# FROM MYTH TO MOVEMENT: WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE NAXALBARI MOVEMENT IN WEST BENGAL 1967-1972

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## CERTIFICATE

Certified that the dissertation entitled "***From Myth To Movement: Women's Participation in the Naxalbari Movement in West Bengal 1967-1972***" submitted by **Mallarika Sinha Roy** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of **Master of Philosophy**, has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other university. To the best of our knowledge this is an original work.

We recommend that this dissertation may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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For my Grandmother——

Late Usha Saha (1925-2003)

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# CONTENTS

## Introduction

Contemporary studies on social movements have etched out a new category of "women's movement", following the vigorous feminist discourse on restoring women to history and perhaps more importantly to restore history to women[1]. The new category focused on recovering lives and works of women, who were engaged in breaking down the patriarchal domination. This focus involving a fresh approach to historicity and individuals, with a critical imagination was required as it entailed not only adding new characters to a linear narrative of emancipation, but rather a method to locate the limitations of institutions, the negotiated spaces of individuals and a continuous fluidity concerning repression and resistance. My dissertation is an effort to capture a figment of this critical imagination through an analysis of women's participation in Naxalbari Movement in Bengal (1967-72), inspired by Marxist ideology, particularly the Maoist interpretation of it.

There have been thorough studies on causes, nature and impact of the Naxalbari movement giving new insights into the nature of peasant struggle, association of the urban youth and intelligentsia and the overall communist movement in India[2]. On the basis of this rich literature I have tried to study the nature of women's participation in the perspective of the interaction between Marxism and Feminism. It is curious and

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[1] Joan Kelly writes that women's studies, as a discipline, has taken up the task of not only recovering the lives of the few rebel women, who actively tried to come out of patriarchal authority but also the average, common women, who suffered resisted patriarchy through covert agency. Thus this discipline has created new areas of study and formulated fruitful dialogue on women's experiences and established history. This is one of the most important contributions of women's study since it disrupts the unilinear narrative of history, with its set patterns of periodization. See for details Joan Kelly-Gadol, "The Social Relations of Sexes: Methodological Implications of Women's History", in *Feminism and Methodology* (ed.) Sandra Harding, (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Milton Keynes: Indiana University Press, Open University Press, 1987), pp.-15-28.

[2] Naxalbari Movement has been one of the most popular social movements to be studied by the Indian academics in the 1970s and 80s. Some of the books devoted to analysis of this movement are--- Sumanta Bannerjee, *In the Wake of Naxalbari*, (Calcutta: Subarnarekha, 1980) and *India's Simmering Revolution*, (Calcutta, Subarnarekha: 1980), Biplab Dasgupta, *The Naxalite Movement*, (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1974), Ashish K.Roy, *Spring Thunder and After*, (Calcutta: Minerva Associates, 1975), Rabindra Roy, *The Naxalites and their Ideology*, (Delhi: OUP, 1988), Mary Tyler, *My Years in an Indian Prison*, (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1977, Delhi: B.I. Publications, 1977), J.C Johari, *Naxalite Politics in India*, (New Delhi: Institute of Constitutional and Parliamentary Studies, 1972),Samar Sen (ed.) Selected Articles from *Frontier*, (Calcutta: Frontier Publications), from 1972-1977.

baffling to note that despite Engels' pioneering work on the "woman question", the tradition of Marxist Feminism and significant female participation in socialist revolutions in various postcolonial countries, Naxalites rarely addressed this question. The Naxalites did not give the required serious attention to gender as one of the main categories of oppression. In India women have taken considerable part in communist politics, but in this particular movement, in spite of major female participation, their issues were rarely dealt with. The recent literature about women's contribution to Marxism inspired peasant rebellions in Telengana, in Andhra Pradesh in southern India (1948-51), has opened new possibilities of analyzing this theme[3]. The life stories of women in the Telengana People's struggle carry meanings of struggle, impregnated with critique against the reluctance of the Communist Party to let women fighters go beyond the 'supportive' role, to let them engage in actual combat, to let them be a part of the leadership, both theoretically and practically. Twenty years later, in 1968, the women participants of Naxalbari were facing identical problems, for they were struggling in the same manner asking that their voices be heard, to join the movement on their own terms. Charting out the specific dimensions of the Naxalbari movement necessitates a probe into the nature of interaction between the grand narrative of Marxism and the historical-sociological matrix of India. For the purpose of my study I have substantially depended on autobiographies of women leaders and party members who had published articles (mainly in Bengali) in smaller literary magazines in Calcutta in late 1960s and early 1970s. My method seeks to analyse five recorded narratives of women survivors, encompassing not only the exact nature of their participation but also their level of consciousness in the context of gender issues involved in Marxism. However, the source literature indicates that these personal accounts, legends around people and promises made in leaflets do not necessarily follow the line of constructing one unlinear emancipatory narrative.

The nature of a movement like Naxalbari is indeed multidimensional and the relevance of the gender-based focus on the movement lies in studying its historical groundedness with a critical view towards the structural conditions giving rise to the

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[3]See Stree Shakti Sangathana, *'We were making history.....': Life stories of women in Telengana People's Struggle*, (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989)

movement[4]. I shall now try to put Naxalbari in the perspective of social movement studies to make the analysis more accessible.

Social movements, as recognized today, are essentially modern phenomena[5]. The term itself only began to be generally used in the early 19th century in Western Europe and one of the first systematic discussions is to be found in the book by Lorenz von Stein *History of the Social Movement in France from 1789 to the Present Day*. Later the intensity of mass participation in structuring and restructuring their societies in post French Revolution (1789) France and post independence North America (1780s) led to the development of a broader paradigm of social movement, which included nationalist anti-colonial struggles, women's movement with its initial focus on suffrage, youth movements and a host of smaller, sectional movements espousing particular causes.

What constitutes a social movement and how should it be differentiated from the ever-going interaction between static and dynamics residing within every society? This question has led to the identification of two characteristics, which mark a social movement from everyday dynamism within any society-----that they are collective mobilizations preferably through either informal or formal organization and carry a particular orientation towards bringing about change, either partial or total[7]. The next step in the studies on social movements is generally the formation of a typology of movements depending on the size (number of participants), range (local, national,

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[4] Here I have followed Theda Skocpol's definition of social revolution. Skocpol has developed the social structural approach to explain revolutions with emphasis on the characteristics of "historical groundedness" and "multidimensionality". For details of this approach see Theda Skocpol, *Social Revolutions in the Modern World*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994)

[5] See Tom Bottomore, *Political Sociology* (London: Hutchinson, 1979). He explains that by calling social movement a phenomena of modernity he does not exclude mass political action of pre-modern period but rather points at the emergence of self-conscious mass political action which inspired social scientists to understand the historical experiences of peasant rebellions, actions of 'crowds' and 'mobs' and millenarian movements. These mobilizations were often diffused, episodic, expressed in religious or cultural terms, lacking in conscious proclamation of clearly defined doctrines but nevertheless provided the matrix for the emergence of conscious political organization and mobilization in modern times.

[7] See Bottomore, where he has defined a social movement "in broad terms, as a collective endeavor to promote or resist change in a society of which I forms a part"(p.41). Alain Touraine in "The Importance of Social Movements" in *Social Movement Studies* vol.1, no.1, 2002 writes, "I like to define social movements, basically, as organized conflicts or as conflicts between organized actors over the social use of common cultural values" (p.90). Also see M.S.A Rao (ed.) *Social Movements in India* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2002).

international), nature (background of the principal participants like peasantry, backward people, blacks, industrial labour, women), locus (linguistics, religion, student, tribal/ethnic), ideological orientation (reformist, transformative, anarchist, revolutionary), intended, which are sometimes fulfilled, consequences (total structural change, violent change for a short period etc.) of the movement. Often these criteria are not mutually exclusive and the method of classification loosely depends on the nature of authority against which the collective mobilization aiming at change takes place. I shall take up a little detailed study of revolutionary social movements to illustrate the nature of Naxalbari Movement since by self-proclamation Naxalites wanted to accomplish rapid, fundamental change in the social, political, economic and cultural matrix of Indian society though violence[8].

**1**

The ideology of Marxism had found its roots among the Bengali intelligentsia from the early 20th century. "The October Revolution met with a quick response from the most advanced nationalist circles in Bengal. Taraknath Das sent a letter from the Tagore Castle in Calcutta on 12th December 1917 addressed: *To the Honourable Working Men and Soldiers Council of Russia through Leon Trotsky, Petrograd, Russia.* It read *"A revolutionary India rejoices in the idea of a free Russia, with the true idea of government of the people, by the people and for the people."*[9] (Italics mine). Though in the 1920s communists in India led a fragmented existence due to the absence of any concrete policy, by the 1930s they consolidated their position. The Communist Party of India (CPI) was formed in 1925 Indian leaders like M.N. Roy became significant in international communist circles and made important contributions to review the situations in colonized countries. In 1942 CPI suffered a set back. It became alienated from the surging independence movement as it vociferously supported the British against Hitler's Germany during the Second World War. However with its aggressive leadership

[8] Samuel Huntington explained revolution as rapid, fundamental violent domestic change in the dominant values and myths of a society, in its political institutions, social structure, leadership and government activities and policies in *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968).
[9] See, Premen Addy and Ibne Azad, "Politics and Culture in Bengal" in *New Left Review*, no.79, May-June 1973, p.-107

in the early phase of Telengana People's Struggle[10] and Tebhaga[11] movement communists gained a popular base in India. The postulates of Marxist analysis opened a new vision among the Bengali middle-class youth and intelligentsia as a newfound identification with the oppressed peasantry and industrial working class bridged the divides of urban/rural, educated/illiterate, middle-class/mass; at least ideologically. In Calcutta, the students found new folk heroes among the peasants of Naxalbari. The successful communist revolutions in China (1949) and Cuba (1959) signaled a fresh inspiration for massive social change among the Bengali intelligentsia[12].

The year 1967 marked the beginning of a social movement in Bengal. A peasant rebellion in Naxalbari region of North Bengal sparked off one of the most violent socio-political upheavals in independent India, chiefly in Bengal. In May 1967, a group of peasants took the harvest by raiding a local landlord's house in *Baramanijot* village and planted red flags in the fields to mark their possession of those lands[13]. Various dimensions of this movement include a major shift in the communist movement in India, vast youth-student involvement with a vision of people's revolution and an armed struggle in largely rural and urban Bengal. The movement, though lasting for a brief period, succeeded in generating a consciousness across different social boundaries, where the peasantry alongside the intelligentsia responded with a grim resolution to the ideological bankruptcy of the government, industrial recession and severe food shortage.

From the earlier half of the year 1967 stories of death in starvation in different districts of the state of West Bengal poured in. The unemployed village artisans and landless peasants were the principal victims. The government busied itself in the hair splitting debate whether they were deaths of starvation or malnutrition or some other reasons. But the bleak situation only became worse. Miles of newsprint was spent in

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[10] The Telengana people's Struggle (1948-1951) was the armed resistance of the peasants to the feudal oppression of the Nizam and the Hindu Landlords in Hyderabad state.

[11] Tebhaga was a movement led by the sharecroppers who demanded two-thirds of the crop instead of one half of the crop from 1946-49. The Tebhaga Movement was carried on in the northern and the south-western districts of the then Bengal, from November 1946 to the last part of 1949.

[12] For details see, Premen Addy and Ibne Azad, "Politics and Culture in Bengal" in *New Left Review*, no.79, May-June 1973, pp.-71-112; Meghnad Desai, "Vortex in India" in *New Left Review*, no.61, May-June 1970, pp.-43-60; Achin Vanaik, "The Indian Left" in *New Left Review*, no.159, September-October, 1986, pp.-49-70.

[13] See Pradip Bose *Naxalbarir Poorbakshan: Kichhu Postmodern Bhabna* (Calcutta: Progressive Publishers, 1998), p.-12.

criticizing the government, which finally conceded to declare several large regions as famine affected ones. The hoarders made a fortune out of the situation as the bureaucracy winked at blackmarketeering of food grains. The rural poor, hounded by the exploitation of the big landlords flocked into the cities, particularly in Calcutta. However, despite steady industrial growth shown in the national survey balance sheets these rural migrants could hardly find suitable living condition in the alien cities. The uprooted villagers, uprooted also with regard to their traditional pieties, whether religious, moral or political, crowded the dingy and narrow tenements and slums in the murkiest part of the cities. On the other hand production of cement went up to meet the demands for building sprawling mansions, five-star hotels and garish theatre halls. Calcutta earned the notorious title of "cholera capital" as underemployment and overcrowding caused some 1800 deaths of that disease in 1958[14]. The industrial recession hit along with food crisis in 1966-67, when over 23,000 workers were laid off in 95 establishments in West Bengal between January 1 to March 15, 1967[15]. The government industrial policy helped only big private houses to grow. Foreign creditors aided these private houses with loans and these collaborations led to the growth of a complex tertiary white-collar employment. These big private houses willingly tagged along with the foreign investments thus giving birth to the much-used leftist terminology "comprador bourgeoisie"[16].

The communist movement in India underwent several major shifts in quick succession from early 1960s. The party experienced a split in 1964, when a pro-revolution section of leaders of the original party, CPI (Communist Party of India) broke away as they resented the parliamentary politics and formed a new party CPI(M) (Communist Party of India-Marxist)[17]. The 1967 election, in which CPI(M) formed a coalition government with a broken away faction of the Congress Party, 'Bangla

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[14] Sumanta Bannerjee, *In the Wake of Naxalbari*, p.-41.

[15] Ibid p.-44.

[16] For details of the nature of foreign investment in India during this period, see Bannerjee p.-45-52.

[17] Pradip Bose writes in *Naxalbarir Poorbakshan: Kichhu Postmodern Bhabna* (Calcutta: Progressive Publishers, 1998) that after the establishment of the Communist Party of India in the British period the communist politics in India groped for a proper policy to usher in the people's revolution. Through the decades reaching explosive 1960s and 1970s a divide in communist politics became quite visible. On one hand the party-leadership concentrated on parliamentary politics---supporting the mass movements to strengthen the popular with an ultimate goal of securing more votes and winning more seats in the parliament. On the other hand, the lower-rung of party-workers dreamt of a revolution, which would uproot parliamentary democracy and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat. In 1964 this divide became too stark and Communist Party of India (Marxist) was formed by the pro-revolution faction. p.-10-11.

