

**THE NAXALITE MOVEMENT IN  
WEST BENGAL : AN EVALUATION**

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Certificate

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled **The Naxalite Movement in West Bengal : An Evaluation**, submitted by **Rajarshi Dasgupta** in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of degree of **Master of Philosophy** of this University is his original work and may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

This dissertation has not been submitted for the award of any other degree of this University or any other University to the best of my knowledge.

  
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## INTRODUCTION/PERSPECTIVES

The present work is an attempt to understand the politics of the Naxalite movement in West Bengal as constituting a process of historical evaluation. The Naxalite movement arose in response to the historical trajectory of the post-colonial Indian state and the corresponding strategies undertaken by the Indian Communist movement. The agenda of evaluation naturally addresses issues within the perspectives presented by this history. At the same time, the epicentre of evaluation remains the fundamental question of change - why 'Revolution' has failed so far in India and what would constitute a real strategy of 'Revolution' in the context.

The existing literatures and accounts of the movement present a plethora of analyses on the Naxalite politics. What most of these studies seem to share in common is the central concern that informs their analyses - why did the movement eventually fail to capture the state power.

Thus, Mohan Ram's account [Indian Communism-Split within a Split (1969) and Maoism in India (1971)] credits the Naxalites with reviving the Maoist strategy forgotten since Telengana but criticises the infantile tactical

leadership of the movement for giving in to 'adventurism.' Mohan Ram's analysis, however, is built upon discussions of the movement mostly confined to the parameters of the history of the Communist movement in India.

The account of Ashish Kumar Roy (The Spring Thunder and After) contributes to the analysis the discussion of the sociology of the movement -its links with 'tradition', 'culture', 'ideological setting' and the rise of the 'Bengali-Hindu elite'. But Roy does not elaborate on the cultural stands of the Naxalites themselves making it a peripheral issue in their politics of change.

Biplab Dasgupta (The Naxalite Movement) directly denounces these cultural stands along with the practice of 'annihilation' and terms the entire movement as 'petty bourgeois adventurism'. In fact, Dasgupta seems to take the CPI(M)'s vantage point while assessing the entire movement. Consequently, he ends up challenging the very basic theoretical premises of the movement, declaring that the Naxalite assessments of the Indian 'situation' and the 'ruling class' were fundamentally wrong.

A more sympathetic treatment is provided by Sumanta Banerjee (In The Wake of Naxalbari, India's Simmering Revolution) who describes the movement as a 'spontaneous youth upsurge.' Banerjee holds that it was a genuine Maoist

beginning which failed to reach the higher stage of Revolution—the establishment of the People's Liberation Army due to the failure of Charu Majumdar's leadership.

What most commentators have described as the crucial failure to evolve a disciplined, centralised organisation (due to essentially Charu Majumdar's leadership) is diagnosed differently by Manoranjan Mohanty (Revolutionary Violence: A study of Maoist movement in India). Mohanty traces this feature into the very nature of the outbreak—the 'pre-organisational character' of the movement. Mohanty's analysis marks an important shift in the approach to the study of the movement. He shifts from attributing the failure of the movement to the lack of political acumen of its leadership to a broader understanding of how the historical constitution of the movement determined its limits.

Another major factor held responsible for the failure of the movement was the practice of 'annihilation' or 'Khatam'—the form of 'class-war' prescribed by Charu Majumdar. Most of the analysts have treated this factor as an aberration in the course of the movement rather than as an organic component of the Naxalite strategy. Rabindra Ray (The Naxalites and their ideology) presents an exception in his approach. His discussion of the Naxalite ideology



focuses on this central aspect of Naxalite 'terrorism' as an expression of the 'nihilistic' nature of the movement. Ray's account of the metaphysics of terror eventually converges the analysis of the movement's history into the Naxalite radical himself. 'Annihilation' is understood by Ray as the violent mediation of the petty bourgeois radical with his externality.

What all these analyses provide are fragmented narratives of the Naxalite movement's engagement with various issues-situated within the political history that produced it. We come across the assessment of the 'ruling class' as 'Comprador' and the petty bourgeois leadership of the Communist movement as 'revisionist' with reference to this particular history. Consequently, a new 'Maoist' strategy of Revolution is formulated that signifies a total break with the 'revisionist' legacy (and its history) on one hand and seeks to establish the agenda of Revolution in the Indian context on the other. It is this new strategy that expresses as-the 'peasantry' as 'vanguard' in the strategy of 'armed agrarian revolution', the stand of aggressive iconoclasm in the cultural sphere, and 'annihilation' as the concrete practice of class struggle.

Most of the studies undertaken so far seem to concentrate rather heavily on the aspect of the 'failure'

of the movement (and these strategic practices). This has led them either to refute the Naxalite evaluations completely or qualify some of them as correct and the rest as 'adventurist.' The recourse to such treatment of the Naxalite politics lies in adopting a methodology that studies the movement within its history. The present work, in its modest scope, attempts to trace the evaluations and assessments of the Naxalite movement in relation to the history that constitutes them i.e. the history they evaluate and participate in to break with. At the same time the discussion seeks to understand how these evaluations are shared by and continue to shape the alternative Marxist discourses we come across today. The focus of this dissertation therefore, is not an analysis of why the Naxalite politics 'failed', but how it was constituted and in what terms it can be understood to survive its 'failure'.

Our discussion starts with tracing the inception of the Naxalite movement within the history of the Communist Party of India. The second chapter identifies the principal themes or points of departure with reference to their political legacies and reformulated stands. In the third chapter we look into the assessments of the Naxalite movement and how these evaluations serve as the critical analytical frameworks for the radical discourses of today.

We conclude our discussion in the fourth chapter with the collapse of the movement and the aftermath-the fatal culmination of the radical evaluative politics into suicidal introspection and the subsequent rehabilitation of the Naxalites in the mainstream electoral politics.

## CHAPTER 1

### THE INCEPTION OF NAXALBARI

The Communist Party of India witnessed the first articulation of a strategy of armed revolution in its Second Congress held at Calcutta, 1948. This Congress revealed an accumulating 'left' assertion within the Party. At the same time it signified a rejection of the earlier line of 'Constitutional Communism' followed under P.C. Joshi. The 'Joshi line', inviting strong criticism because of the alliance with Nehru, was aimed towards salvaging the legitimacy the CPI had lost during the Second World War in the process of opposing Gandhi's 'Quit India' movement and helping British war efforts.

At the Calcutta Congress, the left radicals led by B.T. Randive attacked this line as 'opportunist' and proposed instead the strategy of 'Intertwined Revolution' derived from the Yugoslav experience<sup>1</sup> Randive's line was based on the assumption of 'revolutionary situation' existing in India. This was, no doubt, drawn from the violent peasant

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1. The theory of 'Intertwined Revolution' formed by Tito and Kardelj. The theory held that it was possible to combine a 'National Democratic Revolution' and a 'Socialist Revolution' into a fused single revolutionary process. This line was later criticised and dubbed as 'Titoite-Trotskyite cancer' by the Soviet leadership.

struggle going on in Telengana since 1946. The claim was strengthened by the radical strategy charted out by A. Zhdanov, the Soviet delegate at the Conference of the 'Nine Communist and Workers Parties', held at Poland 1947<sup>2</sup>

The essence of B.T, Randive's 'Political Thesis' adopted at the Calcutta Congress contained a strategy of organising armed struggle. This was to be achieved through an intensification of the class struggle of the industrial proletariat which would manifest through a nation-wide general strike and merge with the peasant struggle spreading out from Telengana.

Inspite of the fact that immediately after the Calcutta Congress, the CPI started an all out "adventurist spree"<sup>3</sup> to organise the revolution, they proved incapable of initiating the nation-wide general strike. As the reliance on the 'industrial proletariat' was belied, the movement met with a heavy crack down by the state forces. As the Randive line stood discredited, the challenge to this line came from the Andhra Communists led by Rajeswara Rao.

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2. The 'Conference of the Nine Communist and Workers Parties' was held to establish the 'Communist Information Bureau' which would henceforth guide the CPI and Communist movements in Third World.
  3. As S. Banerjee characterises the activities in his account.

The new tactical line that was presented was formulated by the Andhra Communists -- The Andhra Provincial Committee of the CPI way back in 1948. The 'Andhra Letter' submitted to the Central Executive Committee of the CPI in June 1948 laid down a strategy of revolution based on a 'self-supporting revolutionary base' (the countryside) from where the industrial proletariat could be revolutionised.<sup>4</sup>

This strategy clearly draws heavily on the Mao-ist model of New Democracy and Revolution. This, considered programmatically, is the first manifestation of Mao-ism in the Indian Communist movement. In defence of the dependence on the Chinese model, at a time when it had still not emerged victorious in China itself, the Andhra Communists argued drawing parallels between the historical experiences, polity and class configurations of India and China. This marked the beginning of a new wave of theorisations drawn from the Chinese model with the 'peasantry' as the 'vanguard class'. This was in sharp contrast to the model drawn from the Soviet Revolution and the Mao-ists stressed on the opposition in defining their thesis.

"Our revolution in many respects differs  
from the classical Russian Revolution;

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4. The date of 'Andhra Letter' indicates a Maoist consolidation taking place within the Party even when the Zhadanovists were asserting themselves. Once again, Telengana must have provided the inspiration.

and it is to a great extent similar to that of the Chinese Revolution. The perspective is not that of general strikes and general rising leading to the liberation of the rural sides; but dogged resistance and prolonged civil war in the form of an agrarian revolution culminating in the capture of political power by the Democratic Front".<sup>5</sup>

And as Sumanta Banerjee comments:

Thus, in Telengana in 1948, for the first time the Chinese tactics were posed as an alternative to the Russian tactics".<sup>6</sup>

B.T. Randive, however, continued to resist the Chinese line even though he made statements at the Calcutta Congress like "Telengana means today Communists, and Communists mean Telengana".<sup>7</sup> The victory of the Chinese Communists in October 1949 gave a tremendous boost to the Communists following the Andhra line. Notwithstanding the mounting pressure, B.T. Randive continued defending his line in a bunch of four articles in the 'Communist' -- the official organ of the CPI. In the last of these articles he attacked the Andhra strategy as a 'shame-faced theory' of

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5. Sundarayya, P. 'Telengana Peoples' Struggle and its Lessons' in Banerjee, S. 1984. India's Simmering Revolution, New Delhi P-64.

6. Ibid P-64.

7. Ibid P-64.

'class-capitulationism' and refused to accept Mao-ism as classical Marxist practice.

At the same time, the meeting of the World Federation of Trade Unions held in Peking, November 1949, saw the Chinese ideologue Liu Shao Ch'i proclaiming the Chinese model as applicable in Asia. Liu's speech contained significant ideological formulations that the Naxalites were to take up later on. Liu urged to build up a Revolutionary Communist Party as a broad United Front led by the working class, a Party 'practising self-criticism' and 'not led by wavering and compromising national bourgeoisie or petty-bourgeoisie and their Parties'.<sup>8</sup>

The final blow to the Randive line came in 1950, when the Cominform (guiding the CPI since 1947) approved of the Chinese strategy. An article - 'For a Lasting Peace, for a Peoples' Democracy' appearing in the official organ of the Cominform dated 27 January 1950 stated that the 'path taken by Chinese people' was 'the path that should be taken by the people of many colonial and dependent countries in their struggle for national independence and peoples' democracy'.<sup>9</sup>

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8. Speech by Liu Shao Ch'i at the 'Conference of Trade Unions of Asia and Oceania' from A.K. Roy, 'The Spring Thunder and After', New Delhi, 1975, P-10.

9. Banerjee, S. 1984. India's Simmering Revolution, (New Delhi) P-66.



In May 1950, the CPI Central Committee removed B.T. Randive and elected C. Rajeswara Rao as the new General Secretary. In the new Politbureau of nine members, four were taken from the Andhra Secretariat. The press statement released in *Pravda* and *Izvestia* July 1950 read: 'The new policy will be based on the national liberation movement in China. The course China is taking and which the countries of South-East Asia are following is the only correct course before our people'.<sup>10</sup>

However, the Mao-ist line could not be pursued for long. The Telengana struggle that was serving as an inspiration (and material evidence of an 'objective revolutionary condition') to the Mao-ist and left radicals was dying out in the face of severe mopping operations of the Indian army. A certain shift was discernible in Moscow's position due to its involvement in the Korean war. The directive sent by Moscow through the Communist Party of Great Britain urged to shelve Telengana/armed struggle and exploit scopes for legal activities.<sup>11</sup> This merged with the resistance of the 'right-ists' within the CPI led by S.A.

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10. Overstreet and Windmiller, pp 298-299, from Roy, A.K. 1975. The Spring Thunder and After, (Minerva Associates, Delhi) P-17.

11. Ibid P-18.

Dange towards the Rao line and eventually a top level CPI delegation to Moscow returned with the new 'tactical line' drawn up in consultation with the Soviet leadership. This new 'tactical line' laid down a strategy of 'four class alliance' and 'two-stage revolution'. On the status of 'armed struggle' in the strategy there are contradictory claims. While Ashish K. Roy maintains that the issue was dispensed with, Banerjee mentions 'partisan war' and 'armed struggle' as part of the strategy'.<sup>12</sup> However, as Banerjee admits,

"But the 1951 statements of policy reflected an uneasy compromise between the Rightists and Leftists in the CPI. Over the years that followed 1951, the Rightists came to gain the upperhand, and the CPI policy drifted more and more towards the peaceful path of parliamentarianism."<sup>13</sup>

Banerjee's observation is corroborated by several developments - the withdrawal of Telengana movement, Rajeswara Rao's resignation in 1951 and the new leadership of Ajoy Ghosh moving close to Nehru (around the first General Election 1952, probably at Soviet insistence). This was clearly articulated in CPI's declared appreciation of the Indian government's role 'on a number of international

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12. Roy, A.K. op. cit. P-19.

13. Ibid P-68.

issues in the recent period' as a 'role appreciated by the peace-loving masses and states'<sup>14</sup> at the third Madurai Congress, December 1953 to January 1954.

The shift to parliamentarianism was confirmed following the 'de-Stalinization' of the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of Soviet Union and Khrushchev's announcement of the 'Peaceful Co-existence - Peaceful Competition - Peaceful Transition' theory. In 1957, the CPI formed government in Kerala - the substantive affirmation of the 'Peaceful Transition' thesis. The CPI which had deliberated tentatively on the 'practicability' of the parliamentary path at the fourth Party Congress of Palghat 1956, adopted the line of 'Peaceful Transition' at the Extra-ordinary Amritsar Congress 1958. The Preamble to the Constitution of CPI adopted at the Amritsar Congress read: 'The Communist Party of India strives to achieve full Democracy and Socialism by peaceful means. It considers that by developing a powerful mass movement, by winning a majority in Parliament and backing it with mass action, the working class and its allies can ensure that Parliament becomes an instrument of Peoples' Will for effecting

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14. Ibid P-69.

fundamental changes in to economic, social and state structures'.<sup>15</sup>

The 'Rightist' leadership of CPI favouring an alliance with the Congress was however facing a constant pressure from the 'Leftist' ranks who clamoured for an anti-Congress democratic front. This conflict precipitated into a crisis with the Sino-Indian border conflict. The on-going Sino-Soviet ideological dispute coupled with 'the Soviet soft-peddalling of the Nehru Government and even implied diplomatic support to India against China, first on the question of Khampa uprisings in Tibet ... and then, during India-China border controversy<sup>16</sup> left the CPI ranks divided into Moscow and Peking groups.

The dismissal of the Kerala government in July 1959 unsettled the faith in 'Peaceful Transition' thesis and strengthened the Mao-ists within the Party who were already speculating and formulating revolutionary strategies at the 'initiative' and 'instigation' of leaders like Harekrishna

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15. 'Constitution of the Communist Party of India, adopted at the Extra-ordinary Party Congress, Amritsar, April 1958', (CPI, New Delhi).

