

## **The Impossible Demands of Nabarun Bhattacharya**

Adheesha Sarkar

“Mahakash hote gu-khego shokun hagitechhe tobo gaye

Bangali shudhu khochchor noy, todupori osohay.”

[Shit-eating vultures are shitting on you from the depths of space

Oh Bengali, you are not only a rascal, but a hapless one too.]

(Nabarun Bhattacharya *Upanyas Samagra* 303)

That was Nabarun Bhattacharya speaking - an author Bengal would like to forget, most probably, and as soon as possible. By Bengal I mean the culturally “conscious” Bengal, and by “conscious” I mean inclined towards a sterile, cautious yet confused, and politically opportunistic astuteness that clings desperately on to nostalgia since it has nowhere else to go. Nabarun is bad news for such astuteness, since this rogue had made it his sole mission to strike at the roots of such sterility and such opportunism. Nabarun, through his writing, has tried to create an alternative semantic index, one that relates to the reality of the people who are excluded from the consciousness of a civilization conceived not spontaneously, but by a throttling presumptuousness. Nabarun, both through the language and the format of his literary expression, creates an alternative index of meanings and connotations for ideas existent in the known discourse of the polite classes. These ideas, when they find alternative expressions, sometimes serve as boomerangs to assist in Nabarun’s mission of politicizing the subaltern reality.

### A Fake Consciousness and Its Antidote

This aforementioned consciousness is not conspicuous to Bengal, though. It has a wider base in the psyche and culture originating from a world led by market economy. This is a world in which sales figures and stock markets govern ideology, and every aspect of life and its corresponding institutions – politics, culture, marriage, media, and even the so-called anti-institutions – has to be molded in a way that may fit the requirements of a certain saleability, and hence, a certain

price tag. Belief systems in such a world often blend the real and the make-believe so finely that it is no longer possible to discern a fathomable fact on which an opinion might be based and be called “unbiased.” From a purely journalistic point of view, the world and the history it creates from moment to moment is becoming as fictional as news reports themselves today, while some writers and filmmakers, some conspiracy theorists and vagabonds, created a comparatively more “real” doctrine of reality that is being investigated and dissected with interest as ‘rebellious’ fiction, more often with wide-eyed awe whenever one of these is banned by some government or the other. Fascist governments are being dubbed as pro-development, and poverty is being hidden away behind vinyl hoardings as cities prepare for the splendor of international sports festivals. This broader civilization – some would call it the “global village” – thrives on a convenient ignorance of what is truly wrong with the systems that run it.

Nabarun relentlessly pointed out, in story after story and in verse, how the cultural pretension and pompousness of this world has resulted in an intellectual stagnation, a sort of intellectual ‘suicide’, if it can be called so. He cried out again and again – sometimes hoarse with disgust – how the falseness of a self-ignorant people, and their insincerity towards their own reality, is bringing forth a dire helplessness in their condition, and how they continue to be blind to it. Nabarun, in his journey of fiction, dreams of an upheaval based on the spirit of subversion that would jeopardize the underlying sense of security protecting this market-economy-led degenerative value system. However, whether such a sense exists in the first place – or that too is an advertisement that only the advertiser believes in – is a different question.

Nabarun’s *Fyataru-r Bombachak* introduces his weapon – the *Fyataru*. What is this creature? Physically, they are flying humans. But culturally, they are the marginalized Other, the subaltern. Nabarun’s literary journey is demonstrably inclined towards highlighting, and demarcating, the political existence of the subaltern. They exist not in the remoteness of faraway villages and tribal occupations, but at the heart of the city of Calcutta. And they are very familiar. They are visible just beyond the veil of Calcutta’s make-believe sterility, just above the surface and on the margins of the newly-cemented roads and highways, turning a corner and disappearing into a dingy gulley that both exists and does not exist on the blueprint of our so-called development. They can be spotted at roadside hideaways buying country liquor, at the wee hours of the morning in public parks, urinating on walls bedecked with gods and goddesses,

spitting a little out of habit and a little out of spite for nothing in particular, looking around with an expression that is both angry and lost, wiping their perspiration on the long-unwashed sleeves of a colour-less shirt, a button missing, maybe. Their eyes, if one bothered to look into them, would seem sleepless first, and then a glint of a tired and bitter sarcasm might surface in them sometimes, only if one bothered to look closely.