Congress', more intra-left squabbles followed[18]. The United Front Coalition government raised people's hopes as they felt that they had a pro-poor leadership at the helm. The rural poor urged for the promised land reforms and the urban poor expected a rapid change in employment problem. Being a part of the coalition government CPI(M) could not deliver the promises and the even more militant faction in the party began to mount pressure . The divide was becoming severe between the followers of Charu Mazumdar, who actively supported the armed land grab movement by the peasants in Naxalbari, and other CPI(M) leaders since1967[19]. In reaction to peasant revolts the East India Company, the British Empire and the Congress governments sent police forces to crush them. Unfortunately in 1967, in Naxalbari also, the United Front government, the people's chosen leaders sent the police force to crush it. This was the last straw in the growing militancy. The fire began to spread in different districts of North Bengal first and then in South Bengal. Finally under Charu Mazumdar, who dreamt of making the decade of the 70s the decade of liberation, formed CPI(M-L) Communist Party of India- Marxist Leninist in 1969.The CPI(M-L) had three programs----a)the cultural movement was marked by a conscious debunking of Indian particularly Bengali middleclass intellectual heritage, b)an attempt to produce the annihilation programme, targets being the police personnel, informers, jotedars and political rivals, c)a preparatory move to build the arsenal by mass scale snatching of arms[20].

The birth of the new party, CPI(M-L), inspired a new viewpoint towards the socio-political situation. The youth of Bengal began to envision the rural and urban condition from a different, revolutionary point of view. The forerunner of this, were the students. In Jadavpur University, North Bengal University and in almost every school and college, CPI(M-L) found a firm footing. Academic

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[18] I shall discuss the splits in The Communist Party of India in further details in my Second chapter.

[19] Pradip Bose has given an excellent and minute detail of the two months in between the formation of the United Front Government in West Bengal (2nd march, 1967) and the beginning of Naxalbari peasant movement (8th May 1967). He has traced the dilemmas faced by the communist leaders like Jyoti Basu, Harekrishna Konar and Pramod Dasgupta who became ministers in the coalition government and were struggling to strike a balance between their commitment to people's demand for better living and maintaining political stability during a period of severe food shortage and industrial recession. His micro history of this period also accounts for the increasing disillusionment of the communist leaders working in the different districts of North Bengal (Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, Coochbihar and West Dinajpur) like Charu Mazumdar, Kanu Sanyal and Jangal Santhal with the left ministers in realizing all the promises made to the people of these areas on behalf of their party. Pp.-12-14

[20] See Sumanta Bannerjee, pp.-226.

reviews of Marxism along with a close follow up of revolutions in Russia, China and Cuba began with setting up of small study circles, which initiated serious debates on the issue of the strategy to be followed in India. The intensity of commitment reached the lower middleclass youth. The placid calm of Calcutta was being torn apart by the energy of a revolutionary urban youth. The student-youth movement began to find its voice in various magazines and newsletters like *Deshabrati, Dakshin Desh, Aneek* etc. The CPI(M-L) sought to give a political direction to the outbursts. Throughout 1968 and 1969 the urban youth showed their solidarity with the peasant struggle, through demonstrations. Students, leaving educational institutions, went to villages, shantytowns of industrial workers and tribal populated forests to ripen the revolutionary situation. They left universities and picked up spades to work in the fields, took up jobs in the factories in the hope of spreading the dream of Naxalbari. Their aim was direct---to make the people conscious of the exploitation and also of their revolutionary potential and then to march with the people's liberation army under the leadership of the proletariat[21].

Explaining revolutions or some broader 'class phenomena' explicitly conceived as subsuming revolutions has been elucidated through three major approaches. They are *Aggregate-psychological theories*, which attempt to explain revolutions in terms of people's motivation from engaging in political violence or joining oppositional movement[22]. Secondly there are *Systems/Value-Consensus theories*, which attempt to explain revolutions as violent responses of ideological movements to severe disequilibrium in social systems[23]. Finally *Political Conflict theories*, which argue that conflict between governments and organized groups contending for political power, must

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[21] See for details of the causes of this movement, Sumanta Bannerjee, *In The Wake of Naxalbari* (Calcutta: Subarnarekha, 1980)

[22] James Davies (1962, 1969), Ivo and Rosalind Feierabend (1972), the Feierabends and Nesvold (1969, 1973), and Ted Robert Gurr (1968a, 1968b, 1970) have been the leading proponents of this approach Ted Gurr's book *Why Men Rebel*, represents the most sophisticated and thoroughly elaborated presentation of a complex model based on frustration-aggression theory where he explained revolutions as a form of reaction to 'relative deprivation', which is a perceived as discrepancy between people's expectations and their value capabilities.

[23] This theoretical perspective was shared by sociologists Talcott Parsons (1951), Edward Tyriakin (1967), Neil J Smelser (1963) and political scientists Chalmers Johnson. Johnson wrote in his 1966 book *Revolutionary Change*, that violence takes the form of a rational choice of action in the overall process of social change.

be placed at the centre of attention[24]. After a thorough critical review of all these three approaches Theda Skocpol has developed her *Social-Structural approach* combining some useful insights from them. As Skocpol's approach places importance on historicity of any movement she has taken a history based sociological approach to study the revolutionary movements in contemporary Third World societies. "Two myths have long coloured popular views about revolutions in the Third World: that destitution, professional revolutionaries, or perhaps both are sufficient to precipitate revolutions; and that local events in Third World countries are easily manipulated by imperialist Great Powers"[25]. Notwithstanding the importance of these two factors focus must be placed on the formations of revolutionary coalitions between oppressed sections and the local powerful regimes. Imperialists certainly exist but they must operate through local regimes or through private agents whose activities are underwritten and strongly shaped by the specific socio-cultural set up regimes and so the revolutionary strategy must be formulated keeping in mind the historical nature of power nexus in that society[26]. Naxalbari movement, with its focus on political violence can be a point of departure for the study of the formation of revolutionary coalition against the established regime in India.

The methodology of Naxalbari Movement included a critique of colonial Enlightenment ideals, which shaped nationalist politics to a great extent from the period of anti-colonial struggles and the Congress politics of 50s and 60s. The bourgeois ideals of colonial modernity formed the base of Indian middleclass. The critique was activated in the form of student protests. In a frenzy of destruction the students started demolishing statues of Indian bourgeois political leaders and 19th century social reformers. The burning of schools, colleges, and laboratories was a programme of methodical

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[24] The political conflict perspective, best articulated by Charles Tilly, argues that revolutions are complex events whose occurrence depends on a convergence of several independent processes, in which the emphasis should be on organized group conflicts for political goals.

[25] Theda Skocpol, *Social Revolutions in the Modern World*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.-259

[26] The formations of the revolutionary coalition involves not just poor or middle peasants in the agro-based societies of the third World, but also of landless and migrant labourers, rural artisans, rich peasants and even landlords who oppose the present power nexus. Students, professionals, clerics, urban poor are also needed to be included within the revolutionary coalition. Nationalism, in particular has proven to be a more inclusive and powerful source of revolutionary praxis. For details see, "Explaining Revolutions in the contemporary Third World" by Jeff Goodwin and Theda Skocpol, in Theda Skocpol, *Social Revolutions in the Modern World*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp.-259-278.

destruction of the past and beginning of a new value-system. The violent mode of bringing rapid change in power equation in the governance and security was the other part of revolutionary methodology. Annihilation or killing the 'enemy of the people' was the violent path of action, in which the urban youth were initiated in 1970.Snatching away of arms from the police in order to build up an arsenal was the principal programme. Along with the police personnel and police informers, violence was directed against businessmen, professionals supporting state authority in towns, and *jotedars*, moneylenders in villages.

The state started flexing its muscles. On September 10, 1970, the West Bengal government declared that the provisions of the Bengal Suppressions of Terrorist Outrages Act of 1936---a notorious law, used in the days of the colonial rule-would be applicable with immediate effect. This was the first time since august 1947, that the law had been revoked[27]. Then, again in November 1970, the second in the series of draconian laws was produced. President V.V Giri introduced--- the West Bengal Prevention of Violent Activities Bill---which gave wide powers including arrest without warrant, to the police to curb the CPI(M-L) movement, and providing the police with the legal sanction to what they had been doing for the last few months[28]. Armed with the [illegible] laws and military assistance (in 1971, more than 20,000-armed men of CRPF and regular army were deployed to aid the local police). the state launched one of the most vicious repressive tactics. In many cases, after beating some political suspects senseless, police took their bodies outside the lockup, pumped bullets into their bodies and threw them out in the streets. The usual stories given out by the police on such occasions, was that there was a gun duel with the extremists, in which course victims had been killed. But the CPI(M-L) revolutionaries responded with amazing fearlessness and increased defence, which put the combat in desperate blood-spilling. As state repression increased, Naxalites were being caught and put to jail at the slightest pretext. On December 17, 1970, at least 8 prisoners were killed and 60 injured when the police opened fire in the Midnapur Central Jail. On February 4, next year, the police opened fire in Presidency Jail, Calcutta, wounding 24 prisoners. On February 21 again 10 died and

[27] See Sumanta Bannerjee p.-244
[28] See Sumanta Bannerjee p.-245

62 were injured in police firing in Berhampur Jail[29]. The horror of the torture chambers left no suspect, male or female.

Despite such massive repression the CPI (M-L) revolutionaries were undaunted. From the end of 1970, till the beginning of the second quarter of the next year, in spite of ruthless terror by the para-military forces like CRPF, Eastern Frontiers Rifles and BSF, in almost every town and district of West Bengal, police personnel were being killed, rifles were being snatched, local gangsters and notorious Congressmen exterminated. Along with students and youth, workers and in some places peasants also formed 'action squads of guerrillas' planned definite moves and executed them.

But even the heroic activities could not sustain mass support. The horror of blood spilling was alienating people from the revolution. In the absence of well-prepared analysis of events and well-thought out party policies, the actions often missed the message they were supposed to convey. This was alienating even the guerrillas, as they could not express any doubts or demand explanations.

An even more dangerous threat was posed to the movement when the lumpenproletariat---wagon breakers, smugglers, professional murderers, thieves and bandits found their way into the movement. Almost imperceptibly the movement was being opened to the underworld-causing a twofold danger-firstly the police attributed the violence, committed by them as Naxalite actions, thus discrediting the movement and robbed the popular support it initially had and secondly, they were often used by police as informers, agent provocateurs and spies, since they had no ideological commitment to the revolution.

At the peak of this clash with the state, a senseless fratricide started between CPI(M) and CPI(M-L) cadres, at the onset of 1971 midterm poll. The spiralling violence compelled the state to expose its repressive machinery over the entire populace of West Bengal as from the pockets of 'liberated zones' (Muktanchal) the law and order almost vanished. The north and central parts of Calcutta with labyrinthine lanes and bilanes became shelters of the revolutionaries and the industrial parts were populated by

[29] See Sumanta Bannerjee p.-248

the lumpenproletariat, thus leaving the police with few options than to conduct heavily guarded raids in these parts. In several districts like Birbhum and Midnapur clusters of villages were such 'liberated zones'. Still, the revolution was on the wane by the end of 1971 as ruthless state terror descended with heavy hands. The revolutionaries were fighting a losing battle. Alienated from mass, confused by the suppressed information by the leadership, the youth were on the run from police and from political rivals. By 1972 only the debris of the revolution remained with most of the revolutionaries either killed or jailed or absconding in far-away places.

## 2

Naxalbari movement was named the 'Spring thunder' and it lived up to its name by blazing the political horizon of India for a flash----bright, blinding and brief[30]. In spite of being brutally repressed and labelled by the liberal political doctrine as a failure, Naxalbari still inspires a hope among the rural dispossessed and underprivileged. According to Sumanta Bannerjee ironically the credit is due to the abysmal performance of the Indian state in alleviating poverty and equal distribution of wealth, rather than the leaders of Naxalbari themselves[31]. With the naive hope of making 1970s a decade of liberation the leadership rushed to take on the main enemy of people's dictatorship—the state. The response of the state was massive repression. Apart from brutal police action the government labelled the movement as a 'law and order' problem, where frustrated students and incapable leadership shifted the focus from nation-building to destruction of the system with violence. This employment of violence as a strategy to lead a political struggle to bring radical change in society and fight against the state forms another major legacy, left behind by Naxalbari Movement. This movement set the tone of political violence for various types of struggles, whether in Punjab, Kashmir or Assam. However

[30] The Chinese Communist Party attributed this epithet to the Naxalbari movement. An article titled "Spring Thunder Over India" was published as an editorial in *People's Daily*, organ of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on 5th July 1967. It was reproduced in *Liberation* vol.1, no.1, November 1967. It read, "A peal of spring thunder has crashed over the land of India. Revolutionary peasants in Darjeeling area have risen in rebellion. Under the leadership of revolutionary group of the Indian Communist Party, a red area of rural revolutionary armed struggle has been established in India. This is a development of tremendous significance for the Indian people's revolutionary struggle."

