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The God that Failed: The Failure of Naxal Movement in Bani Basu's *The Enemy Within*

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Abstract:

The history of India is replete with instances which reinforce the belief that the happiness and prosperity can only be established with the help of a nonviolent method. Every act of violence leads only to another violence. Thus, the ideologies of nonviolence promoted and pioneered by the philosophers like Buddha, Mahaveer, and Gandhi have always been effective and successfully adopted as a guiding force in India. On the other hand every ideology advocating violence has always been despised. In a peace loving country like India, the path of violence has always been disastrous and unwelcomed. The present paper seeks to explore the Maoist ideology of revolution and its failure as a movement in Bani Basu's novel *The Enemy Within* (2002). In the postcolonial India, the subaltern homogeneity remains in its true self, as it was in the colonial India, though in a transformed shape. The poles of power structure have been changed yet the post-Independent democracy has failed to curb the marginalization of the oppressed sections. An egalitarian society based on the ideal principles of liberty, equality and fraternity has remained a mere illusion, thus leaving the pathetic subalterns with no choice—not even to speak, as Gayatri Spivak would prefer to put forth. *The Enemy Within* depicts the state of insurgency that sparked off in Naxalbari (North Bengal) in 1967 after the failure of the promises made by the state machinery. The novel depicts the exploitation of the native people both by the landowners as well as the Government, giving rise to unrest and dissatisfaction and forcing the helpless subalterns to take recourse to the Maoist ideology of violence. This paper questions the relevance of the Maoist ideology of violence in the light of a suitable theoretical framework with reference to the novel *The Enemy Within*. Employing the critical tools offered by Gayatri Spivak and others, the paper also attempts to establish the failure of the Naxal movement which instead successfully hijacked the possibilities of giving voice to the subalterns.

Keywords: Postcolonial, Subaltern, Naxalbari, Naxalite ideology, Nonviolence, Red flag.

The anti-colonial waves of nationalism unfurled the flag of the Indian tricolour replacing the authority of the British empire in 1947. This momentous occasion of decolonization of the country from the cruel clutches of a foreign rule filled the entire atmosphere with an unprecedented fragrance of hope and happiness. A new society based on the highly adorable principles of liberty, equality and fraternity was promised by the government of the day. However, the promises remained like a mirage – never to be attained. In fact, the imperial

structure of the British government was only replaced with a yet another tyrannical regime of the native “brown sahibs” of this very country. The age old caste system went on like before, the suppression of the landless people continued, and the politics meant only for the rich people. Italian theoretician Antonio Gramsci in his ‘*Selections from the Prison Notebooks*’ (1971) described the domination of a culturally diverse society by the ruling class who manipulate the culture of that society and called it *cultural hegemony*. The subalterns (the poor, the downtrodden, the tribal, the proletariats etc.) again found themselves the ‘other’ of those of the elites who used to rule them. The subaltern section of the society couldn’t retrieve its authentic voice-- it remained suppressed while the process of exploitation continued as before. Gayatri Spivak in her canonical postcolonial text “*Can the Subaltern Speak?*” writes:

I define the subaltern as the person removed from all lines of social mobility. That is, the subaltern is barred from access to all public resources that would allow for upward movement, out of dire poverty and into political invisibility. My whole point in “*Can the Subaltern Speak?*” is that you cannot make the subaltern visible or lend her a voice... And it’s not because the subaltern can’t pronounce words or produce sentences. The subaltern “cannot speak”, instead, because her speech falls short of fully authorized, *political* speech. Too much gets in the way of her message’s being heard, socially and politically. (Spivak, 1983)

In 1967, the peasants revolted against the atrocity of landlords and captured a chunk of land from the landlords in Naxalbari area of North Bengal and demonstrated red flag all over the fields. In the aftermath, the landlords crushed the peasants resulting in coming together of the oppressed people under one banner. The movement spread like a wildfire under the leadership of revolutionaries like Kanu Sanyal and Charu Majumdar.

A Naxal or Naxalites is a member of any of the Communist guerrilla groups in India, mostly associated with the Communist Party of India (Maoist). The term Naxal derives from the name of the village Naxalbari in West Bengal, where the movement had its origin. Naxalites are considered far-left radical communists, supportive of Maoist political sentiment and ideology. Their origin can be traced to the split in 1967 of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), leading to the formation of the Communist Party of India (Marxist–Leninist). Initially the movement had its centre in West Bengal. In later years, it spread into less developed areas of rural southern and eastern India, such as Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Bihar and Andhra Pradesh through the activities of underground groups like the Communist Party of India (Maoist).