Perhaps they cannot speak because the semantics of their culture and language has not yet been cemented like the roads of the city that has grown them. The mainstream language and culture of this city has long ignored their expressions, choosing to shove their existence under the carpet of “education” – an institutionalized, direly limited and immobilized system of education in our schools and colleges, that is. They speak the same tongue as us, but not with the same meanings, perhaps. But Nabarun, with a rebel’s spirit, some would say, attempted to give them a language and perhaps a cultural and political identity as well. He taught them to fly, and gave them the “aesthetic liberty” to wreak havoc in the homes and the minds of middle-class Bengal. That, for Nabarun, might have been “poetic justice.”

In his short story, “Fyataru”, Nabarun identifies his offspring as such –

“– Fyatarura tahole ki?

– Thik ki ta bolte parbo na. Tobe Fyatarura holo khub special, bujhle? Itihashe dekhbe koto mahapurush manushke notun kore banabar fondi batlechhe. Amar to mone hoy onek ghenteghunte sheshmesh ei fyataru toiri hoyechhe...fyataruder hatekhoru mane oi bhangchur, chhenrachhenri, hisu kora.”

[ “– what are *Fyatarus* then?

– I don’t know for sure. But *Fyatarus* are special, okay? You’ll see that in history many great men have tried to suggest ways to reinvent human beings. I think after much experiment, the *Fyatarus* have been finally made.... a *Fyataru*’s initiation means wreaking havoc, urinating.”]

(*Nabarun Bhattacharya’s Chhotogolpo* 114)

If this be the initiation, later in the story, the *Fyatarus* proceed with what they recognize as their true calling – upsetting an ongoing upper middle-class dinner party at the Floatel (a floating hotel on the Ganges) and distressing the guests relentlessly by urinating on them and throwing rubbish on their food from above. The *Fyatarus* can fly, and they use their “superpower” to their advantage just in this manner, to various degrees in the various stories of his repertoire. They attack anything and everything that they see as inequality, injustice or snobbishness. Their attacks, although in the lines of guerilla warfare techniques used by the ultra-left, can be interpreted more as pranks than actual violence.

### Anarchy, Demolition, Madness

The three *Fyataru* musketeers of Nabarun – Madan, D.S., and Purandar Bhat – may have easily become caricatures of the believers of an ultra-left philosophy. They could have been dubbed as caricatures of the erstwhile Naxals, even, by ones who would have liked to shove them under the carpet with a gross and politically misinformed generalization. But Nabarun has left no scope for such misgivings. The *Fyatarus* do not, by any means, belong to a doctrinal political belief. They, obviously, are most vicious in their attitude towards the moneyed lot – from which one could start to discern a hatred of capitalism and the bourgeoisie, per se. But in *Kangal Malsat*, the *Fyatarus* of Nabarun show no qualms in accepting the mother goddess-worshipping *Choktars*, or the imperialist Begum Johnson as their allies and friends. Obviously, their politics does not involve allegiance to institutionalized leftist doctrines. Although, in many places Nabarun has fiddled with institutional leftism in various ways, once even by making Stalin’s ghost appear in one of the offices of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). And it is more than apparent from texts like *Kangal Malsat* that Nabarun is a staunch critic of the degeneration of the leftist ideologies that has occurred inside the corruption-infested and stagnated CPI(M) in Bengal.

Nabarun’s criticism of the institutionalized Left in Bengal originates from his identification of what he sees as an inherent hypocrisy in the system, the self-defeating methods of mindless coercion and control that had slowly but surely spelled doom for the party. But Nabarun’s criticism of the Left is mostly ideological, and in that context one could wonder where in real terms that debate could go, given the paradoxical reality of the existence of the CPI(M) – a Marxist mechanism trying to function as a state in a regional setting within a necessarily

capitalistic regime that governs the country. Nabarun's opposition of the Marxist government can be seen in the context of regional politics, but, from a wider perspective, it can also be identified as a fundamental opposition of the idea of a nation state, which necessarily brings with it oppressive institutions. And this opposition makes Nabarun's politics very closely resemble the politics of anarchy. In fact, Nabarun's *Fyatarus* can be best interpreted through the philosophy of anarchism.

The *Fyataru* narrative, from another perspective, most unavoidably had to be at loggerheads with the Left ideology, since, customarily, and with good reason, Marxist and anarchist ideologies and practices have always clashed. Peter Marshall writes in *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism*:

At first sight, anarchists and Marxists would seem to have much in common. Both criticize existing States as protecting the interests of the privileged and wealthy. Both share a common vision of a free and equal society as the ultimate ideal. But it is with Marxist-Leninists that anarchists have encountered the greatest disagreement over the role of the State in society. The issue led to the great dispute between Marx and Bakunin in the nineteenth century which eventually led to the demise of the First International Working Men's Association. (24)

