

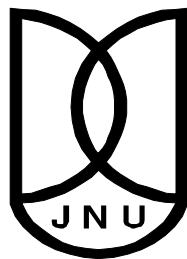
**Revolt, Repression and Resistance – Naxalite  
Historiography and the Alternative Archive of Poetry**

Dissertation submitted to  
Jawaharlal Nehru University  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

**Master of Philosophy**

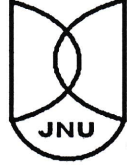
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**2018**



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**DECLARATION BY THE CANDIDATE**

This dissertation titled “**Revolt, Repression and Resistance – Naxalite Historiography and the Alternative Archive of Poetry**” submitted by me for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of any University or Institution.

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## Dissident Aesthetics of the Naxalite Movement in India – Poetry as a terrain of Revolution

“A peal of thunder has crashed over the land of India. The revolutionary peasants in the Darjeeling area have risen in rebellion. Under the leadership of a revolutionary group of the Indian Communist Party, a red area of rural revolutionary armed struggle has been established in India. This is a development of tremendous significance for the Indian people’s revolutionary struggle...”

(Damas, 82)

These lines from an article titled ‘Spring Thunder Over India’ in the July 5, 1967 issue of China’s *Peking People’s Daily* alludes to the events that occurred in the summer of 1967 when the small village of Naxalbari, in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal, became a boiling cauldron of resistance as peasants and artisans, led by a few Marxist-Leninist political activists, took up arms to fight against the growing atrocities perpetuated on them by landowners supported by the then state government of the United Left Front. The epoch of crisis in post-colonial India began in Naxalbari as a rural campaign for land reforms and culminated into Indira Gandhi’s declaration of a state of Emergency between 1975 and 1977, when the movement reached the cities through intellectuals. The problem of socio-cultural change through the historical experience of Naxalism has been a paradigmatic instance of anticipating power through political activism and cultural aesthetics. The reception of the literary representation of the Naxalite movement can be broadly classified into two categories – the first consists of writing that empathizes with the revolutionaries and eulogizes their spirit and sacrifices made, while the second completely condemns and heavily criticizes the violent methods of resistance that the Naxalites embraced. The strategies of violence, individual terror or even guerrilla warfare that the Naxalites resorted to under specific historical conditions need to be re-examined. Contrary to popular belief, history bears testimony to many major movements that succeeded in changing the social structure by taking recourse to violence through deliberate violation of law and authority of the government. The Naxalite movement was instrumental in creating an atmosphere of indomitable resistance against existing institutional violence and the illegal violent methods adopted by the revolutionaries were an important form of counter-violence that was starkly different from the common charge of terrorism against them. Ugrasen Singh’s poem, ‘The Decisive Push’, clearly charts the simmering tension in various rungs of that society, which culminated in the violence of the movement –

“The voices that rise insistent,  
 the questions that proliferate  
 from schools, colleges, factories-  
 how long shall this explosive mix  
 remain successfully suppressed?  
 How long can well-meaning newspapers  
 absorb our smouldering anger?  
 How long can the power of the baton  
 continue to break open our fists?”

(Banerjee 56-57)

Poetry as the most spontaneous art form became the perfect receptacle for the terror and violence prevalent in the society they inhabited and suffered. The existing historic accounts of the movement propose to achieve a singularity and coherence through their supposedly idiosyncratic documentation, but succeed only in ascribing it to the larger scheme of colliding historiographies embedded in uncertainty. Ranajit Guha voices genuine concern regarding the commonsensical assignment of such a complex polyvocal and transhistoric events with the nominating authority of the dominant ideology (Guha 304-305). In the course of my research, I have tried to approach the problem or quandary that emerges while trying to consider alternative forms of historiography – such as tracing a social movement through the artistic and literary works that emerged through it. Revolutionary poetry emerging from the Naxalite movement in the 1960s and 70s provides the perfect ground for examining the discourses of power, performance and resistance, as it brings the poet out of his inner aesthetic sanctum and attempts to get poetry back onto the street – where it once was – out of the classroom, out of the speech department, and in fact off the printed page (Ferlinghetti 4). The history of resistance is also a history of defeat, and years silenced by the force of power, but the poet often finds a way of giving life to struggles which seem irrelevant to oppressive powermongers. The aim of my intended research is to examine whether the poetics of resistance emerging from the Naxalite movement in India provide scope for an alternative study in its historiography.

The severe oppression of the Naxalites by the government, by deploying the state’s forces against them, can be studied through Gregoire Chemayou’s lens who takes up the idea of dehumanizing an individual in the process of recognizing the ‘prey’ in the hunting game

(Chamayou 51-57). The police constantly tried to justify their actions with references to the law, but in order to be effective hunters they often pursued their prey beyond the limits of law. The inhumane atrocities of the police almost became a myth and remained in public memory through retrospective poems like 'This Valley of Death Is Not My Country' by the Bengali post-modern novelist and poet Nabarun Bhattacharya where he writes,

"I reject

Days and nights of interrogation with a thousand watts of electricity blazing straight  
into eyeballs

I reject

Electric needles inside fingernails

I reject

Having to lie naked on chunks of ice

I reject

Being hanged upside down till blood gushes out of nostrils

I reject

Spiked boots pressed on lips, burning iron rods on every inch of skin

I reject

The sudden blast of alcohol on whiplashed back

I reject

Stark electric jolts on the nerves, pieces of rocks shoved inside vaginas, scrotums  
mangled to pulp

I reject

Being beaten and thrashed to death

I reject

Revolver-muzzles stuck against craniums"



(Bhattacharya 26)

However, the presupposition of political subjecthood by the dominant reduces the prey to a foreboding of danger in his life on the run and the only form of liberation that seems available is that of freedom in death. By pushing the dominated to the realm of the dead, the dominant also provides him with the power of rebellion. The whole gamut of poems that was written during the Naxalite movement, and in its aftermath, document the growing sense of desperation among the revolutionaries in the face of extreme repression and the fatal end numerous lives around them. The anonymous poem ‘Silence’ that was inscribed with blood on the walls of a cell in Presidency jail celebrates the spirit of revolution, which might be a failure but not futile, instead of expressing grief for the death of a fellow comrade –

“Here sleeps my brother.  
 Don’t stand by him  
 With a pale face and a sad heart.  
 For, he is laughter!  
 Don’t cover his body with flowers.  
 What’s the use of adding flowers to a flower?  
 If you can,  
 Bury him in your heart  
 You will find  
 At the twitterings of the bird of the heart  
 Your sleeping soul has woken up.  
 If you can,  
 Shed some tears.  
 And –  
 All the blood of your body.”

(Banerjee 91)

Naxalite poetry provides historical references to a number of poets who wrote poetry while being in the very thick of revolutionary action, and were tortured or shot dead by the police. Saroj Dutta, the editor of CPI (M-L) party-led magazine *Parichay* and *Deshabrati*, was killed by the police in an encounter. The poet and activist Cherabandaraju wrote memorable pieces like ‘Rights’, ‘Lal Salaam’ and ‘Rebirth’ while suffering from humiliation

and torture in jail. These young poets constantly experimented with forms of poetry, bending it bending it to their ideas and thoughts. The language of the intellectual elite was deemed insufficient to express the concerns of the workers, farmers and tribes. A linguistic shock through incisive language and public themes of revolt against sufferings seemed to be the need of the hour, and so their poems criticised the establishment and dreamt of rebellion –

“My voice is a crime,  
my thoughts anarchy,  
because  
I do not sing to their tunes,  
I do not carry them on my shoulders...

... But  
No hymn  
to their religion and rule  
will escape my throat.  
Every drop of my blood  
I scatter like seed  
to liberate my country.”

(Banerjee 98-99)

Poetry, much like death, is an important tool for resistance because it is eternal, irrepressible, indomitable and liberated. Naxalite poetry helps to address some of the basic questions of the political and dissensual in the practice of aesthetics. What happens when you are 'performing' a 'felt' rage and anger, one that drove a revolution, however flawed and transient? What is the aesthetics in the flawed and the transient that fits with the politics of Naxalite writing? Jacques Rancière describes this dynamic when he notes that the syntagma 'politics of literature' means that literature 'does' politics as literature - that there is a specific link between politics as a definite way of doing and literature as a definite practice of writing (Rancière 152). The potential of art as counter-hegemonic practice is not limited exclusively to the space of representation, but art and politics as forms of dissent allow a “rearrangement of the common sensible experience.” (Rancière 70) Art is neither political for the messages and feelings it conveys about the structures of the world, nor for the ways it represents the structures of society and the problems of social groups. On the contrary, “[...] what is really proper to art is that which carries out a new distribution of material and symbolic space. And

that is what makes art so engaged to politics.” (Rancière 17) An enquiry into Naxalite poetry, and art in general, provides an alternate method—of tracing the historiography of the movement.

The first chapter titled ‘The Poetics of Politics – Naxalite Documents and Poetry as Modernist Manifesto Politics’ includes the close reading of major theoretical texts written by prominent leaders like Charu Mazumder and Saroj Dutta as manifestos of the movement. These texts question the idea of democracy and equality in the post-independence Indian context, as well as offer a critical understanding of the communist revolution in the country. It also includes poems written by people from various sections of the society who themselves plunged into revolutionary action and inspired thousands of others to join the movement through their literary writings that blur the generic distinctions between poetry, propagandist art or manifesto. The poetic power of Naxalite politics constitutes the very question that is posed to the existing narratives of the dominant classes through the representation of new and marginalised voices. The movement led to the aesthetic development of a radical language, changing forms and rebuilding structures that threatened the normative methodologies of studying art, politics and culture.

In the second chapter titled ‘The Politics of Poetics – Naxalite Avant-garde and Modernism in India’, I have tried to place the poetry emerging from the Naxalite movement in the existing paradigm of modernist writings in various languages of the country. The influence and timing of the Naxalite revolution was different in each part of the country, but in each case, it challenged the literary canons of the language through their overpowering influence on different sections of the society. Other literary movements contemporary to Naxalbari, like Hungryalism, and later of the Bombay poets were essentially urban phenomena, bearing traces of western influences that also radically affected their dominant aesthetics. However, unlike these two movements, Naxalite poetry emerged from the larger, yet local, politics of armed rebellion against the state and its mechanisms. It was not restricted only to city-bred intellectuals influenced by the literature emerging from other armed rebellions in history like those in Vietnam, Cuba and China, but found representative voices equally among the peasant and tribal communities, who were completely unaware of such international developments. Therefore, the speech acts of these suppressed voices created a fissure in the idea of modernism in Indian literature.

The difficulty of archiving and examining a movement that has been severely repressed by the state is a case in study of the final chapter titled ‘The Archive and the Audience: Politics, Poetics.’ In this chapter, I have taken up the difficulties that arose while trying to trace the archive of Naxalite poetry, which are missing from most of the libraries maintained and controlled by the state. I have interviewed two people – Sandip Dutta, founder of Little Magazine Library, Kolkata and Anil Acharya, editor of the publication house Anushtup, in Kolkata – and included the video as an appendix of my dissertation in the end. Their work opened up before me a plethora of literary texts that mostly remained in oblivion. It is an alternative attempt to study the Naxalite movement through a collective memory created by alternative archives that point towards a multi-cultural, multi-lingual and polyvocal history. An against-the-grain reading of these archives reveals the glaring contradictions among Naxalites themselves, like gender discrimination which later became one of the main reasons for their downfall. The changing readership and scholarship of the Naxalite movement continues to have a dynamic influence on dissident aesthetics in India.

One of the major difficulties in tracing the Naxalite revolution through the poetry of the age for a scholar of literary studies like me has been the politics of translation and anthologising that limits the capacity of representing such a movement and restricts it to only articulation. The primary texts that I have used include Sumanta Banerjee’s ‘Thema Book of Naxalite Poetry’ and E.V. Ramakrishnan’s ‘The Tree of Tongues’ – both of which include English translations of poems written in regional languages by various authors. The alternative accounts and poems from little magazines and publications that have been considered for close reading have also lost their original effect because of the transition from one language to another. But the ambit of the Naxalite revolution itself included the dissolving of such boundaries where language was never an important obstruction. The comrades of armed rebellion raised their voices in unison and subscribed largely to the same ideology, although their consciousness was rooted in their specific cultural heritage. The several strands of poetic voices from various sections of society contribute to the larger poetics of the movement, that created an atmosphere of aesthetic dissidence in the context of Indian modernism. In fact, the truly avant-garde feature of Naxalite poetics and politics has been the far-reaching impact it has had on the culture of resistance in India, where most of the problems that the revolutionaries had addressed continue to haunt the poorest sections of the society today, albeit in newer and other complex forms.

The Poetics of Politics – Naxalite Documents and Poetry as Modernist Manifestos

‘Chorus of Peasants And Workers’

I

“We are the tillers of the land and we are the land,  
We are the sowers of seeds and we are the seeds.

The first goddess flowered in the furrows of our plough,

The first song ripened on the sweat of our brow.

On our bent backs the first sculpture was carved.

And the first palace built on our bones and bellies starved.

Hunger today has chilled our hands that fed the world,

Rats have seized our barns to hide their gold.

Penury’s pang has chilled our hearts that warmed the world

And hounds have robbed us of our fertile land.

Their poppy grows on the banks of Ganga where our paddy sang,

Masked demons dance from where our harvest music sprang.

They’ve trapped our trumpeting monsoons luring them by sugarcanes.

They’ve held our neighing west wind by their golden reins.

And we live in the shade of four gruesome mountains

Whose scorching summer dries out our life’s fountains.

The sickle that once reaped the golden corn  
Today shall reap the venomous heads that peasants scorn.  
The plough that once the craggy soil broke  
Today shall break the stony hearts that breed the yoke...

II

We are the makers of the tool and we are the tools  
We are the riders of wheels and we are the wheels  
  
Our life-breath puffed the sails of the first voyage.  
The first city rose up from our muscle's rage.  
On the sea of our tears began the commerce of nations.  
The first empire flourished on our burnt down passions...  
  
Their monstrous machines drink us down to the dregs,  
Their lackeys steal our bread, rape our girls and chain our legs.  
Our creations stare at us from their painted window shade  
In vain longing our children peer at the toys their fathers made.  
And we live in the vales of the four awesome mountains  
Whose woeful winter chills our life's welling fountains  
The hammer that once curbed the iron's rigid pride  
Today shall crush the hoods of Capital's swelling tide.  
The labouring muscles today shall seize the gun  
To hunt down the beasts that prey on our Sun..."

(Banerjee 44-45)

The idea of quoting excerpts from the long poem by the Malayali activist and poet Satchithanandan titled 'Chorus of Peasants and Workers' is to demonstrate how the moment of revolution creates a rupture in art that cuts across various genres because in such demanding circumstances the content overflows the form of writing. The text in question here blurs the distinction between a poetic artifice and a manifesto of the Naxalite movement when read in conjunction with the documents written by the principal revolutionist and theorist – Charu Mazumder. The first part of the poem is a declaration of the peasants' right to the land that they till and the crop that they cultivate. They have been subject to years of exploitation and oppression while the ruling classes have reaped the benefits of their hard work. The nights and days of hunger pangs have transformed their means of livelihood – the plough and the sickle – into weapons. The poet sends out a war cry – the first step of which could be achieved through agrarian revolution. The second part of the poem voices the resolve of the workers in factories and industries who have been denied the fruits of civilisation since time immemorial. They have toiled the hardest to build cities, nations and empires, and instead of being recognised for their struggle, they have been subject to torture, rape and murder. The same hammer with which they shape the iron would be used as the weapon against the growing evil of capitalism that has been haunting their lives in the modern age. The workers and the peasants could no longer depend on State machinery for justice as the very system of law seemed to have been flawed. The four 'mountains' that is a recurring image in the poem is an allusion to the four major obstacles in the path of the peasants and workers as defined by the CPI (M-L) – feudalism, comprador-bureaucrat capitalism, Western imperialism and Soviet social-revisionism. The peasants and workers knew that they would be no strangers to violence and were preparing to seize the firearms from their enemies and use them to build up a strong resistance against the major obstacles.

The post-colonial history of India bears testimony to several struggles of various scales across the different parts of the country that have often raised questions about the legitimacy of the world's largest democracy. Rabindra Ray points out that the chief allegation against the Indian state by the Naxalites was the 'semi-feudal' and 'semi-colonial' nature of its economy and society. (Ray 160-180) The chief objective of Charu Mazumder in his initial years as a member of the communist party was a revaluation of the Indian history and a critique of the erstwhile communist movement in India. He criticised the Nehruvian policies adopted by the Indian government and the understanding it had entered into with the growing

imperialist forces of the world for achieving economic stability while undermining the rights of the peasants and workers who formed the base of this very economic superstructure thereby leading to a semi-colonial situation. In his analysis of the Indian condition Suniti Kumar Ghosh points out that, “On one side, the imperialist monopolies and their Indian compradors grew fabulously rich: on the other, there was stark poverty, hunger, unemployment, malnutrition, stunted growth and disease of the large majority of people.” (Ghosh 62) The first theoretical document by Mazumder titled ‘Our Tasks in the Present Situation’ provides a detailed analysis of the existing socio-political condition in post-colonial India whereby a complete failure of the Indian bourgeoisie represented by the Congress government had led to several famines and a perennial food crisis. He not only pointed out how the Indian government had become a political ally of the American imperialist forces but was also quick to address the fact that capitalist intentions had created a difference within the bourgeoisie, as the monopoly industrialists and trading community were at loggerheads. According to Mazumder, the only possible method of creating an organised form of resistance was agrarian revolution and it is here that he defines the role of the revolutionary cadre who can assess the situation at hand and take decisions of his own. The central objective of the revolutionary cadre would be to educate the workers as well as the petty-bourgeoisie in the tenets of communism and propagate a mass agrarian revolution.

