

**Politics of Culture And Communist Cultural  
Movement : The Study of Indian People's  
Theatre Association Movement in Bengal  
1943 — 1957**

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that this dissertation entitled: "Politics of Culture and Communist Cultural Movement: The Study of Indian People's Theatre Association Movement in Bengal 1943-1957", submitted by Miss Shamita Basu, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Master of Philosophy (M.Phil) degree of this University, has not been previously submitted for any degree of this or any other University and this is her own work.

We recommend this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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## PREFACE

The aim of this paper is to understand the relationship that exists between politics and culture. Such an understanding assumes a significance mainly because most often culture is relegated to a realm that is mainly concerned with man's non-material/spiritual process of existence and is posed in contra-distinction to politics that is having nothing to do with that part of man's activity that<sup>is</sup> concerned with the allocation of material resources of the society and power that is wielded and policies that govern such an activity.

What I have tried to do in the Introductory chapter is to analyse whether such a neutral, a political view of culture is justified or not by posing certain questions like first, if politics is understood as the wielding of state power by the ruling class then whether man's cultural activity remains neutral to or outside this process; secondly, in order to determine this neutrality what do we exclude or include from this cultural sphere; and thirdly whether and how politics of culture is possible.

And these questions are sought to be comprehended and answered within the context of the Marxian historical philosophical theories. For this purpose I have cited the works of various authors broadly within the Marxist tradition who according to me has provided a

perspective on this theme of culture and politics. There has been major omissions chiefly because I have failed to fit certain writers within the analytical schema that I have proposed for myself. At certain points in the introductory chapter it might appear to be overlaid with the questions of art and aesthetics which at first sight may give an impression of being superfluous and irrelevant to the context. But it is necessary to include as Lee Baxandall has remarked "the disputes and the flaws, of bias and haste which have occurred within the international gamut of Marxist aesthetic criticism" within which "is located an essential perspective on the creative arts and culture." From the introductory chapter which attempts at a definition of Politics of Culture the foregoing chapters takes up a historical example like the Indian People Theatre Association Movement in Bengal as the practical illustration of this phenomena. The next three chapters undertake a historical study looking at various aspects of this communist cultural movement that took place during the national liberation struggle in India, with specific reference to Bengal's IPTA Movement.

The main thrust of this paper is to argue for the possibility of politics of culture which it tries to uphold by showing how cultural sphere mediates in the political process. That political war can be fought

even at the cultural level is a fact that is amply illustrated by the purpose for which the Communist Cultural Movement in India was conceived.

Politics of culture I have tried to argue, acquires a special dimension within the conditions of colonial dominations because the cultural domination by the colonial masters becomes particularly pronounced since alien ethos that are sought to be superimposed as part of ideological domination is more readily recognised. Therefore the National Liberation Movement not only fights a political war but also a cultural war to dismantle the whole edifice of colonial culture.

The second chapter variously tries to investigate this phenomena of cultural domination in a colonial society and how this is challenged by Communist Cultural Movement in India that tried to build a National Popular Culture as an answer to the colonial cultural domination. The chapter III essentially makes an empirical study of the historical background of the Communist Cultural Movement basically trying to show that the origin of such a cultural movement was related to the growth of the Communist Movement in India. Although the logic of the movement is derived from the existing conditions in India but the *idiom* of the movement, its objectives and nature are largely fashioned after the theory and praxis of communism. The nature of IPTA's productions

was also largely directed by the predominant concerns of Marxist aesthetics. This chapter also tries to indicate the success of Communist Cultural Movement by citing various statistical data regarding the number of shows given by IPTA; the strength and the kind of audience that it had for the shows and the various accolades that it received in the reviews of its programmes published in the various newspapers and journals of that time. To establish that a cultural movement is successful in the political sphere is also to argue that art can become an effective instrument of mass mobilisation which the ruling class tries to ignore at its peril; the last section of this chapter tries to establish that this movement was successful because the Ruling Class viewing it as a veritable threat took various repressive measures to throttle the growth of the movement.

The concluding chapter attempts to analyse the reasons for the decline of such a movement, providing the thesis that the success of the Communist Cultural Movement which was integrally connected to the Communist movement in India succumbed to the machinations of the Ruling Class politics. The cultural movement had acquired a particular political relevance during the independence struggle because fighting the imposition of alien culture seemed valid and important. But in the absence of the alien ruler the logic of fighting

the bourgeois culture seemed remote and unnecessary to the commonsense of the masses. And this attitude of the people also transmitted itself to the cultural workers who became infected with a sense of reluctance to carry the movement further which finally hastened its decline.

I was first introduced to the problem of power and its various modes by my readings of Michel Foucault. The understanding of the relationship between culture and ideological domination was further deepened with the reading of Edward W. Said's *Orientalism* and Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*.

Later while applying the Foucauldian notion of the invisible aspects of power in trying to understand the phenomena of cultural hegemony of colonialism in India, I tried to argue that communist cultural movement was the attempt to penetrate this cultural hegemony of colonialism. For providing an explanation of the problematic origin of the nationalist discourse which comes to challenge both political and cultural hegemony of colonialism I have borrowed the paradigm of understanding from Partha Chatterjee's book, 'The Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse'.

For explaining the success of such an attempt to challenge cultural hegemony I have made an empirical study of the historical development and the growth and success of the IPTA movement. The wealth of data that

I have used is essentially drawn from secondary sources, mainly from Sudhi Pradhan (ed.), Marxist Cultural Movement in India and Dhananjay<sup>Das</sup> (ed.), Marxbadi Sahitya Bitarka and '46 No: Ekti Sanskritic Andolan Prasange by Chinmohan Sehanobish. In my search for data I have discovered that there is hardly any document and chronicles of IPTA outside these three volumes which have not been included in it.

Wherever possible I have provided a comparative assessment of the IPTA movement with other cultural movement for example in China and Africa and also how the fate of the international communist movement affected the direction of the Communist Cultural Movement in India.

I am deeply grateful to Dr. Sudipta Kaviraj to whom I attribute my sustaining interest in the problem of ideology and politics. Without his acute perception and analytical rigour I wouldn't have been able to clarify the issues which was still in its nebulous state when I first started writing the synopsis of this dissertation. I will never be able to forget his kindness, patience and suggestions without which the groundwork of this dissertation would not have been complete. And I consider myself particularly fortunate to have been allotted a guide like Prof. C.P. Bhambhri. Apart from helping me to deepen my understanding on the subject, his knowledge about Indian

political situation, its various contradictions have provided me with valuable guidelines and analytical tools with which to conduct my research. Besides his support and encouragement during moments of frustration have been phenomenal.

With a heavy heart I recall the enthusiasm with which the late Hemango Biswas, the eminent singer of Bengal's IPTA movement had greeted me when I first went to him for an interview. I recall his racy narrative on the various anecdotes of his life and his association with the IPTA; my regret that <sup>he</sup> will not be here to see the work completed.

There are persons who have offered me various kinds of strategic support, my friend Nawal Rao who indefatigably ran around to arrange for typist, getting the copies of the dissertation xeroxed and helped me to correct the final draft. Our family friend Shyamal Chatterjee, uncle P.G. Basu, aunt Renu Sengupta, friends Anil and Rituparna had provided me with the vital margin of encouragement needed to withstand the strains of completing the work.

Finally no work of this kind would have been accomplished without the sustained cooperation and understanding of my parents. Without their financial support and essential faith in my scholastic ability this work would have remained incomplete.

Also, , I would like to express my appreciation and gratitude to the Principal, my head of the department and colleagues at Loreto College, Calcutta for bearing with me during several leave of absences, without which I would not have been able to dedicate my time and effort for the research work.

SHAMITA BASU.



## CHAPTER I

### POLITICS & CULTURE: A REVIEW OF BIBLIOGRAPHY

#### SECTION I

#### POLITICS

##### Introduction:

If politics is to be understood as the way in which the Ruling Class wields state power then the concept of Ruling Class becomes crucial to any understanding of politics. The term Ruling Class projects two notions which Marx and Engels had distinguished. The first implies that a class by virtue of its economically dominant position controls all aspects of social life. This idea is explicated in 'German Ideology' "the idea of the Ruling Class are in every ages, the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the dominant material force in society is at the same time its dominant intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal has control over the means of mental production..."<sup>1</sup> The second implication is that this dominant class in order to maintain its dominant position has to reproduce the existing mode of production and form of society and to do that it has necessarily to exercise state power that is 'to rule politically'. In the 'Communist Manifesto' Marx and Engels wrote that "the bourgeoisie has at last since

the establishment of modern industry and the world market, conquered for itself, in the modern representative state exclusive political sway. The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole of bourgeoisie.<sup>2</sup>

"Among later Marxists, Gramsci made the clearest and most explicit distinction between class domination of civil society for which he employed the term 'Hegemony' and political rule as such or state power. 'What we can do for the moment is to fix two major superstructural 'levels': the one that can be called 'civil society' that is the ensemble of organisms commonly called 'private' and that of 'political society' or 'the State'. These two levels correspond on the one hand to the function of 'hegemony' which the dominant group exercises throughout society and on the other hand to that of 'direct domination' or command exercised through the State and 'juridical government'.<sup>3</sup>

(1) State Power and Social  
Reproduction:

In his extremely thought provoking and wide ranging book 'What Does The Ruling Class Do When It Rules' Goran Therborn argues that the "novelty of Marxist approach is that not only did Marx lay stress on the fact that society should not just focus on its subjects or structures but that at the same time inquire into its process of reproduction. Capitalist production

therefore under its aspect of a continuous connected process does not create only commodities and surplus value, it also produces and reproduces the capital relation itself."<sup>4</sup> The matter around which most of the content of the book revolves is in trying to answer the question as to what actually is the ruling class doing when its said to be exercising power? According to Therborn the drawback of the Pluralist's discussion of power lies simply in the failure to answer this question, they have taken a circuitous route to evade the problem and answered mostly in terms of how many people exercise the power. The Ruling Class essentially tries to ensure that its dominant position in the economy, state apparatus and ideological superstructures are reproduced by the state in relation both to the other modes of production present within the social formation and to the international system of social production. What is this concept of social reproduction? Marx wrote: "Whatever the social form of the production process, it has to be continuous, it must periodically repeat the same phases. A society can no more cease to produce than it can cease to consume. When viewed therefore as a connected whole and in the constant flux of its incessant renewal, every social process of production is at the same time a process of reproduction." (Capital I ch 23). Social reproduction therefore involves both production

and the setting up of conditions whereby production can continue to take place.

“In a basic sense, the reproduction of a society denotes its mode of functioning as an ongoing social process throughout which goods are produced, distributed and consumed, laws and commands are issued and applied, violence is displayed and exercised and ideas are inculcated and lived. Reproduction has 2 objects the position of a given social structure and the persons required to fill them.”<sup>5</sup> And in order to study the place of the state within the processes of social reproduction it is important to understand what is to be reproduced. In answer to this Therborn identifies three basic objects (i) the relation and forces of productions, (ii) the character of the state apparatus and (iii) the particular ideological superstructure with its specialised apparatus and qualification and subjection. Although the three forms of reproduction just mentioned work together and interchangeably but for our purpose here we shall give priority in understanding the concept of ideological reproduction for its by understanding ideological reproduction and state power that we can best illustrate relationship that exists between politics and culture. But before we go on to elaborate on this mode of reproduction it is extremely crucial to understand the concept of ideology.

(ii) Ideological Reproduction:

"Ideology is perhaps one of the most equivocal and elusive concepts one can find in the social sciences not only because of the variety of theoretical approaches which assigns to it but also because it is a concept heavily charged with political connotations and widely used in everyday life with most diverse significations."<sup>6</sup> The questions that surround the concept of ideology is first whether ideology has a negative or a positive meaning. According to Jorge Larrain ideology may be conceived as a negative or restrictive term which means a form of false consciousness or necessary deception which distorts men's understanding of social reality, this was the original sense in which Marx had used the term ideology. The reason why this original sense is negative is according to Larrain because it involves the idea of distortion, a 'misrepresentation of contradiction'. It is restricted because it does not include within its definition every error and distortion. In other words "the cognitive value of ideas affected by ideology is called in question." On the other hand the concept of ideology may be conceived in positive terms as the expression of the world view of the class. To this extent one can talk of ideologies in plural as the opinions, theories and attitudes formed within a class in order to defend and promote its interests.

"Secondly the question can be raised as to whether ideology has an eminently subjective and psychological character or is on the contrary entirely dependent upon objective factors. If subjective ideology is conceived of as a deformation of consciousness which somehow is unable to grasp reality as it is. If objective ideology appears as a deception induced by reality itself it is not the subject that distorts but reality itself which deceives the subject. While the subjective view emphasises the role of individuals, classes and parties in the production of ideology the objective view sees ideology as impregnating the basic structure of society.

"A further question arises as to whether ideology should be considered as a particular kind of phenomenon within the vast range of superstructural phenomena or whether ideology is equivalent to and coextensive with the whole cultural sphere usually called the ideological superstructure.<sup>7</sup> These questions that are posed by Larrain are some of the basic issues that confront the authors writing on the concept of ideology.

From the very early critique of religion to the project of demystifying economic appearances Marx has throughout maintained a consistency in his understanding of ideology. The idea that a 'double inversion' both in consciousness and reality is maintained through-

out. After Marx's death the concept of ideology began to acquire new meanings. The most important cause of the evolution in the concept of ideology imbibing the positive sense lies in the political struggle of the last decades of nineteenth century, especially in eastern Europe. In order to theoretically account for the political ideas of the class in the context of class struggle Lenin extended the concept of ideology. In a situation of class confrontation, the ruling class ideology is connected with the interests of the ruling class and the counter ideology or its critique is connected with the interests of the working class which is able to offer a critique perforce of its different class position and antagonistic class relations. Lenin therefore "begins to use the concept of ideology in the sense of a set of cognitions and theories which express the interests of a class. There is a bourgeois ideology as much as a proletarian ideology. In general there are class ideologies."<sup>8</sup> Hence for Lenin ideology is the political consciousness linked to the interests of particular classes. He therefore has identified socialist ideology as distinct from bourgeois ideology.<sup>9</sup> Lenin's conception had foreshadowed the later theories of ideologies and his influence on the historicist conception of ideology that has been given for example by Lukacs and Gramsci cannot be denied. In Lukacs it can be cited in his usage of the term ideology or

ideologies to refer to both 'bourgeois and proletarian consciousness'. Marxism for Lukacs is "the ideological expression of the proletariat," or "the ideology of the unbattled proletariat", indeed "its most potent weapon which has led to bourgeois ideological capitulation."<sup>10</sup> However, the difference between Lukacs and Lenin can be noted on the question of the 'ideological subordination of the proletariat', whereas for Lenin it was due to the bourgeois possessing an older ideology and having the means of disseminating ideas for the purpose of subjugating the proletarian consciousness, for Lukacs, it is the class situation of the proletariat which ascribes him the subaltern consciousness and this condition is perpetrated by the reified appearances of the various facades of the capitalist economy.

According to Larrain, the most serious attempt to reconcile the existence of these two major conceptions of ideology within the Marxist tradition has been first made by Louis Althusser. One of the most influential contributions of Althusser has been that he had tried to formulate the problem of ideology from the functional standpoint by which he had distinguished the 'general' and 'particular' functions of ideology and corresponding to these functions he develops his theory of general and particular ideologies.



From the general standpoint the purpose of ideology is to secure cohesion in society. Here ideology is described as a certain representation of the world which links men within their conditions of existence with other men. This general function is universal and eternal and extends to all men in the society. In this context Althusser views ideology as "endowed with a structure and a functioning such as to make it a non-historical reality, i.e. an omni historical reality, in the sense in which that structure and functioning are immutable, present in the same form throughout what we can call history."<sup>11</sup> This particular function of ideology becomes valid only in the conditions of class societies, where the purpose of ideology is geared to securing the domination of one class over the other. But these functions of ideology can be performed in so far as it is "a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence."<sup>12</sup> So although Althusser thinks that ideological representation is not the true cognition of the world yet his argument becomes problematic when he sees this general function of ideology to mythically represent the world as necessary for the nature of social reality itself.<sup>13</sup> But notwithstanding the difficulties of such a formulation one cannot but acknowledge the fact that elements of a neutral concept of ideology can be found in Marx and Engels themselves. Marx often refers to

legal, political philosophical - "in short ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out" (Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy) Gramsci also draws on this idea to interpret ideology as the superstructural phenomena or the sphere in which men arrive at the consciousness of their social relations. Ideology for Gramsci is "the terrain in which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc."<sup>14</sup> Gramsci however proposes a distinction between 'arbitrary or willed ideologies' and 'organic ideologies'. Organic ideologies is explained as those 'which are necessary to a given structure'. According to him "one might say "ideology" here but on condition that the word is used in its highest sense of a conception of the world."<sup>15</sup>

But ideology is more than just a system of ideas, it is an action oriented system of beliefs and as such it has the capacity to inspire people to action. Since ideology provides the guidelines for orientation and action and also through it men become conscious of their class position; ideological domain becomes the exclusive sphere where the Hegemony of Ruling Class is exercised. It is in and by ideology that a class comes to exercise its Hegemony over other classes. It is through the language of ideology that the Ruling Class comes to

'secure the adhesion and consent of the broad masses'.

Apart from distinguishing four degrees or levels of ideology, namely, philosophy, religion, commonsense and folklore, the most notable contribution of Gramsci had been to provide immense insight into the role of ideological apparatus by analysing the role of intellectuals, education and media in the production of ideology and also the relationship of ideology with state .

Although Perry Anderson criticises the separation between the ideological hegemony of the bourgeoisie and the State Power yet such a conception becomes analytically useful to identify the illusory spheres of power or the phenomena that the later critical school came to identify as 'politics of culture.'

## SECTION II

### CULTURE

In recent times one of the main questions that have preoccupied those who have tried to develop a more systematic Marxist political theory is the specific role of hegemony in the general cultural influence of ideology in sustaining and reproducing class domination. The thematic and problematic of domination by culture has preoccupied the theorists within the tradition of Western

Marxism from the very beginning. But before going on to elaborate on the theories of culture it is imperative to understand what the term culture connotes.

In his book 'Marxism & Literature' Raymond Williams argues that the concept of culture has undergone a historical evolution from its original meaning to its present day usage and this has intrinsic relationship with the state of social development at a certain point of historical time. In the 18th century for example, the terms civilisation and culture were used interchangeably. The first attack on such an equation came from Rosseau through the Romantic movement. The separation of the idea of civilisation as superficial and artificial distinct from the natural state implied that the term culture from then on was to carry on an alternative sense as an inner or spiritual process different from external development. The primary effect of this was to associate culture with religion, art, the family and personal life and the institutions and practices of means and values as distinct from and actually opposed to civilisation or society in its new abstract and general sense of the means and works of such development, understood this way, its relationship with the society then became problematic for what was termed as cultural institutions was not outside the aggregate of social institutions and practices. "Culture was then at once the secularisation and the liberalisation of earlier metaphysical forms.

Its agencies and processes were distinctly human and were generalised as subjective, but certain quasi-metaphysical forms, the imagination, the creativity, inspiration, the aesthetic and the new positive sense of myth were in effect composed into a new pantheon."<sup>16</sup> The contrast that emerged between civilisation and culture is said to be due to the new historical rationality of enlightenment, for its with the advent of enlightenment that it came to be implied as an achieved state of development.

The second successive development in the understanding of culture was the extension of the meaning of culture as an anthropological and sociological concept. Vico in *The New Sciences* (1725) wrote "that the world of civil society which had been made by man, its principles are therefore to be found within the modification of our human mind. World of nations on civic world which since men had made it, men could hope to know."<sup>17</sup> His description of a mode of development which was at once and interactively the shaping of societies and the shaping of human minds is probably the most effective description of origin of the general social sense of culture, "It became a noun of inner processes specialised to its presumed agencies in intellectual life and the arts. It became also a noun of general process specialised to its presumed configuration

in whole ways of life. It played a crucial role in definitions of the arts and the humanities from the first sense.<sup>18</sup> In the second sense it could be identified by the whole existing gamut of social phenomena and thus played an equally important role in providing the definitions of the human sciences.

Hence in Williams we find the full propoundation of the term culture interpolated between its two senses.

one hand it denotes the aesthetic domain, in particular Art and Literature and the relations between them. "At the other end we encounter the anthropological usage of term to denote the whole way of life as founded upon meanings, values and so on. Somewhere between these two extremes we find the cluster of senses most fully developed within German idealist thought in which culture is seen as the realm of objective mind or spirit and 'its embodiment in human institutions. Here culture comes close to its original sense of cultivation and development, 'Bildung' sometimes identified with civilisation and sometimes distinguished from it as something more esthetic and profound but almost always given a strong positive sense."<sup>19</sup>

According to William Outhwaite in Marx, "the concept of culture is at the heart of conceptions of consciousness as conscious existence in which consciousness is seen both as bound up with existing state of affairs

and as a condition which makes it possible to change that state of affairs."<sup>20</sup> But what is important is to stress<sup>that</sup> the former does not cross out the latter, an issue which has been mostly confused by vulgar determinists and mechanistic materialists.

It was Lenin's concept of cultural revolution which is to a large extent responsible for the present preoccupation of the Marxist theorists with the problem of culture. Lenin's concern with the building of socialist culture has given rise to the polemics concerning as to what constitutes socialist culture in many socialist countries. In USSR culture is often equated with the whole way of life. And the constitution of the German Democratic Republic includes arts and even 'physical culture', 'sports and tourism' as elements of socialist culture. In China however the ultra radical Maoism that gave rise to the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s had deviated from the Leninist ideas as to what constitutes socialist culture.

Lenin's ideas regarding the gradual evolution of the socialist culture which could arise by political reforms in the field education and culture and also by absorption of the progressive elements of the bourgeois culture by the socialist intelligentsia was totally reversed in the Chinese experiment which gradually degenerated into Maoist fundamentalism by committing

excesses in the name of building proletarian culture. And it was against these very excesses that Lenin's polemics were addressed during the proletpult Movement.

Western Marxism beginning with Lukacs and Gramsci has been so deeply concerned with the questions of culture that J.G. Merquior in his book 'Western Marxism' came to describe this school as 'Culturalist Marxism.'

In his essay of 1920 on Old and New Culture, Lukacs defined culture as distinct from civilisation. According to him culture is "the ensemble of valuable products and abilities which are dispensable in relation to the immediate maintenance of life. For example, the internal and external beauty of the house..., in contrast to its durability and protectiveness,"<sup>21</sup> and since 'the sociological precondition of culture is man as an end in himself', a new understanding of culture is only possible with the coming in of socialism.

(1) Art, Literature, Language, Ideology:

It is already noted that Art and Literature forms the basic component of the aesthetic domain of culture. This paper would remain mostly incomplete if the discussion of the major issues concerning Marxist aesthetics is excluded from it. "A humanist aesthetic has been constructed from Marx's comments on the nature of art as creative labour no different in quality from



other non-alienated labour."<sup>22</sup> The notion that since only non-alienated labour can be creative then all kinds of non-alienated labour can be equated with artistic labour a thesis which provides the basis for a humanist aesthetics "The work of art is an object in which the subject expresses, externalises and recognises itself. To arrive at this concept of art it is necessary to see in the objectification of the human being a need that art in contradiction to alienated work satisfied positively. In order to reach this conclusion, Marx had to establish the distinction between objectification and alienation which Hegel did not grasp ... since man can only realise himself by getting out of himself by projecting himself - i.e. by objectifying himself - art plays a very important role in humanising man. But this in turn means that this objectification must be conveyed in all its positiveness on a real concrete socio-historical basis. That is the gist of Marx's critique of Hegel in the Economic & Philosophical Manuscript of 1844."<sup>23</sup>

This idea implies that in an alienated capitalist society artistic labour also degenerates into alienated labour and as such products of art becomes nothing but commodities and artists are reduced to the position of any other exploited labourer.

AS Marx remarks "capitalist production is hostile to certain branches of spiritual production for example art and poetry". He goes on to say further that "A Singer who sells her song for her own account in an unproductive labourer. But the same singer commissioned by an entrepreneur, to sing in order to make money for him in a productive labourer, for she produces capital." (Theories of surplus value Pt.I Appendix on Productive & Unproductive Labour).

This analysis of artistic labour and artistic production under capitalism becomes the starting point of the later critiques of cultural industry. Horkheimer and Adorno in *Dialectics of Enlightenment* writes "Any additions to the well proven culture inventory are too much of a speculation. The ossified firms such as the sketch, short story, problem film or hit songs are the standardised average of the late liberal taste, dictated with threats from above. The people in the top of the cultural agencies who work in harmony as only one manager can with another, whether he comes from the rag trade or from college have long since reorganised and nationalised the objective spirit. One might think that an Omnipresent authority had sifted the material and drawn up an official catalogue of cultural commodities to provide a smooth supply of available mass produced lines."<sup>24</sup> Hence the regulation by the law of

value and the transformation of cultural products into commodities reducing the products of arts to the status of "confirmist, repetative and worthless things" whose function is to ensure political quietitude is the substance of their critique.

From Marx's general theory of commodity fetishism the Marxist aestheticians Lukacs developed a theory of art. In his major philosophical work History and Class consciousness, Lukacs concerned with the phenomena of reification under capitalism and the impact of commodity fetishism and consciousness. His basic contention is that reified thought fails to perceive the totality of social and economic relations. In all of Lukacs work on literature and aesthetics the concept of 'totality' remains central. According to him, great literature is that which penetrates the surface appearance of reality and is able to expose the social totality, with all its contradictions.

Closely connected with this Lukacsian understanding of 'great' art is the 'Realism' in art. "In Lukacs' opinion, good 'realist' literature portrays the totality through the use of typical characters. This notion of realism receives support from other writings by the founders of Marxism and in particular from two important letters written by Engels to two aspiring women novelists. In these letters Engels firmly rejects literature that

carries an explicit political messages in favour of the realist text, out of which a correct political analysis may emerge. " The more the opinions of the author remain hidden, the better for the work of art. The realism that I allude to may crop out even in spite of the author's opinion." (Letter to Margaret Harkness, April 1888, in Marx and Engels on Literature and Art (1973), p.116). The notion of realism as the accurate portrayal of a society and its class conflicts through use of types, has been a central one in Marxist aesthetics."<sup>25</sup>

#### Realism vs Modernism Debate:

The concept of Realism has engaged the attention of most of the theorists in the field of Marxist aesthetics. And it is centering this concept that most of the content of Marxist debates in aesthetics has grown. The first goes back to an early debate between Lukacs and Brecht where Brecht characterised Lukacs' method as formalistic (by which he meant latter's belief in the possibility of deducing political and ideological positions from a protocol of purely formal properties of a work of art))

According to Frederic Jameson Lukacsian realism can be said to be given aid and comfort to a documentary and sociological approach to literature but "Brecht's aesthetics and his way of framing the problems of realism are intimately bound up with



a conception of science" which for him "was a matter of sheer experiment and of practical well nigh manual activity... Brecht's particular vision of science is the means of annulling the separation between physical and mental activity and the fundamental division of labour... it puts the knowing of world together with changing the world, and at the same time unites an ideal of praxis with a concept of production. The reunion of science and change oriented activity transforms the process of knowing the world into a source of delight on pleasure in its own right. For it restores to realist art the principle of play and genuine aesthetic gratification which the relatively passive and cognitive aesthetics of Lukacs had seemed to replace with the grim duty of a proper reflection of the world."<sup>26</sup> The substance of the Brechtian argument is that it is not only enough to have a realist content but also the technique which will project this content. Traditional realism has failed because of the lack of technique it has obscured the real contradictions and oppositions which it aimed to reflect. The modernist text on the other hand is able to capture the contradictory and project it effectively by means of sophisticated techniques like that of 'textural fragmentation' and 'interruption'. This tendency has been influenced by the work of Pierre Macherey and also by French semiologists such as Ronald Barthes.

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Citing from Marx's 18th Brumaire Terry Eagleton in his 'Criticism and Ideology' sums of the problem of form and content brilliantly "It is not simply of discovering the expressing or representational forms adequate to the content, of the socialist revolution. It is a question of retaining that opposition of grasping form no longer as the symbolic mould into which the content is poured but as the form of the content which is to say grasping form as the structure of ceaseless self production..."<sup>27</sup> And this is decisive in explaining why in the greater freedom of the post-Stalin era orthodox Marxist literary and art critics were confronted with the praise of many artists who had experimented freely with symbolism, fantasy, allegory and subjectivity even by persons like Fischer and Garaudy and Marx himself had praised fantasy filled tales by Hoffman and Balzac.

According to Lee Baxandall the question of aesthetic and politics is central to the contemporary Marxist aesthetics (Baxandall 1972). This question of the relationship between art and politics has been examined by Walter Benjamin who had conceived of revolutionising the means of production as a political act and strategy. Related to the question of the relationship between aesthetics and politics is also the view of 'art as ideology'. One of the earliest propounder of this view is Plekhanov for whom "literature and art are the mirrors of social

life."<sup>28</sup> Besides, Plekhanov was also concerned with developing the key concepts for a class analysis of literature. And he together with Mehring who was concerned more with literature can be said to have done the pioneering work in Marxist aesthetics. Plekhanov argued for a deterministic theory of art by saying that "the art of any people has always in my opinion an intimate causal connection with their economy."<sup>29</sup> Consequently he attempted to look for sociological equivalents of given art form. "From this standpoint he analysed dance in primitive society as a reexperiencing of the pleasure of labour like that of hunting, and music as an aid to work through rhythm. He however made a distinction between art and aesthetic pleasure when he argued that whereas art has a utilitarian origin in the needs of material life, aesthetic pleasure becomes a pleasure in its own right."<sup>30</sup> Although there is no doubt that Plekhanov made substantial contributions to the Marxist theory and social conditioning of art yet it is no accident that his work gave rise to a tendency that reduced Marxist aesthetic to a sociology of art.