The Marxists have always demanded, at least ideologically, that the proletariat takes over the state machinery. Whereas anarchists are fundamentally opposed to the very idea of the state machinery in the first place. Therein starts the conflict between these two beliefs. However, it is funny how the two conflicting sides have the same goal. They want the same thing in the end, at least in theory. As Marshall points out, "Marx and Engels felt it was necessary for the proletariat to take over the State to hold down their adversaries and to reorganize production, they both looked forward to a time when the proletariat would abolish its supremacy as a class and society would become 'an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all'" (25). Anarchism, on the other hand, demands the abolition of the state machinery altogether – be it the bourgeois or the proletariat who is heading it. It is perhaps ironic that the anarchists refuse to trust the Marxist belief that the proletariat would finally give up his

own supremacy for the greater interest of equality. More ironic is the fact that this mistrust may not be entirely illogical.

However, Nabarun was ideologically never at loggerheads with Marxism. In fact, his writings reveal that he is an ardent follower of Soviet writers and Marxist thinkers. But he quarreled most zealously with the Left party that governed Bengal for more than three decades. Nabarun's problem, as is most apparent, is not with Marxist ideologies, but with a particular Marxist practice of ideology, where the "core" ideology is distorted to create almost a capitalist state mechanism. We can see to what extent Nabarun was bitter about the CPI(M) from the part in *Kangal Malsat* where Stalin's ghost appears before an administrative officer to give him a lengthy lecture on how a tyrant should be a proper tyrant, and not mess about with the instrument of tyranny. The acidic satire here leaves nothing to speculation – it shows quite clearly that Nabarun saw the CPI(M) as a "failure."

What is amusing, perhaps, is watching the adaptation of Nabarun's text in Suman Mukhopadhyay's film, *Kangal Malsat*. When the novel was written, the CPI(M) was the ruling party in Bengal. By the time the film was made, the TMC had come to power. Yet, when the film was made, the real conditions allowed the filmmaker to keep almost everything unchanged in the novel and yet the rebellion of the *Fyataru* against the state machinery would stay as contextual as before. That tells us what the core of the politics of anarchy is in Nabarun Bhattacharya's writing –it is not so much a vision to build up a new system by demolishing the old, but an immediate revolt against the suffocating sense of inertia created by a state machinery's sheer laxity and complacency. That has remained conspicuous in the state machineries of Bengal for a long time now, old and new alike. This rebelliousness, Nabarun tries to evoke through his writings, does not so much try to point to or care for an answer and neither does it care to ask any questions. The *Fyataru*'s purpose is to offend and demolish, rather simply put. And this offence is directed towards a holistic demolition of every kind of institutional thought that exists, rather than the demolition of a particular political force.

From a historical point of view, Nabarun has remained faithful to just one kind of politics in his entire fictional journey – more specifically in his presentation of the *Fyataru*. This politics is that of the marginalized, the "cultural" subaltern, the invisibles who inhabit the city but never

quite manage to belong to it, or to any geographical space or physical time, for that matter. Documented history has always stoically ignored, and will probably continue to ignore, them. They are shadows who, by their very presence, distort a defined reality, a socially-constructed and media-nurtured existence. This is why Nabarun is so hard to digest and dangerous if he is taken seriously, beyond the initial hilarity and bonhomie with which his literature is usually read by the prim and the polite.

The politics of Nabarun's *Fyatarus* can be most easily identified with the concept of anarchism because what the *Fyataru* does is guided mostly by a will to be freed from stifling influences of all kinds of institutions and organizations. Peter Marshall, in the introduction to his book, *Demanding the Impossible*, writes:

ANARCHY IS TERROR, the creed of bomb-throwing desperadoes wishing to pull down civilization. Anarchy is chaos, when law and order collapse and the destructive passions of man run riot. Anarchy is nihilism, the abandonment of all moral values and the twilight of reason. This is the spectre of anarchy that haunts the judge's bench and the government cabinet. In the popular imagination, in our everyday language, anarchy is associated with destruction and disobedience but also with relaxation and freedom. The anarchist finds good company, it seems, with the vandal, iconoclast, savage, brute, ruffian, hornet, viper, ogre, ghoul, wild beast, fiend, harpy and siren.... Not surprisingly, anarchism has had a bad press. It is usual to dismiss its ideal of pure liberty at best as utopian, at worst, as a dangerous chimera. Anarchists are dismissed as subversive madmen, inflexible extremists, and dangerous terrorists on the one hand, or as naive dreamers and gentle saints on the other. (ix)

