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People, Politics and Protests VII

THE RADICAL RURAL

**Left Organization, Revolutionary Upsurge and
Popular Movement in Midnapore and Birbhum, 1940s-1970s**

**Atig Ghosh &
Anwasha Sengupta**

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THE RADICAL RURAL

Left Organization, Revolutionary Upsurge and Popular Movement in Midnapore and Birbhum, 1940s-1970s

Atig Ghosh & Anwesh Sengupta *

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionising themselves and things, in creating something that never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle-cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world-history in this time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language.

—Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852)

The so-called Left bastion in West Bengal which survived almost unchallenged till 2011 was not built in a day or by one spontaneous moment of popular revolutionary upsurge. Decades of dedicated mobilisation by Left parties laid the groundwork on which the Left citadel was built. Further, a history that tracks this mobilisation also reveals continuities to and from the moment of revolutionary republicanism that is often thought of as a pure moment of radical spontaneity with no historical forward or backward linkages, i.e. the Naxalbari Movement which started in 1967. The present essay, in focussing on the two districts of Midnapore and Birbhum, tries to make a case for such subterranean material networks of continuity. This is not to debunk the idea of Naxalbari as a pure moment, but to insist on a more integrated understanding of the movement even while acknowledging the “excess”, so to speak, that marks out the revolutionary moment as unique in popular memory. The essay, then, also tries to theorise this “excess”, to understand what it really meant in material terms.

In taking up the cases of two disparate districts of West Bengal, the essay tries to historically understand how ideologies travel. To elaborate, it tries to make sense of what happens to an ideology — in this case the ideology of Naxalbari — when it travels across disparate geographies and to

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different socio-economic contexts. How do regional specificities morph and adapt these ideologies to suit their own conditions? Can they or do they at all? What happens to radical republicanism when it is thrust upon the thickets of the polymorphous *mofussil*? Simply put, is the programme of annihilation of class enemy, say, equally easy to carry out in the anonymous metropolis and the socially close-knit *mofussil*?

Finally, the essay reflects on the idea of revolutionary terror and state-sponsored counter-terror. What occurred during the Naxalbari uprising is somewhat central to the argument of this essay. Was the attempted revolution something of a mistake? What the revolutionaries of 1967 intended, in other words, is not what came out of the attempted revolution and this was so because at its heart was a process of *déravage*.¹ The revolution was “blown off course” by a series of factors, of which terror as extermination and the leadership’s reluctance or failure to build grassroots organisation to counteract statist counter-terror when it was unleashed were critically important. The truth is that the terror developed a logic of its own, threatening or punishing people not for what they did but for what they were or represented. This is why the category of “suspect” was at its heart. Moreover, it was a system that perpetuated itself. Once installed, it operated not just as a system of arbitrary and absolute castigatory power but as something that could not be stopped or even slowed down. Rather the pace of its operation accelerated, in the end engulfing most of the revolutionaries themselves by way of creating the ground for state-sponsored counter-terror to operate with some degree of legitimacy. Terror ensured that beyond a point the people at large had become distanced from the goals of revolution.

The temptation to build general theories to explain the phenomenon is great. But we will desist from such assimilations and let the two cases speak for themselves. In the course of the narratives on Midnapore and Birbhum we will have occasion to reflect on specific issues when and where they appear. In the end, no attempt would be made to tie together the two historical experiences in conclusive homogenisations, only to indicate the multiform ways in which ideological imperatives realise themselves in operation on the ground.

Midnapore

Midnapore had a long tradition of anti-colonial struggles, in which peasants played a very important role. During the Non-Cooperation Movement (1921-22) peasants were mobilised by the Congress leader Birendranath Sasmal against taxation.² During the Civil Disobedience Movement (1929-31), Midnapore witnessed several confrontations between the sharecroppers and the *jotedars* and the Congress leaders had to intervene often to mediate.³ When Quit India movement was launched, Midnapore (particularly Contai and Tamluk subdivisions) emerged as a crucial site.⁴ The tradition of peasant resistance continued during the Tebhaga Movement (1946-47) and Tebhaga rights were established extensively in this district.

The participation of local women during the anti-colonial struggles and also during the Tebhaga Movement in Midnapore is particularly important.⁵ We all are familiar with the iconic image of Matangini Hazra. Perhaps lesser known to us is Bimala Maji, who gave local leadership during the Tebhaga struggle.⁶ After the devastating famine of 1943, Bimala began her political career, inspired by Manikuntala Sen. Her primary task was to build party networks among local women through relief and rehabilitation of the destitute, building resistance against wife-beating and sensitising them against zaminadari oppression. Under the direction of the party, she worked in Nandigram. She also led the first women’s procession in demand of Tebhaga and supporting communal harmony. As the Tebhaga Movement intensified, under Bimala’s leadership women successfully confronted the

guardsmen of the local zamindar. When the major Kishan Sabha leaders of Midnapore were arrested, Bimala's role went beyond mobilising local women exclusively and she took larger party decisions. Just before independence she was arrested and spent two and half years in jail.⁷ Women's participation in Communist politics remained significant in the 1950s and the 1960s. During the Naxalbari movement also, women participated in large numbers.

The 1950s: Laying the Groundwork

The radical peasant struggles persisted in the years immediately after independence. The *Times of India*, for instance, reported on 29 January 1950 on an attack on the police station by "two thousand villagers armed with spears, bows and arrows." The reporter further noted that the attackers were all "Reds", i.e., Communists. In 1953 peasants of the district tried to build up a movement against the arbitrary eviction of the sharecroppers by the big land owners. Moreover, there was a custom in some villages, known as *sajabandha*, which forced the peasants to store their meagre harvests in the houses of zamindars and *jotedars*. Zamindars would then distribute the crops to the peasants according as they pleased. This practice was prevalent in Chandrakona and Dharendra region. Under the Communist Party of India (CPI) leader Deben Das, peasants successfully built up a movement against this practice in 1953.⁸

Throughout the decade of 1950s, Midnapore remained a CPI stronghold. Under the auspices of the party and the Kishan Sabha unit, the district witnessed several phases of peasant mobilisation. Santosh Rana, the present District Secretary of CPI, noted in an interview that during the Congress rule, peasant movements continued against *jotedars* and zamindars of the district. Tamluk, Mahishadal, Potashpur, Khejuri, Bansdamohanpur, Garbeta, Agra, Chandrakona and Bankra were the major epicentres of peasant resistance. CPI, at this point, was also mobilising people against caste discrimination and practices of untouchability.

Midnapore town witnessed three important resistance movements under CPI leadership in 1952: a) movement in demand of release of political prisoners; primarily centred at Midnapore town, the movement also had some impact in Tamluk, Kanthi and Garbeta. It involved public meetings and signature campaigns and was mainly limited to the educated *bhadraloks*. Similar demands were raised from other districts as well and the government did release the political prisoners. b) The 'Save education' movement – this was against the governmental retrenchment policy particularly at the primary-school level. A Midnapore District Save Education Committee was formed under the leadership of peasant leaders Deben Das and Nikunja Choudhury. Participation came from the Forward Bloc, Krishak Praja Party, Jansangh, Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti and Krishak Sabha and they placed their 4-point demands before the education department. c) Deben Das and Bhupal Panda also organised a food movement in the Midnapore town protesting against arbitrary seizure of paddy and the cordon system. A successful strike, with significant participation from women and students, was an important event of this movement. In February 1954, when the teachers' movement gained momentum in Calcutta, the teachers of Midnapore district, particularly that of Midnapore town, also participated in large number. The leadership came from Deben Das. Das, primarily a peasant leader of the CPI, was successful in organising civil society movements throughout the early 1950s. Teachers and students remained an important constituency for years to come for the Communist Party in Midnapore. In the mid-1960s, Kamakshya Nandan Das Mahapatra, an important student leader from CPI, led a students' agitation in Midnapore town, demanding free primary education, cheap canteen, cheap store for stationery, etc.⁹

In 1956, West Bengal witnessed mobilisation for and against the West Bengal-Bihar merger. While the agitators, who were in favour of this merger, in order to alleviate the space crunch in West Bengal (particularly given the massive refugee influx), had the support of Bidhan Chandra Roy's Government, opposition came primarily from the CPI.¹⁰ Midnapore, being a CPI stronghold, witnessed intense mobilisation against the proposed merger. Biplab Maji, son of local CPI leader Ananta Maji, writes:

Communist Party gave leadership to the state wide anti-merger movement. Party sent my mother to the nearby villages to mobilise local people for this anti-merger movement. Everyday processions of poor peasants and tribals reached Midnapore town under the leadership of the party. Their slogan was "We won't allow the merger of Bengal and Bihar". In January 1956, CPI called for bandhs against the Bidhan Roy Ministry that was supporting the merger. Processions of villagers used to come to Midnapore town daily. I also walked with them. First destination was the party office at Mirbazar. From there we went to various major crossings of the town to finally go to the court, where we would stage civil disobedience. Everyday some or the other leader of CPI used to lead the procession. The biggest procession was led by young Communist leader Daru Mukherjee. The people of Midnapore would greet us with flowers and women would blow conch shells. They would mark our foreheads with sandalwood paste *tika*. As the movement against merger gained strength, Bidhan Roy also backtracked saying that even if the merger happened it would not mean imposition of one language and one culture. ... Communists convinced people about the pitfalls of this proposal. This would only help the capitalists but would be against minority interests. ... On 11 February an anti-merger convention took place at the Senate Hall of Calcutta where peasants, labourers, intellectuals from all the districts of West Bengal came. My mother also attended it with other district leaders. On 24 February, the movement reached its peak in our district. My mother led processions of villagers almost every day between 21 January and 24 February, even when there was Cr. PC 144 in Midnapore town.¹¹

Even after February 1956, the anti-merger agitation under the Communist leadership continued in Midnapore district. The Congress supporters and the CPI supporters clashed in Nandigram on 30 March 1956. At that time Midnapore District Congress political conference was taking place in Nandigram. A 300-strong group of anti-merger demonstrators reached the venue shouting slogans against the proposed merger. Three people were injured as "coconut shells and brickbats were freely used in the clash."¹² Reorganisation of state boundaries had become a country-wide issue in the mid-1950s. On 25 January, 1956, Bidhan Chandra Roy and Sri Krishna Sinha in a joint statement had called for the Bengal-Bihar merger. The Communists, supporting linguistic reorganisation of the states, took to the streets against this declaration. Leaders like Saroj Mukherjee, Jyotish Joardar, and Jatin Chakraborty were arrested in connection with this movement.

The next landmark event in the Left politics of West Bengal and that of Midnapore was the Food Movement of 1959. Though Calcutta and Howrah emerged as the major epicentres, "the first phase of civil disobedience movement began on 14 July 1959 when people of Midnapore town, Ghatal, Khejuri, Contai, Tamluk, Garbeta, Bhagabanpur under the joint leadership of the CPI and the Price Increase and Famine Resistance Committee (PIFRC) picketed before law courts and Block Development Offices."¹³ Since 1957, CPI supporters were preparing the ground for building a widespread movement against the increasing food prices and food scarcity in the state. Midnapore was one of the major districts where they focussed. From 1958 Midnapore town witnessed frequent processions, *gheraos* and strikes in protest of the food policy of the government. As instructed by the party many Communist leaders of the district went underground in 1958. But the party office remained the centre of activities. Ananta Maji, by then a prominent face, went underground. But his

wife and children were staying in the party office with his mother at that point. Biplab Maji remembers vividly the days of the Food Movement in Midnapore:

My mother was a key figure in the food movement in our district. We as kids were involved too. We used to work as messengers and carried confidential letters between the pages of our books. People from various localities of Midnapore town and from Kharagpur sent *rotis* and jaggery to the party office. Villagers from all over the district used to reach the office in the early morning. They were fed there. The volunteers would oversee the whole system. After eating, they would go in processions to the court area at around 10 am to carry out a programme of civil disobedience. Initially the police was active and many of them were arrested. But the capacity of the prison was limited. So the police vans would round them up and would take them to some distant area and drop them there. Then they had to walk back all the way to the town and from there to their villages. The rickshaw-wallahs of Midnapore town provided great help at this time. Poor women of the slum areas also supported the movement. They used to collect wheat and prepare *rotis* in huge quantities. Nilima Kundu (wife of famous oil-mill owner Anil Kundu¹⁴), Sushama Pati (wife of Hiranmoy Pati), Renu Mashi, Bose Ginni, Turi Mashi, Asha Mashi and many others were part of the food collection team. The railway workers of Kharagpur sent food regularly. One day, I remember, we heard in the middle of the night that the police had beaten up CPI supporters. My mother along with some party members and well wishers went to see the situation. Ramakanta Kundu and Malik Singh went with her. They too were severely beaten up by the police. They were not Communists before. But the food movement and police atrocities made them so.¹⁵

The above description gives us a sense of the composition of the people who participated in the Food Movement of 1959. Workers and peasants, women and children of families coming from various backgrounds, and slum dwellers came together in demand of food at affordable prices. During the Food Movement of 1966, too, Midnapore remained a site of struggle. In early February of 1966 *Dainik Basumatī* reported that one sub-divisional officer and one magistrate were manhandled in Midnapore by the angry mob which then looted the procured food grains. This was not surprising given that Midnapore remained perpetually poverty-stricken. *The Times of India* reported that around three hundred thousand persons in Khejuri, Nandigram and Bhagwanpore were on the verge of starvation in mid-1953.¹⁶ The same newspaper reported about “many deaths” due to severe scarcity of food in Gopiballavpur area in mid-1953.¹⁷ Throughout the same decade, the district was repeatedly hit by natural disasters like flood and cyclone (1950, 1953, 1956). Consequently, Midnapore remained a fertile ground for oppositional politics in the 1950s and 1960s.