16. Roy, A.K. op. cit.

Konar.<sup>17</sup> The Ajoy Ghosh leadership faced strong polemical invectives from these 'left radicals' in the Party represented by West Bengal state secretary Promode Dasgupta who urged the CPI to 'follow the lead' of the Chinese Communist Party in his attacking document - "Revisionist Trend in the CPI".

However, inspite of the fact that leaders like Harekrishna Konar, Promode Dasgupta, P. Sundarayya, Jyoti Basu and Harkishan Singh Surjeet were taking 'left' stances and using references and allusions to the Mao-ist model quite often at this stage, their commitment to Mao-ism as the correct revolutionary strategy cannot be taken for granted. In fact, it seems that this was more a question of tactical choice. Ashish K. Roy writes -

"Thus, reconstructing the events at this later date, one is inclined to believe that though the leadership of the regular party organisation in West Bengal had pretensions regarding the acceptance of Mao-ism, this should, however, be construed more as a 'maneuver' to intensify their splitting activities in the CPI, thereby breaking the monopoly of power enjoyed by the Rightists in the Party than to seriously

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17. Ashish Roy writes about Konar's secret trip to Peking against the Party directive and his subsequent championing of the Chinese line counterpoised to the 'illusive peaceful transition' line after his return. The Spring Thunder and After, (New Delhi), 1975 P 22-23.

go for a pure Marxist tactical line".<sup>18</sup>

Marcus Franda writes, " ... as later events were to point out in a dramatic way, the leadership of the regular party organisation was much more motivated by pragmatic considerations than it was by the wish to adopt a consistently pro-Chinese ideological stance".<sup>19</sup> The hardcore Mao-ist elements in the Party in West Bengal were actually composed of the middle order District Committee leadership -- Sushital Roy Chowdhury, Saroj Dutta, Sourin Bose, Kanu Sanyal, Charu Majumdar and likes who have been propagating 'armed agrarian revolution' line since early sixties. It is this section who later initiated the Naxalbari movement. The rift between the 'Right' and 'Left' of CPI finally came into open with the armed confrontation between India and China in the North-East Frontier Agency and Ladakh sector of India, October 20, 1962. On November 1, the CPI National Council passed a resolution branding 'China as an aggressor' and endorsing 'Indian government's decision to buy

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18. Ibid P-24.

19. Franda, Marcus F. 1971. Radical Politics in West Bengal, (M.I.T.) P-95.

arms'.<sup>20</sup> Three leaders of the left group Jyoti Basu, H.S. Surjeet and P. Sundarayya opposed the resolution and resigned. During the course of the next two years, the schism worsened. The West Bengal State Unit was divided into 'Bhowani Sen-Somnath Lahiri' faction and 'Jyoti Basu-Promode Dasgupta-Harekrishna Konar' faction. Within the later group, once again, there was a centrist 'Jyoti group' and a radical 'Promode group'. This last sub-section wanted the Jyoti group to merge with the centrist 'Somnath-Bhowani group' for a stronger 'left' assertion in the new Party. Charu Majumdar, Saroj Dutta and other 'Mao-ists', the radical middle-order leadership of CPI West Bengal State Unit, belonged to this later group.<sup>21</sup> It was in the middle of this factional fight that the split finally occurred when the National Council meeting of April 1964 refused to consider the issue of Dange's alleged letter<sup>22</sup> 32 left wing and centrist members walked out issuing an appeal

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20. Even as Dange, the Chairman (a newly created post) and other 'rightists' reacted quickly with public demonstrations, it took eleven days for the CPI National Council to pass the resolution in the face of 'left' opposition within the Party.
  21. 'An Aspect of Left Opportunism in West Bengal', Desh Hitaishi, Annual, October 1967.
  22. It was alleged that Dange had written a letter to the British authorities prior to Independence offering to work for the colonial Government in exchange of his release from prison.

to Party members to reject Dange and his 'reformist' line. The signatories of this appeal were expelled from Party membership. These Leftist leaders met at Tenali on July 7 and formed the Communist Party of India (Marxist).

But, "The formation of the CPI(M) however, left the theoretical, strategic and moral issues unresolved".<sup>23</sup> In a similar vein Mohan Ram would characterize the Naxalite outbreak as the outcome of ideological differences left unresolved in 1964. The CPI(M) started its journey with suppressed radicals in its ranks<sup>24</sup> who were already unhappy and angry with the programme adopted at the Foundation Congress itself. The Programme declared,

"The Communist Party of India strives to achieve the establishment of peoples' democracy and socialist transformation through 'peaceful means' by developing a powerful mass revolutionary movement and combining parliamentary and extra-parliamentary forms of struggle, the working class and its allies will try their utmost to overcome the resistance of the forces of reaction and to bring about these transformations through peaceful means".<sup>25</sup>

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23. Ray, Rabindra. 1992. The Naxalites and their Ideology (Oxford University Press, Delhi) P 126.

24. Banerjee S. India's Simmering Revolution, P 74.

25. 'Programme of the Communist Party of India adopted at the 7th Congress, Calcutta 1964', pp 53-54.



The advocacy of 'peaceful means' along with the declared strategy of carrying out radical agrarian reforms to 'sweep away the remnants of the feudal and semi-feudal fetters' in the 97th paragraph of the Programme deepened the frustration of the Mao-ists. The later's expectation of arriving at last in the folds of a revolutionary party different from the 'revisionist' CPI was belied.

In fact, when the Union Home Minister, G.L. Nanda, accused CPI (M) of organising subversive activities 'to synchronise with a fresh Chinese attack for destroying the democratic government in India', P. Sundarayya, later General Secretary of CPI (M) wrote:

"It will be interesting ... to note that the relevant passages regarding the possibilities for, and the limitations of, the peaceful path are almost similar in our Programme and the Programme of the revisionists. This is the most telling refutation of the canard by the Congress rulers. .... that our Party stands for the insurrectionary methods while the revisionists are the champions of the peaceful parliamentary path".<sup>26</sup>

At the same time from Tenali Convention onwards the CPI (M) maintained a silence on crucial ideological questions inspite of the fact that such issues like the Party's

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26. 'Sundarayya Answers Nanda', Peoples' Democracy, September 12-19, 1965 quoted from ' Roy, A. K. The Spring Thunder and After, P 32.

position vis-a-vis the Chinese line were instrumental in engineering the split within the CPI. Sumanta Banerjee writes:

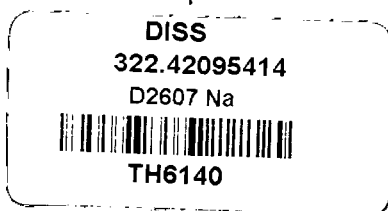
"Besides, the attitude towards China was one of the important issues that divided the Indian Communists. In 1962, the Leftists within the CPI were known as pro-Mao-ists. But when the CPI (M) was formed in 1964, the new Party leadership refrained from spelling out their exact views on China or on the Sino-Soviet ideological dispute on questions like the possibility of a Third World war, the role of non-aligned countries, the future of national liberation movements, and violent or non-violent forms of transition to socialism".<sup>27</sup>

Left to themselves, the question of deciding ideological issues was taken up by the different State and District level units. "What was thrown into sharp relief was the resentment of a middle rank against the leadership, the leadership's attempts to control and then conciliate against this resentment, and an inchoate awareness of solidarity about which the battle lines were drawn".<sup>28</sup> The 'radical left' leadership at this level continued

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27. Banerjee, S. op. cit. P 74.

28. Ray, R. 1992. The Naxalites and Their Ideology, (Oxford University Press, New Delhi) P 124.



consolidating their Mao-ist position, which they felt was the crucial factor behind the split. The newly formed CPI (M) leadership on the other hand, decided not to risk any further tensions within the ranks by discussing the ideological issues immediately and, therefore left the space open for the mushrooming of numerous Mao-ist groups within the Party. As has been later confirmed by the CPI (M) Central Committee's draft on ideological issues presented at the All India Burdwan Plenum, April 1968 -

"One of the principal reasons (for the left adventurist deviation in the Party) is the undue though unavoidable delay caused in clinching the ideological questions that are under debate in the world Communist movement. Since our Tenali Convention of July 1964 when our programme was broadly endorsed, for full three years upto August 1967, our official stand on these ideological questions, more or less, stood in suspense, with the result that in the name of fighting modern revisionism and defending Marxism-Leninism every syllable coming from the Chinese Communist Press has come to be swallowed as an infallible piece of Marxism-Leninism... The non-committal stand of the Central Committee on the ideological issues in the international dispute, until they were discussed and decided by the Party, was in reality utilised by this section of comrades, more and more, to commit themselves to each and every Chinese position, ... Positions were taken, convictions were formed and confirmed and what remained was to carry on the inner party struggle

for the victory of these positions".<sup>29</sup>

Apart from the militant district-level leadership there were certain Mao-ist groups operating within the folds of CPI (M). Since 1964 there was the 'Revolutionary Council' formed by Parimal Dasgupta, Kanai Chatterjee, Mohd. Latif, Sudhir Bhattacharya, Aziz-ul-Haque and others. Around the middle of the same year, another such group came up forming the 'Marx-Engels Institute' under the leadership of Sushital Roy Chowdhury. Closely connected with them was an extremist organisation - the 'Chinta' group represented by Sudhir Bhattacharya and Amulya Sen. The activities of these groups, needless to say, consisted of attacking the 'revisionist' CPI and the 'neo-revisionist' programme of the CPI (M) as well as providing alternative revolutionary programme along Mao-ist lines.<sup>30</sup> In the following years, numerous other 'Mao-ist' groups and splinters emerged challenging the 'neo-revisionist' trend.

With Mao-ists within the CPI (M) gaining currency and fermenting revolution, several significant developments accelerated the process and helped catalyse the outbreak.

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29. 'Why the Ultra Left Deviation?', Document adopted by the CPI (M) Central Committee meeting at Calcutta, October 1968, pp 43-44.

30. Roy, A. K. 1975. The Spring Thunder and After, (Minerva, New Delhi), P 40.

The first development was the Lin Piao thesis and the pedagogy of the Chinese ideologues. On September 2, 1965 Lin Piao upheld the Mao-ist model for the Third World in his "Long Live the Victory of the Peoples' War". His thesis stated:

"It must be upheld that comrade Mao Tse Tung's theory of the establishment of rural revolutionary base areas and the encirclement of the cities from the countryside is of outstanding and universal practical significance for the present revolutionary struggles of the oppressed nations in Asia, Africa and Latin America against imperialism and its running dogs.."31

With the Lin Piao thesis the Mao-ists were reaffirmed in their faith. Besides, the Lin Piao thesis started a 'series of attempts made by the Chinese ideologues throughout 1966 and 1967 to project a Mao-ist revolutionary line to India where they found an 'excellent' revolutionary situation'.<sup>32</sup> Peking's perception of a 'US-Soviet-Indian'

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31. "Long Live the Victory of the Peoples' War", Peking Review, September 3, 1965, quoted Ibid P 49.

32. Roy, A. K. The Spring Thunder and After, P 43.

alliance<sup>33</sup> had made them entirely hostile towards the Indian government. This translated into the pro-Pakistan stance during the India-Pakistan War and subsequently the Chinese championing of "national self-determination struggles" in Kashmir and Eastern India. All this led to the appraisal of the Indian situation in 1966 by the Chinese ideologues as "ripe" for a revolutionary upsurge.

Thus, how far the Chinese Communist Party was ideologically committed to bring about a Socialist Revolution by providing objective assessment of the situation remains in doubt when one considers their preoccupation with the foreign policy factor.

Bhabani Sengupta writes -

"it is inconceivable that the projection of the Mao-ist line to Asian Communist movement was proceeded in 1966 by careful objective assessment of actual social, economic and political situations obtaining in individual countries. Revolutionary fervour apparently got the better of Marxist Leninist homework. This seems to be borne out by the Chinese assessment of the Indian situation in 1966-67; evidently, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) saw a revolutionary polit-

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33. 'What Shastri's Soviet trip reveals', Peking Review, June 1965. The article extolls the Indo-US-USSR alliance-conspiracy model.

ical upheaval in India because it wished to see it".<sup>34</sup>

Manoranjan Mohanty confirms -

"Why did the Chinese policy take a turn in early 1967 toward encouraging armed struggle in India? The two main reasons seem to be India's relevance to the growing Sino-Soviet confrontation and take over of the Chinese Foreign Ministry by a 'leftist' group in 1967".<sup>35</sup>

The second development was the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966) in China. The Cultural Revolution and the famous Mao-Lin Shao Ch'i debate immediately threw up some crucial issues. While on one hand it symbolised an attack against 'Revisionism' (as reflected in the Khrushchevite line), on the other it initiated a violent process of resolving the debate between Mao's line of rapidly introducing revolutionary radical programmes and Liu's prioritisation on consolidating the gains first. In the Indian context, the debate immediately transpired into a rift between the 'Peking group' - B.T.R., Harekrishna Konar, Promode Dasgupta and the 'Sanghai group' or pro-Liu anti-Mao group of A.K. Gopalan, Namboodripad and Jyoti Basu. The former section i.e. the 'Peking group' now drifted more

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34. Sen gupta, Bhabani. 1972. Communism in Indian Politics (Columbia University Press, New York and London) P 388.

35. Mohanty, Manoranjan, 1977. Revolutionary Violence : A study of Maoist Movement in India, (New Delhi) P 193.

close to the Mao-ists within the Party who interpreted the Cultural Revolution as Mao's struggle for 'ideological purity' and proceeded to fight the 'revisionists' within their own organisation.<sup>36</sup>

The 'Food Movement' of 1966, a fall-out of the Industrial recession, rising unemployment, food shortage and price hike, saw stepping up of 'militancy' within the agitational programmes of the CPI (M). Through the 'Food Movement', the CPI (M) moved more towards an 'aggressive social mobilisation' and turned ever and ever more ferociously on the parent CPI<sup>37</sup>. This movement served an immediate role of identifying 'militancy' as an indicator of revolutionary movement and leadership and offered, through the violence perpetrated in its course a legitimate space for 'violence' as radical practice.

Much of the violence and unrest that erupted in the course of events taking place since 1960 could be attributed to the students. It was this section, along with the middle rank leadership that challenged 'revisionism' of the leadership and articulated the Mao-ist assertion in the Party.

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36. Roy, A.K. The Spring Thunder and After.

37. Ibid P 131.



In December 1965, the Union Home Ministry complained in a review that 'student indiscipline continued to be on the increase and posed 'quite a serious threat to public peace'. Among the causes of student indiscipline, it listed (a) lack of proper academic atmosphere; (b) absence of respect for authority - parental, educational and governmental; (c) ideological frustration, and (d) political indifference.<sup>38</sup>

While the 'Food Movement' earned legitimacy for the left alliance challenging the regime, at the same time it 'radicalised' the student movement and gave it a dynamic leftist slant.<sup>39</sup> For the students, it was a bleak and critical period with Industrial recession, rising prices, unemployment and political turmoil. The education system, engineered after the colonial model of Macaulay had not evolved and its elitist character together with the abysmal state of affairs in academics constituted another major source of discontent for them. Gunnar Myrdal writes that the system of education 'conformed closely to the old

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38. 'Notes on Political Development in West Bengal in Political Change in South Asia', Calcutta, 1963, in Ray, R. 1992. The Naxalites and their Ideology (OUP, Delhi) P 79.

39. Ray, R. 1992. The Naxalites and their ideology, (OUP, New Delhi) P 132. In the same context Ray proceeds to comment: 'Most importantly it introduced ideology and the concept of ideology, in its Mao-ist sense, into the ambit of student politics.'

colonial pattern of building up a highly educated elite with an attached lower rank of technical personnel functioning as subalterns, while leaving the population at large in a state of ignorance'.<sup>40</sup> Thus, by the end of the 60s, the students were, as Banerjee puts it, 'ripe for a rebellion'. The situation for rebellion, however, was not merely a consequence of the economic and political decline. There seems to be a perception of a decline that was larger-social and cultural in character. And as Ray indicates, 'a decline that was challenged on the grounds of 'morality'. Myron Weiner traces the root of this decline to the existence of hierarchical and generally authoritarian patterns within all institutions from family to schools, universities, administration and government, which serve to inhibit development of 'innovating individuals'.<sup>41</sup> In spite of the fact that the decision of CPI (M) to participate in the 1967 elections drew flak from the Mao-ist dissidents within the Party (and the Chinese Communist Party as well), the Mao-ists, nonetheless, were undecided on the issue. Jangal

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40. Asian Drama, vol. III, Penguin Books, 1968, quoted from Banerjee S. India's Simmering Revolution, P 176.