“The vandal, iconoclast, savage, brute, ruffian, hornet, viper, ogre, ghoul, wild beast, fiend, harpy and siren,” the “subversive madmen” – *Fyatarus* could not have been described better. The language in which they speak might sound like sacrilege to the *bhadralok*, given that it is chock full of the choicest expletives and every kind of crudeness possible. What is interesting is the way this language quite organically and effortlessly flows through Nabarun's writing, never once seeming imposed. From this, apart from the writer's skill, what emerges is the understanding that Nabarun is not creating an alien breed to make his point. The *Fyatarus* exist, albeit without

flying powers, and their language too is familiar to the urban ear, although we try to ignore their exchanges, we try to pretend they don't exist, we try to forget that this crudeness in their language originates from a history of being neglected, being forgotten, being excluded from the "acceptance" of the lofty institutions of democracy, culture and society. Or perhaps, their very character requires that they be pushed outside the scope of such institutions, since the lack of inhibition and structure in their life and living could very well threaten to displace the very foundation of any kind of institutionalized system.

Yet, the *Fyatarus* have been overtly fictionalized, made almost into characters from a science fiction novel. This element in Nabarun's creation of the *Fyatarus* poses an apparent contradiction between his goal – that of establishing the political identity of the Other – and his means. The *Fyatarus*, as characters, are "alternative" in their political identity most naturally, but this alterity is emphasized to an extreme by their overtly fictionalized portrayal – making them the embodiment of a sarcastic retort against the established forms of socio-cultural existence. Their fantastical representation both alienates and identifies them with the reality of the political Other. The image of a *Fyataru* is at once a satirical metaphor and a sort of "caricature" of the subaltern. This, perhaps, reveals the hapless irony of Nabarun's literary journey. Yet, this irony reflects the larger irony of our hazed and half-sighted perception of the real subaltern. And this reflection lends Nabarun's *Fyatarus* a strange legitimacy, and they often use the thin line between fiction and reality as a skipping rope.

#### The Mirror-image of the Political Other

If examined closely, D.S., Madan, and Purandar Bhat do not really fit the image of the archetypal proletariat. It is not their poverty that makes them "unique," since they are not really portrayed as particularly stricken by poverty. Neither are they unique as the oppressed and the victims of injustice. What makes them "special" is the fact that they do not really belong anywhere – in any group or identity that could truly define them. To put it simply, they do not fit into a box that can be labelled with a prejudiced idea. And whenever people try to do so, the *Fyatarus* take pleasure in having fun at the expense of their presumptions. They take pleasure at deconstructing – be it the gracious revelry at a poetic meet or the secured notions of people, about other people. There is an inherent spirit of anarchism in their being, apart from their actual designs.

Marshall further writes in *Demanding the Impossible*:

The anarchists have thus mounted the most consistent and rigorous critique of the State, whether in its liberal, social democratic, or Marxist form. While the State may have been intended to suppress injustice and oppression, they argue that it has only aggravated them. It fosters war and national rivalries; it crushes creativity and independence. Governments, and the laws through which they impose their will, are equally unnecessary and harmful. At the same time, their confidence in natural order leads anarchists to believe that society will flourish without imposed authority and external coercion. People thrive best when least interfered with; without the State, they will be able to develop initiative, form voluntary agreements and practice mutual aid. They will be able to become fully realized individuals, combining ancient patterns of co-operation with a modern sense of individuality. The anarchist critique of the State not only questions many of the fundamental assumptions of political philosophy but challenges the authoritarian premises of Western civilization. (35)

Whether the anarchist's ideal society that Marshall presents before us is a Utopian dream is a different debate. What is more important is how the anarchist's character is essentially affected by the belief that "People thrive best when least interfered with." An anarchist, therefore, is an inhibition-less "madman," who gives free reign to his instincts rather than ordering his actions by either following or rejecting a preordained value system. The most noticeable characteristic of the *Fyatarus* is therefore urinating as a method of protest – a purely physical manifestation of the denial of social norms as well as the free reign of the instincts of the individual. The same can be said about their use of expletives and foul language, and the fact that the use of this language does not seem forced in the text. The characters created by Nabarun are fictional, but for their "real" counterparts, a similar language full of foul words is the most natural expression. It is perhaps the most spontaneous outpouring of the layers of frustration, anger, hatred, irritation and the nostalgia of failed dreams – which they cannot direct at anyone in particular - that have blended in the mixer of their minds to create this strange, polluted yet pure tongue, just like the water of the holy Ganges that remains sacrosanct even after taking in and blending into itself tons of garbage.

The *Fyataru* poet, Purandar Bhat, writes a most heart-wrenching lament in *Kangal Malsat* (3) –

Amar marane hoy na toh headline

Prasadgatre mutiya bhangibo ain.

[My death will never make a headline.

So, I shall break the law by pissing on a mansion.]

