

NARAHARI KAVIRAJ: THE INTREPID MARXIST

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Chance sometimes creates opportunities, but not often, the vice versa. But in the present scribes life both things happened together. When in 1969, as a mere youth of 23 years and somewhat of ill-health, he was becoming disgusted with old cronies and their unnecessary and chaotic hullabaloo, his friend Sankar Ray took him to 10, Bondel Road of the then Calcutta, and instantly he found a congenial ambience and a gathering of very few almost old men. From that momentous Monday of June 1969 till the end of 1981, when the twin prestigious Publications, MULYAYAN (in Bengali) and PROBLEMS OF NATIONAL LIBERATION (in English) were made defunct, he had almost become an organic adjunct to this projects, thanks to, amongst others, the all enveloping teaching and appreciation of no other than the Editor, Prof. Narahari Kaviraj.

That he would not be with us for very many days I could discern when I met him for the last time sometime in October, 2011. He failed to remember his closest associates and friends of long years. But that the end would come before he would step into his 96th Birthday come February 17, 2012 came as a shock. The youngest and the only living person of the top theoreticians and Party leaders of the West Bengal Committee of the undivided Communist Party of India who had the gentlest of minds and one of the sharpest of Marxist Brains and had drafted the independant line to be taken if the party was to remain undivided during the jail-days after the China-India clash is no more in the living.

One could write volumes about his party activities, on his extra-ordinary perception about Historiography, about his contribution on the Marxian analysis of the Peasant Revolts and how to look at the Peoples' Movements of different times without forgetting the exact perspective of the time and class and social forces extant. But this scribe would dwell only on the personal and man- to-man relationship between a reluctant Teacher and an eager pupil.

I was very happy to extend my both hands to help the Bi-monthly Marxist journal (Mulyayan) to exist and prosper and the Editorial Board was only too elated to be relieved of the daily chores of office and slowly the marketing side of the business. At that time I was not even a dilettante in Marxism and hence shunned all discussions on Marxist thoughts. But, nothing doing! Naraharida (as we called him, though he was almost my father's age) virtually forced me to translate a more than 30 pages of RPD,s (Rajani Palme Dutt) theoretical and practical revolutionary ideas of Lenin into Bengali. He was generous not only to my rendering but advised me to take up writings on Marxist theory too. His argument was that my diction was that of an experienced Marxist.

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As an *Editor*, he was a scientific pluralist, if one may coin such a term. Many of us who congregated around Mulyayan at that time for various political and private reasons; he listened to everyone's view and explained his position clearly and lucidly, (at that point of time it appeared that any explanation was superfluous because we thought we already knew more than that), and most of the time he would ask me, obviously after almost everyone left or on way back to our home that 'Tapanbabu, You read the manuscript and get rid of the unnecessary quotations and please translate only the required portions wherever it seems absolutely necessary'. Thus, by chance or opportunity, he tried to instill in me the mind processes of an editor. That I could not become one, was due mainly to my pusillanimity and fear of plunging on to a completely new endeavour risking the daily bread of my father's very large family

As a family man, he had none other than his adored son Sudipta (Dr.Sudipta Kaviraj- an internationally famed scholar on Political Thoughts) whom he called Kumkum. Though on a very personal, nay, private note, I remember Naraharida murmuring to himself sometime in December 1970 on a platform of an International Symposium on the 150 years of Marx held at the National Library, when Sudipta was just a junior lecturer at the Burdwan University lambasting the myths surrounding the so-called Marxist philosophers and scholars of the then communists of many hue. That was the first and also the last time I had heard him talking of any private matter. In another occasion he just informed us that he would not be able to attend "Mulyayan" for a day or two. Ours was not to question why. When he came back, I, of all, asked, the fool that I was "Naraharida, where did you go?" He replied in that same serene tone-"My father died, I Went to our ancestral home at Nabadwip". He had always been, as far as I could remember a reticent person.

It is not the time to reminisce about Prof. Kaviraj's achievements or contribution to the Marxian understanding of the Indian Bourgeoisie; rather it would be sufficient to say that his constant endeavour in that direction proved to be correct inasmuch as both the official Communist Parties' (CPI&CPM) conceptual and practical positions have been proved wrong time and again. But there will be soberer times and more competent persons to talk about such propositions. Moreover, my remembrances being very personal one, I would like to limit myself to Naraharida as I knew him.

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A few years' back I was asked by old and newer acquaintances to pen my impressions of the Mulyayan years, the first part of which when came out in print, I gave a copy of same to Naraharida. After a few days, he rang me up and told me that he had liked what I wrote. During the subsequent meeting when I asked him if I could write about him he was aghast and told me almost sternly that that was not at all necessary. It took me almost a half of an hour to let him see that what I would write was my impressions about his work at Mulyayan. He agreed but very reluctantly. He never wanted to come to the forefront if not required by circumstances, political or social.

On 16th February, 2011 I rang him up and requested that I present myself to him the next day to pay my respects. He rebuked me and told me and I quote: ' Tapanbabu, do not come to me for at least another fortnight. You know I do not like these things'. Surprisingly, I never told me why I wanted to meet him. He always shunned any publicity. During a Provincial Conference of the All India Kishan Sabha held at Kanthi, in the then undivided Midnapore district, I was made to sit at the Podium with the national and international Communist and peasant leaders and fraternal delegates, I, naturally, got flabbergasted, and founding an opportunity, stole surreptitiously to the congregation of delegates and peasant masses. After the rituals of fraternal greetings were over, he also came down and sat beside me. He asked me very plainly and softly, "Tapanbabu, why did you fly" and then replied in the same tone "you did well, after all we are not big sorts".

When after almost forty years of severance with Mulyayan, I look back and and take stock of things I feel that Naraharida was , after the initial euphoria of the installation of the Left Front in West Bengal died down within a few years, he became a disillusioned one with the brand of Marxism practiced and voiced. But he never doubted the accumulated inheritance and fighting spirit of the masses and was for channelising the revolutionary democratic forces towards a real democracy and socialism. I remember on the occasion of felicitation given to him on his 90th birthday, He spoke, in his thin but clear voice that ultimately socialism would triumph but the thing was that the mindset of the people at the helm of both the official Communist Parties and all revolutionary forces had to be changed with changed scenario. It all seems coming true as both the Communist parties, disillusioned with their performances and tall talks but with both wings broken and burdened with a vast number of degenerated and dissipated followers paying glowing tributes to him. But Narahari Kaviraj, the youngest of Dr. Bhupendra Nath Dutta's disciples, passed away calmly, resolutely and alone as he was always been.