The Naxalbari Movement in Midnapore: Battleground Debra-Gopiballavpur

Midnapore was perhaps bound to become an important site of the Naxalbari Movement. Indeed, the Debra-Gopiballavpur region emerged as one of the most important sites of radical politics towards the end of the 1960s. Living amidst abject poverty and never-expiring debts, peasants of Midnapore warmed up to the Naxalite ideology quite soon. As Lebachand Tudu, a tribal peasant leader of the Naxal movement from Patbandha village of Gopiballavpur area, remembered,

I come from a very poor region. My family was eternally repaying one loan or the other to the local zamindar Sudhir Bhuian and Sushil Bhuian. My father had grown old, but he still had to work. We used to feel very bad. But we could not do anything. Bhuians were very oppressive. One day they forcibly took two of our cows, even though my brother and I resisted to the end. In the end, we had to give up because our family had borrowed money from them. Amidst this came the news of the

Naxalbari incident. We felt hopeful because it was a movement against the zamindars. Santosh Rana and some other students from Calcutta came to mobilise the local people. I was 24 or 25 at that point. I came in contact with Santosh Rana.¹⁸

The leadership came from the radical youths, many of whom were from elite institutions of Calcutta but some were locals who had been exposed to Charu Mazumdar's ideology while studying in Kharagpur, Midnapore or Calcutta. Santosh Rana, who hailed from this region and was educated in the University of Calcutta, was an important Naxalite leader in Gopiballavpur. The other prominent face was his brother Mihir Rana. Then there was Ashim Chatterjee (known as *kaka*), who was then the secretary of the Bengal-Bihar-Odisha Border Region Committee.¹⁹

The first task of these students was to win the trust of the locals, create awareness among the poor peasants about the ideology and possible modes of movement, mingle with the local peasants and understand the socio-political realities of the region. The second phase consisted of guerrilla warfare and annihilation of the class enemies (often termed as "action"). Towards the end of September 1969, three successful "actions" took place in which *jotedars* and zamindars were targeted. The first action took place in the village of Dharampur on 2 September 1969. According to *Deshabrati* of 23 April 1970, a total of 22 "class enemies" were annihilated by the end of 1969. The success of these "actions" and the killings of the notorious zamindars enthused local peasants and helped in strengthening CPI (ML) in this region.

Gopiballavpur region witnessed another mode of resistance that was quite unique to this region. In Santosh Rana's words this was a "harvesting festival". He writes, "Between the third week of November and mid-December, 1969 in Gopiballavpur *thana* in the south-western corner of West Bengal a festival took place – a festival to gain control over the food grains, to destroy feudal structures of land relations, to destroy the power and the influences of the zamindars and *jotedars*, to reveal the true colours of the revisionists in state power."²⁰ More than twenty thousand peasants participated in this struggle to take possession of the crops. In another estimate we find that around 40,000 peasants participated in the 'harvest festival'.²¹ Tudu recalls,

Bhalukshulia, Shalajhuria, Kayashol, Ludhirshol, Mohorboni, Panihia, Machabandha and many more villages came together. We used to have secret meetings, in remote backward villages. Zamindars did not get any information about these meetings. We used to talk about land and crops. Peasants were really excited. Initially we robbed the crops from the fields in the middle of the night. Then annihilation and taking control of zamindar's properties was also a part of our programme. The peasants participated enthusiastically. The money-lending zamindars were the prime targets. In this region, Nagen Senapati and Bhupen Senapati were notorious as moneylenders. They also had rifles. They were killed and the mortgaged properties were confiscated by the peasants. Everyone got back whatever they had mortgaged to the Senapaties. We became very popular among the poor peasants. They realised that we were their true well-wishers. The harvest festival spread beyond the borders and villagers in Bihar and Orissa were also enthused....four or five of us took control of the area. We could maintain our authority for seven days.²²

As the peasants' resistance gained momentum, arms were seized from the zamindars and *jotedars*, they were tried in "people's courts" and punished according to their levels of crime. However, Charu Mazumdar criticised the "harvest festival" as a "reactionary" initiative. "Action" against individual zamindars and moneylenders was projected as the only way for advancing the cause of revolution. Popular movement was looked down upon as "reactionary" initiatives. Consequently, Tudu tells us, "The number of attacks on zamindars increased rapidly. I think at least

120 zamindars were killed in the entire district. ... Too much emphasis on action slowed down our movement. We all went underground. There were warrants in our names.”²³ Mazumdar’s emphasis on annihilation did not go down well with the local leaders like Santosh Rana and prominent student leaders like Ranabir Samaddar who was also working from that area.

In Debra the leadership came from Gunadhar Murmu, a local tribal leader who had been associated with the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPI(M) earlier and Bhabdeb Mandal, an advocate by profession who had contested unsuccessfully the 1967 election as a CPI(M) candidate. Unlike Gopiballavpur, where the top leaders were mainly the city-bred students, Debra witnessed local political leaders taking up the cause of Naxalbari. Before getting associated with Naxalbari, Mandal and Murmu had participated in numerous economic struggles, particularly around the demand for fair wage for sharecroppers.

In Debra, the first incident happened on 1 October 1969 when the house of *jotedar* Kanai Kuity was surrounded by a thousand of local tribal peasants under the leadership of Murmu. While Kuity managed to escape, his house was ransacked and all the documents related to his landed properties were set on fire. By the end of that month Naxalites had conducted at least four armed “dacoities” in which two landowners were killed.²⁴

Initially the police was taken aback by the intensity of the movement. However, soon they got their act together and began to gain control over the situation and, as Rana writes, in the name of establishing law and order “the police took away whatever little the peasants owned – their cattle and poultry animals, money and utensils, paddy. The peasants who fought the *jotedars* bravely could not resist the huge state force. Many were arrested. At one point the number of imprisoned people was twice the capacity of the Midnapore jail.”²⁵ Tudu echoes,

By November-December the CRPF began to raid villages like Pitashao, Holbendua, Shalberia, our Kalajuria, Sarbachira, Patbandha. They were taking all moveable property from the peasants’ houses. Goats, chicken, paddy – whatever they could lay their hands on. We did not have anything. We were staying at Bhalukshulia then. There were local spies who used to help the CRP in identifying us. They used to get a share of the CRP’s loot. In this ignominious way, they earned quite a lot at the time.²⁶

Despite their best efforts to evade the police, most of the senior leaders were arrested by 1970. The police got hold of Santosh Rana and Mihir Rana from Calcutta, Ashim Chatterjee was arrested from Deoghar, Lebachand Tudu and his wife Koni Tudu were arrested from Kharagpur. In most cases, someone or the other from the party informed the police regarding the whereabouts of the Naxalite leaders. Charu Mazumdar’s emphasis on annihilation, disregard for popular movements like “harvest festival” and the increasing police brutality in the villages had alienated the Naxalites from the local people:

Initially we used to take into account people’s opinion and wishes – for example capturing the crop. But the policy of annihilation or what we called “action” did not involve people. As if we were doing these “actions” in the name of people and for the people. People had no role to play. But they had to face police atrocities. They probably thought that because of us they were now suffering. When we opposed the oppression of the *jotedars*, people supported us. But the police robbed them. The Naxals could not or did not resist that. This was the blunder. We could not resist state oppression and people did not take that well. We could not arm the common people also. They became mere spectators.²⁷

Ranabir Samaddar also shares a similar opinion:

If we had focussed more on people's struggle, if we had decided that we would not follow the annihilation line but focus on strengthening our base among the people, who knows what would have happened. The movement might have lived longer. Then there was the total repression, the white terror of the government.²⁸

The government, it seems, adopted a carrot-and-stick policy to suppress the movement. "The villages where the movement was strong started receiving aid. Many families received money and cattle. Our family too got two cows. They also expanded the irrigation system,"²⁹ noted Tudu, while discussing the reasons for the decline of their movement in Gopiballavpur. Moreover, the threat of CPI(M) in Midnapore was increasing. "CPI(M) penetrated this region thoroughly. They used to tell people that if they did not support them against us, major attacks will happen. People felt threatened."³⁰

Midnapore jail, with a massive number of Naxalite prisoners, became a major site of political and social activities. As Samaddar remembers: "we used to take regular classes with 20-30 students. We taught them to read. But we also took political classes, discussed the *Red Book*."³¹ But Midnapore jail became the site of more radical activities as well like attempts of prisonbreak. We read in the *Times of India* of December 18, 1970:

Eight prisoners were killed in a series of violent incidents leading to firing by jail warders at the Midnapore Central Jail yesterday. Twelve others, including two warders, were injured.

According to information received at the secretariat today, the trouble was engineered by some Naxalite undertrials who, in collusion with other prisoners, attempted a jailbreak in accordance with their party's programme.

Among the killed three were known Naxalites. Inquiries are being made about whether the others had any political affiliation. The deputy inspector general of police left for Midnapore today.

It is reported that at 1-30 p.m. yesterday some Naxalite undertrials in the jail compound hoisted a red flag atop central tower of the jail and wrote some Naxalite slogans on the walls. They also tried to assault some warders....

But trouble erupted again in the evening when about 500 Naxalite and other prisoners who had assembled near the central tower turned violent. They broke open the kitchen and the store-room of the jail and made a bonfire of jail property.

... A spokesman of the State police said that the warders had opened fire and not the police.³²

Attempts of jailbreak would become a part of Naxalite programme in early 1970s.

Railway Workers in Kharagpur

While close connection and proximity with Midnapore town had shaped the political culture of Kharagpur in many ways, this railway town itself had a glorious tradition of workers' movement. We have already mentioned above how the popular protests organised in Midnapore town had received regular support from the railway workers of Midnapore. It is also important to take into account the politics of railway workers of Kharagpur when one talks of the popular politics of Midnapore district. Kharagpur, a strategically important rail head that serves the entire ore and steel belt, connects Calcutta to Mumbai and Chennai and serves the ports of Vishakhapatnam, Paradwip and Haldia, had been the major centre of the historic railway strike in 1974. Since 1947, Kharagpur remained a strong base for railway workers' political activities. As early as in 1949, 64 workers of Kharagpur workshop

were arrested when they were trying to mobilise people for a railway strike on 9 March 1949 in demand of an increased dearness allowance. Many of the arrestees lost their jobs. Though the strike was not successful, a section of militant labour leaders and their followers began to organise large-scale movements demanding better salary, dearness allowance and job security. In early 1956³³ and then again in 1957-58, Kharagpur was in turmoil. Continuous price increase without a corresponding hike in the wage had been the primary reason of workers' discontent. The Giri Maidan of Kharagpur witnessed massive and frequent rallies led by the Railwaymen's Federation. Telugu- and Bengali-speaking workers came out together in large numbers in demand for fair wages. The women of their families too attended meetings and processions. The whole railway town came together in support of the railway workers' demand. The leadership came from the All India Railwaymen's Federation.

However, the culminating point in the railway workers' struggles was the great 20-day long strike of 1974. Under the leadership of George Fernandez, 17 lakh workers struck work in demand of raise in pay-scale and 12-hour working day for the loco-running staff. Kharagpur emerged as one of the major sites. Between 8 May and 28 May the railway town witnessed repeated confrontations between the strikers and the police, strikers and non-strikers/ strike breakers; it also witnessed secret meetings of workers and multiple arrests under MISA (Maintenance of Internal Security Act).³⁴ On 8 May itself, thousands of strikers were suspended in Kharagpur.³⁵ Despite arrests, suspension and police oppression the strike continued for 20 days. It was this strike in which Ranabir Samaddar has located traces of Naxalite radicalism when he wrote:

As with several other politically climatic periods, the period of the Naxalite movement had a plural composition, even though it left in the minds of people and on society a singular impression of extremism, of an unbridled radical attitude and youth upsurge. These impressions were not pure myth, and had elements of reality in them. The movement had the participation of the peasants, students, youth, sections of lower middle classes, and workers. In this sense the popular movements of the decades of the fifties and early sixties culminated in radical upsurge of the late 1960s and early 1970s. However, it will be important to see how these sectional participations played out in the upsurge as a whole, and how specific class participations varied, and how the workers movement, particularly the Great Railway Strike of 1974, was the movement of climax.³⁶

Though the militant moment in Midnapore, its high-octane stridency, could not carry on for long, radicalism probably became structural in the region. Traces of this radicalisation would remain in the politics of this region for decades to come and resurface periodically – be it in the form of Maoist insurgency in the Jangalmahal or the Nandigram struggle against the state's attempt at land grab.

