

Society, Representation  
and Textuality

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# Society, Representation and Textuality

*The Critical Interface*

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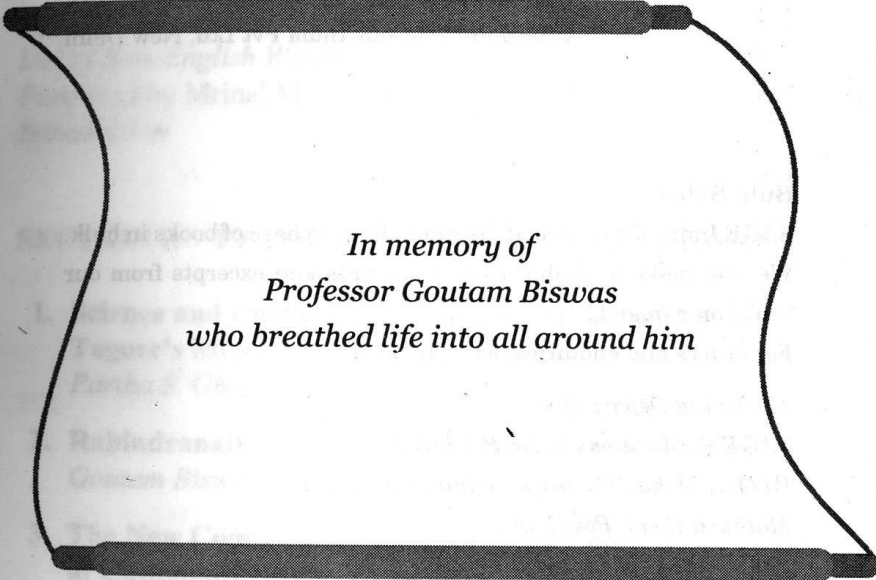
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*In memory of  
Professor Goutam Biswas  
who breathed life into all around him*

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## 5

**Suturing of Selves Past***The Body in Revolution*

Anirban Das

**I**

An exact rendering of events: one can mean so many things by the expression. It's too difficult to resolve. Better to concede, there is nothing like that, never. Though a mortal hankering for the exact account never comes to an end. A sieve of destruction, and omissions born of indifference do invade this piece of writing.

In diverse ways, they continue to disturb, instigate. Then again, words fall short, too. Such is the texture of memory, to weave its yarns is so simple and complicated at the same time, that maybe it is impossible to translate that into language.... I cannot give in to a dissection of events. As past realities are distilled through the breweries of memory, they become somewhat brittle, partial. In those hypnotic times, no one noticed the trifles. So the details escaped the memory that is indisciplined, too much scattered. Only some faces, the lightning-streaks of some events, take possession to fill up the scattered space.

Raghab Bandyopadhyay, *Journal Sottor* (translated by the author).

Looking about forty years back into the past, one sees fragments of one's selves vying for eternity. Haltingly he gathers, trying to breathe meanings into them. Memories and forgetting interweave to forge pasts that creep innocuously in to structure one's 'here and now'. Suturing of past selves becomes a commentary on the present—an act of 'dis(re)

membering'—“decompos[ing] the present that the past composed” (Ellman 1981: 191). Memories, written and written about, have this quality of being a history of selves, an ongoing note on the multiple stories of the individual, the individual shaped and made and brought into being through the forces and processes of larger histories.

Reading memories written as texts brings out certain itineraries of the acts of writing. As one goes on to produce (write) new texts in reading the earlier ones, one becomes—yet one more time—aware of the infinitude of the radical act of producing supplements. The importance of the literary reading as descriptive and productive acts becomes once more emphasized in such a process of readings/writings. The search for a social scientific description of phenomena gets supplemented by acts of ethical and political readings. As always, the supplements—dangerous—disrupt the descriptions. Memories of revolution exceed the history of revolution. Memories of the body of the revolutionary, inscribed upon by events and ideologies, interrupt these ideologies and produce events that go beyond the structure of the earlier ones. It is worth remembering that all writings of memories do not enact the breaks. Such enactments need ideological work. That work involves the descriptive of the social sciences and the performative of the literary (of course, empirical instances at both ends of this analytic binary combine the descriptive and the performative). The force of a responsible writing/reading pries open (im)possibilities in unanticipatable ways.