(*Upanyas Samagra* 263)

Apparently, this is an almost nonsensical, even hilarious wail and yet, it has the pungent reek of a naked reality that the polite class would like to laugh off, at best, but never give a second thought to.

Language is a salient weapon of anarchist resistance for Nabarun. Abusiveness is an element of strategy here. If this strategy aims at distancing the *Fyataru* existence from the middle-class rectitude of the *bhadralok*, as it seems to do, it is with the purpose of creating a decisive culture shock for the reader, with an aim to subvert his or her linguistic hegemony. Yet, one wonders if this subversive strategy defeats its own purpose to an extent, since the vulgarity of the language instantly serves to first repulse and then push the *bhadralok* reader into non-identification with the characters. Here, we can discern a distinct rebelliousness in Nabarun's ideology. He seems not to be bothered by the non-identification but to be hooked to the building up of the Other tongue, with the aim of pushing through the *bhadralok*'s cultural resistance, even if the "assault" be "violent."

This is the anarchism of Nabarun's *Fyataru*, who has become a representation of what has gone wrong in the fabric of our lives. The anarchism of this writer does have a history, one that carries within it the oft-avoided history of the Other people who are essentially forgotten when the narrative of a civilization builds itself up over the years on the foundation of multinational funding and an imperial value system. Anarchism has historically attacked state institutions. But Nabarun's pet anarchists are not so driven. Their rebellion is mostly a haphazard, almost childish, struggle without a definite direction, but they most often rise up against and try to make a mockery of a cultural hegemony that has inflicted upon a people a

certain direness, a code of conduct that has defined the ‘culture’ of Bengal in its own way, without leaving any scope for such a culture to be permeable to the social and political reality of the region.

To be fair, I argue that Nabarun’s anarchist *Fyatarus* are too conspicuous to Bengal’s environment and history. That such anarchism as Nabarun proposes may not find an expression elsewhere. This criticism is valid at some level, but it also has to be admitted that anarchism has remained mostly in theory and in isolated and experimental practices that have largely been closeted so far. Nabarun has given this idea or belief a plausible face and a real language. He has, at least, created a fictional reference point for how an anarchist might exist and behave in our world. Nabarun’s *Fyataru* may be constrained by its regional characteristics, but the practice it propagates has spread a wider wing already, elsewhere. Ironically, Nabarun did not relate to the real *Fyatarus* of this world in his literature, and neither did they know much of Nabarun. The media shows us what it thinks we need to see. Events, as they unfold, are given meanings and viewpoints. But the media does not tread the dangerous territory of endorsing anarchist practices by calling Julian Assange or Edward Snowden anarchists, and therefore rendering them the backing of a much-discussed and debated philosophy.

#### Anarchists – Fictional and Real

For some he is an egoist, an irresponsible villain who has “blood on his hands.” For others, he is a hero, an “uncompromising rebel.” Julian Assange, the editor-in-chief of WikiLeaks, a whistleblowing website that has till date exposed a number of shady dealings of powerful governments and other institutions, had become quite a phenomenon when the website first leaked some scandals related to the White House and its prisons in Guatemala. “I enjoy crushing the bastards,” Assange had boasted (Sarkar), which may have given his cause a certain air of fairy-tale fancifulness. Nevertheless, WikiLeaks has exposed thousands of documents containing secret, highly sensitive material that governments are fiercely protective of. In a huge leak sometime back, which was called the biggest intelligence leak of all time — over 75,000 files amounting to an entire history of the Afghanistan war had been displayed for the public to judge (Sarkar). This had made Assange an enemy of the US government and he had been branded by the US media as “one of the most dangerous men in the world.” He was already living the life of

a nomad, changing homes and countries almost every week. After this massive leak, Assange was hunted fiercely, and he had to literally run for his life and seek cover wherever he could find it. In its latest leak, documents released by the whistleblowing website WikiLeaks show that the US not only tapped Angela Merkel's mobile phone, but also eavesdropped on several German ministers. This, obviously, created a controversy far beyond what the US would like to have on its plate. Now, Assange is on the verge of facing spying charges.

Nobody seems to know how to define the antics of this media insurgent. Is this investigative journalism? Or is it irresponsible activism? If one were to look at not the motive but the method of Assange's work, what he does is in actual fact most akin to spying. It is hard to tell the whereabouts and identities of Assange's sources. Experts call the method he uses to gather information "crowdsourcing." His network consists of 800 part-time volunteers and 10,000 "supporters." One of them, Bradley Manning, who had assisted the leak of the Afghanistan war documents, was a Pentagon insider. This fact gives a fair idea about the strength and viability of Assange's network. When the WikiLeaks page on Twitter listed its location as "everywhere," it wasn't just using a figure of speech. Like an efficient espionage system, WikiLeaks is well guarded and almost immune from meaningful damage. The secret documents are anonymously sent to digital drop-boxes and stored on servers across the world.