Birbhum

The forest of Gonpur is about an hour's drive from Muhammadbazaar in Birbhum along the NH14. Farther North of Gonpur— situated off the winding country-road that forks away from the National Highway and threads through the ancient, lichen-whiskered woods— is Damra, a village abutting Jharkhand, underdeveloped, and home to indigenous people in the main. Let us begin our narrative journey from this neck of the woods.

June, 1949. Not two years had passed after the transfer of power and the partition of South Asia. At this time a powerful peasants' movement against the *jotedars*³⁷ and moneylenders had come into existence in Damra under the leadership of charismatic Left organisers such as Dharani Roy, Deben Roy, Sourindra Mukherjee (Kumkum) and Turku Hansda. The indigenous people living in

Damra, and in about forty villages around it, were mainly agricultural workers. Unsurprisingly, the exploitation of the *jotedar*-moneylender combine here was considerable; as such, a struggle for better wages, *tebhaga* rights to the harvest,³⁸ and against the extortions of the moneylenders had gained momentum and, in fact, a boycott movement against the *jotedars* had started in the area. The organizational ability and efficiency of the leadership were apparent; the people in general too were responding enthusiastically. The *jotedar*-moneylender combine, therefore, had ample reason to be alarmed and they lashed back. On June 24, 1949, *jotedar* Sarojaksha Ghosal lodged a diary with the Muhammadbazaar Police Station levelling false allegations against Deben Roy, Sourindra Mukherjee (Kumkum) and others. Among the false charges were those of robbery, physical assault and other crimes. On the basis of these charges a force comprising a Head Constable and six *sepoy*s were sent; the force was accompanied by a member of the DIBSI and a watcher. On June 25, Ruhi Das, Dukhu Let, Golab Let and Baul Let were arrested from Damra. On the same day, the police surrounded and raided the house of Turku Hansda in Nimpahari and apprehended the peasant leaders Deben Roy and Saroj Kumar Hajra as well as the students' leader Sourindra Mukherjee (Kumkum). They were taken to the police camp at Damra in a jeep. On the way, the police kicked Deben Roy till his leg fractured. The news of the arrest and police atrocity spread like prairie fire to the surrounding villages. Thousands of angry peasants, armed with bows and arrows and red flags, gathered under Turku Hansda's leadership and marched to the police camp demanding the immediate release of the arrested leaders. Terrified by this indignant demonstration of strength, the police barricaded themselves in Mukti Bhattacharyya's house and from its top floor started firing at the assembly of protestors indiscriminately. 31 rounds were fired, in the process killing Dashu Majhi, Kudno Majhi, Habol Let and Manik Let. Many more went missing or were seriously wounded. Mukti Let succumbed to his injuries later at the Benagaria Hospital. On the side of the assaulters, only one officer was injured— Constable Ramjas Pandey. From his chest, four bloody arrows were recovered as evidence.³⁹

Memory of the Five Martyrs of Damra (*pancho shobeed*) has become somewhat blurred in the history of the peasant movements of post-independence West Bengal. It is true that on June 25 every year 'Damra Dibash' is observed in some parts of Birbhum by the Krishak Sabha to commemorate the martyrs;⁴⁰ but this is done, it seems, more to preserve ceremonial continuity than to draw any actual political inspiration from the observance. Yet, we may think of a comparable incident that took place almost two decades later in a *jote* village— not unlike Damra— in North Bengal on May 25, 1967. Most of us are familiar with the name of this village located near the Indo-Nepal border— Naxalbari. Probably we should not compare Naxalbari and Damra for a number of reasons, especially given the considerable gap of time that separates the two events. Nevertheless, if we were to imagine these two events as catalytic moments in the history of West Bengal's peasant struggle— if we were to after all force a comparison between the two, citing the horizon of movemental possibilities they helped open up— then we would be surprised.

The Krishak Sabha strongly criticised and protested the incident at Damra. After much back and forth over the incident at Damra, finally a temporary settlement was arrived at in the presence of the District Magistrate. The main conditions of the settlement were as follows: following the *krishan protha*, after the harvest of seed crops, 1/3rd would be received by the cultivator while the *jotedar* would receive 2/3rd of the share; if the cultivator employed a farm labourer within the period he was supposed to work the fields, then the labourer would have to be given wages (in cash or kind) in accordance with the *shoija protha*; further, the cultivators would receive straw to thatch their huts. While declaring this award, Birbhum District Magistrate P.P.I. Vaidyanath additionally announced the plan to open another school in the neighbourhood. He gave further assurance that governmental

support would be given to the peasants as well as the people of the area at large. Although Turku Hansda, Ashu Bauri and Abhilash Bauri were sentenced to imprisonment, it can confidently be said that the incident at Damra had succeeded in achieving many of its goals, even if only at a local level. Yet, this incident failed to have any significant impress on future peasant movements; it never became a guiding example for, say, future peasant militancy in the district or state, let alone the country.⁴¹

On the other hand, the deep impact of Naxalbari across space and over time is well-known. This moment of rural assertion quickly amplified to encompass other villages, towns and cities, mainly through a dynamic network of youth and students' politics. On June 28, 1967, *Radio Peking* declaimed stirringly, "A peal of spring thunder has crashed over the land of India." Claiming that "a red area of rural revolutionary armed struggle has been established in India" under the leadership of a "revolutionary group of the Indian Communist Party", the communiqué assessed the situation to be "a development of tremendous significance for the Indian people's revolutionary struggle".⁴² The revolutionary spirit engendered by Naxalbari flared up in Birbhum as well. So intense was the "eruption" in Birbhum that Sumanta Banerjee has identified the district, along with Debra-Gopiballabhpur, as the third major flash-point of the Naxalbari Movement. In the new "Introduction" (2008) to his authoritative account of the 1967 peasant uprising, *In the Wake of Naxalbari*, Banerjee writes:

Obituarists of the movement have always proved to be premature in their pronouncements. If the movement was declared contained and 'crushed' in one part of the country, it soon erupted in another, sometimes a very unexpected corner of the country. Naxalbari was followed by Srikakulam in Andhra Pradesh; Srikakulam by Debra-Gopiballabhpur and Birbhum in West Bengal; the latter by Bhojpur, Jehanabad and Aurangabad in Bihar, and then again in Malkangiri in Orissa, Dandakaranya in Chhattisgarh, and Palamau in Jharkhand ...⁴³

This is a reference to Birbhum in 1971. As many leaders of the time fondly remember: "When the others were fizzling out, Birbhum flared up."⁴⁴

Now, what explains the pervasive nature of the revolutionary mood during 1967-71? Put another way, why was the impact of Damra limited, even local, while the fire of Naxalbari could easily leap from village to village, town to town, city to city— from house to house, as it were? Various analyses and commentaries have stressed the role of ideology which putatively birthed a pure, novel revolutionary *zeitgeist*, so to speak, that came to frame and drive the spontaneous mood of 1967-71.⁴⁵ One could probably identify Charu Mazumdar as the fount of this line of thought.⁴⁶ And it is true that his thesis cannot be roundly rejected. But, as the epigraph to this piece suggests, all events in history— even revolutionary ones— are convergences, even if counter-intuitive, of historical processes; and the Naxalbari Movement could not have been an exception. Such a suggestion often surfaces in the observations of Kanu Sanyal, a leader who has been cast in the mould of a pragmatist revolutionary by his authorised biographer.⁴⁷ The idea here is not to indulge in the "world-historical necromancy" that Marx warns us against.⁴⁸ It is not as if Naxalbari, as a moment and movement, possessed no spontaneity, originality, and in that sense purity, beyond a combinatorial convergence of historical processes. Naxalbari was not merely a sum of the foregoing political processes; but, at the same time, if we were to understand the contours of this widespread revolutionary upheaval, we probably should not entirely ignore these anterior developments and their genealogy. In this section, the attempt would be to understand the dynamics of the emergence of such processes and their evolution over time in Birbhum. At the end, a further daring endeavour would be made to understand if we could speak of Birbhum '71 as a "unique" moment in history

that exceeded its historical-processual determination. If we could, what was this “excess”— the revolutionary “surfeit”, if you will— that makes the subsumption of Birbhum ’71 as a simple sum and culmination of the anterior political processes impossible? Can we theorise this “excess”?

We would embark on our analytical journey momentarily. But, before we start I would like to pause for a moment and acknowledge my deep debt to the people of Birbhum who have, over the years, tirelessly and enthusiastically researched their history and left behind a rich trail of accounts and analyses. I have heavily borrowed from their work.

Birbhum ’47-66: “Beaten Man, who shall Avenge you?”⁴⁹

After the formation of the Communist Party in Birbhum in 1938, the expansion of its organization was accompanied by the establishment of mass organizations for peasants, workers, students and so on. Between 1938 and 1942, the people who dedicated themselves to building up these organizations were mainly former nationalist revolutionaries. They were at that time returning from the British jails. Many of them belonged directly to the *Jugantar* Group (such as Prabhat Kusum Ghosh of the Bhalash village); some others had been indirectly associated with the Group, such as Dwarik Banerjee of Sainthia. From outside the *Jugantar* Group, too, came able organisers like Kalipada Bashishth, Suren Banerjee, etc. Some of the organisers came from the *Anushilan* Group, such as Baidyanath Chakrabarti of the Phintor village of Labpur. From the Congress’s Non-Cooperation Movement came people like Sudhindra Kumar Roy of Nagari.⁵⁰ A detailed account of this process is beyond the scope of this paper. However, even though these organizations developed under the umbrella of the same party, it should be mentioned that at least the students’ organization and the peasants’ organization followed more or less parallel trajectories till the middle of the 1960s. We would explore the reason for this in the next section. As for now, suffice it say that it is not as if these two seemingly parallel streams of popular mobilisation did not at all meet during the two decades of the 40s and 50s; social forces do not abide by the rigid rules of geometry. This we shall see, though not at great length owing to the paucity of space. Those interested in knowing this history in detail may read *Sangramee Birbhum* by Muhammad Selim which, while being every bit a party propaganda, is nonetheless rich in information.⁵¹

Peasants’ Movement

The demonstration in Damra on 25 June 1949 and the memory of the Five Martyrs indicate a burgeoning peasant organization in Birbhum from a time before independence. The work of building this organization had started with the return of the revolutionary freedom fighters to Birbhum from British jails. This is a complex story. In threadbare, simplified terms, it may be said that these revolutionaries enlisted with mainly two groups: one section joined Saumyendranath Tagore’s Communist League of India (which later came to be known as Revolutionary Communist Party of India); the other section predictably joined the Communist Party of India (CPI). Both these parties had the same objective before them, i.e. to build a powerful organisation among peasants. As such, competition between them became inevitable. After a period of cold war, so to speak, this bitter rivalry came out in the open in 1938 when two competing Birbhum District Krishak Samitis were formed. One was formed under the leadership of Saumyendranath Tagore, and the other under the stewardship of Bankim Muherjee and Niharendu Dutta Mazumdar. Saumyendranath organised the first Birbhum District Peasants’ Convention at Dubarajpur on 19 April 1938.⁵² Two days after this, a parallel District Peasants’ Convention was organised at the Langalhata village of Labpur on 22-23

April under the aegis of the CPI, though it was also attended by Congress leaders like Dr. Sarat Mukherjee, Mihirlal Chattopadhyay, Kamadakinkar Mukhopadhyay and others.⁵³ On 23 April, Sibdas Banerjee presided over the event and Shamsul Hoda hoisted a red flag bearing the hammer and sickle.⁵⁴ The differences became apparent now. In 1939, the third Peasants' Convention was organised in Nanoor. Abdul Halim, in a letter to the editor of *Dhusbar Mati* dated 8 January 1966, dubbed this Convention as the first Birbhum District Peasants' Convention.⁵⁵ His contention, which ignores the first two conventions, has been subsequently supported by the official stands of the CPI and later the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)) through untenable arguments.⁵⁶ The real reason for this unsustainable party line, however, cannot elude the discerning lector.

