

Popular Movements in West and Bihar: Report of the First Consultative Meeting

Day 1: 28 February 2016

Session 1

The first presentation was by **Paula Banerjee**. She spoke on the **Refugee Movement in West Bengal**. Banerjee's work seeks to engage with the narratives of partition refugees that have evolved in the last sixteen years. The literature on refugees has followed a certain familiar trend. 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 power structures as agents. 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 Chakrabarty, Manas Ray etc. discussed the imaginative mappings of the refugee lives expressed through memories. These writings did not contradict the victimhood narrative but added a new dimension to it. Following these appeared a number of writings that discussed institutional responses to the arrival of forced migrants. These authors critique how that state viewed refugees not as individuals but in terms of sheer numbers as it attempted to provide them with shelter, food, health, hygiene etc. Apart from these, there are other authors who have tried to understand refugee experience through experiences of particular communities. Authors like Shekhar Bandyopadhyay and Joya Chatterjee belong to these schools of thought. Ranabir Samaddar's *Marginal Nation* was a paradigmatic shift in the entire study of refugee discourse in West Bengal.

Although the figure of the partition refugee in West Bengal has now become a favourite topic of research for many scholars, 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 have been studied by a few authors but that is yet to be 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. Banerjee's work will address this gap. 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 there. For instance, 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 far from public access. It 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.

Two experts, **Meghna Guhathakurta** of Research Initiative, Bangladesh and **Dipankar Sinha** of Department of Political Science, University of Calcutta, commented on her presentation. According to **Guhathakurata**, Paula Banerjee's proposed study bases itself on the need to study the refugee movement in West Bengal as part of the popular movements in West Bengal in the 1950s and 1960s. It is 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. It is in fact the period when the landed Hindu middle class from East Bengal became estranged from and dispossessed of their traditional property rights both by the processes of dispossession during the partition violence as well as by the East Bengal Tenancy Act of 1950 which called an end to the zamindari system. Guhathakurta asked whether this created a new class of proletarians or a temporal group of de-classed petit bourgeoisie seeking to accumulate new forms of capital through education or land acquisitions. How far were these interests reflected in the refugee movement in West Bengal? Was the movement in fact inclusive of caste interests of the *Namashudras*? If so, then to what extent? Banerjee, Guhathakurta noted, talked of agency of the refugees. How far did their voices gain political credibility? Were they used by left political parties such as the Communist Party of India [CPI] and Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CP(I)M] or did the left political agenda include the demands of the refugees in any meaningful way. The example of the rise of Marxist voices in Japan in the aftermath of a massive post-war destruction can serve as an instance where left perspectives served as an important conduit for a newly emerging middle-class to take shape in a restructured society.

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 comments that there remains a scope for situating research methodology as a constitutive element of popular movement. It is a much needed venture. 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 twin processes permeated subjective, inter-subjective and collective levels. A methodological technique appropriate for this study would be narratives. Sinha admitted the archival value stressed by Banerjee, but also observed that her work should not be confined to it. Sinha further reflected that the text is structured by time sequence of the events that it represents. In more theoretical terms, it is a critically reflective mode, as told by the subject. It is also purposive in orientation with some kind of 'anchor' in subject intervention. Refugee narratives are

intertwined with everyday personal and collective, positive and negative experiences, as lived and negotiated. Sinha then gave instances from his study of the Bijoygarh and Samargarh refugee settlements in Kolkata revealing a journey from shanties made of tea leaves to multi-storied houses within a span of five decades. One of the cardinal features of narrative as is explicit and implicit arrangement of causally-linked set of human actions and events, with constructions transformed into understandable composite. The 'Narrative turn' in critical theory is of immense importance in social science research in India; however researchers are still groping to find ways and means of negotiating narratives – torn between two reigning methodological pulls – positivist-empirical mode of inquiry and postmodernism. One may find some sort of commonality between the two which are otherwise 'antithetical'. The former dismissing narratives as 'anecdotal' and the latter at best concerned with little narratives, although both are dismissive of grand narratives. Historians like Banerjee, Sinha concluded, could intervene in this very moment of constitutive disjuncture.