The CPI (M) had only been mildly criticising the State and pointed out the semi-feudal functioning of the economy where the comprador-bourgeoisie unity was exploiting the working class. However, they chose to forget about the real issues of the proletariat once they were able to seize power in a few states through elections based on the Parliamentary form of revolution being the victims of revisionism. The second document titled ‘Make the People’s Democratic Revolution Successful by Fighting Against Revisionism’ is a critical measurement of the ongoing communist movement in the country. Mazumder delineates organisational work like the Krishak Sabha, and trade unions, as one of the many weapons that the party should be using as means to an end of total revolution. The idea of total revolution seemed to be impossible by launching few movements with specific demands. It could only be successful by overthrowing the Centre through complete ‘seizure of political power.’ He drew on his experience of the Tebhaga movement and eulogised the struggle of simple peasants and artisans who had built up a fortuitous resistance against the armed forces of the Centre. The traces of armed struggle that Mazumder had advocated in the second document were pursued by him further in the third document titled ‘What is the Source of



Spontaneous Revolutionary Outburst in India.’ In this particular text Mazumder cited the example of the revolutionary struggles in various parts of the world since the Second World War. He is seemingly hopeful about the revolutionary spark in countries like China, Vietnam and Cuba potentially leading to a prairie fire in India. The fourth document titled ‘Carry on the Struggle Against Modern Revisionism’ is a detailed study of the existing political scenario in India. It was written during the time when the Soviet Union was trying to strengthen its bond with India by promising an aid of Rs. 600 crores during the Fourth Five Year Plan. According to Mazumder, it would only fuel Soviet-American imperialism and lead the country towards modern revisionism. The idea of nationalism preached by the government was heavily criticised and the need for organising the struggle for identity in various parts of the country like Kashmir and Nagaland into a singular mass movement was identified. The two imperative steps towards achieving this goal was a keen analysis of the class difference and taking up arms against the authority as an act of counter-violence against the years of oppression and exploitation. Only the newer methods of revolution like creating a network of secret organisations could have helped to realise such a dream.

Charu Mazumder’s methodology discernible in the Eight Documents bathed in Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tse-tung thought are deemed historic by Marius Damas because it created a sharp departure from parliamentary cretinism, by making a resolute case for revolutionary politics combating the revisionist approach of the existing communist movement in India. (Damas 242) The form and language of the Eight Documents are well entrenched in the idea of the manifesto – a genre created by Marx and Engels through their groundbreaking work that brought into “a novel and startling juncture philosophy and politics, analysis and action, historiography and intervention.” (Puchner 11) The etymology of the word ‘manifesto’ can be traced to the sovereign idea of ‘manifest’ which is a kind of declaration to be put into action. However, the revolutionary manifesto in contrast challenges this authoritative pre-assumption and attempts to create a far more insecure yet aggressive discourse. The idea of the Communist Manifesto had initially been a collection of articles of faith in the form of catechism but Engels was the first to realise the need for tracing the historical process through the narrative of an urgent plea for action. Charu Mazumder had internalised Marx’s idea of the manifesto as a study into the preceding revolutionary movements which helps to channelise the struggle at hand towards the imminent revolution of the future. The manifesto is always impatient in tone because it cannot wait for its own end so that real action can begin (Puchner 43). The Naxalite documents and literary pieces can be

traced to the lineage of postponements and failures of the final revolution which it envisions. The aggressive and hopeful undertone of the manifesto also underlines the uncertainty associated with it. The idea of modernity requires production of new form and new content to be mutual, in order to actually shape the future, which is exactly what Mazumder attempts to do through his major theoretical work.

“India, two black paws of famine

Stare from your eyes

Death hovers over your head.

The dry wind of the countryside

Brings down the news of death on the barren fields...

India, I've not been baptized

into your doctrine of non-violence.

I am the outcast, the fallen.

I don't obey any mandate.

Death is on my left,

Death is on my right.”

(Banerjee 36)

Partha Bandyopadhyay's Bengali poem 'March, '73' justifies the position of violent struggle adopted by Charu Mazumder in order to develop a theory of revolution in the Indian context that Marius Damas vehemently defends in his analysis of the movement. The Fifth Document is a decisive juncture in Mazumder's career as a political activist as well as the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) not only because this was a kind of final call for action but also in the course of writing this document he had been arrested under the Defence of India Rules. The revisionist tendencies of the Communist Party of India is compared with Khrushchev's tactics of peaceful transition to socialism which is deemed ineffective in the Indian context whereby every movement had been violently repressed by the government. This was also a turning point as far as the activities of the erstwhile Soviet Union is

concerned which had fallen into the trap of revisionism. He traces the course of action for the working class and peasantry and invites them to an armed rebellion resorting to methods of guerrilla warfare. The Leninist idea of turning the war against imperialism into a civil war like the one in China led by Mao Tse-tung is proposed as the role model for the Indian revolutionaries as well. The Sixth document begins by taking a cue from the previous document and addresses the revisionist methods imported from the Soviet Union whereby the party is restricted to making speeches about a mass revolution through the unification of the peasant and labourers struggle yet fail to put any of it into action. The Communist Party identified the ones believing in the violent methods as 'adventurists' whereas their own revisionist policies were unable to produce any considerable change in the socio-political scenario. The revolutionaries underlined the need for a destruction of the existent party system and the democratic framework behind it. This could only be achieved through intercepting and annihilating the class enemies to strike terror in the minds of the authority. It is interesting to note here that the function of the Naxalite manifesto was not only identifying the symptoms and indices of social formation as superstructure, but more importantly, it was a moment of intervention – an attempt of the superstructure altering the base.

The theoretical premise of taking up arms and organising small pockets of revolt in various parts of the country was based on the age-old debate of putting communist theory into action. Ghosh identifies the long lineage of Marxist thinkers who have stressed upon the importance of a revolutionary thrust required for revolution. While Marx identified 'force' as the 'midwife' of every society on the verge of rebirth, for Engels 'force' is the instrument through which social movements nullify the old and deceased 'political forms', and Lenin identified the need for not only a violent revolution but also for destroying the apparatus of state power created by the ruling class. The most contemporary example for Charu Mazumder was Mao Tse-tung in China, who declared that it is only by the power of the gun that the working class and labouring masses can put up a resistance and defeat the armed bourgeoisie and landlords, which will eventually lead to the transformation of the world in the true ideal of socialism. Hence, it was imperative to take up the gun and participate in a war in order to get rid of war in general. (Ghosh 86) Charu Mazumder had correctly identified the nature of communist struggle in India's past whereby every conjunctural crisis of the State had been seized upon by the revolutionary factions, only to realise their political ambitions in the process and thereby failing to organise a class struggle. Thus, he defies the idea of non-violence and advocates the idea of mass armed struggle as the 'cardinal' task of

the CPI (M-L) if they wanted to 'entrench' themselves among the masses. The central fallacy of previous rebellions that failed to transform into a revolution across the country was because of the dwindling support from the common people due to increased politicisation of efforts among the revolutionaries. Mazumder's solution to this very problem was the idea of armed class struggle and the heavily criticised tactic of 'annihilation'. Mazumder was trying to create the base required for a full-fledged guerilla warfare, and this annihilation theory was the first step towards achieving such a dream. The central theme of Partha Bandyopadhyay's poem alludes to Charu Mazumder and his followers, who felt that it was imperative to take up arms against the menacing situation that was developing in the country. This was the only way that the poor peasants and workers would remain united with the cause of revolution, because it meant an investment of power and responsibility in their hands. (Damas 235-237)

The Sixth document begins by taking a cue from the previous document, and addresses the revisionist methods imported from the Soviet Union, whereby the party is restricted to making speeches about a mass revolution through the unification of the peasant and labourers' struggle - and yet fail to put any of it into action. The revolutionaries underlined the need for a destruction of the existent party system, and the democratic framework behind it. This could only be achieved through intercepting and annihilating the class enemies, to strike terror in the minds of the authority. The Seventh document titled 'Take this Opportunity' has been subject to severe criticism due to the claims of mass rebellion in various parts of the country made by Mazumder. He feels that it was the right moment to carry on armed struggle by uniting the peasants and workers under the single banner of an organised party. The onus of the organisation lay on the students and the activists, whose other responsibility would be engaging new recruits in the functioning of the party. Although the pace at which the revolution was taking shape, as reported by Mazumder, is subject to debate, his claims and assumptions regarding the revisionist principles of the Communist Party were proving to be very appropriate predictions. In the Eighth Document titled 'Carry Forward The Peasant Struggle By Fighting Revisionism', he underlines how the Party had betrayed the cause of the poor workers and peasants after coming to power in West Bengal. The leader of the organisation in power in Bengal, Harekrishna Konar's promises of redistributing land and ensuring minimum wages for the workers after coming to power, was completely overlooked after the general elections. Instead, the leadership dissuaded the peasant as well as the trade union movements and tried to reach a point of compromise that was against the revolutionary spirit. Their belief in the bureaucracy and democratic form of

political agitation had been rendered useless several times in the past but they refused to learn. Thus, the true revolutionary needed to break through the shackles into the very midst of action and be ready to make sacrifices when the state machinery would try to combat them with all their force.

“Even with death,

There is no end.

Even today

Debates pile high

Into a mountain.

Arrayed on its one side

Is a group,

On the opposite

Another.

In the centre

Stands that man-

Charu Mazumder,

Turned blue by the

Poison he drank!”

(Banerjee 112-113)

The Eight Documents that form the core of Naxalite literature has been subject to severe criticism, due to dubious facts and figures as well as the politically charged emotional outbursts of the author who was himself dreaming about the mass armed revolution. The lines quoted above from Kaushik Banerjee’s poem ‘That Man’, where he compares Charu Mazumder to Shiva who drank the poison from the ocean before it could contaminate the world, perfectly captures the lingering debate surrounding Charu Mazumder as the central figure responsible for the conception as well as the failure of the movement. However, it is

important to understand that the central challenge of Mazumder was to put theory into practice, and I would like to argue that in doing so he had subscribed largely to an idea of the manifesto, whereby the poetics of the text becomes far more significant than the content. Martin Puchner posits that “Manifestos do not articulate a political unconscious that needs to be excavated through careful analysis, as Fredric Jameson does in the case of the novel; rather, they seek to bring this unconscious into the open.” The Naxalite manifesto had directly challenged the legitimacy of the prevailing system of law and order, and thus it entailed a call for action to violence against the ruling classes of the society. Like every other political manifesto, Charu Mazumder’s vision of the mass revolution and its impact was far from the real conditions at work; however, the theatrical exaggeration of his writings overcompensates for the actual powerlessness of his or his organisation’s position. His writings were similar to performative speeches that intended to change the world by reducing the difference between speech and action. The form of Mazumder’s text and the time at which it was written, looking towards a revolution of the future, provides an estimate of modernity in the Indian context. The Communist Manifesto always had a space for alteration and update, until Marx and Engels felt that they no more had the right to alter it because it had become a historical document, in the sense that the future it envisions has a history of its own. The future that Mazumder had envisioned in the manifestos of the Naxalite movement threatened to leave a trace on history, and this has been successful through the gamut of art and literature produced in reaction to the dreams that were being nurtured. Although the movement failed to sustain due to a number of circumstantial and situational crises, yet it was successful in creating a radical solidarity among the educated intellectuals and the poorest of peasants, farmers and manual labourers. I will try to study the dissensual poetics emerging from the politics of such a radical solidarity between the two classes that challenge the parameters of Indian modernism and succeed in becoming the avant-gardist discourse.

Naxalite poetics opens up completely new forms of speech and action, that allow the muted and forgotten sections of society to partake in politics through dissent. The Naxalite manifestos as seeds of dissensual activity, as discussed earlier, attempted to have a double existence in the field of art and politics much like the manifestos of the avant-garde movements in Europe. The poems written during the initial stages almost act as a supplement to the original text of the manifesto and bear traces of modern manifesto art. Civic Chandran’s poem ‘Kabani’, that I would like to quote at length here, performs the political by

opening up new spaces of representation, and allows the silenced sections of society to raise their voices against inherent injustices in the Indian democratic system.

“I

Raghuraman, my friend, a clerk in the office, says  
That his cook reads history and philosophy at night  
After his master has gone to bed  
To find out tales of cooks, peasants and woodcutters  
Who had used their implements for revolt.  
My friend feels that his cook will soon run away  
And leave him to starve.  
Raghuraman, my friend, upon the testimony of Pandurangan, his cook,  
Says for certain that River Kabani will turn red again.

II

Vijaylakshmi, my schoolmate, who comes  
From a village and is now in a college, says  
That the slave girl working in the fields  
Is humming songs  
Which speaks of landlords and moneylenders losing their heads  
And of slaves celebrating festivals of freedom.  
It seems that the reports from the fuming factories  
Of the town  
Fascinate the dark girl.  
Vijaylakshmi, my schoolmate, upon the testimony of Thema,

The slave girl,  
Says for certain that the River Kabani will turn red again.

III

Radhakrishnan, the journalist, just back from the trip  
To the hills of Brahmagiri and Narinirangi says  
That his tribal guide cherishes warm memories  
'of a fighter he calls the 'Peruman'.  
He says that the summer forests of Wynad are waiting for their spark  
And the rock of Kumbarakkuni is bleeding still  
Haunted by a pair of eyes gauged out of their sockets  
Radhakrishnan, the journalist, upon the testimony of Marachathan, his guide,  
Says for certain that the River Kabani will turn red again.

IV

Madhavan Unnithan, our esteemed member of the Legislative Assembly,  
Who invites our attention to the recent reports of starvation deaths, says,  
That Pembi from Pothumoola, a victim of starvation,  
Still speaks through her baby,  
That we can't ignore the fire of those tiny eyes.  
He reminds his distinguished snoring friends in the Assembly  
That starvation is the highroad that leads straight to revolt  
He insists on their doing something to avoid a possible storm.  
Madhavan Unnithan, the MLA, upon the testimony of Pembi's child, says,  
For certain that River Kabani will turn red again.



## V

Putting two and two together, I too feel that they  
 Are not far from wrong.  
 Kabani is not for ever going to suffer in silence...  
 I suppose their witness have the right to  
 do whatever they want to –  
 Pembi's child can burst out at the top of its voice  
 Pandurangan can leave his master;  
 Thema can cut off her landlord's head; and  
 Marachathan can follow the example of his Peruman.”

(Banerjee 69-71)

The central theme of the poem is examining the premise for a violent confrontation between the neglected sections of society and the rulers of the land. In the Indian state, the idea of democracy was and is still accessible only to the aristocracy, and under such circumstances the poor can only expect neglect, exploitation and rejection. Thus, it became imperative for them to partake in democracy through violence and thereby exert their presence in Indian society. In this context it is imperative to delineate violence and the various forms that it can take during a social revolution. The categorization of violence cannot simply be restricted to physical blows, but also involves a discreet method of inflicting pain and suffering on the victims. Foucault's biopolitics refers to the policies and regulations embedded in a particular ideology that are used to manage the lives of populations (Foucault, 246-249). Biopower, as a consequence of biopolitics, creates clear distinctions within the population, whereby a particular group is considered to be more dispensable than others. In the modern world, biopower determines the livability of lives and thereby influences the decision to make live or let die. Defective policies, and refusal or failure to act in situations of crisis on the part of the government leading to destruction of lives, is also a form of violence. This is in fact what Johan Galtung calls “structural violence” that remains latent in society through political repression, economic inequalities and

educational disparity (Galtung, 167–191). The theoretical justification of the violent methods that the Naxalites resorted to is that it was an inevitable movement of resistance through counter-violence. Hannah Arendt suggests that, historically speaking, the foundational act of violence is constitutive of every major event of revolution (Puchner 81). The glorification of the violent act by Charu Mazumder in his manifesto and Civic Chandran in his poem is similar to the Futurist Georges Sorel's unflinching belief that the preliminary act of proletarian violence reopens the class antagonisms that pave the way for the final revolution. Naxalite politics was heavily influenced by the aesthetics of the Chinese Cultural Revolution and the theories of Mao Tse-tung who highlighted the influence of art in social construction. Mao criticised the idea of 'art for art's sake' and argued that art cannot be apolitical because it is not above class differences. (Mao 26) Since art is always bathed in the ideology of the producer, proletarian literature and art for him are parts of the whole revolutionary cause of the proletariat. In such a theoretical framework, art becomes a weapon of social change in the hands of the peasants, poor workers and intellectuals, for ushering in radical change in culture. The militant nature of art is also visible in the Naxalite cultural production; however, the major point of difference between them and their Chinese counterpart was that instead of art and literature initiating the revolution, for the Naxalites it was the revolution that changed the trajectory of art and culture.

