

POLICE AND NAXALITES

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Naxalite movement that shook Indian polity in the late 1960s and early 1970s is now history. But it still raises a great deal of curiosity, Samar Sen once wrote that although it was true that Naxalites created more problems than they solved, but the questions they raised never came up with so much ferocity since the historic Telengana struggle. The state machinery, from the very beginning, looked upon the Naxalites as a menace. It is also true that during those days of turbulence, the long-term perspective was lost sight of by the movement and its leaders, and the shrewd persons in charge of the police and a bureaucracy took advantage of it. The *book under discussion contains many valuable documents, which show how the police tried various means for containing and destroying the movement. They included wanton killing of Naxalite youths. Not only the young men, but also old ones were also killed; for example Saroj Datta was killed, something that the police never admitted because it was not possible for the murderers to concoct a story of 'encounter' about him.

The notifications reproduced from the various issues of *Calcutta Police Gazette* show that the high-level police officers shrewdly tried to maintain, with a good measure of success, the unity of the police forces against Naxalite attacks. The mainstream of the Naxalites, instead of trying to take advantages of the contradictions in the enemy camp, began to attack the police indiscriminately, and this facilitated the work of the police authorities, just as during the early stages of the movement, severe cruelty by the police against half-hearted young sympathizers transformed them into hard-core supporters and activists. Among the Naxalite youths of that period, heroism and self-sacrifice often went hand in hand with dogmatism and more courageous and dedicated activists and local leaders were often prone to treat their well-meaning well wishers with contempt and not infrequently with hostility. What is more unfortunate is that the impetuous leadership failed to take a dialectic approach to the subject and their dogmatism gradually alienated friends and created more enemies. This cost the movement dearly.

These documents, however, do not contain any reference to the blatantly illegal activities of the police. This is not unexpected, because the custodians of 'law and order' do not want to leave records of their own misdeeds for future use by historians. The editor is not, however, ignorant of these misdeeds and in his well-written Introduction, he has provided at least a curious that after the end of the Indira-Siddhartha rule in 1977, partial account of how the police officers acted like cold-blooded killers. It is also there was a demand for the punishment of guilty police officers, but this demand met with little success for the twin reasons of the apathy of the Left Front Government and the failure of the Naxalites and civil rights activists to build up a powerful mass movement. Intriguingly enough, the most notorious police officer of the period went away without any punishment. In one case he got a jail sentence after many years of

tussle, but even that did not materialize owing to legal complications. That officer is now dead but his obloquy remains with him.

The statement allegedly made by Charu Majumdar before the police is interesting as well as confusing. This statement is inaccurate in many respects. But what stands out is that Charu Majumdar did not bow down to the police, nor did he try to denounce what he had done. In his comments, Professor Suniti Ghosh has pointed out many contradictions in this statement. He has argued convincingly that there is a conscious attempt at character assassination by the police. Suniti Ghosh, however, has not informed whether the group around Charu Majumdar took any decision to convene a meeting of the Central Committee and to initiate any discussion on the basis of the suggestions of the Communist Party of China. That no such meeting of the Central Committee, i.e. the Central Committee elected at the Party Congress, took place is a fact and neither Charu Majumdar nor the group around him cannot be absolved of the responsibility. Among the serious Naxalites who realized their mistakes empirically, there grew a common belief that had the suggestions been seriously taken in the nick of time and the party's tactical line rectified in the light of them, such a setback would not have occurred and the party could have made at least a retreat in good order. It was also held that Charu Majumdar and the group around him, for fear of losing their prestige among the ranks, considered it wiser to suppress these suggestions. Charu Majumdar personified an ideology, and was a veteran of the communist movement, whether to him, consideration of his self-esteem was more important than the interests of the movement remains a moot question, to which Suniti Ghosh could have provided an answer. But he has unfortunately evaded the issue. The book is important and interesting, but even as a document of the attitude of the police, is inadequate. A lot of information can possibly be found from the police records of the districts where the movement took its most acute form, e.g. Midnapore, Birbhum and Darjeeling. Of course the editor has not made any pretension about that. The purpose of the book is limited and it can be said that it is useful in that limited sense. □□□

*THE NAXALITES THROUGH THE EYES OF THE POLICE : Select notifications from the Calcutta Police Gazettes 1967-1975.

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