[31] See "Naxalbari: Between Past and Future" by Sumanta Bannerjee in *EPW*, June 1, 2002, pp.-2115-2117

an easy equation between terrorist movements around religious, linguistic or ethnic issues and Naxalite movement is grossly misleading since the Naxalite movement was and is always wedded to the politics of a socialist revolution, which aspires to bring economic and social justice in the society by capturing state power. A different kind of lasting impact of Naxalbari movement has been the emergence of different voluntary organizations to work among the dispossessed. But the lingering presence of extremist groups following the Marxist revolutionary strategy in the tribal areas of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Orissa reveal that much learning on the part of the government and much consciousness on the part of the privileged sections are incomplete. "The main achievement of the Naxalbari movement was the ignition of a fire among the rural poor that has refused to die down till today."[32]

The significance of women's participation in Naxalbari becomes crucial as at this moment of rebellion while on one hand questions were put against the institutions of marriage, monogamy and family on the other hand women participants faced sexual harassment (from the enemy and sometimes from the comrades themselves), slandering, forcible silencing and an overall patronizing denial of leadership to them. These aspects of socialist movement and Marxist Party politics are not new but they attract attention because of their near invisibility in India[33]. My choice of personal narratives as the analytical point of departure to approach this research refers to the emphasis put by women's studies on subjective dimensions of experience in the perspective of womanhood as a collective identity, shared from many different points of views. Malavika Karlekar, while writing on the early personal narratives of Bengali women, principally from late 19th early 20th century has noted that Bengali women were among the first to respond to a feminine consciousness in India. In her "Introduction" she writes in a footnote to explain the importance of personal narratives in studying gender relations, "[w]omen's autobiographies, diaries, journals and letters are becoming increasingly important as a source on self-perception as well as for providing insights into gender relations, social structure, political and social change and so on.....[t]wo important points that emerge are feminine suppression of anger as well as of the

[32] Sumanta Bannerjee in *EPW*, June 1, 2002, p.-2115

[33] See Abhilasha Kumari and Sabina Kidwai (ed.) *Crossing the Sacred Line: Women's Search for Political Power* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1998),

admission of ambition, the recognition that accomplishment was neither luck nor the result of the efforts or generosity of others"[34]. Since writing was the only available method of self-expression from the colonial period due to a forceful closure of women's traditional oral culture in India, women's autobiographies and other writings bear their perceptions about themselves[35]. In the postcolonial period though performance-oriented women's agency regained some of its lost ground writing has kept a continuity of communicating women's own interpretations of womanhood. Indian patriarchy, which attained a new form after its interaction with colonialism and formulated a nationalist model by the end of nineteenth century, deployed the method of selective appropriation of these writings to fit the alternative interpretations within its fold of the dominant mould of *bhadramahila*.[36] Even in the postcolonial period this legacy dominated the mode of approaching the women's issue and thus women's writing was often treated as a part of the dominant literary tradition rather than as a source of alternative portrayals of experiences of womanhood[37]. But despite these methods women's writing is increasingly asserting its 'difference', especially in recent years.

**3**

In the first chapter, divided into three sections, I have attempted to chart out the dynamic exchange of ideas between Marxism and Feminism. The interaction has been very lively in the sense that from the beginning these two theoretical positions have had polemical dialogue regarding women's position and women's liberation, which finally developed the strand of Marxist Feminism covering both the Marxist theoretical postulates on 'women's question' and liberal Feminist ideas on women's emancipation. In this chapter, I have concentrated in the first section on three themes. In the first section I have

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[34] Malavika Karlekar, *Voices from Within: Early Personal Narratives of Bengali Women*, (Delhi: OUP, 1993), p.-5

[35] Sumanta Bannerjee has given a detailed study of this process of marginalization of women's oral culture in Bengal in the wake of colonialism in his essay "Marginalization of Women's Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Bengal", Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (eds.) *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, (Delhi: Kali for Women 1989) pp.127 179

[36] See for the detailed account of development of a singular expression of "Indian Womanhood" from the end of 19th century by the emergent nationalist middleclass patriarchy, Partha Chatterjee, "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question" in *Recasting Women*, pp. 253-273

[37] Shibaji Bandopadhyay's essay in Jasodhara Bagchi (ed.) *Indian Women: Myth and Reality* (Hyderabad: Sangam Books, 1995).

discussed the theoretical debate on the treatment of reproductive activity in relation to production both as a concept and practice. The interface between capitalism and patriarchy as twin systems of renewing and perpetuating women's oppression and the discussion on the road to liberation for women form the next two dimensions discussed, in this section. In the second section I have briefly discussed the life and works of three early Marxist Feminists------Eleanor Marx, Clara Zetkin and Alexandra Kollontai. The choice of these women is not arbitrary but follows my original conception of tracing the development of Marxist Feminism both as a theory and as a practice which include not only the adoption of Marxist theoretical insights in explaining and activating women's liberation but also points of friction, manifested through the dilemmas faced by these women. Eleanor Marx has been one of the pioneers of taking the "woman question" to the forefront. Both Clara Zetkin and Alexandra Kollontai were prominent leaders of the communist movements in their countries—Germany and Russia respectively. Eleanor Marx, Clara Zetkin and Alexandra Kollontai represent the early generation of women Marxists who supported the ideology after being attracted to it independently. Their uninfluenced assessment of Marxism a perceptible sense of autonomy enabled them to articulate their own theoretical positions, sometimes colliding with the official party ideology, to the patriarchal party elite. I have chosen not to include Rosa Luxemburg in this discussion because she was the only exception among women leaders who achieved the position of a top-level theorist and strategist. Clichéd it may seem yet her exception almost proves the rule of absence of any other top women leaders. The third and the last section deals with the women's participation in Indian Marxist movement from the early days of 1930s to 1964, when Communist Party of India split into two after a major ideological difference. I have tried to capture the nuances of the women's question in India through a short discussion of the personal narratives of one of the most well known women leaders—Manikuntala Sen. Thus the first chapter aims at a comprehensive lay out of the international and national scenario concerning the dialogue between Marxism and Feminism from the early decades of 20$^{th}$ century.

The second chapter has focused around the history and consequences of Naxalbari Movement from 1967-72. The first section of this chapter is a quick overview of these five years, concentrating on the insights of the earlier studies rather than chronology. The

principal focus is on the ideological dilemma faced by the Naxalites with particular reference to women's issue. In the second section this focus has been further developed to pose the definite problems faced by the women participants and their reaction to these problems at a more generalized level. The unavailability of source material has been one of the main deterrents in writing this chapter hence much of the tentative conclusion arrived at, requires extensive further research, which at this stage is not possible. Since none of the standard literature on Naxalbari Movement in Bengal has devoted specific attention to gender as a category let alone discussing women's particular problems, the progress of this dissertation depended to a large extent on my own ability to look at these texts from the perspective of gender studies.

The third chapter is the translation and analysis of the five personal narratives, of five women mainly from different socio-economic situations. Their narratives formulate the principal theme of my work since their lives depict the struggles they faced both as women and as Communist revolutionaries. Finally in the Conclusion I have tried to formulate a critical assessment of Marxist Feminism in India in the perspective of a radical movement like Naxalbari. I have used the comparative method between Telengana and Naxalbari movements regarding the nature of women's participation and their recording of their own experiences, either as oral history or in the form of personal narrative. I shall further focus on the centrality of personal narratives in retracing the social relations between the sexes from the point of view of women. How the postcolonial scholarship has, at the same time opened new avenues of writing women's history and posed new difficulties in doing that work will consist of the theoretical backdrop of my final comments.

Marxism and Feminism, both provide theoretical basis for women's liberation and thus a meaningful dialogue between them has the possibility of critically reviewing each other and reach a point of agreement. Since both engage with the larger view of emancipation from all kinds of oppression at every juncture of social change their dialogue develops new implications. This interaction has produced not only agreement amid two theoretical positions but also intense debate. In the following section my effort has been directed to give a concise argument regarding the affirmative

discourse between Marxism and Feminism, while I shall develop the points of discord in the next chapter.

A cursory look at how the Socialist Theories of Emancipation before Marx, handled the category of women, would enable further detailing of this dialogue. In England, Robert Owen, (1771-1858) argued against the ties of marriage for free love, but female Owenites demurred. What was needed was childcare and relief from housework not a sexual freedom that might leave women more exploited and more vulnerable than when they were married. Even these reforms were unacceptable however to male workers recruited by the Owenites, who were not pleased with the prospect of an influx of female labour into the market. Male authority in the home would have to be maintained. In this clash between idealism of Owen and the concrete situation of the workers prevailed, and Owenites reverted to a more moderate support of women's rights and marriage reform that did not go far beyond the programme of liberal feminism. Fourier, (1772-1837) advocated the complete break up of the family, and the bringing up of the children by the state. Each sex was to receive an equivalent education and there was to be no restriction in healthy sexual activity women would work, but here lies the catch,---there would be *differences*. 'Respected' and 'appropriate' places would be found for women in the industry. Proudhon (1809-1865) was quite clear in declaring women as inferior to men in every respect though he did not miss the romantic concept of frailty, daintiness of women and so his socialism guaranteed a good protected life for women, where the husband would be supported by the state. The problem of these Utopian Socialist ideas was that their strategy was 'deceptively moral'. Utopian experiments could even function as useful safety valves, creating comforting conduits for the moral uneasiness of a middleclass sufficiently well off to dabble in a socialism that in no way threatened the real power relationships[38].

With Marx's theory of emancipation, particularly his critique of family as an institution as well as a value system, the critical importance of women's issues increased greatly. His position on the women's question is intricately related to his critique against liberal Feminism, which has exercised a considerable influence regarding

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[38] See Andrea Nye, *Feminist Theory and the Philosophies of Man*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1988)

women's place and status in society. Marx's criticism against the bourgeois ideal of 'equality' shaped his cynical distantiation from women's suffragist movement. I have dealt with this polemical relationship between Marx and liberal Feminism in greater detail in the next chapter. Here it is sufficient to note that Marxist Feminists harboured a hostile suspicion to women in liberal feminist movement.

One of the most important themes of debate regarding women's role in society was based on the conception of domestic labour. Since the late 1960s debates around the application of Marxist analysis of historical materialism and alienation in understanding housework or domestic labour, the chief constituent of sexual division of labour began to develop with new dimensions in Feminist perspective. Marxist Feminists like Lise Vogel, Susan Sontag, Angela Davis and Eli Zaretsky analyzed domestic labour as an antithesis to alienating work outside home, where the worker had lost any control over the labour and entirely appropriated[39]. Lise Vogel suggested that housework is relatively unalieanating since it produces use-value, not exchange value that is the chief means of appropriation of labour by the oppressor. Angela Davis formulated her thesis on Black women's situation much in the same line of argument. She stressed that the private world of housework was the only meaningful labour of black slave community as it produced use value. Susan Sontag acknowledged family and the world of domesticity as the only space free of alienation. Eli Zaretsky's analysis is far more complex as the development of argument takes account of not only alienation but also social construction of consciousness. The argument builds on the analysis that reified the world of work outside the domestic space gave family an aura of ultimate emotional retreat and thus women in family found themselves as embodiments of perfect emotional balance and emanating perfect values and transforming into ideal-types of motherhood and caregiver. Thus Zaretsky has concluded, "[w]omen were identified with emotional life, men with the struggle for existence". The other view on housework formulated by Marxist Feminists like Zillah Eisenstein and Mariarosa Dalla Costa considered it as

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[39] See for details Lise Vogel, "The Earthly Family" in *Radical America* 7, no.s, 4and5 (July-Oct.-1973), Angela Davis, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves" in *The Black Scholar*,3, no.4 (Dec.-1971), Susan Sontag, "The Third World of Women" in *Partisan Review 60*, no.2, 1973, Eli Zaretsky, *Capitalism, the Family and Personal Life*, (New York: Harper, 1976), Zillah Eisenstein, "Developing a theory of Capitalist Patriarchy and Socialist Feminism" in *Capitalist Patriarchy and the case for Socialist Feminism*, Zillah Eisenstein (ed.), (New York: Monthly Review, 1979) and Mariarosa Dalla Costa, "Women and the Subversion of Community" in *Radical America* 60, no.1 (Jan-Feb. 1972)

inherently alienating. Zillah Eisenstein urges that any tasks pre assigned to a group of people are alienating as they leave no choice and the monotony of housework becomes isolating. It is clear that the question of whether housework is alienating or not may be answered by saying that some aspects of it are and others are not. The housewife has more control over time than the factory labour; and this can create unalienated labour as Marx suggested but her chores are prescribed, respective and trivialized. But the housewife lives out of the political world and has actually no life outside the monotony of housework and thus in one way she remains alienated. On the other hand her forced economic dependency adds on to her alienated self.

Juliet Mitchell writes that reproduction in our society is often a sad mimicry of production, as maternity, for women are equated with production of commodity and thus leads to her powerlessness and alienation. For her the physiological dimension of maternity will remain the chief determinant of womanhood as long as reproductive activity will continue to be the lynchpin of family under the moral garb of monogamy. Mitchell aims at uncoiling the "ideology of woman" as an undifferentiated totality by analysing the key structures of Production, Reproduction, Sexuality and Socialization of Children. For her, each of these elements constitute the complex unity that shapes the identity, activity and agency of women and the complexity is *ultimately*, determined by economic factors. For emancipation, a revolutionary movement must base its analysis on the uneven development of each structure and attack the weakest link in the combination. While examining motherhood in terms of woman's choice she concluded that unavailability of choice in becoming mother and the aura attached to the role actually externalises the woman from the role. The expected performance of motherhood overshadows the experience of being a mother. Thus when the overarching role of mother diminishes from the life of the child as he/she grows up the mother faces a crisis of lost identity. Her effort to trace the undulated topography of the history of reproduction rather than the fixed notion of it being 'natural' historicizes an atemporal reality. For her, the invention of the Pill is no less a revolution than any of the discoveries of the scientific revolution and thus takes account of a significant aspect of

the history of sexuality in relation to history of production[40]. The establishment of the revered purity and holiness of motherhood in fact reduces the woman within a singular role. Thus motherhood also becomes another form of alienation. And, this is the point where the labour of giving birth gets related to the labour at home, thus forming a bridge between two forms of production---human and artificial. Marx's contribution in this relation is providing the basic tool of disentangling the web of economic, cultural and political domination over women.

The interface is succinctly outlined by Maria Mies when she has discussed the issue in the perspective of motherhood. Her essay "Colonization and Housewifization" has captured this complexity of gender inequality within the historical backdrop of colonialism[41]. Her essay deals with the perception and utilization of women's labour in the Caribbean islands, dependent on plantation economy from 17th century. The density and intricacies arising out of political and cultural matrix of master/slave dichotomy between white colonizers and Negro natives moulded the role of motherhood among Black slave women, which followed a different trajectory of role construction in Western Europe. In the plantation economies with slave labour, forcible celibacy of the slaves was considered profitable in the beginning (17th century) as buying a slave was far less costly than allowing a slave mother to give birth (thus being absent from work) and then rearing the baby (which meant less working hours for the mother and too much investment in bringing up the baby to be an able slave). On the other hand when the Black woman was neither a mother nor a woman, only an abstract labour the white women was being schooled into domestic duties and bearing child, virtually being turned into breeding machines. In the Caribbean these birth restrictions continued for nearly a century and when towards the end of the 18th century the colonizers shifted focus on 'local breeding' rather than buying (since that process became more profitable by that time) slaves, the slave women had already internalised an antimotherhood attitude and aborted pregnancy at their will with their traditional knowledge of abortion. Rhoda Reddock sees in this antimotherhood attitude as an example of the way in which

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[40] See Juliet Mitchell's essay, "Woman: The Longest Revolution" (first published in *New Left Review*, No., 40; 1966) for details.

