjee ended the presentation stating that women are political beings, and efforts that are critical in transforming them into agents of truth, lose the feminist edge and make it impossible for them to become subjects of study for feminist researchers with whom they share a symbiotic relationship. Ruchira Goswami began by shedding light on the fact that popular movement and populist movement mean many things, but populism and women and populism and gender yield very limited literature in terms of research, study, traditional discourses for the concepts. Conceptually populism has no specific relation to gender; populism in fact tends to avoid the subject of gender, the main reason for it being the embeddedness of popular politics in a machismo culture and masculinism. Samata Biswas tried to connect the dots and establish that students' movements can also be considered as popular movements not merely because at times they articulate popular demands but also because the ways in which they tie-in closely with civil society, because of the ambitions, participations in them and the networks that are forged. Biswas raised two questions, one was 'who is a student activist and how does a gender identity among many other identities define activism among students? The second question she raised was on the issues that culminate into bigger issues and the nature of gender panning-out in them. Ritu Menon wrapped up the session and opened the panel for taking up questions with a few words. She was of the opinion that the place of women when gender study is upheld is obscure in many ways because populism and women have not been equated on the same page commonly. When people's movements and gender issues are considered, there are gaping holes in the research because women are left behind or left out, or considered as 'not fitting-in', in most cases.

September 1, 2018: Day 2

Photo-Exhibit on Documentation of Popular Movements

The photo-exhibit incorporated documentation and display of a collection of photographs that captured incidents of Food Movement, Students Movement, Naxal Movement and Tram Movement along with newspaper articles reporting on them in dailies such as The Statesman, Jugantor and others.

Panel Discussion IV- Populism and its Attitude to Law

Moderator & Discussant: Sibaji Pratim Basu, Vidyasagar University, Medinipur

Panelists:

Sabir Ahamed, Pratichi Trust, Kolkata

Parivelan K.M., Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai

Sahana Basavapatna, Factum Law, Bangalore

Sabir Ahamed spoke on Peoples Struggle for Freedom of Information in India in relation to the implementation of the Right to Information (RTI) Act and the gradual transition from Official Secrecy to the RTI. Sabir Ahamed distinguished between data that is meant for public policy, and data that can be accessed by people. He emphasised on how in terms of accession of data, compared to other countries, India lacks digital literacy and the ability to access data. Parivelan K.M. adjoined the element of an environmental analysis to the theme of panel discussion by speaking on a case study of Tamil Nadu and in specific he tried to look at the recent Thoothukudi violence and how the Sterlite copper smelters had been polluting the environment, causing health hazards. Parivelan mainly spoke of the huge number of protests that took place against the copper smelting company of Sterlite in Thoothukudi (Tuticorin). The speaker concluded saying accountability and

transparency becomes important whenever force is used by the state; whether be used for prevention of people from protesting or in cases of probes on the functioning of hazardous units of production companies for safety of environment. Sahana Basavapatna provided an account of the Indian judicial system's strides in interceding into the process of law making and governance. She said, in many cases it has been seen that petitioners seek, among others, a declaration that Section 6A of the Citizenship Act, 1955, is unconstitutional, being discriminatory and illegal. The National Registrar of citizens, 1971 found special mention. Several petitioners have filed for NRC in Assam, relating to citizenship and deportation. Sahana Basavapatna ended by saying the Supreme Court's practice of taking on the role of the executive in matters that reek of populist politics such as the NRC and the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2015 case, reflects the apex body of judiciary overstepping the precincts of its functioning while passing its jurisdiction.

Concluding Session

Movie Screening

The concluding session of the conference screened the movie 'Harlan County, USA', a documentary directed by Barbara Kopple on the Brookside Strikes of 1970s in Harlan County, southeast Kentucky. The movie signified the control and influence that communities coming together in protest of environmental, social and economic issues can have on authorities holding power.

The conference ended with a **vote of thanks** presented by Shatabdi Das, Research and Programme Assistant, CRG.

