

PREFACE

Efflorescence Efflorescence ... Efflorescence. I distinctly remember that the legendary teacher of English Literature, Professor Taraknath Sen, used this particular term to evaluate the outburst of sonneteering in the Elizabethan age. Quite consciously, I am repeating this term to encapsulate, if possible, the prolific abundance of creativity inspired by the Naxalite movement. A few relevant though approximate figures will substantiate the choice of the word. No fewer than 500 poems were written by activists and sympathizers to record the upsurge; no fewer than 200 short stories were penned by the writers to capture the ebb and flow of the complex, political movement; no fewer than 50 novels were written to express the Naxalite experience; no fewer than 50 plays were written by indefatigable playwrights to dramatize the movement which struck us like a meteor and then dwindled, no fewer than 20 films were made to capture in celluloid the upsurge and tragic decline of the violent rebellion and resistance. Indeed, when I began to explore this creative efflorescence, I did not know where and how I should terminate my quest. It is therefore strange to read the comment of an otherwise excellent critic, Iraban Basu Ray, which labelled this outburst as 'slim', 'confined' and 'slender'. If one cares to read the plays published in the journal 'Abhinay Darpan' and old copies of two magazines in particular, Anustup and Aneek, one realizes that the objections chosen by Iraban Basu Roy, were fallacious.

The truth of the matter is simple. No social and political movement in post-independence India spawned this amount of creativity as Naxalbari spawned, and that too in all possible branches of literature beginning from poetry and ending in autobiographical journals with short stories, novels and dramas coming in between. In this context I have one specific request to make bearing in mind this outstanding proliferation. Please do not ask why I have ignored the poems of Manibhusan Bhattacharjee, why I have concentrated on the only novel written by Swarna Mitra; why I have not selected even more plays written by Amal Roy; why I have left out the stories of Sankar Ghosh who wrote the splendid novel "Communis". The answer to all these queries is the fact that my 12000 word limit compelled me to be selective, if not judicious. The cultural dimension of the Naxalbari revolution deserves one full-fledged book running to 250 or 300 pages. I intend to write this book later. Further, I did not want to indulge in staccato roll-calling of names, I knew that I had to explore, dissect and analyse the texts I have chosen.

POETRY

There are still some literary critics in our midst who raise their complaining eyebrows the moment they confront the expression ‘committed poetry’. These steadfast disciples of Stefan Mallarme and Paul Valery reason that ‘committed’ poetry is opposed per se to ‘pure’ poetry, and hence not much worth should be attached to this kind of verse. Their argument is as follows : (a) committed poetry does not fulfil the precondition of pure poetry because it brings politics to the forefront (b) this intrusion of politics leads to the entrance of slogans and (c) poetry of commitment turns fast into sheer sloganeering. These critics are so stubborn that they hesitate to extend rightful applause to markedly political poets like Vladimir Mayakovski, Bertolt Brecht and Pablo Neruda.

To these critics who love to dwell in their self-contained ivory towers, we should gift the anthology titled ব্রজমানিক নিয়ে গাঁথা. Edited and compiled by Rahul Purakayastha, this selection contains 280 rousing lyrics as well as tragic reflective poems penned by 182 poets, some of them Naxalite activists and others dedicated fellow-travellers and sympathizers. Needless to say, this remarkable anthology proves once and for all that the poetry of commitment fulfils the basic aesthetic preconditions. In fact, poems such as these or committed poetry engender at the same time a new aesthetic or poetics which goes beyond the borders of pure poetry.

The poets included in this anthology follow celebrated icons like Mao-tse-tung and Louis Aragon. Mao-tse-tung has exhibited how to blend the Chinese tradition of lyric writing with new revolutionary content. Following his footsteps, the activist Dronacharya Ghosh has written : “আমাদের জন্মে শুধু অবিরাম শোষণের গ্লানি/ এখন সময় নেই চপল ছায়ায় বসে গল্পের আসর/এখন সময় নেই পান করি অসহায় চরিত্রের মদ/তীক্ষ্ণ বুলটের মুখে এখন প্রয়োজন/ শ্রেণী শত্রু নিধনের/কঠিন, কঠোর এক সংগঠন”। In this lyric resonant with resolution, rebellious promises are uttered with refined nonchalance. The language employed is hard and strong and it reveals a revolutionary programme that must be translated into necessary action. It needs to be mentioned that Dronacharya, one of the finest lyricists of the Naxalbari movement, was martyred in Hooghly Jail on ২৪-এ মার্চ, ১৩৭৮.

