

**POLICIES AND
PRACTICES**

81

People, Politics & Protests - II

Bengal and Bihar



December 2016



Policies and Practices 81

December 2016

Published by:
Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group
GC-45, Sector-III, First Floor
Salt Lake City
Kolkata-700106
India
Web: <http://www.mcrg.ac.in>

ISSN 2348 0297

Printed by:
Graphic Image
New Market, New Complex, West Block
2nd Floor, Room No. 115, Kolkata-87

*Gefördert durch die Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung e.V. aus Mitteln des Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland.
Sponsored by the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation eV with funds of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of the Federal Republic of Germany.*

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People, Politics and Protests II
Bengal and Bihar

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2016

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The Defining Moments of Left-Popular Politics in West Bengal: The Food Movements of 1959 & 1966

Sibaji Pratim Basu *

Situating the Movements

India won freedom and was partitioned in 1947. Pakistan, the new state, emerged on the western and the eastern parts of erstwhile British India, resulting in a mass exodus – the largest in the history, according to United Nation High Commission for Refugees, especially with the division of erstwhile British Indian provinces of Punjab and Bengal. Although the Indian state of Punjab could somehow tackle the ‘burden of refugees’ through a so-called ‘land-man exchange’, the new – territorially truncated after partition – Indian state of West Bengal had to provide shelter to millions of partition-refugees. Thus, the infant state of West Bengal began its journey as a crippled toddler crowned with problems.

The pressure of millions of refugees, food shortages (as many of the fertile rice producing districts went to East Pakistan) and industrial decline (owing to lack of supply of raw materials for jute, paper and leather industries) put post-independence West Bengal in a severe crisis, which the Dr. B.C. Roy led Congress government in the state, despite several efforts, could only solve partially, leaving a wide space for the oppositional politics, which the left parties – dominated by the Communist Party of India (CPI) first, then by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or the CPIM, after CPI’s split, occupied fast.

The CPI/CPIM, along with other left and centrist parties, soon began to mobilise people against the government on a host of diverse issues like refugee rehabilitation, increase in teachers’ pay and allowances, anti-tram fare hike, food crisis and so on. Although, the movements were primarily organised and led by the left parties (in some cases by some centrist parties), in most of the cases, they drew a huge popular/mass spontaneous participation beyond the party control and often crossed the party line, giving these movements a new ‘left-popular’ dimension that left an indelible mark on the state politics of West Bengal. The left leadership also sought to uphold the ‘popular’/‘mass’ character of such movements. Thus, many issue-based mass organisations were formed (of course, at the behest of the left parties, mainly the CPI) to lead the movements. For example, the United Central Refugee Council (UCRC) acted as the frontal mass organisation of the CPI, and then CPIM for the partition refugees. Among these movements, the Food Movements of 1959 & 1966 have their own marks of distinction.

Historically, the food movements of 1959 and 1966 have their own unique existences. Yet, they can be seen as continuum, a legacy that started in the post-1943 – the post Great Bengal Famine

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Policies and Practices, Issue No. 81, December 2016

left movements and passed through the Tebhaga movement (which demanded two-third of crops to the tiller and one third to landowner) during the last years of the Raj, and the movements over the corrupt and inadequate Public Distribution System between 1956 and 1958. It continued through the first half of 1960s and reached its zenith in 1966, when, besides the old urban support base, it gradually engulfed the rural spaces and made it a state-wide affair.¹ Marcus Franda, the American scholar on the state politics in West Bengal, also held that the 1959 food movement had an impact on the internal debates with the CPI in West Bengal.² According to him, the militant campaign against the Congress state government was used by the leftist, anti-Congress sections (known as the ‘let-wing’) within the CPI to subdue those sections (popularly known as the ‘right-wing’) that sought tactical cooperation with Congress. But before going into details of these movements let us first settle scores with some theoretical issues about ‘popular’ movements.

Popular Movements: Some Theoretical Considerations

A distinguished feature of social/protest movements based on genuine (felt by a large number of people) grievances is that they create a relatively autonomous space for people’s action – sometimes peaceful but mostly violent – which cannot be fully controlled or ‘contained’ by any leader or organisation (no matter, how powerful they are). Even if they are initially organised vertically, soon a kind of horizontal movement in different directions are often seen, which can inspire initiatives of other movements on similar, or altogether different people’s issues. Even the instances of such movements of the distant past can inspire future spell of movements.

Taking cue from Deleuze/Guattari, we may describe these movements as ‘rhizomatic’.³ In their celebrated book, *A Thousand Plateaus*, the authors-duo introduce the term “rhizome” in such words:

A rhizome as subterranean stem is absolutely different from roots and radicles. ... The rhizome itself assumes very diverse forms, from ramified surface extension in all directions to concretion into bulbs and tubers.⁴

A rhizome has specific uniqueness yet connectivity. The authors further elaborate:

A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organisations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, science and social struggles.⁵

This kind of partly organised but vastly participated movements of radical nature (which often crossed the boundaries of ‘lawful’ movements) marked the first phase of left politics in West Bengal till they came to power in 1967. In another context, Charles Tilly has called this sort of protest movement based politics as ‘contentious politics’.⁶ After this phase, left politics itself got divided between the ‘official’ parties (who were in favour of ‘using’ parliamentary means to further the cause of revolution) and the ‘revolutionary’/Maoists (who believed in immediate peasant revolution on Maoist line).

The police and the administration often resorted to coercion and counter-attack to contain ‘anarchy and violence’, which often became a part of these movements, which again resulted in a number of deaths by firing and also by beating. The success of these movements was instant: a large number of common masses – the urban poor and the middle classes – joined them and the rate of violence and casualties was much higher than the pre-independent times. In these movements we find many features, which Tilly has associated with ‘social movements’, which according to him, first came into being in Europe in the 18th century and spread throughout the world through colonialism,

trade and migration.⁷ Tilly further distinguishes between three sorts of claims advanced by social movements

1. *Identity* claims declare that “we”—the claimants—constitute a unified force to be reckoned with. Such claims commonly include a name for “us,” such as “Cherokees,” “Diamond Cutters,” or “Citizens United against X.”
2. *Standing* claims assert ties and similarities to other political actors, for example as excluded minorities, established traders, properly constituted citizens’ groups, or loyal supporters of the regime.
3. *Program* claims involve stated support for or opposition to actual or proposed actions by the objects of movement claims. The relative salience of identity, standing, and program claims varies significantly among social movements, among claimants within movements, and among phases of movements.⁸

It may seem here that there is a disconnect between Tilly’s formulation, which sees a lot of ‘organisation’ in social movements, compared to the notion of the ‘rhizomatic’ which puts more value to ‘horizontal movements’ and spontaneity. However, the ‘truth’ about popular/mass movements lies somewhere between the exclusive positions of ‘organisation’ and spontaneity. Rather, they are dialectically connected. All popular movements, initially spontaneous in nature, develop some kind of ‘vertical’ leadership after a point (if they have to achieve some amount of success/impact), how little short lived that might be. By the same token, all genuine popular/mass movements enjoy an amount of ‘relative autonomy’ based on the spontaneous participation of the people (cutting across various classes and other social groups). They also possess, at least spiritually, to inspire other popular movements in different times and spaces. In cases of the food movements of 1959 and 1966, we have to bear this in mind.

The Background

Since inception, the Public Distribution System (PDS) had steadily declined in the ‘new’ state of West Bengal. However, the problem did not lie with West Bengal alone. If we go by the official statistics, from the early-1950s to the mid-1960s, we will find a huge *gap* between production and procurement of food-grains, which in turn also affected the PDS in a great way. For example, while the net food production in 1951 was 48.1 million tons throughout India, the government agencies could procure only 3.8 million tons and only 8.0 million tons of food grains could be distributed through the PDS. In 1955, the net production, procurement and distribution through PDS were 61.9, 1.3 and 1.6 (in million tons) respectively. In 1965 the figures on the above items had been: 78.2, 4.0 and 10.1.⁹ These differences between production, procurement and distribution only reveal the sorry state of PDS throughout India in mid-1950s and 1960s. The situation worsened in West Bengal in early 1959. In Kolkata and in some Southern Bengal districts, rice was sold between Rs. 28 and Rs. 30 per maund (1 maund=37.324 kg). Hoarding and black-marketing became rampant in the state, creating a near-famine like situation in rural Bengal.

In this backdrop, the PIFRC came into being in early 1959 with special initiative from the CPI. The left leaders took a twine policy in this regard. First, they brought the issue of food-scarcity inside the State Assembly and thereby, drew public and media attention. Secondly, as a strategy of organising anti-government mass movements, they formed various issue-based committees to draw popular support beyond party-line. However, in the Assembly House the left/opposition members also raised the debate over the scarcity to such a pitch that the government side seemed, at many times, almost stumbling and overwhelmed.

The 1959 Movement

Since the beginning of 1959, the government and the CPI-dominated opposition were at loggerheads over the crisis. The leftists and other opposition parties fought the battle at the twine levels: a) on the floor of the West Bengal Assembly as well as at the Indian Parliament in Delhi; b) at the level of mobilisation of the common masses through the PIFRC as well as the party machinery. In the West Bengal Assembly the leaders who led the frontal attack were Jyoti Basu, Somnath Lahiri, Hare Krishna Konar, Hemanta Ghosal, Chitto Basu, Subodh Banerjee and many others, including the then-Independent member, Siddhartha Shankar Ray (who later joined Congress and became the Chief Minister between 1972 and 77). Their main targets were the B.C. Roy Government and especially against its Food Minister, Prafulla Chandra Sen. At the Indian Parliament, MPs such as A.K. Gopalan, Tridib Chaudhuri, Renu Chakrabarty, Prabhat Kar, Md. Elias, Hiren Mukherjee severely criticised the state government and the food policy of the central government on several occasions.

Newspapers like *The Statesman*, *Hindusthan Standard*, *Amritabazar Patrika*, *Jugantar*, *Basumati*, *Ananda Bazar Patrika* and party mouthpieces like *Swadhinata* regularly published the news about the food scarcity, malfunctioning of the PDS, political initiatives of the opposition – within and outside the Assembly and government’s responses throughout 1959. For example, *The Statesman*, in its issue of 3 January reported about a heated debate between the opposition and the government sides in the State legislative Assembly with a heading: ‘Angry Exchanges in the Assembly’.¹⁰ *Hindustan Standard*, another English Newspaper from Calcutta/Kolkata in its editorial of 6 February, questioned the government’s food policy with sarcasm: “Starvation is not as swift as the agent of death as ‘Botulinus’ [a soil bacterium].”¹¹ On the very next day (i.e. 7 February) the Editorial of the same newspaper expressed its concern over the manner the ‘gulf’ between the government and the people was widening in the state, not only in case of food but in other areas also.

Towards August-September 1959

However, despite government’s promises food grains, especially rice went more scarce every day. Black-marketeering and hoarding of rice by a section of businessmen became order of the day. Long queues before the ration shops for hours became common features in Kolkata and district towns. In such a situation, the Union Food Minister, A.P. Jain visited Kolkata on 26 April on a fact-finding mission. He met the CM at his residence and later told the reporters that ‘food situation’ in West Bengal was: ‘easy, smooth and comfortable’.¹² Public outcry throughout the state began to mount since May-June.

The CPI and the frontal mass organisation PIFRC took the leadership of organisation and campaign. Hemanta Basu, Jyoti Basu, Amar Basu, Makhan Pal, Niranjan Sengupta, Nihar Mukherjee and others, in a jointly-signed petition of 6 July declared, on behalf of the PIFRC, their mission to mobilise 50,000 volunteers for making the administration ineffective and organising a two/three-day long continuous general strike throughout the state in August.¹³ On 9th July, *Swadhinata*, the CPI organ, gave the clarion call in its editorial:

There is no other way. Hence the struggle! ... People of West Bengal know quite well that the Congress Government and its food policy are responsible for their destitute condition. They also know that only by hitting hard, time and again, they could be forced to do at least something... Hence the struggle and its preparation.¹⁴

On the part of the regime, the CM along with Dr. P.C. Ghosh of the PSP issued a joint statement on 6 August, warning of stringent action against any anti-government agitation. Despite such warnings the movement seemed to multiply itself every day. About 6400 protestors were put behind bars, including left leaders and MLAs by the end of August.¹⁵ On 19 August, the PIFRC protestors squatted in front of the food Minister's residence, which was cordoned by the police and the area was put under the preventive section 144 of Cr. PC. The demonstrators left the place warning the authorities about the forthcoming rally convened by the PIFRC in Kolkata on 31 August.¹⁶

31 August – 5 September 1959: Kolkata & Howrah

Kolkata

Hundreds and thousands of men and women swept the streets of Kolkata (then Calcutta, in English) since the early-afternoon of 31st October 1959. They came from the rural districts of West Bengal as well as the semi-urban places around Kolkata and Howrah, braving heavy rains, to attend a rally at the Maidan (a large ground located at the heart of the city), near the Octerloney Monument – now known as the Shahid Minar. The rally spilled over into the Surendranath Park (formerly Curzon Park) and Rani Rashmoni Road.

Problem began when the people, forming a procession, proceeded towards the Writers' Buildings. They were stopped near the Government Place East, nearly half a kilometre from the Writers' Buildings. The entire area beyond that point was under section 144 Cr.Pc. which prevented any gathering of more than 4 persons as unlawful and punishable. This preventive provision is still operative in this part of Kolkata. When they were barred from moving further, the demonstrators led by left leaders like Mohit Maitra, Amar Basu, Chitta Basu and Makhan Pal squatted on the road, raising anti-government slogans.¹⁷ At about 7.20 pm, a small batch of fifty persons broke the police-cordon and courted arrest.