The discussion by the audience raised few crucial points. It was suggested that it would be interesting to see how one movement disposed and displaced many other movements. For instance, one of Joya Chatterji's articles on the Selimpore Burial Ground in Kolkata shows how refugees in trying to settle themselves disposed Muslim settlers. It was also pointed out that it would be crucial to study how refugees became 'un-refugees' subsequently and how the connection between refugees and the popular movements of the 50s was forged, defining the 'popular' itself. It was agreed that the challenge would be to find out what happened in the 50s which was peculiar to that period and could not be recreated now or later. One comment focused on the phenomenon of 'mainstreaming' of the refugee movement would also mean mainstreaming its politics. So what is 'mainstream' in the popular movements need to be addressed as well. This also has reference to Joya Chatterji's work where the line between 'popular' and 'mainstream' is conceptualized.

Next presentation was by **Anwesha Sengupta**. The title of her abstract was **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. The leadership came from the Communist Party and other Left organizations. Sengupta's work proposes to look into the nature of the leadership, the modes of conducting the movement, who participated in these movements, who were the sympathizers and who opposed it. The government's role in 'controlling' these movements is another critical aspect that Sengupta will look into. 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. From the memoirs, it seems that the young women of the refugee areas also were sympathetic towards this movement. Thus this particular research complements Banerjee's research where the latter

proposed to look into the role of refugees in various popular 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 proposes to analyze the forms of protest, the reason behind the violence that was associated with this movement and popular and governmental reaction towards it. More importantly, her 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? 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.

Sandip Bandyopadhyay, independent researcher, and **Siddhartha Guha Roy** of Vivekananda College discussed Sengupta's abstract. Bandyopadhyay made the following comments: a) 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 is important to keep that in mind and to explore the possible reasons for this ups and downs in the movement; b) media's reaction to both these movements require elaborate study and separate sections dedicated to it; c) the researcher has perhaps given too much emphasis on the participation of the refugees in the Tram Movement. The existing literature, like the work of Prafulla Chakrabarty (*The Marginal Men*), also puts too much emphasis on refugee participation in popular movements of West Bengal in 1950s. However, Tram movement was strong in areas like Bhowanipore, which hardly had are refugee concentration. Therefore, it is important to go beyond refugees while understanding tram movement; d) the conflicts and tensions between the leaders of tram movement need to be studied from memoirs, autobiographies and party literature; e) regarding teachers' movement, a crucial question is, why did All Bengal Teachers' Association mobilize the secondary school teachers only and not the primary school teachers, even though the primary teachers were much less paid? f) the role of the 'anti-social' elements in teachers' movement needs to be studied. Why did this movement turn violent?

Guha Roy's comments are as follows: a) there is a long history of tramway men's struggle in colonial Bengal. Tram workers' Union had always played a leading role in labour movements. This long history has to be taken into account; b) why in 1953 the tramwaymen remain indifferent towards this movement initially is a worth probing question c) the relevance of popular movements of 1950s, particularly the tram movement, in contemporary times needs to be understood. Just as today, the police and the authority 'criminalized' the students and youth participants of this movement. Military was brought in and Preventive Detention Act was

indiscriminately applied to arrest the leaders and participants; d) one needs to take into account that in 1953 the Tram Company was still a British owned company. Therefore the protest against the fare hike also came from a nationalist sentiment. The Congress sympathy towards this British owned company made space for anti-government agitation. The demand of the day was for a truly nationalist government, which the Bidhan Roy government was not; e) there was an afterlife of this movement as well. For instance, in 1958 there was a prolonged strike of the tram workers and among other demands they opposed fare hike. The pre history and afterlife of the tram movement of 1953, and the role of tram workers in them, need to be studied.

During the general discussion, 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

The first speaker of the second session was **Sibaji Pratim Basu**. His abstract 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 Deleuze and Guattari – in these movements as they evinced creation of their own structures and functions without much contribution from the ‘vertical leadership.’