Be it as it may, there is no controversy regarding the "second" District Peasants' Convention which was held in Mallarpur on 11 May 1940.⁵⁷ Subsequently, the third, fourth, fifth and sixth Conventions were held in 26-27 May 1942 (Chandpur), 1944 (Rajnagar), 1945 (Deriapur Thana area of Sainthia) and 8 June 1946 (Ahmadpur) respectively. We cannot get into details of these peasants' conventions. However, it should be mentioned that the DIB files report with increasing anxiety the growing number of popular participation in these conventions as well as the intensifying militancy of the leadership. As such, the Damra incident in 1949, which happened after independence, does not stand out as a unique moment but must be understood as part of an evolving militant trend among peasant leaders and organisations. This is supported by the figures presented by Muhammad Selim in his book: the membership of the Birbhum Krishak Sabha grew from 4000 in 1942-43 to 9000 in 1954-55; in 1955-56 it swelled to 10,909; by 1966-67 the Krishak Sabha boasted a membership of 21,147 peasants.⁵⁸

One year after independence, in 1948, the Nehru government declared the Communist party illegal, probably in order to break the back of the intensifying left movements. But, the measure could not stem the tide. The Tebhaga movement as well as other militant peasant movements which took place from 1946 to 1949 bear testimony to this. In Labpur, Sainthia, and Mayureshwar Thana⁵⁹ areas of Birbhum a powerful movement articulated itself during this period, demanding *tebhaga* rights and opposing the oppression of the zamindar-moneylender nexus. After independence, the police became active to violently quash these peasant movements; the state's executive arm, predictably, was actively aided by the private armies of the zamindars and *jotedars*. As a result, Subal Mardi, a tribal youth, was murdered at Goraipur village of Sainthia thana; we have already heard the saga of Damra's five martyrs. There are numerous such incidents of murderous state action that are still alive in the popular memory of Birbhum. One may recall the story of Jadu Soren and Anath Lohar of Muhammadbazaar; or that of Shashthi Let of Mayureshwar Thana.⁶⁰ The stories of these militant peasants, and the terrible death they were dealt by the state-landlord combination, have quietly been expunged from the annals of institutional(ised) history; all these peasants were *dalits*. One is forced to wonder if this is the reason for the mainstream *savarna* forgetfulness.

Among the important movements of the 1950s are the huge demonstrations held against the hardship caused by increased Canal Tax and compulsory levies, the movement demanding relief for flood-affected people in the villages, etc. In 1959, different corners of the district witnessed agitations, meetings and civil disobedience demanding food, as part of the state-wide food movement. Peasant leaders Turku Hansda and Deben Roy gave leadership to a mass rally and civil disobedience at Siuri, the district headquarter, at this time.⁶¹ Hundreds of demonstrators were arrested by the administration. It merits mentioning here that it was on the 31st of August of the same year that Bidhan Chandra Roy's police opened fire on thousands of protestors gathered on the roads of Calcutta demanding right to food, thereby killing at least 80 people.⁶² In Birbhum, rallies were organised to protest against this act of police barbarism.

The decade of the 60s opened with the Sino-Indian Border Conflict of 1962.⁶³ Taking advantage of the situation, the state stirred up a brand of virulent nationalism that is easily fomented during the times of international conflict and unleashed a reign of terror on the Left parties. Arrests and repression of Left activists became the order of the day. Political sympathy for China among some sections of the Left parties in India may have caused a dwindling of popular support for them as well during this period.⁶⁴ To compound the crisis, the “Great Debate” between Nikita Khrushchev and Mao Zedong occasioned by the Sino-Soviet doctrinal divergences and eventual split had its direct effect on the CPI, which split in 1964 and the “pro-China” CPI(M) was formed.⁶⁵ Possibly because of these reasons we see that the peasant movement had somewhat lost its intensity in the first half of the 1960s. It would regain its strength once more, riding on the back of the Food Movement of 1966. We would return to this theme later. As for now, let us look at the development of the students’ movement in Birbhum post-1947, which would eventually merge with the militant stream of peasant movement in 1966.

Students’ Movement

In 1942, the *Soviet Subrid o Fascibad Birodhi Sangathan* [Friends of the Soviet and Anti-Fascism Organisation] was formed. On 7-8 July of the same year, this organisation called a delegates’ convention and a public meeting in Siuri. The chief speakers at the convention were Jyoti Basu and the Muslim League leader Chowdhury Shamsul Hoda. Among the other speakers were Manoranjan Dutta of the Communist League of India, Hemchandra Mukhopadhyay of the Hindu Mahasabha, and Pradyot Roychowdhury, one of the revolutionaries convicted in the Birbhum Conspiracy Case of 1934 who had returned to the district after having served prison term at the Andamans.⁶⁶ At this time, the Students’ Federation had already been formed in Birbhum. We can say this because among the organisers of the convention we get the names of Narahari Dutta, Khayrul Bashar, and Atul Deb on behalf of the Birbhum District Students’ Federation. The Muslim Students’ League was also present in the district. Their representatives too were among the organisers, namely Shah Ahmed, Aafi Mahmud and Kalim Sharafi (who was later arrested for participating in the Quit India Movement of 1942 and at present is a renowned Rabindrasangeet exponent in Bangladesh).⁶⁷

From the beginning of the 1940s, it is possible to descry a growing trend of Communist students’ movement in Birbhum. We have already made the acquaintance of Prabhat Kusum Ghosh of Bhalash village. He and Saradish Roy of Siuri had joined the Students’ Federation in Burdwan while studying there and had become members of the Communist Party in Birbhum in 1942. On their return to the district, they became active not only as workers of the Communist Party but also as organisers of the students’ front. By the mid-1940s, the Students’ Federation had been established in Siuri, Rampurhat and Bolpur. From among the students, Byomkesh Roy of Rampurhat became a member of the Party in 1944 and Sourindra Mukherjee (Kumkum) — whom we have encountered at Damra — became a Party member in 1947. Sunil Sen of Bolpur-Sriniketan, too, became a member of the Party in 1947. In the 1950s, he was put in charge of organising students’ movement in Birbhum and in the mid-1950s he became the state secretary of the Students’ Federation.

By 1951-52, a party unit had come into existence among the students and youth of Bolpur. At this time, Communist activist Ajit Sen, having lost his job with the Air Force, had returned to Bolpur as a low-ranking employee of the Bolpur Court. It was under his stewardship that a Party unit of students and youth was formed and its office was set up in Bolpur. Krishnapada Singharoy joined Bolpur College in 1953 and under his leadership the college’s Students’ Federation unit was formed. It is interesting to note that Bolpur was a stronghold of the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP, which

had emerged out of the Anushilan Group and the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army⁶⁸) at this time and at its helm was Shanti Sarkar, who wielded considerable influence as a popular leader. The leaders of the RSP — theoretically and through their organisational strength — obstructed the work of the Communist workers in the 1950s.

In 1952, Bolpur hosted the Party workers' conference. Satish Chandra Pakrashi and Bhabani Sen attended the conference as representatives of the state leadership. In 1954, the district conference of the Students' Federation was organised. Students from all over Birbhum came for this conference. The event was publicly presided over by the famous biographer of Rabindranath Tagore, Prabhat Kumar Mukhopadhyay. In 1955, a youth festival was organised in which Indira Devi Chaudhurani was the chief guest. In the same year the Australian General Secretary of the International Union of Students visited Bolpur and spoke to the students of Bolpur College. The college authorities gifted him a copy of Tagore's *Gitanjali* and a handcrafted leather bag of Amar Kutir. In 1956, two members of the Eighth Central Committee of the Communist Party of China — Zhou Enlai and Zhou De — came to Santiniketan. Thousands of people along with the Left parties of Birbhum, the Communist Party and the Students' Federation came to felicitate them. Hundreds of students raised welcome banners written in Chinese. In this way, Bolpur evolved into the nerve-centre of the Communist students' movement in the district in the 1950s. A number of female students too were at the forefront of this movement: one recalls the names of Pratibha Mukherjee, Mamata Chatterjee and others in this connection.

The Suri Vidyasagar College was established as a branch of the Vidyasagar College in Calcutta in 1942. Tejarat Hossain got admitted to this college in 1951. As we have already noted, the Communist Party had put Sunil Sen in charge of the district's students' organisation in 1947-48. In 1948, Hossein was a student of Class VIII at the Suri Benimadhab Institution, a resident of Dangalpara and an active participant in the parades and physical-training programmes of the Subhasist "Nirmal Bhai-Bon Sangha"[Immaculate Brothers and Sisters Association]. It was in this year that Hossein first came under the influence of Binay Banerjee, a follower of Sunil Sen and a member of staff at Suri's chief dispensary. The burning issue for students in those days was the shortage of paper and kerosene. Hossein's entry into the Communist movement started with activism on this issue. He held pickets outside the school and is known to have shattered, by throwing stones, the pane of Gandhi's photograph which hung in the school's common room. While in school, Hossein joined the Students' Federation. In 1951, he joined the Suri Vidyasagar College to study the Intermediate level. In 1951-52, he became the secretary of the District Students' Federation and almost immediately became a member of the Birbhum District Communist Party. At a time, Hossein was involved in the students' organisation, the *bidi* union and the rickshaw union. As such, predictably, education was not a priority. While Hossein was a student at Suri Vidyasagar, Mani Chakrabarti joined the college to teach Sanskrit. Chakrabarti dedicated himself to building Party organisation in the villages through spreading the message of Marxism — his role in creating the Party's base in Birbhum during the 1950s is undeniable. Some college-mates of Tejarat Hossein have achieved considerable renown in later life; among them are Pranab Mukherjee, the 13th President of India, and the internationally-acclaimed footballer PK (Pradip Kumar Banerjee). Instead of focussing on these personalities, the choice of discussing the career and work of Hossein and Chakrabarti in some detail here is of course guided by the theme of this article; however, the choice is also guided by the fact that these are two exceptional persons who did never limit themselves to the mere confines of a specific Left organisation (i.e. teachers' or students' organisations), but strove to work in different fields of Left organisation, and made the enmeshment of these putatively parallel streams a practical reality.

The Communist Party of India became legal once more in 1952. Leaders like Saradish Roy, Suren Banerjee and others were released from jail. On his return to Birbhum, Suren Banerjee became the district secretary and started residing at the party office. As we know, Hossein was a student of Suri Vidyasagar at this time. He was then the joint secretary of the college union. In 1954, Hossein was expelled from the college. After failing to get admitted to a number of colleges, he finally got into Bolpur College in 1955. Manik Chattoraj too joined Bolpur College in the same year and soon the famous “Tejarat-Manik” duo was formed. In 1956, Hossein was elected the general secretary of the college union in a direct election. And finally he decided to concentrate on his studies. His efforts bore fruit — both Hossein and Chattoraj cleared their Intermediate finals successfully in 1957.

By this time, Krishnapada Singharoy, having passed out of Bolpur College in 1955, had joined the BA programme of Visva-Bharati, the university founded by Rabindranath Tagore in 1921 at Santiniketan. There was a Students’ Federation unit in Santiniketan at this time, but there was no formal organisation. Students of all stripes were part of the *Chhatra Sammilani* (students’ union) then. Sunil Sen was still at the Cheena-Bhavana. Biprendu Chakrabarti and Vikraman Nayar were members of the Students’ Federation unit and they were joined by Debabrata Roy from Hetampur. Vidyasekhar and Ishwarmurti from Sri Lanka were also members. They dedicated themselves to the popularisation of Marxism, holding political debates and discussions, sale of Communist journals and magazines, and so on. In this period, at least 40 copies of *New Age* were sold at Visva-Bharati. At the district convention of the Students’ Federation of 1954, Tejarat Hossein became the district secretary and Krishnapada Singharoy, the joint secretary. Both of them were from Bolpur. Before the “Tejarat-Manik” duo came to Bolpur, Krishnapada Singharoy had already created a textbook bank, ran a night school in a poor locality, and sold copies of the SF mouthpiece *Chhatra Abhijan* and other Communist journals and magazines in Bolpur. He also occasionally organised the screening of various Soviet films. With the coming of Tejarat-Manik, these activities were further expanded to a movement demanding the construction of new hostels. To fight the problem of inadequate hostel facilities, Tejarat Hossein and his comrades rented a house on behalf of the SF to run an unofficial hostel. The doors of this hostel — which was appropriately named “Cosmopolitan Hostel” — were open to all, irrespective of religion or caste. At this time, the students’ union had no constitution. It was Tejarat Hossein who took the initiative of drafting a constitution which was formally adopted in 1956. The Health Home movement too started under the leadership of Hossein.

By 1957, however, Hossein and Chattoraj left Bolpur to study Bachelor of Arts at Asansol College for some time and then at Hetampur College. From the early 1940s, Saumyendranath Tagore’s RCPI was influential in the Hetampur-Dubarajpur area under the leadership of Amulya Chatterjee and Nepal Majumdar. In the 1950s, this stream of politics was nourished by student leaders like Subal Rajak, Mahadev Bauri, the poet Ashananda Chattoraj, and others. In the early 1940s, Kalim Sharafi was a student here. In the mid-1950s, Debabrata Roy took the active initiative of building a students’ organisation in these parts. As we have noted, he, however, soon moved to Bolpur. Towards the end of the 1950s, his initiative of creating a CPI students’ organisation in Hetampur was taken up by Tejarat Hossein, Manik Chattoraj and Kanan Datta Mudi. When they left as well, this responsibility was carried forward by Alok Mukherjee for some time. In the mid-1950s, Nirnanjan Sengupta, a sympathiser of the RCPI brand of politics, was a professor at Hetampur College. He wielded considerable influence over the students. However, when Tejarat-Manik came to Hetampur College in 1957, they forged a powerful SF organisation there with the active help of Kanan Dutta Mudi and Anil Acharya. It should be borne in mind that this was a time when the students’ elections in colleges were not held under organisational banners. As a result, the need to win institutional posts for the sake of maintaining organisational continuity was not felt strongly.