Trouble started when others also went to follow their example. At this point, the police resorted to lathi-charge (charging with long sticks) to disperse the masses. According to reports in *Amrita Bazar Patrika* (1 September): "Tear-gas squad soon went into action and fired 10 rounds. Demonstrators dispersed in different directions, leaving streets strewn with shoes, festoons, banners, food, tiffin-box, umbrellas and scores of injured people."¹⁸ The government's version of the story was predictably different. In a press-note, appeared on 1 September, it described the above incident from a different angle, defending its own action. It accused that after the first batch of persons courted arrest "suddenly, it appears, the whole crowd surged forward, while still others from amongst them started throwing brickbats, soda water bottles and crackers at the police".¹⁹ Thus, the government put blames on the protestors for provoking the police first, inviting a stern action.

Whatever be the cause of the police action, the result was the dispersed protestors (most of whom had virtually no idea about the geography of the city) began to move in frenzy at many directions. At this point many sympathisers of the movement also gathered around the Esplanade East and Government Place East and cheered the demonstrators. These people were soon chased by the police and dispersed. Trouble then spread to nearby streets of central Kolkata like Dharmatala Street, Central Avenue, Mission Row. Stone throwing began near Curzon Park and then spread quickly in other parts of the city. According to the above government press-note, people in small groups at many places "continued to throw brickbats, soda water bottles and crackers at passing

buses and even private vehicles”. “There was an attempt”, the press-note held, “at looting of a small shop and breaking glass panes of the other. An attempt was also made to tamper with the tram tracks. Some street lights were damaged.”²⁰

However, the number of the agitated/panicked people rose rapidly since many more people had also assembled in the Esplanade-Maidan area to cheer up the participants in the rally. Thus once the police resorted to lathi-charging, not only the rallyists, but their sympathising-spectators also got affected. They together with the rallyists ran helter-skelter to take refuge. Gradually, the ordinary people on road, innocent passers-by also got mingled with the police-public chase and the chaos that followed. Later, a section of city-lumpens might have utilised this anarchic situation.

As usual, the number of the wounded and the killed the official and the opposition/private estimates also varied. Although, no definite number of killed persons in the 31st's incidence had been claimed/given by the opposition in the Assembly, we come to know from the reports of the Bengali daily, *Jugantar* that ‘at least 400 persons were injured’ on that day.

The next day, i.e. on 1 September, Kolkata witnessed massive students’ protests, violence and massacre that swept the streets of the city. After the incidents of the 31st, many school and college students observed strike protesting the police action on that day. Many students assembled at the College Street campus of Calcutta University (located at central Kolkata).

Near the University, the police had to retreat for some time in the face of students’ violent resistance. It was reported that turbans and batons of the police were snatched from them and then set on fire.²¹ “This was followed by a procession towards Mr. B.C. Roy’s house”, reported *Amrita Bazar Patrika*.²² But the procession was stopped by the police by lathi-charging. “Clearly, peaceful demonstrators were given chase by the police, making students fall in confusion.”²³

In the Esplanade area, panic-stricken shop-owners immediately shut down their shops. At the Hogg Market (popular as New Market), according to reports, the authorities had to ‘prevent shopkeepers to allay panic’.²⁴ Three ambulance vans were also ‘set alight after dusk’. Harassment and manhandling of journalists, including two British women journalists were also reported. Violence and utter chaos gradually engulfed the length and breadth of the city as evening descended. From Kalighat in the south to Vivekananda Road in the north through the central Kolkata areas like Esplanade, Subodh Mullick Square, College Street and C.R. Avenue (popular as Central Avenue) the whole city had changed into a battleground.

Howrah

The scene of violent protest shifted its place to Howrah after an uneasy calm for a day. In the words of *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, ‘Storm centre shifted on Thursday (3 Sept.) from Calcutta to Howrah.’²⁵ The city of Howrah, on the opposite and western banks of river Hoogly (the local name of Ganga) was, and still is, the hub of many medium and small manufacturing industries, beside some big industries. Goods produced in this densely located medium and small industries were recognised as ‘quality’ articles both in other parts of India and also outside. This was perhaps the reason that Howrah was known as the ‘Sheffield of Bengal’. It was/is also the home of the vast working class people, most of who were badly hit by the food crisis in 1959.

The ‘rowdies’ took charge of many streets and roads in Howrah, according to newspaper reports. They gathered between Khurut Road and Bamangachi on the G.T. Road and started throwing stones on passing police cars. After 7.30 am, the police began to hit back with lathis and tear-gas, which continued till 10.30 am. Gradually, the local people, passers-by became involved in the incident. The mob set a traffic control post on fire near the south-western parts of Howrah

Maidan area. Being outnumbered the police took shelter in the Control Room. The police gradually gained their ground but was not successful in pushing the angry protestors. Barricades were erected with “logs, push carts, scavenging carts, brick, packing-boxes and even telephone poles” on the G.T. Road and other areas. It was also reported that although private cars were “interfered with [by agitators], but not cyclists”.²⁶ Later, ambulances were emptied to shift wounded agitators.

In this daylong violent agitation the police opened fire on the people on many occasions, killing at least 11 people and seriously causing wounds to at least 120 persons. 25 police persons were also injured. The mob chased some 20 policemen, who were passing along Narsing Dutt Road. Almost all of them fled, except one, who fell in the hands of the rioters, and later found dead, with his throat cut. By 4 pm, military troops were called in to control the situation because by afternoon the situation went out of control of the local police.

On the same day (3 September), trouble also spread in the industrial areas in the district of 24 Parganas, especially at Khardah and Behala. In Kolkata, youngsters and even children raised many road blockades. Cars and taxis were not seen on Kolkata roads till the evening. They along with local people roamed the streets challenging occasional vehicles. Train and bus services were stopped, schools, colleges and bazaars also remained closed. Areas like Shovabazar and Beadon Street in north Kolkata, Bhowanipore, Dhakuria and Khidderpore in the south were badly affected. Picketing, road blocks and attacks on the police in these areas continued. The police lathi-charged the protestors to dismantle road-blocks. They also opened fire at them on at least seven occasions, causing 3 deaths.²⁷

On the next day (4 September), Howrah occupied the centre stage again. The trouble began when the violent protestors had beaten two persons to death in the Bharat Jute Mills area. These persons, according to reports, rescued a patrolling sub-inspector of police from the hands of the violent agitators/“rowdies”. Later, a rumour did spread in the locality that two workers of Bharat Jute Mills (situated near Dasnagar), who supported the strike, were thrown alive into the factory furnace, causing their instant death. This made the crowd furious, which attacked the bustee (slum), where the two rescuers of the police lived, found and killed them, looted their bustee and burnt about 50 huts. The army put a ½ sq mile cordon to control the situation and nearly 500 people were rounded up by them. Later, army and police pickets were set up in the sensitive areas.

Life seemed to have come back to ‘normalcy’ in Kolkata on 4 September, after three consecutive days of unprecedented violence and almost-leaderless chaos since the independence. Despite some stray incidents of bombing, the city picked up its pace as ‘state and private transport operated normally’. By noon, tram and train services were fully normal. Howrah too, ‘had quietened down’ on the next day, i.e. 5 September. The victims of arson (on the 4th) near Bharat Jute Mills were sheltered in the premises of the jute mill itself.²⁸ The total number of the killed and injured persons, between 31 August and 4 September, varied as usual, according to official and the unofficial accounts. For instance, Jyoti Basu, Leader of the Opposition, along with other opposition MLAs claimed that ‘about 80 people’ were killed during this time, thousands were injured and many went on ‘missing’. While, according to official reports, the number of the killed and injured were 41 and about 300 respectively.²⁹ The PIFRC, on 6 September, in a meeting discussed the effects of the movement and the government’s response to it. It was proposed that the next phase (“Third Phase”) of the movement would begin soon with street corner meetings in different parts of the state, “to maintain public pressure on the Government for an impartial enquiry into police violence and providing compensation to families of killed and wounded”.³⁰

Afterwards: 1959

Three main kinds of assessment emerged in the discourse of civil society, media and political parties after the tumultuous 5-days of violence, counter-violence and uncertainty. The *first* kind was an *angry reaction against* the police action/government's handling of the situation. The *second* kind *blamed the left/organisers* of the movement for indulging in "lawless anarchy", which resulted in loss of life and property, and saw the "communist conspiracy" in it. The *third* kind preferred a *middle-road of assessment*, while criticising the government's food policy and also its handling of the situation, it also criticised the left leadership for having *no control* over the situation.³¹

In such a tense and charged atmosphere a host of opposition leaders like Jyoti Basu, Hare Krishna Konar, Subodh Banerjee, Jatin Chakrabarty, Chitto Basu, Golam Yazdani Siddhartha Shankar Ray, Labnya Prabha Ghosh, Amarendra Nath Basu, Haridas Mitra and many others took part in Assembly debates and fired volley after volley of criticism against the government. The police 'barbarism' against the food-agitators was compared with the Jalianwalabag massacre under the British rule. The opposition also moved a No-Confidence motion against the government, which was naturally defeated due to lack of adequate members. Even in Lok Sabha, the opposition members, on 4 September, raised their voice against the "brutal firing" in Kolkata, Howrah and other places. Members such as A.K. Gopalan, Tridib Chaudhuri, Renu Chakrabarty, Prabhat Kar, Md. Elias, Hiren Mukherjee criticised the state government in an animated debate. Even the Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru became involved in a haughty interaction with the opposition.

Beside the opposition, many members of the civil society, especially the eminent persons belonging to academia, also registered protests in strongest possible terms. Triguna Sen, Vice Chancellor, Jadavpur University; Prasanta Kumar Bose, Principal, Bangabasi College, Kolkata; a number of teachers of Ballygunj Science College of Calcutta University, Jadavpur University, Vidyasagar College, Surendranath College, City College; intellectuals like Atul Gupta, Tripurari Chakrabarty, Surendra Nath Sen and many others include in the list.³² Among the media, party organs like, *Swadhinata*, *Ganadabi*, *New Age* etc along with *Dainik Basumati* made frontal attack against the government. Many citizens also wrote letters to editors of various newspapers, expressing anger and criticism against the government for its handling of the situation.

Notably, the third viewpoint, which carried a great deal of sympathy for the movement held the 'antisocials' responsible for the 'suppression' of the movement and criticised the leadership for their lack of control over the courses of movement and observed that the leaders had virtually no control over the anarchic situation.

But, as we have argued, this has been the characteristic of almost all the 'social movements'. Social movements, as Tilly argues, often engage in 'contentious politics', which is the use of disruptive techniques to make a political point, or to change government policy.³³ According to him, examples of such techniques are actions that disturb the normal activities of society such as demonstrations, general strike action, riot, terrorism, civil disobedience, and even revolution or insurrection. Many of these techniques featured in the movement of 1959.

The 1966 Movement

1959 had a loud echo in 1966. However, if we compare, we will see that

- i) 1959 movement began with more preparations, organisation and campaign, although after the beginning many things went far behind the control of the leaders; whereas in 1966 it started

- more as a spontaneous mass action, the leaders/organisations rallied only after the first incident in Swarupnagar/Tentulia, Bashirhat (then 24 Pgs, now North 24 Pgs);
- ii) in '59, it started from Kolkata from the rally of 31st August, which was attended by people from districts, and the heat of the movement also spread from Kolkata; but '66 Movement started from districts and the heat reached Kolkata ['Bashirhat Shows the Way'] after the incident;
- iii) a large number of refugees, organised by the left-dominated UCRC (United Central Refugee Committee), participated in the 1959 Movement, in 1966, however, the distinction between the 'refugees' and the indigenous Bengali population had almost blurred – people, even from the districts with little refugee population, participated in large number;
- iv) students were especially involved in 1966.

Before 16 February

The 'second' food movement (1966) became more fierce than 1959's. At this phase, the 'epicentre' shifted from Kolkata to districts – involving a greater number of rural people than before and making the small towns and villages, the theatre of an exciting and gruesome drama. It was more spontaneous and popular than 1959. Although, the opposition parties – on the left and centre – soon jumped on to the scenes of occurrences to foster the spirit of solidarity with the agitating masses, used the 'parliamentary space' to embarrass and 'expose' the regime and to organise the protest under their folds, the movement bloomed and spread almost without any party command and initiative. The anti-tram-fare-hike movement of 1965 had already charged the spirit of the city protestors. The events of '66 ignited it throughout the state.

The steep rise in the price of rice and scarcity of kerosene (both distributed through the government controlled PDS) had been the primary cause behind the movement. The price of rice reached Rs. 5/ per kg that year. Kerosene, the main domestic fuel for the village people and the city-poor, and used largely by the students in districts, became more and more scarce. But what infuriated people the most was an 'advise' of the new Chief Minister, Prafulla Sen. Sen, who was the Food Minister under the B.C. Roy Ministry during the food movement of 1959, had become the CM after the demise of B.C. Roy. In view of growing scarcity of rice, he advised the people of state, in one of his speeches, to change their food habit. He suggested that people should shift in their traditional choice of food: from rice to wheat/flour. He also argued that they could also live on 'green-bananas' because it had more nutrition value than potatoes. These comments of Sen made the people angry and agitated as never before.