What is ironic about Assange's spy machinery is the fact that it very closely resembles espionage systems so far adopted by rulers and nation states — from Chandragupta Maurya, Queen Elizabeth I to Adolf Hitler; from the World Wars, the Cold War to the "war on terror." What Assange does has been done earlier by Francis Walsingham and Fritz Joubert Duquesne. And, as has been revealed to the world just a few months back by another whistleblower, Edward Snowden, even today, the US government uses elaborate systems of surveillance to track the whereabouts of not only the American people, but also the people of other countries. It does so both officially and unofficially: apart from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the US has well-wishers like the Project Vigilant, an alliance of 600 volunteers who scrutinize internet traffic and pass information on to the federal authorities.

Assange, apparently, is a self-confessed anarchist, although he has rarely been dubbed as such. He has most conveniently been seen sometimes almost as a fictional superhero, and

sometimes as a supervillain. What is important to remember is that he has dramatically subverted State-sponsored espionage. He became the people's spy, and robbed governments of their monopoly over information. There are many debates surrounding WikiLeaks. The reality of Assange's standpoint is most akin to what the British journalist, David Leigh, writes in a report about WikiLeaks, "...if it can be leaked, it will be leaked." (Sarkar) His subversion, most interestingly, stems from the fact that he is rootless, global and accountable to no institutional power.

This trait of being nation-less, this rootlessness that allows Assange to be accountable to no one has given him the freedom required to pursue the path of an anarchist. The fact that he does not owe allegiance to a particular political force or cultural framework has made WikiLeaks capable of standing up to a super-state like the US. In this world of so-called globalization, political interests of nations have become tangled with each other so irrevocably, that it is hard to conceive of an organization such as WikiLeaks without a person like Assange heading it, one who is a nomad in the truest sense, who does not belong anywhere. In a much smaller scale, the *Fyatarus* of Nabarun have acquired the same permeability through their lack of belonging, their rootlessness.

Is Assange a *Fyataru*? Here the real and the fictional meet. The *Fyataru* is an anarchist in the same way as Assange is. Another such anarchist in the "real" world is Edward Snowden. He was a CIA employee who made headlines in 2013 when he leaked classified information from the National Security Agency (NSA). The information he leaked told the world that powerful governments have put flies on our walls. Global surveillance systems, mainly operated by the NSA with the cooperation of some global telecommunication companies and European governments, have created an elaborate spy mechanism that is designed to dissect every move made by every other person in almost every corner of the world through the internet. Such surveillance systems has made a mockery of the word "personal." Snowden's revelations, obviously, sparked an immediate debate over mass surveillance programs initiated by powerful institutions, and how the common man is treated as a puppet by governments. Snowden was charged with the violation of the Espionage Act, and since then, the media has been quite baffled with him. Some have called him a hero, while others have called him a traitor. He has been called a dissident on the one hand, and, interestingly, a "patriot" on the other. But he too has

seldom been referred to as an “anarchist.” Or, even if he has been, loosely, the term has not been used with an intention to connect him to an existing and practiced school of thought that is formally known as Anarchism.

Nevertheless, anarchism is becoming a recurring manifestation of the people’s dissent today, increasingly, as the governments of the world become more and more despotic and defiant of the people’s will. In the 1980s, Julian Assange was the member of a teenage hackers’ club in Melbourne called the International Subversives, which had launched a cyber-attack on the US’s space mission in 1989. The idea of Assange’s WikiLeaks originated out of this club. Assange drew inspiration from another anarchist, Daniel Ellsberg, who had leaked the Pentagon Papers in 1969. The acts of these men, as is increasingly clear, are inspired by a will to destroy the false sense of invincibility that is making powerful state mechanisms so direly vindictive.