41. Rudolph, Lloyd I, Rudolph, Susanne H. and Ahmed, Karuna 'Student Politics and National Politics in India' in Economic and Political Weekly, Special Number, July 1972, quoted from Banerjee, S. India's Simmering Revolution P 50.

Santhal, the revolutionary peasant leader of Naxalbari and Charu Majumdar's trusted cadre, fought the elections as a candidate alongwith two other Naxalite candidates. Operating within the logic of armed revolution, they had to deny the legitimacy and validity of the electoral action they were undertaking and in the process they lost the elections.

Events took a dramatic turn with the announcement of the 1967 General Election results. The Congress, to everyone's surprise [including the CPI and CPI (M)], failed to secure an absolute majority in the State of West Bengal. On March 2, 1967, the United Front - a coalition of united Left Front (consisting of CPI (M), RSP, SSP, SUC, Workers' Party, RCPI and Marxist Forward Bloc) and the People's United Leftist Front (consisting of CPI, Bangla Congress, Forward Bloc and Bolshevik Party) formed the United Front Government and sworn in with Ajoy Mukherjee as their leader.

Meanwhile CPI (M)'s ambivalent and indulgent attitude towards the Mao-ists had created a delicate situation. The extremists were already organising violent agitation in several districts of North Bengal. This was the outcome of a long period of radical activism aimed towards 'seizure of state power' nurtured and patronised by leaders like Harekrishna Konar and Promode Dasgupta.

CPI (M)'s decision of operating within the parliamentary democracy and eventually the formation of the United Front government came under scathing criticism from the Mao-ist dissident groups like 'Commune', 'Santras', 'Dakhshin Desh', 'Bidroha' and others. One organisation - 'Antar-Party Sodhanbad Birodhi Sangram Committee'(Committee to fight inner Party Revisionism) brought out two documents - 'Letters to the Politbureau, Nos. 1 and 2, in which they denounced the 'opportunist', 'revisionist' parliamentary line immediately after the formation of the United Front.

"Marx taught us that 'force is the midwife of every old society pregnant with a new one. And Comrade Mao Tse Tung teaches us that 'political power grows out of the barrel of a gun'. But are you not teaching us the path of 'peaceful transition' to the New Democratic State by the parliamentary means through actual practice of forming electoral blocs and alliances with bourgeois social reformists, with the serious intention of forming coalition governments at State levels in West Bengal, Kerala and other States".<sup>42</sup>

The dissidents immediately received endorsement from the CCP. In an article - "After the Indian Elections : A Still More Reactionary Government" in Peking Review on March 24, 1967, the coalition government in West Bengal was

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42. Letters to the Politbureau, No.II, quoted from Roy, A. K. The Spring Thunder and After, P 7.

condemned as "revisionist" - an epithet quiet contradictory to the CPI (M)'s projection of the government as 'instrument of struggle'. The CCP's diatribe on the coalition government in West Bengal and Kerala subsequently went to the extent of representing them as 'component parts of the state apparatus of India's big landlords and big bourgeoisie under the direct control of the Central Government'.<sup>43</sup> And finally, came the apocalyptic prescription of armed revolution:

"These facts prove that without a people's revolution, without the seizure of political power by force and without the smashing of the old state apparatus there can be no change in the social system, in the nature of the political regime and there can be no real social reform. There is no precedent in history, nor will there be any in the future".<sup>44</sup>

Immediately after Harekrishna Konar was sworn in as the Minister in-charge of land and land revenue, he announced a policy of distributing surplus land among the landless and stopping the eviction of the sharecroppers through the

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43. 'After the Indian Elections : A Still More Reactionary Government', Peking Review, June 9, 1967, quoted from Roy, A. K. The Spring Thunder and After, P 79.

44. Ibid.

enactment of agrarian reforms. This policy contradicted CPI (M)'s early emphasis on independent, radical peasant activism. But the operative space within a constitutional set up, the question of approaching the issue through 'the due process of law', the colossal administrative marathon of documentation, in other words the immense complications of how a politico-juridical-administrative structure operates had to be taken into consideration by the Party that was now in power ( in the parliamentary democratic set up). An immediate outcome was tempering down of the policy ambition and its bitter & emphatic rejection by the Mao-ists.

"..... while in office these renegades did not adopt any legislative measure or issue any ordinance that could serve the interests of the poor peasantry at the expense of the exploiting classes. What prevented them, for instance, from reducing the ceiling on land holdings from 25 acres per family to, say, 10 acres per family or 2 acres per head? What prevented them from increasing the share of the share-croppers from 60 percent of the produce (which they do not actually get) to, say, 75 or 80 percent? .....This shameler's lackey of the jotedars (Hare Krishna Konar) has the cheek to claim that his government was serving the interests of the poor peasantry and acting as an instrument of struggle in their hands".<sup>45</sup>

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45. 'More on Phrases and Facts', Editorial-reprinted from Liberation, Volume One, No.5, March 1968, in Ghosh, Suniti Kumar ed. 1992. The Historic Turning-Point: A Liberation Anthology, volume one, (published by S. K. Ghosh Calcutta)P. 285.

Around early March 1967<sup>46</sup>, a peasant convention was held by the Siliguri sub-division kisan sabha. The leadership consisted of the District CPI (M) Secretary Charu Majumdar, Kann Sanyal, Jangal Santhal, Khokan Majumdar, Kamakhshya Bannerjee and Kadam Mullick. The Convention gave a call to "(i) establish the authority of the peasant committees in all matters of the village, (ii) get organised and be armed in order to crush the resistance of jotedars and rural reactionaries and (iii) smash the jotedars' monopoly of ownership of the land and redistribute the land anew through the peasant committees".<sup>47</sup>

According to Banerjee, the Conference "warned" the landless that their struggle would have to encounter opposition from the Central Government as well as from the United Front Government and therefore it was "necessary to prepare for a protracted armed resistance". Following an incident of assault and eviction of a sharecropper by a jotedar<sup>48</sup>, violence broke out. Armed bands of Kisan

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46. Banerjee gives the date of the meeting as 18 March 1967, 16 days after the formation of the United Front government, Ibid P 84.

47. Sanyal, Kanu. 1966. 'Report on the Peasant Movement in the Terai region', Deshabrati, 14 October 1968, quoted from Mohanty, M. 1977. Revolutionary Violence : A Study of the Mao-ist Movement in India(New Delhi) P 41.

48. Roy, A.K. 1975. The Spring Thunder and After, (New Delhi) P 83.

Committee members started looting, arson and forcible seizure of land. By the end of May the situation was "out of control". Kanu Sanyal's description of the "ten great tasks" in his Political Report<sup>49</sup> offers us a schematic narration of the outbreak.

- (1) It was declared that land which was not owned and tilled by peasants themselves was to be redistributed. This was put into practice.
- (2) Peasants burnt all legal deeds and documents which had been used to cheat them.
- (3) Unequal agreements between the money-lenders and peasants were declared as null and void.
- (4) The hoarded rice which is used as capital for carrying on usurious and feudal exploitation was confiscated by the peasants and distributed among themselves.
- (5) All jotedars in the villages who were known for a long time as oppressors were subjected to open trial and sentenced to death.
- (6) The wicked, ruffian elements and flunkeys who are used to preserve the political, economic and social

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49. Sanyal, Kanu. 1968. 'Report on the Peasant Movement in the Terai Region'op. cit. P 42.



authority of the jotedars in the villages and those who cooperated with the police were all brought to open trial.

- (7) Realising that their struggle would be subjected to armed repression by the State apparatus, they armed themselves with their traditional weapons like bows and arrows and spears as well as with guns forcibly taken away from the jotedars, and organised their own armed group.
- (8) Peasant committees maintained order, ran schools and guarded against theft and decoity.
- (9) Central and regional revolutionary committees were set up.
- (10) They declared the existing bourgeoisie law and law courts null and void in the villages. The decisions of the Revolutionary Committees were declared to be the law.

On 23 May 1967, a police party had an encounter with the tribal rebels in the Naxalbari police station area in which a policeman was killed. On 25 May, the police fired at Prasadjote, where Kisan processions were converging for

holding a meeting. In the shooting ten processionists were killed including seven women and two children.<sup>50</sup>

The Naxalbari had erupted. On 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 1969, the CPI (ML) was formed. Kanu Sanyal announced the formation of this third Communist Party of India at the May Day Rally in Calcutta.

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50. Roy, A. K. The Spring Thunder and After, P 44. Banerjee's account while narrating the incident does not mention processions and refers to the victims as villagers.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE POLITICS OF THE CPI (ML)

In the present Chapter, we shall discuss what can be termed as "the points of departure" for the Naxalites i.e. the crucial issues of difference between the Mao-ists and the CPI (M) as well as the CPI that necessitated and expressed the rebellion. These issues pertain to the political core of the discourse and we have categorised them (inspite of a certain risk involved in such exercise) as two major stands and their related implications. They are-the rejection of the 'Petty-bourgeois leadership' and its 'understanding'; and upholding the Mao-ist model of armed agrarian revolution. We start with the issue of rejecting the petty-bourgeois leadership and its understanding - a stand which became otherwise famous as "debunk the middle class".

#### Rejection of the Petty Bourgeoisie

Who constituted the category known as the 'petty bourgeois' leadership that the Naxalites were rejecting?

Ashish K. Roy writes -

"It is rather striking to note that the Indian Communist Movement has been led exclusively by the same leadership for the last four decades. The intellectuals in the CPI were largely recruited in Indian and European colleges and universities, while the organisational leaders

were drawn from among the 'terrorist' prisoners in the jails. When the CPI held its first Congress in 1943, more than two-thirds of the delegates (92 out of 139) listed themselves as landlords, traders and members of the intelligentsia and at least 70% of the delegates were less than 35 years of age.

Subsequently, during the post-independence days the same leadership managed to retain their grip on the mainstream of the Indian Communist Movement by excluding the younger generation from almost all prominent party positions. There has been little or no infusion of new blood into the party leadership. The extent to which the older, pre-independence leadership now dominates the Central Executive Committees of both the CPI and CPI (M) is illustrated by the average age of the members of the CPI Central Secretariat which in February 1968 was just over 60. Similarly, the average age of the CPI (M) Politbureau in January 1969 was just under 60. In order to keep their power-political positions intact, these leaders have always tried to ward off any ideological challenge to their political wisdom".<sup>1</sup>

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Roy, Ashish K. 1975. The Spring Thunder and After, (Minerva Associates, New Delhi) P 37.

The issue of the 'middle class'/petty bourgeoisie merits discussion at length since it lies at the heart of the Indian Communist Movement. We will proceed with the historical analysis of this class and follow it up with a sociological sketch of the class in Bengal trying to understand in the process the unique relationship between this particular class and the Left movement.

## **A Brief History**

This leadership, historically, was a product of colonialism which gave rise to a new category of middle class in Bengal. Educated in the Western model and urban-centric, this section was designed (as per Macaulay's model) to act as the intermediary between the exploiting colonial and the exploited colonised. The experience of Modernity and its values (the Bengal and Kerala 'Renaissance') created the intellectual orientation of this section and led to the critique of social orthodoxies that later became famous as the 'Young Bengal Movement'. At the same time, the dissemination of bourgeois humanist values, the ethics of egalitarianism (contribution of the French Revolution) and the critique of Imperialism and Capitalism (in Marx's philosophy) made this very middle-class intelligentsia antagonistic to colonial order. This class came to provide leadership to the anti-colonial struggle. The radical section among them along with the recruits of terrorist organisations (drawn more from the lower middle class) initiated the Communist Movement in the colonies. Thus, historical expediency required the petty bourgeoisie to lead the Communist Movement in the Third World in the colonial phase. But once the country became independent the political role of this class came under serious questioning.

The Petty bourgeoisie and the National/  
'Comprador'bourgeoisie

There were two major reasons arising from the particular 'class position' of the petty bourgeoisie behind such questioning. The relationship between the petty bourgeoisie and national bourgeoisie was one of them. The alliance that had emerged between them during the colonial phase had become redundant in the post-colonial stage but the attitude of the petty bourgeoisie towards the national bourgeoisie continued to be ambiguous. The inconsistency of the petty bourgeois leadership of the left in its antagonism towards the national bourgeoisie (which was anyway punctuated with alliances like that of CPI and Nehru) reveals why there has been an on-going controversy in leftist circles on this question. The petty bourgeois leadership of left was never totally confident of the historical role of the national bourgeoisie vis-a-vis their own class and movement. Correspondingly the programmatic understanding and characterisation of these questions remained fuzzy, often changing and controversial. It was in response to this debate and as an ideological supplement of challenging the leadership that the Naxalites rejected the idea of indigenous bourgeoisie as only national bourgeoisie and put forth the concept of compradore bourgeoisie after the Mao-ist model. As Charu Majumdar put it, "In a

semi-colonial country, the national bourgeois is bound to the comprador bourgeois".<sup>2</sup> The possibility of maturing the anti-colonial movement into the struggle for Socialist Revolution depended heavily on how this particular class of petty bourgeoisie - the leadership of the left acted in the post-colonial stage. The chances of partaking a radical, progressive role was at heavy odds with the class identity of the petty bourgeoisie itself. It could only be resolved by what Amilcar Cabral refers to as the "capacity of committing suicide as a class".<sup>3</sup>

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2. Banerjee, Sumanta. 1984. India's Simmering Revolution, (New Delhi) P 43. Majumdar, while explaining the concept of comprador and its ties with the national bourgeoisie, writes: "First, the small and middle bourgeois take help from these compradors for their capital. Secondly, the raw materials for their industries also have to be bought from the comprador bourgeois. Thirdly, for the improvement of their industries they depend on the comprador bourgeois. Fourthly, it is these comprador bourgeois who are the purchasers of a large part of the output they produce, and taking advantage of this the comprador bourgeois impose their crisis on the small and middle bourgeois. Fifthly, in the case of opposition to the working class, they are united with the comprador bourgeois. Sixthly, a part of the accumulated profits of these small and middle bourgeois, which they keep as reserve fund, is employed as shares in the big industries of the comprador bourgeois. For these six reasons, the national bourgeois is a class which is the weakest. It is impossible for them to take any decision and implement it independently". Quoted from Banerjee P 43.
3. Chabal, Patrick. 1983. Amilcar Cabral-Revolutionary Leadership and People's War, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge).

### The Petty bourgeoisie and the mass

Cabral's radical prescription should be read keeping in mind another serious issue - the relationship between the petty bourgeois leadership and the masses. The nature of this relationship was constituted in the anti-colonial struggle phase. It was a relationship between the educated and the illiterate, the urban and the rural, the bearers of bourgeois humanist values and the believers in the fray of feudal vestiges. The elitist nature of such a relationship naturally posed a serious difficulty for the movement resulting in the characteristic hesitation of the leaders to identify with the led. Revolution in the Naxalite strategy, therefore precluded revolutionising the leadership and cadres - the urban petty bourgeois intelligentsia.