Interestingly, in many places, the authority had to face the wrath of both the common men and the hoarders/black marketeers, who were extremely unhappy by the government policy of 'cordonning', which did not allow businessmen to transport food grains, especially rice, beyond a restricted territory. In many cases, women from poor family background were employed by rice merchants as 'carriers' of rice from districts to cities. Sometimes, the women themselves operated as independent carriers. These women usually travelled (mostly without tickets) in the Ladies' compartment of local trains. Often clashes occurred between these women and police. *Dainik Basumati* reports (31 January) ³⁴ one such incident that happened in Hooghly district, in which a (male) member of the home-guard/civic police was severely attacked and beaten by a group of women, when he entered the compartment, reserved for 'Ladies' in the Sheroaphuli-Tarakeswar local passenger train, to confiscate rice from them. Allegedly the women also bite this man at several parts

of his body as he advanced to catch them! The guard of the train rescued the home-guard by stopping the train, after hearing his shouts for help.

According to *Dainik Basumati* (8 February)³⁵, such clashes between the police and the black marketeers of rice, on one hand, and between police and ordinary people, on the other, were taking place in districts like Jalpaiguri and Birbhum. It also reported about such a clash in a village of Midnapore district (3 February), in which one Sub Divisional Officer (SDO) and one Magistrate were manhandled by both the illegal exporters and the angry mob, when the authority detained a rice-loaded truck. First, the black marketers/illegal exporters had beaten up the SDO and the Magistrate, then, the mob also manhandled them, and finally, the mob looted the rice from the truck and fled away. Thus, 'people' from all quarters and places were growing impatient over the food policy and PDS of the state government.

Events between 16 February and 9 March

But the first ignition took place at Bashirhat and Swarupnagar in 24 pgs district. The police opened fire at Bashirhat injuring 6 agitators in a police-people clash in the middle of February. On the 16th, the police again fired on the agitators at Swarupnagar, killing a 15-year-old school-boy, Nurul Islam and severely injuring his schoolmate, Manindra Biswas during a demonstration against the scarcity of kerosene and the steep prices of essential commodities. The news spread like forest-fire. And unlike '59, this time the people from districts/villages did not assemble in Kolkata to meet their demands but they fought back the police and administration in their different localities. Towns and villages of the southern parts of the state like Bashirhat, Swarupnagar, Habra, Baduria Krishnanagar, Barrackpore, Ranaghat, Chakdah, Hindmotor, Uttarpara Assansol, Dhubulia, Plassey, Beldanga, Berhampur and many other places saw incessant processions, demonstrations, blockades of roads/railways, destruction of electric points of railways, closure of schools and clashes between the agitators and police, during the month-long movement, spanning between 16 February and 14 March.³⁶

Jyoti Basu, then the principal opposition leader, and later the longest serving Chief Minister under the Left Front (LF) government (1977-2001) reminisced about the stormy events after three decades, in 2009:

The food crisis had not abated. Cases of suicides and starvation deaths were pouring from the rural belt. The Congress government proved to be a total failure in taking measures to stem such tragedies. By this time though, the price rise and food crisis issues had fuelled the imagination of the entire country.³⁷

The rationing system had also broken down. It was apparent that unless the government changed its basic policies, there would be no solution... In the food movement of 1966, the police opened fire at Basirhat killing Nurul Islam while in Baduria, Ali Hafiz and Kalu Mondal were killed. Others who became martyrs were Sukhen Mukherjee in Behala, Bablu Das in Khardah, Ananda Hait in Krishnagar, Ranjan Dutta in Konnagar, Narayan Sadhukhan in Serampore, Rabin Pal in Rishra and S.P. Singh in Hind Motor. Many of these martyrs were either boys or youths.

In the first four months of 1966 – in the name of putting down the agitation on the release of political detenus and the food movement – the police killed more than 50 agitators. Apart from this, raids and searches in the houses of our supporters were the order of the day. People were brought to police outposts and subjected to major atrocities. There were no limits to the oppressive measures which the Congress regime launched on us those days. Even women and children were not spared. The attacks incidentally were not only confined to our supporters but the general public

too suffered a lot. But despite all this, the Congress rulers could not stop the wave of agitations let loose by the general public.³⁸

On the 18th, clashes between the police and people took place near Baduria Hat. Students from nearby institutions assembled there to mobilise support for observing strike against the incident of Swarupnagar. The atmosphere was vitiated when an angry mob saw nearly 40 maunds (1 maund = 37 kg approx) of rice stored on the veranda of nearby police station. The agitated people demanded immediate selling of the rice but the police acknowledged their inability. As a result, heated exchanges of words took place between the people and police; some among the crowd tried to take away the sacks of rice. Police fired blank shells to drive away the masses. The people ran and crossed the road, and began pelting of bricks and brickbats stored there for some construction work. Police fired 35 rounds of bullets, killing Ali Hafeez (36), a local trader and Kalu Mandal (40), a local mason; injuring Haridas Biswas, Gopal Mandal, Tulsi Goldar, Mrityunjay Mandal and Bipradas.³⁹

On the next day, i.e. 19 February, the district of 24 Parganas remained apparently 'peaceful', although, as a precautionary measure the state government issued an Order of Closure of all the educational institutions, between 21 and 26 February, in Calcutta/Kolkata, Burdwan and Presidency divisions. On the same day, Girish Chandra Mahato and Kandu Majhi, two MLAs of Lok Sebak Sangha (a Gandhian party influential in Purulia) were arrested in Purulia, when they reached Purulia from Kolkata in the morning of the 19th.⁴⁰

Like 1959, in 1966 too, the opposition (the 'left' and the 'right' CPI along with other left, centrist and even Gandhian parties, e.g. Lok Sebak Sangh) clashed with the state government and its CM, Prafulla Sen, on the issues of price rise and scarcity of rice and kerosene, and also on the issue of police atrocities and killings. The issues were raised both on the floor of the Assembly and outside, in districts. Several arrests were made, which ranged from rank and file to the top leadership. Often the spirit of street-fighting seemed to influence even the members of the Assembly – the 'temple of democracy'! The headline of one report (The Hindustan Standard of 23 February) tells us all: "Free For All in the Assembly Chambers – Broken Specs, a Bleeding Nose, Swollen Forehead".⁴¹

The report says: "Broken specs, a bleeding nose, a swollen forehead and a sprained wrist – these were the results of a 10-minute free-for-all in the West Bengal Assembly chamber on Tuesday, seconds after the Speaker adjourned the House for an hour and a half." It started when the opposition began protesting on the firings by the police and arrests of the opposition members. They protested over closure of Visitors' Gallery in the Assembly, and the Finance Minister's proposal to discuss the budget proposal (while several opposition members were absent due to arrest or threat of arrest). The fire was ignited when the Speaker allowed Sankar Das Banerjee of the Congress to move a privilege motion, since Banerjee sought permission beforehand.

"This infuriated the opposition members who rushed in a body towards the Speaker demanding the withdrawal of the permission.

And while a tug of war ensued the Congress workers for mace, the Speaker adjourned the House for three hours. Immediately a free fight started. A microphone was broken, files, papers and books including May's Parliamentary Practice were thrown at each other. One member was seen brandishing a table. Another table had a number standing on it. The fight lasted about 10 minutes, but might have continued but for the timely intervention by some senior members of both sides."⁴²

The second Food Movement left over 40 dead in five days and several thousands were badly injured. The political impact was tremendous. Senior Congress Minister, Ajoy Mukherjee resigned and formed Bangla Congress, which later joined the leftists to form the United Front in the elections of 1967. The CPI (M) and the newly formed Bangla Congress too called two separate Food

Conventions on 6 March in Kolkata. But neither of the parties could persuade the masses to call off the movement. Thus both the parties agreed to the peoples' demand and gave the call for a general strike for 24 hours on 10 March. But the spirit of popular spontaneity made the strike continue for another 24 hours.

From 9 March to 31st March: Battle between the Government and the Opposition

Although the movement came to a formal end with a long silent procession, starting from Subodh Mallick Square at central Kolkata to Deshapriya Park at south Kolkata on 14 March, 1966, the aftershock of the movement was felt throughout the March in the state. Gradually the spontaneity of the untrained masses was being overtaken by the conscious and calculated steps of the seasoned politicians.

Various dailies had chronicled the day by day developments till the end of March. According to these reports, a tense quiet prevailed in Calcutta and Suburbs on 9 March, before the General Strike.⁴³ The situation in Krishnanagar was improving as the day curfew was lifted there. For the first time since the imposition of the order, the bazars and the shops reopened on the day. But the night curfew still remained.

As the zero hour for the general strike approached, police round up of 'anti-social elements' sped up all over the state. By nightfall the total preventive arrests in Calcutta, Howrah, 24 Parganas and Nadia had crossed the 2000-mark, the break up being Calcutta - 600, 24 Parganas - 600, Howrah -327, Nadia - 113.

Kolkata and Suburbs

The movement took the shape of a situation comparable with guerrilla warfare in the serpentine lanes by-lanes of Kolkata and suburbs. In place of the clashes between the police and the protesters in the highways and the large open public space bands of youth organized themselves as small units in localities. The streets of Kolkata would witness this sort of "guerrilla warfare" and unwarranted police raids again after 3-4 years in the wake of Naxalbari movement.⁴⁴

Let us take a look of the situation from 9 March to 31 March, 1966. In Kolkata, Satyapriya Roy, MLC on his way from Legislative Assembly Building was arrested inside a taxi on the day. Other arrests on the day include the Forward Bloc leader Chitta Basu from Barasat and the Joint Secretary of PSP, Sujit Bannerjee from Calcutta, Sanat Chatterjee of Forward Bloc, detained in Presidency Jail was transferred to the Medical College Hospital for illness. A few untoward incidents were reported but those were of minor nature. In another incident, the residence of Calcutta Corporation Councillor in Vaishnabghata in Southern Suburbs was attacked by a mob in the evening. A few crackers were thrown but none was injured.

On the same day, an altercation between some passengers and employees of CSTC near the RG Kar Hospital resulted in a minor scuffle in the morning. As a result, buses could not run in the route for some time and a constable on duty had been beaten by the mob. The police complained that interference by some students from RG Kar medical college in a quarrel between a group of passengers and employees in the bus terminus started the trouble. They alleged that the students beat up the constable on duty, who had been pulled inside the hospital compound. But later he was given some first aid and released. The Principal however denied the whole thing. He said that the students did not intervene neither had they beaten up the constable.

The other incident was reported from College Street market area. A rumour spread that a bomb had exploded inside the garbage heap in the market. The police arrived on the spot and detained persons for a few hours for inquiry but the bomb could not be traced. There were also a few demonstrations and meetings at Barasat, Habra and Asoke Nagar in 24 Parganas. At Barasat demonstrators made a round of town protesting against the police firings. Chitta Basu and others were arrested on the day.

At Habra, the PSP and other left parties brought out demonstrations. In a statement issued on the day the local PSP has announced that it would squat before the Commerce and Industry Minister T K Ghose's house on March 18. The city otherwise had a normal appearance, though in the afternoon attendance in the offices thinned a bit as commuters left earlier for home on the day. City markets had a great rush in the afternoon for pre-hartal marketing. A large number of marriage parties arrived in the city on Wednesday afternoon apprehending communication difficulties today.

Trains in most of the suburban sections had a normal run. But in Sealdah- Bongaon, Sealdah- Ranaghat and Sealdah-Krishnanagar sections of Eastern Railway services were limited to 80 percent of capacity. A Railway spokesman informed that this was due to the dearth of the coaches. An unsuccessful bid was made to set fire to the wooden overbridge at Barrackpore station late in the evening. A group of persons set fire to Shyamnagore Station building. The fires were put out within few minutes by the station staff. Some arrests were made at Shyamnagore. An attempt to put a state bus on fire at Dakshineshwar was also foiled before any damage was done. A cracker was also reported to be hurled at a bus near Sodepur station. A fire broke out in a state bus at Howrah bus stand, a woman passenger sustained very minor injuries. The fire was promptly put down.

Government versus Opposition

On the 10th, the C M (P.C. Sen) went round the city, according to press news.⁴⁵ Later, he told newsmen that the Hartal (General Strike) was observed peacefully except for big and serious incidents at some places of Hooghly, at Khardah in 24 Parganas and at Asansol in Burdwan. There was huge loss and damage of Government property at various places. The CM further said that 25 buses in all plied on these special routes in Calcutta. The number of passengers, however, was very small. He alleged that the left communists were involved in the violent actions at Asansol, Konnagar, Rishra and Hind Motor. Here is an excerpt of his interview, appeared in *Hindustan Standard* on 11 March.

Q: Will the movement in rural areas stop with more supply of food?

Mr. Sen: I don't think so. Moreover, where can I get more food? Those who have resorted to violent measures are not participants in the food movement.

Q: Kerala had an increased supply of rice after the food movement there.

Mr. Sen: The people at Kerala don't take wheat at all. The Chief Minister said that 50 to 90 percent fair price shops were open on the day and people drew the weekly rations.⁴⁶

Mr. Sen also informed that he went round the city for about two hours in the morning. He drove through Chowringhee Road, Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose road, Burrabazar, Bentinck Street and went to Howrah Station. While passing through Bentinck Street, Mr. Sen found that some persons from the burning ghat asking a taxi to take them to South Calcutta. He got down from the car and requested the driver to go, but the "Sardarji" refused. (Here it must be added that the Sikhs in India are popularly called 'Sardarji's. For a long time till early 1970s, the majority of the cab drivers in

Kolkata were Sikhs). The Chief Minister waited there for some time and asked a passing police van to give those persons a lift to their destination. Mr. Sen said, "I did not disclose my identity."

On the 13th, The United Left Front, supported by Forward Bloc, the PSP and the Student's Action Committee had given a call to observe as Martyr's Day.⁴⁷ In Calcutta, a silent procession was taken out from Raja Subodh Mullick square after participants assemble there at 2:00 pm. The ULF had called upon all the people of the state to organize similar silent processions all over West Bengal. According to reporters, in view of the order under Section 144 Cr. PC now in force, the organizer approached Calcutta Police for necessary permission. But the permission was refused in consideration of present disturbed situation. The organizer's decision however stands.