One of the primary debates of modernism has been questioning existing notions about art, and what role it can or should play in a revolution. Georg Lukács attacked theories of modernism that saw revolution just as a 'rupture' as flawed, because it severed all conditions with the past thereby failing to achieve what he calls 'authentic freedom' from imperialist forces. According to Lukács, wherever cultural heritage is deeply embedded in the living contradictions of the world, it is bound to give birth to a progressive and dynamic movement, where the sufferings of the people come to the fore and provide a revolutionary thrust. Unlike the one-dimensionality of high modernism, the artistic practices originating in such a cultural heritage subscribe to the idea of history as the living dialectical unity of continuity and discontinuity, or, in other words, evolution and revolution – and its value lies in this idea of diversification. (Lukács 53-59) The normative idea of Indian modernism, whose origins can be traced to the Bengali Renaissance, was built on the premises of high modernism in Europe that the litterateurs and philosophers were trying to emulate while ignoring the real conditions at work back home. The independence of the country from the British imperialist forces acted as a kind of narcotic that alienated the artists and intellectuals from the everyday struggle of

the people. The Naxalites attempted to jolt the consciousness of the people and defy Indian modernism, which were the main reasons behind urban youth taking to the destruction of statues of national leaders and symbols of their achievements. This was vehemently criticised by the leaders of other political parties, the press and the torch bearers of progress and modernism in India. The revolutionary poet Saroj Dutta's essay 'In Support of Image-Breaking' written in defence of the urban youth upsurge, that first appeared in *Deshabrati* (later the translated version appeared in *Liberation* on August 10, 1970 under the pen name of 'Shashanka') could be read as a manifesto of the cultural revolution envisioned by the Naxalites. Saroj Dutta had already drawn the battle lines for two major ideological battles in the cultural field – one against Buddhadev Bose's school of thinking, and the other against that of Samar Sen. He contested Buddhadev Bose's speech at the conference of the Progressive Writers Association, where Bose said that it was the responsibility of writers and artists to depict the loss, suffering and existential pangs that were inevitable before a revolution. According to Dutta, the artists and poets themselves should engage themselves in the task of changing society, by attacking the dominant structures that put artists in a stranglehold. He resorted to similar arguments to criticise Samar Sen's essay 'In Defense of Decadent Culture' where he said that it was the task of communist revolutionaries to remove traces of decadence in society. He warned revolutionaries against the revisionist tendencies of Sen, who argued that writers who depicted the decadent nature of societies were progressives, and the call by communist revolutionaries to write only propaganda material was intolerable. (Sengupta 8) This was the historical premise of Saroj Dutta's manifesto that went on to reveal the prevalent contradictions in the context of Indian modernism.

The Governor of Bengal Sri Santiswaroop Dhavan, at a prayer meeting held at Barrackpore Gandhighat, had bitterly criticised the act of desecrating statues of national heroes like Mahatma Gandhi and Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, by students and youth following the path of Naxalite revolution. Dutta argued that the myth of Barrackpore Gandhighat was being attacked by the youth to reveal the truth behind choosing the site of Sepoy Mutiny to turn into a place for worshipping Gandhi. He further stated that such a request was made by Lord Mountbatten to erase the memory of Mangal Pandey – the first ever martyr for the cause of the nation. During Mangal Pandey's struggle and subsequent hanging in the army barracks, the Principal of Sanskrit College, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, had allowed the British to use his campus as an army base for suppressing revolts across the city.

“Under the impact of and in the light shed by the CPI (M-L) led peasant struggle that has assumed a sharp and widespread character in West Bengal, the mystery about the Barrackpore Gandhighat is being unravelled at long last before the eyes of the revolutionary youth... That is why the youths today are breaking the statues of Gandhi and Vidyasagar so that they can built statues of Mangal Pandey. The great teacher on mankind’s liberation Chairman Mao has taught us that there is no construction without destruction. As the cunning ruling class has realised this, the lackeys fed on its leavings have raised hysterical cries in defence of the statues of the wise.”

(Shashanka 457)

The first attempt at a manifesto of a cultural movement in India was made by the ‘The Indian Progressive Writers’ Association’ initiated in England by the likes of Mulk Raj Anand and Sassad Zaheer and was later established in India with the support of leaders and intellectuals like Rabindranath Tagore, Sarat Chandra Chatterjee, Munsii Premchand, Sarojini Devi and Jawaharlal Nehru, among others. The major objectives as outlined in the manifesto included – condemning all literature that was far removed from the realities of life and engaged in metaphysical abstractions, to entertain critical and scientific reasoning, to engage the masses in literature and write about pain, hunger and abject poverty, to initiate interaction between regional writers and take up the task of translations for increasing accessibility. But the successive generation of artists and litterateurs failed to subscribe to most of the objectives in their art and literature and did not see in it the potential of being a truly revolutionary activity. Even dissensual movements in art that wanted to confront false ideas of Indian modernism, like the Hungryalist movement, concentrated on the sexual and cultural liberation of the individual but found that it was futile to revolt against existing conditions because the betrayal had been too deep. The Hungryalist Manifesto clearly declares the vision of the Hungryalists – “Poetry is no more a civilizing maneuver, a replanting of the bamboozled gardens; it is a holocaust, a violent and somnambulistic jazzing of the hymning five, a sowing of the tempestual Hunger.” Instead of resisting the dominant order with violence like the Naxalites, the Hungryalists restricted themselves to being mourners in their pages of poetry, while attempting a sort of anti-aestheticization of the urban life through their work as well as lifestyle. (McCord 2) The Hungryalists like the Naxalites understood that it was impossible to usher in a cultural revolution without understanding how each individual life was influenced by the historical forces at work, and it is such relations that give rise to genuine slogans and guidelines that would put the progressive forces of politics into genuine

action. The Hungryalist politics was based on their dissensual aesthetic practices that created an important rupture in the Bengali culture, but their ambit was totally different from the Naxalites who could not afford to be alienated from the masses. Hungryalist movement's politics was one of alienation – from the masses, from themselves, from those they were intimate with – but also a harsh and felt critique of capitalism, so in that sense they had a connection with Naxalite politics. Their revolution was in rejecting all social mores and indulging various appetites in a deliberate flouting of societal structures and norms. The revolutionary mode of these two movements were different because unlike the politics of revolution originating from aesthetics in case of the Hungryalists, the Naxalite aesthetics originated from their politics of revolution.

The Naxalite manifesto could be seen as an example of what Brecht calls 'popular literature' – not in the sense that it was popular among the masses, but that it spoke about the real conditions of individuals in the existing socio-political conditions of the country. The real crux of the aesthetic debate that the Naxalite manifesto fuelled was examining the relationship between the workers and intellectuals within the revolutionary movement. But as Theodor Adorno contests, literature is the most class-divided of all art forms because of its racination in language and hence it has proved resistant to the inter-twinning of popular and vanguard genres. (Adorno 108) The literature of the Naxalites did not have to subscribe to a single manifesto that laid out conditions for the practice of art, but produced polyvocal, multi-cultural and multi-lingual manifestos thereby contributing to the archive of Naxalite literature and thus their art retained its truly autonomous character. The manifesto of Revolutionary Writers Association or the Viplava Rachayital Sangham (Virasam) that was formed in 1970 is another example of Naxalite manifesto that underlines the truly autonomous nature of the revolutionary struggle. Telegu modernism was built on the doctrines of the October Revolution by the Progressive Writers Association or the Abhuyadaya Rachayital Sangham (Arasam) since the communist party came to power in the state of Andhra Pradesh. But the fire of revolution in Naxalbari had spread to Srikakulam which became the site of another historic revolt against the Indian state and its organs. The split in the communist party of Andhra Pradesh was inevitable, and so was the fissure in the cultural sphere. The Revolutionary Writers Association provided a platform to the thinkers, intellectuals and revolutionaries who had studied Mao's model of the Cultural Revolution in China. The manifesto of Virasam accepted literature and art as mediums of creative expression and propagation, that could play an important role in the historic struggle of the proletariat against

the cultural dominance of the ruling classes. The writers associated with the movement resolved to put up a resistance against any form of feudal, capitalist, imperialist or revisionist forces through their works and writings that would uphold rationalism and dialectical materialism. The vision of modernity that was nurtured by the poets and writers of Virasam is reflected in the words of their leader Sri Sri when he writes –

“I look for words to say it all  
 and they come in battalions  
 crossing dead dictionaries  
 breaking the shackles of grammar  
 free from the serpentine embrace of meter.  
 They came running  
 and entered my heart.

(Rao 16-17)

The manifestos of the Naxalite movement were written in the very thick of action when the intellectuals were drawn into the battlefield, being inspired by the peasant revolts in various parts of the countryside. Art and literature produced by the educated intellectuals produced during the Naxalite struggle do not qualify as bourgeois idealism because they maintain their solidarity with the causes of the proletariat, being fully aware of the situation and taking responsibility for the same. Similarly, when the proletariat from his position during revolution feels the need for knowledge and engages in art or literature, it helps in strengthening the radical solidarity between various classes of people. This dialectical process within autonomous art leads to experimentation which, even if it fails, gives birth to newer techniques and ideas that is imperative for a significant cultural change. It is impossible for art to become real knowledge by simply providing a mirror image of the societal conditions, but what is proper to art is devising its own formal laws and thereby aestheticizing knowledge thoroughly. Although Charu Mazumder attempted to write a socio-political document in the initial stages of his career, his own texts as well as the poetry influenced by it became increasingly aestheticized when the revolution had finally gained some momentum.

“One after another,  
Eyes burn.  
Watch them from far,  
They look pale like the night stars.

Come closer,  
Every eye looks larger than the Sun,  
Each a ball of fire...”

(Banerjee 54)

The free-floating images of the ‘night stars’, ‘the Sun’ and ‘ball of fire’ in Bipul Charavarty’s poem ‘Burning Eyes’ can be considered as traces of both truth and appearance. When the eyes are seen from far, they reveal the alienation of every individual, but the reason for this lies in the existing contradictions in society. The societal mediation is much more significant in such cases because, when transposed in the context of revolution, each eye reveals the resolve among the alienated individuals to build up a resistance and emanate heat and light like ‘balls of fire’. Thus, the individual intention of the poet becomes secondary and his art becomes knowledge only when it is considered as a totality through all its mediations. In the words of Adorno, “Art does not provide knowledge of reality by reflecting it photographically but by revealing whatever is veiled by the empirical form assumed by reality, and this is possible only by virtue of art’s own autonomous status.” (Adorno 162) The Naxalite movement reintroduced the truly ‘committed’ art in the Indian context, but it was not long before that artists would start producing texts bearing an autonomous character. The Naxalite movement reintroduced truly ‘committed’ art in the Indian context, but it was not long before that artists would start producing texts bearing an autonomous character. Naxalite poetry started off by being manifestoes of the movement, then acted as a collective memory of the suppressed voices and finally ended up in being search of identities that later transpired into movements like that of the Dalits and women when the Naxalite movement had fizzled out. The retrospective poems also provide a sharp criticism of the movement itself and question their own aesthetics of revolution. They remain ‘committed’ to the Naxalite

discourse even when they were sceptical in their autonomous expressions about the methods and strategies of their leadership or the course of the movement. The poems, novels and drama that are considered a part of Naxalite literature do not try to incite pleasure, question legality or create literary institutions, but aim at questioning and trying to change the fundamental attitude of the people around them. This form of art often makes the content ambiguous when it tries to overtly subscribe to a particular ideology, but the advantage of autonomous art is that it provides to the subjective agents the freedom of making choices for themselves. The inherent structure of autonomous art, and an examination of the same by the artists, assume far more importance in the context of a truly cultural revolution. It is important in such cases that it is not the intellect that is invested in the creation of such an art but the other way around – the measure of awareness that particular piece of art can bring about in the public sphere. Such an analysis nullifies the possibility of essentially political art because politics itself makes its way into autonomous art. The Naxalite manifestos were conceived by an individual before the beginning of the actual movement, and throughout the course of the movement the free-floating images of armed rebellion had been reappearing in the central texts as well as in the gamut of art and literature produced around it. Although it was aimed at being committed to the revolutionary cause, it is the autonomous structure of the texts that have transposed it to the centre of political action and debate among the intellectuals, adversaries, the common people as well as the revolutionaries themselves.

In their bid to develop a truly revolutionary practice, the Naxalites were able to reveal the existing contradictions in the society drawing influence from the theories of Mao Tse-tung. In his essay titled 'On Contradiction', Mao emphasises on the law of contradiction for developing a dialectical materialist viewpoint that is an essential premise of revolution. The prerequisite for development according to him is the inherent contradictoriness of history and it is more importantly the internal conflicts of a society that calls for revolution. (Mao 313) The Naxalite manifestos were able to delineate various levels of contradictions in Indian society – the poor and the rich, proletariat and bourgeoisie, the landlords and peasants, the peasants and manual labourers, democracy and a semi-feudal semi-colonial structure, parliamentary form of agitation and a truly socialist revolution. However, one of the chief criticisms against them is that they were unable to understand the particularity and relativity of the contradictions. Instead of developing strategies based on internal conflicts by understanding the particularity of their Indian conditions, the Naxalites envisioned the Chinese model of revolution in the indigenous context. Mao stresses the importance of



understanding the universality as well as the particularity of contradictions and considering them as a whole - for developing and continuously revising methods or practices according to the need of the hour. The most important argument about contradiction from Mao is the relationship between the principal contradiction and non-principal contradictions. (Mao 335-343) The principal contradiction in Indian society was the double fold exploitation of the poor - by the indirect methods of imperialist powers and the direct methods of their Indian counterparts - that finally led to the Naxalite revolution. The non-principal contradictions included the one between the jotedars and the peasants, factory owners and workers, students and the elitist intellectuals. Although the Naxalites started off by taking action to resolve non-principal contradictions, their attack on the principal contradiction was cut short by superstructural elements like the specific politics and culture of India. In the course of the Naxalite struggle it was necessary to understand and retain the identity of the struggle.

An important contradiction that the Naxalites were unable to address was the contradictions amidst themselves and it was this, the differences that arose between the 'revolutionary authority' and the cadres of the party, that pulled some of the most important figures away from the centre of action. The central leadership of the Naxalites succumbed to 'overdeterminism' while they were pushing for a mass struggle without actually studying the contradiction between their own methods and that of the masses – in other words without seeing their methods in the context of the social whole. 'Overdeterminism' is the extreme eagerness in thoughts or action that occurs in the face of extreme contradictions giving rise to extreme measures like that of a civil rebellion. The point that the Naxalites missed was succinctly put by Althusser in his 1962 essay 'Contradiction and Overdetermination' – "the 'contradiction' is inseparable from the total structure of the social body in which it is found, inseparable from its formal conditions of existence, and even from the instances it governs; it is radically affected by them, determining, but also determined in one and the same movement, and determined by the various levels and instances of the social formation it animates; it might be called over-determined in its principle." (Althusser 3-5)

The Naxalites in India were considered a threat to the democratic functioning of the government because they challenged the naturalisation of the order of governance in India and claimed social democracy devoid of the existing contradictions in the society. Jacques Rancière argues that the idea of democracy as a form of government is threatened by the idea of democracy as a form of social life. In such situations it is imperative for the oppressed classes who are participating in dissensual activities to justify their position and reason out

the causes for such activities. The politics of the revolutionaries is thereby an anarchic activity that questions the legitimisation of power relations in society and justifies their resorting to the idea of violence that would lead to a restructuring of the society. The democratic logic of politics lies in testing the limits of the political, and blurring the pre-conceived boundaries of its scope as well as its condition. (Rancière 45-54) Charu Mazumder's chief allegations against the post-independence Indian condition were the oppressive nature of statist forces under the garb of democracy, and the kind of politics that was used to apparently counter the dominant ideology.

Although Mazumder and his allies lacked the academic disposition of Jacques Rancière and were political activists rather than philosophers, yet the Naxalite manifestoes bear traces of arguments as put forward by Rancière, who was himself influenced by Maoist thought traditions during the May 1968 revolution in France, especially in the ideas of 'politics' and 'democracy'. Rancière challenges the idea of politics as simply an 'exercise of power', because such a conception of politics immediately creates a difference between the powerful and powerless which is arbitrary in nature. The major reasons given for such a distinction are natural superiority and the rule of science. Politics on the other hand is the ability of each individual to think and act in ways contrary to each other. The pre-conditions of ruling the Indian state were seniority, birth, wealth or virtue of knowledge in the Congress regime that was attacked by the Naxalites. The misplaced notion of viewing democracy as a political regime is based on the Statist discourse of power. The Statist narrative in India, like in most flawed democracies of the world, does not view the poor as a part of the population that is a disadvantageous position economically, but simply as a dispensable part of the nation whose ideas and concerns do not matter in the governance of the country. The poor peasants, labourers or workers are not allowed to be the subjects of this flawed democracy and continue to remain in the margins of the society. An examination of this suppressed voices opens up a space for the unaccounted in the social whole. In the ideal scenario, politics is supposed to dissolve the differences between the varying classes and create a situation of equality where every part of the population can bear the fruits of modern lives but in the practical cases it is reduced to wielding of power for maintaining the existing social contradictions that give rise to such inequalities in the first place and resisting any revolutionary activity that would address them. The residual in the practical form of modern politics is the narrative of the suppressed and dissenting voices. But such functioning also develops the politics of these exploited sections of the society when they want to confront the

state through their rebellion. Politics is a deviation from the normative functioning of the state where one group is subordinated to the other. This brings Rancière to the central idea of dissensus in politics as one of the imperative practices for the functioning of democracy. The political conflict between the Naxalites and the existing parties of the Indian democracy was not always a clash of interests but more importantly a contestation between the logic of understanding society. The Naxalites not only spoke about the contradictions in the society but also opened up new spaces of representation and stressed on the need of having a political identification in the functioning Indian democracy. The chief objective of political dissensus lies in the 'distribution of the sensible' which in other words means reconfiguration of new spaces through speech and actions of those relegated to the margins of the society, and it is this premise of litigation and polyvocality that Rancière identifies as the truly revolutionary aesthetic in politics. (Rancière 27-37) Political struggle proper, in Rancierian terms, is not just a debate between conflicting interests but above all it is the struggle to make one's voice heard, and it is here that Mazumder's Eight Documents - and the poems that act as supplementary speech to the major theoretical text - take the greatest aesthetic turn towards being a truly avant-garde manifesto of Indian modernism.

