Cultural Impact of The Naxalite Movement (1970s) in Bengal

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Abstract

The Naxalite Movement (1967-1972) which started its journey from May 25, 1967 in North Bengal (Naxalbari Thana) through brutal massacre of 11 people, was undoubtedly a landmark in history of revolutionary peasant uprisings in post-colonial India. The movement did not take shape all of a sudden. The Tebhaga Movement and the Telengana Movement (1940s), The Food Movement (1959), The Movement against enhancement of tram fare (1965), Indo-China War (1962), emergence of C.P.I. (M) in 1964 and the Food Movement in 1966; emergence of Quallition Government in election of 1967 in arena of political power of Bengal etc. slowly but steadily paved the way of the historic and bloody Naxalite Movement mainly guided by Charu Mazumdar. West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, U.P., Bihar, Kerala, Punjab and many other regions were utmost affected and influenced by the uprising mentioned above which flourished both in urban and rural spheres simultaneously. The Communist Party of China gave full-fledged psychological support to the movement of India and acknowledged its role as Spring Thunder. C.P.I. (M-L) Party was established on April 22, 1969 as a milestone in rebellious progression. The determined revolutionaries were not at all successful in their mission of transforming decade of 1970s as a decade of liberation but their legacy thoroughly influenced literature, songs, satirical painting and film world of Bengal as well as whole India. In this article I have tried my level best to show immense cultural impact of the Naxalite Movement in Bengal.

Keywords: Naxalbari, revolutionary culture, Communism, liberation, Bengal

Introduction

The Naxalite Movement was primarily based on ideology of annihilation of landlords etc. socio-politically influential people and barricade of urban areas through villages adopting policy of guerrilla warfare. According to political philosophy propagated by revolutionary leaders Charu Mazumdar and Saroj Dutta, only arms and not mass-based organizations could eradicate corrosive influence of the American imperialism, Indian feudal cultural legacy and bureaucratic capitalistic structure. Brilliant students of renowned educational institutions joined hands with youth force who were mainly slum-dwellers and used to take part in anti-social activities. They burnt school-buildings, destroyed statue and images of eminent personalities related to Bengal renaissance etc., decorated walls of cities with rebellious slogan-writings, continued killing of police personnel and all those people who were marked as pillars of espionage network of police officers. Charu Mazumdar and Saroj Dutta tried their best to uphold glory of destruction of statue and images of famous people of our country by revolutionary youth as an important part and parcel of peasant rebellion and armed class struggle. But actually, those leaders did not have minimum knowledge related to military science and as a result of their dearth of realistic sense they could not comprehend that mainly unarmed peasantry with urban educated naxalite youth would fail miserably against heavily armed police, C.R.P.F. and military power. As a result, large number of revolutionaries had to face brutal death due to encounter, and custodial torture in Bengal, Bihar, U.P., Punjab and Sriakulam etc. Authoritarian leadership style of Charu Mazumdar, wrong policy of attack on schools, libraries and laboratories, dearth of proper propaganda within labour class, blind imitation of the Cultural Revolution of China, absence of mass base...
in naxalite activities and leonine violence / atrocities of police force on revolutionary youth paved miserable failure of the movement in 1972 . Chief Minister Siddharthashankar Ray with support of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi crushed the movement in Bengal and leader Charu Mazumdar himself died in police custody on July 28, 1972. The movement almost breathed its last during Emergency (1975) and even in 1977, contemporary Communist government in Bengal was not capable of punishing police officers who were infamous for atrocious behaviour in custody towards political prisoners.