On the other hand, referring to the projected 'silent procession' on the 13th, Mr. Guljarilal Nanda, Union Minister said: "We are worried about tomorrow. Knowing our earnestness for restoring normal conditions, it should be possible for the left leaders to postpone the procession."⁴⁸ When asked by a newsman, why the State Government could not permit the procession, the Union Minister did not give any reply nor did the Chief Minister, Mr. Sen, who was present at the conference.

A Forward Bloc spokesman said that at a Martyr's Column set up at five point Shyambazar crossing, wreaths would be placed on behalf of FB, SSP and PSP at 9:00 a.m. Besides CPI Left and CPI Right, other parties of the ULF, who had given the call for Martyr's Day, were Revolutionary Socialist Party, Socialist Unity Centre, Bolshevic Party, Revolutionary Communist Party of India, Communist Unity Centre, Samayukta Socialist Party and Forward Bloc Marxist.

On the 15th, the CM warned action against law breakers in the Assembly.⁴⁹ He told the state assembly that so long as the law and order situation did not return to normality, the Government would take action against law-breakers under the ordinary law or under Defence of India rules as the case might be. The Chief Minister said that the state has received a communication from the centre on the Defence of India rules. This was being considered by the state government. But there has been widespread lawlessness and disturbances in Calcutta as well as some districts. The Government was firmly resolved to see that lives and properties were not destroyed or disrupted.

However, West Bengal Congress MPs back Sen expressed full confidence in the Chief Minister.⁵⁰ The meeting was held, state Congress leader, Atulya Ghosh's residence. Mr. Asoke Sen moved the confidence which was seconded by Arun Chandra Guha. Mr. Nanda, Union Home Minister, and Subramaniam, Food Minister also attended the meeting on invitation and took part in the discussion in which the correspondence that has passed between the Chief Minister and the Opposition leader Mr. Jyoti Basu figured.

It appeared that intention of the MPs in adopting the resolution was to extend support to Sen's stand as explained in his point by point reply to the demand of the Leftists. Moving the resolution, Asoke Sen vigorously supported all the measures of the Chief Minister and said "we would always support him". Giving an assessment of the situation, Mr. Nanda said, that the destruction of property during the recent agitation in West Bengal was pre-planned. The Congress MPs hoped that resumption of talks between the Chief Minister and the left leaders would consolidate peace in the state.

Jyoti Basu's Initiative

On the 18th, Jyoti Basu arrived in Delhi. According to reports, Jyoti Basu, Left Communist leader, had suddenly arrived in Delhi in the evening mainly to meet the Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi.
⁵¹ He is staying with Mr. Bhupesh Gupta, the Right Communist leader who is trying for an

appointment for him with Mrs. Gandhi. Mr. Basu's intention was to discuss with the Prime Minister the questions relating to the functioning of his party and the release of its members, now in prison under the Defence of India Rules. For the reporters, Basu's arrival seemed to have hastened by the virtual failure of the Left leaders' talks this morning with the Chief Minister of West Bengal, Mr. P C Sen, on the demands of the United Left Front.

On the questions of Kerosene and increase in the amount of Ration in West Bengal, Mr. Basu had been requested by the state's Chief Minister to try to impress upon the Centre the need for augmenting the allotment of these commodities from the Central pool.

Mr. Sen was stated to have pleaded his inability to make any promise to increase the wheat content of the ration, without a guarantee from the Centre for additional supplies. So far as rice is concerned, West Bengal Chief Minister was understood to have indicated that there was little possibility

Mr. Basu had raised the demand for increased supplies of rice when he meets the Prime Minister. He also undoubtedly demanded the release of not only those arrested in connection with the recent agitation but also those held under the DIR since before the movement began.

Mr. Sen was stated to have told the ULF deputation that he could not agree to release people arrested for violent activities, including destruction of public property and attacks on Congress leaders' houses. However, the Leftists' contention that about 7,000 people have been arrested in connection with the movement was disputed by Mr. Sen. His impression was that at the outset 2,500 people had been taken to custody.

Students' Initiatives

Eleven students collected Rs. 110 by selling 2750 cc of their own blood⁵² and donated the money for setting up a martyr's column in college square. Mrs. Achiya Khatun, mother of Nurul Islam, laid the foundation stone of the column on Monday. At a meeting organised there by Student's Federation (Rightist), its Secretary Mr. Paltu DasGupta, urged the Government to give help and compensation to the families affected by recent police excesses. There would be another flare-up, unless the demands were met, they warned. A resolution asking for the immediate reopening of Schools and Colleges was also adopted at the meeting which was also addressed by Prof. Gautam Chatterjee, and Mr. Devdas Bhattacharya. Mr. Enchab Ali Mollah and Mr. Surat Ali Mollah, father and younger brother of Nurul Islam, were also present.

Government for Softer Measures

In the meantime, a call for a General Strike/Hartal on 6 April, 1966 was given by the ULF. And the government, this time did not chose to take proactive measures.⁵³ According to reports, the Chief Minister Mr. P C Sen had free and frank discussion with his Cabinet colleagues at an unscheduled Cabinet meeting as to what should be the attitude of Government vis-à-vis April 6 Hartal call by United Left Front. The consensus was that this time the Government should better not resort to any "provocative" posture unpalpable to those bent on making the Hartal a "sure success". It was generally felt that the trams, buses and local trains might not be pressed into service on the day. As to long distance trains, these would be asked to stream in as far as these could without encountering trouble.

The Government, however, planned to deploy a larger number of Police personnel from outside the state to deal with any eventuality. The police will be mounting guard on the "protected

areas” and vital installations lest these are made targets of attack by anti-social elements. The Cabinet members almost, except one, held the view that the police must come all out for the protection of those who might be specially marked out for “revenge” for their political convictions.

Preparations for another General Strike

On the 26th, the CPI Leftist held a meeting at Klokata Maidan, which was described as “The Red’s Maidan Rally”⁵⁴ by the press. At that meeting, Jyoti Basu, leader of the Opposition in the State Assembly, told the mass that they had not launched an armed revolution but only a movement so that people could live. The meeting was held under the auspices of the Communist Party (L) was presided over by Mohit Maitra, MLC. Some processions from different parts of the city converged at the meeting. Basu said that the Congress which had definitely been cornered at the moment should be ousted from among the masses. He appealed to the people to make the current movement grow from strength to strength. The Chief Minister had asked why we did not condemn violence. But did the Chief Minister himself condemn the firings and other repressive measures adopted by the police? Had the Chief Minister expressed sorrow for those killed in connection with the movement? Jyoti Basu felt that it was the Congress which was responsible for engineering violent activities. He said that the Chief Minister had first showed impertinence by calling off the proposed talks with the Opposition leaders. This sparkled off the recent flare-up.

Referring to the failures of the Government in the administrative field Mr. Basu said the Congress itself had attacked the parliamentary democracy. The people must take the responsibility saving the democracy from utter ruin. Even if the demands were met, movements would continue for ousting the Congress Government.

Sadhan Gupta, another left CPI leader said that the Chief Minister was trying to evade their demands. The All Party Advisory Committee was nothing but a “hoax”. “We want a committee that would be formed with public cooperation.”⁵⁵ Mr. Gupta, a prominent Advocate at Calcutta High Court, said that if there was a judicial enquiry into the police firings at Basirhat, Swarupnagar, it could be proved that the police was punishable for the “murders”. But the present enquiry instituted by the Chief Minister was one-sided for it would only assess the number of displaced and unemployed persons who had taken part in the disturbances. Mohit Maitra, the President of the meeting, announced that March 29 would be observed as a “Protest Day” when a meeting would be held at Maidan. He also announced the programme for the proposed General Strike on April 6. At this meeting money was also collected for the martyr’s families.

Protests from the Cine and Stage Worlds

Even the cine and stage personalities joined hands to express solidarity.⁵⁶ According to reports, Calcutta’s stage and movie people marched in the hot and humid city miles from South to North in a procession to collect fund for the families affected by recent disturbances.

The call was given by Artistes and Technician’s Relief fund Committee, pledged to stand by those who really needed help. And it received an almost spontaneous reception. Not that this was the first time that one saw actors and actresses of Calcutta take significant roles off the stage and screen. Way back in 1962, they had accepted the challenge of China in their own way. Funds had been raised and blood donated for the Jawans. Before that, they had brought out processions for the flood victims and like.

Even so, by the sheer length of the trek, Sunday's event was remarkable. It began at 8:30 in the morning from the Technician's Studio, Tollygunge. The procession got a perfect shape at the crossing of Gariahat and Rashbehari Avenue around 10. Proceeding along Rashbehari Avenue, it meandered through Shyamaprasad Mukherjee Road, Asutosh Mukherjee road, Dhurmatolla Street, College Street and Bidhan Sarani. The marchers reached Shyambazar well past noon.

All most all the notables of Bengali stage and screen took part in the procession. Among actors and actresses, there were Uttam kumar, Bikash Roy, Tarun Kumar, Dilip Mukherjee, Dilip Roy, Anil Chatterjee, Niranjan Roy, Ajoy Ganguli, Anup Kumar, Chandra Shekhar, Soumitra Chatterjee, Bhanu Bannerjee, Nirmal Chatterjee, Premangshu Bose, Prasad Mukherjee, Sukhen Das, Sailen Mukherjee, Sabitri Chatterjee, Haradhan Bannerjee, Madhabi Mukherjee, Sharmila Tagore, Nilima Das and Ruma Guha Thakurta. Among Directors, Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen, Ajoy Kar, Asim Bannerjee, Ajoy Biswas and Bishnu Chakravorty were there. The collection was quite impressive.

Protest Day⁵⁷

In the meantime, meetings and demonstrations were held throughout the state to observe Protest Day on 29 March. The United Left Front arranged a public meeting at the Maidan at 5:30 pm. Street Corner Meetings were held in Calcutta and the Districts.

At the meetings organised jointly by Praja Socialist Party and Forward Bloc, the official food policy was severely condemned. The resignation of the Chief Minister Mr. P C Sen was also demanded. These parties had also given call to observe Wednesday as the "Food and full rationing Day". At 6:30 pm, Mr. Hemanta Bose, Mr. Samar Guha and Mr. Sujit Banerjee addressed the meeting at the five point crossing at Shyambazar. At Hazra park and Gariahat, the meetings were addressed by Mr. Sunil Das, Mr. Nirmal Bose and others and in Central Calcutta and Sealdah by Mr. Nalini Guha and Mr. Sailen De. Street Corner meetings were also held at Cornwallis square, Burrabazar and Rashbehari road crossing.

Jyoti Basu's Negotiations with the Centre⁵⁸

On the 29 March, Jyoti Basu sent an envoy to Delhi to request the Centre to use its influence over Mr. P C Sen to ensure that the Hartal called by the United Left Front on April 6 was to be observed peacefully. In the absence of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the request has been conveyed in a letter to Mr. Dinesh Singh, Minister of External Affairs who had urged Mr. Basu on March 28 to do his best to arrive at an understanding with the West Bengal Chief Minister so that proposed hartal might be avoided.

Mr. Singh was present when Mr. Jyoti Basu and Mr. Bhupesh Gupta, right Communist MP had a discussion with the Prime Minister on West Bengal situation in March 19. Mrs. Gandhi is understood to have made anxious inquiries from abroad on the progress of talks between Mr. Sen and ULF. Mr. Basu's letter was handed over to Mr. Singh by Jatin Chakravarty, the RSP leader who arrived here in the afternoon. Mr. Bhupesh Gupta was with him when he called on Mr. Singh. Mr. Basu said in his letter that he was sorry to have failed to prevail upon the Chief Minister to see reason. In spite of the ULFs best efforts, Mr. Sen had not accepted even the "reduced demands" of the ULF.

Another meeting between Mr. Chakravarty and Mr. Singh took place on the 31st. Mr. Singh had promised to have talks with the Union Minister to ascertain if there was anything that the Centre

could do in the circumstances. Mr. Chakravarty, who flew back to Calcutta had told Mr. Singh that the front was not going to negotiate with Mr. Sen anymore.

At a meeting on the 30th, the Congress Parliamentary Party Executive discussed the situation between the West Bengal Government and the ULF. Mr. Nanda who had earlier had a telephonic talk with Mr. Sen, made a report on the developments. This was followed by a discussion during which members are reported to have generally agreed that the Chief Minister had gone to the furthest limit possible in arriving at a settlement. They said that now that the Hartal was going to take place, the Government must discharge its responsibility to protect life and property. At the same time, the Government should be careful not to give provocation. Mr. Jagjivan Ram and one or two others, while expressing this view said that it was time that the Congress tried to find out why people were going more and more away it.

Instead of a Conclusion

In 1977, after a decade from the first left-led UF government, the Left Front (LF), led by the CPIM, came to power in West Bengal and remained there till 2011. In its initial years, the LF took the question of food security very seriously and implemented various legal as well as social policies from a radical land reforms (Operation Barga, which allowed three-fourths share to share-croppers) and establishment of three-tier Panchayat (rural local government) to effective functioning of PDS and successful running of many Central government-sponsored programmes. However, these efforts and initiatives started fading after a few years. The process of land reforms was only partially completed. In most cases, it was not further radicalised by programmes like cooperative farming, which were necessary for increasing productivity. Generally speaking, the official left seemed to be self-complacent about their twin policies of Operation Barga and the three-tier panchayat system. But gradually, the flow of spontaneity gradually became a matter of routine-ritual under the absolute control of the “party”, i.e. CPI (M)...