Histories, even the minutest ones, have ultimately to work within a secular telos of reason. A history of beliefs, superstitions, religions or ‘unreasons’ of any sort, can hardly work within the tenets of those very beliefs, religions or ‘other’ thought systems. To quote a brilliantly simple instance from Dipesh Chakrabarty (1998: 476), as he speaks of Ranajit Guha’s exceptionally perceptive analysis of the Santhal rebellion of 1855 (Guha 1983), “The historian, as historian, and unlike the Santhal, cannot invoke the supernatural in explaining/describing an event.” This happens because the historian, qua historian, has compulsively to work with “a narrative strategy that is rationally—defensible in the modern understanding of what constitutes public life” (D. Chakrabarty 1998: 476). Dipesh Chakrabarty would tentatively grope for the “subaltern pasts” that act as a ‘supplement’ (in a Derridean sense) to the historian’s pasts. These, he argues, “enable history, the discipline, to be what it is and yet at the same time help to show forth what its limits are” (D. Chakrabarty 1998: 476) If one retraces his arguments as to how it becomes possible for ‘history’ to be aware of, even if unable to grasp or assimilate in cognizance,

this supplemental ‘otherness’, the partial commensurability between the past and the present becomes a symptom of the incompleteness of the present. The ‘inherently fraught and fragmented nature of the present’ looks closely at one’s gazing face. Fraught in the dimension of time as it is in that of space. “[The] writing of history must implicitly assume a plurality of times existing together ... what allows medievalist historians to historicize the medieval or the ancient is the very fact that these worlds are *never completely lost*,” Dipesh Chakrabarty (1998: 478) (italics added) asserts. The junction of the other time with the time of the now points at disjunctures in the ‘now’. The non-contemporaneities of the present with itself are the “time-knots” (D. Chakrabarty 1998: 479) he speaks about.

Reversing, yet wholly within the spirit of, Benjamin’s (1992: 255) comment on the site of history being “not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now”; one could look at ‘now’, the ‘present’, being ‘filled up with the chips of a blasted, non-continuous history’. In a way, one thus arrives at the conception of the present as the ‘time of the now’, “shot through with chips of Messianic times” (Benjamin 1965: 45). Memories—written and written about—can, at times, convey this sense of fractured histories, their rough edges fitting uneasily into a blasted present.

One important offshoot from Dipesh Chakrabarty’s insight is the recognition of the element of a sensitivity to and a bearing of, the ‘presence’ of the ‘past’ in all ‘History’, even in its most formal or disciplinary enunciations. This leads to an understanding of the sheer impossibility of a ‘complete’ objectification of the past by the present (history). Objectification of the past occurs, but fails, remains incomplete to the extent that the past is conceived as ‘understandable’, the element of commensurability forming the indestructible hiatus ‘in’ the object that (paradoxically) connects it with the subject (of history). In other words, objectification in history occurs not in the act of truncating the past, but in the act of reaching out to it. Not in the act of ‘forgetting’ (elements of the past), but in the act of ‘remembering’ (in terms of the present). For the presence of the ‘pasts’ in the ‘present’ is always already mediated by the terms of the present. Terms, lest one forgets, are forged—among other things—by these very pasts. The cycle of causality revolves eternally, until, maybe, one reaches the ‘time-knots’ where the pasts and the presents, the causes and the effects, coexist.

Disciplinary ‘Histories’ try to straighten things up. Unwinding the knots put ‘pasts’ and ‘presents’ in their respective assigned locations. They inexorably fail in (completing) their project(s). The unwindings reveal

hybridities, mutual constitutivities that resist separation. As 'History' broadens its reach, goes out into the nether lands of othernesses, of victims, mads or un/pre-civilizeds, it carries on with its (ever) unfinished task of unwinding the time-knots. It seems it gets more and more wound up. But as Dipesh Chakrabarty convincingly asserts, the purported task remains the same. Minority histories, despite their seeming resistance to the discipline of 'History', retain their tours de force. 'Subaltern pasts' is the name he chooses for the radical alterity of 'History', an alterity that definitionally brings the practices of historicization to a crisis, a crisis unfolding in the very workings of the practices, yet bearing traces of a fundamental elision.