"Like Plekhanov in Russia Mehring in Germany stressed the class character of art and denounced the pretensions of pure art aloof from social concerns. But he also attempted to free art from that conditioning

with the help of Kantian aesthetics which he considered essential complements to Marxisms causing him to waver between a sociological schematism and a Kantian formalism.<sup>31</sup>

The recent theoretical discussions on art and society deal predominantly with two themes that have preoccupied Marxist Thinkers from the very outset i.e. (i) art as ideology and (ii) art as one of the principal manifestations of human creativity.

A complex account of art as ideology is found in the works of Lucien Goldmann whose study in the sociology of literature and history of ideas influenced the critical theory of the Frankfurt School.

Goldmann's genetic structuralism is based upon the assertion that the significance of social phenomena is given by their being structured and upon the fact that these structures are a "result of a genesis and cannot be understood or explained independently of this genesis."<sup>32</sup> Every human fact is a process of structuration. But no structure is permanent and is bound to change with history since it results from the activity of groups and classes. Therefore while analysing a whole text one has to explain "the genesis of the structure which enables us to interpret the whole of text under consideration in a coherent manner."<sup>33</sup> This



structure is the world view of a class.

According to Goldmann this world view can be defined as "the conjunction of aspirations, feelings and ideas which bring together the members of the group (or more frequently of a social class) and oppose them to other groups."<sup>34</sup> Every philosophical or literary work is an expression of a world view. This concept enables the researcher to understand why authors as different as Kant and Pascal have nevertheless a similar basic structures of thought which Goldmann labels as tragic vision. The world view of the class is ultimately its class consciousness which finds various expression through the works of certain individuals. In so far as the individuals are exceptionally gifted as writers or philosophers, they convey with maximum coherence the world view of the class; i.e. they express the maximum of consciousness of the class. \*Following Lukacs Goldmann makes a distinction between the real consciousness and the possible consciousness of the class. The real is the consciousness which can be factually found in the class at any given moment... The possible is the consciousness which the class might attain without changing its nature... Literary and philosophical works therefore are expressions of the maximum of possible consciousness of the class. To this extent they are more the product of the class world view than individual accomplishments... Between the collective

consciousness and the individual consciousness there is no contradictions... In a literary and philosophical work the exceptional individual is identified with the fundamental trends of social life so that he may express with coherence what others held vaguely or confusedly."<sup>35</sup>

But what is problematic about recognising cultural products as collective consciousness of the class is not every<sup>work</sup> is in itself a 'significant structure' as Goldmann himself recognises, only certain privileged works are said to be expressing the coherent world view of a class. Then the question that one can rightfully ask in this context is how such privilege is accorded to one particular text excluding the others? Is it not so that Goldmann is trying to use an arbitrary criteria which discriminates between authentic and in-authentic literature.

Nevertheless Goldmann's work provides a valuable insight which can contribute to the comparative study of cultural production and to the analysis of its social determination by the class struggle of the historical period in which it emerges.<sup>36</sup>

Another major contribution in the sociology of art is the study of Max Raphael (1933). Talking of artistic production and its general relation to society

Raphael makes a detailed analysis of Marx's text in the Grundrisse (Introduction) and raises a series of new questions regarding the relation that exists between mythology and art. Criticising Marx's explanation of the 'eternal charm of Greek art' which he considers as 'essentially incompatible with historical materialism.'<sup>37</sup> Raphael seeks to find an explanation of the characteristics of a particular school of art from the type of socio-economic situation within which it was born.

However, one has serious doubts as to whether Marx ever meant that the eternal charm of the Greek art was due to a critical viewing and analysis of it in retrospect, what he tried instead is to emphasise that Greek art was good art inspite of it. Eagleton's view possibly comes nearer to a more satisfying explanation when he argues 'that valuable art comes into being not despite its historical limitation but by virtue of them.'<sup>38</sup> In this context historical limitations refer to the attainment of material progress.

#### LANGUAGE & IDEOLOGY:

The theories of art as ideology has received considerable attention from the recent Marxist theorists. Within the tradition of western Marxism, "Hermeneutic theory, semiotics, structuralism and reception aesthetics most of themselves though not strictly within the

Marxist theory has provided valuable insights and tools for the analysis of the active role of the recipients in producing cultural work and their meanings.<sup>39</sup> One such trend in this new direction is the analysis of language which have a bearing on the concept of ideology.

One of the major feature of contemporary intellectual development is the increasing importance that is accorded to the study of language as a significant phenomenon for the understanding of social life and consciousness. Marx and Engels dealt with the questions of linguistic theory addressing themselves to the problem of the essence of nature of language. Language is one of the intrinsic properties of human life that is arrived at by the virtue of the interactive nature of social existence. Language functions for communication because it presupposed the need of people to do so. "Language like consciousness, only arises from the need, the necessity, of intercourses with other men." (German Ideology, vol.I Pt.IA, 1). Hence Marxist linguistic theory argues that language is essentially, a social phenomenon. Language was conceived as 'practical consciousness'. In the 20th century the phenomena of language is viewed in a new perspective that is it is argued that if the whole gamut of cultural phenomena is constitutive of signs then it may also be seen as the particular form of representation of language. Since it is argued that

ideology acquires meaning because of representation of things in a particular way therefore it is only natural that studies in ideology should focus attention to the content of discourse on one hand which gives meaning to ideology and also it must focus attention as to how the 'material practices' which are at the root of ideology<sup>40</sup> is constructed as languages.

From the point of view of structural linguistics which sees language and speech as two levels of discourse having a manifest and latent content ideology is relegated to this second level of hidden content. Ronald Barthes speaks of this second level as the level of 'connotation' (secondary language) against the level of 'denotation' (primary, ordinary language). This second level is also the mythical level so that any ideological reading of any form of linguistic representation tries to unmask this mythical content. According to Barthes, language comprises of two levels one is that of expressions and the other is that of content. These two levels are also called the 'signifier' and 'signified'. The relationship between both these terms "Expression related to content" is what gives rise to the signification of language.<sup>41</sup> The second level or the connotative level always brings with it a new content that is not articulated by the denotative level on speech/expression. And language assumes importance

in ideology for this reason that it always inheres in this second or mythical level. The nature of language intrinsically gives rise to the possibility of projecting ideology. The 'systems de la Mode' of Barthes attempts to analyse the 'fashion system' of the society by applying the structuralist method. According to Barthes the necessities which the fashion system tries to satisfy is artificially and arbitrarily created and imposed from above and made to appear as natural/given. Barthes distinguishes the denotative level or the 'vestimentary code' which disguises the connotative level or the authoritarian directives that creates the fashion fads to generate artificial needs in society. But the problem with Barthes' analysis is that theoretically there is nothing to account for that he has arrived at these conclusions mainly by linguistic analysis.

With Barthes we have already made our acquaintance with the denomination of Myth, to identify the hidden level of connotation that represents ideological sphere. It would not be out of place therefore to discuss. The relationship between ideology and myth that we find in theory of Levi Strauss. Myth according to Strauss is a particular form of language whose purpose "is to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction."<sup>42</sup> Although apparently there is a striking

similarity between Strauss's and Marx's conception of ideology yet it is doubtful as to what extent they hinted at the same meaning. Though both the definitions think in terms of a consciousness which attempt at solving a contradiction but whereas in Marx this contradiction arises out of the movement of history for Strauss it is the problem of human nature. Levi Strauss is not concerned that Myth distorts reality but that it acquires a special significance because it can be explained from a logical point of view, only that mythical logic is unconscious which man has still not been able to unravel. And from this standpoint myth then becomes forerunner of science because the moment the mythical explanations are understood logically it acquires the character of scientific explanation. According to the theorists of structural linguistics cultural life is unconscious and most of the cultural elements through which ideology operate is successful precisely because of their mythical nature. "Myths" as Levi Strauss sees it "operate in men's minds without their being aware of it."<sup>43</sup> But this thesis of cultural process is problematic viewed from the Marxian standpoint which views the cultural process as arising out of man's practices. P. Bordeau criticises Strauss by arguing that he is trying to construct the idea of a collective unconscious entity which is beyond human practices.

A study of the relationship between language and ideology would not be complete without the inclusion of the work of Pierre Bourdieu. To suggest that linguistic exchanges can express relations of power is to recognise that language is one of the crucial medium of social reproduction. By highlighting the dangers of linguistic formalism which ignores the social and political conditions of the formation and use of language Bourdieu brings language into the scope of that general theory of practice.

According to Bourdieu "the efficacy of a performative utterances is inseparable from the existence of an institution which defines the conditions (such as the place, time the agent) that must be fulfilled in order for the utterance to be effective. It is the institution which endows the speaker with the authority to carry out the act which the utterances pretend to perform."<sup>44</sup> Another of his most provocative suggestion in this connection is that the exchange of gifts is a form of symbolic violence "through which an interested relationship may be transmitted into a gratuitous relationship. For giving is also a way of possessing, a gift which cannot be met by a counter gift of a comparable quality creates a lasting bond and obliges the debtor to adopt a peaceful and cooperative attitude."<sup>45</sup> Institutions which make possible the accumulation of symbolic goods enables further in the



appropriation of the material goods as a corrolary to the former.

Symbolic violence argues Bourdieu and Passeron in 'Reproduction' is an imposition of a cultural arbitrary, through institutions when such violence is also implicit in the hierarchies of language. By the virtue of the relative autonomy of the institutions the individuals who are placed in the dominant positions can dispense with strategies aimed directly at the domination of others; violence therefore is built into the institution itself. Bourdieu and Passeron effectively using the notion of symbolic and cultural capital tries to decipher the system by which the reproduction of class relations takes place in the cultural sphere.

It is in pursuing questions such as these that Jurgen Habermas had initiated in the early 1970s a programme of universal pragmatics. The attempt here is to provide a critique of ideology by analysing the everyday speech act in so far as ideology can be conceived as communication systematically distorted by the exercise of power. Such a programme is of course in the tradition of the Frankfurt School which had always insisted that a society develops not only in the sphere of technological innovation but also in the sphere of communicative interaction. Communicative

interaction is an autonomous sphere in which cultural traditions are historically transmitted and social relations are institutionally organised. But what is important to specify here that Habermas does not fail to take into account the fact that language too is dependent upon the social process and therefore the task of the critical theory is to show how the 'deep common accord' that 'is presupposed by symbolic formations is operative in spite of the distorted conditions under which communication actually takes place.'<sup>46</sup> The importance of an enquiry into the foundations of language has also been his theme in 'Knowledge and Human Interest.'

(ii) politics of Culture:

In 'One Dimensional Man' Herbert Marcuse tries to analyse the function of culture in the socio-political sphere. He designates the culture of the 'bourgeois epoch' as the affirmative culture which according to him plays exactly the same role as that of religion as the 'Opium of Masses', as Marx had characterised it. The role of affirmative culture is to 'pacify rebellious desires'. It is able to do so by virtue of its characteristic which 'is the assertion of a universally obligatory, eternally better and more valuable world that must be unconditionally affirmed: a world essentially different from the factual world of the daily struggles

for existence, yet realisable by every individual for himself 'from within'; without any transformation of the state of fact.<sup>47</sup>

Imperialism too has been seen to be a cultural as well as a political phenomenon. Herbert Schillers elaborating on the concept of 'Communication Diplomacy' underlies the process by which the Third World is exposed to the 'business culture' of the Western nations because of their near monopoly over various cultural articles like books, magazines, television and news agency. Due to such a exposure an artificial need for such products is created which leads to the diversion of resources from the essential sectors like food, shelter and clothing to meet such needs which are secondary. First world's need for market leads to this disastrous consequence of drainage of resources.<sup>48</sup> Following in the same vein Paolo Freire's excellent analysis of the consequences of the pouring of cultural goods in the poor nations provides valuable insight as to how the system of new colonialism is perpetuated not only in terms of direct dependence but also in terms of deepening such dependency by creation of westernised elites who become the comprador class helping in to sustain the dominance of foreign capitalism in their own soil.

Cultural Invasion has profound impact on the political economy of underdeveloped countries, first by

generating demands for a type of consumer articles that the country is not able to produce thus affecting the strategy of self-reliance adversely in favour of import orientation programmes.<sup>49</sup> It thus perpetuates the 'dependency syndrome' of underdeveloped countries. His analysis together with Schillers can be <sup>the</sup> starting point of understanding how apart from the economic dependence, the complex processes by which the colonised people are awarded a self-image, have their culture explained to them, the ways they are named and interpreted to themselves, which is what is meant by the reproduction of the colonised subject is also a form of exploitation. Colonialism, as Fanon remarks is a 'violence in its natural state'.<sup>50</sup> In 'Racism & Culture' Fanon makes a profound analysis of the options that the colonised people have for achieving a universalised culture. Fanon recognised that in the dialogue that takes place between the settler, the native and the native intellectual there is 'a permanent confrontation on a phantasmic plane'. In this sphere versions of origins are continually offered and resisted in a continuous state of war because the colonised continually returns to the terms of opposition that is set by the colonial mother. In effect the search for Aryan/ Islamic/Semite origins become for the colonised people a longing for an impossible purity that is fraught with

political dangers for it unwittingly serves the reactionary forces of fundamentalism through revivalism thus cutting the secular threads which is important for a country's unity.

Such a theme is highly reminiscent of Foucault's preoccupation with the notions of origin which for him is highly problematic. Because it leads to nostalgia and all its attendant falsifications. "History also teaches how to laugh at the Solemnities of the origin... The origin always precedes the Fall... it is associated with the gods, and its story is always sung as a theogony. But historical beginning are lowly; not in the sense of modest or discreet like the steps of a dance but derisive and ironic, capable of undoing every infatuation."<sup>51</sup> And for the colonised people such a search for origin is doubly foreclosed derisive and ironic because the process of colonisation meant precisely the wiping out of their history traditions and language.

In his book 'Orientalism' Edward Said's undertakes to understand and reveal not so much the reinscription of the motivation of European mercantile capitalism as the emergence of a new field of knowledge known as orientalist studies. Using the Foucauldian notion of field (which is to mean the formal conditions which make the appearance of meaning possible), Said talks about the imperial aggrandisement of space of the colonised

country and inner psychic space of the colonised people. The Third World Intellectual must grasp the entire cause and effect machinery of origins and the different knottings produced in it. If the notion of rupture by theoretical activism can be subscribed to then in repudiating what lies hidden in the orientalist text Said is working in dismantling the entire machinery that dictates a specific way of apprehending reality and also providing a substantive critique of colonialism.<sup>52</sup>

The above writers whose works have been just reviewed has been overtly concerned with the processes and problems of reproduction per se especially with that of ideological reproduction. Most of them have tried to understand the problem of the maintenance of social reproduction in the face of social crisis that is in other words what determines state power. Still others have tried to see how the cultural products is related to the social life and how it can serve the interest of classes in society. "The process of social reproduction is a totality of economic, political and ideological processes. Each of these contains sanctions which come into effect if and when the process seems to be going off course. These sanctions can broadly be referred to was mechanics of reproduction. In class societies the mechanics of reproduction function in and through class struggle. And conversely the

class struggle takes place and the rule of class is exercised and maintained in and through these reproductive mechanisms. These can be variously referred to as economic constraint, violence and ideological excommunications.<sup>»53</sup> By definition the ruling class exercises its ruling power over other classes and strata through both state and non-state apparatus by the process of mediation and representation, which apart from involving process of repression involves such non-coercive forms like that of institutionalisation and cooperation, i.e. generation of support for the purpose of legitimisation. It is in this sphere of non-coercive political activity that ideological reproduction assumes crucial significance.

Ideological formation by telling individual what exists, what is possible and what is right prepares them as subject to be appropriated by such process of non-coercive political activity. What this chapter had tried to establish is the possibility that culture provides the best realm and opportunity for such an activity to take place i.e. in other words what we understand by the political sphere can be extended to the cultural sphere also.

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## CHAPTER II

### COLONIAL DOMINATION, NATIONALIST DISCOURSE AND COMMUNIST CULTURAL MOVEMENT IN INDIA

The discussion in the Introductory Chapter sought to establish that appropriation of the individual consciousness through the utilisation of the various cultural apparatus constitutes in ultimate analysis a necessary political act by the Ruling Class. It was argued that its by applying various techniques of propaganda which by its very intent is political conducts itself to initiate a person in his self-formation which having imbibed the dominant values comes to perceive his subject status as natural and predetermined. Therefore the rulers who monopolise the expertise of cultural domination over people's mind, enter into a relationship of domination with the subject, the process of which is vastly oblique and invisible except for the manifestation of its impact that results in the creation of a subaltern consciousness, in the minds of the ruled.

Understanding this process of cultural hegemony is crucial in analysing the role of ideas as vehicle of social change. A question that arises in this context is that if the Ruling Class Ideology can be imposed for seeking adhesion to the dominant values and policies then similarly it is possible to intervene in this process of cultural hegemony by posing the counter

ideology. It is for this reason why Cultural Movement has been seen as contributory to political movement; since cultural domination always succeeded as the legitimising factor of political domination.

Comprehending Cultural Hegemony within Marxian framework of analysis can rightfully give rise to the problematic that if primacy of economy over other factors is responsible for determining the course of social history then whether or not the role of consciousness as a factor of social change is vastly reduced and can be said to be only of secondary importance. Engels in his letter to Ernst Bloch (21st-22nd September) makes certain illuminating statements to clarify the classical Marxist position on the relationship of Base and Superstructure and views the proposition of preponderance of economy over all other aspects of society as the handywork of some 'mechanical determinists'. He wrote, "According to the materialist conception of history, the ultimately determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic element is the only determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract and senseless phrase... Marx and I are partly to blame for the fact that younger people sometimes lay more stress on the economic side than is due to it.

We had to emphasize the main principle vis-a-vis our adversaries, who denied it, and we had not always the time, the place or the opportunity to give their due to the other elements involved in the interaction."

Hence the dialectics between base and superstructure cannot be reduced to a form of economic reductionism. Jorge Larrain argues that "It is worth-noting that although the specificity of the spiritual production is determined by the historical forms of material production, spiritual production is said to be capable of exercising 'reciprocal influence' on material production. In other words, the superstructure of ideas is not conceived as a mere passive reflection but it is capable of some effectivity."<sup>1</sup> It is why the concept of 'praxis' has received central importance in the theory of social change. As Marx wrote, "theory becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses." (Karl Marx: Collected Works, vol.III, p.182). Therefore theorising or any creative activity with a practical end is recognised by Marx as Praxis. For the very same reason Lenin viewed the role of the Party in inseminating class ideology and Gramsci thought of the role of the organic intellectuals in transforming the consciousness of people as of crucial importance for the purpose of a People's War.

Theoretically the purpose of this chapter is to argue for the viability of a cultural revolution as an effective instrument of social change. For this purpose the first section of this chapter will try to highlight the reasons for which a cultural movement in India was necessary and the second section will try to justify as to why the Communist Cultural Movement in India could appropriately and effectively come to serve this purpose.

(c) THE COLONIAL IMPACT AND THE  
LIMITATION OF BOURGEOIS LEADERSHIP:

In the introductory chapter it was argued that politics does not begin and end with the use of coercion by the Ruling Class. The ideological reproduction of the society by creating dominant ideas, symbols and motifs to rule man's mind becomes a crucial weapon in the hands of the ruling class to establish its hegemony. The colonised introduces the dominant discourse the parameters of which define for the native the correct, the true and the just, with which he comes to judge himself. The ideas governing the consciousness which he thinks to be his own and natural is in fact imposed. As in any colonised society India also went through this systematic destruction of its culture by its colonial masters. And what was imposed was accepted as superior by virtue of its being the master's culture. This acceptance of the cultural superiority is the first step of the argument of political superiority, for the legitimate right

to rule and command. And it is for this reason of cultural subjugation the character of the third world Nationalism is rendered problematic. As John Plamenatz in his article "Two types of Nationalism" in Eugene Kamenka (ed.), Nationalism. "The Nature And Evolution of an Idea" argues for two types of nationalism, Eastern and Western. "Both types depend upon the acceptance of a common set of standards by which the state of development of a national culture is measured. In the first type, however, although there is a feeling that the nature is at a disadvantage with respect to others, it is nevertheless already culturally equipped to make the attempt to remove these deficiencies. Thus although the new global standards of progress may have been set for the rest of the world by France and Britain, they were based upon a set of ideas about men, morals and society which in their social and intellectual origin were West European generally... Eastern nationalism on the other hand has appeared among people recently drawn into a civilisation hitherto alien to them and whose ancestral cultures are not adopted to a success and excellence by these cosmopolitan and increasingly dominant standards. They too have measured the backwardness of their nations in terms of certain global standards set by the advanced nations of Western Europe. But what is distinctive here is that there is also a fundamental awareness that those

standards have come from an alien culture and that the inherited culture of the nation did not provide the necessary adaptive leverage to enable it to reach those standards of progress. The Eastern type of nationalism consequently has been accompanied by an effort to re-equip the nation culturally, to transform it. But it could not do so simply by imitating the alien culture. The search therefore was a regeneration of national culture adapted to the requirements of progress but retaining at the same time its distinctiveness."<sup>2</sup> The Renaissance and the Revivalist movement in India was the genesis of this process of regeneration, though often imitative and retrograde in its spirit it became the forerunner of the political movement.

"Just by painting in India, one does not produce Indian painting." This was the comment of the historian Akshay Maitreya on the pioneering attempts of Abanindra Nath Tagore and his students to create an original style in the genre of Indian painting which can be identified as truly Indian. "Used as interchangeable, the terms 'Indian' and 'national' were introduced in the early twentieth century as new evaluative categories."<sup>3</sup> This awareness among the Indians, was a part of the Renaissance sensibilities. The attempt to fill the vacuum in the field of art caused by the disruption of tradition was first made by the Bengal School through revivalist movement. Apart from the introduction of



Macaulay's Anglicist education it was the organisation of art centres by which British effort at the appropriation of the Indian culture could be palpably felt. By 1867, the British Government had set up two schools of industrial art including three major art schools in Madras, Bombay and Calcutta. Around 1878, another school was opened at Lahore. This was necessitated by the fact that the westernised educated elites 'whose tastes were formed by the current art trends in Britain' could produce works which according to Herman Goetz 'was merely a rehash of Greco-Roman Renaissance and medieval reminiscences in improved techniques but weakened sensitiveness.' Politically though this particular class came to be useful compatriots for the Government yet promotion of their work meant bad business, because Europe was not interested in buying works of art which were merely bad imitations. Hence to keep the British commercial interest secure it was necessary to restore the best in Indian traditions. The two interests the political and the commercial were reflected in the apparently two contradictory attitudes towards Indian art which was apparent in their reports and executive measures. "The racist feeling of white superiority prevailing over the general policy of education assumed the paternal and caretaker approach explicit in Macaulay's statement."<sup>4</sup> This led to the denial of Indian art. But this attitude proved

counterproductive for the "other concern of the British public (by the 1850s) at the decreasing production of Indian luxury crafts."<sup>5</sup>

In the initial steps it was the perception of Mill and Macaulay that led to the bastardised productions of art by men of western academic training, 'which was rejected by the British artists and educationists as non-Indian'. By this time Owen Jones was advocating that "while the European designers had lost their guiding principles in an industrialised society, the Indian craftsmen true to their traditional values of life reproduced them as guiding principles in their craft. The result could be seen in the creation of articles important both in variety and beauty."<sup>6</sup> This alternate opinion of Jones and William Morris came to be heeded when the Indian art objects began to lose market, the emphasis now shifted towards the revivalism of traditional forms and a rejection of obsolete western academic training which culminated in the Indian Nationalist Art Movement in 1905 with Abanindra Nath and his students walking out of the Government Art College.

From the educational reports of that period it is evident that the policy of art education at the very outset was liberal and job oriented which would produce the cheap skilled labour and at the same time create the 'Black British of Macaulay's dreams' who would serve

the British as the native collaborators. The Indian youth were to be acquainted with the European traditions in art hence the Government sought to provide copies of the original European paintings by persuading the local Zamindars and European art patrons to make a loan of their collections. The thrust of the colonial policy was in two main directions, first, it sought the transformation of art into industrial goods where maintaining the Indianness was merely a requirement of the market. For this purpose Hunter recommended the 'Indianisation of the art lessons'. Secondly it tried to transpose the alien yardstick for judging the excellence of the Indian art by the natives themselves.

The impact of this policy was felt in two ways, in the first place it disrupted the traditional pattern of artisan production where family was the basic production unit and the royal court provided for the raw materials and the work premise for the production of luxury goods. The disruption of this pattern led to the creation of a 'petty bureaucracy' of artists, who belonged to the lower middle class but in the higher caste ranks which did not permit them to do manual labour. It was this class of people whose ambition was to secure a white collar job and in the absence of it had been dabbling in art as a profession. Having inculcated a pedagogic attitude by virtue of their training in English education they

persistently opposed men like Abanindranath and his disciples perceiving them as threats to the utilitarian policy of British in art education which had provided them with bread and butter.

Secondly, the Indian artists and the intellectuals came to be caught up in the dominant discourse of Orientalism, which is the network of knowledge, opinion and theory about the eastern civilisation created and generated in the west. And it was through this body of knowledge which was handed over to the Indians with the impression of it being the truth coming from the custodians of enlightenment and rationalism that the native came to perceive himself as the subaltern.

The liberal intellectuals abroad perceived that knowledge about the subject race can become an effective instrument of power. Beside there was a growing appreciation of the psychological theory that the sublimation of popular unrest through the creative channels was less dangerous which otherwise bursts forth in political movements. E.B. Havell's "Ideals of Indian Art and Aryan Rule" is the best expression of this understanding of political exigency. He wrote "A living popular or national tradition of art is the expression of the people's mind and if from a lack of understanding of it, we repress its free development, we are sitting on the safety valve of the national life and provoking an explosion." His

view also reflected a profound orientalist concern.

"The Eastern question is always with us, for the fate of British Empire is bound up with it and the kernel of the Eastern question lies in India, the country which has contributed most to the wealth, prosperity and power of the Empire. But neglect of the study of Indian history or colossal ignorance of it has never been regarded as a disqualification for the highest position in the government of India."<sup>8</sup>

According to Havell, it was this ignorance of the British which led to the blundering in policy, that is responsible for the outbreak of the Swadeshi movement, the demand for autonomy and a return to the indigeneous. The Times Literary Supplement of 19th February 1925 also wrote in favour of this view, "Mr. Havell has spent a long time pleading this cause and has been European opinion come around in some measures to his view." Apart from the works and such artists, like A.K. Coomaraswamy whom Ratnabali Chattopadhyya describes as the 'Oriental Orientalist', who was 'in quest of his own identity', the impact of orientalism was most conspicuously felt in the thoughts of elite intelligentsia in India. Any attempt at social reform either had to be justified by the received tenets of scientific rationalism or else had to be shown as an attempt at restoration of the original through the reinterpretation religious texts

which took the form of the revivalist movements. Western education and the orientalist discourse provided the prime impulse for the search of the genealogy of the Indian identity. For example the early 19th century social reformer of Bengal Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar had to look for scriptural support for his reform programme inspite of his professed disregard for the sanctity of the Sastras. In fact "this remained a major ideological anomaly in all 19th century attempts to modernise religion and social practice... a spurious conciliation of Indian idealism and imported liberal sanctions... which led to the major backlash after 1880 in the form of movement to 'revive tradition', movements that were openly hostile to the earlier decades of 'reason and enlightenment'." <sup>9</sup>

According to Tapan Raychowdhury, any reading of the text of Bankimchandra, the leading Bengal novelist and satirist of 19th century will show "how the egalitarian values projected in his treatise on equality, samya, are supported by copious references to Rosseau, Louis Blanc, Fourier, Sully Proudhon and Mill's view on inheritance. Even his version of Hindu ideology as stated in his early writings drew heavily on Bentham. To Mill he owed much of his insight into classical political economy and modern logic... The most profound and sustained western influence on Bankim's thought is traceable to

Compte his religion of Humanity and Positivist Philosophy.<sup>10</sup>

Besides, Bankim's observation on the Indian characters and situation is highly reminiscent of Forster's, Kipling's and other Anglo Indian novelists' depiction of what they termed as the Indian syndrome. On the question of power he opines that it is lack of physical strength and courage which is responsible for Indians' subalternity echoing largely the racist view of the natural superiority of the white man which he coupled with another view that Indians naturally lack a desire for liberty. It is interesting to note in this context that imputing this concept of 'natural' to justify the attributes of the self is as Gramsci had noted is typical and symptomatic of all subaltern classes.