Then, in 2007, a mass outrage over the malfunctioning of PDS burst out in many districts of the state, decades after the food movements of 1959 and 1966. Popularly known as ration riots, this apparently anomic movement in three southern and one northern district only indicated the gap between the claims of the ruling regime and the reality. And the wind of ‘change’ or ‘parivartan’ began to blow in the districts of southern Bengal. In the words of a contemporary researcher:

One may deduce a connection between the mass outrage against corrupt ration dealers, as well as the entire PDS system in 2007 and the change of power in the following Panchayat Elections of 2008. While this relationship made its presence felt across the state, in some districts, the line appeared much conspicuously. Indeed, a simple mapping of the PDS outrage and the debacle of the regime show a clear correlation between the two. That rural Bengal, which for long has been taken for granted to be the red bastion, was changing its colour was not confined only to Panchayat Elections, the slogan of “change” had remained influential even in the Parliamentary Elections of 2009. And, undoubtedly, this wave of political “change” has drawn a lot from the PDS agitation, which was only too clear from the electoral debacle of the ruling Left in the districts such as Birbhum, North and South 24 Parganas and Nadia, where the PDS agitation was very strong.⁵⁹

These apparently ‘anomic’ outrages of the masses and their style of operations in 2007 proved once again that the ‘rhizome’ of 1959 and 1966 could surface at any moment and take any shape even in distant futures.

Notes

- ¹ Sibaji Pratim Basu, “The Chronicle of a Forgotten Movement: 1959 Food Movement Revisited” *Policies and Practices*, No. 56 (2012).
- ² Marcus F. Franda, *Radical Politics in West Bengal* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: M.I.T. Press, 1971).
- ³ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), 3-28.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.
- ⁶ Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, *Contentious Politics* (Boulder, Colorado, USA: Paradigm Publishers, 2007).
- ⁷ *Charles Tilly, Social Movements, 1768-2004* (Boulder, Colorado, USA: Paradigm Publishers, 2004), 53-54.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 184.
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From Insurrection to Popular Movement: Bihar Movement, its Possibilities and Limitations

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ye daagh daagh ujala, ye shab-gazida sahar
vo intezaar tha jiska, ye vo sahar to nahi

- Faiz Ahmed Faiz

When Faiz Ahmed Faiz wrote, “Subah-e-Azadi” on 14 August 1947, he was delineating the fault lines of the postcolonial democracies which were coming into being at that moment. It was clear that there was a sense of incompleteness, abandonment and broken promises even as they were made. There certainly was a sense that “the moment of arrival” has not yet been achieved by the nation. These were the fault lines which were going to define the politics of the postcolonial nation-state and the struggle for democracy. Slogans from the left like “ye azadi jhooti hai” to the Gandhian method of redistribution of land (known as *Bhoodan* by Acharya Vinoba Bhave) was a clear indication that not everyone saw independence as a “tryst with destiny.” In fact, what was clearly evident was the main currents of opposition to the government and the state emerging and consolidating. Our moment of study is 1974-75, and it will be quite fruitful if we mention briefly the main currents of several movements, which developed from the time of independence.

The Communist Movement in India had gone through various “lines” from P C Joshi to B T Randive and had split into various factions. The major split came in 1964 with the formation of Communist Party of India (Marxist). In 1967 with the explosion of Naxalbari Movement a new Communist Party called Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) came into being in 1969. It believed in armed struggle and a revolution where the peasants and landless agricultural worker were going to play a crucial role. They virtually had no presence among the industrial working class. In 1971, Satyanarayan Singh broke away from the Charu Mazumdar group and formed the Provisional Central Committee, Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) with other groups from Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal. Each of the communist parties had their own assessment of the political economy and class struggle prevalent in India at the time period 1974-75. After many vicissitudes, the CPI had come to the conclusion from 1971 that “the national democratic revolution required the unity of the ‘left and democratic forces’, drawing in ‘not only the masses following the Congress but also its progressive sections’... The Ninth Congress declared, ‘the old concept of anti-congressism has proven a barren and reactionary concept which was now ‘a weapon of sabotage of left and democratic unity.’”¹ Despite some differences in policy matter and economic conditions, this “line” of CPI allowed them to have a pact with the Congress government and play an ambiguous role during the Railway Strike of 1974 and go completely against the Bihar Movement. The CPI (M) took

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Policies and Practices, Issue No. 81, December 2016

great pains to define “Left and Democratic” forces in the Tenth Congress. This of course included the party as well as their allies in West Bengal and their mass organizations. It also included parties and groups ranging from Right Communist Party, AIADMK, DMK, Akali Dal and almost every “radical” element in all the parties right from Janta Party to Congress. Organizations of tribals were also included. It is quite clear that CPI (M), putatively left of CPI, was even more eclectic and, although they do not mention it as such, differed from CPI on non-anticongressism. They might be called left of the Socialists. CPI (ML) by the time of 1974 had splintered into several groups, but commentators agree that after the brutal suppression of the Movement in West Bengal, it continued with great momentum in Bihar. However, the “left adventurist” line made it difficult for them to organically link to the masses. We will later see how each of these factions of the Communist Movement played their role in Bihar Movement, which crucially decided the course of the movement.

The Socialist Movement in India which formed the chief leadership of the Bihar Movement was always faction ridden and as Arvind Narayan Das has said, was notorious for splitting every year. The major Socialist Parties during the Bihar Movement were Samyukta Socialist Party of which George Fernandes, the leader of the Railway Strike, was the most important leader. The other was Socialist Party (Lohiawadi) whose leaders were Raj Narain and Karpoori Thakur who already had become the chief minister of Bihar and would be again after the Emergency. One of the original founders of the Socialist Party was Jayaprakash Narayan (JP) but he had crossed over to the Sarvodaya Movement in 1954 to join Acharya Vinoba Bhave’s programme of *Bhoodan*. Their contradictions will come to the fore during Bihar Movement.

The final stream of political actors important in the analysis of Bihar Movement is the right which included Congress (O), Jan Sangha and Anand Marga. Congress (O) was formed after the split in Congress of which Morarji Desai was the leader who will go on to become the Prime Minister of the Janta Party government. Jan Sangh (later BJP) was the electoral front of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a radical right wing Hindu organization. Anand Marga was a religious organization. These are the *dramatis personae* of the Bihar Movement and now we can go on to analyze the event and politics of Bihar Movement.

Event and Crisis

The event of March 18, 1974 is when the Bihar Movement is supposed to have begun. The event in itself is quite well known and, in fact, is now part of the folklore. On that day, the Bihar Assembly was to assemble for the inaugural of the Budget Session. University students under the banner of Bihar Chhatra Sangharsh Samiti (BCSS) had decided to block the entry of the Governor. The BCSS comprised of non-left student organizations like the youth wing of Congress (O), Vidyarthi Parishad, Tarun Shanti Sena, Samajvadi Yuvjan Sabha, Bihar State Students Council, Bharatiya Krantikari Yuvak Sangh and Bhartiya Yuva Sangh. There was a *lathicharge* on the students and tear gases but unlike previously the police opened fire in which 8 people died and hundreds were injured.² The word of police firing and students’ death spread throughout the state and students and other groups started organizing militant demonstrations which we will analyze later. Suffice to say that at that moment, March 18 1974, was a moment of insurrection. The state was under siege and the students were attacking at all the symbols and power centers of the state all over Bihar. One must remember that JP had not yet joined the movement (he would join it half a month later on April 6). It was from here that the movement veered away from its moment of insurrection and into a popular movement

that claimed autonomy not only from representative democracy but also from government and governmentality.

In a quote attributed to Lenin it is said that ‘There are decades where nothing happens; and there are weeks where decades happen.’ Most probably it is an imaginative rendition of Lenin’s “The chief task of the day.” The point of quoting this line was to affirm that a condition for insurrection or popular movement is a result of a series of economic and political developments over the years. Here, we will be thinking in terms of a postcolonial ‘passive revolution.’ Suffice it to say that March 18 had been building up for quite some time. Student unrest in Bihar had been going on intermittently with varied degree of intensity since the mid-1960s. In 1965 pitched battle between students and police was fought in Patna over the same demands as in 1974. The main issues then were reduction in fee, transportation cost, and changes in examination scheme.³

The student movement gained momentum in 1972. *Filhal*, a Hindi journal, gives detailed account of the students’ struggle in Patna University.⁴ There was discontent among teachers as well because of salaries that were due for six months. The discontent boiled over when a student Bindeshwar Jha was raped by a Home Guard and a policeman while Jha was on his way to his lodge. The brutality of the police that was at display after March 1974 was already evident in these incidents that were creating mass discontent. On 8th August 1972, 5000 students went to the office of the vice-chancellor of Patna University to give a charter of demands. When they didn’t find him in the office the students took out the demonstration at Pirbohar Police Station (where the police had refused to lodge the complaint of Jha). Police started a *lathicharge* on students and even used teargas. Next day, they went to the chief minister but he refused to concede the demand of the students. After this, the students formed a 41- member Samyukta Chhatra Sangharsh Samiti. This was the first attempt at organizing the students not on the basis of independent organizations mostly attached to electoral political parties but a coalition of different groups based on a clear programme. This Sangharsh Samiti was formed on 17th August 1972 and went on a one-day strike on 21st August. The next day they called for Patna *Bandh* which was successful. On 23rd August the students presented a 14-point charter of demands which mainly included the release of all imprisoned students, suspension for teachers and principal who ordered violence, waiver of fee because of famine etc. All the demands were related to the condition of the universities and education system. They could still not be called “political demands” but economic and local. However, just immediately after this press conference the Sangharsh Samiti decided to withdraw the strike and sought the help of the legislators to demand “justice.” This movement peaked in September. On 5th September 29,000 students marched to the Assembly but were stopped by a large posse of police and *lathicharged* and teargas was used as well. The victims of this violence were students but also included journalists, officials of the Secretariat, hawkers and *rickshawalas*. All these sections of the society will play a crucial role in the Bihar Movement especially *rickshawalas* who emerged as the political subject that represented the subaltern voice of the urban poor. On 7th September police beat up the students of Patna College and Science College without any provocation in which more than 100 people were injured. What happened next will become the dominant narrative of state repression. On the same day CRP was called in the university, help was sought from Bihar and Orissa Police and to demonstrate the determination of the state to brutally quell the movement even the army was alerted. This widespread student discontent has to be seen in the larger political context of other struggles that were being conducted by other political forces and were more political in nature in the sense that their attack on the state was more fundamental.

The Naxalbari Movement brought the class struggle and the oppressive caste condition of rural Bihar into relief. The question of land was now hinged on both at the level of political economy

and social *izzat* (dignity). It was difficult to extricate one from the other and this is at the heart of Dalit and Communist politics. It is a legacy of the Naxalite struggle during this time that forced the debate between left and politics of identity where analyzing the problems of caste and class became one of the cleavages in political thought and practice in India. Class struggle in rural Bihar was going on continuously without interruption and under severe repression since 1967 which began with Ekwari in Bhojpur from where the charismatic Jagdish Mahto or popularly known as Jagdish Master emerged. In fact, it was the killing of landlords in Musahari which saw the re-entry of JP in politics when he camped in Musahari for peace between Dalit and Upper Castes. JP will be accused of helping the landlords at the expense of the Dalits during the movement, especially in West Bengal, when he was trying to expand the movement all through the country.⁵ Similarly, there was a wave of strikes in industries and tool down by sectional autonomous unions of railways which will culminate in the biggest strike by organized working class in India. The unrest in the industrial working class, especially in South Bihar (now Jharkhand) was happening simultaneously and in an overlap with the beginning of the Jharkhand Movement.⁶ The relationship between the working class struggle and identity struggle is interesting and we will come back to it when we give the detailed account of the trajectory of Bihar Movement.

The above narrative was not to trace any teleology of the Bihar Movement. Here, we do not want to say that these sporadic movements, in a predetermined way and inexorably, led to Bihar Movement. However, it will be correct to emphasize that these movements prepared and developed what Charles Tilly has called repertoires.⁷ Also, it gives an indication of Indian state's very precarious balance between its conception of prescribed, tolerated and forbidden claim making. These movements suggest that in contentious politics the postcolonial Indian state, the way it was constituted from independence till the Emergency in 1975, would perceive tolerated form of claim making transforming itself into forbidden realms quite swiftly. It was this struggle between the accumulated repertoire of violent and non-violent struggles of the "people" and regime's resorting to violence due to its own precarious existence that was at the heart of Bihar Movement. It was, as Arvind Das has pointed out, when politics was brought to the streets of Bihar.⁸

Bihar Movement was a postcolonial moment which set itself the task of not only deepening democracy but redefining it as well. It cannot be denied that human rights, freedom of speech, inviolability of fundamental rights and democratic rights in general formed the heart of subsequent development of civil society and its discourse as a result of the Bihar Movement. Even most of the slogans that are used in contemporary struggles were formed during the Bihar Movement. It also tried to set the terms of contentious politics vis-à-vis the state. In fact, the movement also transformed the state, in the sense that the regime enlarged the scope of tolerated forms of claim-making. This analysis will continue later in the paper but we need to remind ourselves of what Lenin has identified as the elements of a revolutionary condition:

To the Marxist it is indisputable that a revolution is impossible without a revolutionary situation; furthermore, it is not every revolutionary situation that leads to revolution. What, generally speaking, are the symptoms of a revolutionary situation? We shall certainly not be mistaken if we indicate the following three major symptoms: (1) when it is impossible for the ruling classes to maintain their rule without any change; when there is a crisis, in one form or another, among the "upper classes", a crisis in the policy of the ruling class, leading to a fissure through which the discontent and indignation of the oppressed classes burst forth. For a revolution to take place, it is usually insufficient for "the lower classes not to want" to live in the old way; it is also necessary that "the upper classes should be unable" to live in the old way; (2) when the suffering and want of the oppressed classes have grown more acute than usual; (3) when, as a consequence of the above causes, there is a considerable

increase in the activity of the masses, who uncomplainingly allow themselves to be robbed in “peace time”, but, in turbulent times, are drawn both by all the circumstances of the crisis *and by the “upper classes” themselves* into independent historical action.⁹

We, therefore, now move towards the analysis of the conditions of Bihar Movement to identify the moment of crisis, the preparation of the oppressed classes and the ability of the ruling class to rule with legitimacy and authority.