Consequently, it was not always apparent from outside which group was in control of the college unions. Sometimes Left students comprised the leadership; at other times, non-Left students could also rise to the position of union leaders. Tejarat-Manik, however, did not confine themselves to students' politics alone while in Hetampur; they got actively involved in the *Bidi Mazdoor Union* and joined the *bidi* workers movement centred on Islampur. As discollegiate students, they were barred from giving their examinations. Hossein returned to Bolpur while Chattoraj travelled to Calcutta to get admission to Scottish Church College. The famous duo finally parted ways.

With the coming of the 1960s, Birbhum was engulfed by a phase of stifling inactivity. Tejarat Hossein was arrested from a gathering in Muhammadbazaar during the Food Movement of 1959. Bolpur, too, witnessed political processions. Krishnapada Singharoy and others built a *Shabeed Bedi* [Martyrs' Alter] on the night of 31 August 1959 itself in the Dakbungalow Grounds of Bolpur. But, following the ineluctable rule of students' politics, Singharoy too completed his Masters degree in 1960 and ceased to be a student. By then, Tejarat Hossein had moved to Calcutta to do his MA after his release from jail. Sunil Sen had moved to Germany; Ajit Sen to Calcutta. The SF unit was still there in Bolpur College (led by Joy Chattopadhyay, Bibhudan Mukherjee, and others), but Krishnapada Singharoy had by then become somewhat detached after getting a job in a school at Purandarpur in 1962. The students' movement in Bolpur was at a low ebb. The same was true of Rampurhat. Sourindra Mukherjee and Ashok Mukherjee had already relocated to Calcutta by 1954/55 and got detached from the Communist movement at large. So, the state of students' movement was rather bleak in Rampurhat by the start of the 1960s. It was only in Suri that the stream of students' politics, though enfeebled, had not dried up entirely. The reason for this could be the return of Tejarat Hossein to Suri in 1962 after the completion of his Masters. In 1962, *Dhushar Mati*, the mouthpiece of the district CPI, was first published under the editorship of Sharadish Roy. We find that Tejarat Hossein was its publisher. From 1963, he played an important role in organising intra-Party debates and was crucial in the formation of the CPI(M) in 1964. Hossein was arrested in 1965 and in 1966 his ties with the Communist movement of Birbhum ended. However, Hossein would again be prominent in the Birbhum of the late 1960s as the CPI(M) leader who extended his support to the Naxal revolutionaries of the district. This we would see in the next section.

“Thence we came Forth to Rebehold the Stars.”⁶⁹

The stasis started lifting with the Food Movement of 1966.⁷⁰ From this time, we observe that the two apparently parallel streams of politics begin to merge. In Bolpur, a massive joint rally of peasants and students was organised. Krishnapada Singharoy was arrested from this gathering — and still as a student leader, after so many years. All the students of Bolpur College and schools boycotted class and led a procession to the Bolpur Court. Peasant processions from the nearby villages of Sattor, Bishnukhanda, etc. came and joined this gathering. The police cane-charged and the students got into a *mêlée* with the force.⁷¹ In other parts of Birbhum, too, the broad scene of clash between the students and peasants, on the one hand, and the police, on the other, is similar. Everywhere indiscriminate arrests became common. It should be noted, however, that these moments of resistance were generally organised and managed by the Left parties, and were not spontaneous expressions of anger by students and peasants at large. Even so, it is incontrovertible that the Food Movement of 1966 marked the beginning of the end of the broad separation of students' and peasants' movements in Birbhum. Even as the two powerful streams of popular politics commingled, Birbhum was hurtling into 1967, the year of the spring thunder over India and the emergence of the

revolutionary mood for liberation. From thence opened the road to the unforgettable Birbhum '70-71.

Birbhum '67-71: "We'll Wash the World with a Second Deluge..."⁷²

At its inception, the Naxalbari Movement was not the result of student and youth politics in West Bengal. This is well-known. The militant movement that exploded at Naxalbari, Phansidewa and Kharibari of the Darjeeling district was the outcome of the tireless political mobilisation by Left activists and organisers "of the poor peasantry who were mostly from the Rajbansi scheduled caste and the Santal and Oraon scheduled tribes" throughout the decades of the 50s and 60s.⁷³ This is clear from the account of Khokon Majumdar.⁷⁴ Kanu Sanyal, Kadam Mullick, Khudan Mullick, Keshab Sarkar, Panchanan Sarkar, Jangal Saontal, Jogen Mukherjee, Kanti Kalita (rail worker), Mujibur Rahman, Babulal, Raghunath, Ropna Rajgoud, Manilal Singh, Punjab Rao and Khokon Majumdar himself — "all of them had got involved in the Terai peasants' movement by 1952-55".⁷⁵ Charu Mazumdar and Souren Bose came from the Tebhaga Movement of 1946.⁷⁶ This peasants' movement and the movement of tea-plantation labourers had from the very beginning chosen the path of armed resistance against the *jotedars* and planters.⁷⁷ As such, the leaders and the militant peasant-activists had repeatedly been thrown into jail over the past two decades. On stepping into the 1960s, many of them had had to combat the virulent jingoism that the Sino-India Border Conflict of 1962 engendered; from September 1963 they had had to take sides in the so-called "Great Debate" between Mao and Khrushchev; in 1964 a large number of them had left the CPI to join the CPI(M);⁷⁸ in 1965, they stood witness to the Indo-Pak War and the re-escalation of jingoism; many of them had to serve prison sentences during the Food Movement of 1966; and then came spring of 1967. It is unsurprising therefore that the original torchbearers of the Naxalbari Movement were these battle-scarred leaders.

In Birbhum, too, a Left peasants' movement had burgeoned over the decades of the 40s, 50s and 60s; we have had the opportunity to look at the broad contours of this development in an earlier section. But, when the strong northerlies from Naxalbari hit the southern plains, it was not the peasants but the students and youth of Birbhum who enthusiastically took on the mantle of espousing the revolutionary mandate. This does not mean that the long history of peasant mobilisation in the district was put in the shade by the onset of the Naxalbari mood. On the other hand, it may be argued that this long, foregoing history of mobilisation had in fact prepared — even empowered — the lower rungs of the peasantry to voice their discontent and fight against the oppressive state machinery and its landlord lackeys. We can at the most say that the *leadership* of the Naxalbari Movement in Birbhum emerged from among the students and youth; it was under their direction that the war against state-power assumed an indignant revolutionary character in Birbhum of 1967-71. In this limited sense, the Naxalbari moment in Birbhum was a watershed, a break from the past. But, like in all such historical breaks, a stream of continuity flowed through this putative divide, no matter how attenuated we think it to be.

Bharat Jyoti Roychowdhury has argued that it was solely a particular section of students and youth — "who had no direct link with the history of Left political mobilisation in Birbhum before 1967" — that accounted for the adoption and expansion of the Naxalbari Movement in the district.⁷⁹ His contention has been supported by Sailen Mishra in his recent book *Naxal Andolan: Manusher Bhumika*.⁸⁰ It is true that the political ideology of the Naxalbari uprising had very little impact on the Communist camp in Birbhum. Apart from Tejarat Hossein's "sympathetic support", no other leader was drawn to the movement. Though some initial sympathy was expressed by sections of the district

leadership, it never evolved into anything more strident.⁸¹ It should, however, be borne in mind that even though an overt history of political continuity may not be discernible, many of the youth and student leaders of the Naxalbari Movement in Birbhum had learnt their first lessons of Marxism from the Left leaders of the preceding generation. These trailblazers, so to speak, were often family members, family friends, teachers and even seniors in schools and colleges, and many of them had already begun to express their doubt and disillusionment about the efficacy of what they thought to be the moderate, if not compromised, politics of the official Communist Parties, the CPI and the CPI(M) alike. Examples of such figures are sprinkled across the pages of Bharat Jyoti Roychowdhury's book itself. This book, which is a remarkable combination of reminiscence and history, tells us of the people who visited Roychowdhury's childhood home — among them were Kanak Mukherjee (*née* Dasgupta), founder of the All India Democratic Women's Association; Amulya Sen, founder of the *Dakshin Desh* Group which later became the Maoist Communist Centre in 1969; Sushital Roy Chowdhury, a leading light of the CPI(M-L); to name a few.⁸² Roychowdhury's father, Pradyot Roychowdhury (Sagar), and maternal uncle, Prabhat Kusum Ghosh (Khoka), were themselves ex-revolutionaries who embraced Communism and remained committed Communist Party workers till the end of their lives.⁸³ These people not only inspired the younger generation to explore more militant alternatives, but, as in the case of Amulya Sen or Sushital Roy Chowdhury, in fact, led by example.⁸⁴ One wonders therefore if no foundation of rebellion was laid through these involved inter-generational interactions. Bharat Jyoti himself, from his own account, is an undeniable part of this process.

Most of the Communist activists who took the side of the Communist Party of China in the "Great Debate" later played an active role in the organisation of the Naxalbari Movement in West Bengal. In Birbhum, too, like in other districts of the state, we see the same tendency. We will return to this. But, for now, let us quickly look at how an attempt was made to bind this spontaneous moment of peasant revolution in institutional formalism.

In Calcutta, the *Naxalbari O Krishak Sangram Sahayak Samiti* (NKSSS; Naxalbari and Peasant Struggle Assistance Committee) was formed under the leadership of Sushital Roy Chowdhury, then of the CPI (M).⁸⁵ In the all-India convention of the NKSSS held on 12-13 November 1967, the decision to form the All India Coordination Committee of Revolutionaries of the CPI (M) (AICCR of the CPI (M)) was adopted. This temporary committee was established to assemble and organise the revolutionaries on one platform with a view to forming a revolutionary party. The action plan of the AICCR of the CPI (M) comprised: the advocacy of Marxism, Leninism and Mao Zedong thought; organisation of Communist revolutionaries on this basis; to fight revisionism uncompromisingly; to connect and intensify the various revolutionary struggles taking place in different parts of the country (particularly those which resembled the Naxalbari uprising in political nature); and to frame a revolutionary programme and tactical "line". The second session of AICCR of the CPI(M) was held in May 1968, on the eve of the first anniversary of the Naxalbari uprising. In this session, the name of the one-year-old Coordination Committee was changed to All India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries (AICCCR) and Sushital Roy Chowdhury became its convenor. By this time, the Communist revolutionaries had taken the decision to bring out political journals and magazines to further promote the revolutionary "line". On 11 November 1967, the first issue of *Liberation* came out under the editorship of Suniti Kumar Ghosh. In Bengali, *Deshabrati* started being published. Soon, the sale of *Liberation* touched 2,500 and that of *Deshabrati*, 40,000. In the meantime, the revolutionary fire of the Naxalbari Movement had spread across the country like prairie fire and in the Srikakulam district of north Andhra Pradesh, it had assumed formidable intensity. Under these circumstances, on 8 February 1969, the decision to form a party

was accepted at the meeting of the AICCCR. In the full session of the AICCCR held on 19-22 April 1969, the final decision on the matter was taken and on the 100th birth anniversary of V.I. Lenin the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), or the CPI (M-L), was formed. Yet another Coordination Committee was formed to draft the constitution of the Party and organise the Party Congress. On 1 May 1969, Kanu Sanyal formally declared the foundation of the CPI (M-L) at the base of the Monument in Calcutta. Asit Sen presided over this public gathering.⁸⁶

Not all groups who were inspired by the example of Naxalbari, however, joined the CPI (M-L); of those who did, many did so only after a period of serious consideration. For instance, the new party was not joined by the *Dakshin Desh* group of Amulya Sen and Kanai Chatterjee or by the Andhra Pradesh Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries (APCCCR). The *Dakshin Desh* group did not find the idea of hastily forming a party, and the process through which this was done, acceptable. And the APCCCR found the very political “line” of the CPI(M-L) objectionable. As we have mentioned earlier, the *Dakshin Desh* group formed an independent party of their own on 20 October 1969 — the Maoist Communist Centre. Amulya Sen and Kanai Chatterjee were its leaders.