However, Bankim makes a departure from this understanding when he shifts his explanation from the level of the natural to that of the historical and cultural, much in line with the Weberian argument in 'Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism' where Weber had tried to show how the Protestant Ethics was the necessary precondition for the spirit of capitalism to flourish. According to Weber it was Protestantism which advocated those values which made up the capitalist mind. Bankim likewise is convinced that it is the Hindu religious doctrines of non-violence and denigration of the

conquest for power which is responsible for Indians' lack of belligerence which has reduced India to the status of subject nation. This cotermination of religion with the nation is characteristic of the early revivalist thinking. In the Weberian vein Bankim also seeks to locate the reasons for power in the area of culture. For him, "Certain cultural values are more advantageous than other in the real political world of power relationships. Those which are advantageous imply a certain rational evaluation of importance of power in material life, and indeed of the material bases of power in society, and attempt to sustain and extend those bases. Other cultures do not make such a rational evaluation and are consequently thrown into subjection. The critique of Indian culture is here, in every way, a rationalist critique."<sup>11</sup>

The colonial impact was therefore far reaching which reflected in the creative efforts of the ascending class of artists and intellectuals who even at their progressive best accepted the British as their mentor. Even Protest Dramas of that time like Neel Darpan registered the rebellion of people but without deviating from the unflinching faith of the enlightened intelligentsia in the 'legitimacy of the social order'. And it was towards this middle class that the people at large looked for leadership in the political sphere.



The Amrita Bazar Patrika of 9th December, 1869 wrote:  
 "Middle class ("madhyabitta") people are always considered the most useful group in any society. Our country's welfare depends to a large extent on this class. If there is ever to be a social or any other revolution in this country, it will be by the middle class."

Nationalism, therefore, had a troubled beginning in India, where the nationalist sentiment which was the offshoot of the modernist rationalist values inculcated by the educated middle class, mingled with the obscurantist and fundamentalist values which was revived through religious movements to give the people a sense of identity. The language of politics was therefore often garbed in religious overtones which was reflected for example in Tilak's protest against foreign rulers' interference with religious and social custom and his revival of the Ganapati festival in Maharashtra to breed a sense of identity and solidarity on the basis of which the natives could successfully counter the 'other culture' that was sought to be imposed.

Rationalism could not be encountered qua rationalism since it was realised as the dictum of an alien culture. The search for an alternate ideology which could confront it successfully led the Indians towards religious <sup>dogmas which they could</sup> claim as their own. This will to confront culturally was perhaps best represented by Sasadhar

Terakachudamani and Krishnaprasanna Sen "who claimed 'Shastric' precedence for all the discovery of modern western science."<sup>12</sup> Hence the early cultural war that preceded politics took the form of religious revival movements.

The political movement therefore at the very outset failed to attract the masses because the concept of national was largely lost on people still searching for their identity with reference to their respective religious sects be it the Hindus through the Arya Samaj movement or the Muslims through the Ahmadya movement. However what cannot be denied is that the revivalist appeal to the past was an integral process of national awakening which characterised European national also. Hans Kohn in "A History of Nationality In The East" (pp.55-56) wrote, "The multiform world of Hinduism was stirred and awakened to a spiritual revolution in the nineteenth century much as Europe had been in the sixteenth... like the Reformation, they reverted to the earliest traditions and attacked the degeneration and superstition of later days." In the 18th Brumaire, Karl Marx also recognises it to be an inevitable process found in the history of many nations. "The traditions of all the dead generations, weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living. And just when they seem to be revolutionising themselves and things, in creating something that has never existed, precisely in such

periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from their names, battle cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in the time honoured disguise and its borrowed language." But according to B.T. Ranadive, "In India it was not simply a question of using the past to seek inspirations for the present. The revivalist appeal represented a compromise with the anti-democratic institution of caste, a compromise with religious orthodoxy. Because the rising intelligentsia and bourgeois interest were from the beginning interested in compromising with landlord interests they failed to confront their feudal privileges against the peasantry and the entire village set up which sustained blind religiosity and the caste system."<sup>13</sup>

And it was this class which provided the leadership to the political movement spearheaded by the Indian National Congress, and for a long time the critique of imperialism which they sought to provide was problematic because they themselves were the product of the very power structure which they sought to repudiate. Besides within a depredated economy their contacts with the huge mass of agrarian proletariat created by the transformation of land laws under the British can be said to be at best tenuous. Hence they remained isolated from this large and significant section of

the Indian population, the peasantry, whose class interest in an economy where precapitalist relationship still survived often ran counter to these elites who were mostly from the landlord background. It is this reason why the intelligentsia failed to play the role of the 'organic intellectuals' in absence of their contact with the 'more fundamental forces of social transformation' and seek to create a national popular culture. As Partha Chatterjee writes, "The narrow elitism of the intelligentsia could hardly resolve the central problem of nationalist politics in a large agrarian country under colonial rule. To represent the nation as a political entity within a colonial state process which clearly possessed considerable resources to broaden its bases of legitimacy by intervening directly in the agrarian class struggle it was necessary above all to take nationalist politics to the peasantry. Without this an emergent Indian bourgeoisie could never hope to pose an adequate challenge to colonial rule. Similarly without devising suitable ways of establishing an intellectual-moral leadership over the vast masses of the peasantry, the organic functions of the new intelligentsia in building a national consensus for self-government were doomed to failure."<sup>14</sup> The attempts to overcome the difficulty of reconciling 'the modes of thought characteristic of peasant consciousness' with the 'rationalist forms of

an enlightened nationalist politics' was first made through the Communist Cultural Movement in India.

(ii) COMMUNIST CULTURAL MOVEMENT  
IN INDIA:

One of the first attempt to evaluate the progressive role of the working class and the peasantry to build a national popular culture was made by the CPI in 1930s while trying to organise its cultural fronts, the Progressive Writers' Association and Indian People's Theatre Association following the tactics of Peoples' War Line against imperialism and fascism. Taking Lenin's formulation of the role of the party in transmitting socialist consciousness, the Communist Party of India for the first time launched a cultural movement which was to be the nationalist answer to the ideological penetration by colonialism in the national sphere and against Fascist Dictatorship in the international sphere.

A vigorous anti-imperialism always reaches new cultural heights. Amikar Cabral has characterised national liberation as 'necessarily a cultural act'. The Communist Cultural Movement has to be viewed as the cultural aspect of the India's freedom struggle. The PWA and IPTA were the political movements of the writers and artists under the auspices of the CPI. While speaking on the nature of the movement Chinmohan Sehanobis, one of the eminent Bengal Communists remarked, Communist cultural movement

has to be understood as part and parcel of the Indian national movement. For, when the artists and writers had joined the cultural organisation like IPTA they had not merely come to compose their poems, songs and plays but had joined with a specific task in mind which was to communicate their ideology to the people through their works of art. And this endeavour of theirs in the ultimate analysis was a political act. And this they had done because of their faith in Communism which at that moment had set two goals for them, one was, freedom of India and second was to built an egalitarian and just society free from hunger and oppression.<sup>15</sup> Thus it was stated in the first IPTA Bulletin of July 1943, "Imperialist expansion was coming to an end.. Against the machinations of the ruling class, the revolutionary movements of the working class and colonial peoples were gathering momentum. In India a great mass upsurge has begun to develop even towards the close of the previous century. The upper and the middle class in our country assumed the leadership of this mass movement and their hopes and ideals found expression in the literature of this time.

"Social realism... gathered more votaries... In recent years the depth and sweep of the titanic events of contemporary history, the grim brutality of the Fascist attacks on culture and freedom, the grave perils

of the present and the prospect of a bright future if reaction is defeated, compelled many sensitive writers and artists to realise in varying degrees that art and literature can have future only if they become an authentic expressions and inspirations of the peoples struggles for freedom and culture... In the wake of this great struggle for national existence and freedom, for the defeat of Fascism and Imperialism for a Free India in a Free World, a great cultural movement has sprung up among these defiant sons of our soil and factories which breathe a new spirit. Old art forms with new and vibrant themes, all that is best in our folk arts and in the spirit of our people are again bursting into life... because the democratic movement of the peasantry and working class have taken them over from their isolation and made them the expression of the revolutionary moods of the people. Here, at last the people have themselves begun to create a new theatre movement of their own.

It is in this situation that the Indian People's Theatre Association has been formed to co-ordinate and strengthen all the progressive tendencies that have so far manifested themselves in the nature of drama, songs and dances... It is a movement that seeks to make of our arts the expression and the organiser of our people's struggles for freedom, economic justice and

a democratic culture. It stands for the defence of culture against Imperialism and Fascism and for enlightening the masses about the causes and solution of problems facing them. It tries to quicken their awareness of unity and their passion for creating a better and just world order." Further that Draft Resolution of the first IPTA Conference recognised, "the urgency of organising a People's Theatre Movement as a means of revitalising the stage and the traditional arts and make them at once the expression and organiser of our people's struggle for freedom, cultural progress and economic justice."<sup>16</sup>

As far as the problems of India were concerned it was pointed out that it was the external aggression by the Fascist hordes who are the deadliest enemies of freedom and culture and internal repression by an alien Government which seeks to hold our people in subjection and prevent them from organizing an effective defence of their own home-land. Lastly it was the absence of sufficient unity among the people's forces which alone can compel the imperialists to retire was one of the gravest problems facing the country to eradicate which the IPTA set for itself the task "to portray vividly and memorably through the medium of the stage and other traditional arts the human details of these important facts of our people's rights and enlighten them about their rights and nature and solution of the problems



facing them."<sup>17</sup> Also it was declared that it was the task of the cultural movement of IPTA to make itself "a means of spiritually sustaining our people in this hour of crisis and creating in them the confidence that as a united force they are invincible."<sup>18</sup> For this purpose it was decided that the themes of the IPTA songs, ballads, plays etc. should be made suitable for this purpose in view and it was recognised that productions therefore should be simple and direct so that the masses can easily appreciate and understand and also participate in the creation and production of these. Besides a need to revive the folk arts, mass singing and open air stage was especially emphasized. The Resolution also noted that "under the stress of the present situation there has been developing spontaneously from among the masses, particularly the militant kisans, workers and students, a movement of songs, recitation and dances rousing the people to action against the Fascist aggressors and the food hoarders and for the release of national leaders and the achievement of a national government. It is essential that this spontaneous movement should be organised and co-ordinated into an all-India People's Theatre Movement."<sup>19</sup>

Hence the communist cultural movement aimed as the revitalisation and reconstruction of the national culture as a part of the national struggle. But unlike the past religious revival movement it was progressive in its

character in the sense that it denied the correspondence of culture with religion but understood it in its secular aspect and gave it for the first time a materialist interpretation. Because of this it could address itself to the whole people without confining itself to a particular religion or class. Secondly the progressive intelligentsia for the first time articulated their recognition of the fact that cultural domination was part of the political domination which had to be countered by demystifying the colonial mind.

It was a progressive and popular movement because it for the first time addressed itself to the people who were so long denied entry into the national political mainstream because of their exploited status. Cultural Revolution as Lenin had understood it "was the necessary part of achieving appropriate subjective conditions, and involves the breaking down of the habits and artifacts of bourgeois culture."<sup>20</sup> The Gramscian understanding that cultural hegemony must be destroyed if revolution had to succeed prompted the cultural Revolution in China in 1967-68. "Art, music, literature and the institutions of education were purged of western influence, while revolutionary Red Guards were licensed to demote and humiliate those who seemed most responsive to such influences."<sup>21</sup> It was the Communists therefore who understood the significance of a cultural revolution as an effective instrument of social change. It was

to this very purpose that the Communist cultural Movement in India sought to build a 'national popular culture' to be pitted against the ideology of imperialism.

On the question of National Popular Culture, A.S. Vasquez defines the category of 'popular' as that whose "fundamental essence resides in the working classes, to which must be added the intellectual strata, during a particular period of history, the Bourgeois in its ascendant stage."<sup>22</sup> And for the understanding of cultural revolution as part of the national struggle, Algerian freedom fighter Frantz Fanon, in his statement made at the second Congress of Black Artists and Writers, at Rome in 1959 posed the question, as to whether the struggle for liberation a cultural phenomenon or not. According to him culture is the best expression of national consciousness. Speaking on the liberation movement in Africa, he argued, "This problem of national consciousness and of national culture takes on in Africa a special dimension. The birth of national consciousness in Africa has a strictly contemporaneous connection with the African consciousness."<sup>23</sup>

For Fanon, "the future of national culture and its riches are equally also part and parcel of the values which have ordained the struggle for freedom."<sup>24</sup> And it is for this very reason a cultural movement becomes crucial for furtherance of the national liberation

movement. The intellectuals through their works rebuild the perception of the people and by renewing contacts with the indigeneous art form that the native is able to regain the confidence and vigour by confronting his heritage. And it is this confidence which gives birth to the national consciousness.

The artists and intellectuals therefore play a significant role in building the national consciousness. But a significant difference between the left intelligentsia in India and the early western educated elites was that the latter's movement was restricted only to a privileged minority, their audience was like themselves the upper class elites. This was true also in the case of political movements headed by them, because of which the recruitment and the mobilisation pattern of the Indian National Congress had reflected a urbane, rich and castist bias. The clientele pattern of the Congress was restricted exclusively to either urban elites or the rich landlords in the rural areas. On defining the character of the Indian nationalist leadership Lord Dufferin in his famous minutes dated 6th November 1888 and in the St. Andrews Day Speech on 30th November 1888 characterised the emerging Indian national leadership as representing 'only an infinitesimal section of the people' and being 'a microscopic minority'. He also asserted that this leadership was indifferent and even hostile to the true interests of the masses... He

discovered that the Indian society was horizontally divided between the educated 'Babus' and the uneducated masses. As a proof of his... assertion that the nationalist leaders who were usually referred to as the Babu Class or Babu agitators, were opposed to the interests of the masses, Dufferin referred to the anti-popular attitude adopted by the Indian National Congress and other leading bodies of the nationalists, the Indian members of the Supreme Legislative Council, and the 'Babu agitators' in general towards recent tenancy legislation in Bengal...<sup>25</sup> However, though Bipan Chandra is critical of Dufferin's idea that nationalist leaders' attitude towards British legislation was anti-popular but what can't be denied is the class character of such a leadership as was given by Dufferin. Even later theorists who are unbiased and objective in their assessment echoed the same. While analysing the composition of the Indian National Congress, Francine Frankel wrote, "Yet despite the fact that the constitutional changes facilitated the periodic mobilisation of the peasantry in nationwide civil disobedience campaigns, the new party structure did not substantially alter the caste or class characteristics of the political leadership. The membership of the AICC continued to be drawn predominantly from the upper caste Hindus. Virtually all had western style education and most had training in the professions - law, medicine and journalism.

“Even at the local level, the great expansion of the Congress membership did not signal any significant devolution of political power to the bulk of lower caste subsistence cultivators, tenant farmers and landless labourers... Such demographic data as is available in the Congress party leadership prior to Independence indicates that the new rural recruits were primarily drawn from the dominant land owning castes in the countryside... Congress claimed to speak for the masses.. In large measures however, the party organisation was controlled by the business class in the cities and the landowning castes in the countryside. The intelligentsia most of whom were committed to social and economic reform, feared the effects of splitting the nationalist forces by openly supporting the tenants and landless labourers against landlords and urban workers against the industrialists.”<sup>26</sup>

Because of the competing pattern of mass mobilisation of the Communists and Socialists against the Congress the Communist Cultural Movement from the time of its inception could broad-base the movement since it was addressed to the mass of rural population and the working class in the urban areas. It will obviously be an oversimplification to say that none of the artists and intellectuals of Communist movement belonged to the upper class, but what was important was that it was by participating in the workers and peasants' movement they were

able to de-class themselves. Although there were those who did not belong to the Communist Party yet they were close sympathisers of the Communist Party, as Sudhi Pradhan writes, "Although it was an urban-elite effort to bring art to the people, there was no dearth of sincerity and dedication to the cause."<sup>27</sup> And for the first time as in the political movement, Kisan Sabhas and Trade Unions were organised for bringing the workers and peasants to the mainstream of national movement so also in the sphere of culture the Communists were able to imbibe and arouse the national consciousness in the minds of hitherto neglected and deprived segments of the nationality. It was through the Communist Cultural Movement that the working class co-operated with the intellectuals in the cultural fronts to create a national popular culture as an answer to colonial ideology.

(ii) THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT OF  
THE COMMUNIST CULTURAL MOVEMENT:

The Progressive Writers' Association and the Indian Peoples' Theatre Association which was established as the Cultural Front following the Peoples' War Line strategy was conceived also as the Anti-Fascist Peoples' Front as an expression of solidarity with the worldwide struggle against Fascism. It was urgently felt that intellectual freedom was a mere sham when millions lost their lives under the fascist assault; writers and

poets were brutally persecuted for their protests against the ghoulish acts of the fascist regimes. Till the world was freed from the scourge of war there was no place for creativity; and it was this persistent thought which motivated artists and intellectuals all over the world to meet in various conferences to register their protest. Some like Ralph Fox and Julius Fuchik even sacrificed their lives for the cause. This worldwide intellectual concern of the writers and the artists to save the culture from decadence was echoed by the Indian communists also. Hiren Mukherjee in his address to the All India Progressive Writers' Conference in Calcutta in 1938 asseverated that the artists and intellectuals in India could not remain silent spectators to what was happening in Europe. Because "Problems that agitate the writer in the West are here with us, and in a much more intensified form. "Further, he reiterated, "Intellectual freedom is something of a luxury which, we in our practised submission to tyrants both at home and abroad, are hardly able to afford. In the West, again the poet today finds he is no longer popular; he is slowly but surely deprived of that feeling of writing for a wide audience which understood his language... Something of the same process can be discerned here among our writers. On top of everything else, of course our writers are being increasingly reminded of the urgency, from their own standpoint of fighting imperialism and all its obscurantist allies, for till that fight is won, their work



is bound to reflect the anaemia of a society inured to ages of passivity and servitude.

"The writer or the artist who has found his kinship with the fight for a new society does not equate art with action... Art he knows has its special function, the grasp and transmission of "experience"... The writer's social affiliation must inevitably condition the character and the flavour of his experience, and in an era of developing class struggles such as ours, collective action and class purposes significantly enacted in real life may well become themselves "experiences". Identifying the problems facing Indian culture he pointed out, "We have adopted, largely, it seems, the worst of both worlds. From our own past, with fatal discrimination, we have taken the mystical-devotional obsession which has long scotched our cultural development; from the West, we have tried, most disastrously, to borrow sentimental-aesthetic posturings. Our literature will not acquire reality and vitality unless it broadens so as to include the consciousness of the working masses of our country... For that, of course, a radical change in the political, economic and social structure of the country must be achieved. The chief hope for our literature is our fight for freedom and social justice.

"The writers and artists who are on the side of the worker and peasant will, of necessity, during the revolutionary and near-revolutionary periods, find

that they must forge of their art a sword for use in the struggle which they cannot avoid. Not before the triumph of the cause can their work be less concerned with pressing and desperate social issues. Lamentations over the inadequacy of New Writing are thus in reality, out of place.<sup>28</sup>"

The two main ideas that broadly emerge from H. Mukherjee's speech is that at a time of cultural decadence, when people's taste are sought to be regulated by the Fascist whip, artistic expression is stifled. His most succinct comment is that, "Writers in Europe, especially the poets are panting for a public."<sup>29</sup> But it is a historical reality that, it is from this very craving to find his audience that the artists comes to create what is best in the tradition of popular art. A.S. Vasquez analyses this phenomana, "The artist who removes his roots from the popular soil ceases to identify with the sentiments, aspiration and interest of the people, and does not feel the need to create a popular art. The cause of this break is sometimes found in the negative attitude of the artist toward a society which negates him as an artist and as a man, pushing him toward alienation, at other times it resides in the impossibility of discerning the location of the social forces - the people - with whom the artist could satisfy his need for communication. Finally, it may happen that the artist cannot find the audience which could

encourage him to end his isolation. The artist and the people search for each other without finding each other most often it is the people who search for the artist and do not find him at other times, in this alienating industrial capitalist society, it is the artist who seeks the people without finding them. However, history offers us clear examples of solidarity between the artist and the people, examples which are so clear and recurrent that the current radical separation between art and the people appears in the light of the universal historico-artistic experience as a terrible and painful anomaly, in spite of attempts to regard it as a perfectly normal situation."<sup>30</sup>

To overcome this schism between art and people and to take art to the masses, the artists and the writers came under the banner of Communism because it is the philosophy of Communism, writes Chidananda Dasgupta, the noted film critic which unifies the art and the artists. In Communism an individual is understood in his relationship with the society. And, because of this 'unification of personality' or 'unity of self' art under Communism comes to its fullest manifestation. Therefore progressive writers all over the world had been gradually drawn to the Communist movement.<sup>31</sup> This argument of Chidananda Dasgupta finds best support in the statement of James Carroll who wrote in Saturday

Review of January 12, 1945, after Theodore Dreiser, one of America's greatest writers joined the Communist Movement. Carroll had written, "Still seeking to know, to learn, to be free, Dreiser joined the Communist Party of the United States last summer. The major significance of this act is that it was the way he took to repudiate the values of bourgeois America. As such it was a militant action and it casts a meaning on all of his past writing. It shows us that the novelist who most truly, most thoroughly, most broadly pictured in the meaning of life in America its most hopeful period of growth, came at the end of his days, to repudiate the values of that same society, in this sense. Dreiser, as an old man, moved towards the ideas of socialism... For this one honours him for his courage and his integrity... The statement he issued when joining the Communist Party is - like recent statements of Picasso - unmistakably sincere... a rejection of capitalism and a deep concern because of the impasse into which modern man has now come to find himself. Dreiser was not a man who trifled in these matters. He declared that he was joining the Communist Party as this was the logical consequence of his life-work and life-experience." This idea was also reflected in the speech of Sekou Toure while he was addressing the 2nd Congress of Black Writers and Artists in Rome in 1959. He said, "There is no place outside that fight for the artists and intellectual who is not himself concerned with and completely at one with the

people in the great battle of Africa and of suffering humanity." <sup>32</sup>.

In conclusion, it can therefore be said that Communist Cultural Movement in India was primarily a political movement of writers and artists who had organised themselves in their united war against imperialism and fascism. As one of the Bengal's eminent Communist Cultural workers Hemango Biswas remarked "the stage was our battlefield, our songs, poems and dramas were the weapons with which we came to fight this anti-fascist, anti-imperialist war." <sup>33</sup> Reaching to the people was the prime need of the hour which served the twin purpose of evoking nationalist consciousness and rescuing the moribund culture from the grip of imperialist ideology. Besides, it was by participating in the workers' and peasants' movement, by coming in contact with people and their realities that the writers and artists sought the impetus for creating their best works of art. Joining hands with the masses in their political struggle was a part of the artists' endeavour to realise their creative and intellectual capacities. It is this factor which had prompted George Thomson to comment on the career of Christopher Cauldwell, "It was not an accident that his most productive period as a writer coincided with his political activity in Poplar." And this is true of all progressive artists. As Stanley Kauffman recounting the success story of the great Soviet Film

director Sergel Eisenstein and other great directors of USSR wrote, that "it was the Soviet Revolution and its need for a film one may say made geniuses of them."<sup>34</sup>

Communist movement envisages the cultural front as complimentary to the political front, which had prompted Mao to initiate the Cultural Revolution in addition to the organisation of military fronts. And as a part of the rigorous training the cultural workers of the Chinese Communist Party had to live with the working class families at least for two to three years. It was this phase of their training, and acquiring of life experiences, which later became the fountain-head of new literature and art. Hence, the Communist Cultural Movement fulfils the dual aspirations of the people and the artists. The artist fulfils his intellectual commitment and through it comes to serve the political cause; and the people who craves for the artist through his work imbibes the political consciousness which motivates him to participate in the political process. And this aspect assumes, special significance during the national liberation struggle of a colonised nation. Frantz Fanon, commenting on the development of the native intellectuals and nationalist writers and artists, says, "If we wanted to trace in the works of native writers the different phases which characterize this evolution we would find spread out before us a panorama on three levels. In the first phase, the native intellectual

gives proof that he has assimilated the culture of the occupying power. His writings correspond point by point with those of his opposite numbers in the mother country. His inspiration is European and we can easily link up these works with definite trends in the literature of the mother country. This is the period of unqualified assimilation. We find in this literature coming from the colonies the Parnassians, the Symbolists and the Surrealists.

"In the second phase we find the native is disturbed; he decides to remember what he is. This period of creative work approximately corresponds to that immersion which we have just described. But since the native is not a part of his people, since he only has exterior relations with his people, he is content to recall their life only. Past happenings of the bygone days of his childhood will be brought up out of the depths of his memory; old legends will be reinterpreted in the light of a borrowed aestheticism and of a conception of the world which was discovered under other skies.

"Sometimes this literature of just-before-the-battle is dominated by humour and by allegory; but often too it is symptomatic of a period of distress and difficulty, where death is experienced, and disgust too. We spew ourselves up; but already underneath laughter can be heard.

"Finally, in the third phase, which is called the fighting phase, the native, after having tried to lose himself in the people and with the people will on the contrary shake the people. Instead of according the people's lethargy an honoured place in his esteem, he turns himself into an awakener of the people; hence comes a fighting literature, a revolutionary literature, and a national literature. During this phase a great many men and women who uptil then would never have thought of producing a literary work, now that they find themselves in exceptional circumstances-in-prison, with the Maquis or on the eve of their execution-feel the need to speak to their nation, to compose the sentence which expresses the heart of the people and to become the mouthpiece of a new reality in action.

\*The native intellectual nevertheless sooner or later will realize that you do not show proof of your nation from its culture but that you substantiate its existence in the fight which the people wage against the forces of occupation... The colonized man who writes for his people ought to use the past with the intention of opening the future, as an invitation to action and a basis for hope. But no ensure that hope and to give it form, he must take part in action and throw himself body and soul into the national struggle. You may speak about everything under the sun; but when you decide to speak of that unique thing in man's life that is represented by the fact of opening up new horizons, by



bringing light to your own country and by raising yourself and your people to their feet, then you must collaborate on the physical plane.

\*The responsibility of the native man of culture is not a responsibility vis-a-vis his national culture, but a global responsibility with regard to the totality of the nation, whose culture merely, after all, represents one aspect of that nation. The cultured native should not concern himself with choosing the level on which he wishes to fight or the sector where he decides to give battle for his nation. To fight for national culture means in the first place to fight for the liberation of the nation, that material keystone which makes the building of a culture possible. There is no other fight for culture, which can develop apart from the popular struggle.<sup>35</sup> And this role of native intellectuals is what the writers and artists tried to fulfil when they joined the Communist Cultural Movement in India.

The subsequent chapters will focus on the various aspects of the Communist Cultural Movement in India, with particular reference to the Indian Peoples' Theatre Association Movement in Bengal which has been taken as an epitome of the all India movement for the purpose of analysis.

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### CHAPTER III

#### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE EMERGENCE OF THE INDIAN PEOPLE'S THEATRE ASSOCIATION MOVEMENT IN BENGAL

In the previous chapter it was argued that Indian People's Theatre Association was a cultural movement conceived for political purposes. It was organised as a popular front by the Communist Party of India, and as such its inception and growth is integrally connected with the history of the Communist Party of India. Secondly, it must be conceded that Bengal's IPTA cannot be studied in isolation from the all India movement but at the same time it must be pointed out that though set up under the aegis of the CPI the movement was decentralised and each regional unit had its own pace of development under distinct socio-cultural condition.

Hence a historical study of the IPTA movement in Bengal must clearly outline the regional specificities, the various moments in the political culture which forms the backdrop of the Communist Cultural Movement in Bengal. However, these variables are fitted within the mosaic of the totality of developments in the national and international sphere.

This chapter briefly tries to depict the history of the Communist movement in India, especially highlighting those episodes and issues which is related to or important for our understanding of the background of the

## Communist Cultural Movement in Bengal.

### (i) COMMUNIST MOVEMENT IN INDIA:

"Despite official allegations of British officials and some later scholars that the whole movement was <sup>no</sup> more than a foreign conspiracy organised from Moscow, Indian Communists really sprang... from the roots within the national movement itself as disillusioned revolutionaries. Non-cooperators, Khilafatists and labour and peasant activists sought new roads to political and social emancipation."<sup>1</sup> The advent of economic and political organisations of the working classes came about in the aftermath of the non-cooperation movement, when the victory of Bolshevism and the establishment of Socialist state in Russia had a great impact on the Indian mind. A section of radical rationalists dissatisfied with the Gandhian policy of Non-violence and the tactics of Constitutionalism of the Swarajists began to veer around these new founded ideologies and tried to "evolve rival programmes of Indian Independence"<sup>2</sup> based on them.

The famous revolutionary of the Yugantar (an Extremists' Group of Bengal) Naren Bhattacharji who is more well known as Manabendra Nath Roy first came in contact with the Russian Communist, Mikhail Borodin in 1919 and assisted him in settling up the Communist Party of Mexico. In the summer of 1920, Roy attended

the second Congress of the Communist International where he embarked on his famous polemics against Lenin on the 'Role of the Communists in the colonial countries' which is known in history as the Lenin-Roy controversy. Whereas Lenin viewed the national bourgeoisie of a colonial country like India as a progressive force with whom the communists must cooperate in the national liberation struggle Roy urged for a total severance of ties with the Bourgeois led Congress party and argued that the peasants and workers already disillusioned with the Gandhian leadership were prepared to start a revolution independent of the Congress Party. "If Lenin and Roy disagreed as to the tactics by which the Communists in the Eastern countries could finally succeed in seizing power, they were both equally persuaded, that once the Soviet power was established, these countries could avoid the capitalist stage of development and move directly to socialism." <sup>3</sup>

In October 1920, M.N. Roy, Abani Mukherjee and some Muhajirs (Khilafat supporters who were crossing over to Soviet territory through Afghanistan) like Mohammed Ali and Mohammed Shafiq founded the Communist Party of India at Tashkent. In 1922 Roy shifted his headquarter to Berlin and started publishing from there the fortnightly 'Vanguard of Indian Independence'. Later, in collaboration with Abani Mukherjee he brought out the 'India in Transition' where cogent analysis of

the Indian socio-economic conditions were undertaken from the Marxian standpoint. Around this time several other emigree Indian revolutionary groups like the old Berlin group headed by Virendranath Chattopadhyay, Bhupendranath Dutt and Barkatullah turned towards Marxism. These neophytes started the Indian Independence Party in Berlin. By 1920s an important section of the Ghadr Party in exile was also indoctrinated in Communism under Rattan Singh, Santokh Singh and Teja Singh Swatantra.

