

LETTERS

AMITAVA DASGUPTA

Acclaimed peoples' theatre and music director Amitava Dasgupta, known to his friends as Amit Da, breathed his last on October 9, 2010 (born on July 1, 1947). He did not recover well from a heart surgery in July and continued working until his very last days. His was a four-decade career of a hectic, enormous and distinguished pro-people cultural activist whose passion to use music and theatre against injustice never diminished.

The German theatre director, Fritz Bennewitz (1926-1995) an authority on Brechtian theatre and Dr Werner Hecht, the current head of Brecht Centre, Germany regarded Amit Da among the most prominent practitioners of Brechtian theatre. With his death India and the world also lost a prominent practitioner of Brechtian genre of theatre.

He had great cultural dreams, the most important being to mould Brechtian theatre into the folk theatre as practiced by different sections of the working class of Delhi. He had been experimenting with *jatra* while he was in Bengal. When a drama critic described it as a project to Indianize Brecht, Amit Da was quick to retort that he did not subscribe to this kind of nomenclature as it seemed to claim that Indian theatre was some kind of homogenous whole or free of class biases. For him folk forms of theatre were the product of the toil-sweat-blood of the Havenots and as a cultural response were close to Epic Theatre of Brecht which not only exposed the hypocrisy of rulers/elites but also aimed at enabling the audience to critically respond to human conditions in a class divided society. He was conscious that ruling classes in the past were able to introduce anti-woman and vulgar content to this genre thus killing its political substance. By combining Indian folk traditions with the Brechtian theatre he wanted to bring back the original thrust of the former.

Even Emergency could not deter him and he was ready with his repertoire of short Brechtian plays exposing the emerging fascist state. He also helped in organizing the printing and circulation of anti-Emergency literature, especially folk songs in and around Delhi.

The weakening of the left politics and set-backs to mass struggles in the wake of the rising tide of the neo-liberal order world-over did not dishearten him and he took these set-backs as part of the struggle for justice. However, he had to seek funds from state cultural academies to continue his work. He was not happy with the situation and hoped that a day would come when mass movements would sustain works like his.

Shamsul Islam

'CONGRESSI DEMOCRATS'

This is about the issue of FRONTIER dated November 7-11, 2010. What has the weekly come to? It has acquired classic anti-communist characteristics. First the article by Bibekananda Ray summarily denouncing communism as a creed, in the name of exposing the CPI(M). Second a votary of the World Bank lauding its paternal role in a book-review. Not so long ago the same weekly published an interview with the author of Confessions of an Economic Hitman.

Is the weekly becoming a mouthpiece of Congressi democrats?

Hiren Gohain, Guwahati