

Paper: "Popular Movements in the Districts of Bengal, Birbhum, Nadia and Midnapore, 1950s-1970s."

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Expert: Kumar Rana, Project Director, Pratichi Trust

Kumar Rana began with the statement that the task of looking into the nature and progress of popular movements in the districts of West Bengal is important particularly because it is an under worked area. Rana pointed out that an important framing question would be, what happened to these movements when they moved to the districts? Another pertinent question is that as many movements began in the districts, how were they shaped or changed as they moved to Calcutta or other parts of Bengal? Thus, in other words, how and to what extent a locality shaped the particular characters of a movement is an important aspect that needs to be looked into and this in turn will require an indepth study of the history of a particular district. Kumar Rana particularly pushed the authors to engage with the caste question while looking into left politics in various districts. The city based Communist leaders had been upper caste Hindu bhadraloks but in Midnapore or Birbhum, those who were killed or those that participated in the Naxal movement were from Dalit and scheduled tribe background. Therefore, their equation with city bred leaders; how they appropriated the movements and their modes of protest in colonial and postcolonial times are important issues that need to be taken into account. Rana also highlighted the significance of gender in any analysis of popular movements. In the final instance, Kumar Rana suggested that creative literature can be a valuable source in understanding the contemporary left politics of various districts and though Mahasweta Devi's writings are important, the writings of authors like Nalini Bera and Madhup De would be more relevant as they are from the districts that are being studied.