The Politics of Poetics – Naxalite Avant-Garde and Modernism in India

‘Confessions of a Revolutionary Poet’

“My poetry is not meant to be my testimony,  
Neither will any rhythm voice my cries.  
My poetry is not the mourning of the weak,  
Neither will I be rambling outpours of failed love.  
This not the love of the selfish individual,  
Neither a gift presented at the altar of power.  
I am the poet who summons his comrades  
To the firebrand of mass revolution  
You will not find me in the pages of poetry –  
I have crossed such boundaries to plunge in the multitude.  
The perilous river enjoying the slumber in silence  
Has been hit by the flood of uprising.  
The witch will not lament my death in the grave,  
I am a fearless droplet with the heart of an ocean.” (river/Sindhu)

(Dutta 4)

The martyr poets of Naxalbari revolution, who have proved, by sacrificing their lives, that for them the dream of liberation was far more important than the individuals in it, find their courage from inspirational writings of activist poets like Saroj Dutta who was himself killed in an encounter by the police. In Marxist theory, the society that is defined by class distinctions is likely to have class conscious humanity, and thereby the literature produced in such a society is also marked by distinctions of class. An artist or a poet may either identify with the status quo and give vent to his personal passion, emotion, love and despair or choose to attempt an understanding of the contemporary society in flux through their art or literature.

For those artists and writers who tend to study the society, effecting a change for the betterment of that society is the most important form of art and revolution is the most important form of poetry. One's attempt to understand the work of such writers and artists demands a different set of parameters. Their poetry is born of compassion for poor people who have been exploited over years and the major thrust of their artistic inspiration is provided by their indomitable spirit of revolution and dream of liberation. A revolutionary poet struggles along with the thousands of people he represents and is ready to give up his life at any point of time for them. Therefore, his poem, like the one quoted above, is not a personal memoir of emotional outpourings that is commonplace in literatures of all ages. Georg Lukács observes that 'authentic freedom' i.e. freedom from the imperialist forces cannot be achieved if individuals or artists fail to break through their immediate experience. (Lukács 37)

The poets of Naxalbari revolution were inspired by dreams of anarchy, of breaking down systems that are oppressive and unequal, and of building in their place new structures of equality and liberty. They were so fired by the flames of revolutionary ardour that they would not stop at anything to achieve these dreams. The imagery of the small tributary flooding the ominous yet silent river in the poem alludes to the fiery development of the Naxalbari revolution that dealt a thunderous blow to the seemingly peaceful political condition of the country. The last two lines of the sonnet perfectly capture the mood of the poets, artists and student activists who plunged into the very thick of action following the events of Naxalbari without paying any heed to obstacles ahead of them. The life of a revolutionary poet does not end in his deathbed; as it gives birth to the newer generation of the liberation army. His poetry survives through the everyday struggle of the common people dissenting against existing inequalities and atrocities against them. The poet is fearless even in his death and proclaims that his spirit will outlive his body, as it will be kept alive by revolutionaries of the successive era. Although he is just an insignificant individual comparable to a droplet of water in the larger perspective, yet it is such droplets of water that have the potential to build the tide of revolution. Brecht identifies that during the moment of revolution, a bourgeoisie poet is completely proletarianized as he identifies himself wholly with the cause of the proletariat. Adorno contests that the goal of the revolution is the abolition of fear. Therefore, neither does an artist need to fear nor ontologize the fear. It is not bourgeois idealism, if in full knowledge and without mental prohibitions, the artist maintains solidarity with the proletariat instead of making personal necessity a virtue of the proletariat

as one is always tempted to do. The proletariat experiences the same necessity and need for knowledge as the artist needs the intellectual to make the revolution. (Benjamin 87)

The revolutionary movements in the history of various countries have usually been anticipated in art, literature and culture by the intellectuals of the age. In sharp contrast to this, India was subject to an unprecedented political revolution during the 1960s which brought the poets and artists into the very thick of action, whereby some of them identified with the struggle of the common people and started writing in little magazines and newspapers or pamphlets. The conscious attempt of a cultural revolution through art and literature began much later than the political activities. The great debate of an international Communist Revolution across the world in 1963-64 and the Chinese Revolution of 1966 had kindled the spirit of revolution among a group of communist revolutionaries in the country who decided to follow the path of armed struggle. During the months of March and April in 1967, the peasants of Naxalbari, Kharibari and Fansidewa in Siliguri district of West Bengal, led by a few communist revolutionaries, demanded land reforms in the existing system and ownership of the land that they had been working on for years while they had been deprived of their basic needs. The faction of the communist party that supported proletarian revolution was confronted by the leaders of the erstwhile Communist Party of India (Marxist) in several heated debates. The revolutionaries had already organised about twenty thousand peasants and workers mostly belonging to the Rajbanshi, Orao and Munda tribes under their leadership. The peasants who were united under the banner of Krishak Samiti started capturing the land forcefully from the jotedars and zamindars, looting the houses of their class enemies and burning down records of unfair debts that they owed the money-lenders. The peasants and tribal of the area managed to snatch away guns from the powerful people by using indigenous weapons like the bow and arrow, which they used to form their own army and declared a cluster of villages as the liberated zone. The erstwhile Chief Minister of the Left Front government, Harekrishna Kongar, declared such activities illegal and demanded surrender of leaders who were organising such an uprising. In response to the stubbornness of the dissenting leaders, he sent police forces to arrest the leaders, but they were confronted by thousands of peasants and workers who had risen up in rebellion. The confrontation claimed the life of a police officer named, Sonam Wangdi, who was killed by an arrow. As an act of suppressing the rebellion another force was sent to the villages that killed ten people, including seven women and two babies. This heinous act of violence dealt a blow to the façade of the communist party in India while simultaneously giving impetus to the proletarian

revolution and a direction to the art, literature and poetry of the age. The poet Dilip Baghchi wrote the song quoted below on 25th May, 1967 – the same day on which the massacre took place and ignited the rebellion that later transpired into the Naxalite revolution.

“O Naxal! O mother of Naxal!

The blood from your wound paints our flag red

The peasants of our country are celebrating your sacrifice.

O mother of Naxal!

You demanded the land, you demanded the crop,

The kind government of the United Front

Has taught us a lesson by killing you.

O mother of Naxal,

The peasants are burning with the fire of your heart

People may die but the spirit will remain.

O mother!

The blood from your wounds

Will give birth to a Jangal Santhal in every household.”

(Bagchi 8)

Jean Paul Sartre believed that it is not the work of intellectuals to decide when and where a revolution will take place but when the public starts a revolution, it is the job of the intellectual to participate in the same. For Sartre, this is not the responsibility of the artist or poet, but his work. This is exactly what a group of like-minded intellectuals had started doing in Bengal through magazines like *Kalpurush* where they declared that the situation demands the artists, writers and poets to unite in their struggle against the existing system. The activist poet, Saroj Dutta, took over the onus of publishing the weekly magazine named *Deshabrati* that became the chief platform of upholding the new ideas and works. The events of Naxalbari created a clear division between the ‘revisionists’ and the ‘adventurists’ – as the

two factions of the communists preferred calling each other. The revolutionary faction of the party left the mother organisation and met for the first time on 14th June, 1967 at the Rammohan Library Hall in Calcutta and formed the Naxalbari Peasants Struggle Aid Committee, which spread the message of Naxalbari uprising.

Simultaneously, along with the police action, the CPI (M) expelled many existing members from inside the party. Sushital Roy Chowdhary, a member of the West Bengal state committee and editor of their Bengali party organ was expelled. So were other leading members like Ashim Chatterjee, Parimal Das Gupta, Asit Sen, Suniti Kumar Ghosh, Saroj Datta and Mahadev Mukherjee. The Darjeeling district committee and Siliguri sub-divisional committee were dissolved. The spark of Naxalbari set aflame the fires of revolution in Srikakulam, Birbhum, Debra-Gopiballavpur, Mushahari and Lakhimpur-Kheri. The states of West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu saw a big spurt in Naxalbari-inspired struggles and Marxist-Leninist groups started sprouting in nearly every state of India.

The wildfire of Naxalbari revolution challenged the existing system of exploitation by a particular class of people, and the revolutionaries started nurturing the dream of a proletarian revolution. The furore of armed rebellion was captured in the short stories, novels, drama and poetry of the age. The student activists from the major colleges of cities like Calcutta started desecrating the statues of several political leaders as well as intellectuals. At this critical juncture, Saroj Dutta wrote an essay titled 'In Support of Image Breaking' under the pen name of 'Shashanka' that opened up newer debates regarding the Bengali Renaissance, which had been identified as the most significant movement in the modernist phase of Indian literature. Scholar Binoy Ghosh who had intensively studied the Bengali Renaissance throughout his career later declared in the context of the essay that the concept of 19th century Bengali Renaissance remains a myth. Hansraj Rahbar had used similar arguments in his works *Gandhi Unveiled*, *Nehru Unveiled* and *Ghalib Unveiled*. (Kumar 9)

The AICCR declared in 1968 that the way forward for them would be boycotting the general elections and inviting the common people to support their idea of revolution. CPI (M-L) was formed on 22nd April, 1969 and came to the forefront on 1st May, 1969 amidst a huge public gathering at Maidan in Calcutta. The youth of the country responded massively to this call for action and started joining the revolutionary party. They travelled to the villages and started spreading the ideas of Marx, Lenin and Mao in a bid to organise the poor



peasants, labourers and factory workers in the cities under a single banner – the red flag of revolution. The literature of revolution is always bathed in this dissenting ideology, and originates from the struggles of everyday life as well as the willingness to put one's life on the line for the greater cause. The tide of revolution saw the birth of several fiery young poets like Dronacharya Ghosh who completely changed the trajectory of literature.

“This is the infallible age  
 Which shakes the throne of the exploiter  
 The wretched hands of the greedy.  
 The flag shines in the hands,  
 History is being written in letters of blood of toilers –  
 – a deathless, luminous history.  
 A spirited figure of liberty is being carved.  
 All the old words are discarded today  
 Armed revolution grows firm in belief.  
 This is the only path of liberation.  
 There is no other word in our hearts.”

(Banerjee 66)

The poet and guerrilla commander who wrote the above lines was killed ruthlessly by the forces of the ruling class inside prison, but posthumous publications have established him as one of the most important Bengali poets of his generation. Poems like the one above assumed militant character and inspired the intellectuals and youth to take part in the war of liberation that the Naxalites had envisioned. The then Chief Minister of Bengal, Jyoti Basu, in anticipation of a civil rebellion issued a shoot at sight order against the Naxalites on 3rd December, 1969. However, the Naxalites succeeded in reducing the order to a joke as they met on 15th and 16th May at Behala in South Kolkata for the First Party Congress of the organisation. This event was also important as the principal theorist of the Naxalite movement, Charu Mazumder, was declared the leader of the organisation by the unanimous

decision of his fellow comrades. The brutal repression of the Naxalite movement had started during the Congress regime in West Bengal led by the preceding chief minister Siddhartha Shankar Ray. The prisons of Calcutta and other parts of Bengal were filled with political prisoners who had participated in the movement. The police forces engaged in a number of encounter killings across the villages, cities and even inside the four walls of the prison.

However, this bloodbath was not enough to quench the thirst of the CPI (M) state secretary Pramod Dasgupta who was quoted saying on 17th December, 1971, “Are the policemen’s bullets covered with condoms? Why aren’t the Naxalites dying?” (Kumar 11) However, much to the dismay of several political leaders like him, neither did the Naxalbari revolt die an easy death nor did their politics, art and culture fall into the claptrap of decadence. The history of cultural revolutions bear testimony to the fact that proletarian struggle has had the most discernible impact on the language used in literary writing. The tide of Naxalite Revolution that had influenced poets and writers in various parts of the country succeeded in ushering in a multilingual revolution that would also allude to the existing inequalities leading to the rebellion.

#### Naxalism and Modern Bengali Poetry

The nascence of the political in Bengali poetry occurred in the colonial era when the likes of Rabindranath Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam criticized and resisted the colonial order by inviting the common people to take radical actions against the state authority. The idea and form of poetry needed to change drastically along with the geo-political scenario of Bengal. The Bengali literary journal *Kallol* (Stormy musical current) bears testimony to the conflict between the traditionalists and young writers attempting to break away from the style of their celebrated predecessors. A number of other journals were founded to bolster the *Kallol* camp including *Kali O Kalam* (Pen and Ink, 1927), edited by Premendra Mitra, Muralidhar Basu, and Sailajananada Mukhopadhyaya; Nareschandra Sengupta and Buddhadev Bose's *Pragati* (Progress, 1928) and *Kabita* (Poetry, 1935); Sudhindranath Datta's *Parichay* (Acquaintance, 1931); Sanjay Bhattacharya's *Purbasa* (Hope of the East). This initial modernist foundation was strengthened in the forties and fifties by the poets like Jibanananda Das, Bishnu De and Dinesh Das and magazines like *Krittibas* who were subject to crisis like the Great Famine and the war of Independence. However, the notion of modernism in writing, as a form of opposition within structures of social power, is a continuous process and cannot be restricted to a particular literary period in Bengal. The

modernist ethos had a firm grip on Bengali poetry which was selectively internationalist, but often homemade and insulated within a provincial set-up. (Chakravarty 1) Expression and formal experimentation, in spite of occasional audacity, had remained largely unchanged. The keenly political and cosmic was finally reflected in Bengali poetry during the tumultuous period of sixties and seventies in the works of poets emerging from the Naxalite movement.

Walter Benjamin in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* asserts that art has one of two functions: the ritual, or the political. In the modern world, “instead of being based on ritual, [art] begins to be based on another practice – politics.” (Benjamin 3) Communism and fascism, he supposes, were the first two political movements to embrace the politicization of art whereby fascism aestheticizes politics whereas communism politicizes aesthetics. But this notion has been challenged by future theorists who have refused to restrict art simply to its political function. Alain Badiou posits that the burden of truth telling does not lie with philosophy alone but also with other things like – politics, mathematics and the arts – which he calls the ‘truth procedures’. (Badiou 1-2) The practice of aesthetics as a truth procedure is intrinsically political due to the multiplicity of the collective voice and infiniteness of situations that it opens up to positioned against the metastructure of a state. Plato’s book *The Republic* is not merely considered the centre of philosophy and poetry because of the ideas propounded by him but also because of the way his work was subject to criticism. Similarly, a political poem is a poem that cannot be reduced only to its artifice – it is a new poem that goes beyond the text despite the political underpinnings. It is important to understand how a new poem goes beyond itself to sustain the newness in all its peculiarities, by examining closely the exclusions as much as the inclusions of the text. The poets from Bengal in the post-Tagorean era have tried to mediate the personal through the political by writing complex polyvocal and transhistoric texts, in the process of revealing the truth. The form and structure of poems have been influenced heavily by European avant-gardism, and later anti-establishment movements in the West, but still continue to maintain a distinctively indigenous quality by going beyond the boundaries of the dominant discourse.

According to Krishna Dhar, the seeds of departure from the Kallolean modernist era in Bengal were sowed in Subrata Mukhopadhyay’s first book of poem *Padatik* (The Foot Traveller) that was published in 1940 – a year before Tagore’s death. His creative urge to represent the socio-political reality led to the development of a new diction and metrical virtuosity that was trying to deconstruct the traditional romantic imagery. The ravages of war time operations in society and its value system completely disenchanted poets like him who

were inspired by ideals of humanism and dream of a just society, free from domination and exploitation. (Dhar 2) Tagore's prophetic vision of the forties being the crisis of civilisation became a lived reality as the old values were trampled to create new forms of expression in the seminal works of representative poets like Dinesh Das in his poem 'Kaste' (Sickle) –

“Did you love to behold  
The curve of the crescent moon?  
This is not the century of the moon  
The moon of this age is the sickle.”

(Das 1)

Poetry was in no mood to remain in splendid solitude but tried to participate in the lived experience of people. It was done with artistic success by ideologically committed poets to turn the attention of readers away from the traditional modernists. The poetry of Jibanananda Das with its haunting music and imagery was strikingly original and delved deep into the personal by expanding the horizons of middle class thoughts and dreams. Jayanta Chowdhury argues that after the likes of stalwarts like Sudhindranath Dutta and Jibanananda Das died, the intellectuals from Bengal failed to write anything substantially new as far as poetry was concerned. (Chowdhury 241) There were attempts at writing poetry that was political in the personal by the likes of Nirendranath Chakraborty and later by Sunil Gangopadhyay and Shakti Chattopadhyay, yet they did not have an ideological base and were far more interested in their romantic sojourns and existential leisure. Jayanta Chowdhury questions Sunil Gangopadhyay's integrity and intention when he pays a tribute to the greatest extremist revolutionary, Che Guevara, in his poem 'To Che Guevara' after his death –

“Che, your death makes me a sinner.  
  