[41] See Maria Mies "Colonization and Housewifization" in Rosemary Hennessey and Chrys Ingreham (ed.) *Materialist Feminism: A Reader in Class Difference and Women's Lives,* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997)

the ideology of the ruling classes could, for different though connected reasons, become the accepted ideology of the oppressed[42]. Simultaneously this birth strike also disrupts the naturalization and valorisation of motherhood for women. When the birth strike of the slave women threatened the profit, the colonizers began to pump in the ideology of sacred marriage and family customs among the native population. Due to the birth strike slave-breeding became a regular business involving the two pronged attack by the white masters---forced intercourse and continuous hammering of family ideology. This economic and cultural contingency finds support in Marx's insistence upon abandoning the concept of 'the family' in favour of historical, political and cultural specificities. Thus the entire notion of domestic labour and housewifization, allegedly to which Marx was partially blind, also suffers from the same false universalistic tendencies, which the feminists have so far critiqued. Susan Visvanathan's article on women and work is also an indicator to the possibilities of analytical categories in understanding spatio-temporal specificities, rather than rigidly confining them within essentialism[43].

In spite of the valuable contribution of Marxist analysis to understand women's work and emancipation, the critique by the Feminists posed against Marx indicate one significant shortcoming in the application of his theory of historical materialism, which refers to the inability of this theoretical formulation to account for women's subjugated position in pre-capitalist societies and survival of subversive sites of women's agency in pre-capitalist societies. Michel Barrett has been crucial in pointing out this limitation and a severe critique. I have dealt with Barrett's analysis in my next chapter. Here it will be adequate to note that despite this stern critique it cannot be argued that Marx was entirely insensitive to the 'women's question' with regard to women's position and their relentless struggle throughout history. It is true that most of his discussions on women are located in his analysis of family but his treatment of marriage in terms of labour and property, his understanding of domestic labour with reference to use and exchange value, which actually questions the capitalist system of adding value to a certain type of 'useful labour' and his inclusion of women within all

[42] See Rhoda Reddock, *Women Labour and Struggle in 20th Century Trinidad and Tobago*, (The Hague: Institute of Social Studies, 1984)

[43] See Susan Visvanathan, "Women and Work: From Housewifization to Androgyny" in *EPW*, November 9-16, 1996

oppressed classes set him apart from his Utopian Socialist predecessors and Bourgeois Feminist contemporaries. Tearing him apart from his historical location and burdening him with expectations emerging out of feminist theory and praxis in the second half of 20th century fail to do justice to the basic critical tools of his theory[44].

However the feminist critique is as important as appreciating Marx's contribution in putting the evolution of women's question in the realm of theorising and strategising. Without one the other becomes biased and in most cases absence of a balance evaluation of both these positions has retrograded the process of emancipation not only for women but also for all oppressed classes. My next chapter will deal with the critiques in detail.

[44] See Paresh Chattopadhyay, "Marx on Women's Question" in *EPW*, July 30, 2001

## Chapter—1

## Marxism and Feminism: The Woman Question or the questions women asked

### 1

> On the question of feminism however, even the most committed Marxists now suspect that our idol has feet of clay
>
> Michele Barrett[45]

The interrelationship between Marxism and Feminism chart a long and complex history, revealing today a situation porous with numerous possibilities of interpretation and intervention. In this chapter I intend to trace this historical trajectory principally through the issues of contention rather than through chronology. Even in this task, I want to make it clear that this will be a review of the themes which have enlivened the debate, the communicative theoretical interchanges between these two positions rather than a review of the categories of Radical and Socialist feminisms[46]. I shall take up certain personalities to highlight the intricacies of the debate at a later stage of this discussion but these personalities, I feel, will only illuminate the naiveté of creating theoretical boundaries around this interconnection and also reflect upon the necessity to look at it with the relevance of contemporary life—western and indigenous at the same moment.

The 'woman question', as it is popularly noted in Marxist theory, suffers from a lack of serious and longstanding attention from Marx himself. Juliet Mitchell writes that in Marx's early writings woman becomes an anthropological entity, an ontological category, of a highly abstract kind; contrarily in his later work, where he is concerned with describing the family Marx differentiates it as a phenomenon according to time and place. Thus women become submerged in an analysis of family. In both

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[45] See Michele Barrett, "Marxist-Feminism and the Work of Karl Marx" in Anne Phillips (ed.) *Feminism And Equality*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), p-44.

[46] The discussion of Feminism, either laterally or longitudinally misses a vital component of any theory to be relevant across space and time—plurality. Thus, categorising the history and politics of Feminism as a singular construct within the rigid frameworks of Liberalism, radicalism and Socialism fails to address the point that there is not one Feminism but Feminisms. This plurality is not an indication of feminism's incapacity to take up all women's concern but rather a significant fluidity and flexibility, which not only expands and adapts according to the variability of situations but also accommodates debates on theoretical postulates to modify itself.

periods of Marx's intellectual engagement with the issues related to the 'woman question' women remain a 'problem', to be explained through political economy and never become an independent category with multiple realities existing in the socio-political matrix[47]. But it is undeniable that the overall framework of Marx's class-analysis offers immense possibility of understanding and interpreting women's oppression, both cross-culturally and historically. Simone de Beauvoir 's piece on historical materialism in her monumental "Second Sex" appreciates the brilliance of the concept in analysing the oppressive conditions for women but formulates a critique, which is voiced later in Mitchell's essay also[48]. Beauvoir states that Marx's inattention to the analytical category of women in terms of differentiating power-positions developed from his overemphasis on economy. She rightly pointed out, way back in 1949, that women can neither be defined in terms of her sexuality or reproductive capacity nor by her productive role in doing housework or simple domestic labour. The realization of womanhood along with her economic role encompasses her world-view, her self-perception, her intellect and her desire and so despite being a pioneer, Engels' work falls short of explaining the nature and multiple dimensions of the oppressive condition in which women spend their lives[49]. For Engels, the development of private property along side technical improvement spelt the end to old division of labour, where women and men had equal sharing and equal value was placed on every type of labour. Then maternal authority gave way to paternal authority; women's role became confined within the domestic space and prescriptive monogamy ruled out her sexual freedom and women became unworthy of inheritance. Beauvoir's question goes deeper than this historical materialistic analysis can offer, as she asks where does this *interest* of private property, the source of social institutions, come from. She is interested not only in questioning the power of techniques in suppressing women but also in the emergence of the technique wielding men who exercise this power. The significance of her question becomes more plausible when she says that 'the imperialism of human consciousness' creates an objective category of sovereignty and an Other who is to be dominated and that, without this consciousness no

[47] See Juliet Mitchell's essay, "Woman: The Longest Revolution"
[48] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, (London: Vintage, 1997) first published, 1949. p. -84-91
[49] Beauvoir's critique is more directed towards Engels rather than Marx but on 'woman question' both these theorists have to be taken in unison as Marx rarely spoke anything specifically on women.

amount of technical invention could have resulted in enslavement of one group by another. So she qualifies the 'woman question' in the total perspective of human existence and says that the value of muscular strength, the implicit power of the phallus, the importance of tools of production can only make sense when the conditions of existence and the search for freedom from abusive conditions are taken into account. Such a situation seeks the agency of human beings, not the *Homo oeconomicus*.

Beauvoir's critique is further substantiated by Michele Barrett's position regarding women's question as that sheds light onto the treatment of the analytical category of women and also feminism in Marx's own works. Barrett believes that since feminism in 19th century was based principally on the philosophy of egalitarianism, Marx marginalized feminism as he identified it as part of the political arsenal of the ascendant bourgeoisie. It is reflected in his failing to identify himself with the suffragist movement, the strongest manifestation of feminism at that period. To quote Barrett again, "[j]ust as he was happy to leave the theorization of the women's question to Engels, so he left its political profile to others, such as his daughter, Eleanor. The implication must obviously be that, to say the least, he regarded such issues as marginal"[50]. In so far as egalitarianism is a source of conflict and disagreement between feminism and Marx, Marx did not consider it fit to counter the classical arguments in favour women's rights as he remained silent to Wolstonecraft's and Mill's arguments but vigorously countered liberal ideas on other aspects[51]. This confirms his inattention to the women's question as not being worthy enough to be included in ideological confrontation concerning political economy.

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[50] Michelle Barrett, "Marxist-Feminism and the work of Karl Marx" in Ann Phillips (ed.) *Feminism and Equality*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), p-46 (pp.-44-62)

[51] Feminism as a self-conscious, protest movement arose as part of a revolutionary bourgeois tradition that had equality of mankind as its highest goal. The first expressions of feminism were endowed with the strengths of the concept of equality, as the middle-class bourgeois women wanted to be at par with men of their class and follow the ideals of egalitarianism, impartialism and fairness. In 1700, writing on marriage, Mary Astell wrote, "If all men are born free, how is it that all women are born slaves?" (*Reflections Upon Marriage*). Though, working-class women, ex-slave women, women from *lumpenproleteriat* and so on contributed to, reshaped and developed feminism, the seventeenth century feminist rhetoric and movement remained inspired and also constricted by the bourgeois ethos of equality. However, in eighteenth century feminism reached a new crescendo and drew major inspiration from French Revolution (1789) as the feminists demanded not only equality in principle but in practice. Mary Wollstonecraft's arguments bear a testimony to this new high that feminism acquired in 18th century Europe.

It is argued that the philosophical humanism and ethical emphasis on the issue of alienation constitute his major influence on feminism. His ideas on alienation are effective as a general theory of oppression and liberation for the reason that it has a strong relational character. It enables us to understand oppression not as an imposition but as a process involving the oppressed and continuous reproduction of the conditions of their subservience. Feminist theory and practice has tended to emphasise the necessity of engaging with subjectivity and consciousness as well as with external structures and it has attempted the analysis of how an oppressed group comes to live out the dynamics of oppression in forms of collusion. It is to these concerns that Marx's account of alienation speaks so eloquently, in the context of the 'woman question'.

But the problem arises as Marx repeatedly refers to the exploitation of 'man' as a labourer and forgets the relationship in which a woman is placed as a worker. To what extent does the theory of alienation apply to a fulfilment of housewife? How do we analyse the dual role of women as wage-labourer and a housewife and the escalated sense of alienation felt in both the roles? Increasingly as he construes the labourer as male it becomes difficult to apply the theory of alienation in feminist theory. This male-centric concern takes us back to Marx's notion of 'progress' and 'production' as conquest of nature since growing equation between women and nature are referred in various disciplines and naturalisation of women's biological existence is related to define her social, political and intellectual position[52].

The Marxist theory on ideology serves as a fitting example to this difficulty of its applicability in feminist analysis. This passage from *German Ideology*,

> "[t]he ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling *material* force of the society, is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force. The class, which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those

[52] Andrea Nye has located a similar kind of critique as she felt that while democratic egalitarian theory attempts to theorise a world where men can compete less destructively, Marxism envisages a violent overthrow of capitalist men by working-class men and establishment of communal ownership of property, which ignores activities like nurturing, services, education and even medical care. She emphasizes that the conflict Marx talks about involves men, and only men. See Andrea Nye, *Feminist Theory and the Philosophies of Man*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1988).

> who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships."

can be a point of reference.There are two extremely contentious dimensions of this apparently straightforward point. To say that those who lack the means of ideological production are generally speaking thereby 'subject' to the ruling class is to invoke a whole series of difficult issues around popular culture and popular consciousness. These have been raised in their most striking form by feminist work on cultural phenomena such as soap opera, royalty or romantic fiction, where the traditional notion of 'ideological' subjection endorsed by Marx in the passage does scant justice to the passionate enthusiasm of many women for the products for which they are allegedly the victims[53]. It is now widely recognized that at the very least we need a more sophisticated analysis of the ways in which such processes of 'subjection' work, including a consideration of participation in the construction of ideology that goes beyond the notion of collusion in what is ultimately not in one's interests. Although this problem has been most strongly raised by the feminists, it strikes at a vulnerable point of Marxist theory of ideology in general.

Dale Spender's thesis is that men control language, control the media, and control the gate keeping institutions of publishing and criticism: they control what Marx would control means of mental production, but the interests they represent are those of men rather than capital. Spender's argument of extension of Marx's point on ideological production, based on gender rather than class reveals the Achilles' heel of Marx's argument here[54]. Is it axiomatic that the ideology of the ruling class rules or does this occur by the virtue of class control over the means of mental production? This is also being questioned with regard to studies on racism and Marx's theory on ideology clearly shows a need for fine-tuning. So the requirement is to go deeper and make sense of the subtle point Marx is making about the class-generated character of ideology. He points at

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[53] Rosalind Coward in "Sexual Liberation and the Family" found the new modes of controlling women's body, sexuality and consciousness. The capitalist imagery of women emphasized on consumerism, commodification and thus created a new ideological controlling system, through representations in films, fashions, popular literature and television.

[54] See, Dale Spender, *Man Made Language* (London: Routledge, 1980), *Women of Ideas—and What Men Have Done to Them* (London: Pandora, 1982) and *For the Record* (London: Women's Press, 1985).

the inevitable but implicit relationship between relations of production at the material level and at the mental level. The examples he gave are that of the ideas of loyalty and honour of the land-based aristocracy and the notions of freedom and equality endorsed by the bourgeois society. For him production of ideas is not neatly suited to the modes of material production but rather is analytical forms of grasping the nature of modes of material production[55].

But there are problems regarding such formulation also. The notions of Patriotism or nationalism can be generated and fuelled in societies with various class-characters. Such ideas are seen in terms of feminism turning a new leaf with resistance from postcolonial third-world countries against white women's conceptions of freedom and equality as the sole definition of these concepts[56].