Mao Tse-tung, the ideologue behind this movement, justifies the violent ways of the revolution to bring social equality and shatter the class structure of the society:

A revolution is not a dinner party, or writing an essay, or painting a picture, or doing embroidery; it cannot be so refined, so leisurely and gentle, so temperate, kind,

courteous, restrained and magnanimous. A revolution is an insurrection, an act of violence by which one class overthrows another. (Mao Tse-tung)

Praising and advocating the ideology of Mao, the *People's Daily*, a Chinese Journal writes:

A peal of spring thunder has crashed over the land of India. Revolutionary peasants in Darjeeling area have risen in rebellion. Under the leadership of a revolutionary group of the Indian Communist Party, a red area of rural revolutionary armed struggle has been established in India...The Chinese people joyfully applaud this revolutionary storm of the Indian peasants in the Darjeeling area as do all the Marxist-Leninists and revolutionary people of the world..... It is an inevitability that the Indian peasants will rebel and the Indian people will make revolution because the Congress rule has left them with no alternative. ('*Spring Thunder over India*' *People's Daily*, 1967)

The Enemy Within locates the year 1967 as a "Call from the Dark" in the political history of modern India when a new ideology based on sheer violence began to rear its head among the masses. The oppressed section of the society started to seek for an alternate option that could fight for their problems. According to the novelist that fourteen-party coalition was the result of the dissatisfaction of people:

The year 1967 is an astonishing year in the political history of West Bengal. In the February general elections of the year, twenty years of Congress party rule in that state came to an end. An unprecedented fourteen-party coalition government came into power among whose members were the Moscow-following, C.P.I. and the China oriented C.P.M. (Basu 10)

Bani Basu shows the futility of the Naxalite ideology. Through the characters of Munni and Bibi, who are University students, the novelist underlines the influence of Maoist ideology not only among the deprived masses, but also the intellectuals of the society. Munni introduces Bibi to the revolutionary ideology:

In China, the Cultural Revolution began from Peking University, Bibi. All the students, young people, left the university and came out in droves. We first have to break all that is old. Shatter it to pieces the system's despicable futility. Our goal will be people oriented education in a classless system. It will always look at the masses. It won't teach us to think that farmers, labourers, working men belong to a different class or category. (Basu 15-16)

Charu Majumdar, a die-hard follower of Chinese leader Mao Tse-tung, sought Indian farmers and marginalized castes to overthrow the Government and the upper classes whom he held responsible for their exploitation. His exhortation as contained in the 'Historic Eight Documents', expresses the Naxalite ideology:

Come, Comrades, let all toiling people unitedly prepare for armed struggle against this government under the leadership of the working class, on the basis of the

programme of agrarian revolution. On the other hand, let us lay the foundation of the New People's Democratic India by building liberated peasant areas through peasant revolts. (Historic Eight Documents)

Basu's characters seem to be deeply influenced by this revolutionary ideology of Majumdar. They plan for a revolution to overthrow the established norms of the governance. Munni seems to make a ground for the *Laal Kranti* (Red Revolution) and Bibi there to propagate it, to bring it in practice with the help of her brothers Bappa and Bacchu. Munni puts the blueprint for the revolution before ever-questioning Bibi:

We've had quite a few revolutions in our country, Bibi. The 1857 revolt, the Telengana movement, the Tebhaga agitation, the Santhal uprising. But none of these could maintain the tempo till the end. Do you know why? Because none of them was backed by any clear ideology. The ideology must be as plain as water to any member of the cadre. Our primary task is to make the revolution successful. (Basu 16)

Bani Basu seems to hold nerves with all the contemporary politics. She notably depicted her characters taking part in the pool of revolution. They are intense with emotions who know not any bounds except a thing, a revolution, and the Chinese model to eradicate the oppressive classes and the biopolitical model of government.

Munni introduces Bibi to the circle of comrades. Right from the beginning it is noticeable that Bibi does not have any instincts to do any politics. She is an intelligent student who in the name of Maoist ideology for the well-being of deprived sections, is dragged into the world of catastrophe from where there is no way out:

'We have only one option left - the Chinese option. We have only one weapon in our hands - the Chinese weapon.'

Comrades, say with me- "In the barrels of guns-"

The room reverberated as if with thunder- "is the source of power." '

'Down with parliamentary democracy!'

'China's Chairman is our Chairman!'

'Naxalbari - Red Salute!' (Basu 23)

In the backdrop of the Naxalite Movement two interlocking stories run in parallel towards a climax where some astonishing revelations are unfolded with the death of Sumanta Sengupta (Antu). The story moves smoothly like a detective story. The deadly outcomes of this fatal ideology are visible clearly till the end with the death of Antu.

