CHAPTER II
STRUCTURING OF THE LEFT

This chapter exclusively looks into the context of the formation of the leftwing in Orissa in the mid-thirties. However, attempt has been made to locate the pattern of left politics in the subsequent chapters.

The post-Civil Disobedience phase in fact, marked the strengthening of left movement in Orissa. The crystallisation of the left trend within the Congress movement also helped to activise the peasant and tribal movement. Following the formation of Congress Socialist party in Gaya (May 1934), the Orissa unit of Congress Socialist Party (CSP) was formed on 5 June 1934. The prominent activists of this unit were Prananath Patnaik, Naba Krushna Choudhury, Malati Choudhury, Bhagabati Panigrahi, and Surendra Dwivedi. Prananath Patnaik and Sarat Patnaik went to Banaras to study Kashi Vidyapith after Gandhi-Irwin Pact (1931). Guru Charan Patnaik also joined Kashi Vidyapitha around 1934. The Kashi Vidyapitha offered a platform to learn about various ideological strands ranging from Gandhism to communism and terrorism. Many prominent nationalists like Narendra Dev, Joglekar, and Lal Bahadur Shastri used to offer lectures on various subjects. These young activists, who had steeled themselves in the heat of CDM, acquired their initial inclination for Marxist ideology in the Kashi institute. They also formed a group called 'Young Communist League' in Kashi

itself.\(^2\) With the formation of the CSP, a weekly newspaper called *Sarathi* was brought out. *Sarathi* which was edited by Nabakrushna Choudhury, had a broad socialist perspective. *Sarathi* basically intended to politicise and unite the peasantry and workers. It was two to three workers of the *Sarathi* press, who for the first time in Cuttack town went round in a procession holding placards to celebrate the May Day in 1933.\(^3\)

The Socialists also started publishing a weekly journal *Krushak* (peasant) around 1938. This journal basically championed the cause of peasants and offered a direction to the peasant movement of the province. *Krushak* had a circulation of around 2,000 in March 1939. *Krushak*’s perspective was that of a non-violent anti-imperialist struggle to attain *Purna Swaraj* under the banner of Congress movement. It sought to mobilise peasants on that basis. Malati Choudhury, Sangangadhar Das, Bhagabati Charan Panigrahi and Surendranath Dwivedi were involved in the editing of this journal.\(^4\)

Alongside these developments, a group of students of Ravenshaw College got together and floated a literary-cum-cultural forum in November 1935.\(^5\) The forum was named as *Nabayuga Sahitya Sansad* and had eight members. The initiative for the organisation of this forum came from Ananta

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2. Interview with Sarat Patnaik
   P. Patnaik (ed), *op. cit.*, pp.4-5.
   However S. Dwivedi, in his book, *Quest for Socialism: Fifty Years of Struggle in India* (New Delhi, 1984), contends that Utkal Samyavadi Sangha (Utkal Socialist Workers Association) got formed around 1933, after the withdrawal of CDM.


5. *HPD*, *A Note on Youth Movement in Orissa*, ACC-893.
Charan Patnaik and Bhagabati Panigrahi. The objective of the organisation was to "disseminate progressive, revolutionary and radical ideas" among the associates of the forum. The forum marked the germination and spread of Communist movement in Orissa. The Nabayuga forum, in its bid to initiate the trend of mass literature in Orissa, started publishing literary supplements. A booklet released by the forum in 1939, captioned Rakta Sikha,\(^6\) (the Flames of Blood), in its preface explained the objective of the forum as follows:

"The mass movement in Orissa is spreading very fast. But, it is a pity that mass literature has not been able to keep pace with the mass movement. Rather, it has lagged behind. There is a need to have a distinct perspective to guide any mass movement in proper direction. Keeping this in view, the Nabayuga literary volumes have been created. These volumes will bring message about the New Age to all the anti-imperialist forces and help the latter to clear their perspective about the struggle...."

With its communistic overtones, Rakta Sikha contained several poems of the youthful communists like Ananta Patnaik and Sachi Routrai. For instance, one poem, went like this: "Oh! proletariat, march on! to achieve socialism, and shed your blood smilingly under the banner of Red flag...." In another poem, named Sarbahara (proletariate), Ananta Patnaik wrote: "...We will take our due, we are the labourer community, we will bring bloody morning, after killing the dark nights". Similarly, Sachi Routrai, in his poem Ame Mana­sara, Yuga Anibu (we will bring the Age of Man) wrote: "...crores of minds are agitated, crores of handfists are raised up, the peasants/labourers are conscious, they will bring the Age of Man". Similarly eulogising the Russianian revolution, he wrote in his poem titled Biplabara Janamadine (The birth day of Revolution):

"Bring your Red sol­diers, Fly the bloody flag, Sharpen your weapons in the skeleton of oppression, Forget your sympathy, forgiveness, be strong, Play with bullets, it is very very interesting."