Barrett's analysis leads us to the first theme of interchange---- production and reproduction. "Orthodox Marxism had made invisible the mode of reproduction by treating family as if it were natural and biological and therefore inevitable."[57] However, though some feminists would like to make a simple equation between naturalization of family and orthodox (or probably economically deterministic version of Marxism) Marxism, Marx and more specifically Engels tried to historically situate family as a set of social relations to locate women's oppression. In today's context

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[55] For a detailed analysis see Michele Barrett, *The Politics of Truth: From Marx to Foucault* (California: Stanford University Press, 1991)

[56] The term 'third world women' coined by liberal/radical feminist position creates an 'other', and assigns the third world women to the category of victimhood. It has identified 'patriarchy' as a uniform institution perpetuating women's subordinated condition and denies any difference in women's position in different socio-cultural situations. Chandra Talpade Mohanty (Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses", Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, Lourdes Torres (eds). *The Third- world Women and the Politics of Feminism,* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991 pp-51-80) argues that western feminists (she used it as a figurative term to refer to the particular patronizing position adopted by some feminists residing in the industrialized western countries) have generalized the category of third world women and by focussing on their experiences of exploitation, coercion, meek subservience perpetuated their victimhood. In analyzing the status and role of third-world women, terms of underdevelopment, oppressive traditions, high illiteracy, rural and urban poverty, religious fanaticism and 'overpopulation' are located as the principal categories. While such descriptive information is useful and necessary, collapsing the everyday, fluid, fundamentally historical and dynamic nature of the lives of third-world women into a few frozen presumably objective indicators feed the oppositional hierarchy of western (read progressive/modern)/non-western (read backward/traditional). She has indicated that third-world feminism (if such a blanket term can be used for methodological purposes) emerged in a "common context of struggle" both historical and contemporary against racism, sexism, colonialism, imperialism and monopoly capital. She has further suggested an "imagined community" for such struggles since it symbolizes alliances and collaborations across divisive boundaries, asserting the female agency in postcolonial situations.

[57] Andrea Nye, *Feminist Theory and the Philosophies of Man,* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), pp.-54-64

Engels' dependence on Morgan's anthropology will seem quaint and definitely outdated but his insights must not be overshadowed by its limitation of anthropological data. The dissolution of women's supremacy passionately referred by Engels as "[t]he overthrow of mother right was the *world-historic defeat of the female sex*" not only reverberates with class struggle, the cornerstone of Marxism but also relates 'relations of sexuality' with 'relations of production'[58]. This relation is often termed by some feminists, determined to apply Marx's vocabulary in its exactness to analyse women's oppression, as 'mode of reproduction'[59].

But the very term 'mode of reproduction' attempts at a straightforward linking of economic systems and sexual systems without considering the richness of either system. Sex is sex, but every society has culturally determined modes of behaviour, which denotes a particular activity as sex and a particular form of identity as sexuality. In the same manner, economic behaviour depends on spatio-temporal formations to be recognized so. Such specificity did not escape Marx and he did not define reproduction as a simple economic marker, indicating the level of wages corresponding to a labourer's ability to maintain himself and also the children who will replace him. For Marx, in capitalism, just the same as every commodity gains a value with reference to its ability in exchange, the class of free labourers put a value to labour-power to a historical moral element. Gayle Rubin points out "[i]t is precisely this 'historical moral element' which determines that a 'wife' is among the necessities of a worker, that a woman rather than a man does housework, and that capitalism is heir to a long tradition in which women do not inherit, in which women do not lead and in which women do not talk to God."[60] This set of relations are naturalized as family, are revered as moral values and this very process of naturalisation is questioned by Marxism.

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[58] Frederic Engels, *The Origin of Family, Private Property and State*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1983) p.-57.

[59] Gayle Rubin writes that the term 'mode of reproduction' was proposed both as a challenge to more familiar 'mode of production', which has resonance of economic determinism and as an alternative comprehensive term to conjoin both sexual and economic relations. See Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex", first published in Rayna Rapp Reiter (ed.) *Toward an Anthology of Women*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976), p-80

[60] See Rubin, p-79. Rubin has pioneered the study of women's oppression on the basis of historical specific conditions through a critical review of Marxist, Lacanian and Levi-Straussian positions. She developed the methodology of "sex/gender system", where biology and society must be taken together in an anthropological-historical analysis to elaborate on the co-dependence of sexuality, economics and politics in determining the secondary position assigned to women. This essay remains critically important even today, not only for its insights but also for its effort to combine different theoretical standpoints within Feminist studies.

Despite such insights an important aspect of the inadequacy of economically deterministic Marxism create problems in certain ambiguities in the key terms like 'production' and 'economy' to start with and also in theorizing domestic labour. For Linda Nicholson[61] it stems from an ambiguity in Marx's use of the term "production." This ambiguity is illustrated in the following passage

> The production of life, both of one's own in labour and of fresh life in procreation now appears as a double relationship: on the one hand as a natural, and on the other as a social relationship. By social we understand the cooperation of several individuals, no matter under what conditions, in what manner and to what end. It follows from this that a certain mode of production, or *industrial stage*, is always combined with a certain mode of co-operation, or social stage, and this mode of co-operation is itself a 'productive force.' Further, that the multitude of productive forces accessible to men determines the nature of society, hence, that the 'history of humanity' must always be studied and treated in relation to the *history of industry and exchange*.

In the first sentence "production" refers to all activities necessary for species survival; by the middle of the passage its meaning has become restricted to those activities which are geared to the creation of material objects (industrial). While from the meaning of "production" in the first sentence, Marx could include family forms under the "modes of cooperation" he describes, by the middle of the paragraph its meaning has become such to now include only those "modes of cooperation" found within the "history of industry and exchange." In effect, Marx has eliminated from his theoretical focus all activities basic to human survivals, which fall outside a capitalist "economy." Those activities he has eliminated include those identified by feminists as "reproductive" (childcare, nursing) and also those concerned with social organisation, i.e., those regulating kinship relations or in modern societies those we would classify as "political." Marshall Sahlins and R.H Tawney articulated this exclusion of kinship and family systems from the definition of economy and Morris Godelier is also one of the Marxist anthropologists who came close

[61] See for details, Linda Nicholson, *Gender & History* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1986).

to expressing and elaborating this problem. This becomes clearer from this passage in the *Preface to the Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*:

> In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life.

In the above, Marx equates the "economic structure of society" with its "relations of production." Since a reasonable interpretation of "mode of production of material life" would be all activities conducive to the creation and recreation of the society's physical existence, the "relations of production" should reasonably include all social interaction having this object as its end. Thus the family should count as a component of the "economy." Even if we interpret the phrase "mode of production of material life" to refer only to activities concerned with the gathering, hunting, or growing of food and the making of objects, the family, in many societies, would still be included as a component of the economy. Neither of these two meanings of "economy," however, is the same as its meaning in post-industrial capitalism, where the "economy" comes to refer principally to the activities of those engaged in the creation and exchange of commodities. Thus Marx's concept of economy in the above is ambiguous as a consequence of the ambiguity in his concept of production. Such ambiguities pose further challenge for theorizing domestic labour. The juxtaposition of cross-cultural historical analysis with universal application of the theory blurs the specificities/generalizations existing in labour types and conditions. As he defines economy with production and later production with commodity, his previous definition of labour being the motor of change; in the widest possibility of the term as change in production relations refer to changes in conditions of human existence; contradicts itself when labour in social reproduction is discounted as it is not directly related to commodity production.

Barrett writes that Marx maintained throughout Capital that the wage labour of women is a capitalistic phenomenon, which is little other than a threat to the male worker. He describes with an air of shock and surprise in inclusion of women in wage labour and treats the situation in terms of moral degradation of the women-worker and its negative impact on the resistance of the female worker. The tone of his account suggests that the mass-employment of women was an innovative capitalistic strategy and completely forgets the volumes of evidence that women have been wage-labourer since the earliest moment of wage-labour. Barrett feels that in the first place Marx was in error in his assumption that women's employment 'cheapened' the value of labour power since his comparison was with the fictitious situation of woman as 'exclusive' a housewife; in the second place he failed to see that the contribution made by domestic labour cannot be traded off against wage-labour but exists where the housewife is also a wage-labourer; in the third place such a strategy has tended merely to exacerbate the badly paid and marginal position of women workers thereby worsening the threat they objectively pose to male workers. Andrea Nye, from a slightly different point of view has located principal problem in theorizing domestic labour in Marxist theory in defining and evaluating the 'value' of domestic labour. The 'exchange value', not the 'use value' is the particular result of a capitalist mode of production in which concrete labour power produces exchangeable goods for the profit of the capitalist employer. So, the housewife indirectly contributes to the surplus value, appropriated by the capitalists, in terms of providing the male worker cooked food, laundered clothes and an emotional support often in 'home' where the wife works. Moreover Marx did not consider women employed in welfare, teaching, nursing, sales or clerical work since these are 'unproductive labour', which have subsidiary and parasitic existence at the productive base of capitalist society.

The problem of just adding 'reproduction' as a category within Marxist analysis to include and explain women's oppression is not only the insufficiency of its applicability analysed above but also comprise of dislocating the significance of class-differentials and historiography. Nicholson has noted that the Marxist Feminist aspiration to make the Marxist methodology of historical materialism universally applicable through the inclusion of reproduction misses the variability of the category not only in terms of cross-cultural scenario but also in terms of 'pre-capitalist' and 'capitalist' forms of

societies. She analysed Marx's position vis a vis the category of gender in the context of theory of human existence and consciousness by locating Marx, with a stronger sense of history than most economic theorists of his period and in consequence was aware of the origins of contemporary economic relations in older political and familial relations and the continuous interaction of state, family, and economy even in the context of their historical separation. However, while Marx, more than most economic theorists of his period, was aware of the interconnection of family, state, and economy, his theory did not consistently abide by this awareness. She feels that the assumption common to much economic theory, that there is cross-culturally an economic component of human existence which can be studied independently from other aspects of human life, exists as a significant strand within his writings, and most prominently in what might be called his philosophical anthropology or cross-cultural theory on the nature of human life and social organization. Indeed, Marx, by building a philosophical anthropology on the basis of this assumption developed and made more explicit that very perspective in much other economic theory, which in other contexts he criticized. Gayle Rubin's critique of the term 'patriarchy' supports Nicholson's this argument[62]. Rubin writes that the use of patriarchy obscures the historical and cultural specificities of male-domination, which is vital for the function of the gender-insensitive women's oppression. For her patriarchy refers to a system of nomadic society, where fatherhood as an institution wielded absolute power over the other members of the family especially wives, sisters and daughters. However the term has attained a quality of universal application over the years of usage and since the benevolent image of the patriarch is much more appealing in the present socio-political situation where forced imposition immediately attracts opposition while same kind of domination exercised without the overt show of power goes unchallenged, it is also useful to formulate a critique of the subtle violence embedded in patriarchal condescending attitude, practiced in various forms over the world.

This brings us to the next theme of interaction between Marxism and feminism, notably the collaboration of capitalist exploitation with male-centric ideology working in different spatio-cultural specificities to dominate and hegemonize not only the working-class but also those who are thrust into the category of 'second sex'. Heidi

[62] See Rubin.

Hartman's essay "The Unhappy marriage of Marxism and Feminism" deals at length with the nature of such a collaboration[63]. She begins her critique against Marxism's underlying patriarchal theme by stating that the appropriation of women's labour by the men lies at the bottom of gender-based oppression. For her, it is not only the ruling class, which appropriates the value generated out of women's labour, but also the men, who belong to the same class. In ancient and feudal societies the appropriation was direct as in the mode of production the value of the women's labour bore less significance in terms of exchange and also, as Nicholson has rightly pointed out that the close connection between economy and family/kinship systems did not create clear divisions between women's labour outside domesticity. It is with the emergence of capitalism, that the fetish character of commodity and the separation of family from economy women's labour became vital not only at home but also at factory level (outside domestic labour including women's works as governess, nurses, secretaries). The availability of 'cheap labour' in the forms of women workers and child workers were one of the main features of early industrialization and subsequent consolidation of capitalism. The early Marxists and indeed Marx himself felt that such exploitation of women's labour would help to abolish patriarchal system at the end. It was felt, since the capitalists would want to exploit 'cheap' labour (women's labour was cheap as their entry into workplace increased competition in the labour market in terms of exchange value of labour and also as the popular notion was that women have less physical strength, less mastery and being essentially weak they would demand less wage) and the working-class women would swell the ranks of working-class in totality the patriarchal system of confining women at home along with the notion of women being inferior to men would finally wither away. This equalization would in turn create a stronger working-class which would overthrow the entire system of capitalism altogether.

However, Hartman writes that the discrepancy between the hypothesis of 'pure' capitalism and 'actual' capitalism was that capitalism showed great flexibility while dealing with the woman question and successfully alienated women workers from male workers thus weakening the strength of working-class per se. Rather

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[63] See Lydia Sargent (ed.) *The Unhappy marriage of Marxism and Feminism* (London and Sydney: Pluto Press, 1981). In this book the lead essay is by Hartman while several other essays discuss Hartman's essay from various point of views arguing the validity of her declaration of the 'unhappy' relation between the two theoretical positions.

than the tangible inequalities of labour and working-class the gender inequalities are far subtler and thus could not be fought on the same grounds of challenging capitalistic exploitation. Instead of more women coming and joining working-class in the actual factory shop floors the demand for 'family wages' became dominant among the labour reform agenda. Women's role outside family and as equal wage-earners affected the ego of working-class men and they fought for enough increase in their wage so that it would be sufficient to take care of their families rather women coming out to earn that extra money. In addition to such demands the constant valorization of family values through media actually ensured women's subordinated position not only at home but also at the workplace. It was never possible on the part of the male-workers to extract enough money as family wage and women workers at meager wages filled up the lower positions in the bureaucratic hierarchy. So in the end women started working outside family, earned wages but never enough to ascertain their economic independence and men on the other hand felt secured under the women's inferior role in the workplace and the continuity of secondary status within family.

Valorisation of family values played an immense role in creating and perpetuating this fragmentation. In spite of women's participation in the workplace women's role as nurturers, care-givers and family as the ultimate emotional refuge for men, ravaged by the exacting career have been relentlessly disseminated by popular cultural forms of films, television, literature etc. Most of the Hollywood movies giving rise to film industry at different corners of the world as 'dream factories', television series with its appeal to everyday lives than the larger than life character of big screen, innumerable magazines creating and catering to the ever-growing readership keen on gathering expertise on every aspect of life and the very process of institutionalising any rebel voice as 'different' and thus 'interesting' by subsuming the rebellion within the fold of domination designed the hegemony of capitalist bourgeois society. I have mentioned earlier that the strategy of cultural analysis is required to take account of this mode of ideological production but surely with a caveat that production and consumption of popular culture is never an easy one-way traffic, affecting the hapless consumer only. Cultural studies is opening a new method of interpreting popular culture by reading against the grain and trying to explain why they remain popular even by disseminating

the values necessary to continue the people's subordinate position to a smaller ruling section[64].