Basu contextualized the Food Movement of 1959 in the backdrop of the famine in Bengal in 1943, the subsequent peasant mobilizations in the late 1940s and the corrupt and inadequate public distribution system in post-independence West Bengal. The failure of the government to procure and distribute food grains coupled with the increasing population pressure after partition led to massive hoarding and black-marketeering which artificially increased the food price. The Left leaders of the Communist Party of India (CPI) brought up the issue inside the State Assembly and formed issue-based committees like the Price Increase and Famine Resistance Committee (PIFRC) for broader public support. The year 1959 saw five days of violent clashes between protestors and the state which, according to Basu, gave birth to three kinds of reaction: (1) an angry reaction against the government’s handling of the situation; (2) blaming the organisers of the movement for indulging in ‘lawless anarchy’; (3) a balanced assessment which criticised both the government’s food policy and its handling of the situation and the left leadership’s losing control over the situation.

Although the PIFRC withdrew the movement on 26 September 1959, it continued to resonate in public memory and culminated in 1966 in a more fierce food movement where the onus shifted from the state capital of Calcutta to the districts. With the killing of Nurul Islam, a fifteen-year-old school student, by police firing, the movement took a consolidated form where the districts became hotbeds of agitations, processions, demonstrations, blockade of roads and railways, destruction of electric points, closure of schools, etc. Basu opined that the intensity of the Food Movements changed the political complexion of the state by ensuring decline of the Congress' support base and split of the Communist Party. In spite of the mainstream Left parties' appropriation of the spaces of popular movement during its rule of 34 years, its 'rhizomatic' character refused to die down as another spell of popular agitations over public distribution of food shook the foundation of the government and the party in power in 2007.

Two experts, **Sanjeeb Mukherjee** (Department of Political Science, University of Calcutta) and **Manabi Majumdar** (Pratichi Trust and Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta), commented on his presentation. While appreciating Basu's attempt to contextualize the movements in the broader political environment of that time and his wish to study their impacts on movements in future, Mukherjee requested him also 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 asked Basu to explore how the Left parties earned people's trust and emerged as their representatives by creating 'political hegemony' in the state. He drew Basu's attention to the impoverishment of the Bengali middleclass and increasing unemployment which might have played a role in intensification of the movement. Congress, the ruling party at the time, was close to the rural agricultural elite. The food movements challenged their political dominance and brought other sections' interests to the fore. Mukherjee concluded by asking Basu to contemplate on the relation between left militancy and the idea of Bengali masculinity as the 'bread earner' of the family and its connection to the formal understanding of the movement.

Manabi Majumdar made the following points while discussing Basu's abstract: a) 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. This acknowledged, the paper does talk about how the opposition party leaders raised and debated several demands germane to this movement on the floor of the State Legislative Assembly. 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. Surely, there were some instances in which the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate practices got blurred and as a result there were setbacks. But speaking generally, and drawing on

the idea of the moral economy of popular action developed by E.P. Thompson, it may be argued that there are moral assumptions, and not just actual deprivation (in this case the non-availability of food grains and their rising prices), that ideally shape and somewhat contain the relatively autonomous impulses of such movements; c) a general point was made about the forms of mass political action, suggesting that in practice often there is a co-mingling of the mainstream and the movement; (d) revisiting the idea and practice of this movement is particularly important since the food movement is not over. Globally and in the country, the campaign for right to food is vibrant, so is the initiative to recognize it as a socio-economic right. Also, the debate has evolved to focus not just on 'food security' but on 'food sovereignty', insisting on people's right to access not only food but also the 'decision space' where land ownership issues and production processes are politically debated, settled, and unsettled. Extending this argument further, it may therefore be argued that the question of food has got tightly entangled with the land question. In this connection, it is essential to engage with the important observation made by Professor Ranabir Samaddar regarding the essentially urban character of the food movement under review. Using a comparative perspective, it is possible to explore to what extent contemporary campaigns for food rights extend beyond the urban confines and get aligned with people's 'land wars'.