Various primary sources such as letters of Charu Mazumdar, Calcutta Police Gazette, contemporary periodicals such as Deshbrati, Liberation, Frontier, Dakshindesh, Chhibrafanj, Chinta, Darpan, Purbadesh and Vitti etc., memoirs/prison literature such as Karagar 18 bacher by Ajijul Haque, Jeler bhitar jel : pagalbari parva by Minakshi Sen, Hanyamaan by Jaya Mitra, My Years in an Indian Prison by Mary Tylor, Antarango Charu Mazumdar by Amit Ray (edited), Charu Mazumdarer Kotha by Souren Basu, Smriti Satta Saroj Dutta by Swapan Dasadhikari (edited), Sattar Dinguli (02 volumes) by Debasis Bhattacharyya, Naxalbari Andoloner Dinguli by Arjun Goswami (edited), Anannya Sushital and Sattar Shabid Lekhaak Shihip by Swapan Dasadhikari (edited books) etc. are extremely important in understanding that particular revolutionary period and also reminiscences are quite prominent in literary sphere. But here in this article now I would discuss elaborately on impact of the Naxalite Movement on short stories, poems, dramas, songs and world of film – making of Bengal so that whole cultural influence can be highlighted properly. Some books such as Naxalbandi Andolan O Banglasahitya written by Nirmal Ghosh, Naxalbarir probhabe shilpa sabitya chalachitra edited by Amar Bhattacharyya, Naxalbari Parva O Bangla Kavita written by Fatik Ghosh, Theme Book of Naxalite Poetry edited by Sumanta Banerjee, Jelkhanar Kobia edited by Arjun Goswami, Naxal Andoloner galpo edited by Bijit Ghosh, Ganansangit – Samgraha edited by Subrata Rudra and Prithibader galpo : Naxalbari-1 edited by Parthapratim Bandyopadhyay and Sadhan Chattopadhyay etc. are undoubtedly helpful apart from relevant periodicals such as Aneeek, Anushtup, Ubudash, Shiladitya, Bitarkika, Ebang Jalarka, Sish, Sainya - Naxalbari volume; EPW etc.

Impact on literature

In world of literature one can observe that drama-writing was thoroughly influenced by the footprint of the Naxalite Movement of Bengal. Bijan Bhattacharyya wrote the play entitled Devigarjana before 1967 but this was extremely significant in this discussion because it elaborately depicted miserable condition of peasantry under exploitative feudal structure and onslaught of poverty-striken agriculturist class against landlord who was murdered. This drama was undoubtedly a successful predecessor of future plays of the Naxalite era. Bijan Bhattacharyya created another play Chalo Sagare (1970) which was based on armed revolutionary movement of 1970s and internal conflicts of the Communist block of our country. Actually his writings reflected Terai Report produced by Kanu Sanyal. Rakter rang (1968) written by Anal Gupta was a skilful representation of political conflicts and ideological clashes between C.P.I (M) and C.P.I. (M-L). Tir, a highly debated play produced by Upal Dutta was written in backdrop of armed peasant revolt of Naxalbari. Anger and hatred of the exploited peasantry towards the landlord class and the police force was expressed in a quite realistic manner in the drama. Urban naxalite activities were depicted in Aferk Spartacus, a play of Jojhan Dastidar and it upheld inner conflicts of the naxalite youth regarding onslaught against schools and politics of murder/annihilation. Manoranjan Biswas depicted another – driven rebellion of poverty-striken peasantry against landlord through his play entitled Padatik. His other play Banakhetre aabi was reflection of fearless struggle of four naxalite youth: Shanku, Anup, Nikhil and Droncharyya.

Amal Ray wrote his famous play entitled Aat jora khola chokh on the basis of massacre at Barasat. Total 11 people who were actively involved in naxalite politics were brutally murdered and this incident was known to the public through newspaper of November 20, 1970. Heading of the drama mentioned above was taken from a renowned poem of Nabaran Bhattacharya (Ei nritta – napatyaka amar desh hoy). Another two famous plays of the same author were Lashipani and Pankaj Dutta ashibon. Mass murder of naxalite youth force and brutal killing of eminent leader Saroj Dutta were depicted in those dramas by Amal Ray. Jhaer Pakhi and Mukhomukhi written by Sukdev Chattopadhyay, Agnigarbha Hekempur, Tirbiddha Shikar and Borrai Khaya by Shyamaltanu Dasgupta,
Chak bhanga madhu by Manoj Mitra, Ginipig by Mohit Chattopadhyay were also significant for analyzing this violent era.