By the end of 1922, Roy started establishing links with miniscule communist groups that lay scattered all over India in their embryonic stages. Emissaries like Nalini Gupta and Shaukat Usmani helped Roy in his effort to communicate with such communist leaders like S.A. Dange in Bombay, Muzaffar Ahmed in Calcutta, Singaravelu in Madras and Ghulam Hossain in Lahore. Several left nationalistic journals also made their debut around this time, notable among them were 'Atmashakti' and 'Dhuketu' in Calcutta and 'Navayuga' in Guntur and the most important of them all was the weekly 'Socialist' brought out by Dange from Bombay in August 1922 which undoubtedly can be referred <sup>to</sup> as the first communist journal of India.

On 2nd November 1922, Roy in a letter to Dange proposed a plan for 'a dual organisation one legal and another illegal', and a 'secret communist nucleus' that

will work amidst a broad workers and peasants front. The Socialist of 16th September had made similar suggestion of forming a 'Socialist Labour Party of the Indian National Congress'. Immediately after this in December 1922 at the Gaya Congress Singaravelu averred that there was a 'need to combine Non-Cooperation and national strikes', and as a follow up of Roy's suggestion announced the formation of a Labour Kisan Party in May 1923.

In view of these activities, the British apprehension of a 'Bolshevik menace' influenced their policy towards the communists during this period. Mujahirs who tried to come back to India were tried in consecutive 5 Peshwar conspiracy cases between 1922-27. And in May 1924 Muzaffar Ahmed, S.A. Dange, Shaukat Usmani and Nalini Gupta were incarcerated by the verdict of the Kanpur Bolshevik Conspiracy Case. But defying these reprisals various Communist groups came together in one Open Indian Communist Conference in Kanpur in December 1925. The Conference announced the formation of a 'Skeleton Organisation' of the Communist Party of India and the 'United CPI in 1959 acknowledged the 1925 meeting to have marked the formal foundation of the Party'.<sup>4</sup>

"The ideas on the basis of which the CPI was formed" wrote E.M.S. Namboodiripad, "first in Tashkent and then in Kanpur, thus had gripped the minds of lakhs of people and, in a way, became the official programme of the major organisation of the freedom movement."



"A significant consequence of these developments was that the cult of the bomb which have been the ideological basis of the militant groups for almost three decades ceased to operate. In its place came the programme of militant mass organisations and struggle."<sup>5</sup>

Various workers and peasants parties were formed in Bombay, Bengal and Punjab; chief among them was the Labour Swaraj Party renamed as the Peasants and Workers' Party which was set up in Bengal in 1925-26 by the well known militant nationalist poet Nazrul Islam, Qutubuddin Ahmed, Hemanta Sarkar and Muzaffar Ahmed. It published two Bengali journals, the 'Langal', and 'Ganabani.' It was mostly centering these pro-communist journals that the militant youths and a radical section of the intelligentsia came to organise themselves, like in Punjab where 'Kirti' edited by Santokh Singh attracted radical section of the Babbar Akali movement who later established the Kirti Kisan Party. In Bombay too, the Marathi journal 'Kranti' inspired S.V. Ghate, K.N. Joglekar and S.S. Mirajkar to form the Workers and the Peasants party.

By 1922 the left literary movement made its impact on the masses. Bengali journals like 'Atmashakti', 'Sarathi' and 'Bijoli' published articles and memoirs eulogising the heroic self-sacrifice of the martyrs. Sachin Sanyal's 'Bandi Jeevan' (which was translated in Hindi and Gurumukhi) deeply stirred the young minds. Besides, one of the most

popular novelist of Bengal Sarat Chandra Chatterjee published 'Pather Dabi' in 1926 celebrating the cause of violent revolution. In veritable panic the Government banned this highly acclaimed novel which only served to enhance its popularity and opened the floodgate of militant activities in politics. And in this atmosphere it was only obvious that the moderate path of Congress was looked upon by these urban educated youths as largely ineffective.

In U.P., two Bengalis, Sachin Sanyal and Jogesh Chandra Chatterjee came to establish a radical youth organisation, the Hindusthan Republican Association. The programme of this group was to raise funds by insurrectionary activities like dacoities etc. to help militant organisations. A 1925 pamphlet of the Hindusthan Republican Party justified terrorism by declaring that 'Chaos is necessary to the birth of a new star' for the ultimate aim was 'the abolition of all systems which make the exploitation of man by man possible'. However, most of its members were arrested during the Kakori train hold up in August 1925. The surviving unit which was comprised of men like Ajay Ghosh and Sachin Sanyal's brother Jatindranath Sanyal established links with a group of Punjab revolutionaries under Bhagat Singh and set up the Hindusthan Socialist Republican Army in September 1928, at Delhi.

Unlike most of the extremists' group in Bengal like the Yugantar, Anusilan Samity and the Revolt

Group which were characterised by their impetuosity of action the HSRA and its youth organisation the Nava Jeevan Bharat Sabha can be commended to have operated with a much broader perspective. With a singular commitment of the leadership to a systematic political doctrine they tried to evolve a socio-economic programme which had set them apart from other conventional terrorist organisations. All of their actions were demonstrative of their commitment to the working class revolution which they saw as an integral part of the national liberation struggle, and that is why Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutta hurled a bomb at the Legislative Assembly which had met to discuss the anti-labour Trades Dispute Bill on 8th April 1929. Bhagat Singh who had made a systematic study of Marxism reaffirmed his commitment to Marxism both during his trial and in a poignant piece entitled 'Why I am an Atheist'. So extensive was his popularity that a confidential Intelligence Bureau account 'Terrorism in India (1917-1936)' described, that 'for a time he bade fair to oust Mr. Gandhi as the foremost political figure of the day'.

Although these radical youth activists were not directly aligned with the mainstream communist movement in the initial stage but their organisational work corresponded to and drew sustenance from the communist policies and programmes till the time all these splinter groups came to coalesce within the communist party of

India. Some of the striking events of 1928-29 the massive labour upsurge which was in no way less militant than the terrorist activities was due to the large scale penetration of the communists into the Trade Unions. In Bengal, the Kharagpur Strike of 1927 were followed by a protracted struggle at the Liluah Rail Workshop (January-July, 1928) headed by Gopen Chakravarty, Dharani Goswami, both communists. The movement culminated into several protest marches organised by the workers who thronged the streets of Calcutta against the police firing at Bamungachi on 28th March, 1928. Communist activists of the Workers' and Peasants' Party also led the Calcutta Corporation Scavengers' strike and strikes at Jute Mills in Chengail and Bauria. A growing political awareness among the workers were witnessed at this time when they increasingly came to align themselves with the leftists, whom they perceived as protectors of their interests even in voicing their demands on the question of national independence. In December 1928 the working class in Calcutta led by the Workers' and Peasants' Party gathered themselves and occupied the pandal where Congress Session was on and passed a resolution calling for Purna Swaraj.

Although during this period Bengal was the centre of labour militancy staging successful workers' strikes for example, like that in the South Indian Railway on at the Jamshedpur industries several times

in 1928, but the most spectacular of all the strikes was that of the Bombay textile workers from April to October, 1928. The famous communist led Girni Kamgar Union developed as a radical alternative to the N.M. Joshi led moderate Textile Labour Union. The Girni Kamgar commanded 60,000 members even outweighing the well established Gandhian Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association which had 27,000. By late 1928 the communist influence in the Bombay workers' organisations assumed some proportion to be reckoned with.

Apart from these organised agitations to voice their economic demands the workers also joined the mainstream politics by demonstrating against the Simon Commission. The Government retaliated by promulgating series of acts aimed at throttling the growing workers' movement. The Government sought to pass the Public Safety Bill which would give it power to deport Philip Spratt and Ben Bradley, British Communists who were helping to organise the Bengal and Bombay workers. The Trades Disputes Act of April 1929 was also proposed which will make strikes 'undertaken for objects other than furtherance of a trade dispute or if designed to coerce Government and/or inflict hardships on the community', illegal. In other words strikes were banned by this Act and more or less as a sequel to these reactionary measures Government arrested 31 labour leaders including the three British communists Bradley, Spratt and

Hutchinson. The conspiracy trial was staged in Meerut which is known in history as the Meerut Conspiracy case.

Although labour militancy continued unabated under new leaders like S.V. Deshpande and B.T. Ranadive in Bombay, and Habdul Halim, Somnath Lahiri and Ranen Sen in Calcutta yet the communist movement was considerably attenuated for several reasons. Apart from the unrelenting oppression by the Government which had seriously impaired the organisational strength, the communists found themselves isolated from the so called nationalist politics. Till the end of 1928, they had pursued the unity cum struggle policy with regard to congress intending their criticism mainly as a corrective and not as an invective against the leadership, striving at the same time to build a common anti imperialist front with the progressive elements within the Congress itself. But in December 1928 the 6th Comintern Congress proposed a sharp left turn in its policy and "the CPI under comintern directions followed the United Front from below tactics which implied an antagonistic posture towards the Indian National Congress and other nationalist groups".<sup>6</sup> And the highly sectarian path that was followed by the communists at this time in line with Stalin's policy of 'concentrating fire on the middle of the road forces' isolated themselves from the anti-imperialist front and their influence was considerably eroded when they began to attack even such left minded Congress leaders as Nehru

who was expelled from the League Against Imperialism in 1930.

Narayan (pseudonym of Soumendranath Tagore) reviewing the draft declaration of the 6th Comintern Congress observed, "After our experience in India in 1922, when the bourgeoisie betrayed the great mass movement, which shook India from one end to the other, it is high time now to formulate it more clearly to show that the bourgeoisie can never fight imperialism genuinely."

"Every practical alliance with the bourgeoisie means the abandonment of the slogan of agrarian revolution, which means the virtual abolition of revolutionary struggle in the colonial countries especially in such a predominantly agricultural country as India."<sup>7</sup> But that such perusal of extreme sectarian line was clearly a folly on the part of the Indian Communists soon came to be realised. Apart from self-criticism by the Indian Communists themselves particularly from the eighteen accused in the Meerut conspiracy case who differed from Comintern thesis on the question of the nature of national bourgeoisie and also on the question of the 'stages of Indian revolution,'<sup>8</sup> an Open Letter of the three parties CPC, CPGP and CPG was sent to the Communist Party of India in May 1932. According to Sobhanlal Dattagupta, "This document for the first time made a detailed review of the errors of the CPI." It pointed out "that there was tendency" among the Indian Communists,

"of mechanically contrasting the class interests of the proletariat with the interests of the independence movement as a whole, which drove the toiling masses and the revolutionary ranks of the petty bourgeoisie into the arms of the National Congress, particularly towards its left wing. Theoretically speaking, this idea of contrasting the class question and the national question lay at the root of the isolation of the CPI."<sup>9</sup> Following these suggestions the Communists began to gather its forces on the working class fronts.

Labour movement from 1934 onwards showed signs of rejuvenation especially after the reunion of the communists and trade union factions. There were big strikes in Sholapur, Nagpur and most successful of them in Bombay. Alarmed by this new wave of labour agitation the CPI was formally banned on 23rd July under the old 1908 Act against Seditious association. But the left wing within the Congress also began to pick up momentum, "The idea of a distinct Socialist ginger-group, working within the Congress but trying to push it left-wards, has been floated in Nasik jail meetings in 1933 where the participants included Jayaprakash Narayan, Achut Patwardhan, Yusuf Meherali, Ashok Mehta and Minoo Masani."<sup>10</sup> 'A Tentative Socialist Programme for India' was drawn up by Congress leader Sampurnanand in April 1934 and Congress socialist party was formally launched at a conference in Patna in May 1934 chaired by Narendra Dev.



The main purpose of the party was to mobilise opinion within the Congress on the questions like agrarian reforms, problem of industrial labour, the future of princely states and the like. And many of its leaders were successful in establishing close connections with the Kisan Sabha movement. A South Indian Federation of Peasants and Agricultural Labour, started in April 1935 with N.G. Ranga as the Secretary and E.M.S. Namboodiripad the Joint Secretary who suggested in its conference in October 1935 the immediate formation of an All India Kisan body, the Socialists took up the idea at the Meerut conference in January 1936<sup>presided</sup> by Swami Sahajanand Saraswati.

Although labour militancy continued unabated under the Communist Party inspite of the illegal status of CPI, but it was not until 1935 that the CPI found itself within the national mainstream of politics when they came to consolidate and advance themselves through the United Front from above tactics as proposed by Georgy Dimitrov in the 7th Congress of the Comintern (July 25th-August 31st, 1935). The Dimitrov Thesis proposed the formation of Anti-Fascist Peoples Front in Capitalist countries and Anti-Imperialist United Front in Colonies and dependent countries and this called for the CPI to pursue the strategy of active cooperation with the nationalist movement. Under the new General Secretary P.C. Joshi the communists began to renew their contacts with the Congress and Congress Socialist Parties in 1936.

E.M.S. Namboodiripad and A.K. Gopalan had by mid-1930s formed the local units of the Congress socialist party and absorbing members of the Trivandrum communist league groups layed the foundation of the Communist party of Kerala. In 1935 when the 7th Congress met, the Nazis have seized power in Germany. The Congress decided to abandon the tactics of "class against class" and to return to the United Front. Schram and d'Encausse analysing this thesis argues that for the purpose of the application of this tactical line to non-European countries the Comintern stated, "In the colonial and semi-colonial countries, the most important task facing the communists consists in working to create an anti-imperialist people's front. For this purpose it is necessary to draw the widest masses into the national liberation movement against growing imperialist exploitation, against cruel enslavement, for the driving out of the imperialists, for the independence of the country; to take an active part in the mass anti-imperialist movements headed by the national reformists and strive to bring about joint action with the national revolutionary and national reformist organisations on the basis of a definite anti-imperialist platform."<sup>11</sup> As E.M.S. Namboodiripad observes "For four full years since the Meerut arrests of 1929, the party virtually ceased to exist as a party, the small groups of communists in

some parts of the country acting as they thought fit while the tenacity with which these groups operated testified to the influence exerted by communism over large sections of anti-imperialists, the pronouncements and practices of these groups cannot be termed as the work of the Communist party of India.

"These difficulties could be overcome partly towards the end of 1933 when most of the Meerut case comrade came out of Jail, but that could not overcome the difficulties caused by ideological confusion. These were removed only when the Seventh Congress of the Comintern (1935) gave the line of unity against fascism and as an integral part thereof, the anti-imperialist united front in countries like India. This helped in politically and organisationally unifying the various communist groups which had for several years been ideologically divided."<sup>12</sup> Also apart from this strategy of United Front it has been argued by many historians that it was the 'Dutt Bradley Thesis' which had set the changing tone for the Communist politics in India in early 1936. "According to this thesis the National Congress could play 'a great part and a foremost part in the work of realising the anti-imperialist people's front."<sup>13</sup> It is further argued in Bipan Chandra et. al. (eds.) India's Struggle For Independence (New Delhi, 1988, pp.303-4) that, "The Communist Party" at this time, "came to call

upon its members to join the Congress Party and enrol its masses under its influence to the Congress. In 1938 it further accepted that the Congress was the central mass political organisation of the Indian people ranged against imperialism. In 1939, P.C. Joshi wrote in the party weekly 'National Front' that, "the greatest class struggle today is our national struggle of which the Congress was the main organ." The broad basing of the political movement saw the large scale dissemination of Communist ideology among the masses.

In Bengal mid 30s saw a large scale conversion of terrorists to Marxism in the various detention camps. It is from the area of extremists politics came Bengal Communist leaders such as Bhabani Sen and Harekrishna Konar. The impact of this <sup>left</sup>centric politics was marked in Bengal's cultural sphere also, with the growth of Marxist literature and writers' movement. One of the eminent literary monthly of this time 'Parichay' was founded in Calcutta in 1931, by Sachindranath Dutta and it was around this journal that most of the Marxist literary debate in Bengal took place. During the course of his conversation with a Marxist literary critic Dhananjay Das, one of the oldest members of the Parichay group Hiran Kumar Sanyal commented on the role of this journal. According to him it was 'Parichay' which through its essays introduced the basic tenets of Marxism to the general public and helped to create a

body of opinion among the educated intelligentsia.<sup>14</sup> In Andhra too a vogue of realistic novels about the toilers was created after the translation of Gorky's 'Mother' in 1932. And inspired by Bhagat Singh's martyrdom the rising poet Sri Sri who was first to use the spoken Telugu in verse composed the famous Mare Prapan-cham (Another would be calling).

(ii) FASCISM AND THE SECOND WORLD WAR: THE BIRTH OF PEOPLE'S FRONT.

When these developments were taking place in India, the world was confronting the menace of fascism. Hitler had seized Germany on March 1933. Hitler, Goering, Gobbles conspired and the grand building of the Reichstag was set on fire. Several communist leaders including the Bulgarian communist leader Georgy Dimitrov was arrested. On 16th May 1933 the fascist forces set ablaze all the major works of German literature openly on the streets of Berlin. The intellectuals, writers and artists of the whole world rose as one man in protest against this dastardly act. Meanwhile fascist forces tried to infiltrate in French politics but it was successfully resisted by the working class and the communist party who formed the united front against fascism and the middle class was also drawn in it. Several Anti-Fascist Organisations came into existence in Europe at this time. In 1932, a 'World Congress Against Fascism and War' was organised in Amsterdam presided over by

Romain Rolland. In June 1933 the European Anti-Fascist Workers' Congress was held in the Pleyel Hall of Paris sponsored by communists, social democrats and progressive intellectuals of Europe. The League Against Fascism and War again met in a conference in Paris on 21st June, 1935. Around the same time French writer Henri Barbusse gave a clarion call for the writers and the artists of the world to unite which culminated in the World Congress of Writers' for the Defence of Culture in Paris. It was a momentous event in history when in the Balboulille Hall of Paris writers of almost every civilised nation had gathered to register their protest against fascism. The Conference was adorned by such eminent personalities as Romain Rolland, Andre Malraux, Maxim Gorky, Thomas Mann, Waldo Frank and several other doyens of the literary world. At the conclusion of the conference, an International Centre of Progressive Literary Movement of the entire world was established.

The protest movements against fascism organised by the intellectuals were particularly successful in France, where largely by the indefatigable effort of Barbusse and the progressive intelligentsia that the middle class was brought on the forum of the United Front Movement of the proletariat and a popular front was established which was ultimately successful in forming a government in France in the middle of 1936.

Around this time in England, a section of the intelligentsia was progressively being inclined towards the Left Ideology which came to be later expressed through the New Writing Movement, among them were some Indian students like Mulk Raj Anand, Sajjad Zahir, Hirendranath Mukherjee, Jainul Abedin, Raja Rao, Bhabani Bhattacharjee and others. On one hand they were influenced by the Neo-Realist movement like Dadaism, Surrealism and Futurism in art and in literature by poets like Andre Breton, Paul Eluard and novelist Aragon. And on the other hand they were inspired to build a progressive literary movement with positive left orientations in their own country by their frequent conversation with Socialists like Harold Laski, Rajni Palme Dutt and novelists like Ralph Fox. While still studying in London, this group of students drew up a manifesto in 1935 with the resolution "to bring the arts into the closest touch with the people by focussing on the problems of hunger and poverty, social backwardness and political subjugation." And it was this Manifesto which served as the future blueprint of the Progressive Writers' Association of India.

The first session of the All India Progressive Writers' Association was held in Lucknow in April 1936 presided over by Munshi Premchand. Tagore in 1938 sent a telegram wishing success to the organisation. The Conference was graced by such literateurs as Josh Mahilabadi and Sarojini Naidu. Government however

did not remain a silent spectator to these happenings. The hired Press of the Government made a concerted effort to create an adverse body of opinion against the organisation, especially opprobrious was the aspersions cast on the background of the PWA's members. The Statesman of 7th July 1936 wrote under the heading: "Communist Propaganda: Moscow Changes Tactics"...

"The IPWA held its first annual conference at Lucknow during the last Congress Session, and published the inevitable manifesto... Indian literature had become anaemic through its flight from reality to a heaven of 'baseless spiritualism and identity'. The cure must be scientific rationalism."

"That sounds innocuous enough even praise worthy. But it lacks candour to the extent that it is not the whole or most important part of the story, and the manifesto might have attracted more attention if it had said something about the progressive writers' antecedents. One important point is that a large majority of the manifesto's signatories came from well to do middle class families, and have had their higher education in England where for several years the communist party has been trying hard to attract just this type of Indian students. The famous raid on the party's headquarters in 1926 produced plenty of evidence to this... the party got to work again in 1930 or 31 decided that it must work actively among the Indian



residents in Britain (Workers, Sailors, Students etc.) and establish the best possible connections with India through them."

"This part of its work of course fell to the late Shapurji Sakhlatawala and many of today's progressive writers were members of the group he rallied around him. One of their earliest ventures was a communist monthly. The Bharat which they described as 'The Journal of Indians Abroad'.

... "These then are the men who now returned to India from the kernel of the Indian Progressive Writers' Association. Some probably get posts at wages sufficient to distract them from their old thoughts others have undoubtedly learned wisdom with maturity, but many continue to shock their parents..."

"A local leader of the IPWA for instance combines service in the foreign propaganda section of the Congress with work as an accredited and correct communist, and any Government of connections with recognised political institution is useful for the disorientation of 'Progressive' literature that has nothing to do with 'art for arts' sake' or with realities of India's traditional civilisation." (The Statesman, 7th July, 1936)

But even prior to the formation of the AIPWA Trade Union leaders and leading intellectuals of Bengal had already set up the League against Fascism and War in an

informal meeting in Calcutta on 27th October 1935. Abyssinia fell on 5th May 1936 to the Italian fascist forces and between 19th-23rd June 1936 the second Conference of the International Association of Writers for the Defence of Culture was held in London. Mulk Raj Anand represented India in this conference and reported to the Congress about the work which the AIPWA was doing. "The main purpose of the London gathering was, after the campaign to help the victims of Fascism organised by the first conference, to evolve a more positive defence of culture. The plan of an Encyclopaedia of world culture was put forward and the proper means of appreciating our cultural heritage were discussed."<sup>15</sup> On 18th June 1936 Gorky passed away, the Bengal unit of the PWA met at Albert Hall on 11th July 1936 and passed a condolence resolution mourning the death of Gorky.

Meanwhile civil war broke out in Spain, when ex-General Franco heading a conspiracy ploy of International Fascism staged a coup on July 16, 1936 to oust the democratically elected Republic in September 1936. The World Congress for the Defence of Peace met again in Brussels. The Manifesto from the AIPWA which was sent to the second conference of the International Association of writers for the Defence of Culture was also sent to this conference. The signatories to this Manifesto included Rabindra Nath Tagore, Jawaharlal Nehru, Munshi Premchand,

Sarat Chandra Chatterjee, Nandalal Bose, Ramananda Chatterjee, Pramatha Chowdhury and others. The manifesto declared "On our own and on behalf of our countrymen we take this opportunity to declare with one voice with the people of other countries that we detest the participation of India in any imperialist war for we know that the future of civilisation will be at stake in the next war." In November 1935 Romain Rolland made a fervent appeal to the world to rise unitedly against fascist menace. Besides, Rolland sent a personal appeal to the Indian National Congress representatives at the Faizpur Congress. On 1st December 1936, the text of Rolland's former appeal was sent to Ramananda Chatterjee by Francis Jourdain for widespread circulation, with a letter that read:-

"Dear Friend,

We are enclosing herewith an eloquent appeal addressed to the conscience of the world by Romain Rolland.

We feel sure that you will associate yourself with this appeal and therefore we make so bold as to ask you to send us a few lines expressing your opinion on the terrible bombardment which the civilian population in Madrid has endured already for so many days.

We attach particularly great value to such a personal declaration from you. Its publication in the press and particularly in Spain will be an important testimony

to world opinion and a mark of solidarity with the Spain's people.

Thanking you in anticipation,

Yours sincerely,

For the World Committee Against War and Fascism

P.P. Francis Jourdain<sup>16</sup>

The text of Rolland's appeal which was published in the January edition of the Modern Review had a tremendous impact on the public mind.

Meanwhile a special conference of the International Association of writers for the Defence of Culture was held in shell torn Madrid in the summer of 1937 'in an magnificent gesture of solidarity' with the people of Spain. Some of the members of the Congress like Ralph Fox, John Cornford and Christopher St. John Spriggs had layed down their lives in anti-fascist war while in Spain Andre Malraux, Ralph Bates, Ludwig Benn was fighting on the side of the Republic and a great many others such as Stephen Spender, Witt Anden, Ernest Hemingway, Edgell Rickword were actively helping in the Spanish anti-fascist war efforts.

In India, on the initiative of Bengal's League Against Fascism and War, an all India Forum of this League was set up in March 1937 with Tagore as its President. The Committee included such eminent personalities such as Sarojini Naidu, S.A. Dange, N.G. Ranga, Jayprakash Narain, Sajjad Jahir and many others.

To express solidarity with the Spanish people, the League published a pamphlet called "SPAIN" with pictures of Tagore, Rolland and Barbusse where Tagore made a moving appeal to all to contribute to the Relief Fund for helping the victims in the Spanish War. The text of Tagore's appeal read:-

"TO THE CONSCIENCE OF HUMANITY".

"In Spain the world civilisation is being menaced and trampled under foot. Against the democratic government of the Spanish people Franco has raised the standard of revolt. International Fascism is pouring men and money in aid of the rebels. Moors and foreign legionaries are sweeping over the beautiful plains of Spain, trailing behind them death, hunger and desolation."

"Madrid, the proud centre of culture and art is in flames. Her priceless treasures of art are being bombed by the rebels. Even hospitals and creches are not spared. Women and children are murdered, made homeless and destitute."

"The devastating tide of international Fascism must be checked. In Spain this inhuman recrudescence of obscurantism, of racial prejudice, of rapine and glorification of war must be given the final rebuff. Civilisation must be saved from its being swamped by barbarism."

"At this hour of the supreme trial and suffering of the Spanish people, I appeal to the conscience of humanity."

"Help the peoples' front in Spain, help the government of the people, cry in million voice 'Halt' to reaction, come in your millions to the aid of democracy, to the succour of civilisation and culture." (The Statesman, 3rd March, 1937).

On the 11th March, 1937, under the auspices of the League Against Fascism, a conference was held in Calcutta's Albert Hall presided over by Sarojini Naidu when the 'Help Spain' Committee was created and the Relief Fund for helping the war victims was set up. In order to create an awareness among masses about the significance of the anti-fascist struggle, the Bengal Committee of the League Against Fascism drew up a programme. On April 12th, 1937, the Help Spain Committee organised a mammoth public meeting at College Square in support of the anti-fascist struggle in Spain.

In December, 1938, the 2nd conference of the AIPWA was held in Calcutta. The conference began with a reading of the message from Tagore in which he spoke about the new awakening of Asia and paid rich accolades to Kamal Ataturk's role in the modernisation of Turkey.

In the cultural sphere, an important landmark was marked in Bengal's literary movement with the publication of the first communist journal in Bengali 'Agrani' by the communist party of Bengal in 1939. Agrani's editorial board comprised of eminent communist members

like Chinmohan Sehanobish, Sudhin Pradhan, Saroj Dutta and others. After 'Parichay' it was 'Agrani' which contributed most to sustain the tradition of Marxist literary debate in Bengal. After the outbreak of the second World War the years 1940-41 witnessed a minor split in the Indian communist camp on the question of war. Whereas the Royists felt that the war was anti-fascist and hence cooperation with the British government was necessary a major section of the Indian left stressed the need to force a militant anti-war struggle against the government. Of course it needs to be mentioned in this context that although by 1941 the communists had captured most of the Congress Socialist Party Units and their leaders and consequently came under suspicion yet there was no major difference between the CSP and the larger section of the communist party as regards to their attitude to war. The Nazi Soviet pact in August 1939 which Stalin justified on the basis of the Thesis 'the need to preserve Socialism in one country' proved a serious embarrassment for the European communists. But such a stance was advantageous for the Indian communists who could now resolutely justify the anti-British stand and waged the anti-imperialist struggle with renewed vigour. And in the face of this rousing anti-British campaign the Government intensified repression.

In protest, Subhas Bose led a successful Satyagraha in Calcutta in July 1940 demanding the removal of the Halwell Monument (a memorial to the British victims of alleged Black Hole). The left controlled Pradesh Congress Committee of Kerala organised a successful anti-repression day on 15th September 1940 marked by Police firing at Tellicherry Matt avenue and Movazha. In Bengal most of the communist leaders were either taken in custody under security Act, Defence of India Act etc. or were put under house detention. Rest of them either fled or went underground. In the cultural field communist party's pioneering publication Agranī was stopped. PWA's work also showed signs of decline.