All these poems basically exhorted the peasantry/worker to

organise themselves to violently fight against all sorts of oppressions on them.

Bhagabati Panigrahi edited a monthly journal, called Adhunika (modern), on behalf of the forum. The forum also sought linkage with the All India Progressive Writers Association. Nehru, during his visit to Orissa in 1936, addressed the forum. By 1937, the membership of the Nabayuga association increased and it included many student activists of Ravenshaw such as Sachi Routrai (23), Bijoy Chandra Das (24), Biswanath Pashyat (25), and Nilamani Routrai (22). Besides, the forum also started exerting its influence in the All Utkal Students Conference. The latter, hitherto with its objective of basically encouraging scholastic and athletic activities of students, came to focus on the arousal of political consciousness of the youths of the province, under the impact of the Nabayuga activists. The Communist trend under the banner of Nava Yuga as well as Orissa Students Conference became open and louder around 1937. For example, protesting against the treatment meted out to political prisoners in Andamans, Ananta Patnaik, in a meeting at Cuttack (22 August 1937), observed that Gandhism had dampened the spirit of the youths, otherwise they (youths) would have by now done what the students of Spain and Japan were doing. He also maintained that unless there was shooting and bloodshed, the freedom of a country could not be attained. He also exhorted the students to learn to handle arms and also to create a situation so that the Congress Ministry would be forced to resign.

Ravenshaw College became a hotbed of the preaching of

7. Ibid. The monthly circulation of Adhunika stood at 250 in 1935. However, Adhunika merged into a fortnightly, Pragati (Development) in 1936.

8. Ibid.
communist ideology. An official enquiry regarding the
Communists and communist literature, in the province around
October 1938 pointed out:

"...Several issues of National front publication have been found in Orissa... the publication
is subscribed by about 36 persons.... Regarding the political views of persons like Ananta
Patnaik, Biewanath Paeyat, Bijaya Chandra Das, Asoka Das, Baidyanath Rath... they are all
close associates and that they more or less share the same opinions. Asok Das who could
probably be more correctly described as a revolutionary of Jugantar views. Even so the dif-
ference is not of great value. The leader of the group is Bhagabati Panigrahi assisted by
Ananta Patnaik. Ananta is known to be in frequent correspondence with P.C. Joshi, the well-
known Communist of Bombay who sends his typed propaganda literature for dissemination in
Orissa. Ananta is the local agent for the National Front and supplies that paper with infor-
mation about agitation in the states.

In respect of Ananta Patnaik, perusal of some of his reported speeches, show his continual
opposition to the 'Capitalist' and the fact that he includes among those capitalists the
present Hon'ble Ministers is clear proof that his views are for more 'left' than those of the
average socialists.... Meesers Bhargava and Maesani did not believe him to be a Socialist,
the former actually calling him a 'Red' and the other asking him point blank whether he was
not a communist."

The distancing between the Socialists and Communists
became sharp around 1938. In fact, in a discussion with
Satindranath Guha (Ex-detenee of Bengal) in May 1939, Bai-
dyanath Rath had pointed out that Nabakrushna Chowdhury
(CSP) had 'recently' become inactive and therefore they were
trying to find a platform leader for the Socialists and the
Communists. He also told him about the plan of the Commu-
nist group to organise the students and peasants and also to
agitate against the Congress Ministry. Rath further, re-
vealed that he had received instructions from his associates
in Bengal to capture the revolutionary 'brains' in Orissa to
utilise them for their work. This aspect of the growing
difference between Congress socialists and communists has
been brought out in our subsequent chapter on Peasant Strug-
gle.

Another notable trend within the left movement was the
politics of Forward Bloc. The communists in Orissa, who
wanted to organise Forward Bloc platform in Orissa around

9. For example, refer Desakatha, 29.7.38.
10. HPD, Extract from secret letter from I.G. Police,
Orissa, 1.5.39, ACC-1156.
11. Ibid.
1939, shied away from it.\textsuperscript{12} This was due to the fact that Forward Bloc came to be dominated by the rightist-opportun­ist leadership represented by Nilakantha Das and Godabarisha Mishra. We have touched upon this aspect in our discussion of the period 1940-41.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.