Assange’s and Snowden’s leaks created a massive turmoil across governments, which is why the world knows their names today. But such underground whistleblowers and hackers have existed just beneath the surface for quite a long time now. Every now and then, someone or the other breaches the ‘secured’ networks of the FBI, CIA, and the Pentagon to throw up information critical enough to start world wars. Sophisticated encryptions are treated by these Black Hat hackers as toys in the hands of a child. Gary McKinnon, in 2002, infiltrated 97 US military and NASA computers in a span of 24 hours, and shut down the US military’s Washington Network just for the sake of some amusement, apparently. His antic is known as the biggest military hack of all time. Another notorious group of Black Hat hackers, the Lulz Security, had hacked into the computers of Sony, News International, CIA, FBI, Scotland Yard, and several other noteworthy institutions. A 16-year-old, Jonathan James, had hacked into and shut down the Defense Threat Reduction Agency of the US. But the most fantastical hacker that ever existed in reality is perhaps the ‘hacktivist’ group called Anonymous, the real identity of the members being still unknown. They were dubbed as the ‘digital Robin Hoods’, and they had made their intentions quite clear by launching serious attacks on several government, religious, and corporate institutions, including the Vatican, the FBI, the CIA, Mastercard, Visa, etc. [The references to the three hackers mentioned here are gathered from *The Rise of the Hacker* by Christopher Williams, The Telegraph, UK, June 22, 2011]

These hackers were clearly not driven by a strong sense of purpose as Assange or Snowden were. Their anarchy was a sort of rebellion against the larger sense of order – or perhaps just an intent to amuse themselves by mocking the aura of authority that global institutions emanate. A brewing dissent is starkly visible in their acts, but most of them do not identify a particular institution or belief system as their “enemy.” It is hard to say what would have happened, or would happen, if these sharp, young people were joined by a singular sense of purpose, under a common ideology. WikiLeaks, in a way, had sown the seeds of such an organized movement, which is why it is perceived as a dire threat by governments, and dealt with very cautiously by the media.

### The Need to Subvert

The *Fyatarus* resemble these “floating” anarchists. They are not driven by a cause; they are rather disturbed by a void originating the lack of a concrete cause. They wreak havoc sometimes out of pure habit and sometimes to give vent to their disgust of the rich and the pretentious. In the case of the *Fyatarus*, subversion is a habitual trait. This is interesting, since subversion, by definition, refers to deviation from habit. When deviation becomes a habit, it implies a reversal that may politically help an anarchic vision and yet oppose it ideologically.

Mostly, *Fyatarus* are fractured images of the classic anarchist. The question that arises is why Nabarun chose to make them a fractured image. Why did he not create the ideal representation of an anarchist, someone in the mold of Michael Bakunin or Emma Goldman? The answer, perhaps, lies in the author’s fundamental mistrust of the sense of surety in individuals who follow the path of the politics of individualism. Perhaps, he sees this as the point from which an institutional framework takes shape. He thus wants to destroy all sense of direction and instead create an environment of pure chaos, which, he seems to believe, is the most natural state of the human mind. The *Fyatarus*, therefore, not only try to demolish physical institutions, but also institutions of the mind. There is a peculiar blend of the possible and the impossible in Nabarun’s work. The impossible beings – such as flying humans – become the tools for his anarchism. But Nabarun’s anarchist tendencies are limited to a certain point.

In *Kangal Malsat*, Nabarun had almost arrived at the point where the *Fyatarus* gather in an organized rebellion against the state. But he scattered their designs in the end, and the

*Fyatarus* went back to being the madmen they are, jeopardizing the lives of the secured and healthy lot. One wonders why he chose this resolution. Was the author afraid of not merely suggesting the possibility of but actually inspiring an anarchist upheaval? Or is it not fear but something deeper? Maybe, it is the ultimate nihilism of a firm cynic that does not let him believe in even a structured rebellion to bring about a chaotic turbulence. Instead, Nabarun chooses to keep his *Fyatarus* in the sidelines, more as vigilant spies who would keep a watch on the ordered world around them, and punish any instance of complacency or despotism with the outbreak of an unthinkable, unmanageable disruptiveness.

As Nabarun points out in another novel, *Herbert*, “Bisforon kobe, kothay o kibhabe ghotbe ta rashtrajontrer ekhono jante baki ache.” (The state is yet to acquire the knowledge of how, when and where an explosion might take place). (*Upanyas Samagra* 62) This explosion seems to be almost an orgasmic dream for him – a refuge from the depressing reality of the stock market ruling the world.

Whatever it might be in theory, it cannot be denied that anarchism is yet to provide a practical blueprint for the transformation of a civilization. Yet, anarchism is an inevitable necessity if a truly democratic structure of a society is to be thought of. Democracy is almost always at risk of slipping into the garb of dictatorship, as has often been seen in history, or, if one may suggest so, is what is happening in several prominent nations of this world at present. It is an anarchist force that can save democracy from falling into the trap of autocracy. The disruptive power of anarchism would not allow an institution to grow so powerful and complacent that it might set a trap for the people or try to make them endorse a totalitarian regime posing as a democratic one. Anarchy would keep an eye on such vindictive institutions – be they governments or corporates – and always try to threaten their sense of indomitability with its troublemaking tactics. This is why, real-life *Fyatarus* like Assange and Snowden spoil the fantasies of the US government, and fictional *Fyatarus* spoil the weekend dinner plans of corrupt police officers. If we care to look closely, such troublemakers exist in a state of invisibility all around us. They are potent bombs waiting to go off, and sometimes they do. Nabarun’s *Fyatarus* and their acts of pure chaos are meant to have a sterilizing effect on a contaminated society.