How to conceptualize a radical alterity to history? Dipesh Chakrabarty, in a Derridean vein, does not indulge, at least in the said essay, in any discussion regarding the possibility of a 'positive ontological dimension' to this alterity. Elements that interrupt the narratives of History cannot be defined except in terms of those narratives. Interruptions to history are defined as interruptions with regard to history, and not in terms definable fully beyond history. Žižek (1989), who speaks of a positive ontological dimension in his concept of symptom ("as *sinthome*" [Žižek 1989: 75]), poses the possibility of an ontic alterity. Yet, it seems to me that this positivity of the symptom does not reside in its own positive onticity. Rather, this dimension of the 'symptom' flows from its making possible, bringing into existence, of a 'certain positive entity', the being in the symbolic. Symptom remains the 'only point that gives consistency to the subject' (Žižek 1989, 75)—its positivity residing in its quality to provide consistency to the subject. I do not go into the theoretical intricacies of the problematic of naming, of choosing between the 'supplement' and the 'symptom'. Instead, I would like to speak of the (im)possibilities of an element of onticity in the category of a radical alterity to history. I want to speak of a certain kind of memory—and I emphasize, only a certain kind—in this context. I speak of a slender literature in Bangla on the memories of the Naxalite movement in the 1970s in India, written by some of its active participants in West Bengal.

I deal mostly with a single book, *Journal Sottor*, by Raghav Bandyopadhyay (2000), with occasional references to one other (*Karagare Athero Bochor* by Azizul Haque (1991) and some pieces from a third (*Sei Doshok* edited by Pulakesh Mandal and Joya Mitra (1994)). I have deliberately left out writings by women activists.<sup>1</sup> This 'gender bias' is self-imposed. I wanted to focus my attention on a very small problematic, without going into the profoundly interesting aspect of gendering<sup>2</sup> of

memory—discourse except in a cursory and cavalier manner as it stands now in this chapter.

A note of caution and clarifications: disclaimers to the 'disciplinary' 'commonsense' of history have become commonsense assertions in many varieties of history writing. They search for the "small voice in history" (Guha 1996), alternative histories, or some other similar category with claims to an alterity. This mode of historiography has borne rich, variegated and brilliant results in certain traditions, like that of the 'subaltern studies' group emanating from India. They focus on the power differentials acting between the dominant, 'statist' view of history and the 'other' forms of remembering and retelling of the pasts. This preoccupation with the element of 'power' in strategies of representation and narration, an important dimension to be incorporated into the modes of historiography, may have resulted in a certain reification of the subordinated (narratives) as the 'others' to a dominant one. In this narrative of power play between 'History' and the 'rest', History may paradoxically have emerged to be the one to set the tone, the terms of reference and discourse. "To open up the area of historical enquiry" (Pandey 1999: 49) seems to be the project. The others lose their onticity. More importantly, when they retain the ontic element, it happens to be 'essentialized', defined in terms of the dominant. Memory, as one of the others, has probably had the same fate. Let me elaborate.

To understand memory as a 'positive substance', as not being solely definable in negativity (from history), there should be an assertion of the positive onticity of the phenomenon. This assertion may very well flow from the positive onticity of its phenomenal other. The onticness remains a mirror image of the 'authentic' onticness of History. Like the 'sheer presence' of the exotic other, this exotic onticness of memory may serve the causes of History, an instance of commodified symbolic capital. This 'reified presence' of memory may very well dispose of the criticalities in certain forms of history—turning more coercive than the master (narratives of history). The 'memories' of the Jews, reified to serve the state of Israel, have been effective in erasing memories of Palestinians (Said 2000) and even the criticalities in a disciplinary history of the region. Nearer home, purported 'memories' of the Hindus might be equally functional in the destruction of a mosque, straightening out the criticalities of a non-conforming 'history'. "Welcome to the memory industry," Klein (2000: 127) had his opening lines speak eloquently of the predicament. The aura of 'immediacy' that seems to authenticate the 'presence' of memory, as posited vis-à-vis the 'writing'

of history, might very well turn out to bear ineradicable traces of this very writing—the privileging of memory over history may parallel a similar assertion of the primacy of the speech over writing, a guised phono- and logo- centrism.

How then, can one think of memories in a way that pushes history into a crisis, yet not renounce the criticalities of historicization?

## II

We have not seen the tiger

We have seen only them who saw the tiger.

Ranjit Gupta, *Mayabi Tantuja* (translated by the author).