The long gaze from childhood to youth –  
  
Even I was supposed to be there beside you with weapons  
  
Even I was supposed to hide in the rocky caves of the jungle  
  
And wait for the moment of final revolution...”

(Acharya 255)

Despite all the experimentation in modernist Bengali poetry, the poets did not dare to challenge the boundaries of the artifice. They were mostly middle-class and upper middle-class writers who belonged to an anglicized culture and wrote in a polite language that bore the ethos of a typical 'bhadralok'. The poets were cultured, introspective and sensitive to the plight of the Indian communities estranged their his own culture yet remaining tolerant of the situation. The defining moment in modernist Bengali art, culture and literature came in the decades of 1960s and 70s when the old values and ideals were seriously challenged by two movements that shook the very base of every foundation that had ever been laid down by the previous generations – namely, the Hungryalist and Naxalite movement. Although these two movements were distinct in character as far as their origin and aspirations were concerned – the Hungryalist movement emerging from the frustration of younger generations who felt claustrophobic in the existing literary atmosphere trying to liberate themselves whereas the Naxalite movement attempted to build up a resistance against the exploitation of the people under the existing form of parliamentary government – yet, the common effect they had on poetry was to break free from the dominant aesthetics of Bengal till that time.

Professor Howard McCord argues that – “This [Hungryalist] kind of poetry is dangerous and revolutionary, cleanses by violence and destruction, unsettles and confounds the reader. This is the poetry of the disaffected, the alienated, the outraged, the dying. It is a poetry which alarms and disgusts the bourgeois, for it describes their own sickened state more clearly than they wish to hear and exposes the hypocrisy of their decency.” (McCord 3-4) The Hungryalists were closely associated with the Beat generation poet Allen Ginsberg who came to India and spent a lot of time with the likes of Malay Roychoudhury, Subimal Basak, Debi Ray, Saileswar Ghose, Basudeb Dasgupta, Tridib Mitra, Subhas Ghose, Falguni Ray and Arunesh Ghose. The biggest controversy regarding the Hungryalists was their trial by the State on the charge of obscenity where a number of contemporary poets testified against them in the court. Malay Roy Chowdhury's 'Stark Electric Jesus' can be considered a case in study of the controversial 'Hungry' poetry that shook the genteel bhadrolok society –

“I do not know whether I am going to die  
 squandering was roaring within heart's exhaustive impatience  
 I'll disrupt and destroy  
 I'll split all into pieces for the sake of art  
 There is not any other way out except suicide Subha  
 Let me enter into the immemorial incontinence of your Labia majora

Into the absurdity of woe less effort  
 In the golden chlorophyll of the drunken heart..."

(Roy Chowdhury 18)

The likes of Ginsberg and Noam Chomsky supported the Hungryalists in the course of this trial. S.Mudgal states that another element of controversy was the use of expressions in the language which did not quite suit the sophisticated Bengali intelligentsia. Initially they used to publish handbills which carried their writings, and these used to be distributed in College Street Coffee House, colleges and newspaper offices. (Mudgal 3) The papers on which these were printed were intentionally very cheap and coloured, to hurt elite sensibilities. Poetry recitals were held by them in country-liquor shops, temples, brothels, street junctions and graveyards as a matter of protest against exorbitant charges for regular halls. The Hungryalists were trying to reclaim hidden spaces and unchartered territories of language through their writings and lifestyle. They were fairly successful in spreading the literary movement away from the middle class through the writings of poets from other cities and social order.

The Naxalite movement coincided temporally with the Hungryalist movement but in this case, poetry emerged from the ideology of revolution rather than revolution emerging from poetry. While the Hungry generation poets engage in the use of provocative imagery and question the idea of obscenity while bringing poetry onto the streets, the Naxalite poems are much more persuasive – almost a call for action awakening the common people from their stupor of inactivity. Murari Mukhopadhyay provides an antithesis to the typical images of Bengali romanticism like the ‘moon’, ‘river’ and ‘fire’ that had been eulogised by the ‘bhadrolok’ poet in his poem titled ‘Love’ –

“The moon,  
 The river,  
 The flower,  
 The stars,  
 The birds –  
 We can look for them later.  
 But today,  
 In this darkness,  
 The last battle is yet to be fought.

What we need now in our hovel  
Is – fire!”

(Banerjee 55)

Birendra Chattopadhyay builds on the image of ‘fire’ in his poem ‘Fire Worshippers’ that blurs the gap between manifesto or propagandist art and poetry as a distinctive literary form –

“Your task  
Is not to fall madly in love with fire,  
But to learn to use the fire.  
Don’t fret and fume,  
Just get yourselves prepared.”

(Banerjee 80)

Bipul Chakraborty’s ‘We Want the Release of All Political Prisoners’ that was widely sung in demonstrations and gatherings in the city demanding the release of detained activists –

“Under what law  
Will you keep them behind bars?  
The people of the country are roaring in anger.  
They’ll stick at nothing to bring them out of jails  
Tear up the Black Acts, burn them to ashes,  
We want the release. . .”

(Banerjee 114)

The twentieth century has been a major turning point for Bengali modernism mainly due to the anticipation of the political in the practice of aesthetics. The political in this sense cannot be restricted to activism adhering to a specific ideological premise, but mainly refers to the process of stretching the boundaries of a literary text to place it in the context of contemporary socio-economic, geo-political and historiographic functions.

### Naxalism and Modern Telegu Poetry

The voice of dissent in the modernist phase of Telegu poetry was first heard from the group of poets who described themselves as ‘Digambaras’ (naked poets) including the likes

of Nikhileswar, Jwalamukhi, Nagnanmni, Mahaswapna, Bhairavvya and their leader Cherabandaraju who shot into prominence through a controversy when he wrote his poem 'Vande Mataram'. The Digambara poets defied the ideas of individualism and refused to identify with any established ideological order. They expressed their agony, rage and grief in obscene language that was initially subject to severe criticism by the so called 'Official Marxists' who rejected them as 'petty bourgeois anarchists.' However, K. Balagopal argues that the honesty of their anger was reflected in their language unlike the so called 'progressive poets' of the generation who thrived on Madrasi film sub-culture and were celebrated by the erstwhile communist government of Andhra Pradesh. Although the Digambara poets were anti-ideology they were not far from social and political concerns even in their most existential utterances. (Balagopal 1261) In their first manifesto, poet Nikhileswar urged readers to question themselves and their banal existence when he wrote the following lines –

“Tell me, was there a day when you did not weep?

Your smoke-scarred face reminds me of coal-mines.”

(Balagopal 1188)

The poets wanted to attack the facades of individual existence that were oblivious to the world around, as well as the veil of peace and progress in the largest democracy of the world that failed to address the concerns of a majority of the population. Cherabandaraju, Nagnamuni and Nikhileswar concentrated on unveiling the social hypocrisy in the process of searching the individual unlike some of their contemporaries who chose the social being as their main rival because it suppresses the very basic essence that could be found in the figurative 'nakedness' of man. The second manifesto of the movement pledged to uproot the social evils and bring forth a noble system. Cherabandaraju's poem marks the shifting focus of the Digambaras to the mood of the age when he says,

“Licking the boots of

barons of opportunism

you have built mansions in their shade

Before the foundation crumbles,



I want to send you.

Not to the prison. No.

But to the butcher's shop”

(Balagopal 1188)

The third manifesto of the movement concentrated largely on social issues and an honest attempt to study the prevailing conditions was noticed among the poets of the movement, especially those like Cherabandaraju and Nagnamuni, who would later go on to join the Revolutionary Writer's Association formed by the artist-activists of the communist movement in Andhra Pradesh.

In reaction to the growing rebellion in Bengal and similar atmosphere in their area, the activist intellectuals of Srikakulam formed an organisation that was led by Bemputapu Satynarayana that explicitly took up the social and political concerns and accepted that complete revolution was the only path to progress. Satyanarayana depended on art, poetry and music to influence the masses and align them with the path of revolution. His initiatives were provided further impetus by his long-time friend, comrade, poet, singer and artist Subbarao Pannigrahi who willingly died for the cause of the people. Pannigrahi arrived in the very thick of action with his instrument known as 'gummeta' and used it as a hammer to strike fear in the hearts of the enemies. His songs like 'We Are The Communists' provided a montage of classical folk and revolutionary philosophy that became one of the anthems of Naxalbari revolution afterwards. The extremist leaders of Srikakulam built about four hundred guerrilla groups who succeeded in exercising their full control over about three hundred villages under the Parvatipuram Agency area. On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the great Telegu poet Srirangam Srinivasarao, popularly know as Sri Sri, an organisation named 'Visakha Students' issued a leaflet and asked the poets and intellectuals, gathered for the event, whether they were aware of the incidents in Srikakulam and identified with the cause of the revolutionaries. The peasant rebellion in Srikakulam was vehemently repressed by the state and the likes of Subbarao Pannigrahi had been martyred. In reaction to this leaflet, a revolutionary writers' association named 'Viplava Rachayitula Sangham' (Virasam) was founded in Hyderabad on 4th July 1970. The founding members of the first people's cultural organisation of the CPI (M-L) included Sri Sri, Varavara Rao, Kodavatiganti Kutumba Rao, K.V. Ramana Reddy, Raavi Sastry, Krishna Bai, Chalasani

Prasad, Nagnamuni and Cherabandaraju. The Naxalite Revolution inspired Cherabandaraju who had initially subscribed to an existential ideology, to write poems like ‘Vande Mataram’ in the third manifesto of the Digambaras.

“Oh my dear motherland!

You are the mother, the father, and

God Almighty

Yours is a chastity that

Allures all to your bed.

Yours is a beauty that

Pawns its parts in the world market-place

Yours is a youth that

Sleeps its parts in the world market-place.”

(Banerjee 30-40)

The poet was severely assaulted by a prominent right-wing leader when he recited this poem inside the prison during the time of Emergency. After joining the Revolutionary Writer’s Association, Cherbandaraju understood the importance of reaching out to the masses and thereby identified songs as the correct form of expression that would help the cause of the revolution. Cherabandaraju was influenced heavily by the likes of Subbarao Pannigrahi who wrote memorable pieces like ‘We Are Communists’ that became one of the anthems of the movement and Sri Sri who wrote in a lucid language of the middle class to send out strong messages. Cherabandaraju, remained a part of the organisation as an Executive Member till the very last day of his life, and carried on the legacy in spite of several trials and tribulations. He was arrested under the Preventive Detention act in 1971 along with his fellow ex-Digambara poets; in 1973 he was yet again jailed for about thirty-seven days under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act. On both occasions, he was accused of influencing the youth into armed rebellion through his poetry and songs. He lost his job as a school teacher after the Secunderabad conspiracy case, but was later reinstated only to be removed again. When the matter escalated, and the Education Minister was confronted by a teacher’s

organisation, he declared that Cherabandaraju had been removed from service. He was nominally taken back only a few weeks before his death when he went into a prolonged coma. Balagopal argues that revolutionary poetry is often dismissed as mere sloganeering however the poems of Cherabandaraju and his contemporaries like Sivsagar and Gaddar had the potential to open up the performative scope of these texts as they were not only sung by the people but became part of the cultural milieu through graffiti and posters.

#### Naxalism and Modern Punjabi Poetry

“Watch out now!

Those chewing dry roti with just an onion

Have arrived to swallow

Your dining table and even your serving trays.”

(Gill 19)

The poet Avtar Singh Sandhu who wrote under the pen name of ‘Pash’ identified the legacy of grave injustice in poem likes ‘For Withered Flowers’ from which I have been quoted above and succeeded in providing momentum to the revolution in Punjab. His translator and critic, Tejwant Singh Gill, identifies that the launching of journals like *Rohle Baan* (Raging Arrows) and *Siar* (Furrow) by the poet marked his allegiance to the Naxalite movement. Pash became the cynosure of all eyes as he refused to censor himself even after being jailed and tortured by the police on false charges of murder. Gill also contests that Pash was heavily influenced by Leon Trotsky’s idea of ‘autonomous art’ and later by Pablo Neruda’s autochthonous form of poetry. (Gill 1-6) His poem ‘Bharat’ (India) reveals the true condition of the country post-independence, where a significant majority of the population fail to earn a square meal every day.

“The greatest word of respect for me,

Wherever it is used

All other words become meaningless.

This word has its meanings

In those sons of the fields

Who even today measure time  
By the length of the trees' shadows;  
Who have no problems other than  
That of the stomach  
And, when hungry,  
Can eat their own limbs;  
For whom Life is a tradition  
And Death, freedom  
.....  
For the idea of Bharat is not related  
To some 'Dushyant'  
But is present in the fields  
Where food is grown..."

(Pash 1-2)

The cities celebrate their grandeur and prosperity while the villages of the country are affected by extreme poverty, malnutrition and illiteracy, leading to a glaring inequality that the men in power refused to address. The poet and leader of workers Lal Singh Dil was arrested by the police and tortured inhumanly while in custody. Poet and folk singer Santaram Udasi lost his vision while sitting for hours in front of floodlights – a method used by the police to break the resolve of the revolutionaries – but his songs have stood the test of time as they are sung even today by the local activists and sympathisers. The other major figures of Naxalite literature in Punjab were poets like Amarjit Chandan and Surjit Pattar who wrote 'To Go Back Home Now Is Difficult' which charts out the difficulties of the survivors among revolutionaries to return to home and continue to abide by the societal norms.

Naxalism and Modern Malayali Poetry

“Santhe,

Come for a forever green dream, come like a lightning of love, come like anguish,  
come like Sakthi, come as truth...

...Talk! Break the ice, before those larvae eat us, speak something through the  
canticles of your chains. Sigh once. Let those chains break

Dance my woman dance, with lightnings in your hair, dance like a serpent, dance on  
the dry paddy fields – let a thousand plantains bloom, dance, full woman dance, let  
the streams break out

Let the rains fall.”

(Ramakrishnan 1-2)

The resurgence of the prose poem form in Malayali modernist literature had begun through the existential utterances of poets like Ayyappa Panicker, but it became sharper and had a much more significant impact in the hands of poets like Kadammanitta Ramakrishnan who wrote the lines quoted above, in his poem ‘Santha’ during the years of suppression and revolt. The poem is a scathing soliloquy of a man returning home to his wife Santha, who discovers the crude realities of life in his native village and a desperate need for resistance. The powerful recital of poems like ‘Kattalan’ (The Savage) and ‘Kirathavritam’ (The Story of the Savage) in which he concentrated on studying the power relations of the society became a phenomenon in various parts of Kerala. These texts map a perfect transition from the alienation of the individual that became a central theme in Malayali poetry, to a discovery of the self through engagement with the outer world. The subaltern subject was finally able to express the discontent on being evicted from his own land. The initial poems of his career gave vent to his rage at the state of affairs, and revealed his inclination for Marxism. However, he belonged to the Patayani clan of artists who practised an old folk tradition of dancing and singing in order to invoke the mother or the primordial form of Bhagavati. Kadammanitta’s songs and poems provided a curious amalgamation tradition and faith as well as social inequalities demanding a call for action. E.V. Ramakrishnan points out in his study of modernism in Malayali poetry that the ritualistic and performative values of Patayani tradition are subsumed under a mytho-poetic narrative that highlights the tragedy of man in his surrounding environment. The poems written during the period of Emergency like ‘Kannurkotta’ (Cananore Fort) and Santha reveal a kind of maturity in the sensibilities of the poet, as he delves deeper in the politics of resistance and the poetics of dissidence.

Kadammanitta was one of the first translators of world poetry into Malayali; he began with the poems of Octavio Paz and Leopold Senghor. The first definitive cultural organisation of leftist intellectuals was the People's Cultural Forum, that initially aimed at street plays and proscenium theatre adapted from European or Latin American literature, and later took to original campus plays, recitals and demonstrations against the government.