For detailed report, visit:

http://www.mcrg.ac.in/RLS_PML/RLS_PM/International_Conference_Popular_Movement_2018.pdf



**Experts and discussants in 2018: Bishnu Mohapatra, Ritu Menon (left);
Researchers Rajesh Kharat and Sahana Basavapatna (right)**

Calcutta Research Group
&
Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung

BOOK RELEASE

FROM POPULAR MOVEMENTS TO REBELLION

The Naxalite Decade

Editor Ranabir Samaddar

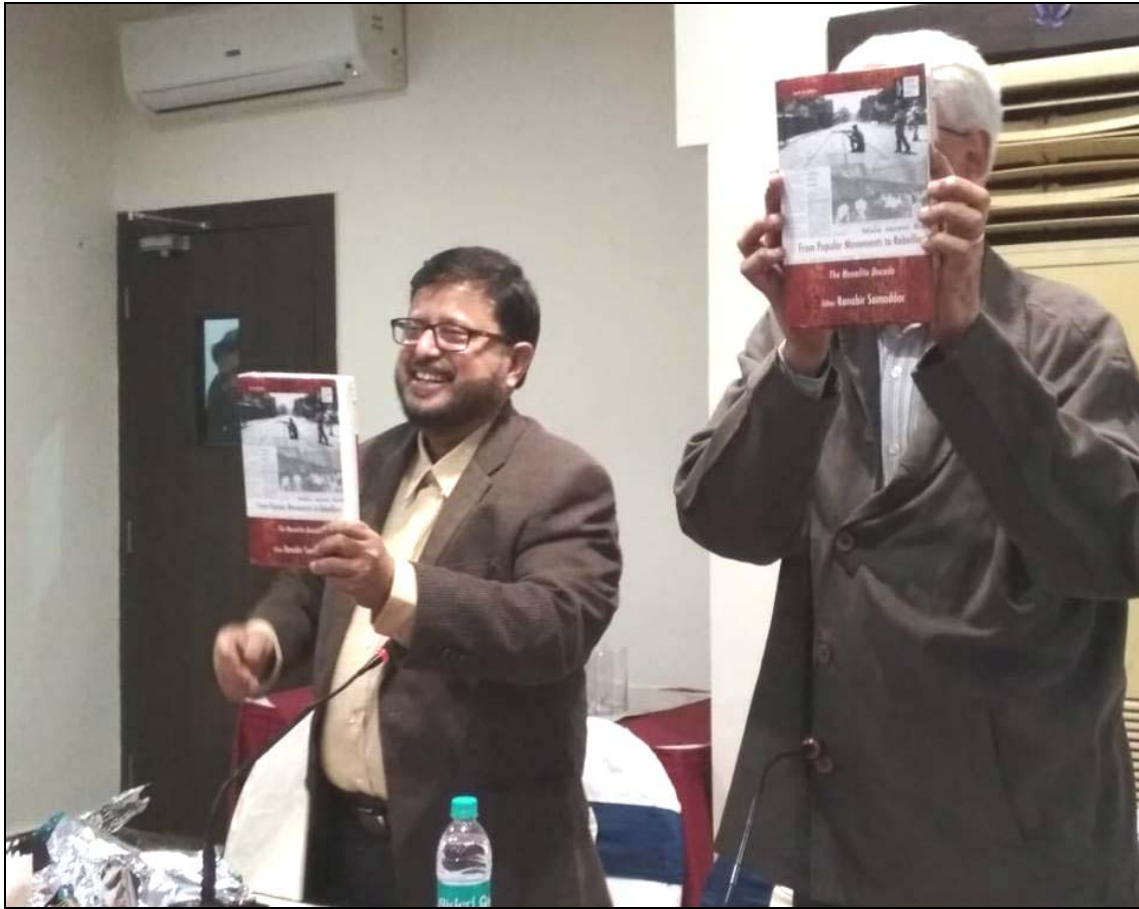


Date: 21 December 2018
Venue: The Sojourn, Salt Lake City
Time: 5.30pm to 8.00pm



Book Release

21 December 2018



Release of the book *From Popular Movements to Rebellion: The Naxalite Decade* (Edited by Ranabir Samaddar, Orient Blackswan, 2018) by Bernard D' Mello (right) and Sibaji Pratim Basu (left)

In a book release event organised by the Calcutta Research Group on December 21 2018, at the Sojourn Hotel in Salt Lake, Kolkata, *From Popular Movements to Rebellion: The Naxalite Decade* (Edited by Ranabir Samaddar, Orient Blackswan, 2018) was released by prominent journalist and writer, Bernard D' Mello. Other prominent speakers included Meghna Guhathakurta, the eminent academic cum activist from Dhaka, who spoke about the Road Safety Movements in Bangladesh and Subir Sinha, from SOAS, London, who discussed Brexit and the politics of populism in the United Kingdom. Rada Ivekovic, a Croatian academic, Indologist and writer spoke about the failure of Yugoslavia and the citizen protest movements in Paris. The event was organised to mark the closure of a successful collaborative project between Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, South Asia and the Calcutta Research Group on **Popular Movements in West Bengal and Bihar**.