And why only Dronacharya Ghosh ? Murari Mukhopadhyay, Timirbaran Singha, Bipul Chakravarti and many others travelled and fought on the same road. One is particularly drawn to Murari Mukhopadhyay's poem ভালোবেসে. Almost following the structure and syntax of Heinrich Heine's lyric – another rebellious poet – Murari in this poem links a number of conventional romantic associations with pristine revolutionary ardour. For example, the moon-river-flower and bird shed their conventional semantic to inaugurate the process of violent change. He writes with deathless determination : “চাঁদ, নদী, ফুল, তারা, পাখী/দেখা যাবে কিছুকাল পরে/ কেননা এ অন্ধকারে শেষ যুদ্ধ বাকি/ এখন আগুন চাই আমাদের এই কুঁড়েঘরে।” Like Dronacharya Ghosh, Murari Mukhopadhyay was also martyred on July 25, 1971 in Hazaribagh Central Prison. His lyric ভালোবেসে is like a sheet of steel, astute and glistening.

We are startled even more by Bipul Chakravarti's heroic lyrics. Probably, under the influence of Rainer Maria Rilke, who in spite of his angelic missions, was firmly rooted in material reality, Bipul compares his condition with that of a wounded tiger. He reminds us of Rilke's celebrated poem 'Panther'. Awful torture and persecution have failed to weaken his commitment. In point of fact, just the opposite has happened – he has turned out to be even more ardent and more devoted to his revolutionary cause : “পা থেকে মাথা পর্যন্ত চাবুকের দাগ/যেন থাকে/ এমনভাবে মারো ... এমনভাবে মারো/ তোমার মারের পালা শেষ হলে / আমায় দেখায় যেন ডোরাকাটা বাঘের মতন”. Like an enraged and wounded tiger, the poet is determined to strike his foes – his agenda is that of rockhard and merciless retribution.

Not only those engaged in direct political action in towns, cities and villages, but also non-active fellow-travellers, sympathizers and, broadly speaking, humanists coined lyrics and poems to express their sensitive and anguished reactions to the Naxalite movement. Rahul Purakayastha, quite correctly, has included their creativity in ব্রজমানিক নিয়ে গাঁথা which remains till date the best and most comprehensive anthology of poetry dedicated to the violent and idealistic moment. Eminent poets like Subhas Mukhopadhyay, Birendra Chattopadhyay, Sankha Ghosh, Alope Ranjan Dasgupta, Shakti Chhottopadhyay, Sunil Gangopadhyay stood beside the activists extolling their sacrifice, courage and bravery though they did not endorse their picking up the gun. Sankha Ghosh, by far the most eminent poet writing in Bengal, explained the

ideological stand of the poets. He said, “We endorse the idealism, desire and aspiration of the Naxalite youths – with that we did not have any quarrel. But we questioned their method, course of action and violent programme. We were dead against the ruthless state oppression that was launched against them. I do not know if the Naxalites spread লালসন্ত্রাস or red terror, but of this we are quite sure that the state unleashed horrible white terror or শ্বেত সন্ত্রাস against them”.

These poems written by well-known poets expressed solidarity in a variety of moods and intonations. For example, Subhas Mukhopadhyay in his almost iconic poem ছেলে গেছে বলে laments the fact that the young rebel has gone to the forest to fight leaving the old and aged comrade in self-lacerating, familial bondage. The pronounced note of sorrow and guilt recorded in this poem gives way to loud and outspoken condemnation in the poems of the uncompromising bard Birendra Chattopadhyay. We all know that Birendra Chattopadhyay throughout the phase of this movement from the late sixties to the early seventies of the last century voiced rocklike support for the young militants, despite the fact that he was not a Naxalite by conviction. In one of his condemnatory lyrics, burning like hot iron, he wrote : “আমার সন্তান যাক প্রত্যহ নরকে/ছিঁড়ুক সর্বাঙ্গ তার ভাড়াটে জল্লাদ/ আমার, যে আমি করি প্রত্যহ প্রার্থনা/ তোমার সন্তান যেন থাকে দুখেভাতে।” We fall silent as we read these scalding lyrics, we realize that the poet is revealing the very tears of things – to quote Horace – in these poems.

