

The Cultural-Creative Dimension of the Naxalite Movement

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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 sociopolitical 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 Devi, 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 Devi 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 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 *Kolkata71* 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 farreaching 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

Work and Time Schedule

Granted that I shall be having one full year to write my appraisal and evaluation of the cultural-creative dimension, I intend to maintain the following time and work schedule.

First Four Months : Meticulous reading of the creative texts – poems, plays, short stories, novels and autobiographical journals. It is obvious that I have to be selective in my approach because the entire range cannot be captured in a text limited to 10,000 – 12,000 words. I have already made a partial, preliminary selection. For example, Mahesweta Debi's *Hazar Churasir Ma*, the same author's short stories, Raghav Bandyopadhyay's autobiographical recollection, Samaresh Bose's *Mahakaler Rather Ghora*, poems of Srijan Sen and Monoranjan Biswas, plays penned by Bijan Bhattacharjee and Utpal Dutt will be examined and these will constitute the basis of my commentary. This period will also be utilized to see the relevant films once again. I intend to translate a few searing dialogues and attach these in the accompanying index.

The *fifth month* will be devoted to conducting interviews with eminent men of letters. For example, **Samik Bandyopadhyay** will be asked to comment on the dramatic production and texts. Again, our most respected poet **Sankha Ghosh** will be requested to shed light on the aesthetic excellence of the cultural dimension. **Raghav Bandhyopadhyay** will give his comments on the novels and the film expert **Mainak Biswas** will evaluate my words on the films.

The remaining period of six months will be primarily devoted to the writing of my text. I shall request eminent critics to read my first draft. I shall approach Ranabir Samaddar, Raghav Bandhopadhyay, Sudeshna Chakraborty, Sankha Ghosh, Samik Bandhopadhyay and Ratan Khasnabis and invite their comments. Thereafter, I shall incorporate their suggestions and write the final version. Though I have not finally decided, I could seek some more space to add an Appendix which could carry creative specimens of the entire movement. For example, two or three poems ranging from the propagandistic to the reflective; dialogues from plays and

screenplays; translation of a small story and excerpts from the novels I select to comment upon, would constitute this section which would serve as real-actual evidence of the cultural dimension.

My ultimate aim (which goes beyond this project) is to write a full-fledged book on the cultural-creative endeavour and outcome. No such work has been done till now, though several books on the Naxalbari uprising per se have been written. A few examples of the latter are : Sumanta Banerjee's *In the Wake of Naxalbari* and *The Simmering Revolution*; Sankar Ghosh's *The Naxalbari Movement*. : "Marius Demas" *Approaching Naxalbari* and Rammohan's : *Maoism in India*.