That there was a crisis in the decade 1964-74 is unanimously accepted by scholars as well as the documents of the Government of India. Ranabir Samaddar in his work on the Railway Strike of 1974 observes:

The magnitude and rate of unemployment in the country increased significantly in the 1960s and 1970s. The economy grew at a rate of around 3.5 per cent as against the planned rate of 5 per cent per annum. Though employment grew at a relatively high rate of 2 per cent per annum, the labour force grew faster—at a rate of 2.5 per cent as against less than 2 per cent per annum assumed, the result was an increase in unemployment. The magnitude of unemployment doubled during 1956–1972, from around 5 to 10 million, and the unemployment rate went from 2.6 to 3.8 per cent. With the availability of comprehensive data on levels of consumption, employment and unemployment for 1972–73 which revealed a high incidence of poverty (54 per cent rural and 41 per cent urban) and high unemployment rates (8.4 per cent on current daily status and 4.3 per cent on currently weekly status basis), the situation was serious.¹⁰

Bipan Chandra’s study of the Emergency which is more in the nature of apologia to both Emergency and critique of Bihar Movement through the criticism of Jayaprakash Narayan also points to the economic crisis that India was going through.¹¹ Chandra puts the economic crisis in international perspective and puts oil shock of 1973 as a major factor triggering the economic crisis as it raised dramatically the prices of petroleum, fertilizers etc. Chandra traces the crisis to the plan holiday from 1964-67. The economy during this period saw negative growth and although it picked up from 1967 the rate of growth of national income was only 2.9 per cent down from 4.3 percent during 1954-64. Industrial production declined to about 3.3 per cent during 1965-70 and 2.8 per cent during 1970-74. This was against growth of 7 per cent during 1956-61 and 9 per cent during 1961-65. He also accepts that there was a fall in the production of basic goods. He points to the crisis in agriculture which saw an increase of 35 per cent in production from 1967-70. This was followed by drought and there was a sharp decline in agricultural production and food grains had to be imported. Chandra in his study does not mention the Bihar drought of 1967 which was declared a famine followed by devastating flood in North Bihar. The problem with Chandra’s thesis on agricultural production is that he does not take into account uneven development that is inherent to capitalism.

Paul Brass in his excellent study of Bihar famine of 1966-67 points that 1965-66 was the year of the so-called Green Revolution and there was a marked increase in production of food grains especially rice.¹² Taking into consideration all food grains the production increased by 2 million tons. However, this increase concealed the fact that there was a sharp decline in rice production in Bihar and Eastern Uttar Pradesh. The quantum of the decline can be gauged from the figure which tells us that Index Numbers of Total Food grain Production in Bihar fell from 139.7 in 1964-65 to 67.4 in 1966-67. However, agricultural production showed steady growth from 1967-1973. In fact, for the study of our period it is important to note that the index for 1971-72, 1972-73 and 1973-74 were 170.2, 157.7 and 154.4 respectively which shows a decrease but it should be remembered that they were more than any year except 1966-67. These figures are important to us as Chandra claims that

the lull in Bihar Movement was caused by a recovering economy. This is an unsubstantiated claim and tries to put Bihar Movement as a direct result of economic crisis, hence a movement based on economic demands, whereas our task is to demonstrate that the movement went beyond economic demands to make political ones that at once challenged the established order of postcolonial democracy. As an important aside, one of the most important leaders who were at the forefront of relief in Bihar through leading the Bihar Relief Committee (BRC) was JP, the most important *dramatis personae* of the Bihar Movement. This was, though, his Sarvodaya phase of reconstruction, reform, *Bhoodan*, *Gramdan*, and even *Jeevandan* which JP did in 1954 when he withdrew from active electoral politics. As mentioned above, two years later he will be going to Musahari and by that time JP on his own admission would be thinking about re-entering politics and was looking for a movement through which he could join political struggles. He found that in the student movement of Gujarat and Bihar.

In another study, Ghanshyam Shah conducted a field study of Bihar Movement and Gujarat's Nav Nirman Andolan makes the point that agrarian unrest in Bihar was getting worse by the year and in 1970 there were 649 agrarian agitations which was seven times than the last year.¹³ The agrarian struggle was largely in the hands of revolutionary left led by CPI (M-L) and the parliamentary left like CPI and CPI (M). The former carried out an armed struggle with sole emphasis on individual killing of oppressive landlords and their *lathais*. CPI and CPI (M) were engaged in mass movement and occupied the land of the landlords. Here again the unrest must be understood politically and not only in economic terms. The production had increased dramatically from the years of famine and yet agrarian struggle was at its peak both through revolutionary violence and through mass movement. As pointed out above, the more crucial reason for this was the wide and oppressive class divide which was at the root of these movements. This was true especially in the case of Dalits who mostly were landless agriculture workers. Apart from the economic exploitation of Dalits there was untouchability, sexual abuse of Dalit women and other brutal atrocities. The struggles, especially the violent struggle in the leadership of the revolutionary left became a struggle for *izzat* (dignity) for the Dalits. In fact, these strata of classes in the villages became the social base for the revolutionaries of the Naxalite Movement.

Shah's analysis of urban unrest points towards some interesting aspects on the struggles just before the Bihar Movement. Shah identifies teachers, government employees, lawyers and other vocal sections of the urban middle class. This was also the period of prolonged student struggle on issues like better amenities in the university, reduction of fee, supply of books and even reduction in the prices of cinema tickets. The most important thing to note here is the alliance that was formed between the middle classes and the working class. The government had imposed a professional tax in 1973 that affected both the middle classes as well the working class. The opposition parties and trade unions came together to form Bihar Rajya Abhaab Pesha Kar Virodhi Mazdur SwaKarmachari Sangharsh Samiti. This committee organized rallies in front of the Assembly. On December 16, 1973 the committee organized a rally in which 120 trade unions participated that included industrial workers, teachers, engineers, government employees and railwaymen etc. These struggles ran concurrent to the Nav Nirman Andolan. Bihar Bandh was declared on January 21, 1974 by Samyukta Sangharsh Samiti (CPI, CPM, SSP, Jana Sangh and others). The Bandh was organized to protest against high prices and scarcity of essential commodities. What is most interesting is the participation of nearly 400 trade unions.

One of the tasks on our hands is to understand why the working class and the peasantry played an ambiguous role in the Bihar Movement when there was a sustained and simultaneous struggle. The role of urban working class is quite important to understand as one should not forget

that this was the period when the preparation for the Railway Strike had begun in earnest. The failure of Bihar Movement to form an alliance with the Railway Strike is a puzzle when George Fernandes was one of the major leaders both of the strike as well as the movement. This also ran concurrent to militant working class struggles in the coalfields of South Bihar and at several industrial towns of which the most important were Jamshedpur, Dhanbad, Barkakana, Ranchi, etc.

We also have to take into account the revolutionary movement under the Naxalite which was organizing the Dalits who were the most oppressed. Although during the Bihar Movement students went to the villages and established *Janata sarkars*, the experiment did not result in any active participation of the Dalits although middle peasantry and later landlords became firm supporters of Bihar Movement. It is true, though, that the Satyanaran Sinha group of the CPI (ML) did participate in the agitation without formally joining the Bihar Movement. All these movements were going parallel to each other. The student movement, teachers and government officials, working class movements and Naxalite movement and quite interestingly JP was related to all of them in various capacities. These struggles went on without a conscious aim to form a network or alliance although they did overlap and came together at crucial times, however, during the Bihar Movement it seems that they were ambiguous, if not totally indifferent, to the movement. We have to explain this situation that arose during the movement and what were the causes of such ambiguity.

Vicissitudes of a Partial ‘Total Revolution’

There was a mention above that Bihar Movement first began as an insurrection and with the leadership of JP it entered the phase of Popular Movement. To make this assertion we need to theorize both insurrection as well as popular movement so that we can demonstrate how that transition is made and what does it entail for the movement.

Insurrection has been a subject of all Marxist revolutionaries and thinkers. It is important to make a difference between insurgency and popular uprising to examine the relation between revolution, populism and passive revolution. Engels provided the lineaments of insurrection and called it an art:

Insurrection is an art quite as much as war or any other, and subject to certain rules of proceeding, which, when neglected, will produce the ruin of the party neglecting them. Those rules, logical deductions from the nature of the parties and the circumstances one has to deal with in [are] so plain and simple...Firstly, never play with insurrection unless you are fully prepared to face the consequences of your play. Insurrection is a calculus with very indefinite magnitudes the value of which may change every day...bring strong odds against them you are defeated and ruined. Secondly, the insurrectionary career once entered upon, act with the greatest determination and on the offensive. The defensive is the death of every armed uprising; it is lost before it measures itself with its enemies.¹⁴

Insurrection, for Engels, is armed uprising by a party. However, he makes it clear that insurgency is also indeterminate and a calculation of probabilities that the party has to face. Insurgency is, thus, dialectic between preparedness of the vanguard and fluidity of unpredictable revolutionary situations. Also, implicit in Engels is that insurrection is not yet revolution.

Marx puts the question of “masses” firmly at the center in his analysis of *Class Struggle in France*. Read together with Engels the following passage makes it clear that the indeterminacy of insurrection comes from the nebulousness of the masses and its formations. It becomes a necessity because of this indeterminacy to establish dialectic between the party (vanguard) and the “masses”.

This dialectics is what makes insurrection an art hence politics while revolution is in the realm of the political:

The time of surprise attacks, of revolutions carried through by small conscious minorities at the head of unconscious masses, is past. Where it is a question of a complete transformation of the social organization, the masses themselves must also be in it, must themselves already have grasped what is at stake...But in order that the masses may understand what is to be done, long, persistent work is required, and it is just this work which we are now pursuing, and with a success that drives the enemy to despair.¹⁵

What is important here to note is that the “masses” is always expressed as a multiple (not multitude). It is not a singular category and is, in fact, not constituted but extracted. A point could be made that irrespective of the precarious nature of its constitution, “people” is a singular category. This point will become clearer when we analyze the writing of Mao on war and insurrection where he makes a theoretical and empirical distinction between “masses” and “people.” But first we have to understand Lenin’s conception of insurrection, masses and people.

Writing a few weeks before the October Revolution Lenin was seeking a stable alliance of classes that will bring about the revolution. He had to look for an alliance with the peasants, of whom, as a class he always sought solidarity but also was aware of its vacillations due to abundant petty production in agriculture. Thus, he subsumes the cause of the peasantry within the larger struggle for socialism in 1905 but in 1917 after the February Revolution he said that the success of revolution depends on the alliance of peasant poor with the revolutionary worker:

To be successful, insurrection must rely not upon conspiracy and not upon a party, but upon the advanced class. That is the first point. Insurrection must rely upon a *revolutionary upsurge of the people*. That is the second point. Insurrection must rely upon that turning-point in the history of the growing revolution when the activity of the advanced ranks of the people is at its height.

We have the following of the majority of a class, the vanguard of the revolution, the vanguard of the people, which is capable of carrying the masses with it.¹⁶ The point about the singularity of “people” and multiplicity of the “masses” is very clear in Lenin’s formulation. The elements can actually be separated and isolated. The moment of “people” being constituted is when the working class and the peasant poor decide to form an alliance. However, this alliance is only at the formal level and becomes material when “majority” is extracted from the “people” which then forms the “masses” the heterogeneous entity which is formed by active subjects of insurrection. What is important to note is that the dialectics between the vanguard and the “masses” are only contingent and can break down any time. On the other hand the constituent of the “people” have to acquire a synthesis of their heterogeneity.

Mao thinks about the question of “masses” and the “people” in the context of anti-imperial war thus putting the question of nation firmly at the center of his analysis. He has to differentiate between “masses” and “people” to arrive at the question of New Democracy in the life of a postcolonial nation. For Mao, people are the summation of all revolutionary classes that had been identified as anti-imperialism:

Therefore, the proletariat, the peasantry, the intelligentsia and the other sections of the petty bourgeoisie undoubtedly constitute the basic forces determining China’s fate. These classes, some already awakened and others in the process of awakening, will necessarily become the basic

components of the state and governmental structure in the democratic republic of China, with the proletariat as the leading force.¹⁷

The alliances of classes in the anti-imperial war with Japan is an evidence of Mao's acute understanding of the correlation between the "nation" and the "people" and that it is the "people" that is constituent of the "nation" while "masses" is a political entity through which war is conducted. "Masses" have to be continuously aroused and educated. Thus, it is a mobile entity which cannot be let at rest for the fear of turning reactionary and going against the anti-imperial war. With the question of "people" and "masses," in the context of anti-imperial war and making of a postcolonial nation, insurgency no longer remains a strategic question as in the case of Marx-Engels and Lenin but is now a tactical question which can be deferred, given up temporarily or simply be discarded. It is in the moment of nation that the question of "people" takes precedence over that of "masses." Whether there will be a moment of insurrection will depend on the balance of forces between the classes that have formed the contemporary "people." What is clear thus is the fact that "people" at each stage of struggle, economic and political, is a negation of negation. "Masses" on the other hand is the political force that delivers this negation. This is one of the reasons that "masses" are inherently insurrectionary while formation of "people" lies in the time and space of passive revolution in the postcolonial political condition. I will go on to make the claim that in fact "popular movement" is one of the characteristics of "passive revolution."