The third theme of dialogue between Marxism and Feminism addresses the issue of emancipation from tyranny of capital and the mode of struggle against capitalist domination. I have already mentioned that though Marxist approach to the 'woman's question' brought new insights, in Marx's own work women's relations to men and women's capacity to shape their own lives and the society in which they live are extrinsic. It is undeniable that women could and still can claim inclusion within the general concept of 'humanity' but the fundamental problem lies in the fact that 'humanity' as a concept rarely deviates from man as the model of either individual or collectivity. Later, also as I have already pointed out that the Promethean struggle of the workers against capital consumes Marx, women lose significance beyond the abstract category of the proletariat. Although Marx remains committed to the legal emancipation of women and right to work, his intellectual passion does not investigate the inequality invested within the man-woman relationship, which emerge as the foundation of oppression of women. So when his theory started conceptualising the final emancipation of 'humanity' it seemed that women's interests were assumed to be safely included with those of men.

Potentially, Marx's theoretical approach could have been reworked to consider women as both active agents working within historically specific locations.

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[64] Cultural Studies emerged as an academic discipline in 1960s in Britain as discontents with the existing models of social sciences urged the social scientists to open up a new discursive field of multidisciplinarity using qualitative research in order to avoid the pitfalls of sociological objectivity and functionalism. It aimed principally to recuperate the voice of the marginalized subject in its effort to repudiate "statism and the new right". Since Cultural Studies is heavily influenced by Marxism it based its understanding of history on historical materialism, put in a nutshell by Raymond Williams as "history and culture are not separate entities"[64]. The influence is even more pronounced in its treatment of culture as a terrain on which continuous struggles over meanings take place and where the subordinate groups relentlessly attempt to resist the imposed dominant meanings. But we must keep in mind, while tracing the methodological historicity of Cultural studies, that despite such influences, this discipline shares a polemical relationship with Marxism. This was the discipline which first began to question the 'meta narrative' status of Marxism, the inherent essentialism and eurocentrism, the doctrinal character regarding class positions of Marxism to relocate the understanding of power, domination and hegemony. Cultural Studies focussed on race and gender as categories of discrimination to create a wider horizon for the study of meanings and symbols. The attempt has been not only to incorporate these concepts within the fold of Marxist understanding of culture but also to formulate a different understanding by pointing to these categories within political economy. Thus cultural studies emerged as something more than a revised version of Marxism to construct a new academic take-off point for the study of culture. For greater detail see Simon During (ed.) *The Cultural Studies Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993) and John Storey (ed.) *What is Cultural Studies? A Reader* (London: Arnold, 1996).

Instead, the historical materialist interpretation of women's oppression and emancipation, as it took shape in Engels' work, provided a restricted way of looking at women's predicament that left its own set of problems. The mode of solution was especially acute for women, involved in Marxist politics, since they were struggling for birth control and abortion rights, the two main demands for all women to surpass their 'natural' roles of motherhood.

Engels' economic and social perspective was a useful complement to the abstract assertions of an individual's right of self-ownership, which as the basis of the feminist case for voluntary motherhood and claimed rights of birth control. Unfortunately, the two aspects—the individual's control over fertility and the implications of the social organization of child bearing and rearing were not interrogated. In Engels' writing both the individual woman's needs and the collective action of women became submerged in his analysis of the evolution of social and economic structures of reproduction and production. Regarding unwanted motherhood and termination of pregnancy according to the mother's will, Marxists were frequently to insist that socialism would make these unnecessary by creating sufficient wealth for all children to be wanted. Moreover, the means to fight for the rights of abortion and birth control are ambivalent in Marxist theory of class struggle. The non-recognition of housewives and women workers engaged in professions like teaching, sales, clerical work by Marx left a vast section of the oppressed out of the unification of all exploited persons of the human society. How would women who live at home (mostly not by their own choice) and who are not organized (whom even a theorist like Marx excluded from class struggle) commence the fight?

Engels' simplistic solution for women's oppression, that is women's right to join workforce, does not answer these questions and thus the dialogue between the basic demands for women's emancipation and Marxist class-struggle failed to reach a conclusive partnership in strategising the emancipation for 'humanity'[65]. More

[65] The working class women considered themselves a part of the oppressed poor rather than oppressed women as the bourgeois women's movement tried to emphasize. So the working class movement had a lot of promise for them, a way to fight poverty as well as sexism. But the initial gains of the working class women in the workers' movement were minimal. In Germany Marxist Social Democratic Party and Paris Commune women were not prominent. In France, in 1900, 34. 5% of workforce was female but only 6. 3% of the French Syndicatists were women. In 1877 the Trade Union Congress in Britain passed a resolution that women's place was in the home and man's job was to provide. At the International Anarchist Conference in Paris in 1900, Emma Goldman was prevented from reading her papers on sexuality on the pretext of a bad press. Many such incidents mark the early Marxist movement in Europe as a gender insensitive movement but in the context of that period it opened several possibilities to question the insensitivity also. For details see, Nye p-36-7

generally, Engels' approach to theory in *The Origin of Family, Private Property and State* detached the woman question from personal experience. He was inattentive to the details of everyday life that had illuminated his own earlier work on the condition of the working class. He also implicitly assumed a sexual division of labour. Biological differences between men and women were extended to imply the social differences in male and female activity in reproduction were also natural. He ignored that questioning the naturalised set of production relations through historical materialist approach includes biological and sexual reproductive activities and thus professing women's emancipation through participation in workforce cannot gloss over his own social and economic analysis of reproduction.

However, Marxist Feminists like Joan Kelly have refined Engels' position and chiselled the theoretical explanation of women's liberation by going deeper into relations between sexes[66]. Kelly pointed out that the relations of sexes is one of the most vital indicator of women's history as well as history of people since the use of sex as a category brings in a new conception of historical change, change in social order in a more fundamental way than envisaged by Engels and Marx, though their initial theorisation has been the point of departure. She has found that rather than adding women as a "lost city, submerged but intact, unaffected by history, waiting to be recovered", to routinized history writing would have a sensational value without critically unsettling the categories of history[67]. For her the social relations of sexes constitute a core of conceptual development as it charts out the index of both pronounced and subtle claims of women for equality against domination and victimization. The importance of Kelly's position becomes more recognizable when she attempts to include the category of class in the perspective of sex and vice versa conceptualise social change. "A theory of social change that incorporates the relations of sexes has to consider how general changes in production affect and shape production in family and, thereby, the respective roles of men and women"[68]. This necessitates a new relationship between class and sex to be worked out for a broader theory of emancipation. To achieve the relationship Kelly relies on the

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[66] See Joan Kelly-Gadol, "The Social Relations of Sexes: Methodological Implications of Women's History", in *Feminism and Methodology* (ed.) Sandra Harding, (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Milton Keynes: Indiana University Press, Open University Press, 1987), pp.-15-28

[67] Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha (ed.) *Women Writing in India: 600 BC to the Present,* New Delhi: OUP, 1991), p.-30

[68] Joan Kelly-Gadol, "The Social Relations of Sexes: Methodological Implications of Women's History", in *Feminism and Methodology* (ed.) Sandra Harding, (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Milton Keynes: Indiana University Press, Open University Press, 1987), p.-24.

fundamental changes in the mode of production. The significant departure in her position is taking account of the complexities involved in forging that relation rather just adding two categories. She has analysed women's history with distinct clarity following Engels, but the most exciting and promising part is the last paragraph, where her analysis actually transcends class analysis in terms of mode of production as the single denominator for womanhood in the trajectory of space and time. Here the two separate domains of economy and culture merge since women are not only seen as property but also as agents. The politics of movement meets the politics of culture and thus Kelly's final call for the reconstruction of the families opens a new point of departure, though a less travelled one.

## 2

In this section I shall be discussing three women activists, Eleanor Marx (1855-1898), Clara Zetkin (1857-1933) and Alexandra Kollontai (1873-1952), of late 19th century and early 20th century Europe, who tried to face the questions arising out of the 'woman question', within Marxism and Marxism's interactions with what they called 'bourgeois' Feminism in their own terms.

Eleanor Marx has been one of the earliest women in Marxist movement, who etched out her own place as a labour leader in late 19th century Britain. She is distinct from Zetkin and Kollontai as her allegiance to the workers' movement obviously lay in her heritage of being the favourite daughter of Karl Marx and her personal life getting much more prominence than her involvement with Marxism at a public level. Though in matters of the woman question she held strong views and acted according to the idea of 'free love' to assert women's choice, her representation in Socialist literature as a tragic victim (she committed suicide after she came to know that her companion for fourteen years had married another younger woman) often overlook her contribution to labour movement beyond extending a helping hand. Eleanor Marx is rarely discussed as a figure who led but always sympathised for wasting her lifelong devotion to a misfit, Edward Aveling.

Both Zetkin and Kollontai worked as organizers and theorists within the framework of Communist Party, which was then fast becoming an emergent force in

European political ideology and real politik. Zetkin became one of the most important leaders of German Communist Party, developing close links with post-1917 Revolution Russian Communist Leadership and Kollontai was a part of the Russian Communist Party's Central Committee from the days of the 1905 failed revolution. Their similarity also lies in their constant involvement with the woman question, as one of the most important dimensions of Marxist Theory and practice. As women they tried to incorporate the revolutionary ideals by critically assessing the problems faced by women. Valiantly they faced the criticisms, often bordering on their personal lives to make their voices heard in the party hierarchy but their relatively less popularity and even getting washed from public memory after death show their failure to make their points relevant. This silence reveals that despite seeking 'people's emancipation', Marxism was gender-blind to some extent in its interpretation of liberation.

## Eleanor Marx

The sixth child of Karl and Jenny Marx, Eleanor was a darling of the family and grew up under the fond tutelage of Dr. Marx, Uncle Engels and numerous other socialist stalwarts of that period. She was the pet of her father and accompanied him in the serious political meetings as well as vacations in the country. "The baby is a remarkably witty fellow, and insists that she has got two brains", wrote Marx and her political consciousness became so accomplished by the time she became eight years old that she felt that Abraham Lincoln badly needed her advice for the American civil war and wrote long letters to him, which her indulgent father dutifully agreed to mail[69]. She was quite influenced by Engels, who remained her guardian and close confidante after her father died and following Engels' Irish companion Lizzie Burns she developed a lifelong interest in Irish Nationalist struggle.

Her association with the labour movement developed with her regular attendance to her father's lectures, checking her father's proofs and corresponding with her father's friends like Liebknecht. Marxism was her birthright and parallel to her

[69] See Chushichi Tsuzuki, *The Life of Eleanor Marx: A Socialist Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), pp-10 and 20. All the personal details of Eleanor Marx's life are taken from this book.

theoretical and political education she was learning from her mother the value of a companionate marriage, the loyalty and love invested in a union of two minds, which makes the woman's position more than a housewife and an occasional sexual partner to her husband. She saw her mother, who was content in remaining a helpmate to her father but she could also feel the tension Jenny Marx struggled with between the identities of a private woman and a political wife. From Eleanor's personal life it seems that she also continued this search for a perfect balance between becoming a loving, loyal helpmate yet contributing to her companion's intellectual labour. She found in Edward Aveling, the right companion and as Aveling was a married man (though he was estranged from his wife for long, his wife refused to give him divorce), she decided to live with him. Eleanor's friends, contemporary socialists—all found Aveling particularly short of the virtues of fidelity, frugality (as the situation of a poor socialist would demand) and extreme callousness in treating a woman like Eleanor. But Eleanor was determined to be happy as she felt that they had similar interests and Aveling's training in Darwinian theories would enable them to interpret Marx's ideas from evolutionary angles for the betterment of workers' movement. Aveling must have found great inspiration in Eleanor but surely the level of his devotion did not match hers and his general easy ways with women won him numerous female friends. Being a daughter of Karl Marx, fidelity for whom was definitely not a virtue, Eleanor coped up with Aveling's short liaisons but after fourteen years of living together, when Aveling married a much younger woman (after his first wife died) and lamely claimed that he did it for her property, Eleanor committed suicide. Her death made her a martyr of free love and overshadowed her enthusiastic participation in the Gas Workers' Union, her days spent in Jewish ghettos to educate them and her tireless translation of various socialist documents mailed to her across the continent. Her Unionism, her Socialism and her Internationalism founded the bedrock of her activist self, where the woman question acquired a very distinct position.

Eleanor wrote a review of August Bebel's book "Woman –Past, Present and Future" with Aveling, which was published in *Westminister Review* in 1886, titled 'The Woman Question' and this review contains her ideas of the gender dimension of

Marxist theory[70]. Rooted in economic analysis this review seeks to untangle the questions of women's secondary position in society. The authors have appreciated the bourgeois women's movement for educational opportunities, women's suffrage, repeal of Contagious Disease Act and legal recognition of women as equal to men in fields but for them the principal activists of this movement come from propertied classes and as a result their ideas are based on either questions of property or sentiment, which lack an intensive class analysis. Thus the bourgeois women activists do not envisage a total revolutionary social change to which women's liberation would be a corollary. Aveling and Eleanor have severely criticised the contemporary form of marriage, which could be translated only as a transaction where women have neither autonomy nor dignity. On the questions of sex education they expressed an extremely open view that sex as a part of life must be discussed freely without the moral baggage attached to it. Eleanor's personal life was a testimony to what she believed as a union of two minds and she struggled all her life to make her commitment to the pursuit of autonomy as a woman a reality. She took a different view to the notion of charity, which her father criticised from a theoretical distance as she painstakingly taught illiterate workers to read and write, helped them with the paper work of the workers' union and showed compassion to their misery. Eleanor was introduced to the evils of capitalism in a very intimate manner, looking at the hardships of factory labour from close quarters so instead of theorising about the conditions of poverty and coming of the revolution she worked among them, actively participating in public speaking to their times of crisis. Once she lamented that she had inherited only her father's nose and not his genius but independently, not as the daughter of Dr. Marx, she left a mark in British Socialist movement. She could not escape the torments of mixing her personal life with her political commitment but that makes her more humane, not a tragic saintly figure, which the Communist movement later created out of her.

[70] For the entire text of the article see, Edward Aveling and Eleanor Marx Aveling, "The Woman Question", transcribed by Sally Ryan for www.marxists.org.