Partha Chatterjee (1993), in his discussion of the ‘women and the nation’ in India, speaks about two genres of autobiography in nineteenth-century Bengal. One of these is the *atmacarit*, which most of the male writers of autobiographies resorted to. These deal with the growing up of the ‘individual’ personality of the protagonist, though as Chatterjee argues, remaining intimately related to the ‘making’ of the nation. The other genre of writing is the *smritikatha*, which has been used by almost all of the women writers. *Smritikatha*, the genre of ‘memoirs’ or ‘stories from memory’, “was not the life history of the narrator or the development of her ‘self’ but rather the social history of the ‘times’” (Chatterjee 1993). The writings I am going to deal with belong neither to the one genre nor to the other. Written in a different time and social space, they in a way combine the qualities of both. These are memoirs in a very ‘thick’ sense of the term, putting together and grappling with slices of time and space, faces and events, forging histories out of the fragments. The individual pieces of the collage retain a sense of palpable ‘presence’, of an immediacy. Yet the marks of the effort in putting them together remain evident, belying any such gesture of authentication. The work of suturing—of times, of selves—creating intricate patterns of truth and fiction, memory and history. Nostalgia, which in other contexts has been indicted as “mourning for what one has destroyed,” (Rosaldo 1989: 107) acquires a different texture in this setting. The objects of nostalgia are, here, one’s own selves, emotions and rationalities. What one decries today are what one had loved, maybe never did cease to love. What one had destroyed were parts of one’s being, never ‘others’ except in a very ‘intimate’ sense.

A quilt of tenderness wraps each moment of remembrance, even when it is being dismembered.

Now the beard has reached the chest.... Rage, pain, disgust and the burning questions, all have been extinguished. In slow yet steady steps, the tender instinct of Bangladesh has taken hold of me. The locks of the prison-gate were undone, the bolts moved noisily.

Outside, a white image of Annapurna. Mother’s eyes were fixed on my face. How keen! How penetrating the gaze was!

(Bandyopadhyay 2000: 63)

The mother’s gaze—loving, tender, yet penetrating—maybe the metaphor for the memories I write upon. The figure of the mother remains central in Bandyopadhyay’s narrative. His account almost starts and ends with his mother—her life, her aspirations, how her imagined future had shaped his own imaginations and his own futures, the tensions between her projected dreams of super-human living and sacrifice, and the middle-class ambitions of an insecure Bengali mother, the sweet self-contradictoriness born of “parental affection, family prestige and a terrible fear ... a fear of the subaltern life” (Bandyopadhyay 2000:11)—the tensions that rent his own self into a plurality, the same tensions that goad him on. Arguably, these are the tensions that drive him today to look back and re(dis)cover fragments of those very selves. This feminine figure of love, care and ambiguity, this (re)figuring of the ‘mother’ as the ‘other’ within, calls for a meticulous and sensitive study of gendering that I do not go into in this chapter.

Remember, even before the mother, in the very first utterances of the narrative ordering of the memoir emerges the almirah full of books “Dust, soot, cobwebs, insect-shit, spittings and fossil. Soiled pages of brittle books too. The disgrace which this book-filled almirah evocative of nineteenth century colonial furniture had to face, was the first thing that comes to [my] mind” (Bandyopadhyay 2000: 9). This was the repository of knowledge, the signpost of educated middle classness that the author and his mother carried with them, amidst the base rabbles of the urban bustees. This was the space where the memories of the gentile past resided. The police, when they came, did not fail to recognize where to strike. For they came to strike the person. The person who is the most resilient site to keep memories alive. They hit the almirah. When they went away, it was in a shambles, reduced to planks of wood—“As if, destruction of memory is the reason for

which the facts, the signs and the evidences were erased. Those turbulent eventful years of terror and revolution, of self-annihilating courage and extreme madness, is a black hole. A lost man” (Bandyopadhyay 2000: 9). The almirah in its very absence, still remains the strongest evidence to evoke memories, memories of erasure and void. The theme of emptiness recurs throughout the book. Emptiness on different registers. Like a gap between one’s multiple selves—the crucial moment when, following a party meeting where the author fails to voice, even utter, his own convictions against the party line, he feels divided into two separate halves. Suddenly, the possibility of a doubt-ridden journey in revolution leaps up before him. And then—the emptiness of discontinuity, of a break in the rational concatenation of thoughts. The emptiness born of the ‘event’, the event of his arrest—“all of a sudden, the chain of logic breaks down. Succession fails; and a gap, a hole, a void is born” (–Bandyopadhyay 2000: 46). Remember, the event qua event, transcending the boundaries of rational causality, could also work the other way round. A Kafkaesque phone call from some superior official saved the author from being killed by the officer in charge. To kill the only child of a Brahmin widow on the auspicious day of *navami* was deemed somewhat improper. Radical unanticipatability that marks the structureless structure of the event is the abyss that one crosses in the everyday existences of being. It is in the times of revolutions when this structure gets accentuated. To be more apt, the memories of revolution focus on the unanticipatability of events, blowing them up to characterize the event called revolution. The fullness of reason in the Marxist–Leninist revolution is remembered as the emptiness of the event. The void remains, yawning.