PUBLICATIONS (2018)

South Asia Edition



persons were arrested till midnight.

Curfew has already been imposed at Behala, Jadavpur, Manaburuz along with the whole of Barrackpore subdivision for a week. This is also likely to be imposed all over the city from today (Friday).

Life in the busy city had come to a near halt. Tram cars completely disappeared from the streets that negotiated little vehicular traffic. Shops were all closed. Office attendance became thin to the point of eclipse. The city's two terminal stations at Howrah and Sealdah looked deserted. Air services were seriously affected. Because of trouble in the Ramrajatala area, long distance trains on the S. E. Railway started from Santragachi instead of from Howrah.

A few trains left Howrah and Sealdah but they were detained at mid-stations. Cancellation of all trains until further order were announced at Howrah at 11-5 a.m.

Buses empty

Buses on three special routes plied almost empty at unusually slow speed. Series of idle rickshaws were at different road crossings and

Leftists thank people

By A Staff Reporter

Different leftist parties congratulated "the people of West Bengal for their support in observing the Bungla Bundh call."

They issued statement on Thursday condemning the Government's "ill obstinate attitude towards the people's cause."

Forward Bloc: Mr. Hemanta Bose said that in spite of the Government's suppressive measures the people have once again "expressed their opinion against the bankrupt and unscientific food policy of the Government."

R.S.P.: Mr. Nani Bhattacharjee and Mr. Mool Chakraborty demanded radical alteration of food policy, release of all political prisoners, revocation of 'emergency' and institution of judicial inquiry in all cases of police firing.

S.S.P.: Prof. Dwijen Bose greeted the people for "their



Barasat's Passenger-ablaze at Rishra Station on Thursday morning. A crowd set fire to the train.

—STANDARD Photo

Deaths

Main target Rail

From Popular Movements to Rebellion

...they were ordered back to the depot by 6 p.m. The bus service was con-

munity and the people to be prepared for the greater movement to abolish the

and a seriously injured were hospitalised—all victims of bullet

ASANSOL.

...a special 40 to 50... bank which was located near

The Naxalite Decade

Editor **Ranabir Samaddar**

Cover Page of the book *From Popular Movements to Rebellion: The Naxalite Decade* (Edited by Ranabir Samaddar, Orient Blackswan, 2018)

From Popular Movements to Rebellion: The Naxalite Decade (Editor: Ranabir Samaddar, Orient Blackswan & Routledge, 2018)

The Book argues that without an understanding of the popular sources of the rebellion of that time the age of the Naxalite revolt will remain beyond our understanding. Many of the chapters of the book bring out for the first time unknown peasant heroes and heroines of that era, analyses the nature of the urban revolt, and shows how the urban revolt of that time anticipated street protests and occupy movements that were to shake the world forty-fifty years later. Some of the essays are deeply reflective about why the movement failed and was at the end alienated. Ranabir Samaddar observes that the Naxalite Movement has been denied a history. The book also carries six powerful short stories written during the Naxalite Decade and which are palpably true to life of the times. The book has some rare photographs and ends with newspaper clippings from the period. As a study of rebellious politics in post-Independent India, this volume with its focus on West Bengal and Bihar will stand out as an exceptional history of contemporary times. ***From Popular Movements to Rebellion: The Naxalite Decade*** will be of enormous relevance to students and scholars of history, politics, sociology and culture, and journalists and political and social activists at large.

Policies and Practices

People, Politics and Protests IX: Issue 97 (December 2018)

POPULAR MOVEMENTS IN ASSAM (1971-1982)

Peasants, Students, Insurgents and Popular Movements in Contemporary Assam

Sanjay Barbora

Full Paper available on: <http://www.mcrg.ac.in/PP97.pdf>



Ranabir Samaddar, Prasanta Ray, Paula Banerjee (from left to right)

The Research Collective (2016, 2017 & 2018)



Sibaji Pratim Basu, Atig Ghosh, Anwasha Sengupta, Manoj K. Jha, Manish K. Jha, Sucharita Sengupta, Anita Sengupta (from left to right)

2016

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