### The Petty bourgeoisie in Bengal: the 'bhadralok'

Let us now briefly discuss the trajectory of the politics of the petty bourgeoisie in the particular context of Bengal. Joya Chatterjee writes:-

"The Bengali bhadralok were essentially products of the system of property relations created by the Permanent Settlement. They were typically a rentier class who enjoyed intermediary tenurial rights to rent from land. There were many differences within the bhadralok, reflecting the variety in size and quality of their holdings in the land, and in part the result of subinfeudation and proliferation of intermediary tenures. But from the



landed magnate down to the petty taluqdar this was a class that did not work its land but lived off the rental income it generated. The bhadralok gentleman was the antithesis of the horny handed son of the soil. Shunning manual labour, the 'Babu' saw this as the assence of the social distance between himself and his social inferiors. The title 'Babu'-a badge of bhadralok status-carried with it connotations of Hindu, frequently upper-class exclusiveness, of landed wealth, of being master (as opposed to servant) and latterly of possessing the goods of education, culture and anglicisation".<sup>4</sup>

The ambition of this elite was to participate in the legislative and parliamentary process of establishing the self-government and eventually running it. The anti-partition movement of 1905 witnessed a considerable participation of this section. At the same time, along with the distrust of British policies of cooperation, there developed a simultaneous criticism of the constitutional agitation forms & techniques and secular ideals of the moderate Congress leadership. The frustrated from among the lower middle class drifted towards extremist organisations and terrorism. Between 1913 to 1920, the Hindu elite worked within the legislative system and endorsed its growing

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4. Chatterjee, J., 1995, 'Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition 1932-1947', (Cambridge Unviersity Press, New Delhi), pp. 3-6.

involvement with parliamentarianism. But soon after the communal riots of 1918, there was a new development in 1921 - one million voters, mostly rural illiterates and significantly Muslims were enfranchised. This spelt a new non-bhadralok presence in the legislative bodies. And "using their positions in the provincial government and forming coalitions after 1926 with the European and low caste Hindu communities, the Muslims gained unprecedented control and authority over Bengal's institutional life in 1930s and 1940s".<sup>5</sup> This led to a steady disenchantment with electoral politics among the 'bhadralok's. By 1923, the Hindu elite, faced with the decline of its social power and political ambitions, moved towards revivalism and formed 'defensive' communal sabhas based ostensibly on the cult of 'Sakti'.<sup>6</sup> Revivalism, however, did not seat well in the 'Bhadralok' perspective and society which already was having a good share of the liberal European ideas. As a particular section of the elite became reactionary, another section of them as well as the lower middle class became

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5. Roy Rabindra, 1988, 'The Naxalites and their Ideology'; (Oxford, New Delhi), P.71.  
In P. 53 of his book, Roy talks about the 'evolution of a Bengali cultural entity (rather than merely an ethnic one) based on the ideas, values and outlook of the so-called Bengali Renaissance'.
  6. Roy, Ashish K. 1975. The Spring Thunder and After, (New Delhi) P 173.

attracted to terrorist and extremist movement. By 1930s, non-conformism had become deeply rooted within the 'Bhadralok' society and it was ready for Marxism. Marxism appealed (in the particular context) because, as Marcus Franda writes -

".....it rejected electoral politics, which had led to the loss of bhadralok dominance; because it denigrated orthodox Hindu ideas and behaviour at a time when Bengalis were becoming disenchanted with Hindu revivalism because it promised the overthrow of the hated British and anglicised ruling groups, who were guided by their ideas (and who controlled Calcutta); because it promised a modern society in which the intellectual will have a more prominent position; because it legitimized the terrorist and conspiratorial activities on which the bhadralok had staked their reputations for three decades".<sup>7</sup>

**The Petty bourgeois leadership and composition of the Communist movement in Bengal**

This is the background to the petty bourgeoisie composition and leadership of the Communist movement in West Bengal. However, the terminology 'bhadralok' or petty bourgeois does not connote a monolithic population. Rather the category encompasses heterogeneity in thinking, values

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7. Franda Marcus, 1971, Radical Politics in West Bengal, (M.I.T.), P 12.

and political action to the extent of throwing up major contradictions and furious contentions as is evident from the history of the Communist movement. Communist movement drew upon the 'madhyabitta' (middle class) of all shades - the 'baniyadi' (traditionally propertied), the 'sahebi' (anglicised cultural elite) and the 'vernacular intelligentsia' to constitute its leadership and ranks and the heterogeneity thus earned manifested as different groups with contending programmes for political action in the days to follow.<sup>8</sup>

"It is rather striking to see that the present Communist movement in India and in West Bengal, in particular, clearly identifies three sharply distinguishable sets of leadership in the CPI and the CPI (M) - first are those who are primarily interested in organisational work, because of their previous experiences in the highly institutionalised terrorist (extremist) federations. Almost all of them who had been active in the pre-split CPI's organisational front in this state opted en masse for the CPI (M) because they hoped to make it more militant and less election oriented. Leaders like Promode

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8. 'baniyadi', 'sahebi', 'vernacular intelligentsia' are sociological categories. Rabindra Roy uses in his analysis of the Bengali society, The Naxalites and their Ideology, New Delhi, 1988, P 70. As opposed to the 'anglicised intelligentsia', Roy talks about the 'vernacular intelligentsia' who led the Naxalite movement. "The leadership of the Naxalite movement belongs quite clearly to the vernacular intelligentsia." Ibid P 10. The claim remains uncorroborated by other sources and Roy himself does not elaborate on the issue.

Dasgupta, Harekrishna Konar fall in this category; in the second group may be included those intellectual leaders of the movement most of whom are highly educated and prominent in the theoretical debates in the party. Leaders like Hiren Mukherjee, Bhowani Sen, Somnath Lahiri, Renu Chakravarti and Indrajit Gupta who constituted the intellectual core of the undivided Communist Party in West Bengal later joined the (Right) CPI after the official split in 1964. There is still another group of leaders whose principal interests lie in the legislative politics in the Communist movement; it includes a few prominent leaders like Jyoti Basu and Bhupesh Gupta".<sup>9</sup>

Before we conclude the discussion on petty bourgeoisie [identified and traced so far within the leadership and composition of CPI and CPI (M)], let us take a brief look at the leadership and cadre composition of the Naxalites. We shall soon see that the rejection of this class by the Naxalites does not imply a composition any different on the part of the rebels. In fact the debate emerges once again [as within the CPI and CPI (M)] as a discourse on contradiction within the very same class i.e. the petty bourgeoisie. The difference in the composition lies mainly in the age-group factor. While the CPI and the CPI (M) were dominated by leaders of the pre-independence

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9. Roy, A.K. op.cit. P 175.

period, the CPI (ML) was constituted of a post-independence generation. However, Banerjee raises another important distinction, significantly an ethical one - "In marked contrast with the parliamentary Leftist leaders, whose activities were a routine of revolutionary phrase-mongering from a safe distance, followed by a ruthless self-seeking through every available avenue in the existing system, the CPI (ML) leaders of petty bourgeoisie origin left their homes and gave up their careers in a bid to declare themselves and become professional revolutionaries".<sup>10</sup> Banerjee's contention seems well founded when we consider Amilcar Cabral's prescription of "committing suicide as a class" being consciously practised as "de-classification" and "revolutionising the leadership and cadres" (through the annihilation of class enemy - khatam) by the Naxalites. Even Charu Majumdar's description of the petty bourgeois tries to strike a note of difference. In reply to the question "who are the allies of the working class in this revolution?" he writes - "Basically, they are the entire peasantry, that is, the poor and landless peasants and the broad masses of the middle peasants ... Apart from these, the toiling petty bourgeoisie will also be with the working

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10. Banerjee, S. 1984. India's Simmering Revolution, (New Delhi) P 49.

class. These three main classes are the main force of the revolution".<sup>11</sup>

Rabindra Ray has suggested a sociological difference in his analysis. According to him, the leadership of the Naxalites belonged to a 'vernacular intelligentsia' (in an understood opposition to the 'anglicised'/'sahebi' intelligentsia of CPI and CPI (M)).<sup>12</sup> This claim is not corroborated by other commentaries and Ray's otherwise elaborate discussion only touches the issue making any further analysis or discussion a difficult proposition. However, since we started with an identification of the petty bourgeoisie within the CPI and CPI (M) leadership, it would be fair to conclude the discussion on the issue with a graphic analysis of the CPI (ML) leadership provided by A.K. Roy himself.

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11. Majumdar, Charu. 1968. 'The United Front and the Revolutionary Party', Liberation.

12. Ray, R. 1988. The Naxalites and their Ideology, (Oxford University Press, New Delhi) P 12.

Data on 12 Central Committee members of the CPI (ML) leaders

**Table 1a**

Religion and Caste of the 12 CPI (ML) leaders

Muslims: Nil.

Christians: Nil

Hindus:

(i) Brahmin	- 4	(iv) Mahisya	- Nil
(ii) Kayastha	- 6	(v) S.C.	- 1
(iii) Vaidya	- Nil	(vi) Tribal	- 1

Total: 12

**Table 1b**

Class Origin of the 12 Bengali leaders of CPI (ML)

Working Class	- Nil	Landlord	- Nil
Agricultural labour	- Nil	Intelligentsia-	11
Poor peasant	- Nil		
Rich peasant	- 1		

The foregoing analysis of class origin of CPI (ML) leaders from West Bengal clearly reveals that like two other Communist Parties the CPI (ML) was also essentially an 'elitist' organisation".<sup>13</sup>

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13. Roy, A. K. 1975. The Spring Thunder and After, (New Delhi) P 175.



## The Maoist model of Agrarian Revolution and the Peasantry

Let us now discuss the second stand that forms the core of the Naxalite discourse - the question of armed agrarian revolution after the Mao-ist model. We shall start with a general discussion of the shift away from the "proletariat as vanguard" formulation taking place in the Communist movements and following it with a brief discussion on the agrarian situation in India in the eve of the outbreak which elicited the revolutionary response from the Naxalites.

### Problem with the 'Proletariat'

Problems arising from the proletariat as vanguard model have been plaguing the Communist movements in the Third World since long. The concrete nature of the problem came into sharp focus through the theoretical paradox presented by Stuart Hall - how does a 'class in itself' transform into a 'class for itself'. Working class was just beginning to take shape in the Third World as a direct outcome of the colonial industrialisation. But this particular working class was yet to approximate its classical 'proletariat' model. Existing within a socio-economic system divided into co-existing feudal and early capitalist realities, the working class of the colonies was unique in its contextual manifestation. Trade union-ism among this class meant a necessary perpetration of economist struggles and the

solidarity of such politics with larger class struggles was becoming increasingly a remote possibility.

Even outside the specific context of the Third World, the 'Proletariat' was gradually shifting away from its classical 'vanguard' role (as in the Bolshevik Revolution) to a more status quo-ist position. This movement - the 'embourgeoisification' of the proletariat was perceived as a major threat to international proletariat movement and working class revolution. Daniel Cohn Bendit's warning - 'our danger is that the working class will let itself be crushed'<sup>14</sup> finds parallel concern in Michael Bakumin's apprehension of the transformation of workers' into bourgeois by their ambition and vanity'.<sup>15</sup>

#### The Peasantry and the Land Question

A shift of focus became of dire necessity to the revolutionaries. In the Third World, the shift had to address the peasantry as an outcome of three significant factors. Firstly, it constituted an attempt of addressing the land question (which had become central owing to the colonial trajectory) and thereby linking up the Revolution with the history of peasant revolts. Secondly, the Chinese

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14. Bourges H. ed. 1968. The French Students Revolutions : The Leaders Speak, (New York).

15. Bakunin, Michael. 1950. Marxism, Freedom and the State, (London).

and Vietnamese experiences had already established the 'peasantry' as 'vanguard' and this offered the 'New Left'/the Naxalites in India an alternative class base for radical politics.

At the same time the incorporation of the peasantry into the fold of class struggle meant an attempt to counteract the middle class leadership in the movement. In his letter of resignation from the Brazilian Communist Party dated 1966, Carlos Marighela argues for incorporation of the peasantry into the struggle since the proletariat, being otherwise too weak, "would continue to gravitate round the middle class"<sup>16</sup>

#### **The Crisis in the Agricultural Sector**

Let us now consider the agrarian situation that generated the revolt. The colonial administration had introduced the notion of private property and Zamindari System grafted on the existing exploitative structures on one hand and initiated industrialisation (the later's nature being dictated by colonial logic) on the other. This created a major disparity in the economy and production relations of the two sectors. In the post colonial phase,

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16. Marighela, C. 1966. 'Letter of resignation from the Brazilian Communist Party'.

the agrarian sector, left to ruins, could no longer serve as a supportive infrastructure for the latter's growth. Industrial recession and rising unemployment was soon complemented with devastating famines and food crisis. Around mid-sixties, the situation became explosive - "In the middle of March 1967, some Bengali newspapers carried a small news item about one Mukunda Sarkar, an unemployed worker, in a village called Dharmapur in Bongaon in West Bengal. Unable to feed his wife and three children, he killed them and then committed suicide. Sarkar's case was not an isolated instance. All through 1966 and 1967, rumblings of discontent reverberated throughout the Indian countryside".<sup>17</sup>

On 19 May 1966, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi announced that 46.6 million people spread over 117 districts of Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Punjab were affected by "scarcity conditions". On 27 March 1967, the official food review notified the Parliament that "serious situation may develop on the food front in the remaining months of the year". On 18 April 1967, the Bihar Government declared one-third of the State as famine area.

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17. Banerjee, S. 1984. India's Simmering Revolution, (New Delhi) P 1.

Madhya Pradesh followed suit on 18 August 1967, declaring 18 districts as famine areas.<sup>18</sup>

Class-Composition of the Agrarian Sector

The Indian agraria around this time was constituted of three sections - the big farmers or landlords (jotedars) who owned and controlled the largest proportion of land holdings, while forming a negligible part of the entire population. According to Banerjee, this section comprised only 5% of the rural households while owning 40% of the land-holdings.<sup>19</sup>

The second section comprised of a minority of rich and middle peasants who tilled their own plots and worked as hired labourers at the same time. It was the third section constituted of agricultural and landless peasants who formed the bulk of the exploited. Banerjee quotes the data for operational holdings to reveal that the "households cultivating no land or less than 2.5 acres each constituted 57.59% of the rural households and between them they operated only 7% of the total land".<sup>20</sup>

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18. Banerjee, S. op.cit. P 1-2.

19. Ibid P 3.

20. Ibid P 3.

### The Government's Measures

This was then the scenario obtaining around mid-sixties notwithstanding the Government strategies of Land Reform measures and, later, of the Green Revolution. It would be relevant to discuss in brief how the first strategy was circumvented and appropriated by the exploitative structure and how the second strategy actually accentuated the inequality in the rural sector.

### Land Reforms

The first phase of Land Reform measures witnessed attempts to abolish the 'Zamindari system' and the 'intermediaries' in the rural sector. However, inspite of enactment of such well meaning legislations, the pattern of ownership in the countryside did not change. The Zamindars/Jotedars who had a substantial influence in the ruling party and the State government managed to circumvent the clauses and retain their holdings, losing in the process only their traditional right of revenue collection.

The second phase, initiated in the 50s, was aimed at providing security of tenure and regulation of rent. However, the gap between the time of announcement and actual enactment as well as the loopholes in the legislation allowed the landlords to render the laws meaningless by carrying on large scale eviction of the tenants.

By the end of 50s, land reform measures were introduced with an objective of enforcing the ceiling on the size of individual land holdings and distributing the surplus among landless and poor peasants. This time the landlords

resorted to a practice of transferring the ownership of land in excess of the ceiling limits to their relations and servants. This practice of 'benami' along with the high ceiling limits imposed in the legislation (under pressure from the big landlords) made the surplus land accrued in the process inconsequential and rendered the entire exercise futile. The government's lack of enthusiasm and the way the entire system tilted towards the propertied is summed up succinctly in a review of the Planning Commission:

".... the general attitude of the administration has been one of apathy in the matter of implementing measures of land reform .... The lower echelons of the revenue administration are often ignorant of the legal provisions and are also under the sway of substantial landowners who have a vested interest in evading the enacted laws".<sup>21</sup>

#### **The New Agricultural Strategy: The Green Revolution**

The other central strategy by the government in addressing the rural problems was the 'new agricultural strategy' to increase food production. The thrust of the plan was introduction of high-yielding variety of seeds, mechanising the agricultural process, utilisation of fertilizers and pesticides. But this was the application of proposed American agricultural strategy - the stratagem behind Green Revolution which led to increased production

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21. Land Reforms : Policy, Legislation and Implementation, Mainstream, 4 November 1972, in Banerjee S. op. cit. P 9.