By mid-1969, the paramilitary forces of the state were brought in to carry out widespread arrests and detentions in the “disturbed” areas. Immediately, the leadership of the CPI(M-L) was pushed underground and from there they carried on their organisational work. In 1970, the offices of the *Liberation* and *Deshabrati* were raided and from then on started the full-fledged government campaign to root out revolutionary activities. On 15-16 May 1970, the “Eighth” Congress of the CPI(M-L) was held on the first floor of a house in the Rail Colony of Garden Reach in Calcutta (in continuance with the Seventh Congress of the CPI(M)). The work of this Congress was conducted in absolute secrecy. A Central Committee of 21 members was formed, of which Charu Mazumdar was made the General Secretary. A nine-member politburo was also formed which, apart from Charu Mazumdar, comprised Sushital Roy Chowdhury, Saroj Dutta, Souren Basu (West Bengal), Satyanarayan Singh (Bihar), Shiv Kumar Mishra (Uttar Pradesh), Ram Piara Saraf (Jammu & Kashmir), and Appu (Tamil Nadu). The two seats reserved for Andhra Pradesh ultimately remained vacant.⁸⁷

In step with the activity at the national and state levels, the work of building the organisation was also taking place in Birbhum. Within a few days of the formation of the Coordination Committee, the revolutionaries of Birbhum formed a district committee of the AICCCR and Dipankar Roy was made its Secretary. When the CPI(M-L) was formed, its district committee was formed in Birbhum. Sushanta Banerjee was the first district secretary. It is interesting to note here that many Communist revolutionaries of Birbhum, as elsewhere, were uncertain about accepting Charu Mazumdar as their “supreme leader” straight away and uncritically — Bharat Jyoti Roychowdhury was one of them. But keeping in mind the greater interests of the movement they accepted this doctrine and joined the CPI(M-L) district committee. There was a parallel Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries in Birbhum in this period which was not a part of the AICCCR. In 1970, the leaders of this parallel Coordination Committee too joined the CPI(M-L). The stage for the emergence of the historic movement of Birbhum was thus set.⁸⁸

After the formation of the CPI(M-L) in Birbhum, people from all rungs of the society, particularly the youth and students, started to gather around the Party. Sailen Mishra tells us that a few days later a regional committee was formed for Birbhum-Santhal Paraganas-Murshidabad. Shyamsundar Bose was the secretary of this committee.⁸⁹ The active workers spread out to district towns and villages to propagate the ideological programme of the Party. They started taking the revolutionary politics to the masses successfully through small meetings and the public distribution

of Party literature. It was against this background of an emergent revolutionary consciousness that the main act of the Naxalbari struggle was inaugurated in Birbhum. We know this as the *khatam rajniti* [politics of annihilation of class enemies] of Charu Mazumdar.⁹⁰ This brand of politics did not go uncontested within the Party. Sushital Roy Chowdhury, writing under the pseudonym of Purno, published a document expressing his strong reservations against some aspects of this brand of politics.⁹¹ The document did reach the comrades of Birbhum. But, by then the doctrine of supreme leadership of Charu Mazumdar had been firmly established in the Party Congress and the “line” of *khatam rajniti* had struck deep roots. This “line” must have seemed more radical and, for that reason, appealing to the relatively young leadership of the district. The profound influence of this politics, along with the passion which drove it, meant that Comrade Purno’s arguments fell on deaf ears. Similarly, when in July 1970, Comrade Satyanarayan Singh rejected Mazumdar’s policy of annihilation as “individual terrorism”,⁹² he was branded a revisionist and an advocate of the rich peasants. Thus, *khatam* prevailed.⁹³

It is true that a people’s liberation army was never formed in Birbhum. But, guerrilla squads, armed with guns and rifles, held marches in the villages and towns. And the revolutionary masses took part in these marches. Mobile squads were engaged in snatching fire arms. *Jotedars* and moneylenders were judged in revolutionary courts and punished. Lands of *jotedars* were grabbed and redistributed among the people. The extent of the spread of, and the popular support for, any movement is most effectively known from the data of the successful implementation of its programme. If we study the data carefully we get a fuller understanding of its work and impact on the ground. Such data for Birbhum ’70-71 has been painstakingly collected and collated by Bharat Jyoti Roychowdhury in his book.⁹⁴ From his lists, we get the names of the persons who were killed by the cadre of the CPI(M-L) during the annihilation programme. We also get the dates of their murder and the sites where they were murdered. We also find the details of the arsons committed by the Party in various parts of Birbhum; list of the various incidents of ammunition snatching from the police and the armed forces. On the other hand, we get the names of at least 55 people who were murdered by the police, or with the help of the police, as suspected Naxals. Furthermore, there are the accounts of innumerable people who faced brutal torture without trial or while being under trial at the hands of the police or in their custody. The importance of this collection of data cannot be understated; it alerts us to the nature of state terror. However, another very important indicator of a movement’s popularity, and the breadth of popular support for it, is its rebellious language. This was expressed in Birbhum ’71 through popular songs. Let us pause here to consider just two such songs quoted in Sailen Mishra’s book.⁹⁵

In early 1971, one could hear the revolutionary masses sing:

<i>Rifle tuley bolchbe jara</i>	Rifle in hand, those who cry out
<i>Aae re e-desh mukto kori</i>	For the freedom of this country
<i>Oraa Bharater mohaan janotaa</i>	They are the noble masses of India
<i>Janani taader Naxalbari</i>	Their mother is Naxalbari

Here is a song that was most popular in the rural areas of Birbhum in August-September, 1971:

<i>Cholechbe krishaker gana-fonj</i>	There marches the people’s army of
	peasants
<i>Janajuddher daak shuni</i>	Rallying to the call for people’s war
<i>Shobhito maanusher aashaa bok</i>	Let the hope of the oppressed masses

*Khamotaa dakholer bbaashaa.
Mobaan Chin-er bir janotaa
Babu bachhor dbore
Gorey tulechhen noya Chin ek
E-pathey loraai kore.*

Be the language of capturing power.
The valiant people of great China
For many years
Have forged a new China
By fighting along these lines.

The struggle in Birbhum was in the true sense a struggle against state-power. For, in 1971, to quash the Naxalbari movement in the district, the police was joined by one battalion of the Fourth Raipur Infantry, five companies of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), two companies of State Armed Police, two platoons of Eastern Frontier Rifles, two companies of National Volunteer Force, two companies of Saurashtra Reserve Police, i.e. 8,000 to 10,000 soldiers. This army expedition started on 1 July 1971 and continued till 15 August 1971. Code name: *Operation Steeplechase*.⁹⁶

This impressive marshalling of strength, however, proved ineffectual. During this 45-day campaign, the army arrested 500 persons, of whom only 100 were Naxals. Even these persons were mere sympathisers and not members of the militant squads. The army failed to arrest even one person who was in possession of any form of fire arms or even a weapon. All that they could achieve was to shoot dead three unarmed supporters: a few thousand army personnel managed to shoot dead only three CPI(M-L) workers at Gajalpur Majhipara village of the Suri Thana, namely Raghunath Sengupta, Lakshman Mal and Gopal Kisku.⁹⁷ And from Madhaipur, they arrested three leaders of Birbhum on 14 July 1971: Aalok Mukherjee, Biren Ghosh, and Sudeb Biswas.⁹⁸ This was their sole “achievement” — a classic case of great cry and little wool, pompously known as the *Operation Steeplechase*. On the other hand, in spite of the presence of massive state forces in the district, the revolutionary spirit of the CPI(M-L) workers and the people at large did not falter. People continued to wage war against state power in Bolpur, Suri and other parts of Birbhum. When Siddhartha Shankar Ray, the Union minister in charge of West Bengal, came to Bolpur on 19 September 1971 to flag off his tour of Birbhum, Molotov cocktails and other explosives were hurled at his convoy by way of a literally “warm” welcome.⁹⁹

Though the army could not dampen the revolutionary spirit of Birbhum, in the end the movement failed in the district. The reason for this is not merely the tireless repression carried out by the state machinery. That state repression could ultimately work in the villages and towns had to do with the faulty programme of annihilation which indeed came to be perceived by many sections of the people as a strategy of mindless and individual terrorism (as Satyanarayan Singh had described it in 1970). It also had to do with the reluctance (or failure) of the leadership to create grassroots organisations among the common non-combatant people. As even a statist commentator notes for Birbhum, “once guerrillas left the villages the residents could not resist military troops. ... [t]his outcome flowed from their [the Naxal leadership’s] failure to establish village militias and revolutionary committees, which could have provided the self-defence capacity needed to sustain the movement.”¹⁰⁰ “The reason for the defeat [in Birbhum],” in the inimitable words of Bharat Jyoti Roychowdhury, “inhered in the lack of proper leadership, the nonsensical rodomontade about strategy and tactics of struggle, and the practice of copycat Maoism in inappropriate contexts.”¹⁰¹ For how long can common people persist in the violent and unnatural political mode of annihilation in order to create a classless society? This is not a rhetorical but a serious practical question that needs to be thought through and not necessarily by way of rejecting revolutionary political violence. Again, historical experience across the world shows that programmatic violence is an ideological fiction. Violence beyond a point does not recognise the fine distinctions of friend and foe, self and other — its transgressive, structurally pervasive nature soon makes it directionless, excessive, all-consuming

and, as a result, self-destructive. As such, once the limits of endurance were breached, the poor masses were bound to become separated from the Naxal cadre. And this was the beginning of the end.

The work of an historian, however, is not to pass moral judgment on the rights and wrongs, fairness and unfairness of the Naxalbari movement in Birbhum. (In most cases, one sees that such debates are fundamentally guided by partisan agenda in any case.) What we describe in the final phase of our study of Birbhum is the deep imprint that the Naxalbari movement left on popular memory — this anyone will admit to be true. As such, the question that arises (or, at least, *should* arise) in our mind is: what is it about this movement that, across so many decades, still animates agitated debates, inspires people to take up arms against state repression? In today's national political climate the question is extremely relevant. But, we do not claim to have the expertise or wisdom to hazard an answer. What we can do here is at best try to understand the question in the context of Birbhum '70-71. We will bring our labours to a close through this specific attempt at understanding the phenomenon.

Conclusion: Nec Tamen Consumebatur¹⁰²

In Naxalbari or Debra-Gopiballavpur, the movement started as a struggle to grab and occupy land. And the land issue was at the heart of peasant insurgency. These movements which started with the objective of returning land to the true peasants — and around slogans like “*langal jar jami tar*”¹⁰³ — soon escalated into a struggle against state power. But the Birbhum movement did not start as a forcible land occupation movement. We have seen in an earlier section that in Birbhum there was already a vibrant militant tradition of peasant movement from at least the time of independence. Even in 1968-69 we find that parliamentary Left parties such as CPI, CPI(M), Forward Bloc, Socialist Unity Centre of India (SUCI) and others are engaged in peasant mobilisation in the district and are active in land grab operations against the *jotedars*. Many peasants of the district were martyred in this long process of peasants' struggle. One remembers Damra of 1949. It started then and continued into the late 1960s, when, in 1968, we see that in Darpashila village under Bolpur Thana, Kamal Mal was killed, in Nanoor, Chhekin Sheikh is murdered, in Sirsa village, Bijoy Rana and in Ilambazaar Thana area, Salam Sheikh meet the same fate ... We find records for many more such peasants who were killed by the *jotedars* or by the police. But the parliamentary Left parties did not go for retaliatory violence or revenge. They could not have in any case, for by this time these parties were firmly mired in electoral politics. This had definitely happened by 1967.¹⁰⁴ But the process of electoral domestication had actually started a long time back: Turku Hansda, the militant peasant leader of 1949, was by 1957 the CPI MLA from Suri.¹⁰⁵

One of the unavoidable consequences of donning the mantle of institutional power is probably the need to establish tight control over the militancy of the grassroots workers, if not its complete suppression. We get theoretical support for this line of argument from Lenin's article published in 1917 in *Pravda* titled “The Dual Power”. “The highly remarkable feature of ... revolution,” he wrote, “is that it [brings] about a dual power.” Alongside the institutional responsibility of running a government, which Lenin described as “the government of bourgeoisie” and therefore as “provisional” in nature, the revolution gives birth to “another government, so far weak and incipient, but undoubtedly a government that actually exists and is growing.” What is the class composition of this other government? Lenin averred: “It consists of the proletariat and the peasants (in soldiers' uniforms).” What is the political nature of this government? “It is a revolutionary dictatorship, i.e., a power directly based on revolutionary seizure, on the direct initiative

of the people from below, and *not on a law* enacted by a centralised state power. It is an entirely different kind of power from the one that generally exists in the parliamentary bourgeois-democratic republics of the usual type still prevailing in the advanced countries of Europe and America. This circumstance often overlooked, often not given enough thought, yet it is the crux of the matter.” According to Lenin, the fundamental characteristics of this type are: “(1) the source of power is not a law previously discussed and enacted by parliament, but the direct initiative of the people from below, in their local areas—direct ‘seizure’, to use a current expression; (2) the replacement of the police and the army, which are institutions divorced from the people and set against the people, by the direct arming of the whole people; order in the state under such a power is maintained by the armed workers and peasants *themselves*, by the armed people *themselves*; (3) officialdom, the bureaucracy, are either similarly replaced by the direct rule of the people themselves or at least placed under special control; they not only become elected officials, but are also *subject to recall* at the people’s first demand; they are reduced to the position of simple agents; from a privileged group holding ‘jobs’ remunerated on a high, bourgeois scale, they become workers of a special ‘arm of the service’, whose remuneration *does not exceed* the ordinary pay of a competent worker.”¹⁰⁶ But, those, who have grown accustomed to the loaves and fishes of institutionalised power of the bourgeois government, have great difficulty now in accommodating the revolutionary lower rungs (and, for that reason, in India, lower castes and tribes) of the people. This is what we see in Birbhum of the late 1960s. On the one hand, the parliamentary Left parties, having captured power in 1967, are now eager to eschew the path of revolutionary militancy, while, on the other hand, the *dalit* peasantry is striving for greater militancy, now that they had been bloodied, so to speak. At this juncture, the latter group got a shot in the arm from the Naxalbari Movement whose message was brought to them by the youth and students of Birbhum. As a result, the tempestuous developments of Birbhum ’70-71 became possible. If we view the Naxalbari Movement in Birbhum through the optic of this conjuncture then we, at a time, will begin to make sense of the district’s delayed reaction (the movement gathered momentum only in 1970) and also of its intensity, its legendary ferocity.