As it engulfs him, the ultimate eventuality of the ‘absence’—the absence from the revolution, absence from the daily movements, absence from the society of humans, shifted to being a number, to the *nadaan*, the naïve, to the convict squatting in a file before the jail authorities—an absence from sentience, strikes home. Paradoxically, this emptiness might be a continuation of the ‘nowhere’ called ‘underground’ where the revolutionaries stayed when they were free. This was a space that was in the city, yet outside. An unseen protective ring of confidence and unformed beliefs surrounded them. The ‘nowhere’ was immune to the vagaries of the risky space of the city. As this ring broke down with the event of arrest, a different ‘no where’ engulfed their absent beings. This non-space made them vulnerable.

The void has yet another, a fourth, register. The dimension of corporeality, of ‘the body’. This corporeal emptiness, present only as a

possibility, looks him straight in the face. This bodily nonexistence, to me, it seems, haunts the book in the form of its other, in the ever-present ever-resilient primeval ‘body’.

To see one’s own body being tortured was only a part. A sense of deep and widespread insult combined with the pain and suffering that emanates from torture. The body then was a stray dog; slaps, clenched fists and kicks were wrenching out such pain-shot inarticulate sounds from a structure of blood, flesh and bones that they belonged, far beyond the limits of the language of speech, reading or writing, to some animal. Yes, an animal.

(Bandyopadhyay 2000: 49)

This body—of which the visionary revolutionist was hardly aware in his grand utopic world, extending *ad infinitum ad absurdum* the Cartesian split between the mind and the body, where the mind reigned and the body was almost absent—this body returned to him in vengeance, returned him to (corpo)reality. In another short piece, Bandyopadhyay (2000: 91) asserts:

A surprising(ly) complex time. Completely divided into two. The present and the future are flowing in separate streams, without even touching one another.

Those dedicated to the future do have nothing but the brains. The head, growing in size, had engulfed the body....

About those whom the police murdered before everyone’s eyes at dawn in the premises of Beliaghata CIT building, there was no doubt that till then the bodies of these youths had borne their heads. But not for their heads, nor for their thoughts, the thick mourning that descended in Beliaghata, was for those fresh youthful bodies. For the(ir) lives.

If memory is to be related not only to writing but also to ‘inscriptions’, one has to pay attention to what Said (2000: 180) has termed, “the extraordinary constitutive role of space in human affairs.” And, to think of space in relation to memory, what inscriptions are more resilient, more intimate, more evocative, than those carved out in the space of the body? The body that, in a way, always already bears the marks of other spaces and other times, both literally and figuratively. As the repository of individual and social memory—to mark its inclusion or exclusion from the society, or to act as the bearer of social norms and values<sup>3</sup>—the body,



in memorialising, may act as a heterotopia that “juxtapose[s] in a single real place several emplacements that are incompatible in themselves” (Foucault and Rainbow 1984: 181). Indeed, it is remarkable how ‘the body’ would fit as a heterotopia, in almost all its specifications.

The body of the revolutionary interrupts, even when it constitutes, the call for revolution. This is not the disruption of the mediated by the immediate, not the disruption of the abstract by the concrete. For the body, even when thought of as the space where memory is inscribed, is not immediate. As space is also not the passive substratum of immediacy that gets marked by events of torture, or death, or pleasure. Yet, there is something in the ideological making of the body that enables it to enact the disruptions in the ideal of revolution. One has to be very careful here. For the idea of revolution itself is construed to be disruptive of a dominant order. Yet, it repeats the fixity of the dominant structures in many of its articulations. The body of the revolutionary, in the memories that are textualized, interrupts such articulations of the concept of revolution. Maybe, the purported immediacy of the body—if not reduced to a move that authenticates the presence of the body—lends the body its possibility to interrupt the mediations of the ideal of revolution. Immediacy, as beyond mediations, has the ability to interrupt mediatory principles.<sup>4</sup> Again, the ‘body’ has the possibility to enact such an interruption. It may also not enact this move. Embodiment per se is not radical. Such an interruption is an ideological task that has to be enacted in writing. The act involves ethics and politics. It does not flow spontaneously from a certain ontology. *Journal Sottor* as a text enacts the ethics and politics of a productive disruption of the ideal of a certain form of revolution.