(particularly in wheat), but remained confined in the big mechanised farms of a minority of rich farmers. As a consequence, the price of land in the wheat belt rose and the 'green revolution' contributed in creating newer social disparities and social tensions.

As Francine R. Frankel observes:

"... the introduction of modern technology under the intensive areas and the high-yielding varieties programme has not only quickened the process of economic polarisation in the rural areas, but it has also contributed to increasing social antagonism between landlords and tenants, and landowners and labourers..."<sup>22</sup>

The acceptance of the 'green revolution' generating new inequalities was finally admitted by the Home Minister, Y.B. Chavan: "... unless green revolution is accompanied by a revolution based on social justice, I am afraid that the green revolution may not remain green".<sup>23</sup>

Before we conclude the discussion on the general agrarian situation in India, it would be essential to take a schematic account of the particular agrarian situation in West Bengal in the eve of the outbreak. The table given below shows the concentration of land holdings from 1939-40 to 1961-62 in West Bengal.

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22. Francine R. Frankel, India's Green Revolution, P 197.

23. Patriot, 29 November 1969. Banerjee, S. op. cit. P.13.



**TABLE 2<sup>24</sup>**

**Comparative Projection of Household Ownership of Various Holding-size in 1939-40, 1953-54 and 1961-62**

Holding-size (acres)	Household ownership holding					
	Percentage of household and landholding					
	1939-40		1953-54		1961-62	
	No.	Area	No.	Area	No.	Area
0.00 acre	3.9	----	20.54	-----	12.56	-----
Below 0.50	-----	-----	-----	-----	43.41	1.63
Below 1.00	-----	-----	56.13	4.29	31.14	4.11
Below 2.00	41.7	7.9	-----	-----	-----	-----
Below 2.50	-----	-----	73.47	15.90	69.25	17.54
Below 3.00	51.8	13.0	-----	-----	-----	-----
Below 4.00	61.4	19.7	-----	-----	-----	-----
Below 5.00	70.2	27.3	86.00	34.49	86.06	43.61
Below 7.50	-----	-----	91.51	48.60	93.10	61.90
Below 10.00	89.9	55.8	94.65	60.00	95.87	72.32
Below 12.50	-----	-----	-----	-----	97.56	80.30
Below 15.00	-----	-----	97.41	73.99	98.48	85.73
Below 20.00	-----	-----	98.63	82.82	99.21	91.25
Below 25.00	-----	-----	99.26	88.74	99.76	96.62
Below 30.00	-----	-----	99.49	91.45	99.92	98.42
Below 50.00	-----	-----	99.09	97.82	100	99.74

The table given above demonstrates the increase in the concentration of landholdings from 1939-40 to 1961-62. The analysis of the figures in the table shows the increase in the number of landless and agricultural labourers as well as that of share-croppers over the period. This, therefore, was the agrarian situation obtaining in West Bengal in 1961-62.

24. Report of the Land Revenue Commission, 1940: and Reports of the National Sample Survey: Eighth and Seventeenth rounds in Samanta Amiya K., 1984, 'Left Extremist Movement in West Bengal: An Experiment in Armed Agrarian Struggle' (Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta), P.60.

### 'Semi-Feudal Semi-Colonial'

It was this perspective of exploitation in the rural countryside that led Charu Majumdar and the Naxalites to identify feudalism as the principal contradiction and 'jotedars' as the main enemy of the people. At the same time, this was the objective situation of the sub-continent which was characterised by the Naxalites as 'semi-feudal, semi-colonial'.

This characterisation of the situation as 'semi-feudal, semi-colonial' however, has been commented upon by Rabindra Roy as more of a 'metaphorical' or 'ideational' formulation (deriving from the Chinese model directly) rather than a 'materialistic' interpretation of the economy. As Roy explains -

"The use of the 'semis' in the Naxalites characterization deserves further comment. Semi-feudalism accrues from a schema which sees the Indian economy (as all other under-developed countries) as progressing from a state of feudalism to a state of capitalism, in which semi-feudalism is an intermediate state..... 'Semi-colonial', more easily understandable in this schema of the 'colonial mode' as an agrarian economy open to the vicissitudes of the world market and thus of imperial interests, was, however, formulated before the concept of this 'colonial mode'. In

this prior sense it implied an economy at the mercy of imperial powers not through political coercion, but through the exigencies of capital accumulation in an otherwise independent country".<sup>25</sup>

### The People's Democratic Revolution and a History of Peasant Revolts

On May 15-16, 1970 the foundation Congress of CPI (ML) at Calcutta unanimously adopted a programme of People's Democratic Revolution. Significantly, the programme, tracing the different stages of the Indian movement held: "British imperialists conquered India and established their direct rule some two hundred years ago and since then the history of our country has been a history of ceaseless struggles between the heroic peasantry and the British imperialist aggressors".

Let us now consider in brief the history of the peasant struggles that the Naxalites refer to as the inspiration and legacy of their struggle in terms of strategy and modes of

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25. Roy Rabindra, 1988, The Naxalites and their Ideology, (Oxford University Press New Delhi), P 177 Roy continues in P-196, 'while neither feudal nor capitalist, nor in a state of development from the former to the latter, the government legislation abolishing intermediaries does aim at a transfer of rights from superior landholders to actual cultivators, eliminating rent. It is to this rationale and its non-completion that the term Semi-Feudal refers...'

revolution. Banerjee traces the Sanyasi rebellion of Bengal-Bihar (1787-1800) as one of the first outbreaks which led attacks on the East India Company offices, killing notorious landlords and moneylenders and at the same time engaged in 'both guerrilla and positional warfare against the British army'. Once again, the 'Mao-ist tactics' was adopted by the peasant rebels of South India (1800-1801) when they adopted the 'strategy of harassing the enemy from inaccessible jungles and hills'. Between 1820 to 1890, Chhota Nagpur witnessed turbulent uprisings by the Oraons and the Kol tribals directed 'against government officials and private moneylenders'. This was followed by the Wahabi uprising under Tituneeer in 1831. Banerjee comments, "However imperfect politically, here was a 'liberated zone' established through 'area-wise seizure of power' - concepts that were to figure prominently in the theory and practice of CPI (ML)". The Santhal uprising of 1855-57 sharply pointed out the class-enemies of the exploited in clear unambiguous terms. Their revolutionary slogan was, "death to the money-lenders, the police, the civil court officers and the landlords" thus exposing the exploitative nexus of the system. The escalation of discontent gave rise to successive outbreaks-the Munda rebellion of Ranchi (under the leadership of Birsa) against the Hindu landlords, the Bhil and Meo outbreak in

Rajasthan and the Moplah of Malabar rising against feudal oppression.

Finally, it was the Tebhaga movement initiated in Bengal and the Telengana armed struggle that inspired the Naxalites in partaking a strategy of armed revolution along the Mao-ist lines. As Charu Majumdar writes -

"So the first and main duty of the peasant movement today is to destroy the State machinery. If this cannot be done all over the state, will the peasant sit silently? No, Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tse Tung thought has taught us that if the peasant of any one area can be aroused with political ideology, the work of destroying the State machinery in that area should be carried forward. It is this which is known as the peasants' liberated area. The struggle to create this liberated area is the most urgent and immediate task of the peasant movement. What, according to us, is a liberated area? We shall call that peasant area a liberated area from where we have been able to oust the class enemies (i.e. the 'jotedars' or feudal landlords, and money-lenders). To create this liberated area, the peasants' armed power is necessary".<sup>26</sup>

The programme of People's Democratic Revolution adopted at the Calcutta Congress, 1970, identified the principal contradiction in the country as "between feudalism and the broad masses of Indian people". The programme maintained

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26. Majumdar, Charu. 1967. 'The Peasants' Struggle will have to be taken Forward by Fighting Revisionism' (Document No.8).

that "as the obsolete semi-feudal society acts as the social base of US imperialism and as it facilitates also the plunder of our people by the Comprador-Bureaucrat Capitalism the problem of the peasantry becomes the basic problem of the Indian people". The basic task of the Indian Revolution is therefore to eliminate feudalism, bureaucrat capitalism and imperialism. Hence, the stage of the Indian Revolution is the "stage of a Democratic Revolution, the essence of which is Agrarian Revolution".<sup>27</sup>

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27. General Programme adopted at the Calcutta Congress, 1970, by CPI (ML). in Roy, Ashish Kumar, 1975, The Spring Thunder and After, (Minerva Associates, New Delhi), pp 152-4.

### CHAPTER 3

#### THE EVALUATIONS OF THE MOVEMENT

In our discussion so far, we have been trying to understand the Naxalite movement within a particular trajectory of the post-Independence political history of the Communist movement in India, particularly in West Bengal. While studying the discourse of Marxist political practice we have discussed the Naxalite movement as a break-a-political as well as methodological one. In being so the movement expressed a violent manifestation of accumulating critiques and re-appraisals of the history that produced it—a history of 'betrayal' that was marked by the 'Transfer of Power' i.e. the history of Independence (and Partition in the context of West Bengal).

"..... the situation that exists today in the country is a direct result of that 'great betrayal' the so-called independence of 1947. ....what are we passing through now?Neo-colonialism, absolutely neo-colonialism."<sup>1</sup>

The reason behind this dubbing of the 'Transfer of power' as a 'betrayal' is that the achievement of Independence was assumed by a section of the radical

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1. 'Interview with Ritwik Ghatak' by Chitrabikkhan in Ghosh, Robin. edited. 1994. *Biggapon Parbo*, (Annual No. , vol. XXIII No.1-4).

Communists of our country to be a simultaneous realisation of a Socialist revolution. It was the assessment of the Communist party of India that the revolutionary situation that existed in the country-the Telengana movement and other peasant upheavals, the discontent within the military and navy can be and should be utilized to organise an armed socialist revolution that would merge with the national liberation struggle. It was this programme that was belied by the compromise' that marked the 'Transfer of Power'.

The Indian national Congress-representing the 'indigenous bourgeoisie' was the capital force behind such a compromise but not the only party to the 'betrayal'. It was at the same time, a 'betrayal' by the middle-class'/ 'petty-bourgeois' leadership of the communist movement who capitulated and participated in the 'bourgeois-nationalist' project. The postponement of revolution was argued by the Communist leadership on the basis of a 'working class revolution' model that required the fulfilment of certain 'objective' social conditions. The Naxalites rejected this model as a 'deterministic' theory of change.

The evaluative agenda of the Naxalite movement, therefore, addressed three principal issues-the compromising middle-class leadership and its complicity in the 'betrayals, the incompetent 'comprador' bourgeoisie which



belied any hope of bringing about a 'bourgeois democratic revolution', and construction of a new theory of change-replacing the determinist' and 'working class' model of revolution by a 'political' and 'peasantry' model of Maoist tradition.

Our discussion in the present chapter would evaluate the three central ideas we have mentioned above. In the process we would examine texts from various sources which participate in this scheme of evaluation. As we trace the issues and confirm their presence, we also encounter the maturation of these ideas, especially their bearing on the academic exercise of the Subaltern School of historiography.

#### The Petty bourgeoisie and the 'Betrayal'

Let us start our discussion with the petty bourgeoisie a class that lies at the heart of the Communist movement of India. The politics of the petty-bourgeoisie, however, has never been homogeneous. In fact, the swings-the 'right' as well as the 'left' assertions within the Communist party and their corresponding formations have all been constituted by the different fragments of this class. Even the composition of the Naxalites, who voiced the rejection of the petty bourgeoisie, themselves had the same class-identity. Their leaders came from the middle-class intelligentsia that provided the leadership to the Communist movement in West

Bengal. However, they belonged to a different generation and held their own class responsible for the 'great betrayal' and failure of the revolutionary agenda.

"We have had workers and peasants as Party-members even before. There have been many such District committees where the workers and peasant-members massively outnumbered the members from the middle-class. But still our Party could never become a revolutionary party. Why? Because the working-class party members were never given any revolutionary political programme, they had no work to do within the Party, they were primarily treated as forces complementing the Trade Union movement.... They had to gravitate around the directions of the middle-class leadership of the Trade unions. There was no revolutionary politics or concrete class-analysis within the peasant members either.... basically reformist Kishan sabhas ----- composed of rich and middle pleasantries always directed towards 'legal' forms of movement.... and therefore, led once again by the middle class. That is why we had a 'middle-class' Party in spite of having a considerable number of members from the working class and the peasantry. That is why the Party has become a true 'revisionist' Party.<sup>2</sup>

The 'objective' conditions for the Communist Party partaking a true revolutionary course, according to the Naxalites, were very much there. It was contingent on the 'middle-class' to provide a radical politics. This failure,

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2. Majumdar, Charu. 1968. 'Let us start building up a Revolutionary Party', *Deshabrati*, (Annual Number), P.23.

that is, the failure of the Petty-bourgeoisie to actuate a revolutionary programme is identified by the Naxalites as a problem within the realm of the movement. At another level, this 'conciliatory' 'legal' politics was attributed to the capitulation of the leadership to the 'bourgeois-nationalist' project and the disastrous strategy of alliance with a class that had already compromised with the imperialist bourgeoisie. We come across this apposite critique of the 'history of collaboration' in the cultural productions of the radical left since early sixties. Ritwik Ghatak, a prominent filmmaker with declared devotion to the cause of Revolution and the Communist movement, presented a portrayal of such history in his film 'Subarnarekha' as early as 1962. One of the central characters in the film is 'Ishwar'- the inheritor of the 'Bengali middle class liberalism and the nationalist dream' as well as 'its' main victim'.<sup>3</sup>- "It (The film)...spans itself across Ishwar's own uprightness and confidence in the nationalist bourgeoisie (men like Rambilas) to the destruction of these ideals amid the decadent pleasures of the same class. most of all, it is a portrayal of a change that has takes place in the

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3. Rajadhyaksha, Ashish. 1982. Ritwik Ghatak: A Return to the Epic (Screenunit, Bombay), P.107.

country reflecting in Haraprasad's own conception of the struggle when he denounces Ishwar as a deserter, to his own desertion and his realisation that, as he tells Ishwar, "death does not come so easily."<sup>4</sup>

#### The Legacies of 'Revisionism'

It is the perception of this 'desertion' of the struggle that informs the radical left critiques. To a large extent, the hatred of past,<sup>5</sup> that the Naxalite ideologue Charu Majumdar emphasized as critical referred directly to these legacies-the intellectual inheritances bequeathed by the middle class. On one hand, these inheritances within the context of the Marxist discourse implied a conception of 'legal' politics shared with the politics of the national liberation struggle led by the Indians National Congress, On the other hand, it implied the Enlightenment Rationality-Modernity discourse that constituted the rise of the middle class, and the 'bourgeoisie-nationalist project' that followed it. The critical evaluation of this 'past' as well as the 'intellectual legacies' form the core of discussion in the writings of some Subalternists like Ranajit Guha and Partha

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4. Ibid., P.96

5. "Learn to hate our Past, only then can you become good revolutionaries." - Majumdar, Charu. - Documents and Quotes P.2.

Chatterjee. A major theoretical thrust of their texts can be understood as sharing the critiques of these inheritances.