But mere theoretical expatiation cannot suffice. We need to concretely demonstrate the point about *dalit* participation in Birbhum’s Naxalbari Movement. To do this, we would have to again — and for a final time — seek the help of Bharat Jyoti Roychowdhury. We have already noted that Roychowdhury has given a list of 55 persons in his book who were “those leaderless people of Birbhum who stood against the state in the bloody days of 1971” and were martyred in the process.¹⁰⁷ According to Roychowdhury, this list is incomplete. Even so, the important point to note here is that the author has performed the immensely painstaking task of providing us with the social profile of 52 of these 55 martyrs. In terms of economic profile, 17 of them were landless agricultural labourers, 7 were poor peasants, 4 were middle peasants and 7 belonged to the urban working class. That is, 66 per cent of those who were murdered were from the poorest stratum of the society. In terms of caste and religion, 26 of them were *dalits*, 13 were low castes, 3 were Muslims, and 4 belonged to the Scheduled Tribes. Among the rest, only 6 belonged to the upper castes. That is, 87 per cent of them were from the lowest social orders. 10 of them were illiterate, 11 were barely literate, and 19 had just about touched the level of school education. Apart from 5, all others were between the ages of 19 and 25, or even younger.¹⁰⁸ The statistics clearly tells us that the struggle in Birbhum of 1970s was not a struggle of the upper classes and castes. Those who are still not convinced, for them there is the result of a survey to determine the social profile of the people of who participated in the Naxalbari Movement in Birbhum. The survey was conducted in Bolpur town and village areas, and in the villages and towns under the jurisdiction of the Ilambazaar Thana, Dubarajpur Thana, Nanoor Thana, and Sainthia Thana. An initial list of 300 respondents was

compiled by mainly Bharat Jyoti Roychowdhury, Sailen Mishra, Aalok Mukherjee, Lakshmi Ghosh and Liyakat Ali. In this survey, the results echoed those of the previous list. In terms of economic class, only 23 of the respondents identified themselves as middle peasants, rich peasants, *jotedars* or declining zamindars; only 7 of them fall in the bracket of the upper class. In terms of caste profile, only 59 of them belong to the upper castes. It is noteworthy that as many as 77 of them were from the Scheduled Castes and 25 from the Scheduled Tribe, when the Census of 1971 tells us that only 7.05 percent and 30 percent of the total population of Birbhum belonged to Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes respectively.¹⁰⁹ Among them, 11 were women (of whom 10 were arrested) and 254 of them were between the ages of 19 and 25, or even younger, at time of their participation.¹¹⁰

No matter what the nature and composition of the leadership was, it is incontrovertible in the light of the present statistics that the muscle and bones of the Naxalbari Movement in Birbhum of 1970-71 was the young people of the lower classes, castes and tribes; drenched in their blood the soil of Birbhum is incarnadine. Ranabir Samaddar, in an informal interview with the authors, had expressed his hunch that the intensity and extent of the Naxalbari Movement of Birbhum was the result of the mass support and participation of poor peasants, students, youth, *adivasis*, and poor working-class people. This essay substantiates his hunch. Today, when in the political arena the arrogant braggadocio of *savarna* Hindutva has achieved a deafening pitch, when the society is under the threat of getting bogged in the mire of discriminatory hate politics of the extremist rightwing, particularly in Birbhum — the saga of 1970-71 Birbhum inspires us, fires us with the eternal hope of emancipation: “Tho’ much is taken, much abides; ...”¹¹¹

Notes

¹ François Furet and Denis Richet use this idea for the French Revolution of 1789, in *The French Revolution*, translated by Stephen Hardman, Weidenfeld & Nicolson: London, 1970

² Donald Anthony Low, *Congress and the Raj: Facets of the Indian Struggle, 1917-1947*, Heinemann: Portsmouth, NH, US, 1977, p. 22

³ Sachindra Kumar Maity, *Freedom Movement in Midnapore*, Vol. I, Firma KLM: Kolkata, 1975, p. 42

⁴ Bidyut Charaborty, *Local Politics and Indian Nationalism, 1919-1944*, Manohar: Delhi, 1997, *in passim*

⁵ Rina Pal, *Women of Midnapore in Indian Freedom Struggle*, Ratna Prakashan: Midnapore, 1996; also, “Role of Women in Tebhaga Struggle (1946-50)” in Neera Chandoke & Ashish Ghosh, *Grassroots Movement and Social Change*, Developing Countries Research Centre and Departmental Special Assistance Programme in Politics of Developing Countries University of Delhi: Delhi, 1995

⁶ Neera Chandoke & Ashish Ghosh, *Grassroots Movement*, p. 141

⁷ Peter Custers, “Women’s Role in Tebhaga Movement”, *Economic & Political Weekly* (henceforth, *EPW*), 21:43, 1986, WS97-WS104

⁸ As told by Santosh Rana and Chapal Bhattacharya (an ex-CPI member from Midnapore town).

⁹ Personal interview with Santosh Rana.

¹⁰ M.N. Chatterjee, “West Bengal-Bihar Merger: The Developments in West Bengal”, *Indian Affairs Record*, II:3, April 1956, pp. 4-7; also see, Shamita Sarkar, “The Role of the Communists in the Anti Bengal-Bihar Merger Agitation”, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 74, 2013, pp. 921-924

¹¹ Biplab Maji, Manuscript of his memoir, no pagination, personally collected from the author.

¹² *Times of India* [Henceforth, *TOI*], 31 March 1956.

¹³ Suranjan Das and Premansukumar Bandyopadhyay, *Food Movement of 1959: Documenting a Turning Point in the History of West Bengal*, KP Bagchi & Co.: Kolkata, 2004, p. 6

¹⁴ A Congress supporter who later became the supporter of CPI.

¹⁵ Biplab Maji, Manuscript of his memoir, no pagination, personally collected from the author.

¹⁶ *TOI*, 16 June 1953.

¹⁷ TOI, July 1953.

¹⁸ Interview of Lebachand Tudu, published in Amar Bhattacharya, ed., *Lal Tamshuk: Naxalbari Andoloner Pramanyo Tathya Sankalan* [The Red Bond: A Collection of Authentic Documents of the Naxalbari Movement], Gangchil: Kolkata, 2014, pp. 260-261.

¹⁹ Kishalay Bhattacharjee, *An Unfinished Revolution: A Hostage Crisis, Adivasi Resistance and the Naxal Movement*, Pan Macmillan, India: Delhi, 2017, p. 212

²⁰ Santosh Rana, “Gopiballavpur-e Fasal Katar Obhyuthhan, 1969” in Santosh Rana, *Samaj Sreni Rajniti* [Society, Class, Politics], Camp: Kolkata, 2006, p. 132

²¹ Tarunde Bhattacharya, *Medinipur*, Firma KLM Ltd.: Kolkata, 1979, p. 48

²² Tudu, p. 262

²³ Tudu, p. 263.

²⁴ TOI, 24 October 1969.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 137

²⁶ Tudu, p. 264

²⁷ Tudu, pp. 268-269

²⁸ Samaddar, interview in *Anustup*

²⁹ Tudu, p. 268

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Samaddar’s interview, p. 462

³² TOI, 18/12/1970.

³³ The movement in 1956 initially began with the demand for “skilled artisan” status for 112 brush – hand painters who worked in workshop no. 36.

³⁴ The railway strike has been extensively studied by Ranabir Samaddar. See Ranabir Samaddar, *The Crisis of 1974: Railway Strike and the Rank and File*, Primus: New Delhi, 2016

³⁵ In this strike total number of suspension (including temporary) was 63, 796. *Medinipur Nana Chokhe*, p.168.

³⁶ Ranabir Samaddar, “Fifty Years After Naxalbari, Popular Movements Still Have Lessons to learn”, *The Wire*, 6/3/2017

³⁷ The *jotedars* are generally identified as a class of “wealthy peasants” in agrarian Bengal. This social stratum, which gained prominence during the colonial rule, owned relatively extensive tracts of land. Though many *jotedars* were upper-caste *bhadralok*, whose land-tenure status mostly stood in advantageous contrast to those of under-ryots and bargadars/ sharecroppers (who were landless or land-poor), they adopted the *de jure* status of ryot (peasant) solely for the financial benefits that the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885 afforded to ryots. Though there is some controversy regarding the extent of the influence of this class, the exploitative nature of this class, where it existed, is seldom refuted. Cf. Ratnalekha & Rajat Kanta Ray, “Zamindars and Jotedars: A Study in Rural Politics in Bengal”, *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 9, 1, 1975, pp. 81–102 and “The Dynamics of Continuum in Rural Bengal under the British Imperium”, *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 10, 2, 1973, pp. 103–128; for a qualification of their thesis, see: Sugata Bose, *Peasant Labour and Colonial Capital: Rural Bengal since 1770* (The New Cambridge History of India, Vol III.2), Cambridge: CUP, 1993; Nariaki Nakazato, *Agrarian System in Eastern Bengal, c. 1870-1914*, Calcutta: KP Bagchi, 1994; Chitta Panda, *The Decline of Bengal Zamindars: Midnapore 1870-1920*, New Delhi: OUP, 1996

³⁸ The demand of the *tebbaga* (sharing by thirds) rights to harvest was to reduce the landlord’s share from the existing half to one-third of the harvest. Asok Majumdar, *The Tebbaga Movement: Politics of Peasant Protest in Bengal 1946-1950*, Delhi: Aakar Books, 2011, p. 13

³⁹ Muhammad Selim, *Sangramee Birbhum* [Militant Birbhum], Siuri, Birbhum: Dhusharmati Prakashana, 2005, pp. 21-27

⁴⁰ Atig Ghosh attended the one that was observed at Damra on June 25, 2017.

⁴¹ For short biographies of the people mentioned here (and afterwards), see Arun Chowdhury, *Birbhum Jelar Communist Andolan: Gathan o Byaktitta* [The Communist Movement of Birbhum District: Organisation and

Personalities], Kolkata: national Book Agency Pvt. Ltd., 2014; also useful is Bharat Jyoti Roychowdhury, *Satchallish theke Sottar ebang Age Pare* [From 1947 to 1970 and before and after], Kolkata: Punashcha, 2011

⁴² First published as an editorial in *People's Daily*, organ of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on 5 July 1967. It was reproduced in *Liberation*, Vol. I, No. 1, November 1967; see the opening paragraph.

⁴³ Sumanta Banerjee, "Introduction" to *In the Wake of Naxalbari: Four Decades of a Simmering Revolution*, Kolkata, Sahitya Samsad, 2008 (first published 1980), p. viii

⁴⁴ Ranabir Samaddar, in conversation with Atig Ghosh: "*Bakira jakhon hNapiye porbhe, takhon jhNapiye porlo Birbhum*". Sailen Mishra too made the same statement.

⁴⁵ See, for example, Rabindra Ray, *The Naxalites and their Ideology*, New Delhi: OUP, 1992 (first published 1988)

⁴⁶ See Charu Mazumdar's historic *Eight Documents*, promulgated between January 28, 1965 (*First Document*) and c. 1966 (*Eighth Document*); see, in particular, the *Third Document*: "What is the Source of the Spontaneous Revolutionary Outburst in India?" (April 9, 1965); all accessible at *People's March*, Historic Documents—Charu Mazumdar, <https://ajadhind.wordpress.com/historic-documents-charu-mazumdar/> As Souren Bose has observed, "Charu Mazumdar had drafted his political thinking distinctly and as a continuous journey through the Second to the Fifth Document. These documents did bring forward definite political and organizational programs, which served as the pivot for the Naxalbari peasant struggle as well as the formation of the CPI (ML)." Souren Bose, *Charu Mazumdarer Katha*, Calcutta: People's Book Society, 1989, p. 86

⁴⁷ Bappaditya Paul, *The First Naxal: An Authorized Biography of Kanu Sanyal*, New Delhi: Sage, 2014. Sample, for example, the following statement of Sanyal made in his biography: "Truly speaking, the series of actions throughout 1954-55 had laid the actual foundation for the landmark Naxalbari uprising of 1967." And again, while looking back at the 1960s, Sanyal seems to attach more importance to the peasant movement of 1959 than that of Naxalbari: "In fact, in my opinion, 1959 had more potentials than 1967 when the Naxalbari movement actually broke out."