## Clara Zetkin

Clara Zetkin was undoubtedly the leading woman of European socialism during the early decades of 20th century. Her involvement with the woman question was neither superficial like many members of the German socialist party, nor submerged within the overall theme of class-struggle, a view endorsed and publicised by Soviet Communists. Zetkin was a figure of opposition rather than orthodoxy within communist movement and fought relentlessly against the overcoming of any independent discussion on women's oppression and silencing of the issue. Beginning her political career with German Social Democrats she increasingly found herself in conflict with the leadership both on women's issues and on the whole question of whether socialism could be achieved thorough piecemeal parliamentary reformist method. In 1919 she left the Democrats and was elected in the same year as a member of the newly formed Communist party in Germany.

As a communist she wholeheartedly agreed with Engels' and Bebel's central thesis and was hostile to the 'bourgeois feminists', to the extent of refusing to cooperate with them in their campaign for the vote. Her battle with Lily Braun (1865-1916), a Social Democrat, over the correct socialist solution of the woman question reflected her theoretical positions. Zetkin condemned Braun's ideas of establishment of co-operatives for working and non-working women, particularly mothers as a luxury affordable by the affluent, rejected rights for birth control as a dangerous distraction from the real exploitation of capitalism to overbreeding and considered unification of women across class-lines a divisive strategy. Though at the organizational level she formed separate women's groups to discuss the problems particularly faced by women, even though they were proletariats, her theoretical framework did not allow her to interrogate and explain the problem in deep and detailed manner. She was well aware that the thorny issue of the woman question often vitiated the uniform utopia of socialism, but her commitment towards the people's liberation restricted her in making it too difficult for the communist leadership. Her interview with

Lenin in 1920, (which she recalled in 1924) reveals her dilemma, often self-unnoticed but still evident in her conversation with Lenin[71].

However, through this interview, more than Zetkin's ambivalent position Lenin's superficial sensitivity towards the woman's question and sometimes a sexist outlook surprises the readers. One section, where Lenin accused Zetkin of conducting reading sessions among socialist women on the issues of sex and marriage, which only would reproduce decayed bourgeois values rather than discussing useful socialist concerns, is particularly worth noting. When Zetkin pointed out that understanding socialism and the critique of capitalism would remain incomplete without a thorough study of marriage systems developing on property-ownership systems, further developing on production relations and also indicated that in those critical years after the devastating experience of the First World War, values regarding sexuality were existing in a moral fluidity and thus needed to be discussed openly for the youth, Lenin reluctantly conceded her point. But commented that he was sure that in a study circle of women nobody would discuss the themes of sex and marriage with maturity and political consciousness, rather would yield to frivolity.

Such assumptions on part of a leader like Lenin who praised Soviet Socialist women by declaring that without them Russian Revolution would not have been successful or "rarely so", are not few and far between in the interview. Zetkin agreed with him at each point on sexuality, marriage, organization of working women and re-socialization of men, including communist men regarding gender sensitivity after brief arguments. At each of these points Zetkin made at first the ideas she herself developed on the woman question but did not pursue them when Lenin expressed displeasure in her independent interpretation and repeatedly reminded her that all these issues have been tackled and resolved long back by the works of Bebel and Engels. Lenin did not consider her relevant point about the necessity of discussion on sexuality, morality and values in those crucial years and frequently referred to his own ascetic leanings regarding such light-hearted issues. He stressed on the 'motherly role' of women in guiding the workers' movement, especially the youth. Zetkin marvelled at his wisdom and insights when she

[71] For the full text of this interview see www.marxists.org. This interview was published by International publishers in *The Emancipation of Women: From the Writings of V.I. Lenin.*

recollected the interview but in some points, where she did answer back to Lenin's criticisms, before succumbing to her own veneration about his superior position, flickers of radicalism against orthodoxy can be traced.

It is unfortunate that Zetkin's radicalism never culminated into a full-bodied argument and deprived the early 20th century Marxism of a pertinent critique of the Engelsian explanation of the woman question. This led her to appeal more and more to the socialist women as supporters of the movement, not as active agents. Despite her attempts to develop a new perspective of women's movement through the disentanglement of some of the class-interests involved, she refrained from challenging the patriarchal practices and beliefs at the theoretical level. Despite her own absolute commitment to sex equality, it seems her methods could not lead her to her goal.

## Alexandra Kollontai

Alexandra Kollontai, (1873-1952), was one of the women leaders of Soviet Russia from the early days of communist movement in Europe[72]. Her political career involved relentless struggle both in personal and political fronts and her theoretical standpoint enabled her to develop a critical view not only to the movement itself but to the post-revolution Russian communist leadership as well. Her role is most significant to explore the implications of the quest for equality, and to discover that the woman question was perhaps more complex than the orthodox theory suggested. At first she simply upheld Marxist orthodoxy as interpreted by Zetkin, and campaigned vigorously against bourgeois women's movement, which she felt was selfish and egotistic. She argued for a more class based solidarity of proletarian men and women but soon realized that male dominant party hierarchy often marginalized the women's requirements to be equal partners in creating a classless society. Kollontai was a radical in the sense that she refused to agree with the party standpoint that unequal gender relations and attitudes would automatically change with economic progress. She tried to put forward her own view that since the relationship between economy and socio-cultural superstructure was dialectical, bourgeois society must be challenged from both sides otherwise the woman

[72] Valerie Bryson, *Feminist Political Theory: An Introduction* (London: Macmillan, 1992)

question would remain unresolved. It was this principle that Kollontai tried to put in practice in her brief period as head of the women's department in 1920-21.

In 1917 Kollontai became the first woman in modern history to hold Cabinet Office as Commissar (Minister) of Social Welfare. Her first task was to complete the process of giving women full legal independence and equality within marriage, legalising abortion, ending illegitimacy as a legal category and establishing the principle of equal pay. She also laid down the legal foundations for the state provision of maternity and childcare and succeeded in committing the party to the principle of communal housework, childcare and eating facilities. As the head of the women's department she also sought to combine practical help with theoretical discussion and challenges to traditional patriarchal attitudes. As a member of the highest level of leadership she fought vigorously for women's issues to be kept to the forefront of the political agenda.

Kollontai is best remembered and also misunderstood for her views on sexuality and marriage as her vision of communist society included radical changes in man-woman relationship, far beyond the view of Engels, Bebel or Zetkin, for whom liberty and equality in the 'private sphere' meant a comparatively freely-chosen monogamy. Communism for Kollontai was not simply about redistribution of economic resources or public ownership of the means of production but some fundamental changes in conceptualising private relationships. At this point her views became politically challenged by Lenin, who feel that such theorization only reflected rotten bourgeois mentality. Kollontai was often sneered at for her personal life (two marriages both ending in divorce and two acknowledged affair), which was fairly 'normal' for any male in that society and for espousing the 'glass of water theory', which saw sex as a simple physical need that should be as readily satisfied as thirst. Lenin said that any 'normal' person, while quenching thirst would not fill his glass up from a muddy puddle or would not drink from a glass 'whose edges' have been greased y many lips. He clearly meant the detrimental of an easy attitude towards sexuality. But Kollontai neither practised nor advocated promiscuity. She held the view, though shocking for the society in which she lived, that sex for women is neither shameful nor sinful but a fulfilling activity which could not be equated with a beastly behaviour. She felt that post-revolution Russian society was fast becoming for women 'liberty, equality and maternity', which she

challenged theoretically. This open rebellion against the patriarchal party hierarchy paved her post and spent the rest of her political career roaming from one country to another as an ambassador.

Her personal narrative titled, "The Autobiography of a Sexually Emancipated Communist Woman" contains her political journey as a women in what is considered to be a man's world. The theoretical questions she raised about women's status, her involvement with grass-root level women workers and her continuous struggle in personal life to be accepted as a thinking leader rather than as a meek follower make her an important figure in Marxist tradition. But her untimely removal from power speaks volumes about the inherent male-domination within the Communist Party of Soviet Russia even after successfully conducting a people's revolution.

## 3

My third section will deal with the growth and development of women's participation in Left politics in India, taking account of the issues raised by the continuous dialogue between Marxism and Feminism. Women's involvement in Indian Left politics can be seen through the temporal trajectory into two phases---from 1940s till the split of Communist Party of India in 1964 and then again from late 1970s to the present period. These women were and are involved in conventional party politics with a women's organization, following the overall ideology but the missing link from 1964, to late 1970s is the story of those women who went beyond and participated in the radical and revolutionary politics of Naxalbari. The discussion of women within the formal party-based organization is an important point of departure to trace and emplot the ideas and practices of those who deviated. Beginning with *Mahila AtmaRaksha Samity* (MARS) in 1942 the women in the Communist movement in India started their journey to make the bridge between women's movement and people's movement. Before that All India Women's Conference (AIWC), which was affiliated to the Indian National Congress, was the only public forum for women to place and discuss their demands and needs at a

collective level[73]. But the difference between Congress politics in those pre-independence years and the growing Left politics necessitated the development of a separate space for women, who were a part of the Left movement. The MARS held its first meeting in 1942 with only 112 members but by 1944 its membership had grown to about 43,000[74]. Initially it was primarily involved in the rehabilitation of the poor rural and urban women after the Bengal famine and relief work through kitchens and first-aid centres, it also organised demonstrations against black marketeers and hoarders. Though it was claimed that the main force was the toiling masses of the country, actually it had a very broad patriotic platform for women, including women from Hindu Mahasabha. However the political leadership remained with the CPI.

The nature of the MARS underwent a qualitative change with the Tebhaga movement (1946-48), where omen played an extraordinary militant role[75]. Though MARS played a minor role in the Tebhaga movement, principally due to its urban middle-class composition and lack of identification with the peasant women was undeniable, it inspired the MARS leadership deeply as one of the leaders, Manikuntala Sen noted in her autobiography.

After independence in 1948 Indian Communist Party was banned. Mass struggles against the newly constituted Congress government grew among peasantry, railway, textile and mining workers, most of the top leadership was arrested and put to jails while the rest went underground. MARS, along with many other mass organisations, was banned and it worked underground between 1947 and 1951. During this period, it encountered massive onslaughts: the police killed four communist women at a demonstration in Calcutta in April 1949, numerous women were killed in the district

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[73] AIWC was formed in 1926, to give women an opportunity to express their views on female education and soon expanded to include social questions concerning women. By 1932 it as claimed to be the second most representative body of India and was concerned with all questions on the welfare of women and children.

[74] By 1944 the MARS had 390 units in 26 districts; in Calcutta it had 13 units, some which were in *bustees* (slums)occupied by the urban poor. When the second annual conference was held at Barissal in Esat Bengal, the MARS had 43000 members; 51 delegates elected by primary members attended the conference. *Ghare Baire* (The Home and the World), the organ of the MARS, became a popular journal.

[75] Tebhaga was a movement led by the sharecroppers who demanded two-thirds of the crop instead of one half of the crop. Women formed *Nari Bahinis* (women's militia) and fought against the landlords and police to forcibly harvest the paddy. They also played important role in organising communication by transmitting messages between activists, hiding cadres and raising an alarm when the police came. Tribal women also joined this movement in great numbers.

through this period, many women leaders imprisoned for long periods of time without trial. MARS as an organization could not recover from such an oppression blow and dwindled in the coming years. However communist women felt that in the place of MARS, a new forum must be formulated since they needed their own machinery to talk about the gender dimension of class struggle and finally in 1954 National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW) was created. "Vidya Munshi claims that the communist men initially opposed the formation of the NFIW for they feared it would divide and weaken the party but women overcame this resistance"[76]. The NFIW became affiliated with the Soviet based international organization, the Women's International Democratic Federation, which was opposed to bourgeois feminist goals and espoused the resolution of the woman question through class struggle.

In 1953 MARS was reconstituted in West Bengal as Pashchimbanga Mahila Samity (PBMS) and was affiliated to NFIW as an important state wing. The main activities constituted of constructive works like opening schools for girls, welfare of children, mothers' rights and reproduction health rights of women. In 1964, came the deciding split between CPI and CPI(M), along with which PBMS was also divided as the outgoing faction renamed itself as Pashchimbanga Ganatantrik Mahila Samity (PBGMS). While PBMS found some common issues with the new women's organizations claiming redress for oppression and violence against women, PBGMS remained a faithful ally to its parent body CPI(M) and pursued the older party line on the woman question[77].

The functioning of PBGMS and PBMS called for an all India women's organization, which would translate the Marxist position on woman question into the lived reality of Indian women. Since PBGMS and PBMS are functioning in the context of a state government under the control of left politics, a wider forum was needed to address the issues of dowry, other forms of violence against women and women's empowerment at a national level. All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) had its first conference in 1981 to formulate the required platform. With its headquarters

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[76] Abhilasha Kumari and Sabina Kidwai (ed.) *Crossing the Sacred Line: Women's Search for Political Power* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1998), p-133

[77] CPI(M)'s view towards the Woman Question followed the historical materialist interpretation of women's oppression in society over different time periods of different modes of production and emphasised that liberation for women would come only with the liberation of all oppressed classes.

in New Delhi, AIDWA now has branches and affiliates in 18 of the Indian States and union territories[78]. AIDWA mobilises women to struggle against the social evils and feudal legacies such as dowry etc., which act as obstacles to women's emancipation. It also campaigns for all working women and women's democratic rights as Indian citizens. The oppression of women's also understood to be an integral part of the exploitation of the Indian people in general. AIDWA's efforts are also geared to promoting solidarity and establishing links between women and the struggles of the workers, peasants, youth and all other sections of toiling masses for their common interests and to bring about a radical set change in Indian socio-economic set up. From this agenda, the Marxist orientation of the Association emerges clearly. However the criticism, often levelled against the association is that its position of the association is conspicuously close to vanguardism, where the arrogance of knowledge on the part of its middle-class educated leadership imposes directions and decisions over rural, poor and uneducated women.