In the texts of the Subaltern studies we come across an analysis of their political idiom, the legal' politics of the national liberations struggle-that Charu Majumdar later on faces at the next of the 'legal' 'trade-communist politics of the middle-class leadership of the communist movements. The analysis is presented by Ranajit Guha as 'Rightful Dissent'-a category' unknown to the pre-colonial history of India'

- "There was an awareness, in this idiom, of the legal and constitutional limits imposed by the colonial authorities on its articulation; and it contained itself, most of the time, within those limits, acquiring thus a peaceable aspect which was systematically mis-represented, abused and exploited both by the foreign and indigenous elites-misrepresented by the British rulers as evidence of an ingrained 'national' cowardice, abused by the Congress leadership in order to stop popular militancy from 'going too far' in the nationalist movement, and by the leadership of parties on the left to stop class-struggle from boiling

over into armed conflict (e.g. by the Communist leadership during the Tebhaga struggles)".<sup>6</sup>

The rejection of the Enlightenment-Rationality discourse can be identified, although obliquely, in the Naxalite gesture of attacking the cultural figures and ideologues of this discourse-literally in their 'Murti-bhanga' (breaking the public statues of these personalities) movement. But before discussing the politics behind such a gesture, let us attend to an analysis of the elements that constituted the colonial Bengali middle class by the subalternist historian Partha Chatterjee. Chatterjee's analysis is informed by the curiosities that web the issues-the root to the 'compromising' and 'indecisive' political character of the middle class and its constitution through the Enlightenment discourse.

Partha Chatterjee's interpretive reading of the 'Ramkrishna Kathamrita' as a text coding the collective psyche of the middle class identifies two categories-the 'mortal fear'<sup>7</sup> of the Bengali middle class towards the

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6. Ranjit, Guha. 1989, 'Dominance without Hegemony and it's Historiography', in Guha, Ranajit ed. Subaltern Studies, Volume VI, (Oxford University Press, Delhi).
  7. Chatterjee, Partha. 1992. 'A Religion of Urban Domesticity :Sri Ramkrishna and the Calcutta Middle class', in Chatterjee Partha and Pandey, Gyanendra ed. Subaltern Studies. vol. VIII, (OUP, Delhi) P.47.

British colonizers and its resultant 'strategy of withdrawal'<sup>8</sup> as the major class- attributes. What immediately draws our attention is that both the categories and a negative representation of the middle-class seeking to sociologically explain its later 'failure'. The role played by the Enlightenment discourse at the same time, according to Chatterjee was de-stabilizing, oppressive and directly related to the logic of imperialism.

"For the colonized middle-class mind, caught in its 'middleness', the discourse of reason was not unequivocally liberating. The invariable implication carried the historical necessity of colonial rule and its condemnation of indigenous culture as the storehouse of unreason or....reason yet unborn which only colonial rule could bring to birth...made the discourse of reason oppressive."<sup>9</sup>

#### The Attack on 'Culture'

The edifice of the rationalist discourse of Enlightenment therefore, carried a concrete political ideology of subordination for the Bengali middle-class context. The discourse functioned as a subordinating ideology through the pedagogy of a 'superior' and

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8. Ibid., P.50.

9. Ibid., pp.46-47.

'progressive' epistemology. The disagreement with this pedagogy, the rejection of the superiority claimed by this epistemology formed an important political stand of the Naxalites who identified these ideas within the realm of the 'bourgeois education system' of colonial legacy. The attack on the education system meant for them a simultaneous attack on the superstructure while the base was already being shaken by the revolutionary peasant movement.<sup>10</sup> Along with the "bourgeois education system", there were parallel sources of the subordinating ideology"-the indigenous bourgeois leaders who shared it and the Bengali 'Renaissance figures' who provided the intellectual legitimation to this subordination through their 'reformist' movements.

Even though the aggression directed towards the bourgeois leaders (the 'collaborationists') like Gandhi enjoyed the confidence of the entire radical left ranks, the rejection of the 'Renaissance figures' like Tagore was not above controversy and divided the Naxalites themselves. Evaluation of the latter was carried out, on the basis of their concrete political role in the colonial context by Charu Majumdar to settle the debate. "On the question of 'Murti-bhanga', he [Comrade 'Purna' alias

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10. Majumdar, Charu. 1970. 'Unite with the peasant's revolutionary struggle' pp.8-9.



Shushital Roy Chowdhury- a prominent Naxalite leader] does not oppose attacking Gandhi or other Congress leaders. He is protesting against attacks on figures like Tagore, Vidyasagar, Rammohan etc, on the ground that these bourgeois intellectuals belong to the classical bourgeois democratic revolution framework....the first task in achieving bourgeois democracy in colonial India is to earn national Independence. Did any of these bourgeois intellectuals who Comrade Purna is trying to defend utter a word about driving the colonialists away? These intellectuals have not only failed to support the first war of Independence in 1857, they have actually opposed it. Therefore the reformist movements that these intellectuals led were in reality directed towards diverting the common mass away from the anti-colonial struggle.<sup>11</sup>

Some of the Subalternist historians' treatment of these intellectual figures bears a striking semblance of tone with the Naxalite analysis. In his study of the 'collaborationist' politics, Ranajit Guha identifies 'Dharma' as a major problematic idiom-as invoked by Tagore during the 1905 anti-Partition movement in Bengal. This was

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11. Majumdar, Charu. 1970. 'On students and youths' A Reply to the Document of Sushital Roy Chowdhary', P.28.

the idiom that matured into the 'Hindu middle-class nationalism' according to Guha-that eventually escalated the existing antagonisms within the colony's body politic (the Hindu-Muslim issue for example).<sup>12</sup>

If the analysis of Tagore, Rammohan Roy and other 'Renaissance' figures by the Subalternists call to the attention their temperamental parallels with the Naxalite assessment, then the Subalternist treatment of Gandhi certainly echoes the proximity in their political vantage-points. Declaring the 'Trusteeship theory' of Gandhi as 'the most important of all ideologies of class-collaboration' Ranajit Guha writes-

".....he (Gandhi) also hoped that the capitalist class would 'read the signs of the times' and voluntarily surrender their wealth before the 'impending chaos into which, if the capitalist does not wake up betimes, awakened but ignorant, famishing will plunge the country and which, not even the armed force that a powerful government can bring into play can avert'. This appeal to the capitalist' fear of consequences of class struggle and their sense of Dharma did not, apparently, go unheeded".<sup>13</sup>

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12. Guha, Ranajit. 1989. 'Dominance without Hegemony and it's Historiography', in Guha, Ranajit ed. Subltern Studies, Volume VI OUP, Delhi) P.

13. Ibid., pp. 245-246.

### The 'Comprador' bourgeoisie

The indigenous bourgeoisie immediately partook the 'universalist pretence' posing itself as the national bourgeoisie while compromising with the colonialists and inheriting in practice the 'liberal bourgeois ideology of colonialism'.<sup>14</sup> The Congress leadership represented this particular class and its politics. Consequently, it was the leadership of this section that protected the imperialist interests and led to the failure of the innumerable peasant uprisings-the reasoning behind their characterization by the Naxalites as 'Comprador'/ 'Dalal' bourgeoisie).

"Thus, the successive peasant uprisings all failed due to lack of scientific discourse (allusion to Marxist analysis) on one hand and proper leadership on the other. The Indian bourgeoisie, created and spawned by the British imperialists were essentially comprador. Their main objective was to leash the popular unrest through reformist movements and bargain with imperialists for some individual gains. They posed themselves as the natural leaders of the masses and was promoted in this image by the imperialists as well".<sup>15</sup>

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14. Ibid., P. 212.

15. Majumdar, Charu. 1969. 'China's Chairman is our Chairman, Chinese path our path', in Ghatona Probaho, (The Chinese Revolution Issue).

The description of the national bourgeoisie recurs almost unchanged in the analysis of Ranajit Guha. Infact, other than actually mentioning the bourgeoisie as 'Comprador', Guha's exposition painstakingly lays down a political indictment of the class that leaves no one in doubt about its historical character and politics.

"Pliant and prone to compromise from their inception, they lived in a state of happy accommodation with imperialism ..... the destruction of the colonial state was never a part of their project. They abjured and resolutely opposed all forms of armed struggle against the raj, and settled for pressure politics as their main tactical means in bargaining for power."<sup>16</sup>

#### **The Complicity of the Left in the 'bourgeois-nationalist' Project**

The consequence of mis-reading this indigenous bourgeoisie as the 'hegemonist' national bourgeoisie by the middle-class leadership of the Indian Communist movement, according to the interpretation of Ranajit Guha amounted to an uncritical acceptance of the 'liberal bourgeois ideology' by the latter and its participation in the 'bourgeois-nationalist' project. This ideological complicity of the left with the 'comprador' bourgeoisie

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16. Guha, R. 'Dominance without Hegemony and its historiography' op. cit. P. 214.

gave rise to the left's vindication of what Samar Sen refers to as the "apparently rational bluffs" in circulation "during Nehru".<sup>17</sup>

These 'rational bluffs' or slogans articulated the 'deceptive' 'bourgeois-nationalist project which the communists participated in.

" 'Parliamentary Democracy', 'development' and 'non-alignment' have been the three main slogans with which the Congress rulers led by Nehru deceived the Indian people...For about two decades the Congress rulers have carried on their utterly reactionary politics under the cover of these deceptive slogans. But how could such a thing happen for so long in India where the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal hatred of the people is so intense?. The main reason for this lies in the treacherous capitulationist line followed by the revisionist leading clique of the Indian Communist movement".<sup>18</sup>

The ideological outcome of this complicity for the Communist movement was, according to another Subalternist

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17. "During Nehru, it was possible for various kinds of people to lead a comfortable life behind the facade of various cheap, easily accessible and apparently rational bluffs. The intellectuals were keeping in good health. The party bosses led a smooth life. They gave up thinking about revolution altogether ('Dhal-Talwarer Chinta') as well as about the common man ('Nidhiramer Chinta') and instead concentrated on Parliamentary Democracy and Peaceful Co-existence." Sen, Samar. 1978. 'Chandrabindu Badey' in Sen, Samar. Babu Brittanto, (Dey's, Calcutta) pp 85-86.
18. 'The Shackles of 1947 Most Be Smashed' Editorial, 'Liberation' Reprinted from Liberation, vol. one, No.Ten (August 1968) in Ghosh, Suniti K. ed. 1982. The Historic Turning-point: A 'Liberation' Anthology, Volume one, (published by S.K. Ghosh, Calcutta) P.306.

historian-Dipesh Chakravarty, to arrive at a 'nationalist reading of Marxism'. Since the Left had much 'sympathy' for the ostensible nationalist project' to build a 'democratic', 'secular' 'India', the Communists rallied with the 'economist critique of colonialism' that lay 'at the heart' of the bourgeois-nationalist project. The Communist strategy ended up 'bending Marxism to serve the cause of a 'liberal-bourgeois nationalism' and left unquestioned 'the most important ideological category' namely-the nation.<sup>19</sup> Hence the bourgeois ideology of nationalism became another fundamental point of rejection for the Naxalites. Charu Majumdar, the ideologue, located this problem specifically and linked the 'revisionist' politics of the Communists with their complicity in the project.

"The only role of 'bourgeois-nationalism' at this stage of the struggle is to weaken the intensity of the movement. Hence, there can be no real progress in the movement without striking at such 'bourgeois-nationalism.' This is why we have turned our faces away from it and raised the slogan 'China's Chairman is our Chairman.' Even today, 'Revisionism keeps on attacking us from behind the facade of

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19. Chakravarty, Dipesh. 1985. 'Discussion : Invitation to a Dialogue' in Guha, Ranajit ed. Subaltern Studies, Volume Four, (Oxford University Press, New Delhi) P.373.

'bourgeois-nationalism; unless we attack the later, we will fail to counter 'Revisionism.'"<sup>20</sup>

#### The Search For The New 'Idiom'

The Naxalite strategy of Revolution, informed by this evaluative discourse, adopted a Marxist strategy of 'armed agrarian revolution' led by the peasantry. This was the articulation of their search for a contextual idiom of rational politics uncorrupted by the 'revisionist' discourses of 'economist' struggles. On one hand, they attempted to restore the leadership of the struggle to the real 'vanguard' class-the peasantry, and on the other hand they tried to counter the 'petty-bourgeois' degeneration of the movement through 'Khatam'/ 'individual annihilation' (an issue we would return to in greater details in the next chapter). Most importantly, the Naxalites emphatically stressed the question of change as 'political' in sharp contrast to the earlier 'determinist' models. Since we have been aligning the 'texts of some Subalternist historians along the analytical stands of the Naxalite movement, it would be interesting to note at this point how the Subalternists reacted to this evaluation. Let us take a look at the strategies that the Subaltern Studies employ-a

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20. Majumdar, Charu. 1970. 'Unite with the Peasants Revoutionalry Struggle'.

school of historiography that explicitly rallies itself with the Naxalite politics in the declaration of its 'central problematic'.

"It is the study of this historic failure of the nation to come to its own, a failure due to the inadequacy of the bourgeoisie as well as of the working class to lead it into a decisive victory over colonialism and a bourgeois-democratic revolution of either the classical nineteenth century type under the hegemony of the bourgeoisie or a more modern type under the hegemony of workers and peasants, that is a 'new democracy'- it is the study of this failure which constitutes the central problematic of the historiography of colonial India".<sup>21</sup>

A central strategy of the Subalternist historians can be located in the attempt to 'recover' a new political idiom that was revolutionary in content, 'traditional' in genealogy and finally, outside the comprehension of both the bourgeois politics and traditional Communist discourses. The major reason behind its non-comprehension was the fact that it was located in the 'subaltern' (peasantry-in this context) realm and articulated itself through 'Religiosity' which the 'Enlightened' discourses always failed to grasp'. Ranajit Guha expresses this idiom as 'Dharmik Protest'. In the analysis that follows, Guha incorporates the traditional protest forms with those to be found in the national

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21. Guha, Ranajit. 1982. 'On some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India'op. cit. pp.6-7.



liberation struggle as well as within the Communist movement. But he refrains from attributing the form with an identifiably 'progressive' character by incorporating the negative violence as well.

"It (Dharmik Protest) was manifested in some of the most dramatic forms of popular protest throughout the colonial period-in peasant uprisings variously called 'hool', 'dhing', 'bidroha,' 'hangama', 'fituri' etc., in 'hizrat' or desertion enmasse of the peasants or other labouring people (eg. miners during the santal hool of 1988, Assam tea plantation workers during the Non-co-operation movement etc); in 'dharna' or protest by sitting down in the offender's presence with pledge not to move untill the redress of the grievance; in 'hartal' or the general suspension of public activity ; in 'dharmaghat' or withdrawal of labour; in 'jatmara' or measures to destroy the offender's caste (identity) by refusal to render such specialist services as are required to insure him and his kin against pollution; in 'danga' or sectarian, ethnic, caste and class violence involving large bodies of subaltern population".<sup>22</sup>

Guha's methodology can be seen from two critical angles. Firstly, his analysis signifies the attempt to

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22. Guha, Ranajit 1989. 'Dominance without Hegemony and its Historiography'op. cit.P. 269.

locate an idiom of radical politics that does not depend on the mediation' by any intermediary class to protest against exploitation. And secondly, he initiates in the process an interrogation of the 'past' in search of the 'Subaltern' politics & 'consciousness'. This, therefore, constituted the strategy employed in the attempt of overcoming the inadequacy and contingency of the 'determinist' Marxist discourses on one hand and their 'failure' to effect a revolution on the other.

### **The New Strategies**

The urge to discover a new idiom to communicate with the subaltern and the methodology of interrogating the past, however, were not unique to the Subaltern Studies.

We come across these tendencies within the body of different cultural productions scattered over time. What unifies these productions is the fact that they engage either in an attempt to encompass the social complexities and values that remained outside the rigid 'class discourses' of the earlier Marxist variety or in a declared cultural strategy in line with the Maoist practice. In other words, these tendencies can be identified in the cultural productions that remain pre-occupied with the contemporary Marxist discourses and debates.

The following quotation - an excerpt from a short story by the novelist Ashim Ray (whose protagonist is a ex-Communist Party member-turned journalist) can serve as a piece of evidence.

"Perhaps the fact that we don't have any geography, any time for our subjectivity is the biggest professional edge in our business of words; just as we are without a past, so we no longer need a future.