⁴⁸ Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852) reprinted in *Karl Marx: A Reader*, edited by Jon Elster, Cambridge: CUP, 1986 (rpt. 1999), p. 277

⁴⁹ From Bertolt Brecht, "All of Us or None" (From *Svenborger Gedichte*), trans. Hoffman Reynolds Hays, in *Poetry: A Magazine in Verse*, Vol. LXVII, No. III, December 1945, p. 140

⁵⁰ Jugantar and Anushilan Samiti were two related organizations active in colonial Bengal in the early twentieth century, which in the guise of suburban and urban fitness clubs, propounded revolutionary violence as the means for ending British rule in India. For a synoptic outline of revolutionary activity in British Bengal, see: Peter Heehs, "Revolutionary Terrorism in British Bengal", in Elleke Boehmer & Stephen Morton, eds., *Terror and the Postcolonial*, Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010

⁵¹ Muhammad Selim, *Sangramee Birbhum*; for a longer history, see Durga Banerjee, *Swadhinata, Samajtantra o Ganatantrer Sangramee Birbhum* [Birbhum in the Struggle for Independence, Socialism and Democracy], published by Tanushree Banerjee, Sainthia, Birbhum, 1999

⁵² *Birbhum Barta*, 4 Baishakh, 1344 (Bengali calendar); Archives of the Department of History, Visva-Bharati

⁵³ Anil Biswas, ed., *Banglar Communist Andolan: Dalil o Prasangkeik Tathya* [The Communist Movement in Bengal: Records and Relevant Facts], Volume 4, Calcutta: National Book Agency, 2002, p.231

⁵⁴ District Intelligence Bureau Office (DIBO), File No. 55/1937

⁵⁵ Cited in Arun Chowdhury & Ashok Bandyopadhyay, eds., *Jibaner Sangramee Comrade Abdul Halim* [Comrade Halim and his Revolutionary Life]

⁵⁶ See, Durga Banerjee, *Swadhinata, Samajtantra*, pp. 34-35; also, Anil Biswas, ed., *Banglar Communist Andolan, Vol. 4, p. 232*

⁵⁷ DIBO, File No. 55/1937

⁵⁸ Muhammad Selim, *Sangramee Birbhum*, p. 20

⁵⁹ Thana: police station

⁶⁰ Muhammad Selim, *Sangramee Birbhum*, p. 31-32

⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 32

- ⁶² Sibaji Pratim Basu, “The Chronicle of a Forgotten Movement: 1959 Food Movement Revisited”, pp. 9-11 (accessible at <http://www.mcrg.ac.in/PP56.pdf>)
- ⁶³ Dai Chaowu, “From ‘Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai’ to ‘International Class Struggle’ against Nehru: China’s India Policy and the Frontier Dispute, 1950-62” in Amit R. Dasgupta & Lorenz M. Lüthi, eds., *The Sino-Indian War of 1962: New Perspectives*, Oxford & New York: Routledge, 2017
- ⁶⁴ Subho Basu, “Manufacturing Radicals: the Sino-Indian War and the Repression of Communists in India” in Amit R. Dasgupta & Lorenz M. Lüthi, eds., *The Sino-Indian War of 1962*
- ⁶⁵ Pradip Basu, *Towards Naxalbari (1953-67): An Account of Inner-Party Ideological Struggle*, Calcutta: Progressive Publishers, 2000, pp. 51-54; also see, Lorenz M. Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World*, Princeton: Princeton UP, 2010
- ⁶⁶ Incidentally, Pradyot Roychowdhury was also the father of Bharat Jyoti Roychowdhury, Naxal leader of Birbhum in the 1960s-70s and the author of the memoir, *Satchallish theke Sottar*. The account of the development of the students’ movement in Birbhum is taken from this book (Bharat Jyoti Roychowdhury, *Satchallish theke Sottar*, pp. 441-8), unless otherwise indicated.
- ⁶⁷ Anil Biswas, ed., *Banglar Communist Andolan, Vol. 4*, p. 251
- ⁶⁸ Murari Mohan Saha, ed., *Documents of the Revolutionary Socialist Party: Volume One 1938–1947*, Agartala: Lokayata Chetana Bikash Society, 2001, pp. 37, 52
- ⁶⁹ Dante Alighieri, Canto XXXIV of Vol. I “Inferno”, *The Divine Comedy*, translated by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1867, p. 112
- ⁷⁰ For an account of this movement see, Sibaji Pratim Basu & Geetisha Dasgupta, eds., *Politics in Hunger-Regime: Essays on the Right to Food in West Bengal*, Kolkata: frontpage, 2011
- ⁷¹ Bharat Jyoti Roychowdhury, *Satchallish theke Sottar*, pp. 387-394; Also see, Anil Acharya, ed., *Sattar Dashak*, Vol. III, *Sbaat-Shattarer Chhatra Andolan* [The 1970s, Vol. III, Students’ Movement in the 60s & 70s], Anustup: Kolkata, 2012 (expanded third edition), particularly the chapters by Asim Chattopadhyay, Saibal Mitra and Ranabir Samaddar
- ⁷² Vladimir Mayakovsky, “Our March” (composed in 1917) in *Poems*, translated by Dorian Rottenberg, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972
- ⁷³ Debal K. Singharoy, *Peasants’ Movements in Post-Colonial India: Dynamics of Mobilisation and Identity*, Sage: New Delhi, 2004, p. 84
- ⁷⁴ Khokon Majumdar, *Bharater Buke Basanter Bajranirgosh*, Narayan Chandra Roy: Siliguri, 2004
- ⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 30
- ⁷⁶ Sumanta Banerjee, *In the Wake of Naxalbari*, p. 21; also see, Arindam Sen, “The Movement-Party Dialectic: Tebhaga-Telangana to Naxalbari-CPI(ML)” in *EPW*, 52:21, 27 May 2017
- ⁷⁷ Debal K. Singharoy, *Peasants’ Movements*, p. 84
- ⁷⁸ Pradip Basu, *Towards Naxalbari (1953-67)*, pp. 51-54
- ⁷⁹ Bharat Jyoti Roychowdhury, *Satchallish theke Sottar*, p. 440
- ⁸⁰ Sailen Mishra, *Naxal Andolan: Manusher Bhumika*, Gangchil: Kolkata, 2017, pp. 16-17
- ⁸¹ Bharat Jyoti Roychowdhury, *Satchallish theke Sottar*, p. 440
- ⁸² *Ibid*, p. 38
- ⁸³ *Ibid*, *in passim*
- ⁸⁴ Pradip Basu, *Towards Naxalbari (1953-67)*, p. 7; also, Arun Srivastava, *Maoism in India*, Prabhat Prakashan: New Delhi, 2015, p. 80
- ⁸⁵ The following account has been taken from Bappaditya Paul, *The First Naxal*, pp. 133-64; Arun Mukherjee, *Maoist “Spring Thunder”: The Naxalite Movement, 1967-1972*, KP Bagchi & Co.: Kolkata, 2007; and Mallarika Sinha Roy, *Gender and Radical Politics in India: Magic Moments of Naxalbari (1967-1975)*, Routledge: London, 2011, unless indicated otherwise.
- ⁸⁶ Bappaditya Paul, *The First Naxal*, pp. 142-43
- ⁸⁷ For an account of the Party Congress, May 1970, see Ajmer Sidhu, *From Ghadar to Naxalbari: Babu Bujha Singh, An Untold Story*, Tarkbharti Parkashan: Barnala, 2013, p. 158

⁸⁸ Sailen Mishra, *Naxal Andolan*, p. 17

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Sumanta Banerjee, “‘Annihilation of Class Enemies’: CPI(M-L) Tactics at Critical Point”, *EPW*, 5:35, Aug. 29, 1970, pp. 1449-1452

⁹¹ Jagadish Chandra Johari, *Naxalite Politics in India*, Institute of Constitutional and Parliamentary Studies: New Delhi, 1972, p. 76

⁹² Manoranjan Mohanty, *Revolutionary Violence: A Study of the Maoist Movement in India*, Sterling: 1977, p. 121. Initially, Singh supported Mazumdar’s “line” of annihilation of class enemies and implemented it to some extent in Musahari and other areas of Bihar. By 1970, however, he had changed his opinion. See, Biplab Dasgupta, *The Naxalite Movement*, Allied Publishers: New Delhi, 1974, p. 153

⁹³ For a fuller discussion, see Biplab Dasgupta, “Naxalite Armed Struggles and the Annihilation Campaign in Rural Areas”, *EPW*, 8:4/6, Feb 1973, pp. 173-188

⁹⁴ Bharat Jyoti Roychowdhury, *Satchallish theke Sottar*, pp. 592-601, 663-677

⁹⁵ The following songs have been taken from Sailen Mishra, *Naxal Andolan*, p. 19; the inadequate translations are by Atig Ghosh

⁹⁶ E.N. Rammohan, “Rise of Naxalism, Its Implication for National Security and the Way Forward”, in V.R. Raghavan, ed., *The Naxal Threat: Causes, State responses and Consequences*, Vij Books India Pvt. Ltd.: New Delhi, 2011, p. 102; also, Anup Kumar Pahari, “Unequal Rebellions: the Continuum of ‘People’s War’ in Nepal and India”, in Mahendra Lawoti, & Anup Kumar Pahari, eds., *The Maoist Insurgency in Nepal: Revolution in the Twenty-first Century*, Routledge: London, 2010, p. 208

⁹⁷ Bharat Jyoti Roychowdhury, *Satchallish theke Sottar*, p. 616

⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 614

⁹⁹ Siddhartha Shankar Ray’s role in orchestrating counterinsurgency in Birbhum is discussed in the section “Counterinsurgency in Birbhum” in the statist account provided in Sumit Ganguly & David P. Fidler, eds., *India and Counterinsurgency: Lessons Learned*, Routledge: London & New York, 2009

¹⁰⁰ From “Counterinsurgency in Birbhum” in Sumit Ganguly & David P. Fidler, eds., *India and Counterinsurgency: Lessons Learned*, Routledge: London & New York, 2009

¹⁰¹ Bharat Jyoti Roychowdhury, *Satchallish theke Sottar*, p. 639

¹⁰² “No matter how much it burned, it was never consumed by the flames.”

¹⁰³ “Land belongs to the tiller”. Asok Majumdar, *Peasant Protest in Indian Politics: Tebhaga Movement in West Bengal*, NIB Publishers: New Delhi, 1993, p. 225.

¹⁰⁴ The United Front formed the government in West Bengal in 1967, dislodging the Congress for the first time in the history of the state. Jyoti Basu of the CPI(M) became the Deputy Chief Minister. Along with the CPI(M), most other Left parties were a part of the Front: CPI, RSP, Forward Bloc, SUCI, etc. See, M.V.S. Koteswara Rao, *Communist Parties and United Front: Experience in Kerala and West Bengal*, Prajasakti Book House: Hyderabad, 2003, pp. 229, 236

¹⁰⁵ “Statistical Reports of Assembly Elections,” *General Election Results and Statistics, Election Commission of India*; West Bengal Assembly Election results in 1957;

<http://www.elections.in/west-bengal/assembly-constituencies/1957-election-results.html>

[last accessed 2 November 2017]

¹⁰⁶ Vladimir Lenin, “The Dual Power”, *Pravda*, No. 28, April 9, 1917, reprinted in *Lenin Collected Works*, Vol. 24, Progress Publishers: Moscow, 1964, pp. 38-40 (All emphases in the original.) Also see, V. Lenin, “The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution”, first published September 1917 as a pamphlet by Priboi Publishers (signed: N. Lenin), reprinted in *Lenin Collected Works*, Vol. 24, Progress Publishers: Moscow, 1964, pp. 55-92

¹⁰⁷ See Note 101

¹⁰⁸ Bharat Jyoti Roychowdhury, *Satchallish theke Sottar*, pp. 679-680

¹⁰⁹ *District Census Handbook: Birbhum (Village & Town Directory)*, West Bengal, Series-20, Part XII-A, Directorate of Census Operations, West Bengal, 2011, pp. 48-63

¹¹⁰ Bharat Jyoti Roychowdhury, *Satchallish theke Sottar*, pp. 681-82

¹¹¹ Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *Ulysses* (1833), line 65

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