To fill this vacuum in the communist cultural movement in Bengal, a section of left minded students came forward to set up the Youth Cultural Institute in Calcutta in 1940. Its members included Nikhil Chakravarty, Renu Roy, Chinmohan Sehanobish, Jolly Kaul, Devabrata Biswas and many others. Although some of the leaders of the rival student movement like Biswanath Mukhopadhyay criticised the composition of the YCI by branding its members as rich and elitist and considered it to be a liability for the CPI to maintain such an organisation, yet, whatever might have been the members' background, it must be acknowledged that at a time when the communist movement in Bengal was marked by its near



absence it was YCI that tried to keep the communist cultural movement alive in Bengal; by organising a variety of programmes that included poster exhibitions, presentation of debates, discussions on the question of culture and for the first time introduced the tradition of community singing in Bengal. They sang the rousing patriotic songs of Tagore and Nazrul as also revolutionary foreign songs translated in English along with those composed by themselves. Mr. Chinmohan Sehanobish wrote that "the YCI was not established with a view to create a new cultural movement. Their idea was to project through songs, dances and dramas - contemporary events the significance of which was to be understood both by the audience and the performers... and on the strength of these dramas and acting style free from the stagings was born a new set of audience ."<sup>17</sup>

In the international sphere the year 1941 was marked by two significant developments which was to transform the course of world history and with that the Indian situation; Hitler's invasion of Russia on 22nd June 1941 and the dramatic advancement of Japan in South East Asia onwards from December 1941, which succeeded in ousting the British out of Malaya, Singapore and Burma within 4 months and threatened to bring its empire in India to an end. In the wake of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union and the latter's allining

with the Allied forces, drastically shifted the International communist line and put the CPI in a dilemma. After six months of intense debate the CPI in January 1942 pledged its support to the British government in their war efforts in a gesture of solidarity with the rest of communist block, but not without reiterating their stand on the question of national independence.

At this time, the sentiment of the CPSU which guided the strategy of the CPI was best illustrated in an article by V.I. Lenin entitled "The Role of the British Empire In The Current War" which the Russian Party organ the Bolshevik printed in this September 1941 issue. In it Lenin "assigned to the British empire as a whole the highest place side by side with the USSR in the great coalition of democratic peoples' fighting fascism."<sup>18</sup> The substance of this article was that "the attack of fascist Germany on the Soviet Union called forth huge indignation among the Indian people who understood that this increases the menace to India itself since German fascism always considered an attack on the Ukraine and Caucasus as a beginning of a further attack on Mesopotamia and India."<sup>19</sup> As long as the British fought as an ally of the Soviet Union, argued both British and Soviet communists that India ought to support the British Imperial Government inspite of their subaltern colonial status. As Ralph Retzlaff observes <sup>that</sup> these dictates of International communists were rather significant during

that time, because "during the early phases of the development of Indian Communism in the 1920s, the movement as elsewhere was largely under the direction of the CPSU but a pattern developed whereby this control could be exercised by the Communist party of Great Britain. The ties between the Indian and the British communists were extremely important. They covered not only the matters of ideology, strategy and tactics but also the supply of funds, trained organisers and other agents."<sup>20</sup> Hence on the question of deciding on the strategy of peoples' war line the British opinion was forthcoming. R. Palme Dutt in Notes of the Month in Labour Monthly 13th September 1941 (p. 381) argued "the interest of the peoples of India and Ireland and of all the colonial peoples as of all the peoples of the world is bound up with the victory of the peoples against fascism that interest is absolute and unconditional and does not depend on any measures their rulers may promise or concede."<sup>21</sup>

The British Government however was not unaware of the tactical significance of the peoples' war line. In a secret fortnightly writes Sudhi Pradhan, report for the month of January 42 in the section 'Communists and the War', it was said, "Although the views recently expressed by some communist bodies may suggest a more realistic approach towards the war,... it is unlikely that the anxiety of the communists to ensure the survival

of the Soviet Russia will prove stronger than their hatred of British imperialism... their professed change in policy is inspired by no sympathy with British causes but looks forward to the eventual destruction of imperialism after the defeat of fascism."<sup>22</sup>

But to make this underplaying of the anti-imperialist line even remotely palatable to the Indian masses, Indian communist leaders like P.C. Joshi had to adopt a complex line of reasoning going much beyond the arguments of the Russian and British communists so as to legitimise the tactics of people's war line. His two main lines of reasoning were "(i) the involvement of the Soviet Union in the war as an ally of the British was in itself a guarantee of liberation from the pre-war conditions and (ii) that the creation of the peoples' front to unite the Indian nationalities against the fascist rule would compel the British to concede India's freedom under the pressure of a progressive public opinion at home."<sup>23</sup>

Hence the two apparently irreconcilable goals, independence from the colonial domination at the national level and forging a struggle against the larger evil of fascism at the international level was sought to be shown as complimentary and contributory to each other. The extension of this thesis was that in the act of uniting for war the Indian people would achieve the strength to exact the freedom from the imperialist

government. And the substance of this argument was coined into a popular slogan "National Unity for National Defence and National Government". This Theory was however upheld as the necessary adjustment of the communists by the modern Indian historians. Bipan Chandra argues that depending on the identification of the principal contradiction the communists in all countries be it China or Vietnam had to make class adjustments. Mao's prescription was to give priority to the anti-imperialist struggle which could not be subordinated to the fight against national bourgeoisie. Similarly as Bipan Chandra sees it "Interestingly enough the communist party of India too practised class adjustment during the period of the people's war once they located the primary contradiction in the anti-fascist struggle on a world scale."<sup>24</sup>

In keeping with the communist sentiment of this time Friends of Soviets Society was established in Bengal in 1941 by Hirendranath Mukherjee, S.K. Acharyya, Jyoti Basu, Bhupendranath Dutta and others who signed a declaration in support of Soviet victory. Concern and sympathy for the Soviets was however by no means restricted only to the communists alone. Tagore even in his death-bed in August 1941 expressed his faith that 'it will be the Russians, who will finally check the 'fascist monsters'. Nehru's eclecticism also goaded

him to pursue the Congress leaders to strike a certain compromise on the question of cooperation with the British in the war efforts during the Cripps Mission in the larger interest of the world. His efforts however failed.

Although the adoption of the Peoples' War Line had made the communists appear as anti-national and unpatriotic to the general masses yet an advantage accrued to them in pursuing this Peoples' War Line strategy, which was the legalisation of the organisation in July 1942. The years onwards from 1942 till the end of the war was the age of the Anti-Fascist Peoples' War. And in this the Bengal Unit of the communist party was particularly active in the cultural front under the General Secretary of the Bengal Unit of the CPI, Bhabani Sen. Around this time an incident took place in Bengal which shook the entire intellectual, artists' and writers' community in Bengal; it was the gruesome murder of the young trade union leader and writer Soumen Chanda by pro-fascist elements in Dacca on 8th March 1942, while he was organising an anti-fascist rally. In protest against this heinous crime, the whole intellectual community of Bengal rose as one man. On 28th March 1942 under the Presidentship of Ramananda Chatterjee Bengal's leading writers and artists met at the University Institute's Library and decided to launch the Anti-Fascist Writers' and Artists' Movement. Atul Chandra

Gupta, Bisnu Dey and Subhas Mukhopadhyay were elected as the Joint Secretaries of the organisation and it was decided that in future this organisation will function as the AIPWA's Unit in Bengal. A Committee was set up to organise the Anti-Fascist Writers' and Artists' Union, it included even the famous painters like Jamini Roy, Nirod Mazumdar, Gopal Ghose, Rathin Maitra and Pravash Sen and it was this Anti-Fascist Writers' and Artists' organisation which became the stepping stone for the Indian Peoples' Theatre Association in Bengal, because the AFWA no more remained confined within the limits of literature but spread its activities amidst all the fields of art and culture. They brought out an anthology of songs of workers and peasants in distant villages called "Janayuddher Gan" (songs of the Peoples' War). Another anthology of verses (EKASHUTREY) by Hindu and Muslim poets were composed. Volumes of translation of great foreign writers' <sup>works</sup> and Russian war sketches, guerilla stories, poems etc. were prepared. On the programmes of AFWA Hiren Mukherjee wrote "Songs recitals have lately been a feature - and a very effective one at that - of the anti-fascist movement. There is astounding response from all classes of the people, and recitals have had to be often repeated."<sup>25</sup>

The principal figure of the song movement was Benoy Roy. Besides, several groups of singers were formed among them working class comrades and militants working

class singing groups were organised among Tramway and Jute Workers. The songs composed in Bengali and Hindusthani were sung on the Soviet Day meeting at Calcutta on June 22, 1942. The China Day Rally was also observed with similar enthusiasm especially when the news of the legalisation of the communist party poured in, several plays were also staged like 'Ek Hao' in a mime form which was shown to P.C. Joshi, a more successful one was 'Japan Must Be Stopped'.

In August 1942 Gandhi gave the call for Quit India Movement, at a time when German and Japanese fascist forces were threatening Stalingrad and the Burma front. Not only the communists but even Rajagopalachari a leading Congress leader in South opposed Quit India and pleaded for negotiations on the Pakistan demand. The RSS kept aloof from the August upsurge and Savarkar gave the call to Hindu Mahasabha members to carry on with their regular duties. But inspite of these groups' opposition to the August movement it was only the communists who were selected out as traitors to the nation. Of course the adoption of the Adhikari Thesis by the CPI on 'Pakistan and National Unity' (that upheld the right of secession in a multilingual and multinational country in India as in the Soviet Union as valid as a democratic right) further discredited the communists in the eyes of the people. And it proved a difficult time for the communists to sustain the cultural fronts



amidst this backlash of adverse public opinion. It must be mentioned in this context that in this trying time the Bengal Communists played a remarkable role to keep the cultural movement alive. A provincial cultural unit was set up by the noted Trade Unionist and Composer Binoy Roy, writers and poets like Subhas Mukhopadhyay and Anil Kanjilal from the Bengali daily Janayuddha (Peoples' War) also joined the unit. The first annual conference of the Anti-Fascist writers' and Artists' Association was held in Calcutta in December 1943 to a full house at the University Institute Hall. And no sooner the conference was over 'Calcutta experienced its first taste of death and destruction dropped from the air by Japanese Planes. As one of the conference resolution put it, "Fascism is no longer a distant phenomena, its poisonous jaws are straining to swallow our own dear country."



But apart from the menace of international fascism Bengal still had to encounter another disaster, that of the devastating famine of 1943. The economic impact of the war at its worst was felt in Bengal. There was an all out food shortage due to the stoppage of rice imports from Burma and South East Asia. The British who were running a successful war economy at home by rationing the food distribution did little to enforce the same in India. Rampant black marketeering by unscrupulous

businessmen taking advantage of the Government's callous attitude brought about the disaster of famine on Bengal. A.K. Sen wrote on the spectre of famine - "In the terrible summer and autumn of 1943, lakhs trekked to Calcutta, to starve to death on its streets, begging no longer for rice, but just for the water in which it has been cooked. Between one and a half to three million perished in Bengal in a basically man made famine... Direct British rule had begun with a famine in 1770, it was now drawing to a close with a comparable calamity."<sup>26</sup>

During this time of crisis Harindranath Chattopadhyay and Binoy Roy organised a cultural team 'Voice of Bengal' which toured various cities, Patna, Allahabad, Lucknow, Delhi, Lahore and Bombay presenting cultural programmes to raise funds for the famine relief work, which was handed over to the Peoples' Relief Committee. According to Dhananjay Das, a Marxist literary critic, although the kind of enthusiasm that was expected from the CPI at the national level for this newly emergent cultural movement in Bengal was lacking yet it was P.C. Joshi's encouragement, inspiration and advice which helped to strengthen this movement to a great extent.<sup>27</sup> In those days of hectic cultural activity it was Joshi's enthusiasm and imaginative ways of utilising folk media which sustained the cultural front. And it was one of the greatest achievements of the communist cultural movement that Indian Peoples' Theatre Association was conceived

as one of the united cultural front of the artists, writers and the working class. In May 1943 when the first Congress of the CPI was being held in Bombay the AIPWA was holding its 3rd annual conference. It was here that it was decided to formally launch the Indian Peoples' Theatre Association as one of the front organisation of the CPI. On 23rd May, all those delegates (participating in the PWA's conference) who were interested in the Peoples' Theatre met for discussing such issues as the difficulties of organisation, the angle from which plays for People's theatre should be written and the need to draw in as many of the working class and peasants as was possible. This paved the way for the formal conference, the All India Peoples Theatre Conference which met on the 25th of May at Bombay's Marwari Hall, where the resolution was passed for forming the All India Committee and the Provincial Organising Committee of the IPTA.

In Bengal, the IPTA and the AFWAA which had functioned together held its second conference in Calcutta in January 1944. And it was only in 1946, that the writers and the artists decided to come out and separately constitute the Bengal Unit of the IPTA. According to Sudhi Pradhan, the name Indian People's Theatre Association was probably suggested on the basis of Romain Rolland's famous book, 'People's Theatre' by the great scientist Homi Bhaba or by Anil de Silva, the Secretary of the Bangalore unit of the IPTA, formed in 1941.

## NOTES

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5. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, "The Left in India's Freedom Movement and Free India", in Social Scientist 159-160, (New Delhi, August-September, 1986), p.8.
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## CHAPTER IV

### IPTA IN BENGAL - A STORY OF SUCCESS

No evaluation of cultural movement is complete without an analysis of the nature of production, the form and content of the new art that it sought to propagate. Therefore while recounting IPTA's story of success in Bengal, in the first section of this chapter an attempt is made to review its production and the impact it had on masses. This is further compounded by an understanding of the scope of the movement which may be judged by identifying the kind of audience and artists it was able to attract by its dominant artistic leitmotifs.

In the second section we will deepen this analysis further and take into account the impact it had on the government, for applying the criteria of 'mass appeal' and popularity may not be indicative of political significance, as it is generally acceded that audience to cultural programmes are drawn more for the sake of entertainment and less by their will to be politically educated. And seemingly messages of art may not be as viable a catalyst to goad people to political action. But what cannot be ignored as the sheer sign of success is the growing apprehension with which the Government came to view the movement. Had not the Government

perceived it as a serious threat to its hegemony it would not have undertaken the various repressive measures to throttle the growing popularity of the movement. That war by ideology can be an effective means of reversing the power structure is a fact that the Ruling Class ignores at its peril. Had it not been so ideological reproduction would have lost its viability as an effective instrument for organising state power.

Hence the success of IPTA the purpose of which was to promote the critique of Ruling Ideology can only be determined by the kind of attention or the lack of it with which the Ruling Class came to view it. The last section of this chapter focusses on the various Governmental measures which were undertaken to curb the spread of the Communist Cultural Movement.

### Section I

#### NATURE OF PRODUCTIONS AND ITS IMPACT ON THE MASSES

The IPTA in Bengal is popularly known as Gana Natya Sangha. In a discussion article published in 'Unity', December, 1952, Sachin Sengupta wrote, "The compound word 'Gana Natya' has been newly introduced into the Bengali language. The Bengali members of the IPTA are probably responsible for its introduction. It is made up of two Sanskrit words... 'Gana' is used in Bengali

in combination with different words to signify their plural number, and the word 'Natya' means a story that is enacted... I do not know with what idea IPTA created the word gananatya. But after seeing their plays and the English words 'Peoples Theatre' from which the translation has been made I feel that they created this word to mean a special type of drama. Just as they have introduced the word gana natya to use it with a special meaning so also long before their emergence, the political workers have used the word gana to mean certain class of people. That class of people are the neglected, exploited common people. The IPTA has used the word gana in that political sense as prefix to the word natya, probably to express the idea that the natyam or drama that they produce would portray the neglected, oppressed and exploited masses."<sup>1</sup> A similar view is expressed by A.S. Vasquez while elaborating on the content of the 'Popular Act'. According to him capitalism produces art for the masses and not for the people and there is genuine distinction between these two categories 'mass' and people. "People" wrote Vasquez, "is not a general and abstract category in each historical period it has a concrete content. The category of the people is constituted historically by the social classes and strata which create through their activity the principal material and spiritual values and by struggling against



oppression and exploitation, ensure the continuity of the progressive unfolding of history.<sup>2</sup>"

Hence this translation of IPTA in Bengal has a special significance because it revealed its motto that productions were for the people and by the people themselves so that the art that it created genuinely imbibed the elements of a national popular culture.

While identifying the content of a national popular culture, Frantz Fanon has argued that at the stage fighting cultural hegemony and imperialism the art that the native intellectual creates is an 'art of combat'. It is an art of combat because it fights to free the zones of national consciousness that has been appropriated by the imperialistic ideology. Hence at the beginning the native intellectual who used to produce his work for the benefit and appreciation of his colonial master, with the coming of the cultural revolution gradually and progressively begins to address himself to his own people. The revolution in culture aims at transforming the minds of man collectively. The national consciousness according to Fanon, "is the most elaborate form of culture"<sup>3</sup>. There is a dialectical relation between the subject and object of cultural revolution, that is, on one hand cultural objects, arts/ideas affect the subject i.e. the people on one hand and on the other it is the subject who initiates the cultural movement. To understand this relations one must introduce Gramsci's concept

of the role of intellectual who is accorded a privileged position within the domain of the subject who by taking the initiative to mould the ideology of the common man, mediates in the moment where the role of subject and the impact of object coincides.

Thus in a colonised nation the intellectuals assume the leadership in the psychological dimension of the national liberation struggle. By opening up new areas of national culture like revitalising its tradition he breaks open fresh grounds in the mind of men that had been aggrandized by the imperialist ideology. Without Gramsci's characterisation of the organic intellectuals as the 'bearer of the revolutionary ideology' and 'organisers of hegemony in the making', it is not possible to fully comprehend the possibility of cultural Revolution. In the context of a cultural Revolution it becomes the task of the artists and intellectuals to inspire and further the cause of political movement. As the Review Report of the Sixth All India Conference of the IPTA recognised that, "when the People's theatre is developed among the movement of militant workers, peasants and youth it should grow as an inseparable part of the organised mass movements. As a part of its day-to-day struggle it furnishes with cultural weapons."<sup>4</sup> And the art that contains the element of this national popular culture is also progressive art. In the context of the Communist Cultural Movement, Nareni.

Chandra Sengupta, the then President of the PWA wrote in Surendra Nath Goswami and Hirendra Nath Mukherjee edited journal 'Pragati' in 1944; that 'Progressive' is that which strives to be free from the existing customs and practices by questioning its validity in the contemporary situation. Progressive art is therefore always an "art of protest".<sup>5</sup> In the same journal Dhurjoti Prasad Mukhopadhyay opined that "Contradiction" is the main impulse behind progress. In the absence of the need to overcome contradiction there would be no movement or progress. The ultimate aim of progress is freedom.<sup>6</sup> This is also the classical Marxist view which is expressed in Grundrisse. On cultural progress Marx observed that it is marked by 'the complete elaborations of human mastery over the forces of nature. Therefore, as E. Hobsbawm observed in "The Introduction to Karl Marx, Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations" that for Marx 'progress is something objectively definable...' and Marx's aim was to formulate "the content of history in its most general form", and "this content is progress."<sup>7</sup>

To be progressive art must be critical. As Naresh Chandra Sengupta remarked that it must be critical in two ways: first, it must be self-critical, i.e. it must be able to recognise and attempt to overcome its limitations. Secondly, it must be able to evoke and project the theme of critique and protest against the Ruling

Ideology through its content and form.

It was further argued that to be designated as revolutionary art, it is not enough for art to be reflectionist. It must come to serve the revolutionary purpose by goading the people to political action. Hence it must be action oriented. It will not be enough to criticise but its themes must project solutions. The stories, songs and plays should show the ways by which this new and desirable alternative may be reached in the place of the reactionary and decadent. It was following this notion of progressive art the IPTA's productions were conceived.

Summing up all these aspects of Progressive art the 'critic' wrote in Unity in June 1951, "Progressive theatre is that which reflects mankind's problems today - social problems, even moral problems. It is not divorced from life but a part of it. It seeks to bring about or urge the advancement of man.

"Among non-participants, there is a marked tendency to suspect progressive theatre... It is accused of being propaganda and charged with carrying a message. Invariably its character, its propaganda and its message are damned by the critic because these differ from his own views on the subject, progressive theatre believes in projecting, examining or baring the ideologies of our day. It does not look away... But progressive theatre

is a real and vital thing and its demands are so accurate as those of an intricate machine. It has first to fulfil the purpose for which it is designed and created. ... Production then is the most urgent requirement of progressive theatre groups. It is not enough to write or find a great play... A great play deserves and demands a great production." 8

In the same vein Mulk Raj Anand argued that 'there need be no apology for the propagandist intent of progressive theatre since progressive theatre was purposive theatre. But to be potent as progressive theatre he reiterated that form and technique of productions must be honoured, and for this there was a constant necessity to experiment with new forms. In an interview with the Unity Reporter in June 1951 he cited the example of Chinese theatre. "When the Chinese people were at war with Japan and newspapers were scarce, and there was the need to tell people what was happening in the world, the Chinese people's Theatre invented a form called the 'Living Newspaper'.

"In this the journalists wrote up the news in dramatic form, using commentary or narrative to tell the story, and enlivening episodes through the actors ability to portray events, words, as well as the absence of words, were used to significant effect, and dance was thrown occasionally to interpret inner mood.

"The Americans borrowed this form in the service of Roosevelt's New Deal, and many living newspapers were written which are models of what a perfect technique can do to make propaganda into art. For agit prop, purposes in India, I recommend experiments in this technique."

Besides, on the question of the most effective form that may be adopted for people's theatre he recommended that a new tradition must be created by making a synthesis of the Indian Classical and folk culture with the elements of European stage craft. Since the object of the people's theatre is to reflect life there was an urgent need for the audience to have physical contact with the performers and for this it was necessary to learn from the actors and the audience. At the same time Dr. Anand acknowledged that this element of intimacy between the audience and the actor has always existed in the Indian theatre. In the well known plays of Bharat Natya Shastra, the spectator used to bring in the theatre as much as the actors. Therefore what was needed was an intelligent application of both the technique and forms, European as well as the indigenous for which the intensive study of the art of theatre was absolutely imperative.

DRAMA: These problems as was put forward by Dr. Anand appeared as issues before the Drama Commissions of the 7th IPTA Conference. It was which recommended that "the primary function of the IPTA is to develop

Theatre Arts in this country. Drama being the main component of these arts, it must concentrate on the development of Drama by enlisting the cooperation of play wrights in the work, by a creative interpretation of classical plays, by carrying forward the democratic elements in our culture and by fostering the growth of the truly contemporary drama, which reflects the life and struggles of the people for a freer and fuller life...

"The Commission feels that the tendency that the stage craft (decor, lights, costumes etc.) are not necessary for village plays, is wrong and everything possible must be done to develop the existing village stage. This process will help to bridge the gulf between the village and town.

"Attention must also be paid to those forms which thrive on satire which is in same ways the most effective weapon to expose the injustices, follies and contradictions of a social system, based on greed and suppression of people's rights and culture... The IPTA in its dramatic works while always keen to imbibe healthy influences from abroad, must strive to see that its work is rooted in the national tradition. All cosmopolitan tendencies which have no relevance to our living conditions and social struggles must be opposed."<sup>10</sup>

A study of art history reveals that all propagandist art is art of movement. This trait was particularly pronounced in the works of the Constructivist's in Russia who declared that static art was outmoded and unrealistic. According to Standish D. Lawder, constructivist's art which was the "art in motion was expressive of their youthful and revolutionary states of mind, and perhaps more important, that only by creating a truly kinetic art could they bring art closer to life. Their kinetic art, particularly in theatre and certainly in film, was not developed as an aesthetic experiment, but sprang from the passionate desire to incite the spectator to action."<sup>11</sup>) Hence for the purpose of creating truly revolutionary art, technique plays a significant role which has been acknowledged by artists all over the world.

According to Sudhi Pradhan, Bengal always had a long and lively tradition of theatre, "the cultural policy of the British was substantially to keep the masses swamped in ignorance and train the people in the decadent culture of the West so that they might learn to detest their own people and customs and their people's desire for freedom. Under the impact of this cultural policy that sought to appropriate the native traditions and heritage, the old indigeneous art forms of Bengal like Jatra, Panchali and Kabi Gaan lost their former glory and fell into a state of disuse.... Educated residents of Calcutta staged Shakespeare and English



translation of Bhababhuti in their own homes... Shakespeare exercised a tremendous influence on our youth....

"The first departure from this trend was marked by Dinabandhu Mitra's Neel Darpan. The unity of Bengal's poor peasantry, rich peasantry and intelligentsia against the tyranny of the foreign indigo planters which the play depicts, has been a permanent source of inspiration to the national liberation movement."<sup>12</sup>

Calcutta which was the first British capital in India had initiated a great cultural movement and it reflected in the history of the Bengali theatre also. Addressing himself on this subject of Bengal's cultural heritage, Sachin Sengupta, one of Bengal's greatest dramatists, in his speech delivered at a reception to Prithviraj Kapoor at the Purabi Cinema in Calcutta on 9th January 1952 said, "In this whole of India, it is only the metropolis of Calcutta that may claim the uninterrupted tradition of an established stage for a period running over eighty years. Even without any aid from the Government or a Municipality or any cultural organisation, five theatres, twentyfive reputed Yatra parties, and numerous Kirtan play parties have not only been feeding the art hungry people of Calcutta and the people of undivided Bengal, but have successfully served as a great medium of mass education.

"As a result the vast majority of our people have been able despite illiteracy and lack of academic education to keep at a tolerably high pitch, their moral and spiritual tone." <sup>13</sup> Hence it is obvious that given this background of a rich tradition of theatre movement that the Indian People's Theatre Association in Bengal found a fertile ground for sowing the seeds of a People's Theatre. And this is evident from the reports of the various IPTA Newsletters. The unity of November 1951 reported, <sup>that in</sup> Bengal, there are now IPTA in 10 out of 12 districts in the province, with greatest activity of Howrah, Hooghly and 24 Parganas. ...the activities of Calcutta groups in Calcutta as the nerve centre of the provincial movement, during months of September and October yield the following amazing statistics: A total audience of over 75,000 saw 30 shows... More than 30 songs were composed by Salil Showdhury, Hemango Biswas, Faresh Dhar, Nibaran Pandit, Nirmal Ghose and others.

And so successful were the IPTA productions in Bengal that a Soviet cameraman delegate to the International Film Festivals, filmed the IPTA ballet 'Abalya' in colour at Radha Film Studios in Calcutta and made recordings of IPTA songs. Much of this success of superior productions however must be attributed to the considerable attention that was paid for introducing

new innovative techniques in stage craft and the presentation of the plays which is revealed in the report of Sambhu Mitra, one of the eminent actor, director and playwright of Bengal. Commenting on the achievements of his drama group 'Bahurupi', in 1952 he wrote - "Bahurupi's ideal is in short to produce plays which are socially responsible and which will make the audience feel noble. With this ideal in view our organisation has produced five plays and one short sketch so far. The plays are 'Pathik', 'Ulukhagra', 'Chenna Taar', 'Chaar Adhaya' and an adaptation from Ibsen's 'An Enemy of the People'. And on the strength of these productions, Bahurupi has been able to create a position for itself in the new drama movement of Bengal...

"The name Ulukhagra is taken from a Bengali proverb which means: 'Because the kings fight the reeds in the marsh are trampled to death'. We tried to portray this theme in the background of the middle class house. In this play, we introduced 'floating' doors and 'windows' against a black curtain to express stateliness against a darkened background... Ibsen's 'An Enemy of the People'... is our last full length play. In this production we tried an experiment - we asked all the actors not to follow the text rigidly but to extemporise according to the tempo on the stage, keeping of course the theme well in mind.

"The result was interesting and it needs further research. This extemporising was tried very successfully in our short sketch. We had no sets or properties or even a written script. We invited the audience to imagine that we were sitting in a cosy drawing room or walking on a road, by pantomime and certain symbols. The audience did believe, first laughingly, then deeply as the story takes a turn. We have presented our plays on the best stage available in Calcutta and also in villages with the peasants as our audience. We are proud of the experience and are searching for a theatrical expression which will impress the beautiful core of the Bengali mind. We want to make our theatre national and great."

Adaptation from famous classics and progressive plays from abroad was one of the prominent features of IPTA productions in Bengal. The Calcutta IPTA central squad under director Umanath Bhattacharjee dramatised the poignant piece by Julius Fuchik, 'Notes From the Gallows'. Adapting from Maxim Gorky's 'Enemies', Nirmal Ghose wrote a play 'Aarati'. In 1953 Gorky's 'Mother' was also successfully staged at Minerva Theatre, Calcutta. On the significance of this play, Hemango Biswas wrote in Unity, April 1953, "Gorky's Mother is the symbol of universal motherhood. No literary work has drawn as many readers towards the proletarian ideal

as this book of Gorky... At a moment when the future of our freedom movement depends upon the proletarian leadership, the historic role of this drama cannot be overemphasized." Besides, the famous play of Shakespeare, 'Merchant of Venice' was rendered in Bengali by Sunil Chatterjee and was staged in the packed hall of Minerva Theatre in Calcutta on 8th June 1955. One of the most notable adaptation of progressive foreign plays was from the Hungarian dramatist Julius Rosenberg's immortal drama 'Loyalty', the Bengali version of which was titled 'Twentieth June' which depicted the last few hours of the Rosenberg couple in the death cell. 'Unity' in June 1955, in its review of the play, commented, <sup>that</sup> due to the perfect presentation and production it never felt <sup>that it</sup> was a drama of foreign people in a foreign set up. In the annals of the Bengali drama it will remain an episode." And what is most significant in this context is that there was never any dearth of an appreciative audience who thronged the theatres in large numbers to watch the great masterpieces being enacted by the local artists. While reporting on the success of these plays, Unity of July 1952 wrote, <sup>that</sup> during the past five months, Calcutta IPTA has staged about 84 shows in the city and suburbs to an audience of about two lakhs.