It is evident from the above examples that in the Marxist thinking "masses" is extracted from the "people." "Masses" are pressed into the service of the "people." With "people" taking precedence over "masses" the moment of insurrectionary politics is then subordinated to that of popular movement which amalgamates all classes but more importantly subsumes these classes in its totality and goes on constituting and reconstituting "people." A demand then attains the level of a symbol, an empty signifier that performs the most important function of keeping the totality of the entity of "people" intact. It is this notion of the "people" as a "totality" and as a synthesis which leads to the concept of "Total Revolution" propounded by JP in Bihar Movement where the original demand of radical economic and social transformation finally mutated into the tepid demand of dissolution of the Bihar Assembly.

As mentioned earlier the repertoire for Bihar Movement was already being prepared at least a year in advance. The first "action" in 1974 was in the leadership of CPI when it called a "Bihar Bandh" on January 21 on the issue of price rise, unemployment and corruption. All opposition parties supported the bandh and it was a complete success. In February, though, the fissures between left and non-left forces especially the student wings started to appear. There was a convention in February where all students' organization participated. Left students groups AISF, SFI, and Bihar Student Association (BSI) walked out of the convention on the issue of *bharatiyata* in education system raised by the ABVP. These left groups went on to form Chhatra Naujawan Sangharsh Morcha. It was the non-left student organization that formed the Chhatra Sangharsh Samiti which will go on to become the primary force under JP's leadership. In fact, it was the Chhatra Naujawan Sangharsh Morcha that first called a gherao of the education minister, Vidyakar Kavi, on March 16 which passed off without any incident. However, Arvind Das relates another incident in Bettiah on the same day when students and peasant youth clashed with the armed police for several hours in which several people were killed and injured. This was one of the few incidents when the students had a successful alliance with the peasantry. This alliance though could not be emulated for long.

The administration had announced that college, school and universities would be closed from March 13-19. By this time students had taken over the administration of college and

universities. Students of College of Commerce, Magadh University suspended the Principal, the vice-principal and dissolved the managing committee. Instead, they appointed a commerce student as principal and other two students as vice-principals. Bashistha Narayan Singh from the student wing of Congress (O) had taken over as vice-chancellor of Patna University and issued the order that the university would be open on March 18 and that employees, students and teachers should participate in the demonstration of March 18. These experiments in taking over administrative role through which to assert their autonomy will be the characteristic of the first phase of struggle (second and onwards being the advent of JP). In fact, Lalu Prasad Yadav, then the president of Bihar Chhatra Parishad made it clear that politicians would not be allowed to participate in the demonstration of March 18. During the time that these actions for autonomy were happening in the colleges and universities around the state the students moved away from their 12-point demands which were basically all economic demands of university students and started to take over and regulate other spheres of government activities. For example, students in several towns like Muzaffarpur, Motihari etc. took it upon themselves to fix the prices of essential commodities. The prices were supposed to be effective from the morning of March 18. The fixed price was arrived at in a meeting with students, traders, district supply officer and the city magistrate. It was quite clear that the attempt was to create a political space that was autonomous of the government and the state and to take the organs of the state under their control. This is not to say that there was a conscious attempt by the students to challenge the state because as we have seen above this “masses of students” were not following any vanguard or there was a lack of vanguard. It was a “mass” that was amorphous, autonomous even among themselves as was evident in the formation of distinct students’ group as the movement progressed in the state which were not necessarily connected to the central leadership of the Chhatra Samiti.

March 18 arrived and when students started to remove the barricades and enter the Assembly the police opened fire and in the confusion that ensued several groups of people were scattered. Violence followed after the killing of some students and injury to hundreds and in that situation the offices of the newspapers *The Searchlight* and *Pradeep* were burnt down. As soon as the word spread of the attack on demonstration and killing of the students there was protests across the length and breadth of the state. To give an indication of the magnitude of violence, incidents were reported from Motihari, Bhelahi, Pipra, Ranchi, Deoghar, Madhepura, Siwan, Gaya, Dehri-on-Sone etc. The demand and action were similar everywhere though there is no evidence to suggest that there was a coordinated plan to follow a programme of protest. Students in the towns and cities were relay fasting, controlling and fixing the prices of essential commodities and the gazetted officers and other high officials were gheraoed. One should also remember that since March 18, army was called in Patna with the promise that more could be deployed all over the state if such a need arises. It was a state where “masses of students” came direct into conflict with the state apparatus with an implicit threat of coordinated action to threateningly challenge the state and government. It was a moment of insurrection, the moment at a point where the “masses” involved did not completely grasp what is at stake, which according to Marx, is crucial and also a dialectic between a vanguard and the “masses” could not be achieved. It was a moment of aporia too and this is where JP intervened.

JP intervened with his silent procession on April 8 which was remarkable in its symbolism and which gave one of the most important slogans of the movement. JP led the procession and the participants covered their mouth with saffron scarves and their hands behind the back symbolizing non-violence and eschewing the use of bad language during protest. It was at this point when the slogan *hamla chabe jaisa hoga haath hamara nahi uthega* was coined. He gave a speech on this day which pointed out to the change in the direction of the movement. JP first admitted that he was looking for

a political opening since the last 27 years. He finally identified students as a political group that could be pushed as the vanguard of the movement. He could also use students as a moral force apart and away from a political force and turned the discourse to ethics and made it a question of moral revolution which would “struggle against the very system which has compelled almost everybody to go corrupt.” It was because of this ethical introduced in the movement that the demand of the dissolution of assembly became the core of the demand at the cost of demands that were related to class which was raging at the moment as evident in the Naxalite movement and the railway strike by the workers. In fact, this was also the reason why students were unable to achieve any organic political unity with the struggles of peasants and workers notwithstanding individual attempts.

The implicitly coercive method of fixing prices and regulating the markets, by the students, gave way to experiments in *Janta Sarkar*. *Janta Sarkar*, of course, was meant to be experiments in grassroots democracy. However, this was heavily dependent on the state apparatus instead of being autonomous entities. Thus, *Janta Sarkar* worked closely with the local administration and police and JP, in fact, made an emphatic statement that *Janta Sarkar* was not a parallel government. It was an experiment that was decentralized but connected to the state hence, in some senses, became a supplementary form of governance. What is also important to note is that with the advent of JP the organizational nature began to undergo transformation as well with the coming of Bihar Sarvodaya Mandal, Tarun Shanti Sena and Gandhi Peace Foundation. From this point onwards, the ideology and workers of Sarvodaya will dominate the movement the latter at least in numbers. The movement had decisively turned away from the “masses” and was addressing itself to the “people.”

Four days after the silent procession a decisive moment came in the movement, a moment which after March 18 gave a new direction altogether. In fact, it can very well be said that the incident on April 12 began the next stage of the Bihar Movement. As a background, from April 9 the “paralyze the government” programme started which was directed against district administration, police, banks, postal and telegraph department, etc. On March 12 in a programme of “paralyze the government” in Gaya the police opened fire on the pretext that students attacked government offices and police stations. 8 students died and several injured in the police firing and curfew was imposed in Gaya. Bihar Government asked K. Abraham to submit a report on the Gaya incident. JP later admitted that it was the Abraham report that made him firm in his demand for the dissolution of the Assembly although the demand was put by the students themselves. By this time non-congress, non-left parties had extended their support to the movement. At this point of time, the gherao of MLAs and asking for their resignation forcefully began in earnest. At this juncture JP had to leave Patna for Vellore for treatment as a result of which he was not directly connected with the movement for over a month and the leadership of the movement was taken over by his follower Acharya Rammurthy.

During his absence from Patna, the railway strike commenced on May 8. It was the largest strike by the working class of India. The attitude of JP was very clear and he wanted to avoid the strike on the pretext of an economy in crisis. As late as April 13, he wrote to George Fernandes to meet the government half way and avoid a strike.¹⁸ On May 15, during the strike he again wrote to Fernandes almost admonishing him suggesting a suspension of strike and negotiation with the government.¹⁹ Even during his call to the industrial workers in September he will ask the railway workers not to go on a strike but assist the students in Satyagraha. What is important to know is that during the railway strike the Patna and Bhagalpur Chhatra Samiti decided to have a *bandh* in support of the striking railway workers. This was in contravention of the Bihar Chhatra Sangh Samiti and Rammurthy and they opposed it. However, the students in contraventions of the central leadership went ahead with the strike which was successful not only in Patna and Bhagalpur but other railway

towns as well. This was the first instance in which there was a concerted and determined attempt by students and workers to form an alliance; to attempt at creating the “masses.”

There were four movements which influenced Bihar Movement with varied degree of intensity. The direct influence was that of the Nav Nirman Movement in Gujarat where almost the same demands were formulated and almost the same trajectory was followed except that in the case of Gujarat the Assembly was dissolved and Chimanbhai Patel removed as the chief minister. The other influence was that of Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM), a radical movement based on identity, which supported the Bihar Movement and, interestingly, had a very close alliance with the workers of the railway strike. It was admitted even by the most ardent of the supporters that the movement was not as effective in South Bihar. The potential of a network of alliance was never explored even though the political conditions were extremely favorable. Arvind Das shows the very strong alliance that was forged between the workers and the peasants in South Bihar. One must also not forget the very strong influence of JMM among the colliery workers. Many cadre and leaders of JMM were in fact colliery workers. The Naxalite Movement again was a struggle on the lines of guerilla war that represented the class struggle in the countryside. Although JP would repeatedly call on the Naxalites to join the Bihar Movement shunning violence the alliance with them could not be made. There are several reasons for this disjunction although it must be said that Satyanarayan Singh’s group which was quite important did support the movement. One of the major causes is that the Naxalites although carried guerrilla tactics throughout the period they were also quite inward looking. They went to the other extreme in making of the “masses” concentrating just on peasants at the cost of everything else. Vinod Mishra of CPI (ML) - Liberation said in clear terms in 1982 that:

Our main drawbacks consisted...in our failure to link up with the anti-Congress upsurge of students, youth, and all sections of people of Bihar (the leadership of this upsurge was later captured by JP and it degenerated into impotency).²⁰

This, perhaps, is not a correct evaluation in the light of facts but it is quite clear that Mishra realized the potential of creating revolutionary “masses.” The point that I am trying to make by the mention of these simultaneous movements is that the desire of JP to constitute a singular “people” took him to a project of subsuming the entirety of the population. This formulation is a reverse of Ranabir Samaddar’s: “masses dissolve into *people*, a legal category. Labour (as the core of the class) no longer defines historical subjectivity, law (as the core of the people) becomes the historical subject.”²¹ To explicate, what I am trying to suggest is that instead of *masses* dissolving into *people*, the *masses* are precipitate of the *people*. Thus, while *people* is a legal category and at the republican moment *masses* become its antagonist. It will be an insurrectionary moment at the limits of the legal. “Masses” then are the outside of legal, hence, outside of “people.” Thus, if we have to look at the historical subject (as the core of the masses) while agreeing with “labour (as the core of the class) it could only be the party, the vanguard. It is not a novel argument but a different and slightly variant rendition of Gramsci’s “Modern Prince”:

The modern prince, the myth prince, cannot be a real person, a concrete individual. It can only be an organism, a complex element of society in which a collective will, which has already been recognized and has to some extent asserted itself in action, begins to take form. History has already provided this organism, and it is the political party- the first cell in which there come together germs of a collective will tending to become universal and total.²²

The first implication of this definition is that it precludes the presence of a single leader something which theorists of populism and popular movements such as Laclau stresses upon. Instead of a leader who embodies popular/people's will, the modern prince instead of embodying "collective will" (in contrast to popular will) actually contains it. What it means is that "masses" will always be differentiated, in struggle both within and without and the problem that the modern prince (the party) has to confront is not to contain this struggle but give it full play within and use this differentiation to make an insurrection which is simultaneous but uneven.

JP, in my understanding, realized this difference. Once he was back from Vellore he gave the call for "Total Revolution" on June 5. This was also the time he becomes more militant (most likely because of the twin reasons of flagging interest among the students and the petty-bourgeoisie and a very likely possibility of the rise of the "masses" instead of that of the "people.") It is during this period that he gives the call to the police and the army to search their conscience and refrain from firing on the students. He made it very clear that it is not a call for disobeying orders or mutiny. However, he made the statement later that he will not be afraid to make that call if things did not improve for which he was severely criticized especially because of the experience of the revolt of PAC in Uttar Pradesh. This was also the moment when he gives a call to the Naxalites to give up arms and join the movement and this coincided with JP's attempt to mobilize the peasantry including the landlords. It is very interesting to note here that JP was very well versed about the debate between CPC and CPSU something that was at the heart of contemporary communist movement as well. He made the statement that he found China more revolutionary than USSR. On just this count he was in agreement with the Naxalites. This was followed by the most comprehensive call given by JP to the industrial working class. He appealed for the support of wide range of workers for the general strike on October 3-5 which according to Arvind Das proved to be a moment when the movement reached the summit after a long period of lassitude. He appealed to workers in mining, engineering, steel, cement, paper, chemicals, road transport and other industries. He asked banks, post and telegraph and railway workers not to strike but cooperate by stopping the trains and staying away from work and cooperating with the students and people. The last bit is curious and is important to understand the composition of the movement. One obvious reason for asking these workers to stay away from strike is that these are critical logistical industries. However, a more important reason, in my opinion, is JP's desire to show that several constituents of a class could be differentially deployed and yet become a seamless whole. This is at the heart of JP's politics: a search for singularity.