In world of poetry we must mention the name and contribution of Birendra Chattopadhyay, who expressed heartfelt agony and sympathy for tortured youth force during the naxalite period. He was able to understand their political philosophy and this was depicted in his famous poem entitled *Jauharajyer Basinda. Mundabenn dbangyul ablade chitkar kore* was a collection of poems of Birendra Chattopadhyay who expressed protest against massacre and bloodbath in its twenty poems. He dedicated his book *Prithibi ghurekhe* to naxalite leaders namely Saroj Dutta and Ashu Mazumdar. He was a staunch supporter of movement for release of political prisoners from jails and always criticized atrocities of police force. Another poet Sarojlal Bandopadhyay expressed his deep-rooted love for dreams and sacrificing spirit of the revolutionaries through *Astrer mukher deke astraguli*.

Manibhushan Bhattacharyya was the best among all poets related to the Naxalbari Movement. His two books of poems entitled *Utkantha Sharbari (1971)* and *Manusher Adhikar (1977)* and especially one poem namely *Gandhinagare Ekratri* were enough to establish him on a high pedestal in that particular arena. Mass murder, custodial torture, death of Saroj Dutta, silence of opportunist poets had been shown in all his creations. In his other poems such as *Shabid divasga galpo*, *Niribarer swapnabhango* and *Priyatamasu* one can see not only emotional outburst but also proper style.

Samir Ray was comparatively weak in world of poetic expression but he was capable of showing imprint of bloodbath through his book *Rangayete bota jabo*. He criticized those political parties who called the naxalite youth as anti-social element and depicted death of Amiya Chattopadhyay and Dronacharyya Ghosh, two poets actively involved in naxalite politics and rape of Ashima Poddar etc. through his poems. Sagar Chakraborty was influenced by Birendra Chattopadhyay and his hatred for police force and opportunist authors was expressed in *Charidike bhanga shhabidhedi*. Srijan Sen expressed his deep-rooted sympathy for Naxalism in his book entitled *Thanagarod theke maake*. Many limitations of the revolutionary movement and violent physical torture inflicted on naxalite prisoners in police custody were depicted through his poems and he established a mother image which make us remember some portion of a letter written by political prisoner Prabir Raychaudhuri to his mother from Presidency Jail. In poetry of Srijan Sen one can find both spirit of love and spirit of indomitable revolution. Partha Bandopadhyay was not capable enough in expressing his thought process through proper style but he tried his best to show his vehement criticism towards terror inflicted by police force and so-called neutral escapist attitude of middle class through his books such as *Poster atbaha kobita*.

Sabyasachi Dev was famous for *Pratirriti samay swadeshi* and *Stabdha smriti bahamant srot*. He expressed his anger for brutal massacre and indiscriminate torture on naxalite leaders, death of Saroj Dutta but his expression was not at all loud like Manibhushan Bhattacharyya. The movement suffered a lot due to inner conflicts but Sabyasachi Dev never lose hope for its revolutionary spirit. Another renowned poet Kaushik Banerjee was directly involved in that rebellious politics and he depicted his pride for sacrifices made by revolutionary youth force through his book entitled *Jeder deoale pith diye*.

Nabarun Bhattacharyya, Amit Chakraborty, Sanat Dasgupta, Sujit Ghosh, Dhurjati Chattopadhyay and Nayan Chatterjee were other important poets of that specific period. Mridul Dasgupta expressed his spirit of protest in his book of poems namely *jalpai kalber esraj*.

Some significant names in world of poet-martyrs were Murari Mukhopadhyay, Amiya Chattopadhyay, Dronacharyya Ghosh, Ashu Mazumdar, Timirbaran Singh and Tushar Chandra. Eminent poet Sankha Ghosh wrote poem in memory of martyr Timirbaran Singh. Bloodbath of 1970s was skillfully expressed in poems of Subhash Mukhopadhyay and Ram Basu also. Sambhu Rakshit produced his book of poems namely *Rajniti* during Emergency when he was imprisoned.