But, let us halt and think in a different vein. Is not this positing of the body as the repository of memory a simple reversal and not a working through, of the mind–body dichotomy with now the body as its favoured pole? And does not this run parallel to another presupposition? That, in a progressive dialectic of reason and emotion, the latter had been active in making one an activist ‘then’, which he can see for his rational self ‘now’. Subhendu Dasgupta says in so many words (1994: 137):

Maybe it is true that the movement would have taken a more correct course if reason had buttressed emotions at that time. But those who relied solely on reason, when rationality exposed the errors of the movement, drifted away from it.

My primary attachment was through emotion. Now, when in the light of reason I judge the doings of the movement, I understand its faults. But I

cannot tear off the emotional attachment. Now I think and work rationally. That does not take me away from the Naxalbari movement.

For Raghav Bandyopadhyay it is somewhat different. He visualizes, from a certain distance, the logics of his then self. ‘Now’, he sees through them, brings out their ‘irrational kernel’—how what seemed rational were the results of the dynamics in the social environment, of personal psychic patterns, of tall dreams and oppressive presents, of experiences lived and configured—a ‘false consciousness’ about one’s own conscious rationality. “I didn’t think for myself. It was not my search through roads that brought me where I stood. Yet how deep the hypnotism was! It seemed it was me who had thought. Yes, this was my *own* opinion” (Bandhopadhyay 2000: 9). In yet another frame of looking back, Mihir Chakrabarty still subscribes to the rationale that drove him to his decision and activities, given the circumstances leading up to these. He says (1994: 113):

The young man standing on the pavement that day had an analytical and sensitive mind, and maybe, he had a certain sense of honesty.

His surroundings were offensive, tyrannical, and rebellion was in the wind.

The individual rebel of the 50’s had now before him, instead of a disembodied adversary, the state—taught, in its own stale pedagogy and its universities, to be the country—armed to the teeth.

The traditional left had reached its limits of inanity and itself was following the rules of “power”.

At this juncture, the “peal of spring thunder”.

What else could the boy do?

Even Azizul Haque, who almost fully stands by his political activities while writing his memoirs, works within the dichotomous division of reason and emotion. Most of the episodes he recounts are eloquent testimonies to his own vulnerabilities to emotions. He sees his past and present selves as one, reacting in a hypersensitive way to these inputs, to the extent of acting in opposition to the demands of reason. Even when he is perfectly aware of the ‘call’ of rationality. This task of ferreting out reason from emotion remains forever incomplete. Bandyopadhyay’s account is the one to make this felt in a nuanced narrative of events and reasonings, the one flowing

into the other with and without sudden jerks. The inalienable uncertainty that haunts a project of understanding, understanding reasonings of past selves across the hiatus of commensurability, a commensurability tenuous yet unmistakable in its presence in the selves of the present, marks his efforts throughout. What if what I now think to be the cause was not really so? What if I make it up now, as an afterthought? And maybe today's me cannot ever (re)cognize yesterday's—

It is very difficult to answer these questions. The answers are never correct. What I think, I cannot put it down. When I write I find something has gone wrong. It is not possible to get hold of the mind as it was twenty-five years ago. Not possible to understand those passions with today's mind and rationality. I cannot make "today" comprehend the time and surroundings of those days.

(Dasgupta 1994: 134)

To write about those days is nothing but such a failed effort. To make 'today' comprehend 'yesterday'. And writing about memories, somewhat disjointed yet adding up to a narrative structure, remains at least as effective in the process as 'history'. Specially when, popping in fragments of memories into the writing, one keeps in mind the impossibilities of a total understanding, yet keeps on disrupting standard narratives, or at least gives new twists to the existing ones.

Standard versions of the accounts of the Naxalbari uprising<sup>5</sup>, in newspapers or official and institutional documents, mark it as a disruption in 'normal' life. A break in the 'peaceful' natural flow of daily activities, a 'calamity'. *Journal Sottor* does not contradict this view in a general sense. It speaks of the disruptions and the destructions involved. But differently.