Koyamparambath Satchidanandan contests that the influence of thinkers like Gramsci, Bakhtin, Adorno, Benjamin, Althusser and Derrida; African and Latin American poets and writers like Chinua Achebe, Aime Cesaire, Leopold Sen-ghor, David Diop, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Pablo Neruda and Cesar Vallejo; and, European socialist writers like Paul Eluard, Louis Aragon, Garcia Lorca, Rafel Alberti, Brecht, Martin Enzensberger and Gunter Grass completely changed the trajectory of modernism in Malayali literature. Much like their European counterparts mentioned above who had rejected the Soviet realist model, poets like M.P. Paul, C J Thomas and M Govindam had successfully established their standpoint against the idea of progressive or purposive literature in Kerala that was introduced by the conventional Left of the state represented by intellectuals like Thoppil Vasi, O.N.V. Kuruk and P. Bhaskaren. While the conventional Left aimed at establishing a kind of formalism based on the Soviet model of realism, the extremists were keen on finding new expressions, and refused to be limited in their creative pursuits by the directions of the ruling party. The leaders of the Naxalite movement also had their problems with the poets and litterateurs, because it was an essentially underground organisation while the artists and writers were keen on remaining in the public sphere. However, the artists were able to connect with the common people at a deeper level, and so had a greater influence on them. A number of poets did not identify with the ideas of violence and were much more inclusive of the 'subalterns'. They also criticised the misogynistic culture in the party that reduced woman to the sidelines without inviting them into the very thickness of revolutionary activities. (Satchidanandan 8-12)

Satchidanandan's own poems like 'Satyavangmoolam' (My Testament) was a scathing commentary on the deceptive conduct of intellectuals, 'Pani' (Fever) captured the angst of the subaltern while 'Idavela' (The Interval) imagined a reformation in the society and a fresh approach to the art of poetry. M.Govindan's 'Prarthana' (The Prayer), Ayyappa Paniker's 'Kadukka' (The Gallnut) unveiled the façade of freedom through black humour and irony. Satchidanandan's 'Navumaram' (The Tree of Tongues) invoked the folk mode to

speak of people's resistance and ultimate victory against dictatorship as also the poet's victory over censorship symbolized by the severed tongue of the singer growing up into a tree of tongues. The People's Cultural Forum finally disintegrated due to numerous reasons including lack of leadership and changes in concerns, yet the poetry written in Malayalam during the tumultuous years of the sixties and seventies marked a sea-change from the much-celebrated Renaissance and creates two important departures – firstly a new perspective towards life and reality and secondly, newer forms and language.

#### Naxalite Avant-Garde and Indian Modernism

John Oliver Perry in his essay titled 'Absent Authority: Issues in Contemporary Indian English Criticism' questions the idea of Indian modernity, and challenges the process of designating every post-independence literary text as 'modern' In the introduction to the book 'Indian Poetry – Modernism and After', K.Satchidanandan notes that in the post-independence period the most important aspect of Indian poetry has been the breakdown of a single unifying voice that belonged to political pantheons of each Indian language. He alludes to the editors of an anthology titled 'Vibhava' who called this dominant discourse 'Tagore Syndrome' that was characterised by "cultural nationalism, romantic love, idealisation, metaphysics and mysticism and an ideal of nation-building." (Satchidanandan vii) Satchidanandan's methodology involves a distinction between the 'ontological' and 'sociological' phases of modernism in India in which the first group of modernists concentrated on changing identities across class, gender, caste and regional borders while the later group reacted to the growing culture of capitalism and engaged in forming 'imagined communities' and 'alternative nationhoods' like the poets associated with movements like Naxalbari, Dalit or Women's Rights. (Satchidanandan x) The first group of poets that Satchidanandan refers to includes the Digambara poets, the Kallolean modernists like Buddhadev Bose and Sunil Gangopadhyay among others. M.K Naik argues that the alienation effect of Western literature was not a foreign import and had a specific Indian context as the poets were experiencing alienation from old religious, social and political values along with existentialist alienation caused by the rise of capitalistic culture. (Naik 270) E.V. Ramakrishnan in his introduction to the anthology titled 'The Tree of Tongues' posits that the early modernists of India had failed to understand the importance of public sphere in Indian poetry. Although their writings had new imageries, treaded new areas of exoticism and nurtured deeper sensibility, their narcissistic idiom was concentrated on developing the 'aesthetic sublime'. It was only during the tumultuous years of 1960 that the subaltern realm

of subversive voice had acquired a new legitimacy through more socially responsive and responsible writings. (Ramakrishnan xx) Ramakrishnan traces the voice of the tribal evicted from his homeland in Kadammanitta Ramakrishnan's poem 'Kattalan' or 'The Savage' and studies it as an ontological transformation of the self in the quest for one's identity. It goes beyond the stage of alienation that has been discussed previously, towards the reclamation of one's voice through an engagement with the sensual and erotic of the outer world. (Satchidanandan 73) E.V. Ramakrishnan's idea of 'avant-garde' is on the lines of Peter Burger where avant-gardism is a negation of the autonomy of art as associated with modernism and posing questions about art itself as an institution is its major characteristic. Technical innovation as defined by modernists is an important aspect of avant-garde art, but it goes far beyond into the realms of creating renewed critical awareness and sensibility. (Satchidanandan ix) Dilip Chitre laments "Have our mother tongues lost poetry or has poetry lost its mother tongue?" (Chitre 1) But the emergence of truly avant-garde poetry occurred in the regional languages as discussed earlier, and the political emergency of the time also opened up new spaces for what is known as 'interliterariness'. Sachin Ketkar in his work 'Migrating Words: Refractions on Indian Translation Studies' points out that 'interliterariness' – the term coined by Dionyz Durisin has been a major characteristic of Indian modernism in which literary modernism is a map of overlapping modernisms in each Indian language as well as the influence of Western avant-garde movements. (Ketkar 65) In the Indian context this happened in the form of little magazines and independent journals that substantially increased taking advantage of print capitalism and awareness of Western literary movements through their literature and art. The publication costs became less so production increased, and newer forms of expression was encouraged in these alternative platforms.

Jacques Rancière posits that both art and politics are essentially dissensual activities carried out with the common objective of using the potential inherent in them to disrupt structures of dominance. The key to his politics of aesthetics, as Stephen Corcoran points out is to demonstrate that the principle of equality that is applicable to political action can also be used to understand the freedom of aesthetics including its specific forms of expression and experience. (Corcoran 15) Rancière's distinction between three regimes of art, especially the second and third categories can be studied in the Indian context to understand the kind of fissure that the Naxalite rebellion created in the Indian aesthetic scene. According to Rancière, the first category is the ethical regime where art is stripped of its autonomy and questioned for creating false illusions and values like Plato's 'Republic'. The second category



on the other hand is the representative regime where art is a form of imitation, and is identified by its intrinsic contradictions like distinctions between fine art and popular art, or refined sensibility and coarseness. The modernism that was celebrated by the likes of Progressive Writers Association in India always had this tendency to distinguish between high art and low art; and no wonder the High Modernists were their inspiration, and there were collaborators like W.B Yeats and Rabindranath Tagore. Even in the post-independence era, the most prominent writers were elite intellectuals who were responsible for suppressing the dissensual voices like that of the Naxalite revolutionaries and later the Dalit activists. However, the Naxalite revolution succeeded in what Rancière calls ‘distribution of the sensible’, through which even the poorest of peasants and labourers started expressing themselves through art, and they formed a kind of radical solidarity with the educated urban youth who had chosen the path of urban revolution. Peasant poets and activists like Nitya Sen sang –

“Oh peasant brother!

You’ve been robbed of your land

You’ve lost your bullocks

You’ve lost your crops

And now,

You sit drooping in your hut.

Will weeping help you to be free?...

Hark!

Listen to the call of the rebels.

Come out and join them.

March forward

And break the chains of servitude.”

Poems and voices of protest like the one mentioned above coming from aesthetically neglected communities, succeeded in overthrowing the normative understanding of distinctions in art and literature based on the relationship between form and matter. The form and matter of poetry that was written during the Naxalite movement became secondary because they succeeded in creating a specific sensorium that was an exception to the existing regime of the sensible. Nitya Sen's poem in this regard becomes far more important because he was essentially a revolutionary and not a poet, but he felt the need of expressing solidarity with his other peasant comrades and invite them into the wild fire of revolution. Unlike the representative regime constituted by the early Indian modernists where the primary task was to engage in the act of writing, in the aesthetic regime that was created by the Naxalbari movement 'expressiveness' became a far more important factor because this is when the marginalised sections of the society started participating in the practice as well as understanding of art and literature. The poets and writers of Naxalbari were indifferent to the style of their writing, and in some cases were said to lack the incantation of language. The poems discussed in this dissertation have come from various sources, and mostly been accessed through their translations because of which the effect of the original text has been lost to some extent. But it is important to understand that this is the true language of revolution, especially one that bears traces of dissensual voices from multiple languages in the context of their own cultural heritage as well as those from outside that lineage.

The most important aspect of Naxalite art, literature and especially poetry was to free the regional languages from their respective pantheons and open up newer spaces of representation to create a condition of equality where everyone had the potential of intervening in any discourse and use or be addressed by any form of language. The set structures and parameters of art and poetry in Indian modernism were dissolved at the moment of revolution by the Naxalites which reduced the distinction between art and non-art. The political function of the revolutionary aesthetics developed during the Naxalite movement led to an overlapping of the common experience as well as the shared impersonal experience. The reasons for participating in armed revolution were different for each class of people but the demand for equality remained same for all. The urban youth came in direct confrontation with the hardships of rural life and their existential moorings seemed trivial in comparison to the shocking inequalities. The suppressed voices on the other hand started making interventions in uncharted territories of art and literature which initiated newer debates regarding their problematised identities and pedagogy of the discourses themselves.

Every class of people that came in contact with the movement formed a collective memory of violence, bloodshed, resistance and the entire society in a state of flux. The poetry of the age that acts as a repository of such experiences offers new perspectives and gives birth to new possibilities of understanding the avant-garde and reconstructing the history of Indian modernism. In Rancierian terms, Naxalite poetry or literature ‘does politics as literature’ (Corcoran 20) and this politics is between the dominant voices in the existing system and the ‘muted’ voices whose very act of expression is an important dissensual activity that constitutes the politics of art. The retracing of Naxalite politics through the avant-gardist poetry that emerged from it challenges the existing contradictions within the Indian modernist aesthetic debate and redescribes the common world of experience of the cultural milieu.

The Naxalite Archive and the Audience – Poetics, Politics

“Maidan looms heavily on the fog  
Sound of the route march is lost in the horizon,  
Is that a Krishnachura in the middle of the road?  
I crouch and pick up with my own hands.  
It is your bleeding head, Timir.

(Chowdhury 256)

These lines, by the Bengali modernist poet Shankha Ghosh are from his poem titled ‘A few lines on Timir’, written in the memory of his student Timir Baran Singha who had been shot dead in an encounter by the police. Timir was a student of Bengali Honours in the Department of Bengali at Jadavpur University where Ghosh had taught him, but he had given up his studies to follow his dream of a Naxalite revolution. Ghosh was deeply moved by the incident, and his poem captured the blood-curdling violence of the age that claimed thousands of young lives who had dreamt of changing the world. The poem was published as a part of his collection of poems in the book titled *Murkho Boro Samajik Noy* (The Fool is not that Social) which has been identified as one of the most political writings in his career along with *Baborer Prarthana* (Babar’s Prayer) that went on to win him the Sahitya Akademi Award for Bengali Literature in 1977. Timir’s memory continued to haunt the poet in the decade of betrayal, resistance, bloodshed, sacrifice and torture. He wrote the following lines in ‘Indra Dhoreche Kulish’ (Indra holds the Kulish) that was included in the award-winning book.

“Indra has seized his thunderbolt  
The cloud is broken into pieces with thunderbolts from ten directions  
Then everything is quiet like before.  
This is your face, Timir  
But after that everything is silent.”

(Ghosh 225)

Timir Baran Singha came from a lower middle-class family in Calcutta, and his mother testifies that he had acquired a few unique qualities from the days of ‘Jagadbandhu Institution’ – a public school in Calcutta where was a good student. At a very young age, he had asked his mother not to buy rice from the black market during the food crisis and insisted that they should consume wheat instead, if that was the staple food of every household. After completing school, he started studying Chemistry in the prestigious St. Xavier’s College, Calcutta, but later decided to take up Bengali in Jadavpur University. He was initially dissuaded from leaving his first college midway and changing streams by the famous educationist and later Union Minister for Education, Triguna Sen, but he had to finally take him into the university later in 1965, after Timir had made him read his own writings. (Jalarka 29) Those were the initial years of Jadavpur University – that had come up as a space of alternative education in Bengal only recently, as Shankha Ghosh recalls, and ‘Honours’ classes did not usually have more than eight students, thereby providing the space for close student-teacher relationship. (‘Jalarka’ Ghosh 1) Ghosh himself was an established intellectual, professor and poet by then, and went away to the University of Iowa for a year to partake in the International Writing Program Fall Residency of 1967. On his return to the university back home, Ghosh noticed that Timir had changed considerably and moved away from his favourite teacher, because for him Ghosh’s visit to the capitalist superpower United States was an act of great betrayal. He had responded to the call of the Naxalites, and became a part of the units that were sent to the villages by the leadership of the revolutionary party to organise the armed rebellion and spread the area of action. His poetry started bearing traces of revolutionary aesthetics when he began editing *Arani* – the literary magazine of Jadavpur University and wrote the following lines in his poem ‘Walk in Despair’.

“On some of the nights

I have cried like the rain

I have poured fire on my closet existence

I have acted as a lunatic...

I have walked in despair

On the cultivated land

When darkness came down upon the earth.

(Singha 17)

Timir Baran Singha was killed on 24th February, 1971 inside the Behrampore Jail premises when the police force organised a violent attack on the unarmed students who were theoretically political prisoners of the State; they died while shouting slogans of the Naxalbari revolution. There is a huge contradiction in the police reports that said the Naxalites had attacked one of the police officials as well as other inmates of the prison, and the testimony of a witness to the massacre who said that the young students were quite friendly with the other inmates and more importantly, they were moved to the office room from their usual cells while the bloodbath was in progress. (Jalarka 39-44) Alokranjan Dasgupta, one of Timir's teachers and great admirers, has mentioned that Timir's death was a kind of prolepsis. (Jalarka 8) His teachers were shocked to the core after his untimely death, but they had been able to anticipate such a tragic end for their student who had plunged into the very thick of action. Dasgupta posits that his was a kind of romanticism that echoed the life of the greatest revolutionaries like Che Guevara who have always dreamt about the liberation of the common people, and it is this romanticism which is a part of their modernist ethos.

Timir was a poet himself and was deeply affected by the poor and marginalised people of the country with whom he had spent his life. His mother remembers her son saying that he had discovered that love and respect are not based on material values for the village folks, unlike the urban population. He had urged his mother to give food to his fellow comrades if they were in need because their house was too small to become a shelter. The prolepsis that Dasgupta talks about becomes a haunting imagery in Timir's own poetics, that is deep-rooted in his politics. In his final letter to his mother before leaving his ancestral house, Timir pleaded with his mother not to be sad for losing one of her sons, because if a few mothers do not make the sacrifice, it would be impossible to eradicate the sadness of a thousand mothers. Even in police custody, he had urged his mother to read Maxim Gorky's 'Mother' and other novels that he had given her. Timir Baran Singha's poetry did not find place in any anthology of Bengali poetry and yet the traces of struggle, resistance and proleptic vision of an imminent end is discernible in his poems like 'O Pagol' [O Crazy Brother] –

“O crazy brother! don't go down that path

O crazy brother! let go of your lunacy

You have a sister at home on the verge of death

Let go of your lunacy

Tell me

Can you afford to be a martyr?"

(Singha 18)

The aesthetic sublime of poets like Timir Baran Singha might not be comparable to that of his teachers like Shankha Ghosh, but what is far more important in this context is the new aesthetic sensorium that it creates. Voices like that of Timir have been systematically suppressed, not only by repressive state apparatuses but also and more importantly by ideological state apparatuses. I discovered Timir Baran Singh's poetry in a special publication of the little magazine 'Jalarka' dedicated to Bengali martyr poets and artists of the 1970s. The little magazine movement in Bengal started in the first part of the twentieth century with the modernist movement, but gained renewed impetus in the tumultuous years of the 1960s and 70s. These magazines were a platform for experimentation in art and literature as well as for dissident voices coming from various sections of Bengali society. It had completely changed the trajectory of Bengali literature, by creating a parallel discourse of modernity in the regional as well as Indian context when it influenced poets and artists from other languages. The two literary organs of the CPI (M-L), *Deshabrati* and *Liberation* had been subject to a lot of censorship by the state which had imposed bans on the publication, distribution and even possession of the Naxalite magazines and newspapers. The offices of these magazines were subject to several raids and there were recurrent images of copies being burnt and destroyed by the police in various locations. This is when the youth started sending in their poems, stories and essays written in very lucid language, yet with a lot of resolve, to the little magazines and small publication houses that were not disturbed by state interventions till then. The little magazines also created a cross-cultural interaction due to several translations from other Indian as well as European languages that were being attempted by the writers. The new readership that it created included people from common walks of life who were willing to read something beyond the normative and themselves enraged by the chaos in the state and the centre. The little magazines were a true reflection of the dissolving boundaries between castes and cultures, because everyone found the platform to express themselves. The literary ambition of the writings was secondary to their socio-

political intentions, because of which they failed to create a niche for themselves in the cultural sphere. But this in no way reduces their archival importance which is something that Sandip Dutta, founder of the Little Magazine Library in Calcutta, understood when he came across a huge stack of little magazines being disposed of by the National Library of India which he frequented as a student.