The second purpose that anarchy serves is to protect the right of the individual to dissent. Ideally, democracy should mean that the ruling power protects most vehemently the right to speak of its opposition or its critique. This is the “ideal” form of democracy. I doubt if it can be practiced in its purest form at all, since the very structure of a democratic State breeds hierarchic institutions, and therefore an unequal distribution of power. In practice, actually, democratic governments hardly practice such democracy. Governing viewpoints in today’s world is rarely inclusive, and marginalization is an integral part of the political agenda that is driven by populist opinions and the appeasement of popular thoughts and demands. Moreover, hegemonic formations of groups ensure that the individual is the most endangered party in this system. In our society, opinions belong to the majority. On the other hand, minorities, too, become an instrument of the system propagated by the majority rather than actually being a counterpoint to the prevailing opinions that govern the dominant system. That might well be the mainstay of democracy, but it threatens the virtue of free speech. The individual’s freedom of thought is continuously thwarted by social institutions, so much so that often a free thought actually does not take shape in the first place. If the freedom of expression is to be protected, free thoughts must be allowed to form, and thoughts can be freed from the curbing influence of established opinions only by the instrument of subversion. Anarchy promotes such subversion, as does the *Fyataru*. It reminds us why subversion is important.

Although not in agreement with institutional leftism, Nabarun seems to nurture sympathy for the Naxalites. Not surprising, since the extreme-left also thrives primarily on the philosophy of a guerilla rebellion against the state machinery, an idea that his anarchist *Fyatarus* also toy with from time to time. In Nabarun’s writings, anarchism and ultra-Left beliefs sometimes blend in to form a wider repulsion of state-sponsored oppression, the retort to which his characters do not quite seem to find. In *Herbert*, Nabarun came closest to that retort. But the inability to find an apt response to blatant injustice makes his *Fyatarus* insane wanderers of the cityscape, mostly comic at the initial reading, but the victims of a profound tragedy as one goes deeper.

Nabarun has used the long shot to show the readers his *Fyatarus*. The tragedy of the spiteful madman seething with failed anger has been given a touch of comic elusiveness by a wide-angle lens. Above all, the *Fyatarus* are always “untouchables.” Just as the prevalent cast bias has made the “untouchables” inherit a subaltern identity, the *Fyatarus*, by some magical

inheritance, have acquired their flying powers and their subversive nature. Therefore, their “untouchability” becomes literal too. They can escape the police – or the embodiment of State-inflicted “discipline” - by flying out of their reach. They easily fly out of prisons and hospitals, and they casually urinate on merry gatherings once in a while to establish their discontent as well as their freedom in a strained and restrained social structure. With sarcasm and cynicism as weapons against prudishness and so-called sophistication, they manage to inspire the hope for creating a balancing force that would maintain equilibrium in society, and prevent class equations from getting too tilted. But they themselves lead a tilted life, walking on a tightrope, hanging mid-air between despair, nostalgia, and an impossible vision that make up the very fabric of the city which is home to them.

Yet, the very impossibility of this vision makes it a ticking bomb. As Nabarun warns, not only the state but no one at all knows when the bomb might go off. This ticking bomb can very well be seen to represent the invisible ticking bomb inside Nabarun Bhattacharya, the author. His literary passion can be clearly recognized as his expression of pure and simple anger. He has created the *Fyatarus* and let them loose on his readers because he has a vision. His vision is that of a society governed by the spirit of non-governance, a society that organically adopts the principles of anarchy. He dreams of a revolution to conceive such a society. Yet, the closed and dingy alleys from where his *Fyatarus* emerge physically limit the scope of such an ambitious vision. The *Fyatarus* can fly all they want, but it is quite a conspicuous fact that they do not have wings. Perhaps they lack the space to spread their wings. The *Fyatarus*, and Nabarun, seem to be struggling for some “space”, pushing through the layered fabric of a culturally stoic society with all their might. But this “space” remains elusive, both literally and figuratively, for the *Fyatarus*. Their revolution therefore remains incomplete, their anger not wholly subdued, their dissent not fully expressed. The sense of dissatisfaction chasing Nabarun and his *Fyatarus* like a ghost is perhaps the holistic reality that emerges from the world of these “unreal” creatures.

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