Some people would always be misfits in this world, they are there in the capitalist society, they would be there in a socialist society as well .... To me a pan-Indian identity is meaningless, a lie of an existence. I am regional, I will continue to remain one. I face the tides of my first youth, my childhood. I remember the summers in my village of undivided (un-Partitioned) Bengal-mustard oil rubbed all over my body ... sailing up the big river ..... I am Bose, Amitavo Bose, ex-comrade Amita."<sup>23</sup>

Ritwik Ghatak, for his part, delved into the past in search of the traditional forms of representation in his attempt to evolve a new aesthetic idiom. He came up with the notion of the 'archetype' using mythologies and epics to narrate the contemporary.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, we come across the use of myths and epics in the Naxalite cultural

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23. Ray, Ashim. 1981. 'Goralbari' in Ray, Ashim. Ashim Rayer Galpo, (Monisha, Calcutta) P.85.

24. Rajhyaksha, Ashish. 1982. Ritwik Ghatak : A Return to the Epic, (Screen Unit, Bombay) P.54.

activist-Amol Ray as an identified Maoist practice. Amol Ray uses elements from 'Ramayan' to write a narrative of Guhak the 'Chandal' revolting against Dasarath the king and similarly inverts the focus while writing on the 'Jatugriha' episode of 'Mahabharat' by making the five 'Nishads' (tribal hunters) the central characters instead of the Pandavas (as in the main text). The literary manoeuvre of bringing the 'Marginal' to the centre is undertaken with a deliberate political intent.

"Why did I start writing such dramas? I think the answer is because we have to merge our politics with the tradition of the Indian mass that has been there since time immemorial. Mao Tse Tung's articles are generously punctuated with instances from myths and folklores used to earn spontaneous consensus for his political arguments. A phrase became quite popular during the Naxalite movement - 'We don't fight like Rana Pratap, rather it is what Shivaji used to practice'. What can be a better way of representing the guerilla strategy?"<sup>25</sup>

Thus, the shift to the 'Subaltern' as the centre of the discourse and the interrogation of 'Past' became major methodological strands for the new intellectual academic discourses which were pre-occupied with the politics of

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25. Roy, Amol. 1992. 'Bangla Natokey Naxalbarir Probhav O Ami' in Bhattacharya, Amar. edited, Naxalbarir Probhabe Shilpa, Sahitya, Chalacchitra, (Naya Ishtahar Publication, Calcutta) P.38.

Revolution. On the other hand one can notice them as 'maneuvers' and tendencies in the cultural productions (concerned with the Marxist discourse) that emerged during or in the post-movement phase. In that sense one can identify them as the intellectual consequences of the movement or as continuation of the politics in a different realm. This realm is the realm of ideas-the ideological superstructure of the system. This notion of carrying the resistance at the ideological sphere as a practice can be traced to the Maoist concept of 'Cultural revolution' and the Naxalite way of positing change as a 'political' question.

#### **The Engagement with the 'Cultural' realm**

A very fundamental component of the Naxalite politics was its engagement with the ideological. In other words, the distinctiveness of such politics derives from the fact that it posited the question of change as 'political' in sharp contrast with the earlier 'economist' theorizations of change (that engaged more with the 'base'). The Naxalite discourse, taking the cue from the Great Proletarian cultural Revolution, identified the importance of the realm of 'ideas' as a major front of resistance. This, in effect amounted to the inversion of the 'base-superstructure' framework and the established primacy of the 'economic'.

"In general, as he (Mao-Tse Tung) explains, the economic basis is the

principal aspect of contradiction in the movement of society, as opposed to the ideological superstructure, which is the non-principal aspect, but in certain conditions the non-principal aspect of a contradiction may be transformed into the principal aspect, just as a non-antagonistic contradiction, if incorrectly handled, may become antagonistic.

The old ideas will not disappear of themselves: on the contrary they persist, and if they are not fought, they will re-assert themselves even to the point of reacting on the economic basis, and so bring about a revival of the old class-divisions."<sup>26</sup>

There is one aspect in Mao Tse Tung's analysis that needs to be mentioned at this juncture. Mao's warning of the 'old ideas' 'reasserting' themselves points to the threat of a counter-revolution upsetting the socialist 'base' created by the Chinese Revolution. Hence, the agenda is one of continuing the ideological struggle in the cultural sphere. The reality in the Third World, however, is not one of a post-revolutionary society. In our context the pertinent question for the Marxists was how to effect a revolution that has been thwarted time and again. Put in another way, where to locate the principal sphere of contradiction whose comprehension will contribute to a successful revolutionary strategy. At this point the realm of resistance indicated by

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26. Thomson, George. 1992. "Marxism in China Today", in Ghosh, Suniti Kumar ed. The Historic Turning Point : A Liberation Anthology, Volume one, (published by S.K. Ghosh, Calcutta), pp. 255-258.

Mao Tse Tung to consolidate the socialist society was identified as the front of resistance crucial to establish the socialist society in the Naxalite strategy of revolution.<sup>27</sup>

### **The Post-Structuralist Practice of Engaging with the 'Cultural'**

We encounter this particular trajectory i.e. the methodology of 'interrogating the past' and 're-inscribing' history as strategies of resistance in the 'cultural realm' in another discourse - that of the post-Structuralist debate in the West. The post-Structuralist practice of 'Deconstruction' (which is employed by the Subaltern Studies) derives its critical energy, according to Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak, from the post-Nietzschean movement of questioning the Enlightenment liberal-humanist discourse.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, the post-structuralist discourses deliver

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27. "To negate is Revolution. The task of building up revolutionary culture has started the day the students and youths have begun their struggle against the bourgeois culture". - Majumdar, Charu. 1970. 'On Revolutionary Culture and Literature'.

28. Chakravarty Spivak, Gayatri. 1985. 'Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography' in Guha, Ranajit ed. Subaltern Studies, Volume Four (Oxford University Press, Delhi), P.337. The target of the Deconstructionists are the 'grand recits' of Enlightenment - "the rationalist narratives of the knowing subject, full of a certain sort of benevolence towards others, wanting to welcome these others into his own ... understanding of the word, so that they too can be liberated and begin to inhabit a world that is the best of all possible worlds". - Hamsyn, Sarah ed.1990. Gayatri Chakravartty Spivak, The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues, (Routledge, Chapman and Hall, New York and London) pp.19-20.

their critiques of ideology and capitalism in response to the 'failure' of the 'determinist' Marxist discourses which had become 'contingent' and 'provisional' in understanding the contemporary reality.<sup>29</sup> The Subaltern Studies is, therefore, read by Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak in the context of the post-structuralist genealogy.

"I would read it (the Subaltern Studies), then as a strategic use of positivistic essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest. This would put them in line with the Marx who locates fetishization, the ideological determination of the 'concrete', and spins the narrative of the development of the money-form; with the Nietzsche who offers us genealogy in place of historiography, the Foucault who plots the construction of a 'counter-memory', the Barthes of semiotropy and the Derrida of 'affirmative deconstruction'."<sup>30</sup>

The break with 'determinism' that the post-structuralist discourses attempted was translated into a methodology of reworking 'historical materialism' inspired by the theorisations of Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci's notion of the 'Integral state' as the contemporary Capitalist reality

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29. Hamsyn, Sarah ed. 1990. Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak, The Post-Colonial Critic: op.cit. pp.21-22.
30. Chakravarty Spivak, Gayatri. 1985. 'Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography' in Guha, Ranajit ed. Subaltern Studies, Volume four, (Oxford University Press, Delhi) pp.341-342.



with the 'diffusion of hegemony' into 'all levels of the civil society' became the central analytical model in the new discourses.<sup>31</sup> The implication of such a model denotes similar theoretical shifts as witnessed in the Mao-ist practice of 'ideological struggle'. In relation to the classical Marxist tradition, the Gramscian reading implied a 'double inversion' - the attribution of primacy to the 'ideological superstructures over the economic structure', and 'civil society' (consensus) over 'political society' - the state (force).<sup>32</sup> Hence, the engagement of the new discourses with the 'cultural'.

The practice of the Subalternist historians can, therefore, be seen as the attempt to evolve 'alternative' Marxist discourses within the context of an agenda of 'ideological' resistance that is informed by the historical evaluation of the Naxalite politics. When we consider the intellectual consequences of the Naxalite movement, this strategy of engaging with the 'cultural realm' of the bourgeois system and thereby providing it's critique seems to be one of the most serious and contemporary forms of practice committed to the spirit and politics of the movement.

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31. Mouffe, Chantal ed. 1979. Gramsci and Marxist Theory, (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London), pp.4-5.

32. Ibid., pp.2-3.

"To carry forward the resistance that writing offers to established thought, to what has already been done, to what everyone thinks, to what is well known, to what is widely recognised, to what is 'readable', to everything which can change its form and make itself acceptable to opinion in general".<sup>33</sup>

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33. Lyotard, 1988b: 302 in Markovic, Mihailo. 1974. The Contemporary Marx: Essays on Humanist Communism (Spokesman Books, Great Britain) P.127. Interestingly, the 'critical tendency of questioning humanism' in the post-Structuralist practice is located by commentators in the 'New Left' movement of 1960s in the West.
- "in the first stages of the debate, modernism is identified with a liberal humanism that is then exposed as inadequate and even inimical to the world of real human needs and desires ... these early theorists .. of the 'new sensibility' accuse modernism of arrogant anthropo-centrism or ... of narrow euro-centrism, of repressive and reductive nationalism, of elitism and of intellectual self-deception ... It is remarkable how much of what is now broadly seen as the post-modern agenda was already more or less in place by the end of the 1960s". Bertens, Hans. 1995. The Idea of the Postmodern: A History, (Routledge, London & New York P.334.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE COLLAPSE OF THE MOVEMENT AND AFTERMATH

#### **The Collapse**

By 1970, the Naxalite movement was facing severe crisis. The programme of developing revolutionary 'base areas' in the countryside had suffered major setbacks in the face of state repression and the movement had shifted its focus to Calcutta where the Naxalites were practicing 'Red Terror' through 'annihilation.' Struggles continued in different pockets of the agrarian sector but apart from a few incidents, the overall situation did not seem to point towards any possibility of a 'spontaneous' revolutionary 'Peoples Army' being constituted by the landless and agricultural labourers who would actuate the seizure of power according to the Naxalite ideologues. 'Urban terror', therefore, became the centre of political action. The state had already begun responding through severe police repressions—a prelude to the massive 'counter - terror' it was soon to unleash. At the same time, total violence ensued between the Naxalites and the CPI (M) activists as 'annihilations' and retributions continued.

Problems plagued the ranks of the Naxalite leadership as well. Charu Majumdar's political strategies were

beginning to be criticised and rejected as 'adventurist' and 'counter productive' for the movement. Shushital Roy Chowdhury, a prominent Naxalite leader, accused Charu Majumdar of conceiving too 'immediate' a strategy of revolution instead of taking the pertinent line of 'a protracted struggle'. He also severely criticised Majumdar's conception of 'Annihilation' as a Mao-ist practice.<sup>1</sup>

The Bihar State Committee, led by Satyanarayan Sinha, soon followed up these criticisms with two more serious charges-that of 'confusing the democratic, socialist and cultural revolutions' and destroying the mass character of revolution by boycotting the partial and economic struggles of workers, peasant and petty bourgeoisie'.<sup>2</sup>

The next leader to fall out with Charu Majumdar was Ashim Chatterjee. In the document circulated by 'Bengal-Bihar-Orissa Border Regions committee', Chatterjee criticised Charu Majumdar for "advocating an all-India insurrection" ignoring the realistic "theory of uneven development of the Indian Revolution". Unlike others, Chatterjee did support the 'annihilation' line but at the

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1. Ghosh, Sankar. 1974., The Naxalite Movement : A Maoist Experiment (Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, Cullutta). P.136.

2. Ibid P.142.

same time stressed on the need for developing 'base areas' and mass organisations' crucial for re-establishing contact with the people.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile the groups loyal to Majumdar started an experiment of converting the rural and partly urban areas of Birbhum into a revolutionary 'base area'. As the pressure for switching the movement into a line of mass movement and less 'adventurist' programmes mounted on Charu Majumdar, the state repression intensified and the police unleashed an unprecedented 'counter terror' (following the Andhra experience of tackling the Naxalites).<sup>4</sup>

From November (1970) encounters between the police and the Naxals, resulting in death and injury to the latter, 'were almost of daily occurrence'.<sup>5</sup>

Eye-witness accounts in the Beliaghata 'encounter' and the contradictory police information (followed by mid-way aborted CBI enquiry) in the Barasat 'encounter' revealed that these 'encounter's were fake. In reality, the police

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3. Ibid P.147.

4. According to 'Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee, two hundred Naxalites were killed by the police in the so-called take encounters. Ibid P.157.

5. Ibid P.160.

were simply arresting these youths and shooting them.<sup>6</sup> Around December, encounters started occurring within the jails. According to a correspondent of Frontier<sup>7</sup> the unofficial figure of the Naxalites killed in prison between March 1970 and August 1971 stood at 200.<sup>8</sup> In June 1971, the Ajoy Mukherjee ministry (second United Front) resigned and President's rule was declared. The 'counter terror' against the Naxalites was fully unleashed.

"Within six weeks of President's rule, the worst political carnage in the history of this turbulent state occurred in Cossipore-Baranagar,.... For more than twelve hours this area was at the mercy of armed hooligans; the administration seemed to have abdicated so that the area might be cleared of Naxals."<sup>9</sup>

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6. Sankar Ghosh recounts an eye-witness account told by a resident Mrs. Lakshmi Bannerjee to a team of M.P.s - "on the 19-20th at about 5'o clock in the morning I saw from my house a black jeep netted with wire coming across the canal. I also saw another black van coming along with the jeep. Then I saw four young boys, whom I knew ... They were made to stand in a row near some 'mankachu' plants. After that a police officer started firing at them .... I heard about 17 or 18 rounds of firing". Ibid pp.160-161.
  7. CPI (ML): 'The Twilight Hour' Frontier, 8 January, 1973.
  8. The worst of them all, the Dumdum Jail 'encounter' led to the deter of 16 Naxalites while as many as 88 were injured. Ghosh, Sankar. op. cit. P.165.
  9. Ibid P.166.

Thus, 'resistance groups' armed with the administration's consent began wiping out the Naxalite pockets in Calcutta. At the same time, a prominent Naxalite leader in hiding-Saroj Datta 'disappeared' after he was allegedly arrested by the police.

In November, 1971 Charu Majumdar issued two directives to the urban and rural cadres emphasising the need for engaging in mass movement for the first time. It was also a declaration that proclaimed 'middle and even rich peasants' as the allies of poor peasantry - a position that was entirely new to his erstwhile understanding.<sup>10</sup>

With the deployment of army around the elections, the ongoing 'Birbhum experiment' was crushed. The movement came to a virtual end with Charu Majumdar's arrest on 20 July, 1972.

#### **The Re-Emergence and Shift to Electoral Politics**

When the Naxalites re-grouped around 1975, the Central Committee led by Satyanarayan Sinha declared an initial line of adhering to the revolutionary path. But the position was soon reversed with the defeat of Indira Gandhi Congress in the 1977 General Elections. The new resolution reflected the earlier lines of criticism and declared the eventual

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10. Ibid pp.172-173.

entry of the Naxalites into the realm of parliamentary politics and mass movement.

"The parliamentary path peddled by the revisionists and revolutionary utilisation of the bourgeois parliament are not the same thing. The Central Committee in its overreaction to revisionism, wrongly bracketed the two entirely mutually antagonistic concepts and adopted the line of total and general boycott. The impetuosity of accomplishing the revolution on the morrow to our resolve led the C.C. and the whole party to a negative and harmful line of boycottism. It led to boycott of partial and economic struggles and boycott of mass organisations and threw the entire party and the revolutionary movement off its correct rails. (1978f :401)."<sup>11</sup>

Apart from this general theoretical justification of taking the 'legal' parliamentary path, the new line was also projected as a tactical necessity in bargaining for the release of all Naxalite prisoners. This was keeping in mind the anti-authoritarian sentiment that followed the Emergency and contributed to the establishment of the Janta government. In the Assembly elections that followed in West Bengal, three CPI(ML) candidates fought as

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11. Mukherjee, Partha N. 1983. From left Extremism To Electoral Politics : Naxalite Participation in Elections, (Manohar, New Delhi), P.47. According to Mukherjee, it was "the ideological legitimisation via Lenin demonstrating that 'Marxism-Leninism' does not reject talks and even compromises with the adversaries or even enemies in principle of in general'". P.49.