One part of the novel is set in the turbulent historical timeline of 1960s-1970s, greatly absorbed by the Naxalite movement; the other is set comparatively in a peaceful industrial area 15 years later. Both parts are juxtaposed making the sense of the novel thoroughly. The death of the Sumanta Sengupta is the consequence of the Naxalite activities 15 years earlier.

The ideology is set for the bloodshed. Their first step initiates the breakage of established colonial education. Bappa, a brilliant scholar solves higher secondary exam papers beforehand with the help of his genius brother Bacchu and the others distribute these solved papers at the exam centre. The terror of knife holds the teachers dumb. One Jiban Babu tries to oppose the misconduct, but in the evening he is found dead.

The very spirit of Majumdar's revolutionary ideology starts taking place in a family comprising Bibi, her brothers - Bappa, Bacchu, and her cousin Antu. Antu seems to be connected to a wider network. They start asking for ransom from rich people to fulfil their need for armed revolution. However, when they enter deep into this movement, they finally recognize the futility of this Maoist ideology. They understand that it is merely an illusion; people mould every ideology according to their vested interests. Indra, his senior, addresses Bappa the deflection of the armed revolution:

Bappa, it is a terrible situation. The revolution is slipping out of our hands and being taken over by lumpen elements. We are called 'ideologues'. What's most frightening, in all probability, there is no one to direct these anti-socials. Everything has been left to them. They're killing whoever they have grudge against, calling them class enemies, in the guise of Naxal action. The leaders know that these lumpens don't know, can't understand any Marxist, Leninist, or Maoist doctrine. (Basu 67-68)

Mahatma Gandhi believed that violence always begets violence just as, an eye for an eye will make the world blind. As suggested in the novel, no permanent changes can be brought about in the system through sheer violence and brute force. When the situation turns violent and goes beyond control, the government is forced to start its hunting operations to nab the insurgents. Realising their helplessness and failure of their ideology, both Bibi and Bappa desperately seek an escape:

Somehow or the other, we have to get out of this. Find out whether we can sell this house. We'll go far away from here. We'll live a different life. (Basu 72)

Amid the crackdown of the police they live their lives in disguise in a comparatively peaceful industrial area. Munni (Jayanti), Bibi (Bratati), Soumya (Bappa), and Shirsha (Bacchu) all escape the past and live in a peaceful area. But past doesn't get easily obliterated. They all get together when Sengupta (Antu) returns unknowingly at the same place from England who turned a whistle-blower only to save himself from the police. It is here that the last droplets of the blood revolution are shed with the bizarre death of Sengupta (Antu), their former chief. The novelist depicts how a set of violent ideology changes the peaceful life of a family into a

turbulent one. The characters are cut from the outside world and when they catch slight connections of the past, it renders them again into futile knots.

In the present scenario, the advent of liberalization has brought out different national developmental theories in the red corridor. At the same time the Maoist insurgency has filled the void in under-developed villages, as the poorest sections of society failed to get any advantage from the developmental policies and economic prosperity rendered by the Government. In recent years, the biggest corporate houses have established their industrial projects usurping native people's land. The Naxal leadership tries to get advantage of it and instigates the illiterate and poor sections of the society that the Government is making efforts to shoo them away from their traditional culture. This approach seems to create their image as champions of the cause of marginalized and voiceless subalternity. There is an absolute poverty, deprivation, and lack of development in these areas but it doesn't mean that the Naxalites are going to eradicate all these problems. The illiteracy, poverty, and reactionary approach of the Government provide ideal situation to operate their Maoist ideology. They take up the issues of deprivation only for their own causes, to justify their Maoist ideology – it is how they operate their Chinese model of armed revolution.

Bani Basu wants to put a third space here. Neither the Naxalites nor the Government can seek a permanent solution out of violence. The path of bloodshed only brings the feelings of unrest. While it is extremely immoral on part of the Government to exploit their natural resources in the name of 'national development', it is equally disastrous if the Naxalites take to arms against this state-sponsored exploitation. The armed revolution can never cure their subaltern position, nor can the government's retributive and oppressive tactics work up a feasible solution. A poor "*biopolitics*" (Foucault, 1975) encouraging brutality will only generate more violence in the world. Thus, Bani Basu depicts the Naxal ideology as the god that is doomed to fail in the Indian context. One can aptly recall Arthur Koestler's book, *The God that Failed* (1949) and draw a parallel between the situation of utter disillusionment experienced by the former Communists of the 1930's Europe, and the resentment of Naxals of the contemporary India.

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