Political prisoners of Hazaribaag Jail produced a hand-written magazine of poems entitled *Tunir*. Ashok Chakraborty (poet of Berhampore Special Jail), Dipankar Chakraborty (poet of Berhampore Central Jail);
Debabrata Bhattacharyya, Sukumar Hor and Rajaram Chowdhury (poets of Alipur Central Jail), Nemai Ghosh, Dilip Banerjee, Ratan Das and Shankar Bhowmick (poets of Presidency Jail) were undoubtedly prominent names of that revolutionary period.

A large number of short stories were written due to the thought – provoking impact of the Naxalbari Movement. Brajen Mazumdar wrote famous story *Khobhditur daak* (1967) in which character of Sona Mahato was representative of revolutionary peasant who upheld necessity of armed uprising. *Santater naam dban* written by Benu Dasgupta, *Mokabila* of Bashir Al- Helal, *Nayak* of Pabitra Sengupta, *Boghibikar*, *Maynatadanta*, *Prasob* and *Hathakari* written by Swarna Mitra were some prominent stories related to that bloody movement. Swarna Mitra highlighted murder of landlords, poverty of subaltern class and transformation of peasant women into revolutionary pillars through his short stories. Severe clash between revisionist camp and ultra-leftist camp was also depicted in his stories. Manik Islam wrote story on life of Babulal Biswakarma. Some stories lacked aesthetic value but were significant for relevant content. *Bokabiu* written by Samit Sarkar and *Bokaburo ebolo gechhen* by Mohit Ray were two significant stories full of revolutionary flavour of the contemporary period. Naxal leader Timirbaran Singhra who created an extraordinary story *Suryasena* full of poetic beauty and subtle symbols, was killed in Berhampore Jail in 1971. Sankar Bose expressed picture of naxalite politics in urban sphere and terror-stricken environment through his collection of short stories entitled *Akalodbudhon o anyannya galpo*. Swarna Mitra in his story namely *Bhabishyat* depicted fear of urban middle class who experienced fathomless pain and next generation observing their near ones of political prisoners and their transformation into revolution-conscious population. 

Stories of Mahasweta Devi were important milestones in naxalite literature of Bengal. She was not directly involved in that anti-establishment movement but her stories namely *Aparishan Bazai Tuda?*, *Draptapi*, *Jal*, *M.W. bonam Lakhinda* were capable enough to spread spirit of revolution of 1970s in psychological world of commonplace readers. Her book *Agniagarbha* was written in backdrop of the Naxalbari Movement. Mahasweta Devi herself declared – *Amar lekhay ebhito rajniti khoja nirarthaek. Soshibo o nirjalito manush, tader proti sanhedi manushi amar lekhar prodhan bhumikey.*

Nabarun Bhattacharyya depicted ideological clashes between white terror and red terror in his story *Khochar*. Samit Sarkar skillfully highlighted selfish, opportunist and escapist mentality of urban middle class in Bengal through his famous story *Sasbaner Mukh* (*Prastuti*, July 1974). Amal Chakraborty had tried his best to uphold terror-stricken urban environment through his collection of short stories entitled *Baghi*. Sandip Bandopadhyay in his story *Janaika Aniruddha* and Ashim Ray in his stories entitled *Ani* and *Srenishatru* expressed deep sympathy for youth movement during the naxalite era.

Some stories such as *Jayparajay* (Jayanta Joardar), *Timir bidar* (Jaya Mitra), *Surjyer uttare tirbanuk* (Murari Mukhopadhyay), *Kaedkhana* (Debesh Ray), *Shabsadhana* (Saibal Mitra), *Dain* (Amar Mitra), *Ishwarer maa Ullasini* (Ashit Chakraborty), *Apeksha* (Alok Sanyal), *Kapate Karaghat* and *Muktii chai* (*Tapobijay Ghosh*) and *Mamima* (Meenakshi Sen) were necessary for proper documentation of that bloody era.