But the most notable of all IPTA productions that <sup>acquired</sup> tumultuous popularity among the audiences are Bijon

Bhattacharyya's two plays, 'Nabanna' and 'Jabanbandi'. Writing in People's War of February 13, 1944, Hirendranath Mukherjee, while reporting on the cultural festival at Minerva Theatre on January 17, 1944, wrote, "the feature of the evening was Bijon Bhattacharyya's 'Jabanbandi' the most successful play on the food crisis which we have got so far... Written in an idiom which is racy of the soil, 'Jabanbandi' is a play to cherish... The last three plays were earmarked for performance - before at least 7,000 people - of Bijon Bhattacharyya's Navanna, (the famous Bengali play, the Harvest) and the IPTA Central Squad's dances. Never before in Calcutta had a play on a ballet been produced before such vast congregations which brings together perhaps the country's most talented dramatic team under the joint direction of Bijon Bhattacharyya and Sambhu Mitra..." which "have become so popular that the Calcutta public keeps on coming to see them in increasing numbers every time."<sup>15</sup>

#### MUSIC & DANCE:

Music, especially folk music has a special place in the social life of the community and as such it forms an important medium of communication which was recognised by IPTA. It is widely acknowledged that from earliest times men's activities connected with subsistence are associated with music. "Songs and rhythms are linked with the techniques of collective work: weaving songs for the transplanting of rice on the pounding of maize.

The rhythmic structure of the song itself is modelled after the rhythm of the work and the songs often takes the form of responses or alternate passages between solo and chorus."<sup>16</sup> And because of this social content of music, it was always accorded a place of prominence in a people's cultural movement. As the Manifesto of the 7th IPTA conference declared, "art and culture, songs and dances, dramas and poems are of the flesh and blood of our people, their companions in famine and plenty, in periods of devastation, war and peace."<sup>17</sup>

It is universally witnessed that a period of turbulent social change always coincides with the reconstruction of the cultural elements like the period of anarchy from the 1st to the 11th World War which had brought revolutions in the world of music. "The idioms that emerged in the world of music had little spontaneity of the pre-war periods. From Bartok's utilisation of folk tunes in classical music to Schoenberg's extreme modernism all reflected this urge to usher in the new in protest against the old.

"The sense of nationalism was evoked by utilising the speech patterns which for Mussorgsky implied realism in music - a truth to life rather than Romantic fantasy. ...With the sense of nationalism also came the use of folk forms. The discovery of irregularities of folk rhythms and melody had a crucial effect on

on Bela Bartok's music which was the first of its kind in Western art music."<sup>18</sup> The departure from the pre-war types is marked the birth of nationalism in music in the compositions of Bartok and Kodaly in Hungary.

Popular music made its demand on the classical and folk in the crisis ridden Europe. The movement of six in France attacked the Romantic traditions by making a studied use of jazz. "Popular music of Irving Berlin and George Gershwin coming from America also had a deep impact on such composers like Weill and Krenck who had their cudgels on the aimless decadence of Germany of 1920s. Weill by this time started also writing operas in collaboration with Brecht and the Futurists who anticipating the war period extended the boundaries of music to include noise of automobiles, aeroplanes and armaments."<sup>19</sup>

The cultural upheaval from which took the roots of new music was inspired by the political movement in Europe.

"The birth of a national music in Russia under state directives was closely connected to the requirements of the war period. It has been observed that during the war itself in Russia as in other belligerent countries, artists and composers were expected to contribute to the patriotic business of raising the morals of the civilian population and the armed forces... both



Prokopiev and Shostakovitch wrote music in tune with the struggles and aspirations of the Russian people during that period, perhaps the chief work being Shostakovitch's Seventh, the Leningrad Symphony... on the siege of the Leningrad."<sup>20</sup>

Likewise, in the same vein, the song and dance groups of IPTA dedicated themselves to arouse and inspire the people in their war against imperialism and fascism.

When the Bengal Squad the 'Voice of Bengal', toured Bombay to collect funds for famine relief, Dr. D.G. Vyas the art critic of the Bombay Chronicle wrote on the performances of IPTA. "Why such simple performances be effective in their appeal? The reply can be found with no difficulty. The artists who present them are people of definite views and deep political convictions. They do not belong to the class of the artists of the professional stage or to the category of the stage struck amateurs of high society. They have pledged themselves to the noble purpose of spreading the message of patriotism, liberty, unity and economic prosperity."<sup>21</sup>

The People's war of May 28, 1944, while trying to analyse why the Bengal Squad's performance had such a deep impact on masses wrote, "The Squad felt the impression it had produced when it was told what Sayadiants, director of Soviet Films for India and China said: "This is the real thing. It reminds me of art as we have it

in the Soviet Union. Bengali boys and girls came to rouse Bombay but also managed to remind a Soviet citizen of his own home land. Common people the world over are one big brotherhood. True patriotism is their common voice. This what the 'Voice of Bengal' proved in Bombay. The Press was eloquent in its praise of the Bengal Squad's performance.<sup>22</sup>

Some of the doyens of the Indian musical world like Binoy Roy, Hemango Biswas, Salil Chowdhury, Hemant Kumar, Anil Biswas were the pillars of the IPTA's song squad in Bengal. On the Song Movement in Bengal Hiren Mukherjee wrote, "Communists must work and show results, must work without respite so that the heart strings of our people are touched and a mighty upsurge follows that will win us our freedom."

"So where others would have faltered, Communists went ahead into 'struggle' - the struggle for Unity, for National Government, for resistance to fascism, for freedom."

"People's Songs".

"And in Bengal a potent weapon in their armoury has been a new variety of people's songs written in the people's own language and set to the people's own tune..."

"A start was made some eight months ago with three or four Hindi songs. Several groups of singers were

formed, among the working class comrades and militants. In Calcutta's sprawling industrial belts, it was not too rare to hear Haldherji's 'Kekra Kekra, Naam Batao' (1) or Bharatbhusan Agarwal's 'Bar Chalo Kisan Dhir, Bar Chalo Majur Bir' (2) being sung by workers as they toiled." (People's War)<sup>23</sup>

The pioneers of the song movement in Bengal was however the members of the Youth Cultural Institute who first introduced the tradition of Community singing in Bengali. "They drew their inspiration from the anti-Jap song movement all over China led by Ni-En-Zrh about which Epstein wrote so eloquently in his book "People's war"... The easy to learn, forceful tunes, new thematic contents of the songs as well as the inspiringly original team-work of the singers made for the choir a name... A technique adopted by this choir proved very effective: while singing a song, they would ask the audience to join in. This brought them much nearer to the audience and enhanced their renown. This group usually sang at meetings specially of the students and thus they gave birth to present-day convention of singing songs on topical problems at mass meetings."<sup>24</sup> The history of the Community singing of YCI began with a suggestion from Nikhil Chakraborty who after reading Agnes Smedley's 'Battle Hymn of China' informed the rest of the members that one of the greatest weapons in the hands of the Chinese Cultural workers during the revolution was the

community singing, because words when attuned to music was easily popularised, can spread faster and leaves an indelible mark on the people's mind.

But the song movement of IPTA in Bengal owes most to the principal figure of the song movement, Benoy Roy. In his book, 'Benoy Roy - A Tribute', Chinmohan Sehanobish wrote that it was mostly due to the sustained effort of this Trade Unionist comrade that the song movement of IPTA could be broad-based. It was he who took the IPTA songs to the villages of Bengal and outside it and also amidst factory workers, party processions, street corner meetings and even in the second class compartments of Calcutta trams.

During the Bengal Kisan Conference at Domar in 1942 he composed three songs including the famous "Hoi Hoi Hoi" guerilla song. Here, "Comrade Benoy was besieged by thousands of peasants. He had to sing over and over again and teach groups of them who defied elements and sat through the pouring rain. From the conference the songs spread into the village and now at almost every Kisan meeting in Bengal and in many a villages "Hat" (weekly markets) they are sung and heard by hundreds."<sup>25</sup>

Benoy Roy organised classes in the party office at Calcutta, Howrah, Hooghly and 24 Parganas districts. Peasant volunteers' camps at Amta (Howrah district) also trained enthusiastic singing squad.

In Mymensingh which is well known for its rich tradition of folk songs, a peasant comrade Nibar an Pandit wrote poems which was recited in Panchali style.

In various districts in East Bengal like Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet mass songs written by Communists were sung by peasants in the villages which called on the Kisans

"Brother Kisan, listen - look

upon your golden corns the

gangsters swoop

How long will you lie,

Supine and Slumberous, how long?

Rise, brothers, rise

They rush and snatch your food,

In frenzied lust they loot,

In hordes they come, from far and near,

These fascist friends, they pour

Rise, brothers, rise.

In the flames made fierce

By the breath of our famished frames

We'll scorch them, brothers

We'll scorch our foes

Rise, brothers, rise." 26

Among the working classes, "Working Class singing groups" were "organised especially in the Tramway and jute areas. In one case even the officers and gate

keepers of a Jute Mill learnt these songs. Tramway workers and iron workers have added to the stock of songs. Liaqut, a paint factory worker, added several lines to that much appreciated song "Kekra Kekra" and a Tramway worker has added some more to make it up to date. They have no bourgeois inhibition about these amendations, they regard the song as their very own.<sup>27</sup> IPTA's songs became the closest companions even during the working class struggle. When in 1954 thirty thousand weavers of Santipur Textile Mills were facing starvation and unemployment on account of the yearn policy of the Central Government "To combat the rotten yearn policy of the Government and state of unemployment and starvation the weavers" organised "themselves for the coming struggle. A number of songs was composed by the IPTA unit of the weavers which served "to dispel the gloom of frustration among the weavers and sounding a clarion call for the coming struggle." (Unity, August 1954).<sup>28</sup>

Women also did not lag behind in taking to the IPTA songs. In Calcutta, they organised three squads in 1953 who sang in meetings, conferences and baithaks (group discussion). In several mofussil towns they sang during Prabhat Pheries (Prabhat - Early morning; Pheries - Community song sung while making rounds in the streets) and also in the National Unity week. "In Rongpur, Dinajpur, Dacca, Chittagong, Mymensingh and

Sylhet peasant women were all to the fore of the movement."

The Dance movement of IPTA was also commendable in its production. In January 1944 in the Cultural Festival that was organised in Calcutta, IPTA dances received many accolades. According to Gopal Halder, it was by watching the IPTA dances that one could become best acquainted with the rich traditions of folk art of India. Sachindra Sankar's solo dance 'She Died of Hunger' was highly promising. Another dance based on Gandhi Jinnah's Conference was an unique improvisation in the dance form, a synthesis of opera and ballet. Other dances like the Dhobi Dance, Duet Peasant Dance and Ramlila were some of the prominent items of the Dance group of IPTA in Bengal, Hiren Mukherjee reporting on this conference in 'People's War' February, 1944 wrote, "The conference adjourned next morning (January 16) to Shradhananda Park, hallowed scenes of countless patriotic meeting where a stage was improvised and before a crowd of 6,000 people the cultural squad from different districts gave a memorable display.

"Never before has Calcutta seen such spectacles. Nearly a hundred delegates had come from the districts, many of them are active political workers but they showed aesthetic talent... Among them were Nibaran Pandit of Mymensingh, whose panchalis entrance even town people, Hemango Biswas, composer of haunting and rousing melodies,

Nirmal Chowdhury who leads Sylhet, song Group; Panoo Pal whose death dance even without a mask will not be easily forgotten, Amulya Sen, leader of the Kirtan group from Rangpur, Satish Mondal who directed the gambhira song and dance team from Malda... Nepal Sarkar from Jessore adapt in Kavi Gaan form and Dayel Kumar of Kayyur Panchali fame from Hooghly -

" Like the performance, the crowd too was memorable. There were women with babies in arms... there were workers who had heard of the show and came in groups and of course there were writers and others interested in literature and arts. They thrilled to the themes of patriotism of unity and free dance of the refashioning of society rendered before them in broad day light without appurtenances of a theatrical show and rendered with so much more sincerity and vitality than one sees elsewhere." <sup>29</sup>

According to the IPTA Annual Report of 1946 at the All India Kisan Conference held at Bezwada in March 1944, the Bengal squad gave a variety of shows which received the highest praise. 'The Hunger and Epidemic Dances' done by Usha Dutt and Panu Paul moved the audience much that the crowd rushed forward to pay the humble mite for Bengal famine relief." <sup>30</sup>

Nabajibaner Gaan a 'Song of New life' was another unique composition of Bengal IPTA. It is a song drama



composed by Jyotirindra Moitra. This operatic composition dealt with rehabilitation of the Bengal peasantry and their new life after the famine and pestilence.

At the beginning of 1944, Uday Shankar had visited Bombay with his troupe of dancers and musicians and the IPTA organised an open air performance of his shadow play 'Ramleela' especially for the workers. It is through this that many members of his troupe like Shanti Bardhan, Abani Das Gupta and Shachin Sankar came to be attracted to IPTA and became the trainer and teachers of the ballet group of IPTA in Bengal. Benoy Roy with his power<sup>ful</sup> voice led the song group and they together came to form the Central Cultural Troupe. Sushil Roy brother of Benoy Roy became the drummer. Bhatiali songs of Benoy Roy was given the dance form by Shanti Bardhan. There were other innovative dance forms like the Lambadi dance - the dance of the gypsies of Hyderabad and the Harvest Festival dance on a collective farm.

In December 1944 the troupe was invited to give their performance at the Conference of Bombay Students Union. This was their very first appearance in public. 800 students saw the performance at the Sunderbani Hall, and many who heard of it later were sorry to have missed it. The next public performance was at the Cowasji Jehangir Hall at the time of the Annual Conference of the Bombay branch of the IPTA. This might be termed as

the debut of the squad before the public of Bombay and here was put to test the labour of five long months and the verdict was that it was one of the best dance programmes witnessed in Bombay.<sup>31</sup>"

The ballet 'Spirit of India' was highly acclaimed by Sarojini Naidu. She commented, "I was delighted with the two items I saw the other night, at the people's theatre 'Ramleela' and 'The spirit of India'. Throughout the magic of colour, rhythm, music the old form was made the channel of new ideas and vital education for the masses."<sup>32</sup>

The Central squad later performed in Calcutta for the workers at cheaper rates at an open air stage. On each day there were over 3,000 workers present.

The IPTA singers gave such professionally competent performance that the IPTA songs were recorded by the HMV. Three artists of the Bengal IPTA song group Salil Chowdhury, Devbrata Biswas and Nivedita Das also participated in the Asian Peace conference in Peking.

#### FILMS:

According to the IPTA Annual Report of 1946, "Since the very inception of the IPTA, the importance of the film as a powerful medium to enlighten the masses has been recognised. And from the very beginning it has been the ideal of the people's theatre to coordinate its stage movement with that of the film movement

either by arranging film shows of progressive films depicting the life of the people like 'Grapes of Wrath' or by producing films in consonance with the ideals of the people's theatre... encouraged by the Government of India's policy of issuing ex gratia licences for production of cultural films to such eminent artist as Uday Shankar and Sadhana Bose, the association sent an application duly signed by our President, Shri N.M. Joshi, to Government for a license to produce a picture... when the application was sent it was decided to produce a picture entitled provisionally 'Children of the Earth' (Dharti Ke Lal) with an idea to depict in as reliable manner as our resources could permit the life of Indian peasants in general and the Bengali farmer in particular, with special emphasis on the grim tragedy wrought by the recent famine in Bengal." <sup>33</sup>

Comrade K.A. Abbas was appointed by the Executive Committee as the producer director of the picture and 'Dharti Ke Lal' was launched as the first IPTA film on 2nd September 1946. Shambhu Mitra, Tripti Bhadhuri, Usha Dutta of Bengal, Balraj Sahani, Noor Jehan from Bombay were included in the cast. Commenting on the film Abbas said, "With the direct cooperation of the people, the people's artists and sympathisers of IPTA, we are producing the picture. It is a new field of activity for us but with the help of our members, well wishers and sympathisers we hope to produce a real

people's film." <sup>34</sup> And as such Dharti Ke Lal can be said to be a pioneering attempt in making an authentic and realistic film in India.

Unity of August 1952 reported that "Enquiries regarding the availability of IPTA's film Dharti Ke Lal have been received from Canada, America and West Germany for Public performances." <sup>35</sup>

The Recommendations of the All India IPTA Film Commission proposed that "Film today must help common man in his struggle for all that he aspired for. It should help him to solve his economic problems, his day-to-day needs his fight for a better living and his search for truth, which will invariably lead him towards realisation of his goal of peace, democracy and freedom from social and economic enslavement." The substance of this resolution was best reflected in the theme of Ritwik Ghatak's films who in a way can be said to be the trend setter of the radical progressive and realistic film movement in Bengal. According to Sudhi Pradhan, "Dharti Ke Lal" was a humble beginning, but Nema Ghose's 'Chinnamuli' (The 'Uprooted') followed by realistic films by Ritwik Ghatak, Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen and others were direct results of the Marxist Cultural Movement as all these directors were in close touch with this movement." <sup>36</sup>

Recounting the relevance of the art of the IPTA film directors, the Statesman in an article 'Spirit of Another Age' discussed the Films of Ritwik Ghatak and K.A. Abbas, "It was the agony of seeing Bengal partitioned that moved Ghatak. Abbas was obsessed with the belief that the real strength of the oppressed and under privileged lay in their unity against injustice. Both film makers were the leading lights of the IPTA... as film makers they survive and mercifully not merely in the archives." (The Statesman October 7, 1988).

"But if Abbas is remembered today, it is primarily for his first film 'Dharti Ke Lal' (1946) Set against the great Bengal famine of 1943 it saw the birth of Abbas as a film maker after the IPTA obtained a license from the Government." But for Ritwik Ghatak, "The fire and the zeal of such films as Nagarik, Meghe Dhaka Tara and Subarnarekha that turn into frustration in 'Jukti Takko Goppo' portrays the anguished protest against the historical and political forces that divided Bengal and retarded its cultural growth."<sup>37</sup>

Hence the content of the IPTA films were mainly political. Its primary concern was to depict how politics affected the everyday life of common men and wherever possible as in Nagarik it tried to show how the false consciousness of people prevented them

from rising above romanticism to seek a political solution to their problems.

The recurrent theme of Bengal partition occurring in Ghatak's films is reminiscent of Rossellini's harassing preoccupation with the impact of fascism.

"The normal events of life, birth, death, marriage, schooling, shopping are all transformed and distorted by the context of the war and its this sense of disruption that Rossellini, carries in the tone of his cinema."<sup>38</sup> It has been often argued by film critics that the traces of Italian Neo-Realism of the post-war eras that reached India through the first Indian film festival in 1952 largely shaped the new cinema movement in India. "The Neo-Realists," writes Satyajit Ray, "were led by writers who were professed Leftists. (Zavattini, Sergio, Amidei). Their experiment consisted in bringing the film story down to the level of everyday reality."<sup>39</sup> But the influence of the neo-realists in the Indian film makers should not be overstated. For films like 'Dharti Ke Lal' were made before 1952. "The IPTA films were more of a socio-political response with its roots in theatre which had already produced talents like Balraj Sahní and Bijon Bhattacharyya."<sup>40</sup>

And what needs to be emphasized is that films like any other art is a response to the contemporary social situation, which is clear from James F. Scott's comments on Ingmar Bergman. In the 'Journal of

Aesthetic And Art Criticism' James F. Scott in 1950 wrote, "In the era of fascist challenge and socialist response, the director followed the lead of the philosopher in sensitising his audience to the realities of mass movement, as maturing techniques of editing made montages and dissolves the ideal means to catch the fury of a street riot, the deployment of battalions, the squalor of a famine-haunted village. These emphases, of course, were accelerated by World War II and its aftermath, as the haggard honesty of Italy's neo-realism reminds us. In their work of post-war decade, Rossellini and de Sica as well as Antonioni and Visconti took their inspiration from the public world of burned cities and displaced masses, the shattered landscape where ignorant armies crashed by the night."<sup>41</sup> Nearly all the directors of the war period addressed themselves to the theme as to show the 'shaping of the human spirit was accomplished within some institutional frame.'

And what was true of European directors was also true of the Indian directors of the IPTA movement. In every sphere of IPTAs artistic productions it followed the popular slogan 'Art Into Life' that was the guiding theme of the Russian Constructivists whose motto was to take their art into the streets. The essence of constructivists is to be found in their reaction against

the 19th century concept of art as a contemplative activity.

Constructivism according to Sergei Eisenstein cannot be divorced from Communism. One of the main protagonists of the Constructivist Movement in Russia Eisenstein viewed artistic activity strictly from an utilitarian, rationalistic and materialistic perspective. Standish D. Lawder talking about Eisenstein's films wrote, "Eisenstein's criteria for the selecting of each shot, each fragment of photographed reality, was its power to impress the spectator - in a calculated and predetermined manner - with strong emotional or psychological impact or to use his terms, its power of attraction."<sup>42</sup>

That art can successfully perform the social function of arousing and motivating people to action, finds its best support in film critics' rationalizations on the effectivity of Eisenstein's films. According to Lawder, "Eisenstein reasoning is derived from Pavlov's theory of conditioned reflexes, the underlying influences of Pavlov, one should not forget was as important to Marxist art as Freud has been to Western art."<sup>43</sup> The director who had created art for revolutionary purpose intended that his films would induce the spectators to react as if in the presence of the reality itself. And it is this intentionality which had guided the creative enterprise of IPTA also and it is clear from



the reviews of its productions in the newspapers.

When the Bengal Squad of IPTA 'The Voice of Bengal' had toured Bombay in 1944, the Times of India wrote, "Those who attended the performance were deeply impressed by the originality and force of the programme. The organisers can congratulate themselves for having employed, the Theatre as an educative force". The Gujarati newspaper Nootan Gujarati commented, "All those advocating realism in art and yet finding difficulties in its practice must see this programme. It will provide them with guidance and inspiration..."<sup>44</sup>

One of the greatest resolution of IPTA was that its productions were not to be restricted within the narrow limits of the city but were to reach the common men, the working classes in the remote villages and factory premises and not only to draw them as audience but also as performers so as to unite the modern stage craft of the city and folk culture for generating new themes for the People's Theatre Movement. For this purpose, the IPTA organisers in Calcutta took the initiative to help each district to develop their own district committees which would explore new sources of old forms and utilise them in IPTA productions. And as a part of this venture Kabi Ladai were revived whose wordy verses were utilised to discuss the burning problems of the day. It could be satirical at the

same time instructive.

Nirmal Ghose in 'Unity', of August 1954 reported on the productions of the various districts of Bengal. "Howrah district reported about Bhadu Gaan (Bhadu song) Kabi Gaan, Ghetu Gaan, Chaiti Gaan, Bhar Jatra, Bhaer Naach, ... 24 Parganas district organisers of IPTA organised Gajan festival (traditional folk forms of worshipping the Hindu God, Shiva and his consort Parvati, (through songs and dances), Malda district organised a festival of Gambhira.

" Hooghly organisers are taking the lead for a district wide folk art festival. For the first time in the history of IPTA, Gurudas Paul, famous worker poet of Bengal staged a Jatra with worker artists. The Jatra was witnessed and heartily appreciated by about two thousand peasants and jute workers... In Budge Budge the IPTA unit with standard vacuum and jute workers is going ahead with its own drama, 'Dabi' written and produced by workers themselves... In Nadia district, the Santipur unit is functioning with a membership composed totally of weavers."<sup>45</sup>

Apart from revitalizing the folk forms and taking art to the working class and drawing them in the cultural fronts, so widespread was the impact of IPTA movement in Bengal that it extended its activities among all sections of population, women's organisations,

teachers' and students' organisations and workers groups who enjoined IPTA to join its force with theirs. Nirmal Ghose wrote, "In Calcutta, the women's organisation has formed a cultural section which is conducted by IPTA artists. In the same manner Bata Mazdoor Union of 24 Parganas is forming its workers' IPTA. Kishore Bahini of West Bengal is opening its cultural centres under the guidance of the Provincial IPTA. In the field of the youth movement, IPTA is working as its vital core in Dinajpore, Jalpaiguri, Calcutta, Howrah, Burdwan and Barrackpore areas.

"There is hardly any Trade Union or Kisan Sabha Unit, Students' Organisation, University, College or Club in West Bengal which has not been entertained by IPTA at least for once. Here the recent teachers' strike is worth mentioning. During the period of the strike when the teachers were squatting in front of the Governor's House, IPTA artists performed every evening before the respected teachers. At the time of the tram fare movement IPTA marched with the people with a poster drama on the then current movement. At the time of the blockade of Pakistan launched by a handful of people with vested interests, IPTA took a firm stand and in border districts propagated for a trade agreement between the two independent and neighbouring states of India and Pakistan. At that time the Gambhira Squad

of Malda district worked for peace and cooperation between the two neighbouring countries." (Unity, August 1954) <sup>46</sup>

IPTA activities were ubiquitous and was spread among various communities with heterogeneous cultural background. True to their declaration in the Manifesto of the 7th All India Conference which said "while recognising the contribution which the people of tribal areas have made to our culture, we shall seek to develop these cultures and maintain the strength and vigour of their forms." <sup>47</sup> IPTA in Bengal had set up various local units in the tribal belts of the state which met from time to time in various conventions to popularise various decisions taken during IPTA Conference. True to their commitment of 'revitalising the folk traditions in theatre arts and songs', IPTA brought within its fold some of the re knowned folk artists of Bengal. Commenting on the contributions of these folk artists to popular movement Sudhi Pradhan wrote, "When during the second great war, a terrible famine overtook the peasantry of Bengal a legion of folk artists of Bengal died with them. They were the people whose pictures were never taken for posters by the business interests but whose great gifts endeared them to countless villagers. Educated society knows the famous Mukunda Das whose Jatras became the medium of anti-imperialist propaganda. Recently the papers reported the nationalist activities of the Malda

Gambhira Group and similar activities of the people's poets." <sup>48</sup>

Folk art however was not just confined to rural areas alone. To popularise this art form IPTA encouraged its town units to acquaint the urban masses with their traditional heritage. Therefore, we see that various IPTA units of Calcutta in their repertoire of dramas and songs borrowed heavily from the genre of folk arts. As Unity of July 1954 reported, <sup>that</sup> South Calcutta Branch staged on 20th August the long awaited Jatra, "Rahu Mukta" on Peace written by Biru Mukherjee. It was a great success and it had ushered in a new phase in IPTA movement in Bengal.

Apart from Group adapting from conventional art forms, IPTA was also considerably successful in its productions of short sketches and poster exhibitions. Besides, the tradition of realism which was first introduced through the communist cultural Movement in India had had its impact on every field of art including Indian painting.

As Sudhi Pradhan argues, that there were various cultural groups that sprang up under the aegis of the Congress party to mobilise the people like the Indian National Theatre in Bombay under Congress Socialists and the Congress Sahitya Sanbha under the provincial Congress Party in Bengal, "But their anti-Communism

could not lead them further. It was left to the Marxists to disclose the potency of the art forms that are close to the people, their immense possibilities, their untapped source of strength and thereby the opening of the magic door to mass mobilisation.<sup>49</sup> And as far as quality of IPTA's production is concerned it evoked spontaneous praise from professional celebrities like S.D. Burman, Uday Shankar, Sisir Bhaduri and others. That IPTA's production had tremendous success is clear from survey report which tried to study the attendance of the various cross sections of people when the Bengal Cultural Squad was touring Punjab in December 1943. The chart was sent by Binoy Roy from Delhi to Sudhi Pradhan. According to the report the Cultural Squad shows were attended by at least 100,750 people that included intelligentsia, teachers, students, peasants, village and towns folk peasants, working class, women from all sections of society, even merchants and bourgeoisie. The cash collected amounted to 32,472, plus 30 mds of grain, 25 ivory bangles and other gold and silver ornaments.<sup>50</sup>

Apart from drawing the people as audience, one of the greatest contribution of the movement 'was to unite artists and technicians into two trade unions in Bengal through which they began to improve their working and living conditions in stage, screen, radio, gramophone, and private profit making institutions.

Also it was one of the IPTA resolutions that it must tell the Indian people of the new world with its new culture being built in the Soviet Union, People's China, the New Democracies of Eastern Europe of the gigantic and historic movement in Asia and the World participated in by the finest men and women.

And IPTA had pledged to unite the progressive forces of people's culture all over the world. And progressive art everywhere were borne out to social crisis and political movement. Anger and despair prevailing during the crises of capitalism in Europe during the inter-war period was felt by the artists of that period and their concern for change was reflected for example "in the Dadaist rejection of all so called civilised pretensions and the poignant bitterness of Picasso, Braque and Gris who had developed the central line of cubism in the 20th century which was motivated essentially by the Nietzschean desire to shock. Dada, a complex international movement was essentially an attack on both artistic and political traditions".<sup>51</sup> These trends "in art acquired new political relevance in the light of the war, which many intellectuals saw as the logical culmination of the whole ethos of the 19th century."<sup>52</sup> The sense of disruption that was provoked by politics was the prime impulse to the artistic movements that in Stravinsky's language showed 'the way forward.'