The 'normal' flow of events turns out to be stultifying, stale, tyrannical. The hypocrisy inherent in and the insecurity of the living make the disruptions seem natural. Natural and just. Yet, a complete reversal of the orders that be appears too simplistic. For, this same course of orderly events that calls for the tyrannical regime of the police–army–prison institutions to support its continuation, is seen to carry within itself, streams of affection, likings, aspirations and a hankering for peace that borders on selfishness or insensitivity. Little streams, of which neither the institutions nor the revolutionists seem to be aware. In a way the destructions flow from this order of living, flow as being disruptive. And though the author occasionally drops in a comment that has a sense of regret for the forms

that the revolutionary activities had taken, an unmistakable note of tragic inevitability regarding these very forms accompanies his utterances—

They were (also) fugitives. Denying and wiping out the present. The present that was their life, their daily living—they were cursing, spitting on it. This man from Bengal was an enemy of Gandhi, a hardened, merciless critic of the non-violent movement; they do not have the time at hand or the patience at heart to examine any matter with circumspection. In passing judgements on national politics, they are not ready to take the care that is needed to separate the bones from a fish. Uttering obscenities at the father of the nation, they might even, if possible, hit the corpse of the man—struck dead by Nathuram's bullets—with worn out shoes. (Bandyopadhyay 2000: 13)

The account comes from a participant in the events, an active participant. Unlike most of the recent studies on memory and memorial accounts, the author is not an 'object victim', nor does he read written/oral records of the victims from a distance. His separation from the event in time and space remains forever incomplete through the mediation of his self-hood. Not that selves are continuous and authenticating in an absolute sense. Yet, at least for Bandyopadhyay, there seems to be a sincere reaching out into the past that bridges (again, partially) selves through empathy. Here, the sense of being 'caught unawares' by the 'calamity', the bewilderment of "how inexplicable it all was" (D. Chakrabarty 1996: 2144) is seasoned by an effort to make sense of one's own thoughts and activities, of the rationale that had 'activated' one's self. 'Making sense of the inexplicable' becomes an active process of introspection 'and' retrospection, active in a way less spontaneous and unanalytical, less a reflex and more reflexive, than the passivity of victimhood would call for. The narrative hardly waits for the analyst or critical theorist for meanings to be rendered multiple. Not opting for a totally comprehensible rational historical account of the events (that many of the other 'memories' have attempted at, and I have not dealt with them here), it also shuns the authority/authorization of an 'otherness' to history flowing from an unreflexive immediacy. It leaves its reasons incomplete, and incomprehensibility is seasoned with causality. The rootedness of past selves of the narrator in the (re)constructed events, his onticity, does not try to authenticate a counter-history with its sights, in and out, its purported (incomplete) 'presence'. The radical unanticipatability of embodiment produces the politics and the ethics of

a rupture in the reasoned progress of the purported revolution. It, at the same time, does not let go of the tentacles of a revolutionary utopia.

At least, it leaves room for me to make such a reading. For a critical theorist who had dabbled, for a couple of years, in the political projects of the movement after about twenty-five years of these events, it can hark back in, some of the senses of dissatisfaction and rage, loss and void that he (re)collects.

It was a small lane in Tollygunge. It was night. It was dark. The room was dark. There were about five families huddled in the single room. The little boy of four was there too.

He had come up from the ground floor with his parents. Someone was saying, today the police would turn this place into Baranagar. He overheard.

The next day, the police vans went away. The boy felt empty. The joy of living perhaps. They had killed Rabi, the one-legged chap, someone was telling. "Rabi uncle," the boy muttered.

## Notes

1. These include pieces by Minakshi Sen (1993) and Mary Tyler (1977).
2. Not that I conflate the concerns of gendering with the question of women. To deal with both men's and women's writings on the subject would make a discussion of gendering central in a way that this chapter does not aspire to. Swati Ghosh (2001), Srila Roy (2007) and Mallarika Sinha Roy (2011) have dealt with these issues in different yet related ways.
3. For a detailed discussion on the multiple aspects of inscriptions on the body by the marks of society, see Das (1995).
4. The dynamic of such a possibility is worked out in Das (2010).
5. By the expression 'Naxalbari uprising', here I mean a whole spate of revolutionary movements that occurred at the turn of the 1970s, of which the incident of killings in the wake of a peasant uprising in Naxalbari was a single yet iconic episode.

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