

## *Bengali Little magazines, Left Politics and Popular Movements in West Bengal*

Raghab Bandyopadhyay

Little magazines have been in existence now for over a hundred years. There was not much time difference between publishing of little magazines in the West and in India. It is generally assumed that 'Sobuj Patra' was the first Bengali little magazine in which Rabindranath Tagore started to write in colloquial style. It was stated in Sobuj Patra that the work published in the same would defy the existing trend and encourage new forms of literary creativity; this was apparently the broad theme of little magazines.

Parichay in its early days did not have much political approach in its functioning, however when CPI took over its reign it reemerged with a specific political character. In the mid 1970s, there was a surge in the number of little magazines which were sympathetic to the Naxalbari Movement despite the movement's waning influence; several of the comrades were already dead and a large number of them were under jail custody. The 'Emergency' imposed around similar time frame also proved to be an impetus to the publication of Little magazine. An inherent character of the little magazine was the ingredient of protests and despite the limitation of criticisms within a political patronage, little magazine successfully carried on the batons of alternative ideas and dissent. A funny thing about little magazine is the perceived notions that it will run on loss but not profit, it will not be published years after years and after functioning for some days it will cease to exist. Then again a new initiative will be taken by the editor or other associated members to start a new little magazine and the cycle go on like this. Despite such challenges some of the little magazines of that era took up responsibility of 'revolution' besides the task of publishing little magazine. The impediments actually gave rise to a desperate rebellious sentiment which was expressed through the writings exhibiting critical thinking. Not many little magazines had a longstanding influence, however there are few worth mentioning. *Koshtipathor* was one such little magazine in which Marxian discourse was discussed wherein an attempt was made to understand the Indian state through a Marxian lens; debates were centered around such writings. For example those who considered India as a capitalist state argued in favour of socialist revolution wherein power will be attained by the collective leadership of the proletariat. As the debates were published in some of the magazines, these became important modes of gaining knowledge for activists and other interested categories of readers including part members/cadres

RB: The writings of the little magazines which were Left leaning had an inherent problem, about which lot of debates had already occurred before the 1970s. This happened when Parichay was functioning. I witnessed in the writings of the 1970s in the name of progressive literature, there used to be stereotype element within it i.e. that the conclusion of the story was always positive in nature. A major challenge of this kind of literature is that the aspirations of the writers didn't often match with that of the common people, thus it took a certain kind of perseverance to express that kind of aspirations.

As Sandeep had said, that in 'Sanmukh' magazine a novel titled 'Communist' was published over several issues; however whether this kind of writing falls under the category of 'novel' is something I ponder about. There is no doubt in the 70s the Naxalite movement in and around Kolkata comprised of the

lower strata of the society which included labourers, lower middle class and middle class to an extent. There were several labour movements at that particular time which were involved in the broader Naxalite movement as well. While writing what I kept in mind is that the political dialogue, politics and political activities and intermingling different stratas in a collective manner gave rise to a new form of language in which we used to converse. As the time in that period was fast paced and swiftly shifted, the sentences of the novel were short in nature, which in turn gave pace to the language. This new form was criticized in the Left regime as the regular readers of novels were not acquainted with it. Keeping this aspect apart, what I used to expect from a writer that s(he) will think independently and it won't emulate any existing literature. In several stories I have come across that the main content is more or less similar with minor changes in the time, location and objects within it. This practice symbolized a kind of formula of manufacturing literature. While this is a workable formula as it's predicated on pre conceived ideology, however I expect that a story-novel would be thought provoking. Challenge lies in translating the empirical findings of the articles into the story and novels; I had expressed this concern with Sandeep during the prolonged conversational sessions in Coffee House. Hoards of new writers write in the numerous magazines, but there lies a gaping commonality in their writing especially with regards to the theme of fulfilling aspirations of liberation. Some of the writings focused on the despairs of the comrades in the post-movement era which evoked a sense of sympathy within the people. Though some of the writings were appreciated, they are not to be found in the sphere of literary world today. This trend continued till the early 80s. My observation is that the manner in which political thoughts and philosophical discussions were focused in the little magazines, similar attention was not given to literature. After the tumultuous period of the Naxalite Movement there was a reorientation the functioning of the little magazine, more focus was given to environmental issues, gender issues; however the collective theme was little magazine will always be anti establishment.

Several writers who used to write in Desh magazine were dubbed as brokers of reactionaries; this was major blunder from the camp of little magazine as they were excluding writers who had expressed creative anti establishment sentiments in their writings with considerable credibility. For the sake of a collective voice these people didn't allow space for diverse opinions which was self defeating in nature. This trend once again creates a formula which gives rise to some writers, but I don't think they have any meaningful contribution to literature. The space outside little magazine today is not at all conducive for producing literature. In the era of market capital intensive period, a pre conceived condition is that the writings ought to be *Jonomonoranjak*, which is not similar to popular (*jonopriyo*). These kind of writings are not thought provoking, they don't make the readers uncomfortable. Currently the multiple avenues of entertainment has transformed the readers into viewers. Therefore the readers of both journal articles and literatures have decreased considerably.

It is understandable that the writers would be aiming to be write in such a manner that its *jonomonoranjak*. There have been many writers who have been working at newspapers and writing simultaneously; now to sustain by only writing literatures in Bengal is next to impossible. Therefore from my perspective little magazine is the only sphere where the new writers can find a space for literature wherein they can posit though provoking questions and contestations alike.

Like any other Naxalite Movement also waned out after a certain period. However it left an indelible mark in the public psyche. Let me cite 2 achievements of the movement – it reminded us of the rural India which was forgotten by the administration and the state, unless weapon was taken up the establishment wouldn't have taken notice of the plights of the subaltern class; the panchayati system was reaction from the state at a central level aimed to level the inequality. Even the MGNREGA has a faint influence of the Naxalite movement.

Following the influence of Mahasweta Devi several young civil servants posted in the rural frontiers started writing about the rural society where the main theme was oppression under the aegis of a landlord; this landlord used to appear in most of the stories in different forms. There were few exceptions like Abhijit Sen's 'Parbokhetro'. The commercialization of the magazines have now resulted in decrease of the village centric issues, it has majorly shifted to urban centric issues. Now that we are more liberal, we directly refer to the body parts which have given rise to a new trend of writings wherein the urban readers can find themselves.