The session was chaired by **Samita Sen** of School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University. In her concluding remarks, she also raised the question of spontaneity and pointed out the fact of massive participation of women in the movements. During the question-answer session, Ranabir Samaddar elaborated on the differences between forms of movements in Bengal and Bihar and asked whether this difference is characteristic of differences in urban settlements in the two states. He pointed out that the food movements could be viewed in terms of urban cooptation of peasants' movements. He also spoke about the influence of 'industrial militancy' on the movement in 1966 and asked if there could be any continuation between the two movements in 1959 and '66 consecutively. He opined that 1966 constitutes a break in the narratives of popular movements where the communist party became a subject of history in terms of design of the movement and assertion of leadership. Sandip Bandyopadhyay pointed out that the pamphlets brought out by CPI during the movement did not mention the land question. He also referred to the city-bound nature of the movement in '66 and how the left government in the subsequent years exerted violence on the protesters. Sibaji Pratim Basu in his reply expressed his wish to attend the concerns and issues raised during the discussion and commented that he was in the opinion of treating the movement as 'rhizomatic' both in terms of autonomy and continuation. He concluded by saying that there was definitely an element of 'relative' autonomy in the movement which transcended the hegemonic role of the party and its leadership.

Mithilesh Kumar was the next presenter. Kumar, in his abstract titled **The Nonlocal Entanglement of Violence and 'People': A Study of Bihar Movement, 1974**, introduces 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. The term 'nonlocality' is defined by Albert Einstein as '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' and '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.' Based on this framework, Kumar argues 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. As one of the major objectives of his study is also to explore the relationship between violence and popular struggles, Kumar explains that violence effects the formation of the people at large distance (from Nav Nirman Movement in Gujarat to Bihar Movement, from Musharai to Patna), and also that their political destinies are inextricably linked. Kumar's principal research question is: How did Bihar Movement produced the 'people' by galvanizing the competing and collaborating movements and demands and by making a break from them to propel it as a popular movement? The secondary questions include: (a) what role violent movements played in the making of the Bihar Movement; (b) what organizational innovations came of the Bihar Movement; (c) what political ideologies gave it coherence; (d) what inherent contradictions were there within the Bihar Movement especially around caste mobilizations; (e) How Bihar Movement and its populism informed the processes of governance; (f) how it informed other movement such as the All India Railway Strike of 1974 which began just a few months later than the Bihar Movement. Kumar contends that there is a link between political economy and the formation of the people and he wants to ask what were those material conditions that made it possible for several classes and identity groups to form political alliances, however contingent, unstable or fluid, which led to such a huge popular mobilization.

The discussant for the paper was Professor **Pushpendra** of the Tata Institute of Social Science, Patna. He first 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. The relationship between the Communist Party of

India, Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the Naxalite movement on one hand and the genesis of the Bihar Movement should be studied in their relationship, entanglement and dissension. He also raised the question about the concept of agrarian crisis and made the point that there is a class dimension to the concept of agrarian crisis. An agrarian crisis is faced by the landholding peasants and farmers and the landless agricultural workers who are forced to send their labor-power do not register with agrarian crisis. He also made the point that any investigation of the Bihar Movement needs to take into account and ask the question as to why the movement was basically urban with very little reach in the rural areas where it were the Naxalites who had more influence. Continuing on the aspect of the student movement he said it is of extreme importance that the caste and class composition of the students that took part in the Bihar Movement be extended. This same method of investigation should be extended to the leadership that emerged from this movement. The last point he made on the issue of objects of investigation before going on to raise methodological issues was that there was a need to do a comparative study on the violence that resulted from the movement and the violence that emanated from the state. On methodological issues, Pushpendra made the point that it is important to conduct more interviews as opposed to the fact that interviews will be done in rare cases as mentioned in the proposal. This was important that in the study of Bihar Movements the voices of the rank and file have been missing and it is important to study those voices and give them representation.

The discussants commentary was followed by audience discussion. The first observation was given by Ranabir Samaddar who made the point that the concept of nonlocality is a useful one to study relationship between popular movements. A detailed set of observations were made by Jishnu Dasgupta. He said that it was important to investigate the local histories of the Bihar Movement along with the movement as seen from above. He also insisted on linking the emergence of Triveni Sangh and the 1942 for the study of development of repertoire of popular movement. He also pointed out the need to investigate Jayprakash Narayan's attitude to industrial labour and Dasgupta advised to consult the book of Meenu Masani on Jayprakash Narayan.