Independents-Lebachand Tudu from Nayagram, Santosh Rana from Gopiballavpur and Himadri Chakravarti from Jhargram.

Santosh Rana won by a narrow margin in a keenly contested election while the other two candidates lost. Interestingly, the issues that were taken up by the CPI(ML) during and after the elections reflected the essence of their new programme that of organising a radical mass movement within parliamentary parameters.

The Naxalites urged for rationalisation of wages and abolition of the discriminatory wage rates between the sexes. On the issue of Tenancy Rights the Party insisted that the legitimate right of the sharecropper to keep seventy-five percent of the produce be enforced. Other than these, they stressed on doing away with the 'begar' and 'ghar majoor' systems and wanted the recovery and distribution of vested land to be expedited. Finally, to ensure the realisation of these objectives, they gave a call to form 'Krishak Samitis' to be constituted exclusively by the landless labourers and poor peasants.<sup>12</sup>

The electoral venture of CPI(ML) marked a new phase in the political history of the Naxalites. In spite of the fact

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12. Ibid P.176.

that several factions like the Peoples War Group,<sup>13</sup> continued to follow the earlier line, the overall trend was one of mass movement and parliamentary politics with some feudal pockets still witnessing intermittent violence. According to Achin Vanaik, 'thirty-five thousand members' were recorded in a 'secret government study' in 1983. Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal were their main areas of operation while they had some influences in the 'tribal forest regions of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa'.<sup>14</sup> The largest among these groups was the CPI(ML) Liberation which launched the 'Indian People's Front' around mid-eighties as a step towards broadening the base of their peasant movement. Writing in 1986, Vinod Mishra, the General Secretary of the organisation, sums up the situation of the movement from within -

Attempts have been made and are still being made to formulate a comprehensive 'left' line by certain groups, but no such line can be claimed to have been developed so far. Semi-Anarchism is still a tendency debating over forms and methods of struggle and organisation, and a major section of those presently obsessed with this tendency will surely come back to the Marxist-Leninist fold

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13. Banned in July 1996 by the Chandrababu Naidu Government in Andhra Pradesh.

14. Vanaik, Achin. 1990. The Painful Transition, Bourgeois Democracy in India (Verso, London, New York), P165.

as they gain more experience with the passage of time".<sup>15</sup>

He articulates the general strategy of the Naxalites in the post-Movement stage-

"....for boldly expanding the peasant struggles which no doubt hit substantial sections of the rich peasants....And precisely on the basis of these struggles did we work for developing the revolutionary bloc of the workers, peasants and petty bourgeoisie as an alternative to congress rule even as we left the door open for tactical maneuverings with the parties and factions of the bourgeois opposition".<sup>16</sup>

#### **The Analysis of 'Failure': The 'Peasantry' As Vanguard**

In the period that followed the collapse of the movement, there were different strands of analysis on the failure from within the movement's ranks. These analyses constituted the basis of the political line to be adopted when the Naxalites re-emerged around mid-seventies. These strands can be identified under two major criticisms- the partaking of a 'hasty' revolutionary strategy with 'adventurist' programmes such as 'annihilation', and the total boycott of mass organisation and the partial economic struggles of peasants, workers and the petty bourgeoisie.

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15. Mishra, Vinod. 1986. Introduction' in Report From The Flaming Fields of Bihar, A CPI (ML) Document, (published by Probodh Bhattacharya, 108, Radhamadhab Dutta Garden Lane, Calcutta - 700010). P.22.

16. Ibid pp.22-23.

Correspondingly, the re-organised Naxalites undertook a line of mass movement and participation in parliamentary processes as part of 'the protracted struggle' denouncing its earlier semi anarchist' tendency.

Let us now discuss in brief some theoretical analyses provided by scholars on why a strategy of revolution based on 'peasantry' and the centrality of land question' eventually failed.

D.Arnold explains the problem of 'peasantry' in terms of territoriality'-"...the peasants identification with that small territory that encompasses almost all his economic, social and cultural ties and beyond which he begins to feel himself a stranger.... It takes an exceptional set of circumstances a flood or famine, that drives him from his home...to lift him more that momentarily out of his intense commitment to locality".<sup>17</sup>

Thus, the failure of the peasantry to partake a radical role (once its land question is addressed) is explained by Arnold through a psychological attribute of the 'subaltern consciousness'. Arnold's analysis, however, fails to explain the problem beyond a certain tautological perception

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17. Arnold, D. 'Rebellious Hillmen: The Gudem Rampa Risings, 1839-1924', in Guha, Ranajit edited Subaltern Studies, Volume One, (Oxford University Press, Delhi)

of history since both the 'subaltern consciousness' and the 'history of exploitation' produce and shape each other.

The rupture in the 'local' politics of the peasantry is analysed by Ranajit Guha in a distinctive idiom- 'Dharmik Protest'. Guha's postulation that the political forces leading these movements could neither comprehend nor control this distinctive form of politics and its idiom of 'Religiosity', locates the problem at a different level altogether. While Arnold seeks to explain the failure as a shortcoming of the peasant's consciousness, Guha treats it as the failure of the 'mediating'/leading classes.

Barrington Moore, on the other hand, refers to the perpetuation of 'traditional structure' in the Indian agrarian sector as one possible explanation. According to Moore, the feudal structures left undisturbed by the colonialists presented a reality ridden with fragmentation (due to caste & other ethno-religious factors). The lack of homogeneity in the rural populace is what posed the most serious problem in forging the 'radial solidarity' required for bringing about revolutionary changes.<sup>18</sup>

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18. Moore, Barrington. 1973. Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World, (Pengim University Books).

Tornquist offers an alternative theory based on the analysis of political economy. In his study of the Indonesian Communist movement (the Indonesian Communist Party - PKI tried to mobilise the peasants on the issue of land re-distribution), he suggested that the fundamental problem was not 'concentration of land' but rather a 'concentration of agricultural surplus' in the hands of the 'ruling elite'.<sup>19</sup> In spite of the fact that Tornquist suggests a 'structural parallel' between the Indonesian and Indian experience, the Indian reality does not seem to conform to his analysis. In the particular context of India, the 'concentration of 'agricultural surplus' follows as a direct resultant of 'concentration of land' in the hands of the ruling elite. Consequently, the issue of land reform and land re-distribution still continues to be a central question for both revolutionary as well as parliamentary forces in India.

What all the above analysis (with the exception of Tornquist's) seem to suggest together is that the already fragmented peasantry, steeped in feudal relations (but possessing a native politics of protest) could not be fused by the mediating class with the Proletariat. This was the

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19. Torquist, O. 1984 Dilemmas of Third World Communism: The Destruction of The PKI in Indonesia, (London).

central problem in the Naxalite strategy of armed agrarian revolution. It is in forging this fusion that the Maoist key to successful revolution lies. As Michael Foucault recounts -

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- "If we took to the fundamentals we see that the revolutionary process is always the fusion of the rebellion of those classes which are constituted as such, with that of the classes that are fragmented..... And Mao from his red base where he was surrounded-sent appeals to the Central Committee of the Party, saying roughly, send me just three cadres from a factory to counteract a bit the ideology of all my 'barefoot' people. The discipline of war against the enemy was not enough....The Red Army under the leadership of the Party, that is the peasant war under the direction of the proletariat, was the crucible which made possible the fusion between fragmenting peasant classes and the proletariat".<sup>20</sup>

#### **'Annihilation' & the 'mediating' leadership-the Petty Bourgeoisie**

A major aspect of the Naxalite movement that faced the severest criticisms within and without the Naxalite ranks was the strategy of 'Khatam' or 'Annihilation'-the concrete practice of 'Terror. Let us take a brief look at what lay at the heart of such practice.

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20. Gordon, Colin. ed. 1980. Michel Foucault, Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews other Writings, 1972-77, (New York).

There was an awareness within the Naxalite evaluation about the paradox it shared with the political history if tried to reject-the petty bourgeois composition of the movement. Charu Majumdar repeatedly emphasized, the possibility of such a movement to 'degenerate' and partake a 'petty bourgeois character' in its politics. 'Annihilation' was formulated as a practice that would deter any such possibilities a practice of 'revolutionising the revolutionary forces'.

For the peasantry, this particular form of 'class-war' was expected to help them deny their traditional and local allegiances, transforming them into a 'politically conscious vanguard' force. On the other hand, for the urban petty bourgeois radicals, it was the revolutionary course to destroy their own 'class-ties' and identify with the masses. This was the prescription for creating the revolutionary-the 'new man' as Charu Majumdar postulated.

"Only by waging class struggle, the battle of annihilation the new man will be created, the new man who will defy deaths and will be free from all thought of self interest. And with his death-defying spirit, he will go close to the enemy, snatch his rifle, avenge the martyrs and the peoples army will emerge."<sup>21</sup>

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21. Majumdar, Charu. 1978. 'Report on Political Organisation' Sen, Panda & Lahiri, 1978



Thus, 'annihilation' as shock therapy (for the system and the revolutionary as well) become the core of the Naxalite practice. Political strategies with their endless complexities, 'suasive propaganda's, the centralised political control of the movement gave way to the 'propaganda by deed'.<sup>22</sup> It was establishing a politics through ritual violence-a strategy that depended on, more than anything else, the theatrical element involved in it. But who constituted the victims of this violence ? Rabindra Ray writes-

"To begin with, of course, these (class enemies) are the Jotedars (landlords) so that the abstraction of their theory is fleshed in an embodiment that coincides with the practice of their life. With the inauguration of the Calcutta Terror, these come to be ordinary policemen, CPI (M) activities, petty oppressors, political opponents. The class enemies become those who symbolically embody the opposition to the course of revolution".<sup>23</sup>

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22. "The shift to 'propaganda by deed'-a strategy of shocking the system with 'violent acts of profanity' is traced in the New Left Movement in the West by Jerry Rubin. In the context of America, he talks of "hordes of niggers and long-hair scums invading white middle class houses fucking on the living room floor, crashing in the chandeliers, spewing sperm on Jesus pictures, breaking the furniture and smashing Sunday School napalm blood America forever". Rubin, Jerry. 1978 Do It!, (New York).

23. Roy, Rabindra. 1992. The Naxalites & their ideology, (Oxford, Delhi).

The 'class-enemies', the victims of violence were the petty-bourgeoisie themselves. As the practice of 'annihilation' shifted from the peasant perspective to the city the identification of 'class enemies' of the petty bourgeois radical ran its natural course from the 'Jotedars' to the immediate relations and personal class of the revolutionary. The atrophy that plagued the revolutionary agenda was realised to be nourishing from the revolutionary agency itself. This is why Charu Majumdar reiterated on 'Annihilation' as the 'Corrective Surgery' throughout the movement. This is what produced the schizophrenic denial and interrogation of the revolutionary's history and culture. For revolution to survive, the petty bourgeois radical had to sanction and celebrate his own funeral. Because as Rabindra Ray writes-

"In a very fundamental sense, the 'class-hatred' that Charu Majumdar ensconced at the heart of the revolutionary process was the central experience of self hatred of the Naxalite terrorist".<sup>24</sup>

This is what constituted the critical paradox of the Naxalite revolutionary strategy and ensured the movement's tragic destiny.

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24. Ibid.

## **The Naxalite Movement: In Retrospect**

As we have witnessed in our discussion in the First Chapter, the Naxalite movement emerged as a culmination of the 'left' assertions within the Indian Communist movement inspired by the peasant struggle of Telengana and expressed as theorizations derived from the Chinese model of Revolution. The alternating resurgence of the 'right revisionist' political line within the Communist Party of India that propagated a 'working class' revolution in alliance with the 'national bourgeoisie' led to fierce political confrontation between the two lines within the party.

The Sino-Soviet ideological dispute- heightened by the Sino-Indian border controversy led to the first split in the Communist Party. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) emerged as an outcome of the irreconcilability of the ideological rift within the movement. However, the leadership of the newly formed Party refrained from adopting a radical Maoist strategy of revolution. Instead, a cautious programme of action towards participation in the electoral process and pushing radical agrarian reforms through legislative politics was adopted.

The radical left ranks of this newly formed party dubbed this programme as 'neo-revisionist' and declared a

programme of radical peasant activism. Following the violent peasant unrest in North Bengal (Naxalbari, Phansidewa, Kharibari) which they had successfully engineered, an immediate programme of 'armed agrarian revolution' was declared along the Maoist line. It was these leaders and cadres who came to be known as the Naxalites and formed the third communist party of India- the CPI (Marxist-Leninist).

The ideology and politics of the Naxalite movement signified a rejection-that of the 'middle-class' leadership of the movement and its 'collaborationist' politics with the 'compromising' indigenous bourgeoisie. Alongwith the middle class leadership was rejected it's political agenda and theoretical premises-leading the partial and economic struggle of the masses and the criticality of 'working class' in the revolutionary programme. It is this rejection that resulted in the total shift of the Naxalite strategy towards the 'peasantry' as the epicentre of revolution as the pertinent political line in the Indian context.

The process of rejection and reconstruction of the revolutionary strategy constituted a process of historical evaluation as well. It was an evaluation of why the revolutionary agenda failed in India. The analysis started by problematizing the 'Transfer of power' as a historic

'compromise'. It was a 'compromise' by the indigenous bourgeoisie with the imperialist bourgeoisie on one hand and a 'capitulation' of the middle-class leadership to the 'bourgeois-nationalist' ideology the other. The ideological capitulation of the Communist leadership added another dimension to the Naxalite politics. A resistance to the 'ideological'/'cultural realm' of the system identified with the 'colonial Enlightenment discourse' (whose political counterpart was acquiescence to subordination) and the bourgeois education system became an essential part of the Naxalite strategy. We traced this agenda of evaluation in our Third Chapter, taking up other cultural texts and some writings of the Subalternist school of historiography as sharing this critique of history. In the process we witnessed the maturation of this critique in the academic 'interventionist' exercise of the subalternists-the intellectual consequence of the movement.

But if the intellectual consequence was reflected in a strategy of ideological radicalisation, the political consequence was a turn-around to the legalistic & parliamentary form of politics. The Naxalites, once re-grouped, kept firm on the centrality of the land question and the peasantry but reformulated their politics along the

lines of mass-movement rallying around the partial and economic struggles.

In the course of their new political programmes, the question of bourgeoisie as 'comprador' and peasantry as 'vanguard' remained unchanged. But what seemed to be increasingly losing centrality as a concern was the earlier resistance towards the 'petty bourgeois' character of the movement. Accommodation of the petty bourgeoisie became essential in the new 'legal' economic' form of politics. At the same time it contradicted the most crucial dimension of the evaluative politics of the Naxalite movement-the continuing ideological struggle of auto-critiques. It is this forgotten aspect more than anything else that establishes the morality of the movement's politics. And it is this critical enterprise of radical introspection that informed and shaped the alternative discourses that were to follow.

The experience of the Naxalite movement rips apart the futility and contingency of the traditional revolutionary discourses. It does not suffice any more to merely challenge the system. The discourse of change must address one's own complicity in the order of things as well.

"I say, 'Long live the revolution!' as I would say 'Long live destruction! Long live penance! Long live

chastisement! Long live death! I would be happy not only as a victim; it would not disappoint me to play the hangman as well- so as to feel the revolution from both sides! All of us have the republican spirit in our blood as we have syphilis in our bones; we have a democratic and syphilitic infection!"<sup>25</sup>

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25. II, 728, Baudelaire from Benjamin, Walter. 1985. Charles Baudelaire - A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism, (Verso, London).

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