Dutta was then a student of Bengali Honours at Scottish Church College and associated with a magazine called 'Patrakut'. The National Library's attitude came as a huge shock for him, and he started collecting whichever little magazine and other neglected collections he could get from the National Library, small vendors on College Street, friends and acquaintances, with which He first organised a small exhibition of around seven hundred and fifty such magazines in the drawing room of his own house. An important remark that Dutta makes in this regard is that it was difficult for him to make the people understand what difference an exhibition of books made and why at all such a thing was required. He started with the bibliographical work himself, and was supported by a few local clubs and his friends like the painter Subhaprasanna Bhattacharjee who had designed the exhibition. The library was finally set up on 23rd June, 1978, with about 1500 magazines at Dutta's residence in Tamer Lane and this he claims to be an act of protest against the growing contradictions in the most important archival centre of the country. The Little Magazine Library did not receive any governmental aid or funding from foreign institution at any stage, but he continued to struggle with whatever money he earned as a teacher. Today, he has succeeded in creating an archive of about eighty thousand magazines that caters to a huge number of readers, students and scholars in Bengali across disciplines, but feels that there is a lack of space for him to properly carry out his work. The Little Magazine Library in Tamer Lane is a study in the imagery associated with the word 'archive' – about two small rooms and some space beneath the stairs in an old North Calcutta house has been transformed into an invaluable library with magazines arranged according to specific genres, texts that have mostly been forgotten by the common people but have somehow stood the test of time. Most importantly, the huge archive opens up new textual territories in the history of another time, including the voices that have been kept out of the official accounts of the state. In fact, the National Library's act of disposing the little magazines was also an attempt to erase the aesthetic discourse of the political and cultural movements from Indian modernism. Sandip Dutta's work is especially important in the context of the Naxalite movement, because his archives provide the possibility of attempting an alternate historiography of the struggle



through a study of texts that act as a repository of suppressed memory. The discourses of the Naxalite movement that have been archived in the libraries of the State were mostly written by police officers or administrative officials, and the little that had been archived by the party CPI (M-L) includes account of their leadership or reports from their party congresses – however, the truly political in the aesthetics of the Naxalite movement lie in the voices of the suppressed, oppressed, executed and less expressed part of the population which is discovered in the archives of the Little Magazine Library in Kolkata.

The archive is not merely a written document of the past, but more importantly, it has a close association with memory and the functioning of the State. Jacques Derrida in his work ‘Archive Fever’ notes that it is impossible to wield political power without exerting control over the archives. Modern democracy functions based on the archival access that various part of the population gets, the ideology that determines the inclusion of specific documents and exclusion of others, the interpretation of an event in the official records and the way these archives are studied by philosophers and educationists. Derrida’s central thesis in this regard is based on Freudian psychoanalysis. Sigmund Freud, in ‘Beyond The Pleasure Principle’, states that human actions and thoughts are always aimed at experiencing pleasure – ‘pleasure principle’, as he calls it, thus becomes the driving force of any event. However, there are always certain circumstances that hinder the pleasure principle. The primary example in this case is reality – that postpones the attainment of ultimate satisfaction. The reality of a situation prevents the socio-biological being from giving in to his instincts and aligning himself to the surroundings. The conscious and the unconscious ego resists the idea of unpleasure, while human beings try to be tolerant of unpleasure by appealing to reality. According to Freud, human beings are normally guided by the drive towards life thereby they work, recreate and procreate or follow the pleasure principle for a better, and more secure, future of the community – the Freudian term for it being ‘Eros’. In stark contrast to this, there are some factors including those of fear, anxiety and hate, mostly constitutive of the unconscious, which pull some individuals against this life drive to what Freud describes as ‘Thanatos’ or ‘death drive’.

Derrida associates the idea of the ‘pleasure principle’ with the willingness to conserve documents which he calls the ‘archive drive’ – and in direct opposition to the same is the ‘death drive’, which is the tendency of ‘archive destroying’. This idea of the ‘death drive’ is especially discernible in the attitude of the Indian state that decided to burn the books and documents of the Naxalites, as a part of their action to suppress the movement. The act of

disposing the little magazines by the National Library is one such act of ‘archive destroying’ while Sandip Dutta’s work in the Little Magazine Library is an example of the ‘archive drive’. (Derrida 19) Derrida reiterates the importance of the archival processes – which he calls ‘archivization’ – in the process of creating a discourse of history. But it is this gap or lacunae in these very processes that provides the scope of reading against the grain, and mapping the missing voices or the existing silence in the archives. The idea of the archive has changed with higher technological processes of recording, but the basic idea of sifting between documents and a selection of the same has not changed much since the beginning, and this in fact questions the very disciplines in which the archives are studied, like the social sciences or literary studies.

In one of the old and withered copies of the little magazine, *Shish*, I was able to find a poem that is the perfect example of a text that questions the very archive to which it belongs to by remaining in the margins. It might have been one of those copies that Dutta had rescued from the National Library and included in his collection. In this text, the poet questions the process of archivization adopted by the state using simplistic facts and figures for an evaluation of the Naxalite movement – a process that oversimplifies the history of the revolution and undermines sacrifices made by the young people of the age.

“We are slowly being reduced to numbers preserved in official files

The documents are being forged to simplify the situation

Relief or peace? What should I feel now?

Tears or fire?...

Are not the pages of history written only by the powerful?

As far as I have heard this has been called an age of equals and equality

Some have spoken about freedom and democracy.

Words written by the authority grace the pages of books.

It is true that history will be that which is written.

But is it possible to forget the tears? Or the fire?”

(Chakraborty 11)

The transparency of the archive has been questioned by several scholars and philosophers because, mostly, qualitative and even the quantitative entries into the archives are after all reconstructions and reinterpretations, thus preventing any direct or unmediated access to the past. Archives are never raw or primary in the sense that the construction of an archive is always guided by the intention of the curator – a point in example is the archive of the colonies that were maintained by imperialist powers. In such cases it is the absence and the silences in the imperialist archives that become most important for postcolonial scholars. During the Naxalite movement, the records that were maintained by the state deemed the revolutionaries ‘terrorists’ fighting against their motherland, but the study of alternate and supplementary archives clearly reveal the existing contradictions in the Indian context that led Naxalites into the path of armed rebellion. It is especially important to understand the political implications of the archive in collecting, cataloguing or digitalizing a specific narrative and transforming it into history. The power of the archive is not in its inclusions but also and more importantly in its exclusions. The powerful sections of a society are usually in control of the state and its apparatus – they might not be the masses or in alignment with the masses, but they are able to shape the way society thinks and the resources that the future generations refer to with the help of their position in the structure of the society. The authoritative sections of society are able to silence the oppressed and minority sections of it through their repressive apparatuses. But it is also possible to indirectly silence the voices that succeed in finding their way through by challenging their authenticity, due to the lack of an authoritative voice among marginal sections of the society. Derrida’s conception of the archive as a discourse of violence is easily discernible in the acts of the state that involve the use of altered documents and false proofs to naturalize lies and silence the voices of resistance. The Statist discourse allows only those narratives that align with their interests to enter the archives, whereas those voices that speak up against the naturalized order of things are silenced. The marginalization of the state coincides with the marginalization of the archive in such cases. The active and passive processes of silencing voices in the archive also determines the collective memory of a historical event through the process of constructing truths. The Naxalite revolution was an act of dissent by the oppressed sections of society which succeeded in initiating new debates of Indian modernism and attempted to reclaim spaces in the collective memory of the country.

The idea of the archive is deeply linked to the idea of memory because the traces that personal or mediated memory leaves in the forms of written documents all contribute to the

archive of the society and thereby societal memory. The amnesia of Indian modernism with respect to dissident movements like that of Naxalbari has been largely created through the control of existing and suppression of supplementary archives. Just as medical effects on brain create partial or complete loss of human memory, similarly the death drive of archives or the silences in the archives leads to loss of societal memory. The retrieval of lost memory is only possible in the case of powerful sections who have access to the archive, but the ones removed to the margins are unable to address these losses and thereby fail to reconstruct their history. But objectively speaking archives are not an end in themselves because if the archives have only one point of view recorded in them, a lot remains unsaid, which reiterates the need to study what is outside the archive preventing any fetishization of archival material. Moreover, maintaining silence in an archive can itself be an act of exerting power on the archive – in the sense that a marginalised section of the society or the revolutionary groups can choose to challenge the Statist archive and the process of archivization adopted by the state itself by not being a part of the archive altogether.

The Naxalites attacked the discursive system of democracy in post-independent India, and their refusal to participate in parliamentary activities bears testimony to this fact. One of their major lashes with the Indian state was about the existing contradictions in the system of democracy, in which the oppressed sections of the society continued to remain poor, and exploited by the market forces. The documents that make up the Naxalite archive include a detailed criticism of the nationalist archives by the theorists of the movement, which succeeded in creating a new space of debate in the aesthetics of revolution by remaining absent from the Statist archives. Another important silence in the archives of statist discourse that found representation in Naxalite poetics is that of the tribal communities, from where the movement originated. The spirit of revolution grew among these people after years of suppression as they silently prepared to counter the force of the state by preparing indigenous weapons and adopting innovative strategies of combatting the armed men. Anyaman Dasgupta's poem 'Dhar' (Sharpness) alludes to the atmosphere of resistance that was growing even among the ignorant sections of the society which had a non-political existence

—  
 “The edge of the spear keeps getting sharper, be ready

The boy will not melt like the Indian peasants this time

But strip the golden robes of the rulers

The grandeur of gold is false and underneath

Is only dark and deformed spots

This time he will come out in all his force and show

And you will see how an earthworm can become menacing once it wins over fear

Be ready! The edge of the spear keeps getting sharper.”

(Bhattacharya 273)

Michel Foucault contests that archives are not just a collection in a library or cataloguing of past events but in his words, it is ‘a system of discursivity’ that determines the possibility of what can be said. (Foucault 129) For understanding the system of discursivity it is imperative to address what remains unsaid, because it is what constitutes the discursive system. Derrida posits that the archive has a ‘spectral’ or ‘a priori’ structure because it produces memory and forgetting at the same time. The trace for him is at the same time the memory and its erasure, the archive and the act of repressing it, and the forgetting of what is supposed to be remembered. (Derrida 84) The suppressed voices and the silences within an existing archive create ruptures in the normative understanding of the dominant archive, and thus remain within the discourse; and the importance of such excluded voices is directly proportional to the intensity of repression – thereby creating what David Greenham calls the ‘poetics of exclusion’. (Greenham 19) Dipesh Chakraborty in his essay ‘Romantic Archives: Literature and Politics of Identity in Bengal’ says that Bengali poetry acts as a repository, where the collective memory of a romantic sense of the political exists. He goes on to make a comparative analysis of Jibanananda Das’s poem ‘I Shall Return’ and another text with the same title written forty years later by the lesser-known revolutionary poet, Narayan Sarkar. In Sarkar’s poem Das’s vision seems to be crumbling in an atmosphere of crisis. Dipesh Chakraborty notes that in the archives of alternative Bengali poetry written during various moments of revolution, like the Swadeshi movement or the Naxalite movement, the Bengalis unconsciously created a political archive of romantic legacy through the process of their active participation in the struggle. This was achieved not through the assertion of their identity but engagement in a vigilant wait for the political to yield. (Chakraborty 682)

“All those trees

Of the dry field get drenched in the rain

One by one their roots intertwine  
By digging deeper into their own body  
The roots spread their wings  
Singing songs of the sky  
The dead bodies are still alive in their songs

(Mitra 21)

The poem from which these lines are quoted is by activist Jaya Mitra, composed while serving her term in jail after she was arrested for revolutionary activities. She was able to survive the atrocities inflicted on her by the police, and put up a strong resistance even inside the premises of the jail by demanding the basic requirements of hygiene and medication for all women prisoners. Her book titled 'Hanyaman' which is a graphic record of her time in jail, won her several accolades and she continues to be an important gender activist and social worker. Mahasweta Devi is undoubtedly the most important woman writer and intellectual who wrote about the Naxalite revolution, and the kind of intervention that women created in the revolutionary discourse. But works of women like that of Mitra or Devi were scarce during the Naxalite movement and the few attempts at poetry or fiction by others often resided in oblivion and unaddressed. Mallarika Sinha Roy writes that an important lacuna in the documentation of Naxalite politics is the missing voice of the women: in the existing archives they are mostly seen as supporters of the movement, but the active role they played in the movement has not been subject to evaluation.

Roy offers a detailed analysis of the anxiety of masculinity that was associated with the Naxalite movement, and the idea of revenge from which it stemmed. For the male Naxalite revolutionary, sexual abstinence was a virtue and the ones violating this pledge were often punished, while the women were denied entry to the action squads that were active throughout this period. For the Naxalites, women were agents of beauty and chastity who needed their protection, and the leadership was not confident about their abilities to take independent decisions and act in emergency situations. Although several scholars speak about the inequalities in Indian democracy and the existing contradictions within the leadership, only a few have addressed the glaring form of gender discrimination that existed. The exclusion of women activists not only took place in urban areas like Calcutta where the

leadership was concentrated, but also in the lower sections of the society. While the Bengali 'bhadrolok' kept the 'bhadramohila' out of the very thick of action during the Naxalbari rebellion in the urban areas or the upper classes of the society, it was impossible to do so in the case of tribal activists or Dalits who did not have an added baggage of being composed and servile like the quintessential Bengali woman was expected to be. (Roy 12)

Patriarchal hegemony in Malayali Naxalite poetics and politics is traced by E.V. Ramakrishnan in his essay 'The Zoo Story: Colonialism, Patriarchy and Malayalam Poetic Discourse' where he makes a comparative study between the works of Kumara Asan, Kadamanitta Ramakrishnan and K.G. Sankara Pillai. Ramakrishnan locates in the poetics of the extremist revolutionaries a thread of eulogising the masculine and suppression of the feminine. One of the major characteristics of Kumara Asan's poetry is the constant opposition between desire and abstinence, whereby the male characters controlled their sexual urges to become less vulnerable and perfectly fit the role of a revolutionist. The sexuality of woman is seen as a disruptive force to the machismo of the revolutionary, whereas that of the man is a constructive force required to maintain social order. Kadamanitta Ramakrishnan's poetry ventures into uncharted territories whereby the erotic becomes the political, but he uses the feminine as a means of self-realization, without understanding the important role it can play in the process of historical transformation. K.G. Sankara Pillai was writing when the revolution had been deemed a failure, yet his poems continue to celebrate masculinity without realizing the role of Eros in the transformative process of history, like his predecessors. E.V. Ramakrishnan extends M. Govinda's term 'Shaivites' for radical poets and writers like Sankara Pillai who started writing during and after Emergency. (Ramakrishnan 68-75)

The new aesthetic sensorium which the Naxalite movement created was not restricted to archives or archivists and authors or texts, but most importantly included the common people who created interventions in these archives, and read or circulated the new literature that was being produced by the movement. Anil Acharya, one of the founding members and editor of the little magazine *Anushtup*, believes that no one could be immune to the socio-political upheaval that was going on and it had a lasting impact on the culture of Bengal as well as India. *Anushtup* was one of the small publication houses that started, in 1966 from Nabin Kundu Lane in north Kolkata, by publishing journals and little magazines. The little magazines like *Anik*, *Shish*, *Shoinyo* and *Jalarka* provided a forum for practising,

understanding and disseminating modernist art; it was not long before their works assumed a political character. Forming the backbone of each of these little magazines were students and scholars who might not have been taking part in the activities of the Naxalite revolution, but were very much a part of the cultural milieu. They started providing platforms to budding poets whose writings were deeply rooted in the politics of the age. The news of mass killings, signs of bloodbaths in the city of Calcutta, and especially the huge loss of young lives had a deep impact on cultural sensibilities in the state.

Bengal had witnessed a gap in the long lineage of socially responsible intellectuals and artists since the ones born during the earliest years of the communist revolution, through the Indian People's Theatre Movement including Ritwik Ghatak, Hemango Biswas and Salil Chowdhury. The new writers and intellectuals like Birendra Chattopadhyay, Shakti Chattopadhyay and Srijan Sen became deeply political in their own way, and produced a new gamut of literature which fascinated the existing readership and created new ones across various social classes. The influence of the cultural revolution could also be felt on the activities of college professors like Alokranjan Dasgupta and Ranajoy Karlekar, and newspaper journalists like Sumanta Banerjee and Bhabani Choudhury who had been working in the English daily 'The Statesman' but risked their careers in journalism to willingly plunge into the activities of revolution. People like Anil Acharya who were young, enthusiastic and willing to take the risk thought that it was important to publish alternative literature that was being written during the age of revolution. He claims that although the work of these poets and artists were often dismissed or scathingly criticised by the bastions of high modernism, it is of little doubt that a significant part among them bought and read these texts for finding gaps in their form, content or ideology. It is almost imperative for traditionalists to read a text in order to criticize it, especially if it might act as a disruptive force to their cultural regime.

The work of the Naxalite revolutionaries who went underground or remained in prison would reach publishers through their sympathisers, relatives, well-wishers and even fellow students from their universities. These were the same people who would provide shelter to the activists on the run, for saving them from the wrath of the police. Acharya remembers receiving several unsigned letters and parcels containing manuscripts of revolutionaries who had died or remained under cover. Sandip Dutta, during my interview with him, mentioned an instance where he had visited one of the secret hideouts of the revolutionaries for collecting a few magazines and the location was raided by the police at the



same time, but Dutta had somehow managed to escape with the texts. The readers of popular Bengali literature were tired of hackneyed themes of love and its adventures, while it was difficult for them to understand the language of the intellectual elite who were experimenting with newer expressions of modernism borrowed from western literatures and cultures to which they themselves had easy access.