In world of novels one can find tremendous influence of the revolutionary decade. Swarna Mitra depicted policy of annihilation adopted by C.P.I (M-L) in his renowned novel *Grame Chalo* and tried to show picture of armed struggle in villages under leadership of urban revolutionary youth against oppressor landlord class. Mahashweta Devi was not at all involved in naxalite politics but she had shown utmost perfection while writing about glory of revolutionary movement of that particular era. She created some extraordinary novels in backdrop of the Naxalbari Movement - *Hazar Churashir Maa*, *Chotti Munda ebong tar tir*, *Ghare phera*, *Mastarsaab* and *Khobda*. One can find influence of Maxim Gorkey’s *Mother* in image of character entitled Sujata, mother of revolutionary youth Brati in *Hazar Churashir Maa*. *Mastarsaab* was story of life-struggle of Jagadish Mastar, revolutionary leader of Bhojpur. *Khobda* was a skilfull depiction of struggle of subaltern tribal people of our motherland and in *Chotti Munda ebong tar tir* we can observe hegemony of feudal power structure, naxalite politics.
and police atrocities. *Ghare phera* highlighted life of an eminent author Debadideb Basu who actually sold his conscience and distorted facts in his autobiography. He did not utter a single word in protest against police atrocities and brutal murder related incidents.

Gunamoy Manna depicted murder of oppressor landlord class in the hands of peasant guerrillas through his novel *Shalboni* which was actually divided in three parts- *taranga*, *ghurni* and *prabaha*. Jayanta Joardar had tried his level best to express inner conflicts and clashes among naxalite leaders through his novel *Ebhabei egoy*.

Samaresh Basu in his novels namely *Mabakaler rather ghora*, *Oder bolte dao*, *Manush shaktir usto* and *Gantabyo* criticized naxalite politics because according to his theory its leaders were involved only in indiscriminate murder and sexual relationship with many women. Sirshendu Mukhopadhyay also upheld negative side of the movement and utter frustration and despondency of the revolutionary young people in his novel entitled *Shyaola*.

Dibyendu Palit had deep respect and sympathy for revolutionary leadership and so he criticized mass murder and police violence in his well-reputed novel entitled *Sahajoddha*. Its central character Aditya had to face wrath of police because he was eye-witness of a murder and was not ready to compromise with his conscience. Ashim Roy showed activities of urban youth in village area for organizing peasant revolution and violent confrontations with police force through his novel namely *Asanlagna Karya*. One can observe clear footprints of the Naxalite Movement in novels such as *Aantaraghat* of Bani Basu, *Nisibthberi* of Baren Gangopadhyay, *Ragbhairab* of Bimal Mitra, *Bandhumedh* of Gajendrakumar Mitra, *Samne Larai* of Tapobijay Ghosh and *Apatoto shantikalyan hoye ache* of Debesh Ray.

Shankar Basu depicted influence of revolutionary flavour on labour class in his famous novel *Comunis*, where we can find a vivid picture of Beleghata, stronghold of the naxalite youth force. Politics of C.P.I. (M-L) was skillfully described here with necessary rough language and a specific prose-style quite useful to express contemporary social reality. Sibajal Mitra became famous for his naxalism-centric novels entitled *Agnir Upakhyan*, *Agyatabash*, *Agrabahini*, *Sindure Megh* etc. He tried to establish that indomitable courage and psychological strength of revolutionary leaders was not destroyed in face of police violence. Nirmal Brahmacari wrote his novel *Basanter Bajranirghosh* in backdrop of that revolutionary movement. Nabarun Bhattacharyya had shown in his novel *Herbert* that revolutionary outburst could take place anytime and by any person and here lies its actual strength.

Samaresh Basu created an extraordinary novel *Kalbela* in backdrop of the Naxalbari Movement. Its central male character Animesh became handicapped after facing police atrocities and survived only through selfless love and dedication of his love Madhabilata. She was not officially married with Animesh but her son Arka was the only pillar through which devastated and disabled Animesh could find future.

**Impact on cartoons and posters etc. -**

Revolutionary decade of 1970s had tremendous impact on the world of cartoons and posters. Chandi Lahiri in his essay entitled *Amar shilpe taler probabh* (included in Amar Bhattacharyya-edited book *Naxalbarir probhabe shilpa sabitya chalachitra*) opined about the naxalite youth that-

… Jakhoni sambadpatre sujog ami peyechi ei bandider muktit jurongi ami swakshar diycchi, cartoon ekchechi, poster korechii. Ami jani amar khamata simabaddha ebong jebetu ami kakbono kono rajniti pratyokesha-bhabe korini kintu Bandimuktir hyapare eggye aste ami bindumatro kono duidia korini tar karon amar sarbada mone byeche chelegulo aadarshabhrashto moy ami tader dwara probhabeito. 