Art can never be neutral to politics and it was this idea that motivated the artists to join the political struggle, to create new art for the people and it was this concern that informed the nature of IPTA art. As Niranjana Sen remarked in Unity, October 1952, "Today when politics produce mass destitution and wars, how can writers and artists be neutral to politics? Art can't be divorced from politics as it can't be divorced from life. And because it can't be divorced from politics, it can't be divorced from the struggles of the people for a better life, a new society and real freedom". It was therefore the motto art for people which motivated the artists to join the IPTA Movement. Their aim can be best summed up in Maya Kovsky's language which had aroused the artists in Soviet Russia during the Revolution, "Forget your old <sup>whining</sup> for truth.

Slice the old from your heart

The streets are our brushes

our palettes - The city squares." <sup>53</sup>

### Section-II

#### IPTA, AND ITS IMPACT ON THE GOVERNMENT

No assessment of the success of the IPTA movement can be complete without taking into account the impact it had on the Government. In its two pronged approach to fight imperialism and fascism in the pre-independence



period and its commitment to continue this war against the national bourgeoisie after independence brought the Communist Party under fire from both the British and the Congress Government. The success of its Cultural Front can therefore be best evaluated by analysing how effective it was in carrying on this campaign of anti-imperialism, anti-fascism and anti-capitalism so much so that even the Government came to perceive it as a veritable threat. This chapter attempts to look into the various measures of the governments both before and after independence that was directed at thwarting the Communist cultural movement with special reference to the IPTA movement in Bengal.

Although the Communists were branded as anti-national due to their anti-fascist stance which had called for cooperation with the British in their war efforts, it is amply clear from several Government Reports, Secret Circulars and private correspondence among the British officials of that period that the Government had an unalloyed suspicion against the Communists and recognised their promise of cooperation merely as a tactical move.

In 'Under Communism's Crimson Colours' Hiren Mukherjee has liberally quoted from sections of private correspondence among the top brass of the British

Government in support of this view. H. Mukherjee's argument was, "There was this die hard canard that the CPI fiercely persecuted throughout and under a legal ban from 1934-1942 July had its legality in war time by promising support in the war efforts. Even cursory reference to the bulky tomes of the British Government publication on 'Transfer of Power 1942-47'... will demonstrate this falsity of the allegation. Writing to the Secretary of State L.S. Amery on 26th February 1942, the Viceroy Lord Linlithgow complained that there was 'little practical support to the war efforts from the Communists.' (Transfer of Power, vol.I, pp.252ff)

"Bengal Governor Sir John Herbert complained that Communists had 'no intention of stopping and government and subversive propaganda'. (Ibid., pp.439ff) On 20th September 1943, a secret circular was sent by the Government of India's Home Department to all provincial Governments where it referred to the Communists as being 'solely interested in the speedy and violent overthrow of the British rule in India'. Noted in this Report was also the resolution of the CPI in the Bombay Congress of 1943, which was the, 'liberation from imperialist's enslavement' and its aim was the 'defence of the country from the fascist aggression', and identified the Communist Party as 'primarily a nationalist party working for India's independence notwithstanding its lip service to internationalism'. (Ibid., vol.VI, 1943, pp.286ff) <sup>54</sup>

The Communists from the very beginning had succeeded in fomenting trouble for the Government which is particularly clear from Lord Wavell's letter (24th February 1946) to Secretary of State Attlee where he reports that the massive upsurge was the work "mainly of left wing Congressmen and Communists against the intention of more responsible leaders." (Transfer of Power, vol.VI, 1976, pp.1054ff) Besides, Lord Wavell had further written to Pethic Lawrence on 31st July 1946 that "Control in the big centres like Calcutta has been lost to the Communist elements out to make hay while the sun shines." (Transfer of Power, vol.VIII, 1979, pp.158ff)<sup>55</sup>

The apprehension of the Government towards the Communist Party also influenced their policy towards its cultural fronts. From the very beginning such measures as the Sea Customs Act prevented the infiltration of Progressive & Communist literature from abroad, and the Dramatic Performance Act of 1876 had tried to plague any attempt to introduce theatres with anti-government themes that is likely to incite and provoked the masses against the imperialists.

Later the Hallet Circular was issued in 1936 by M.G. Hallet, the then Home Secretary against the Progressive Writers' Association in India. The Circular which was issued to all local governments advised them to be vigilant about this organisation which was suspected to have had affiliations with the Soviet Communist

Party. The Paper Control order also adversely affected the publications of progressive journals after 1943 against which the Bombay Progressive Writers' Association registered its protest. On the history of Government repression on the Cultural Movement in Bengal, Sudhi Pradhan wrote, "from the very beginning the professional stage helped to create a spirit of national resistance through cultural work. This brought the fury of the British rulers upon it. Within the four years of the creation of the professional theatre the Government choked the voice of Bengali drama by passing a Dramatic Performance Control Bill... Even so the dramatics of Bengal carried on anti-imperialist agitation behind the screen of plays adapted from the Classics, and history of the Bhils, the Rajputs, the Marathas and the Mogul emperors. Some plays even advanced the idea of violent overthrow of the British regime.

"As the national liberation movement gathered strength, some play or other of most of the significant writers for the professional stage - from Dinabandhu and Girish Chandra to Kshirode Prasad, Dwijendralal Roy, Bhupendralal Banerjee, Manmatha Roy and Sachindranath Sengupta - came within the scope of the aforesaid act..."<sup>56</sup>

And this tradition of censorship, ban and repressive measures was further strengthened during the Communist Cultural Movement in Bengal, with the hired press of

the Government carrying on a relentless vilification campaign to impugn the motives of such a movement.

But what is yet more reprehensible is that this legacy of violence of the British Government was carried on even in the post-independence era under a national Government with the re-introduction of the various baneful measures such as ban and censorship to even torture and incarceration of the cultural workers. In the year 1948, a gathering of the IPTA members with the youth delegates of South East Asian countries including Soviet Union at Charuprakash Ghose's (an eminent actor of the IPTA movement) house at 25 Dixon Lane, Calcutta was machine gunned killing Sushil Mukherjee, an IPTA member and Bhaba Madhav Ghose, a relative of Charuprakash. The 6th Conference of IPTA at Allahabad from 4th to 9th February 1949 passed a resolution condoling the death of these two martyrs. The resolutions declared that its these two martyrs who with their blood painted the scenarios of the new Peoples' Theatre. They are the first playwrights of this new theatre.

Apart from such blatant acts of violence the Government resorted to stringent measures to curb the growing cultural activities of IPTA, following the line of confrontation that was adopted by the Communist Party of India in its Second Congress held in Calcutta on February 28, 1948. The new political thesis that was proposed by the CPI, " reflected the militant international

line approved by the first Comintern meeting several months earlier. Using the language of the Cold War, the Communists attacked the nationalist leadership of betraying the freedom struggle in 'striking a treacherous deal behind the backs of the starving peoples' to advance the business interests of the Indian big bourgeoisie in alliance with Anglo-American imperialism, and against the democratic camp led by the Soviet Union. The Party leadership called on all communists to rally the working class, the peasantry, and the petty bourgeoisie against imperialism and capitalism through tactics that reaffirmed the validity of violent struggle under Indian conditions."<sup>57</sup>

This hard core left orientation led the communists to engage in guerrilla style agrarian revolutions in several parts of India. "Guerrilla bands were... organised in local communist strongholds of West Bengal, Madras and Bombay as part of a master plan for seizing power on a wave of peasant uprisings throughout the country. With the Telengana uprisings 'several State Governments invoking the measures of Public Safety Act inherited from the British, declared the Communist Party illegal. Large numbers of the leadership were arrested throughout the country. The police action demoralised local party units...'"<sup>58</sup>

Obviously the policy of aggression and the consequent repression in the political sphere reflected in

the cultural sphere also. As Sudhi Pradhan recalls, "Within the framework of 'Peoples war' line the communists led the Tebhaga movement in Bengal, Telangana struggle in Andhra, Punnapra - Vayalar in Kerala, Worldis struggle in Tanjore, and sided with RIN Mutiny. Some of these struggles were reflected in the programmes of the IPTA - in songs, poems, dance and shadow play." <sup>59</sup> Hence it is obvious that such political art would incur the wrath of the Government who

resorted to several censorship measures and bans to prohibit IPTA performances. For this purpose they renewed the various Acts passed by the British Government in pre-independent India.

In 1949, the Secretary of Government of West Bengal issued a secret circular against IPTA and PWA which said: "Attention: District and Police Authorities (West Bengal) Express letter No.511/13) Pr.S/100/49 dated 17th June, 1949, from the Secretary to the Government of West Bengal (Home Press)7/.

'It is likely that some organisations, such as the All India People's Theatre Association and the All India Progressive Writers' Association with Communist affiliation and leaning may be organising public dramatic performances, song etc. with the object of spreading communist propaganda. Should any attempt be made by them to stage drama or other performances in

public places, these should be stopped by District Magistrates as far as possible by the use of the Dramatic Performance Act 1876 (XIX 1876) or any other law which may be applicable.

“District Magistrates are hereby empowered to take action under 3 of the Dramatic Performance Act on their own initiative. No previous reference need be made to the Provincial Government, but all actions taken on these orders may afterwards be reported for the information of the Government.” <sup>60</sup>

It is to be noted that this circular to a great extent is reminiscent of another circular issued by the British Government in 1890 which was issued to impose restrictions on the dramatic performances in Bengal. The substance of the Act was: “Copy of circular No.51/ SB dated 3.3.1890 from the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal”.

“From enquiries made it appears, whilst the number of theatrical companies in these provinces are on the increase, no attempt is made to supervise their performances and take systematic and efficient steps to prevent the production of improper plays... The Lieutenant Governor is of opinion that some measures should be taken in this direction and he accordingly vests all District Officers and in Calcutta, the Commissioner of Police, with powers to take action, whenever circumstances render it necessary under Section 7 Act XIX of



1876. When from information so obtained it appears desirable that a performance should be prohibited under these powers given by Section 3, the Chief Secretary should be at once communicated with and the orders of the Government awaited (File No. D/D/G 6933). " 61

After independence the national Government again renewed this act to ban various plays of IPTA. The unity of June 1955 reported 'BRITISH ACT EMPLOYED IN BANNING PROGRESSIVE DRAMA, Berhampore, March 13'.

"The District Magistrate of Murshidabad has imposed a ban on the performance of "HARIPADA MASTER" (a progressive drama depicting the aspiration and struggle of a school teacher) in Berhampore town. The ban has been imposed in pursuance of Dramatic Performance Act of 1876, formulated during the British Imperialistic regime. On 28th February 1955, the Secretary, Murshidabad District IPTA, sent in a petition to the Superintendent of Police seeking permission to stage the drama in their District Conference. The petition was refused in writing by the District Magistrate .." 62

The 7th All India IPTA Conference at Bombay in a resolution strongly condemned the renewal of the Dramatic Performance Act of 1876. In this protest resolution it said, "We demand that this Act which was created by the foreign rulers of our country to crush the Indian national freedom movement, be immediately withdrawn. We demand

the instant removal of these 'handcuffs on the culture of India' as the Act was rightly described in the year of its promulgation."

Repression on the Communist Cultural Movement was further intensified following the confrontation between the two political parties - the Congress and the CPI which came to a head during the election in 1952. According to S. Pradhan, "The Communist baiting began in the first general election after the release of Congress leaders where not only election booths of the Communist candidates were destroyed and their election agents like Radharaman Mitra, an intellectual of the Meerut Conspiracy fame and Professor Niren Roy of Progressive Writers' Association were mercilessly beaten, the IPTA Commune was also attacked in Calcutta when with the help of Khaled Chowdhury, an old IPTA member... (he) had to defend (the) women folk from the attack of the Congress hoodlums." <sup>63</sup>

Niranjan Sen writing in Unity, December 1952 also lamented this repressive policy of the national Government towards the Communist cultural movement. He wrote, "August 15 this year marked the end of six years of Congress brand independence the achievements of which are paraded by the Government while for the people it has meant growing misery, nakedness and starvation. As lathis, bullets and repressive laws have been the

Government's answer to the rising upsurge sweeping the country in all walks of life, so in the field of art and culture too, the Government has pursued a barren, stagnant and shamefully obscurantist policy.

"The growing theatre activities and cultural upsurge in the country, born out of the living experience of our people and our glorious cultural heritage, is sought to be curbed by two methods. On the one hand the Government refuses to patronise in any way the efforts and the movements to develop our national theatre arts. On the contrary, a large number of repressive measures to throttle the growth of these activities have been adopted. On the other hand the Government is taking recourse to the pernicious and hateful method of thought control by hiring and buying artists and writers to eulogise its policies and programmes." 64

In British India, the imperialist Government took to scrutinising dramas and plays before the performance. But even in independent India why this method should continue is a question that was rightly asked by the great director and actor Sisir Kumar Bhaduri speaking on August 15, 1952.

In fact Police was given unprecedented powers to check the cultural movement of the Communists in post-

independence India. Below is the text of the notice served on the Secretary, West Bengal Branch of IPTA, by the Commissioner of Police, Calcutta:

"In accordance with the provision laid down under Section 7 of the Dramatic Performance Act, 1876, you are hereby requested to furnish this office by 18th February, 1953, at the latest with the printed or manuscript copies of the dramas mentioned in the statement enclosed herewith and which the IPTA have already staged in the public places. The dramas are required by this office for review so as to ascertain the character of each of the same. "Non-submission of the dramas by the above mentioned data will be treated as violation of the provisions of the Dramatic Performance Act and legal action will be taken against you as contemplated under Section 176 of the Indian Penal Code." 65

Under this Act Government wanted to censor the famous play Navanna after 9 years from its first staging in 1944. Of the other manuscripts that was wanted by the police are the following:

- (i) 'Mahesh' by Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay,
- (ii) 'Gora' by Rabindra Nath Tagore (a novel and not a play),
- (iii) 'Neel Darpan' - classic by Dinabandhu Mitra,
- (iv) 'Bisarjan' - Rabindra Nath Tagore,

(v) 'Officer' - Gogol (although no such work is known to have been written by Gogol).

The implication of such a measure was that it would empower the Deputy Commissioner of Police to ban dramatic performance even before the dramas have actually been staged. Such punitive measure in the hands of the Police meant the Police Commissioner could serve prohibitory orders on the owner or occupier of any house in which IPTA performances may be intended to be given, also he would be empowered to raid places of performances, arrest actors on the spot, remove stage property and take into custody the manuscript of the play.

Such scurrilous measures to strengthen the hands of the police provoked widespread criticism and protest throughout the country among overwhelming mass of artists and intellectuals. Even the members of the parliament including some of the Congress MPs in the upper house censured such measures.

New amendments to the Dramatic Performance Act of 1876 were moved and passed also in the Bombay Assembly to include even cultural items such as songs, powadas, shadow play etc. under censorship rule. In Lucknow IPTA members like Mrs. Razia Sajjad Zaheer and Banulal Varma were prosecuted for staging a drama without permission. In Travancore, Cochin, the most popular drama "You Made Me A Communist" which was banned by the prohibitory orders of the Government had to be

withdrawn under massive public demonstration against the order.

Apart from such direct Governmental actions against IPTA, indirect economic pressures were exerted against the artists so as to debar them from joining the Communist Cultural Movement. The Central and State Governments issued circulars banning Government employees from joining IPTA and PWA.

The freedom of the IPTA artists were completely suppressed when they were debarred from programmes in the AIR. According to Niranjana Sen, "In the recent past many prominent songsters of Bengal were not given programmes in Calcutta Station of 'Akash Vani'. Recently, too, Dilip Sharma and other artists of Assam were served with notices to give up singing IPTA songs otherwise their programmes were threatened to be stopped."<sup>66</sup> Under the cultural exchange programmes the Government refused to grant passports to the IPTA workers like Niranjana Sen, Anna Bhau Sathe, Omar Sheikh and many others and restricted their right to perform abroad.

In past, the Muslim League Ministry of undivided Bengal realising the impoverished condition of the Bengali stage, had exempted the professional stage institutions from payment of the entertainment tax. But the amateur and the semi-professional organisations were covered under the entertainment tax programme.

But there was no respite from this system even in independent India.

As a result the efforts of the common people to stage plays were seriously hampered, because very few organisations would meet the cost of staging plays and pay the Entertainment Tax along with the Corporation Tax.

The IPTA moved a resolution protesting against the persecution of its members in Lucknow and also the imposition of the Section 2 of the Travancore Dramatic Performances Act which was applied by the District Magistrate of Kottayam to ban the play 'Sons of Revolution', a musical drama written by Sir P.J. Anthony. In 1954 Representatives of about fifty Theatre organisations and a number of individuals in Theatre movement met in Calcutta at 25, Dixon Lane to work out ways and means to launch a United Movement against the 1976 Act and entertainment tax and also to put forward other demands based on IPTA's Charter of Demands, essential for developing theatre movement in India. An Organising Committee was formed to draft a programme and a constitution so that a gigantic united movement can be developed in Calcutta.

Under this programme a campaign was launched to collect signatures in support of the demands framed by the Organising Committee. A deputation was sent to see Dr. B.C. Roy, Chief Minister of West Bengal to discuss

such demands as the withdrawal of the Dramatic Performance Act, exemption from Amusement Tax, pre-censorship and building of a national stage open to all without any bias regarding their ideology.

This tyrannical attitude of the Government towards the Communist Cultural Movement also had a pernicious effect on the Artists' Union. Sudhi Pradhan who was a Trade Union leader was arrested and put into jail without trial for organising the Radio Artists' Union. During war the same artists responding to the anti-imperialist statement had organised a strike in 1945 in demand for the increase of fees, security of employment, wage increase for staff artists, gradation, no retrenchment without notice and permission to take outside jobs unless wages were increased. Although the success was partial, it made the Artists' Union very popular and agitation continued for the increasing of the fees of artists.

On Independence, when the Congress Government came to power it rekindled the hopes of the artists because they had placed their faith on the national Government who, they believed, would be sympathetic towards improving the conditions of the cultural workers and reform the radio as a communication system dedicating it to the purpose of spreading national education and culture.

However, the Congress Government stunned the whole artists' union by sparing no efforts to break it. Sudhi



Pradhan recalls, "Leftist employees and artists were removed, and the basis of reports from the Intelligence Branch of the Police - progressive singers, authors or lecturers were never called. Plays, songs, lectures are all pre-censored in Delhi. The educational broadcast is not in the least educative and the rural and workers corner sing the employer's praise... There is not a shadow of doubt today that quite in the imperialist tradition the AIR acts as the mouthpiece of this important and oppressive Government."<sup>68</sup>

The situation in the film industry was also equally dismal. The Trade Union movement of the technicians was paralysed. The rise in the raw materials cost after 1950 had shot up as a result of which productions were cut down. To regain the market, English and American pictures with Hindi sub-titles were shown. Huge Anglo-U.S. capital was pumped in India with the consent of the Indian Government that resulted in productions of films under Indo-U.S.A. joint ventures programme. Bengal was worst hit because foreign companies like J. Arthur Rank Organisation employed their own people for the production of such films while the Indian technicians remained unemployed. Besides these pictures became effective instrument of propaganda for imperialist policy of aggression and war that sought to infiltrate the Indian culture. This silent spectator attitude of

the Government did immense harm to the progressive cinema movement in India.

On the whole the policy of repression towards the Communist Cultural Movement that was initiated during the British rule continued unabated under the national government in post-independent India. The combat between the ruling party and the Communists that existed in the political sphere spilled over in the cultural sphere also, with the Communists carrying on the anti-Government propaganda through their cultural organs and the Government retaliating with series of repressive measures. But what is to be admitted hypothetically that had not the cultural productions of IPTA and PWA been so potent and effective in mobilising the masses, the Government would not have resorted to such draconian measures to curb the Communist Cultural Movement in India.

While speaking on the success of the IPTA movement Chinmohan Sehanobish in an interview with a reporter from a Bengali journal 'College Street' cited the heinous killings of the Communist Cultural workers like the Trade Unionist poet of Dacca, Soumen Chanda and the martyrdom of Sushil Mukhopadhyay and Bhav Madhav Ghosh two other members of Bengal IPTA, to emphasize that no other cultural movement has examples of its workers sacrificing their lives for a cause as the IPTA movement in India.

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## CHAPTER IV

### DECLINE OF IPTA: THE CRISIS OF THE COMMUNIST CULTURAL MOVEMENT IN BENGAL

The Communist Cultural Movement was conceived as a nationalist cultural movement to defend the national culture from imperialist penetration, to protest against fascism and unite the working class and peasants to fight against these forces and also to organise a movement to guide the nationalist struggle along the socialist lines. This movement was developed to its perfection in Bengal and its success in the initial stages was unprecedented. But the aim of popularising the national culture which began with stupendous vigour and spirit seemed to have exhausted itself by the end of 40's. Cultural fronts began to lose sight of priorities when more pressing problems of electoral politics engaged most of the attention of the Communist Party leaders. The character of the All India IPTA movement came to be affected by the shift in the context of international and domestic political environment. However, the beginning of the 50's had rekindled hopes of rejuvenation of the cultural fronts with the Peace Movement that was initiated by IPTA. But the Peace Fronts could not sustain the momentum of the Communist Cultural Movement for very long when the all India movement drifted into a state of ennui.

The first section of this concluding chapter will take a glimpse at the efforts to rejuvenate the IPTA movement through the organisation of Peace Fronts. The second section will exclusively focus on the causes that led to the ultimate decline of the IPTA movement.

### Section-I

#### THE WATERSHED PERIOD: COLD WAR AND THE BIRTH OF PEACE MOVEMENT

Immediately after the Second World War the international world order was plunged into the state of super-power rivalry of cold war. With the principal enemy of fascism eliminated, the Communists were again isolated from the mainstream politics and in the pretext of reconstruction of Europe, the Communists were systematically eliminated from the Governments of the countries like France and Italy. This situation also bred a sense of frustration and confusion within the various groups of Euro Communists, who gradually came to subscribe to a particular brand of theoretical Marxism popularly branded as "Western Marxism". According to J.G. Merquior "Since World War II the self-image of Western Marxism has tended to portray the movement as a liberal or liberatarian kind of Marxism, infinitely closer to the humanist vision of young Marx than to the grim political plight of 'real socialism' - i.e. of the communist regimes established under the banner of Marxism-Leninism. Actually the very phrase Western

Marxism did not pre-date the controversies within French Marxism in the mid-1950's. Yet the plain historical truth is that the great initiators of Western Marxist thought of Lukacs and Gramsci above all evinced a life time loyalty to the Communist Movement and unlike German Social Democrats were always proud of the Bolshevik triumph that came in the wake of 1817 Revolution.<sup>1</sup>

But the post World War period saw the disenchantment with Stalinism and anti-Bolshevik sentiment forming the basis of identity with the Euro-Communists. It has been commonly argued by scholars that, De-Bolshevisation was the core of Euro-Communism because the strategies and policies that was earlier derived from the Comintern was no longer seen as viable in the post-world conditions. For the Euro-Communists the path to socialism which they chalked out should be peaceful and democratic, through gradual reforms of existing socio-political institutions. But according to Ernst Mandel analysing the causes of the birth of Euro-Communism remarks that the Euro-communists were fired of keeping with the vicissitudes of the Comintern policy. Their support to the Comintern was based on the fact that they were increasingly dependent on the Soviet Union both materially and politically. But the Communists in Europe could subvert this dependency where they increasingly came to integrate themselves in the



bourgeois state and "amassing the material advantages to be won within the bourgeois parliamentary democracy as a result of their electoral and trade union successes, the apparatuses of the Communist parties in the democratic imperialist countries began to come under material antagonistic to the pressures of Kremlin... the practice of Popular Front... fuelled a gradual process of Social Democratisation."<sup>2</sup>

In a conference of nine Communist Parties of Europe in 1947, Zhdanov, the most loyal spokesman of Stalin castigated this trend of anti-Bolshevism as sheer sign of reformism that was creeping within the Communist Parties of Europe. The Communist Parties of USA, Britain and France came under sharp criticism for being revisionists.

In India the translation of Zhukov and Alexiev's writings on the nature of British rule in India came to be available to the Indians in the aftermath of independence. Their thesis proposed that the British had come to a compromise with the non-Muslim bourgeoisie and the Muslim landlords in order to grant fictitious independence to India. The militant policy of the international Communist line under Stalin guided the Communist Movement in India. Besides the advice of the Yugoslav Comintern delegates who attended the Second CPI Conference in February 1948 in Calcutta strongly urged for militant

action thus setting the seal of international approval on insurrectionary tactics and guerrilla style activity that was already initiated through various agrarian revolts in Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. Around the same time the Soviet Communist Party adopted four resolutions to launch a violent attack against the infiltration of Western decadent culture in the literature, drama, music and films of the Soviet Union. The main opus of the Garaudy Aragon debate in France also centred around the question as to whether the Communist Party should dictate the cultural policy or not with Aragon in favour of it and Garaudy opposing such interventions. These developments in the international Communist Movement plus Mao's cultural policy had a profound impact on the cultural fronts such as IPTA and PWA. The left sectarian approach that was adopted at the second Congress of the CPI reflected in the Manifesto of the Sixth All India IPTA Conference held in Allahabad in 1949, which adopted a programme that was ideologically militant. It was decided that IPTA should be developed as an 'integral part of the struggle of the revolutionary masses, to inspire and equip the revolutionary forces with a cultural weapon and create significant art'. The influence of the Party policy was particularly felt in Bengal because one of the eminent Bengal Communists, Bhawani Sen who was the member of the politbureau was guiding

the cultural policy of IPTA.

In the international sphere, five hundred delegates of at least forty five countries met at Wroclaw in Poland in 1948 in a conference of International Liaison Committee of Intellectuals.

Eisenstein, John Steinbeck, Paul Robeson from American, J.B. Priestley from England, Aragon from France sent a message to this conference welcoming its resolution to fight the neo-imperialism of some of the advanced capitalist nations who by raging an arms race were perpetuating the legacy of fascism. The conference called on the people of the world to fight for peace and to save their nation and culture from the neo-imperialist aggression. It called especially on the intellectuals to meet in conferences to set up national committees within their own countries in defence of peace.

Although the impact of this conference was felt in India yet for the Indian Communists who were engrossed with the idea of an imminent revolution, the far reaching significance of such a conference could not be comprehended. At this time all the energy of the Communist Party was directed against the Congress Government which was identified as the 'principle enemy of the revolution'. However, in spite of it the Bengal Communist took certain initiative in the direction of Peace Movements and in 1949 in response to the call given in the Wroclaw Conference

a League for Cultural Freedom was set up in Bengal to establish links with various international committees set up for the defence of Peace.

Since 1948 the World Communist attention was fixed towards the development in South East Asia. J.L.S. Girling writing on the conditions of South East Asia wrote that "South East Asia, with its natural resources discordant nationalism and unstable regimes has long served a lure for outside intervention and intrigue. There is no doubt that Stalin considered in the early stages of the cold war, as ripe for revolt - whether under colonial rule or where 'bourgeois national' leaders had obtained independence. By the time the Comintern had been established in September 1947, proclaiming that the countries of 'new democracy' and the workers of all countries must unite with the USSR - 'the bulwork of anti-imperialism - against the imperialist camp, the Vietminh had been fighting for almost a year against the French. The Communist led Huk guerrillas were enlarging their operations in the Philippines. In 1946 and 1947 Malaya and Singapore had seen massive strike activities by Communist trade unions, Indonesia lay torn between nationalists (aided at that time by influential Communists) and the Dutch and Burmese nationalists (despite the misgivings of ethnic minorities) were demanding independence from the British.

“A trial of strength was already waged between the Communists and the nationalists in Burma. The radical wing of the Communist Party, the fanatical ‘Red flags’ denounced the independence treaty signed by U. Nu in January 1948 and called for the overthrow of the Nu Government as ‘fools of British imperialists’. Their leader Than Tun with Chinese Vietnamese, Indonesian and other Communists attended the Conference of the Youth and Students of South East Asia Fighting for Freedom and Independence in February 1948 at Calcutta and a month later led his party into armed revolt.

“Rajni Palme Dutt, summed up the situation in South East Asia in his message to the Calcutta Conference.

‘The whole region of South East Asia is today the Central arena of the struggle for national liberation against imperialism. The approaching victory of democratic China heralds a new era in Asia...’<sup>3</sup>

The Malayan Communist Party, after two of its representatives returned from the Calcutta conference denounced the former policy of peaceful mass struggle and in its new programme envisaged a protracted campaign by means of armed revolt to liberate the country. This plan was set out in the party’s Strategic Problems of the Malayan Revolutionary War, issued in December 1948, and clearly based on Mao Tse-Tung’s own ‘Strategic Problems of China’s Revolutionary War’.

Indonesian Communists too were influenced by the militant tone of the Calcutta conference turned to the idea of using military force to gain political power. A secret report by the Communist controlled People's Democratic Front estimated in 1948 that over one-third of the armed forces was already under its control.

Chinese Revolution was the main guiding light in South and South East Asia. In November 1949 Liu Shao-Chi was advocating armed struggle in the countryside and legal and illegal mass struggles in the cities. 'Armed struggle' - he told the delegates to the Asian-Australian trade union conference in Peking, " is the main form of struggle for the national liberation struggles of many colonies and semi-colonies... it is necessary to set up wherever and whenever possible a national liberation army which is led by the Communist Party and is powerful and skillful in fighting its enemies."<sup>4</sup>

This new revolutionary situation in South East Asia captured the attention of the Indian Communists and fired the imagination of writers and the artists in the cultural front. Bengal's eminent poets Subhas Mukhopadhyay and Ramendra Deshmukh composed poems celebrating this new revolutionary era in Asia. Bimal Chandra Ghosh in his poem 'Mao Tse-tung' paid tributes to this great leader. 'Parichay' in 1949 published a

translation of the poem 'Ice' written by Mao. In the same year it published an anthology of poems by Bengali writers dedicated to the revolution in China and it reproduced in translation form the text of Mao Tse-tung's speech on literature delivered at the Writers' Conference in Yenan.