The common people found their consonance with the forceful language of the Naxalites and their direct forms of expression that were devoid of literary jargon, and alive with their politics. The urban youth travelled to the villages and tribal areas and wrote poetry and songs that reflected the intermingling of cultures that had occurred because the forgotten sections of the society started finding a place in their writings, and were also inspired to engage in literary activities. The university space from which these student activists emerged was always ripe with discussions about the methodology of the Naxalites, leading to increased interest among the apolitical sections of the student community as well. This solidarity was further intensified when the graduates suffered from the ill-functioning of the universities, and were subject were subjected to a severe crisis of unemployment immediately after graduating. The revolutionaries from cities like Hyderabad and Benares travelled along with their writings to Calcutta, which always had a cosmopolitan base, and interacted with the poets and intellectuals who were at the epicentre of the movement in Bengal and participated in their political endeavours as well as leisurely 'adda' sessions. The representatives from the Bengal faction of the revolutionary party were also sent to other states to spread the idea of mass armed struggle, and they returned with writings and translations of their fellow comrades in other states.

Inter-regional translations were attempted by some scholars and students who had studied or learnt new languages through the course of the revolution, and thought that it was imperative to express themselves in the regional languages rather than in English for retaining the indigenous fervour. This created a whole new readership of Naxalite literature that cut across existing geographical and cultural borders and led to a restructuring of the dominant cultural aesthetics. It is important here to remember that the translation of such texts into English took place much later when new academics, including former Naxalites, found a renewed interest in such texts for research. Several small publication houses and institutions like the Little Magazine Library were situated very close to College Street that was frequented by students, scholars, political leaders and revolutionaries alike. The new

forms of writing reached the masses through word of mouth, and discussions of these texts by their readers continued in public places like the famous Indian Coffee House located in the same area. The people working in offices who were engaged in trade unions or other political organisations also participated in such gatherings, and were curious about the new methods of the revolutionaries as expressed in their various writings.

The publication and readership of journals like *Anushtup* and *Anik* had increased in thousands from 1968 onwards, which helped them to improve their own publication houses later and expand on the plethora of work that they were doing. They did face issues of censorship and control exerted by the State during the period of Emergency in 1972, but it failed to affect their spirit and fortitude of going against the tide. The quantity of cultural production during the tumultuous years was huge; hence it was not always possible to maintain quality or restrict publication to one specific genre, and so they went on to issue several collections of essays, fiction and poetry by the revolutionaries themselves, or other poets and intellectuals who empathised with them and studied their work. Now it is based on the archives created by such small-scale publication houses, little magazine and journals that an enquiry into the politics and aesthetics of the Naxalite movement is possible.

Jacques Rancière in one of his earliest works titled *The Nights of Labor* examines the aesthetic of resistance among workers in nineteenth century France who played an active revolutionary role in the history of the nation. The idea of ‘aesthetics’ in the Rancierian sense is not restricted to art and set parameters for judging its quality, but, rather, it is a discourse graphed in time and space. The workers in France who engaged in the revolt were protesting not for their abject poverty or lack of resources, but the way their subjectivization occurred in normative discourse around questions of labor. Rancière traces in the writings and utterances of these workers the thread of revolutionary politics, rather than in their demonstrations or gatherings. Those belonging to poorer sections of the society did not have access to education or other benefits of modern lives because their means of livelihood were scarce, and the long working hours prevented them from participating in any cultural activities. In history, the underprivileged and oppressed sections of society have rarely made their voices heard through their own interventions, and it has occurred mostly through interpreters or people who have assumed their voice.

The presupposition that works behind such representations of exploited populations is that they are themselves unable to understand their own condition and take decisions that

would lead to an improvement in their own lives – to put it simply, they are destined to not participate in the process of things. (Rancière viii-xii) The worker's movement in France provided Rancière an alternative method to study revolution, because for the first time the marginalised sections of society were attempting to make their voices heard through their artistic practices. The workers' ability to engage in artistic practices and socio-cultural events even after a hard day's work fascinated Rancière. No wonder the workers struggled to express themselves in the universal language of representation, but they created a rupture in the general scheme of things. The fallacy in their speech, intermittent silences and mistakes in their artistic practices, instead of undermining the importance of their work reiterated it, because they succeeded in reconfiguring time and space within the paradigm of labour, and provided a blueprint for new dissensual practices in art and politics. During the Naxalite movement in India, the political in the practice of aesthetics came not only from the intellectuals, but also from the marginalised sections of society when they created ruptures in language, form and structures of texts. The existing silence of the most oppressed people in the villages found in the existing state archives, and the quandary of gender inequality in the alternate archive of the Naxalites themselves, can also be studied as instances of resistance where these groups refused to be a part of the archives which marginalised them in the first place, and sought completely new forms of expression and location.

Gabriel Rockhill, in his introduction to the English translation of 'The Politics of Aesthetics' by Jacques Rancière notes that the Rancierian idea of 'police' is a system of co-ordinates which carries out the distribution of the sensible and creates hierarchical social identities and functions. However, the essence of politics lies in disturbing this social order by providing supplementary voices to those who are disqualified by the powerful as invisible, inaudible and unaccountable. These people make significant interventions in the democratic order, by attacking and trying to change the system of co-ordinates which undermines them, and demanding equality, or in other words create a transformation in the distribution of the sensible. (Rockhill 3-4) In such aesthetic interventions during the Naxalite revolution, the language and expression of each voice became much more important than the form of each text, the equality of people was of primary concern rather than the distinction between 'high art' and 'low art', and most importantly, univocal speech acts shifted to polyvocality, coming from various modes of writing. An enquiry into the alternative archive of Naxalite poetry reveals the importance of 'literarity' or the status of texts written during the revolution that

exist as elusive traces outside any system of legitimisation, and thereby strengthen their resistance to any normative interpretation.

In the 'aesthetic regime' created by the Naxalites the transformation of the sensible is carried out not only by the texts of activists, writers and poets but also the publishers, archivists and the audience of such texts. The accounts of the archivists and publishers underlines the importance of their work in creating and maintaining a collective memory of a strongly suppressed movement like that of the Naxalites, through their circulation and readership. The gaps and ruptures created by the Naxalites in the statist archives and the existing contradictions in their own alternative archives opens up newer meanings for each of the texts as well as the silences inherent in them. It is not only the archive but what goes into the building of such archives, or remains outside of their ambit or on their margins, that provide a true estimate of their politics. The accessibility and readership of the archive speaks volumes about the aesthetic condition that is created by the poetics of such texts. In such cases it is not the lyrical and thematic quality of individual texts but the aesthetic atmosphere of resistance in the face of extreme oppression that give birth to these texts in the first place – and that is the political in the poetics of such archives. The poetic power of dissensual texts emerging from the Naxalite revolution lies in creating disruptions in the idea of modernity in the Indian context.

## The Legacy of Naxalbari and Poetics of Dissent

“This land is your land

This land is my land

From the high Himalayas to the Cape Comorin

From the Gulf of Cambay to the Brahmaputra

This land was made for you and me!

As I was walking that ribbon of highway,

I saw above me that endless skyway:

I saw below me that golden valley:

This land was made for you and me.”

(Bose and Guthrie)

The urban Indian folk poet and singer Susmit Bose brought the audience to their feet as he made them sing his version of the famous Woody Guthrie song, at a People’s Film Collective initiative called ‘Mukti Chai’ that was organised in solidarity with the tribal revolutionaries of Lalgarh and their leader Chatradhar Mahato. They were given life sentences by the sessions court and later declared political prisoners of the state by the Calcutta High Court in September 2012 under the charge of sedition. Chatradhar Mahato was the leader of the tribal communities in Jhargram district of West Bengal, and had organised a revolt against the severe repressive measures taken by statist forces when the Maoists allegedly attempted an assassination of the then Chief Minister of Bengal Buddhadeb Bhattacharya. Bhattacharya was on his way back from the inauguration of the Jindal Steel Works Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Salboni, which is a part of West Midnapore district of West Bengal. The Chief Minister of West Bengal, in unison with the central leadership of the country, unleashed terror on the tribal population living in what is known as the Jongolmahal (Abode of Forests) area. The common people living in these areas provided support to the Maoists in their struggle against the state as they set up their own liberated zones, and it had far reaching effects even after the initial suppression by the state because it

ignited pockets of similar rebellions in other parts of the state, like Singur in Hooghly and Nandigram in West Midnapore – that finally ended the thirty-four-year long reign of the Left Front in Bengal. There have been several other instances of the communist revolutionaries setting up their own liberated zones and the Indian state fighting its own citizens in the states of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and many others. However, such movements also led to the launch of a movement on the part of the state called ‘Operation Green Hunt’ that was supposedly aimed at improving the economic conditions of the so-called backward regions of the country. The actual activities of ‘Operation Green Hunt’ has been destruction of the natural habitats of the indigenous people, stripping them of their land in a bid to tap the minerals lying in these areas and distribute the spoils among the corporate houses. Even after five decades since the Naxalbari rebellion, the chief area of contestation between the state and the marginalized communities remains the ownership, and distribution, of land.

The leaders of the Naxalite movement like Charu Mazumder, Kanu Sanyal and Jangal Santhal have often been accused of being ‘adventurists’ who drove a generation of young people to seeking violent ways of achieving the political purpose of overthrowing the government and establishing a communist regime. The Naxalite leaders drew their inspiration from the people’s rebellion in China, led by Mao Tse-Tung, and extremist leftist movements in other parts of the world like Latin America. Although the Naxalites failed to achieve their purpose, the movement shook the basic tenets of Indian democracy and raised some very important questions about existing inequalities in the world’s largest democracy, that remain relevant even today. The spirit of the Naxalbari rebellion continues to inspire an entire bandwidth of resistance that has developed in various parts of the nation – especially the forest and tribal regions that constitute a considerable part of the Indian topography. The present government as well as the one before has continued to deploy forces against the poorest sections of the society by labeling them ‘anti-nationals’ and ‘Maoists’.

The outburst of violence and terror during the 1960s and 70s that led to the death of numerous revolutionaries, common citizens, poor villagers and even government officials in the police or the army – continues to be a lived reality in several villages of Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Bihar, Jharkhand, and West Bengal but it is mostly overlooked or misrepresented by the popular media of the day funded by corporate agencies. Writer and political commentator Arundhati Roy asserts that indigenous groups and the poorest of poor are subject to a terrible structural violence of the State, thereby creating a genocidal atmosphere (Roy, ‘Democracy

and Dissent in China and India - Arundhati Roy with Dibyesh Anand'). Fifty years have passed since the Naxalbari revolution, but India continues to be an oligarchy under the garb of being the largest growing economy, in which a majority of the population does not have any access to the much-glorified form of democracy that is presented to the world.

The dissident aesthetics of the Naxalbari movement, much like its political arguments, did not fizzle out once the movement ended. The suppressed voices that found their expression in Naxalite poetics took up newer issues that plagued society including discrimination against Dalits and women. The word 'Naxalite' found its way into the English lexicon after the movement, and since then the term has been extended to include every so-called 'anti-national' activity or social movement that challenges the structure of the state and its apparatus. The revolutionary poets and writers who were active during the Naxalite movement felt disillusioned after the movement failed to attain the status of a wider mass struggle, but Naxalbari and the cultural revolution associated with it has been the subject of several literary texts that went on to become popular. The history of the movement has continually resurfaced in the collective memory of the people through several theatre productions and films that went on to achieve critical and popular acclaim. However, the major thrust of the cultural impact that Naxalbari had, of bringing marginalised voices and concerns to the centre of debate in Indian modernism, has once again been sidelined.

Naxalbari continues to thrive in the nostalgia of the urban middle-class who had once plunged into the thick of its action, but now suffer from a paucity of the ideological premises that led them to such activism. The selflessness of the Naxalite activists that is discernible in their political as well as cultural activities is something that is difficult to achieve today, in a world where the idea of revolution is dismissed as mere romanticism of youth. The poems and songs that were written in the 1960s and 70s are not restricted to being subjects only of academic examination, because the performative scope of such texts is extended when the successive generations of revolutionaries in the country continue to remember them for inspiration. This was the major topic of discussion in a session of the Kolkata Literary Fest 2016 that was titled 'Naxalgia' that had a panel including the Bengali writers Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay who was a school teacher during the tumultuous period, Samaresh Majumder – the writer of the famous novel *Kalbela* that almost became synonymous with the Naxalite movement – and Kunal Basu whose novels like *Kalkatta* bear traces of the Naxalite revolution. What is ironic is to note that the Literary Fest, is a mega social corporate event organized sponsored by the largest corporate tycoons of the country, begin to milk the poor

revolutionaries with a faux sentimentality for their immense contribution to political resistance. Reducing the complex history of Naxalbari to the realm of nostalgia is in complete opposition to the spirit of dissident aesthetics. This event can be ascribed to the larger cultural milieu today in Bengal, and India, where major historical movements events become unproblematically diluted, examined uncritically for a hyped popular affair. In this one, there was a serious lack of effort in identifying the very basic questions that were raised by such a revolution and the aesthetic premises built by it, which made the situation conducive for such drastic measures and effects.

The dream of liberation that the texts were successful in nurturing during the most tumultuous period in post-independence India, though later lost in oblivion, makes the residual impact of the Naxalite revolution felt through the anti-establishment movements that have developed in a breadth of resistance against the state's continued oppression and exploitation fifty years on. The atrocities of the state have assumed new forms and the rising atmosphere of intolerance bears testimony to the flawed nature of the national identity which the Naxalites alluded to, and is now being imposed on the citizens of a country that is the seat of numerous pockets of revolts in various parts of the land. It is in these struggles against the growing exploitation of the state along with its capitalist forces, that the poetics of Naxalbari survives. Photographer and filmmaker Sanjay Kak, in his documentary 'Red Ant Dream', has attempted to trace the legacy of Naxalite revolution that survives in the pockets of revolt by tribal and peasant communities in what is known as the 'Red Corridor' of India. The end credits of the film are accompanied by the Badang song, which is a perfect example of how Naxalite poetics and politics have changed form and are finding newer modes of expression beyond the familiar quarters of nostalgia to which it is restricted to by the dominant culture. I would like to quote the entire song at length as a conclusion to my dissertation, because it not only opens up newer socio-political debates but also aesthetic ones. The song is a result of collaboration between the sound producer Chris McGuinness and the urban artist, Delhi Sultanate, who has written the lyrics and sung it. It is an experience in itself as the sound producer has mixed excerpts from the speeches of politicians in the background along with an overlapping conglomeration of several sound tracks recorded during his extensive fieldwork with the director in the course of shooting the film. The final product is punctuated with a disturbing mixture of sounds and lyrics that reiterates the difficulty of mapping out a movement that has such a violent history filled with muted or missing voices while blurring



the normative distinctions between the different genres of music, film, and poetry – things was one of the chief characteristics of the Naxalite aesthetics.

“I heard the news several days ago

It made me want to blaze arrow

upon dem

the sword of zorro

bandalero

reduce dem ina zero

I heard the news several days ago

It made me wanna blaze arrow – on them

the sword of zorro

bandalero

reduce dem ina zero

badang bang ba bidy bang – skeng

badang bang ba bidy bang bidy bang

badang bang a bidy bang – skeng

some youths turn warrior the state execute them

badang bang ba bidy bang – skeng

badang bang ba bidy bang bidy bang

badang bang a bidy bang – skeng

youths fight for freedom the state execute them

people tell me how does it feel  
dont have nothing and they make your skin peel  
authorities seize you and the truth get concealed  
nobody nah do nothing even when it gets revealed  
some youths a get desperate  
resort to the steel  
rather buss back than continue to live weak  
some will get mad and clap off the heat  
so bullets start to beat and raise from the concrete

badang bang ba bidy bang – skeng  
badang bang ba bidy bang bidy bang  
badang bang a bidy bang – skeng  
some youths turn warrior the state execute them

badang bang ba bidy bang – skeng  
badang bang ba bidy bang bidy bang  
badang bang a bidy bang – skeng  
youths fight for freedom the state execute them

Gunman put their guns into the air  
and lick shots like they just dont care  
when badboy put them tools into the air

and lick shots like they just dont care

I hear these things from me eye them a mi knee

eye them a mi knee

Yes from my eye them a mi knee

I hear these things from me eye them a mi knee

man turn badmen fighting to get free now

gun vs sword

have the license have the title

they give tribal youths the rifle

and now life gets stifled

because money is their idol

government gunmen come pillage your villages

Koya commando start killing kids

PR agent have their clean images

but they all bring death

they run it like business

now ey

the whole of them a run racket

big money man and government a run profit

draw for the (auto)matic unlock it cock it and clap it

and big politicians are in their pocket

say a we?

public enemy number one

say a them

cause they worship destruction

I heard the news several days ago

It made me wanna blaze arrow – on them

the sword of zorro

bandalero

reduce dem ina zero

I heard the news several days ago

It made me wanna blaze arrow – on them

the sword of zorro

bandalero

reduce dem ina zero

Dantewada sufferers

Chattisgarh sufferers

Jungle sufferers

raise up guns like?

Orissa sufferers

Kashmir sufferers

Posco sufferers

raise up the guns like?

badang bang ba bidy bang – skeng

badang bang ba bidy bang bidy bang

badang bang a bidy bang – skeng

some youths turn warrior the state execute them

badang bang ba bidy bang – skeng

badang bang ba bidy bang bidy bang

badang bang a bidy bang – skeng

youths fight for freedom the state execute them.”

(The Red Ant Dream Badang Song 1-2)

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## Appendix

I am hereby attaching a CD containing videos of the interviews that I had referred to in the third chapter of my dissertation.