Comment of Chandi Lahiri has shown us how the world of satirical painting was influenced by that rebellious upsurge full of sacrifices of youth force.
Impact on songs


According to Dilip Bagchi songs influenced by the Naxalite Movement can be divided into two categories–some songs written only for creating an impact on mass psyche and many other songs written with direct political appeal. A large number of songs were created during the revolutionary upsurge but few important songs were written during the phase of movement related to the demand for release of political prisoners from jails. Some cultural groups were quite active in both phases such as *Arani* (*Amitesh Sarkar and others*), *Nishantika* (*Ramen Saha, Manab Sen, Partho Sen and Partha Banerjee*), *Ganabishan* (*Jali Bagchi, Pakhi Ray*) etc. Suresh Biswas, Prithwish Dasgupta/Meghnaad and Alok Sanyal were famous as individual song writers and singers.

People actively engaged in cultural activities through groups of songs and plays became capable to reach world of masses in spite of police atrocities. *Open Theatre* obtained popularity through presentation of *Kahir larai* of Ashim Das. *Sanshaptak, Agnjatak, Charandal, Meghanda, Bidushak* etc. were significant cultural groups who created perfect environment for flourishing of the revolutionary spirit. Actually, *Kahir larai* was nothing but a direct political statement and it became extremely popular in villages and suburban areas of Bengal.

Some prominent treasures of that specific period were – *Lal faujer gaan* (translator kamalesh Sen and composer Pratul Mukhopadhyay), *Jannile marite bole* (lyricist and composer Pratul Mukhopadhyay), *Dabanal jaluk dabanal* (lyricist and composer Pratul Mukhopadhyay), *Amra to bhuli nai sabid* (lyricist and composer Hemango Biswas) and *Gajir gaan* (lyricist George Mirjafar Goswami) etc. Amitesh Sarkar of *Arani* group became popular enough through his singing of *Boka buror panchali*. Paresh Dhar was a renowned cultural activist who used singing as a perfect method of protest. Political prisoners of Dumdum jail and Alipur Central jail used weapon of singing for expressing themselves.

Impact on world of cinema -

The Naxalite Movement of 1970s was actually responsible for era of politically conscious cinema in Bengal. Satyajit Ray was not supporter of naxalite ideology but his respect and sympathy for those determined revolutionaries were expressed in his films namely *Pratidwandi, Simabaddha* and *Jana-Aranya*. Mrinal Sen created his exemplary movies entitled *Interview, Kolkata 71* and *Padatik* in backdrop of that particular movement. Mrinal Sen depicted how urban youth was target of police violence in contemporary daily life and in spite of living in a blood-thirsty environment how they upheld their undaunted spirit and courage. Gautam Ghosh in Dakhal and *Kalbela*, Buddhadeb Dasgupta in *Gribhijuddha*, Utpalendu Chakraborty in Mukti bai, Maynata danta and *Chorb*; Ritwik Ghatak in *Jukti takko gappo*, Sandip Ray in *Himghar*, and Nabendu Chattopadhyay in *Atmaj* tried their level best to make proper documentation of revolutionary spirit of the naxalite phase. Oppression of landlord class in villages, exploitation on labour class were highlighted in various movies.

Conclusion

At last it must be admitted that the Naxalite Movement related cultural impact was not at all completely well-documented. It would need much more research and investigation. Sometimes it had been opined that cultural resources such as poems, songs etc. related to the movement were full of emotional outbursts and they lacked aesthetic value. But those treasures undoubtedly had historical significance as they represented that rebellious era.
upholding bravery and sacrificing spirit of those indomitable young people of 1970s. The period made path for social- realism based movie- making in Bengal and also acted as a perfect backdrop for emergence of the Subaltern group in history.

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