Against this backdrop of the Asian situation especially the Chinese Revolution which was an immense source of inspiration to the Indian Communists it is obvious that the task of revolutionary and insurrectionary armed struggle received the greatest priority and factors like Peace Movements took the back seat. Under such circumstances the organisation set up for the Freedom of Culture in Bengal soon faded away.

However the beginning of the fifties saw the pulse of the international communist movement losing its pace. By 1952 with the widespread failure of armed revolt to achieve the overthrow of Government of colonies or independent countries (semi-colonies) the emphasis in the Communist world was changing. Purely Communist insurrection failed in Philippines, Malaya, Indonesia and Burma. In the great communist debate on armed or legal struggle it is significant that the Russians, who chiefly inspired the 1948 revolts (the Chinese communists occupied with their own liberation) have come down on the side of peaceful struggle while the Chinese have identified themselves with the cause of 'national liberation' or as they prefer it, "people's war".

Towards the end of 1952 Stalin himself urged Communist parties throughout the world to support peace, democracy and national independence which he alleged was rejected by West. But it was Khrushchev who brought about a major shift in the Soviet policy in this direction.

Instead of attacking the character of the newly gained independence by the colonised countries the Soviet Union tried to win over the progressive leadership of these newly independent nations Nehru, Nasser and Sukarno who were already forming the third bloc of power as the group of non-aligned nation, within the orbit of the Soviet influence by pledging support in war efforts to offering economic aid.

The second feature of the Soviet policy was awareness of the disastrous consequence of a nuclear warfare which Khrushchev feared might be sparked off by keeping alive the pockets of armed conflict in Asia. "The promotion of peaceful transition to socialism i.e. to a communist type of a regime without civil war or violent revolution - was a necessary concomitant of the policy of 'peaceful co-existence'".<sup>6</sup>

The Chinese had set out their ideological differences with the Russians as early as November 1957 - at the Moscow meeting which produced the 'Declaration' of policy of the ruling Communist and Workers' Parties.



"In a confidential memorandum, the Chinese delegation headed by Mao Tse-tung admitted that Khrushchev's advocacy of 'peaceful transition to socialism' was 'advantageous from the point of view of tactics'. But the Chinese pointed out, 'too much stress' on it, especially on the possibility of a parliamentary majority winning power, was liable to weaken the revolutionary will of the 'proletariat'... And the memorandum bluntly stated: "To the best of our knowledge there is still not a single country where this possibility (of peaceful transition) is of any practical significance."

This vigorous pursuit of violence was intended to demarcate the difference between true exponents of Marxism-Leninism and its 'betrayers' as the Chinese leadership understood them. Pravada of September 16, 1963 reported that Soviet Union had lost the support of the South East Asian countries who had gradually gravitated towards Peking. The Russians had even come down heavily on the Chinese notion of violence as the only way to transition to socialism and it was criticised as 'the application of the call to armed struggle to countries with national progressive Governments which have the respect of the masses and which adhere to an anti-imperialist line'. Besides what was of violent importance to Soviet Union's national interest was that support to militant struggle in South East Asia was not worth enough to risk a war with USA.

In India, the Communists had to pay a heavy price for towing the militant line. The Indian Government suppressed the Communist violence in a number of States and thwarted the proposed nation-wide general strike and railway strike of March 1949, by which the Communist Party according to Nehru, was deliberately seeking to create famine conditions to create a general background of Chaos, a breakdown on the administration and mass uprising. Crossroads of 13 May 1949 reported that prior to the proposed strike the Indian Government under Public Safety Act arrested 25,000 and took to custody another 50,000 of Communist leaders and workers on specific charges. In West Bengal onwards from March to December 1949, several stalwarts of the Communist cultural movement in Bengal like Sudhi Pradhan, Gopal Halder, Chinmohan Sehanobish, Hirendranath Mukherjee, Parvez Sahedi, Subhas Mukhopadhyay and virtually the entire leadership of the IPTA and PWA were arrested.

Police ceaselessly raided the Press and Publishing Houses bringing out Communist literary journals. Under Governmental orders 'Loknatya' the newsletter of Bengal's IPTA had to stop its publication in 1949. According to Francine Frankel, "By 1951, the Communists, faced with the real threat of political annihilation if they persisted in armed revolt, were ready to reconsider their earlier assessment of the revolutionary potential in the country. A new lead, moreover came from abroad,

this time from the Communist Party of Great Britain. The British party argued that armed revolution was 'not an immediate prospect' in India. They advised that the correct line for the CPI under Indian conditions was to concentrate on building up a more effective party organisation by taking advantage of opportunities for legal activity provided under the parliamentary system."<sup>8</sup> Rajni Palme Dutt in a letter directed to the CPI advised a shift away from adventurism and a reassessment of the Nehru Government. CPSU's policy towards India had already registered a change in the light of India's position on the Korean war. Within the Indian Communist Camp the Sino-Soviet rift was already anticipated in the debates that took place between Ranadive and Rajeshwar Rao on the question of the revolutionary strategy. But the greatest political exigency that forced the Communists at this time was the general election of 1952. The CPI decided to participate in the election and subsequently in the legislatures. In view of this decision the CPI withdrew its programme of guerilla warfare against the Government. "It changed over to a strategy of peaceful oppositions through the organisation of united front alliances of leftist parties. The shift however was based on tactical considerations alone. It did not rule out resort to violent methods in the future if the situation became favourable."<sup>9</sup>

In view of this changed political strategy the cultural fronts also went through profound transformation.

Militant anti-bourgeois campaign came to be steadily replaced by slogans to rally the people in the defence of peace.

The period of lull in the cultural activities during the end 40s came to pick up momentum again. The All India Peace Convention was held in 1951 in Bombay under the banners "India Can Halt War", "The All India Peace Convention made history because it gave India's answer to the question of peace or war now posed before the people of all the world". In the Appeal to members of the Indian Parliament passed unanimously, the Convention urged Parliament "to take the initiative to call a conference of the five Great Powers to discuss all outstanding issues". The convention called for the withdrawal of all foreign troops from the Asian soil and urged Parliament to declare that Indian soldiers, Indian bases, Indian raw materials and war materials shall be denied to foreign powers."<sup>10</sup>

The politics of protest which gave way to the politics of conciliation reflected in the changing line of cultural movement for peace. An 'Unity' of 1951 reported "The Convention made a decisive break in the past sectarianism of peace movement. It established decisively the fact that no difference can divide those who desire peace... The partisans of peace showed at the Convention that if there were differences of opinion

and belief, these differences should be expressed not on the peace platform, but on other platforms.<sup>11</sup> From "People's China", Peking, People's China journals greeted the All India Peace Convention, "Long live the friendship between the Chinese and the Indian peoples who resolutely oppose US rearmament of Japan and whose unity will safeguard peace in Asia",<sup>12</sup> the message said. The great American folk singer Paul Robeson also sent a message of greetings from New York in the eve of the convention. He wrote, "I trust the results of the conference may be seen in the added strength brought to the world peace movement by the great democratic and liberal forces of India."<sup>13</sup>

The All India Peace Convention in its resolution called for the strengthening of colonial relations between the people of India and the people of all the countries of the world with a view to ensuring peaceful collaboration and mutual understanding. It urged the Indian Government "to encourage India's close cultural relations with the people of all countries."

The convention also decided to set up a permanent National Commission for Cultural Exchanges.

The aftermath of this Peace Convention found the cultural fronts of the Communist Party rallying its workers towards the Peace Movements. Narahari Kaviraj wrote in Unity, January 1952, "The Indian people do not want war. They are indignant at the imperialist

intrigues in South East Asia, the Middle East and Kashmir. As imperialist aggression intensifies, the desire for peace and independence on the part of our people has considerably increased. The broadest unity of the working people is the vital condition of preserving peace and national independence...

**TASK FOR WRITERS AND ARTISTS** - In these conditions, the progressive writers and artists must head the struggle for peace. For, not to link the struggle for Peace with the struggle for a new culture is not to see the depth of our cultural crisis, is not to see the intensification of the imperialist stranglehold over culture. This makes the fight for Peace the pivot of the daily work of such cultural movements as PWA and IPTA etc. Thus the prime task of the united front in art and literature is to link the struggle for Peace with the struggle for a new culture. " 14

It is understandable that the cold war condition in the aftermath of the Second World War gave the Peace Movement a lot of viability. After the open breach within the allied power the world was flooded with the American propaganda of the third world war. There was a calculated drive to promote fear of the atom and hydrogen bombs among the ordinary and innocent people. Arbitrary and malicious charges were muted among the super powers on the platforms of UNO.

Besides the various alliances of defence by the Americans like North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the plans for the rearmaments of defeated Germany as well of Japan compounded by actual atrocities like bombing in Korea served to whip up a fear psychosis within the peace loving people of the world. Against this international backdrop of war propaganda and neo-colonialist penetration the All India Peace Festival was held in Calcutta in 1952 in recognition of the fact that no great work of art can be produced unless the people are freed from the nagging suspicion and fear of war and aggression.

West Bengal IPTA contributed songs and plays by a number of prominent artists and composers. Among the most significant contributions was the performance of an old popular folk form 'Gambhira' staged by a peasants and workers' squad from the Malda district. The blind musician Tagar Adhikari, played on a simple four stringed instrument. The Bahurupi group staged the now well known Chenna Taar (The Broken Strings) by Tulsi Lahiri... A new drama entitled 'Janak' and based on a story by Sushil Jana about a family in Midnapore district affected by the last war was also presented along with an impressive ballet entitled 'Atom and Man'.

Apart from all the provinces sending their cultural troupes to the festival one of the tremendous event of the festival was the night long Mushaira by eminent Urdu and Hindi poets like Ali Sardar Jaffri, Kaife Azmi,

Niaz Haider and Parvez Shahidi. On the success of the Peace Festival Unity of July 1952 wrote "The All India Festival for Peace was a demonstration to any who might be planning a holocaust and destruction for the world that the finest writers and artists in India will never stop fighting for peace until war is banished forever from the earth."<sup>15</sup>

### Section-II

#### BENGAL'S IPTA: A BATTLEGROUND OF IDEAS

The widening of the cultural activities with the formations of the united anti-imperialist peace fronts was however short-lived. According to Sudhi Pradhan, "the policy of united front with bourgeois and petty bourgeois interests on the question of war and peace led to the infiltration of bourgeois ideas into cultural work and defused the theory of class war. Of course, a conflict between two lines raged here too, as in China, Reformism crept into the IPTA as it had infiltrated the peace movement."<sup>16</sup>

And as the political line was divided on the question of revolutionary strategy the cultural fronts were torn by factionalism on the question of the nature of art, the technique of presentation and the target audience. This trend was particularly marked in Bengal's IPTA which ultimately threatened its decline.



The dissension with regards to People's Act first crept in with the making of 'Navanna' where suggestions from the Communist Party regarding the production of play was made unwelcome by the cultural leaders like Sambhu Mitra and Bijan Bhattacharyya. Later the dissension deepened into the introduction of new members in IPTA to start a Ballet Group when the Central Squad of IPTA visited Calcutta. A section of cultural leaders opposed the broadening of the cultural front on the ground that indiscriminate recruitment of people who had very little knowledge of people's art was harmful for the organisation.

Ultimately the differences had to be resolved with the intervention of party leaders like Bhawani Sen and Panchu Bhaduri. However, such a truce was temporary. According<sup>to</sup>/C.P. Ghosh the drama section of IPTA continued to maintain an attitude of non-cooperation towards the Ballet Group and was sharply critical of their productions. The rivalry came to a head on the question of the production of Navanna to raise funds for the benefit of flood victims. Both the Drama and the Ballet Squad came to a loggerhead to maintain their supremacy with each wanting to stage their productions for the show.

Theoretically two separate tendencies were displayed by the attitude of two groups towards people's

art which finally disintegrated the IPTA movement in Bengal.

The Drama Group according to Charu Prakash Ghosh felt that "Art was being dragged into the mire of artificiality by artists belonging to the reactionary school and they are keen on building up People's Art on really progressive lines. To be able to do this they must have absolute freedom for exercising their talents. They put great great emphasis on the importance of technique in any production. They would rather put up nothing than stage technically imperfect shows. They feel that early success of IPTA reached such a high standard that this trend must be maintained at any cost, even if that means no activity for some time... They feel impatient with Party Leaders... They have no confidence in the capacity of the Party to give them any guidance where Art is concerned. They seem to ignore that in their zeal for setting new standards, traditions and principles in the culture and development of Art, they are tending to drift away from the Party and to develop lamentable lack of elementary loyalty to Party..."<sup>17</sup> The second Group that is the ballet group was evidently more concerned with IPTA's commitment to build up a widespread people's art movement. According to them technique in production is of secondary importance and orientation to technique reeked of bourgeois values. "In their rigid loyalty to the Party they refuse to

face the special problems of the artistic and cultural front in which regimentation without persuasion does not work very well.<sup>18</sup>"

This conflict between two groups spilled over a wide area of debate concerning the nature of people's art. Sachin Sen Gupta in his critique of IPTA's art 'People's Theatre In India' argued "that social, political and economic consciousness to inspire which they create their dramas, is not yet born in the hearts of those for whom the plays are written or whom they wish to portray."<sup>19</sup> The crux of Mr. Sengupta's argument is that People's Theatre should contain popular and entertaining elements the content of which may or may not be political. Besides, according to him, urban playwrights who had no connection with village life could only produce plays that "becomes either artificial or stiffer exaggeration... The second weakness that is noticed is that characters are not taken forward to a logical development, through their own environment, but are dragged forcibly towards a premediated development along a single track."<sup>20</sup>

This suspicion towards tendencious art conceived for propaganda purpose as less effective as art form was a trend that crept within the section of IPTA workers in Bengal. Theoretically it was the revival of the debate over the question of the realist content of art

versus the technique of art form which should guide the creation of popular art.

Secondly a problem that had always persisted with the very beginning of the Bengal's IPTA movement, a certain amount of urban bias in the content and form of people's art gradually plagued the movement. Mritunjay Adhikari writing on the organisation of Bengal's IPTA lamented that the motto with which IPTA began was "People's Theatre Stars The People" but gradually this motto was relegated to a backseat when its workers became more concerned with professional approach to theatre movement. According to him it was the urban bias which led to the selection of sophisticated themes unintelligible to the rural folk and secondly over emphasis on the technique and obsession with the stage craft gradually transformed the art movement to professional 'shows'. The clamour to separate art from party control ultimately isolated IPTA from the working class movement, the purpose for which it was conceived.<sup>21</sup>

Recognising these problems, the Unity of November 1952 on the eve of the 7th IPTA Conference wrote "The weather beaten veterans of the people's theatre movement recall with pride the early work of the movement, its part in the national struggle for freedom, its work during the grim days of the Bengal Famine of 1943, its championing of the friendship of Hindus and Muslims

during the dark days of communal fratricide which preceded the partition of the country under the Nefarious Mountbatten Award. And IPTA gave many of its finest sons and daughters, who fell as martyrs under the savage repression of hirelings of the people's enemies.

"If there is a lesson to be learnt from those days of struggle it is surely that the movement must not be restricted within the narrow walls of city theatre, must not become "sophisticated" and lose contacts with the broadest sections of the people, must not water down its message of people's struggle..."

But this dilution of the theme of people's struggle and the lure of the commercial world that attenuated the political commitment of the progressive artists had much to do with the contemporary political environment that confronted the left intelligentsia with a new set of priorities.

The various suggestions that was put forward by cultural workers and communist literary scholars and theoreticians to salvage the Cultural Movement from its gradual decline can <sup>be</sup> mainly <sub>^</sub>clubbed into two schools - one urging for rigid party control to hold the reigns of the movement and the others opposing such a view argued strongly for opening up the movement to inculcate various tendencies that they termed as 'progressive'. This debate that took place in India in the context of

IPTA movement is very much reminiscent of Chinese polemics on the concept of 'Revolutionary Vigilance' in view of the so called excesses that was allegedly committed during the cultural Revolution. The slogan that 'East Wind Prevails Over West Wind' directed the Chinese Cultural Revolution towards a path of intolerance. Very many of the Chinese cultural workers were ousted from the Party for 'taking Capitalist roads'.

But this extreme line under Mao had to be later discarded. In the eighth Congress of the Chinese Communist Party it was recognised that "It is wrong to impose restrictions and arbitrary measures on science and art through administrative channels. We must continue to criticise the feudal and capitalist ideologies, but we must inherit and assimilate all useful knowledge whether it is a legacy from old China or has been introduced from abroad.<sup>22</sup>" Even Marx and Engels had strongly criticised a sectarian line in formulating the policy for organising the proletarian culture. Lenin had adopted the same view while recognising the greatness of the works of Tolstoy.

In his Draft Proposal for Prolet-cult Congress Lenin had argued, "Marxism won for itself its world historical significance as the ideology of the revolutionary proletariat by the fact that it did not cast aside the valuable gains of the bourgeois epoch but

on the contrary assimilated and digested all that was valuable in more than two thousand years of development of human thought and culture."<sup>23</sup>

But the problem with the Communist cultural workers in India according to one school of thought is that it was not the idea of learning from the bourgeois field of art that isolated these workers but it was their attraction to more lucrative assignments of the commercial world which led them to sever their ties with the Communist Movement. According to Sudhi Pradhan, "CIA financed journals in India attracted once progressive writers. Added to that there was a lure of Government patronage. Various academics sponsored by the Government of India came up, awards and honours were instituted, financial assistance, cultural exchange programmes, membership of Rajya Sabha etc. attracted many former members of the PWA and IPTA into the establishment. The foreign policy of the Government of India, which moved from a pro-American position to a non-aligned stance of great material advantage, managed to create confusion among Marxists, as did the internal policy of five year plans and other progressive measures. This made the parliamentary path an attractive alternative, but in turn created its own contradictions within the movement."<sup>24</sup>

The infiltration of the bourgeois values within the Communist Cultural Fronts can be explained as due

to the thaw in militancy that characterised the political line of the Communist Party in the 40s and also had bred in them a sense of exclusive identity. But the policy of compromise that the CPI came to advocate vis-a-vis the national Government had impact on the cultural fronts also, the need to wage a cultural war against the national bourgeoisie was no more found to be expedient. Hence most of the artists and writers from within the movement drifted and joined the national mainstream of various cultural institutions set up by the Indian Government. Beside discarding of the past policy of militancy as adventurism and a mistake by the CPI, also helped to breed a sense of confusion in the minds of the cultural workers who felt that the cultural movement had exhausted the purpose for which it was conceived.

This departure from the past was very clearly marked in the resolutions of the Seventh and Eighth IPTA Conference. The IPTA Newsletter Unity of November 1952 on the eve of the 7th IPTA Conference clearly denounced the policy of the Allahabad Conference as a mistaken line adopted by the cultural front. It wrote "The Seventh All India IPTA Conference must also draw its lessons from the period following the Allahabad Conference of 1947 when the scope of work was restricted, when scant attention was paid to raising the level of



artistic production, when many undigested and often meaningless slogans passed in the name of art which were naturally incapable of inspiring the people and expressing their deepest dreams and their grandest desires." It is clear that the 7th All India Conference was expected to undo the harm done by adoption of the sectarian line in the 6th All India Conference.

The Manifesto of the 8th All India Conference abandoned the regular Marxist parlance of uniting the forces of people's culture for the purpose of a revolutionary struggle of workers. Instead the theme of it spoke of the classic liberal concerns. The Manifesto declared, "That we believe the arts we pursue have in them qualities that broaden man's mind, stimulate his imagination widen his vision and liberate him from prejudices, selfishness, lust, fear and inhibitions and inspire him to help realise a higher order of existence where social justice and unbounded opportunities are not denied to man."<sup>25</sup>

Nowhere in the declaration the issue of class war was proclaimed to be of paramount importance to which IPTA was to join its cultural forces; instead the Government's patronage of arts was upheld as the policy in the right direction which was earlier proclaimed as 'mere sham'. In its resolutions it said, "We the delegates of the Eighth National Conference express our deep

appreciation for the co-operation shown by the Sangeet Natak Akademy in the matter of aid and recognition. We feel that the Sangeet Natak Akademy has given correct lead for promotion of Dance and Music in the country, according to the stand taken by it and the IPTA agrees mainly and supports it with all its force."<sup>26</sup>

The politics of compromise and conciliation by the Communist Party was largely responsible for the erosion of the cultural fronts which had lost its purpose of maintaining an exclusive identity as Communist Cultural Fronts. The Communist Party was also reluctant to maintain its cultural fronts. The New Age, the weekly journal of the CPI in its issue of the 12th December 1957 referring to the forthcoming All India Conference of the IPTA declared: "In the new phase of national and international achievements, IPTA has to declare its ideals a new and clarify that it is not a wing of any Party and that it cannot be utilised by any Party to serve its own interests."

The last Eighth All India Conference in 1957 saw the dissolution of the All India character of the movement. Even before 1957 Conference of IPTA, members of the All India Committee ceased to attend its session and that Unity the organ of IPTA had stopped its publication due to the lack of members' support. The party leadership's lack of interest in maintaining its cultural fronts also to a large extent was responsible for the disenchantment of the members with IPTA and PWA. And the popular observation is that it was the arrival of two distinct lines of political strategy that ultimately

led to the split in the Communist Party in India in 60s also foreshadowed the cultural movement. The various fissiparous tendencies and dissension over the theoretical issues that plagued the various regional movements like in Bengal was merely the reflection of this changing political line that bred confusion and chaos. And it was lack of political will on the part of the Party leadership occupied with issues of parliamentary politics to persist with the policy of People's War and Cultural Revolution that eventually led to the decline of the Communist Cultural Movement in India.

#### DECLINE OF IPTA: AN EVALUATION

The cultural revolution in China had degenerated into Maoist fundamentalism. But in India the revolutionary imagination of the architects of the Communist Cultural Revolution could not sustain its momentum in the face of the changing political situation in the post-independence India. The confusion and reformism that seemed to have tainted the purpose of the movement which was to fight the national bourgeois was mostly due to the place that the Communists came to find themselves within the political structure of the country. Describing the state of Communist Movement in India Bipan Chandra wrote, "Though organisationally too weak and politically too confused to offer a serious challenge to the

politically mature bourgeois leadership before or after independence, it has always had, at every stage, vast potentialities of growth. It has constantly waited in the wings, so to speak. Its potential appeal to the masses could not be ignored. The bourgeois leadership has, in fact, kept it confused, divided, and without any real capacity to strike after 1947 by stealing its thunder at the programmatic plane precisely on two issues, one of anti-imperialism, and the other of social development on the basis of social equality and social justice, as signified by the vague goal of socialism."<sup>27</sup>

On the weakness of the Communist Movement in India Bipan Chandra's contention is that it was a miscalculation on the part of the Communists to think that "because of the fear of revolutionary forces and of expropriation the bourgeoisie would rapidly become reactionary, abandon internal bourgeois reforms including economic development and political democracy, and join up with imperialism in an anti-Communist and anti-people crusade... It hasn't happened that way. Thus the reformist bourgeoisie has increasingly succeeded in weakening semi-feudalism and imperialism and in building capitalism..."<sup>28</sup>

Gramsci's understanding of the <sup>phenomena</sup> late capitalism tries to explain this characteristic of bourgeois

politics as the process of manoeuvre which is an integral process of the passive revolution.<sup>29</sup> Bourgeoisie in all late capitalist societies had organised the passive revolution by the means of which it has been able to establish its hegemony. Gramsci believed that ruling classes can be either leading or simply dominant. In the Resorgimento, the new ruling class from Piedmont, almost by legerdemain, took control of a unified Italy without seeking a proper national consent. Subsequently the kingdom's political elite, still dominant rather than leading, absorbed the Mazzinian and Garibaldi wings by dint of transformism, a politics of compromise chiefly destined to deprive extremist parties of their leadership by luring the latter into the 'system'. Transformism was in turn but a form of a complex socio-political process, 'passive revolution' which Gramsci identified in two guises. Either it meant just revolution without mass participation, as in Risorgimento, or it corresponded, in addition to a covert process of social classes prevented from advancing overtly, like the bourgeoisie in Restoration France... Class alliances which Gramsci dubbed 'historical blocs' entered the picture because leading ruling classes are supposed to enlist the support of subaltern classes. Thus while the urban Jacobins won over the French peasantry to their cause, in the Resorgimento the Mazzinians failed



to arouse the peasantry, thereby hamstringing the bourgeois democratic revolution in Italy."<sup>30</sup>

In India the success of the bourgeois revolution was largely due to this effective organisation of historical blocs which had diluted the exclusive identity of the Communists. The significance of the slogan of 'Socialism' lost its viability since the same commitment to socialistic pattern of society was pledged by the Nehru government. As Francine Frankel had remarked, "The Congress party which had dominated politics since the century, mastered the art of political accommodation to the highest degree."<sup>31</sup>

And it was this art of accommodation which rendered the slogan of class war by the Communists obsolete since the idea of class war was submerged under the politics of class conciliation and the Communist fell a victim to this political manoeuvre of the national bourgeoisie. Besides any ideology which comes to challenge the politics of a capitalist state loses its legitimacy, because the ruling class who symbolises state power is seen to be the custodians of reason.

It is the marriage between reason and capital which makes the state the supreme embodiment of reason and the ruling class becomes the recipient of knowledge by virtue of its being the dominant class. As Partha Chatterjee in his 'Nationalist Thought And the Colonial World', argues,

"All politics is now sought to be subsumed under the overwhelming requirements of the state representing the nation. The state now acts as the rational allocator and arbitrator for the nation. Any movement which questions this presumed identity between the people, nation and the state representing the nation is denied the status of legitimate politics.<sup>32</sup> Therefore it is not surprising that Communists in India were accorded a backseat in national politics in view of the fact that they for the first time tried to offer a critique of this historical relation between capital and reasons, a fact that provides the legitimacy to ruling class politics. And the fact that Communists fell victim to the machinations of Ruling class is what is responsible for the dilemmas and confusion that arose within the camps of the Indian Communists movement. And it was fundamentally for these reasons that the Communist Cultural Movement fell into a state of doldrums that ultimately hastened its decline.

## NOTES

1. J.G. Merquior, Western Marxism, pp.5-6.
2. Ernst Mandel, From Stalinism to Euro Communism (London: New Left Books, 1978), p.19.
3. J.L.S. Girling, People's War (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1969), p.19.
4. Ibid., p.22.
5. Ibid., p.24.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., p.25.
8. Francine Frankel, India's Political Economy, 1947-1977, p.65.
9. Ibid.
10. Sudhi Pradhan, Marxist Cultural Movement in India, vol.II, p.286.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., p.290.
13. Ibid., p.291.
14. Ibid., p.299.
15. Ibid., p.313.
16. Ibid., p.11.
17. Charuprakash Ghosh, "Crisis in Bengal IPTA" in Sudhi Pradhan (ed.), Marxist Cultural Movement in India, vol.I, pp.330-31.
18. Ibid.
19. Sachin Sengupta, "People's Theatre in India" (Unity, December, 1952) in Sudhi Pradhan, op. cit., vol.I, pp.112-23.
20. Ibid.



21. Mritunjay Adhikari,  
in Dhananjay Das (ed.), Marxbadi Sahitya  
Bitarka, vol.III,
22. Cited in Chinmohan Sehanobish, '46 No Ekti Sans-  
kritic Andolan Prasange.
23. Ibid.
24. Sudhi Pradhan (ed.), op. cit., vol.II.
25. Ibid., p.267.
26. Ibid., p.278.
27. Bipan Chandra, Nationalism and Colonialism in  
Modern India, p.210.
28. Ibid.
29. Partha Chatterjee, Nationalist Thought & the  
Colonial World, A Derivative Discourse, p.169.
30. J.G. Merquior, op. cit., pp.98-99.
31. Francine Frankel, op. cit., p.23.
32. Partha Chatterjee, op. cit., p.168.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper I have tried to study the Cultural Movement of India as part of the political struggle. In order to do this I have introduced the theme of politics of culture in the first chapter and tried to answer the question as to whether culture can be used for political purposes. To do this I have elaborated on the concept of 'Ideological Reproduction' which is a necessary political act of the Ruling Class to secure adhesion to its policies. 'Ideological Domination' I have argued is one of the invisible aspects of power and as such is an integral part of politics.

Communist Cultural Movement to my mind had assumed significance because it challenged this very structure of power or the cultural hegemony of colonialism. In the empirical study of the development of the movement I tried to show that this movement was successful in its task within a certain stage of India's political history. As a cultural movement performing the political task it went through changes of fortune in response to the changing demands of the political situation. I have tried to make a comparative study of various cultural movements in order to show how everywhere the idiom and pace of the movements has been determined by the political imperative.

Such a study according to me assumes importance because it helps to raise the question as to how we

locate the provenance of political problems. I was deeply attracted by the questions that was raised by Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak, in her book, 'In Other Worlds' where she tried to argue that determining the boundaries of various disciplines is also constitutive of an act of power. It remains the task of future academicians to broaden the horizon of every discipline. I had started this work with that single aim to study problems of culture, art and aesthetics from the political perspective which is normally excluded from the discursive field of politics as being an apolitical phenomena. If I have been successful then I hope it shall help although in a very small way to enrich the scope of interdisciplinary research.

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