To the credit of Bihar Movement, it must be admitted, that urban poor finally and decisively came to the fore as a political subject although subordinate to the students and the petty-bourgeoisie. Rickshawallas, hawkers, contract labour and other wage earners were whole heartedly in support of the movement. When the workers did not respond to the call of JP it was the urban poor who ensured that the strike was total in big towns. The relationship of this class of workers with that of student and petty-bourgeoisie was almost organic to an extent that it was the *rickshawallas* who provided the transport logistics. They would not take fare from students or other protestors while asking "*ka babu chawal ek rupaya mein ek ser milega na.* [SPACE]" The *rickshawallas* were also the one who would take the wounded to the hospital. This might also be due to the fact that these class of workers were not unionized hence outside the influence of CPI. At a later stage of movement *rickshawallas* began to be identified by the police as elements of the movement and had to face repression in equal measures as of the students. JP's "Total Revolution" is not only moral regeneration, idealist eradication of caste and dowry and other social ills. It is not only about grassroots democracy which in any case means a fusion of state and civil society. More importantly it

is formation of the “people”: a seamless whole. JP knew that “people” is a result of precarious balance of several classes and to preserve the singularity it becomes important that the demands should always be equivalential in Laclau’s terms.

The *requests* are turning into *claims*. We will call a demand which, satisfied or not, remains isolated a *democratic demand*. A plurality of demands which, through their equivalential articulation, constitute a broader social subjectivity we will call *popular demands* — they start, at a very incipient level, to constitute the ‘people’ as a potential historical actor.²³

This is precisely the reason that the movement moved away from economic demands to that of the ‘popular demand’ of dissolution of Assembly and then subsequently the demand to remove prime minister Indira Gandhi. Economic demands could have diverged even antagonistically and this was the only demand that was “popular.” Laclau is right that to constitute a ‘people’ plurality (and divergence) of the demands should be fused and this fusion is not the sum of its parts but a considerably different demand. With the meeting of November 18 and acceptance by JP of electoral challenge thrown by Indira Gandhi the popular movement entered the phase of electoral politics. However, it must be said in a representative democracy the aftermath of Bihar Movement brought those classes in the forefront whose representation remained disproportionately low in comparison with their rising economic and social power which were *kulaks* who were largely middle castes. This was the basis of social justice in subsequent governments that were formed. Dalits, working class and even urban poor will have to wait to earn that representation and one has to see if this will be a movement of the “masses” or that of the “people.”

A Reappraisal of JP

It is only after Gandhi that a movement has been so completely identified by one individual. This is to an extent that Bihar Movement is more popularly known as JP Movement. Almost all scholars who have studied the movement agree that Bihar Movement cannot be understood without and away from JP. Most scholars are very critical of JP as well. Bipan Chandra goes as far to claim that JP was a Don Quixote with “hazy, naïve, and unrealistic thinking.” But he also asserts that JP was an opportunist who was aware of the consequences and advantages of targeting Indira Gandhi but could not come up with a coherent plan to achieve it. Chandra finishes his assessment of JP by indicating towards the fear that the movement led by him could go the Mussolini and Hitler’s way casting no doubt that Chandra came close to saying that JP was a fascist.

Ghanshyam Shah is more charitable and says that Bihar Movement cannot be understood without understanding JP. He agrees with his respondents who claim that JP is both confused and complex, that he is at once a Marxist, a liberal, a democrat, a moralist, a humanist, a politician, a saint, a dreamer etc. What Shah wants to establish is that the trajectory of the movement was dependent on JP whose confusion and vacillation resulted in the ebb and flow of the movement. As astute an observer as Arvind Das comes to the conclusion that it was JP’s charisma that was the reason behind the fact that the movement lasted so long and that it was JP who ensured massive peoples’ involvement in the movement. Similarly, he also holds JP responsible for the many drawbacks of the movement such as the absence of the working class, Dalits, agricultural workers and finally for taking the radicality out of the movement and making the sole demand of Assembly and Parliament dissolution and virtually ending the movement by agreeing to participate in elections.

In order to understand a political figure and her influence on the movement the point of departure cannot be the individual but the movement itself. We have to turn the analysis above about JP upside down. This will be an analysis that is historical as well as political. We have to discover the dialectics between the contingencies thrown up by the movement and the political maneuvering of JP. It is through this method that the naiveté, vacillation, confusion and opportunism etc. can be explained. We begin with invoking Gramsci's "Passive Revolution."

Gramsci's concept of "Passive Revolution" makes it clear that during this phase of development of struggle the social relations as a result of various modes of production may not intersect. In such a case, classes may not be well defined or in the case that they are well-defined the alliance between classes might be possible or it is also possible that each class puts itself in a "war of positions." It is at this juncture that popular movement intervenes as Gramsci already says that in such a scenario an insurrection is an impossibility. It is the moment of the "people" as the contemporary social formation could blur class divides and give rise to "groups." Students, *kulaks*, landlords and urban poor could come together because the first three were actually the same class as most commentators have observed. This is also true in the case of non-gazetted government servants and lawyers and other professionals who formed major part of the movement. This was an alliance between urban and rural petty-bourgeoisie. In the same way, agricultural labour who were mostly Dalits went on to another class formation that was certainly indifferent, if not antagonistic, to a very large extent. The same is true for the organized working class. These were the forces at work during the Bihar Movement. The problem with which JP had to grapple was how to form a singular "people" with these class positions. It is a commentary on the precarious nature of Bihar Movement that George Fernandes who was both the leader of the railway strike and staunch supporter of the movement could not convince the workers to strike an alliance with Bihar Movement. The workers' rank and file was largely autonomous from the leadership. JP's call to the organized working class might have fell on deaf ears but this led him to organize the unorganized workers which according to several reports was quite successful.

The same was true for women who played an important though subordinate role in the movement through Mahila Sangharsh Samiti. This was the material basis for the invocation of "Total Revolution." Let us invoke Ranabir Samaddar again to clarify this point. He writes: "It is a situation where the presence of class will always bring back the people, and the presence of people will always conjure up the spectre of class." This provides a clue to understanding people, especially, when Samaddar points out that invocation of "people" will conjure up the spectre of class. But why "class" is present as a spectre and "class" brings in the "people." I think this is so because between "class" and "people" there is a mediating agency and that agency is "group." "People" in this sense is not a negation of "class" but a rearrangement of class relations and this could be achieved only when "class" is made invisible. This is the origin of the spectre. JP's "Total Revolution", I think, was based on this understanding of "people" and "class" as delineated by Samaddar. He was very much aware that direct attempt at subsuming class would lead to class struggle within the people so it had to be displaced on the level of governmentality hence population groups. This was also one of the reasons that the demand for dissolution of Assembly and Parliament came to the fore. Ranabir Samaddar's formulation again will illuminate this phenomenon of Bihar Movement. He writes:

One of the complaints against Marx has been that he focused on state only and neglected the government, hence he discussed classes and people and not classes and populations-the products of modern governments and politics. Apart from the fact that the work *Capital* itself is demonstration of how a certain rationality (the rationale of capital) produces categories of population.²⁴

What can be deduced from the passage is that Marx simultaneously takes into account the question of state and government; citizen and population. Deriving conclusion from Marx's writing on insurrection and masses revolution (insurrection being the strategy) is the question of the state and hence the citizen. Governmentality though and hence population is bound by limits. That limit is the "people" and popular movement. "People" then is not derived from population but a rupture from population. JP understood this intuitively. His effort in Bhoodan, Gramdan, and Janata Sarkar was to break the regime of existing governmentality and constitute population by first constituting "people." It is again an evidence that "people" is actually negation of negation.

What is evident from above examples is that JP was a leader who was guided by tactics. This is the reason why there were different responses at different times in the popular movement that he was part of. This is also the reason he moved away from one current of thought to another. Scholars of JP's political thought divide his development into four stages. The first is Marxism followed by social democracy, sarvodaya and the phase of "Total Revolution." The mistake that these scholars make is that they consider JP made a rupture at each stage. It is more correct to say that instead of a rupture JP drew from all the sources and components of his political thinking. It is because of this reason that he regularly invoked Lenin and Mao during the period of Bihar Movement especially at later stages. When he defended partyless democracy he invoked the concept of the withering of state saying that partyless democracy is to be achieved and is not an immediate goal much like the withering of the state. He had enough chance to learn from the experiments of Janta Sarkar to understand the stranglehold of governmentality. In fact, he tried to find a balance between governmentality and state. And this is what is at the heart of popular movement: a delicate balance between the constituent parts of "people."

Ghanshyam Shah's observation that Janata Sarkar became anemic is misplaced. Popular Movement acts and intervenes between these political spaces and political subjects. Again, as Samaddar points out "Nobody could discuss any more 'people' or various problems for popular politics without relating the concept to sovereign power, legality and governmental power." Hence, popular politics happen at the intersection or rather within the matrix of these three forms of power. Therefore, insurrectionary politics does not occur within this matrix but as a dialectical confrontation between masses and the sovereign power. Again JP intuitively understood the nature of this matrix. He understood that "people" is not a stable category and is contingent upon the dialectical tension between several "groups." For example, if the concept of the "people" would have included Dalits and Workers the caste and class struggle would have indeed made it unstable. "People" then is not like united front of Mao. In this sense, JP's notion of the "people" was a synthesis between the groups (classes cannot achieve synthesis because their inherent relationship is one of struggle). This is the reason why popular movements are always resolved on the plane of government even though there might be an antagonistic gesture towards some state apparatuses. This is also the reason a demand of dissolution of assembly, end of corruption and regulating prices became the central demands because they are aggregate demands and only aggregate demands are possible for the aggregated group called the "people."

These examples do not mean that the tactical political maneuvers of JP bore fruit. For example, the absence of Dalit agricultural workers and the working class was due to the fact that JP was unable to form even a tactical, short-term alliance with this class. I think JP was thinking in terms of strategy while thinking about these classes. He understood that it would be difficult to transform these classes into groups and it was highly likely that they would preserve their autonomy within the constituents that form the "people." As such, these classes remained autonomous and carried their

own struggles in parallel but not without influencing each other to varied extent. These movements never intersected but they were in a situation of what quantum physics called “non-entanglement.” JP was aware of this connection hence he made the appeal to revolutionary Naxalites to give up arms and join the movement and dissuaded railway workers to go on strike and help as an outside of the “people” that was constituted.

Conclusion

Bihar Movement was a popular movement that came at the conjuncture of crisis, discontent and a new formation of the “people.” The stage of “passive revolution” ensured that instead of an insurrection by the “masses” there was a complex play of tactics by JP. JP himself tried to maneuver differently at different stages of the movement. The inherently unstable nature of the “people” meant that the primacy was of spontaneous action instead of organization and strategy. These are some of the findings of the research. Finally, Salman Rushdie in *Midnight's Children* mentions the Bihar Movement at great length. At the midnight when emergency is declared, Aadam Sinai, the son of Saleem Sinai, is born. It is clear that this moment in history is different from that of the stroke of midnight hour that delivered independence which was only a half fulfillment of the promise of the nation. The new midnight's children were born after a movement that will change the constituent of the “people” rearranging and realigning the groups that made the “people.” For Aadam Sinai instead of nation-building Social Justice will be at the core of the nation. This will not fulfill the promise of the nation but it will go beyond the betrayal of the nation into new sites of struggle. This is a new form of independence that is delivered to the nation. No wonder that Bihar Movement was called struggle for second freedom.

Notes

¹ Lockwood, David. *The Communist Party of India and the Indian Emergency*. New Delhi, India: SAGE, 2016.

² Lalan Tiwari, *Democracy and Dissent: A Case Study of the Bihar Movement, 1974-75* (Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1987). All references to historical events and chronology are from this study otherwise stated. This is an excellent source which records events of the movement on a daily basis.

³ Arvind N. Das, *Does Bihar Show the Way? Apathy, Agitation, and Alternatives in an Unchanging State* (Calcutta: Research Indian Publications, 1979).

⁴ Veer Bharat Talwar ed. *Naxalbari Ke Daur Mein* (First ed. New Delhi: Anamika, 2007).

⁵ Das, *Does Bihar Show the Way?*

⁶Ibid.

⁷ Charles Tilly, *Regimes and Repertoires* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2010).

⁸ Das, *Does Bihar Show the Way?*

⁹ V. I. Lenin, "The Collapse of the Second International", *Marxists Internet Archive*. <https://www.marxists.org/> Accessed Nov. 7, 2016.

¹⁰ Ranabir Samaddar, *Crisis of 1974: Railway Strike and the Rank and File*. (Forthcoming 2017).

¹¹ Bipan Chandra, *In the Name of Democracy: JP Movement and the Emergency* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2003).

¹² Paul R. Brass, "The Political Uses of Crisis: The Bihar Famine of 1966-1967" *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 45.2 (1986): 245-67.

¹³ Ghanshyam Shah, *Protest Movements in Two Indian States: A Study of the Gujarat and Bihar Movements* (Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1977).

¹⁴ Friedrich Engels, "XVII. Insurrection." *Marxists Internet Archive*. accessed Nov. 7, 2016.

¹⁵ Karl Marx, "The Class Struggles in France, 1848 to 1850" in *The Class Struggles in France, 1848 to 1850*, *Marxists Internet Archive*. Accessed Nov. 7, 2016.

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- ¹⁶ Lenin. "Marxism and Insurrection." *Marxists Internet Archive*. Accessed Nov. 7, 2016.
- ¹⁷ Mao Tse-tung, "On New Democracy." *Marxists Internet Archive*. Accessed Nov. 7, 2016.
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ISSN 2348-0297