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**. In the abstract, the author begins with the analysis of Perry Anderson on the topics of literary theories and aesthetic texts based on Marxism. Anderson pointed out that the more communists lost in crucial spheres of economic and politics, the more they submerged themselves in creative texts. In this context there is a similarity of the Bengali and Western Marxisms. Bishnu Dey is the best example of the creative commitment from the Bengali community who enunciated Bengali sociology of literature. Dey

bought out the limitations of Bengali renaissance. Dey had detractors of his viewpoint with few genuine friends, their main criticism being that his works were too esoteric and erudite. Dey bought out a magazine known as 'Sahityapatra' to publish his work. The author has dwelled on various literary debates of the seventies, likening them to Lunacharskys and Zhadonovs who engaged in razor-sharp polemics. Dhananjay Das had compiled these literary debates in a meticulous manner. The author plans to deconstruct the thematic patterns of seminal work of Anuradha Roy and Dhananjay Das in his study and perform a comparative study of dramatic productions. The author will also look into the issue of autonomy of creativity in the leftist discourse.

The following abstract was on **The Creative Accent on the Naxalite Uprising - Drama, Film, Prose, and Poetry**. Here Dasgupta delves into the multifaceted creativity inspired by the Naxalite uprising which includes propagandist poetry to reflective prose, especially in the works of Samresh Bose, Sunil Gangopadhyay and Mahasweta Debi. One literary genre which lacked adequate attention from the critics is memoirs. Dasgupta speculates 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 would concentrate on Raghabh Bandhyopadhyay's memoir to examine the tormented dialectics between intrinsic silence and irresistible sound. The author spelt out the list of novels, plays, poems and songs which he would refer to in the paper. The form and content of the poems of this period, enmeshed in revolt and suffering, became a bone of contention on literary grounds: whether they could be considered as poetry at all. The author describes how songs, films, memoirs and short stories connected with the masses in various capacities. The author would take a non-partisan approach while evaluating the creative texts and expressions, while remaining aware of the aesthetic preconditions.

The first discussant of the abstracts was **Anuradha Roy** of the Department of History, Jadavpur University). According to her, it is necessary to look into the cultural reconfiguration of Bengal by communist cultural activism. She also pointed out that it is 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. She asked how influential was the Frankfurt school among the different traditions of Leftist thinking in Bengal? Here she insisted on taking into account the influence of Gramscian aesthetic analysis. She appreciated the author's focus on the works of Bishnu Dey and pointed to the works of Sumit Sarkar, Asoke Sen and Barun De for extending the arguments further. She also appreciated Dasgupta's engagement with Sambhu Mitra and Badal Sarkar. Roy also mentioned the works of Mahasweta Devi like *Aranyar Adhikar* specifically for the period under the second study.

The second discussant was **Moinak Biswas** of the Department of Film Studies, Jadavpur University. He suggested the author to focus 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. Other intellectual duels also took place between Bishnu Dey and the noted literatures like Buddhadeb Basu and Manik Bandyopadhyay. Biswas also requested Dasgupta to elaborate on the issue of relative autonomy.

Ruchira Goswami of the National University of Juridical Sciences, Kolkata), the third discussant, observed that the available seamless narratives about these works emanated from the less use of memoirs. She pointed to 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 the '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.

Questions and observation and observations from audience dwelled on three main points. Sandip Bandyopadhyay asked whether there was any trace of the dialectic methods of Marxian analysis in leftist literature of the time. A second point was raised by Shyamalendu Majumdar who pointed to a series of debates between different playwrights and theatre personalities like Utpal Dutt, Shambhu Mitra, and Bijan Bhattacharya who engaged with each other's works and tried to break conventions by introducing new methods of performance. Ranabir Samaddar also brought up a question about the role of cultural practices in overall left politics and democracy and asked whether the concept of hegemony was contradictory with democracy.