It happened sometime that a tremulous bridge was constructed between the young, relentless Naxalites and progressive poets. One such fervent relationship flowered between Timirbaran Singha, the young fearless Naxalite, and the two eminent poets and teachers, Sankha Ghosh and Alokeranjan Dasgupta. Timir was their favourite student and they saw him going into the deep and long night, to use the words of Dylan Thomas. Timir, according to them – to employ the diction of Dylan Thomas again – raged and raged against the dying of light even if his going deep into the murderous night could not be averted. Timir was killed inside Behrampur Jail in 1971, and on hearing this news, Sankha Ghosh wrote, an ardent elegy : “ময়দান ভারী হয়ে নামে কুয়াশায়/দিগন্তের দিকে মিলিয়ে যায় রঙট মার্চ/ তার মাঝখানে পথে পড়ে আছে ও কি কৃষ্ণাচূড়া/ নীচু হয়ে বসে হাতে তুলে নিই/ তোমার ছিন্নশির, তিমির”. Alokeranjan Dasgupta, on his part, hailed him as অমৃতধাম যাত্রী or Sojourner to Heaven and wrote in his lyric full of agonized sympathy : “আমি

কার মৃত্যুরস আশ্বাদন করি/মনে মনে .. যেদিন পরানো হল হাতকড়ি/গানের খাতাটি তার দিয়ে গেছে আমাকে গোপনে/ঠিক রাত দুটোর সময়/সবকিছু দিলে যেন ভয়ানক চুরি হয়ে যায়’’. And what did the living Timir had to say to his two teachers. To Sankha Ghosh he said, “I am leaving. I do not know where I shall be going, what I shall do and when I shall return’’. To Alokranjan, he said with conviction, “Sir, you must believe, revolution is approaching, no one can stop it’’. What is even more heart-rending is his tongue-in-cheek lyric ও পাগল in which he indulges in caustic self-exploration : “ও পাগল, ও পথ তুই মাড়াসনে মাড়াসনে/ও পাগল, পাগলামি তুই ছাড়/ ... বলতো, শহীদ হওয়া কি আমাদের মানায়’’।

The Naxalite poets picked up this self-deprecatory tone time and again. At times, driven to despair and failure, they questioned the very ethos of their struggle and expressed the terrible fear of loneliness. Such self questionings found their diction in lyrics. The Naxalite activist Srijan Sen wrote while assailed by this mood, “The air becomes heavy/Memories suddenly become pedlars of flowers/I found only stairs before me – stairs of the overbridge/laying themselves here in the darkness/I return home/The lamp is flickering/A cold, wooden seat welcomes me’’.

In the very beginning of this section I placed committed poetry and pure poetry in juxtaposition. My aim was to demolish the redundant wall that is at times raised between the two. So, at the end, let us close with an imagist poem that perhaps would have pleased Mallarme and Valery. This poem was written by Srijan Sen : “One after another/Eyes burn/Watch them from far/They look pale like the night stars/ come closer/Every eye looks larger than the sun, each a ball of fire’’.

As we read and reread these moving poems revealing a mosaic of moods and emotions, as we traverse from fiery slogan transmuted into stirring verse, to the enquiring sotto voce, we realize that the rebels were not only fighters but minstrels too. While recalling Dronacharya, Murari, Bipul, Timir, Srijan we are reminded of those immortal words uttered by the poet of the French Resistance and lifelong communist Louis Aragon, “Friend, I go to my death and O Friends will know the reason why’’.

CONCLUSION OR EPILOGUE

One has to admit that varied, sensitive and searching creative endeavour branching into several directions like poetry, drama, novel and short story is hardly read and discussed at this moment. We are all victims of collective amnesia. It is difficult to categorize the reasons for this indifference. Perhaps our priorities have changed in our globalised world. Perhaps we are no longer disturbed and bothered by revolutionary creativity. Perhaps we are keen to maintain the criminal status quo in the countryside, towns and cities and therefore we are most reluctant to accumulate the signs and symbols of defiant, bloody protest. Be that as may, we cannot afford to forget the innate Utopian longing strongly present in the creative statements. All the writers of Naxalbari revolution dreamt of another, better and different world, and this dream, recognized or forgotten, continues to live. Not only do these forecast a humane future but they also unravel the criminality of the powers that be. As long as injustice, tyranny and exploitation persist, this dream of another world, this Utopia will serve as an antidote inspiring us to battle once again. While reading these poems I was constantly reminded of Theodor Adorno's programmatic statement, "Kunst Utopie sein muss".