This temporal history contains within it a strand of self-critique, best manifested in the personal narratives of some of the women leaders of left politics in India. I shall briefly discuss Manikuntala Sen's autobiography *"Sediner Katha"* (Of Those Days). Manikuntala Sen was a very popular and active communist leader from the early 1940s till 1964, when she completely withdrew herself from politics at the split of her party. Coming from a religious, nationalist and liberal family of Barisal, a province of Eastern Bengal (now in Bangladesh), Manikuntala was attracted to nationalist politics from her childhood days. Despite profound Gandhian influence in her family her interest in serving the oppressed, poor, toiling people of her country drew her towards Marxism. Spending the early years in a deeply religious family ingrained a sense of religiosity in her and she was most uncomfortable with the mandatory atheist position of the communist party till late in her political career. Practising Marxism was an extension of *Daridranarayan Seva* (serving the poor and treating as god) to her, though the critical insights of Marxist ideology never deterred her from questioning superstitions and orthodoxy. In this regard the most important question raised by her is still relevant in her autobiography. She asked if atheism was a pre-requisite for being a Marxist how

[78] See Patricia Loveridge, "Approaches to Change: The AIDWA and a Marxist Approach to the Woman Question in India", *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 1: 2, pp.-215-241, p.-216

could so many women born and bred in a tradition of religiosity but willing enough to work for the oppressed could be addressed and taken within the organization. She argued that critical viewpoint would emerge while working but that may not wipe out religiosity and pointed that religiosity does not necessarily mean religious orthodoxy. Her questions widen as she addressed more and more the themes of tradition and modernity, home and world, private life as a woman and public performances as enactments of a woman's desire. From simple humanist questions like how could young married women avoid beatings by husbands to critical questions like how far a party bent on creating an equal community of all people can satisfy the desires of a person looking for respect, personal ties and emotional moorings. Thus as Ranabir Samadder has rightly pointed out that her autobiography becomes a feminist discourse with an overwhelming sense of non-resolution of these categories closed and finite and a constant search for the dialectical interaction between them[79]. Manikuntala's fond recollections of her mother, her extreme anguish and sorrow at the news of the killing of her closest comrade Latika, her endless energy in discussing women's problems as mothers reveal a personality brimming with compassion, an individual working relentlessly to create a space where public and private coalesce. At the end of her account, it seems that, she was actually not looking for answers but asking, penetratingly, enriched by numerous experiences of a woman in Marxist politics for decades whether the answers provided by her party to the woman question was enough.

[79] See for details " The Nation and The Home" in Ranabir Samadder, *A Biography of he Indian Nation, 1947-1997* (New Delhi: Sage, 2001), pp.-232-264, p.-235

## Chapter—2

## "Memories of the forgotten love for the dead Gods"[80]:

## A Brief Outline of the Naxalbari Movement

The years leading towards the end of the 1960s developed into a colourful, intense and committed social change in almost all the countries of the world. The nature and approach to social change differed but the mood reflected a willing engagement with radicalism in every form. The youth, principally the student community led from the front. There was a distinct revival of Left politics, which took various forms in European countries, in America, in China and in India. The early years of 1960s prepared the shift towards radicalism, which reviewed, critically assessed the possibilities of total social change and around 1967-68 there was a burst of movements—Anti-Vietnam War protests in America, Student Rebellion in France, New Left politics in Britain and Cultural Revolution in China. Thus the international perspective of the Naxalbari movement in India set the radical upsurge in active politics and culture within a new wave of youth protest where the intelligentsia alongside the peasants and industrial workers responded with a grim resolution to challenge the exploitation of the ruling elite and the values underpinning the existing power structures.

In this chapter I shall review the international scenario with brief references to several youth-student led movements in different parts of the world and relate the significance of such a rise in radicalism with the events of Naxalbari movement from 1967-72. This was the period, which experienced the most exciting and action-packed years of the movement.

### 1

*And there stops in the streets of Granada*
*Lorca's bullt-riddled songs*
*The green Maidan seeps*
*In the blood of Saroj Dutta*

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[80] This is a line from a poem titled "To Go Back Home Is Now Difficult" by Surjit Pattar. To read the poem see Sumanta Bannerjee, *Thema Book of Naxalite Poetry,* (Calcutta: Thema, 1987), pp-122-123.

*Subbarao Panigrahi's last poem*
*Trembles like strands of light on a mountain slope*
*The golden paddy still grows under the sunshine*
*The child still bathes in streams of his dreams*[81]

This sense of legacy of a worldwide appeal for people's revolution underwrites the shifts in Left politics in India in the 1960s. Indian communist movement has a long and somewhat chequered history since its formation in 1920s as it oscillated between popular support during periods of internal crisis but failing to create a total revolutionary situation across the length and breadth of India. Peasant rebellions of Tebhaga and Telengana marked the two most radical outbursts of the subalterns under the leadership of Communist Party of India (CPI) and both succeeded in attaining national level importance due to large peasant participation, both male and female. But, Tebhaga ended in the violent quicksand of communal riots in 1946-7 and Telengana could not sustain the continuous police repression for more than three years[82].

After the Sino-Indian War in 1962, discontents were developing within CPI regarding the line of action. Pradip Bose writes, "In spite of numerous movements, popular participation, martyrdom of many party-workers and even Tebhaga and Telengana armed peasant uprisings CPI could not successfully create a revolutionary situation in India. Due to this failure, search for the reasons of this failure, questions on party-line and grievances against party-leadership paved the way for a gradual but definite discontent and search for an alternative line of action. However this effort was usually unstructured, fragmented and regional sometimes centered on partial demands or one particular directive of the leadership. Sometimes it even became person-specific. Still it was becoming quite clear that within the party two oppositional lines of thought were emerging. On one side the party leadership concentrated on parliamentary politics—building up of movements around electoral politics and gaining more votes. On the other hand was the desire for a total revolution among party-workers, which aimed at uprooting

[81] This is a section of a poem "Poet's Own Country" in *Red Path* by Bengali poet, Sabyasachi Deb in 1975.
[82] See for details Sunil Sen *The Working Women and Popular Movements in Bengal: From the Gandhi Era to the Present Day*, (Calcutta: K.P.Bagchi and Company, 1985).

the existing social system. The emphasis was put on an armed uprising"[83]. This internal rift in CPI bore the influences of oppositional interpretations of people's revolution based on Marxist ideology at the international level. While the party-leadership followed the Russian line of de-Stalinization and peaceful co-existence instead of radicalism, the rank and file wanted to emulate Mao-tse-Tung's revolution in China[84]. Thus the radical leaders, who were mainly from the second strata of the party, and party-workers, were held as the 'pro-China' section. During the Sino-Indian war the communist leaders like S.A.Dange supported Jawaharlal Nehru's Government in India, followed the Soviet line of peaceful coexistence and regarded China as the aggressor. At the other end were the pro-China section which did not jump into the nationalist bandwagon during the war and criticized the Nehru Government as the main aggressor. Due to their anti-nationalist stance hundreds of communist party-workers and local leaders of the pro-China section were put into jails under the Defence of India Rule[85]. After the Sino-Indian war the rift within CPI became too prominent to bridge and in 1964 a new party Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPIM) was formed[86].

The year 1966 experienced severe food-shortage and in Bengal violent food-riots blazed over the peasantry, industrial workers and the lower middle-class people of the urban areas. People took to streets in demand of food. Tram-cars were burned on the roads of Calcutta, students threw country-made bombs at the police and long rallies developed a shared camaraderie between the working-class, petty-bourgeiosie and the students. On 17th February 1966, police fired on an angry mob in Basirhat (in the district of 24 Parganas in West Bengal) and a student was killed. Instantly the movement spread in the districts of Nadia, Howrah, Hooghli, Murshidabad and other districts of South

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[83] See Pradip Bose, *Naxalbarir Poorbakshan: Kichhu Postmodern Bhabna* (Calcutta: Progressive Publishers, 1998) p-10, translation mine.

[84] See Partha N. Mukherji, "Naxalbari Movement and the Peasant Revolt in North Bengal" in M.S.A Rao (ed.) *Social Movements in India* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2002). p-23.

[85] Along with many regional leaders of the CPI Charu Mazumdar, Jangal Santhal, Kanu Sanyal and Souren Bose from Darjeeling District were arrested. In Calcutta Sushital Roychoudhury and Saroj Dutta were arrested. In India six leaders from the Central Committee and twenty members of the National Council were also jailed. But the notable aspect was that the leaders like Bhowani Sen and Somnath Lahiri were not arrested by D.I.R. See Amar Bhattachrya, *NaxalbariAndoloner Pramanya Tathya Sankalan*, (Calcutta: Naya Ishtehar Prakashani, 1998), revised edition, 2000, p-49.

[86] See Pradip Bose, p-11.

Bengal. The movement carried resonance to North Bengal also[87]. This movement marked the radical upsurge of the youth-student movement and their mouthpiece, the journal *Chhatra Fouz* (Student Army) was published[88].

May 1968 in Paris was a somewhat similar movement, unleashing a tremendous vital energy of French student-youth in challenging the nationalist bourgeois government of President Charles de Gaulle[89]. Under national bourgeoisie the country's economic potential grew but the growing power of the monopolies brought class contradictions in a stark everyday reality of the French working class. The struggle for survival jaded the lives of all the working people. The government tried to encounter the disillusioned working class by promulgating new social and economic decrees, which promised greater participation of the working class in sharing the profits of productivity, but the disillusionment went much deeper than the ruse of sharing could affect. On the other hand the education system of France was burdened with insufficient funding,

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[87] In February 1966 the West Bengal government under chief minister Prafulla Chandra Sen implemented a food procurement policy to encounter the food shortage. It was thought that around 15lakh tones of rice-grains could be procured and then with the American aid of P.L 480 (wheat) the situation would be under control. But it did not happen as blackmarketeering flourished. So the demand for food resulted in widespread mass rallies in different parts of the state. Two students Ananda Hyte and Nurul Islam, killed in police firing became folk heroes and students were inspired to engage with radical action against the state. For details see Amar Bhattachrya, *NaxalbariAndoloner Pramanya Tathya Sankalan*, (Calcutta: Naya Ishtehar Prakashani, 1998), revised edition, 2000, pp-56-57.

[88] Many student leaders, who were influenced by Maoist ideology, headed this journal and they formed a core of student movement. Though the theoretical standard of this journal was quite high they lacked a strong popular base. Another core of student movement developed around same period in Presidency College, Calcutta under the leadership of Ashim Chatterjee, Deepanjan Roychoudhury, Priyobroto Chatterjee, Ranabir Samaddar and a few more student leaders, which enjoyed a far more powerful mass base and later became pro-Naxalbari Presidency Consolidation. See Pradip Bose, p-21.

[89] In France the events leading up to the great student rebellion and subsequent industrial workers' strikes in May 1968 reflected a somewhat similar circumstances as it happened with the burst of Naxalbari movement in India. With General de Gaulle at the helm, France was posed between the two superpowers of the bipolar world politics but the overall emphasis on nationalism and bourgeois liberalism put the Communist Party of France in a difficult situation. Then came May 1968. Though just as suddenly as it had emerged, the movement in Paris died down, when the government and the workers' unions reached an agreement and the students were gradually toning down the extreme radical bent of action, May 1968 changed French society in some respects unalterably. In the ethical, sexual, cultural and intellectual spheres, it broke apart a rigid groupthink. It set in motion political forces that brought French Socialists to power, in 1981. It installed the street demonstration as a permanent part of modern French political theater, revised the gender roles by accepting equality, brought in massive change in education system and giving rise to some of the most significant intellectuals of the latter half of 20th century. The references for the May 1968 rebellion are taken from Nikolai Molchanov, *General De Gaulle: His Life and Work*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1980). See pp-376-400.

unrefined educational policies, which provided obsolete knowledge and a general lack of stimulating ideas.

The sparks of rebellion began in the first weeks of May 1968. Under the student leader Daniel Cohn-Bendit student protests began first in Nanterre, a suburban university campus of Paris and spread to the heart of Paris, the Latin Quarter, the ancient Sorbonne. Students and police clashed around burning cars and barricades. The students were joined by 10 million workers, half the French labor force, who shut down the economic machinery of France for several weeks. There was no mail, no banking, no transportation, no gas and dwindling food. The scenes of students being bludgeoned by police had turned popular sentiment against the authorities. Merchants on the streets where cars burned and paving stones flew sided with the students. The war cries of the students were for a "permanent creative revolution" and Mao's Red book featured in the hands of many student revolutionaries. Thus the French student rebellion not only bore a character-wise similarity with the Food movement of 1966 and later the similar kind of continued student involvement in anti-state revolutionary pursuit till the early years of 1970s in India, particularly West Bengal, the ideological sharing of Maoism marked the departure from Soviet traditional Marxism.

The socio-political situation was rapidly changing in West Bengal following the massive participation of people in the Food riots of 1966. Popular outrage against the ruling Congress government in the state resulted in formation of the United Front government in 1967 Legislative Assembly elections. CPIM participated in the election as its leadership concluded, since the revolutionary situation in India was not ripe enough they should seek popular mandate and join electoral politics, within which it was argued that other kinds of struggles could be combined[90]. Though CPIM could not secure an absolute majority it was the second largest party in the Assembly. As the Congress despite having a majority declined to form the government a coalition government of Left parties and Bangla Congress, led by CPIM came to power[91].

The general people and party workers expected that the new government would be truly acting for the interests of the people and not follow petty

[90] See Partha N. Mukherji, p-23

[91] Bangla Congress was a break away faction from the original Congress Party which decided to co-operate with CPIM in forming the non-Congress government in Bengal. See Pardip Bose, p- 15-18.

electoral path of making empty promises just to secure votes. The government also began with land reform to redistribute the excess cultivable land concentrated under few families in different districts. But implementing reformist policies proved to be counterproductive within the party. From Amiya Kumar Samanta's detailed study of the relationship between land-tenure system and Naxalbari movement in different districts, it becomes quite clear that the long-drawn process of implementing land reform policy through administration created further discontent among local leftist leaders working among the rural poor[92]. The district of Darjeeling was the first one to explode.

Darjeeling is a frontier district of India in north Bengal. It is bounded on the north-East by Bhutan, on the north-west by Nepal and on the south-east by Bangladesh[93]. The history of Darjeeling district reveals that from pre-colonial to colonial period exploitation of the peasantry by the big landlord (locally called jotedars) intensified[94]. During Tebhaga movement the peasants of this area showed extreme militancy, good organizational possibility and revolutionary potential[95]. Though after independence land reform policies were passed "there were big gaps between promise of social justice through land-ceiling and practice"[96]. Tenurial security of the sharecroppers has been sought to be protected by the provision of land-reform acts. But this was often undone by the political and economic power of the landowners. The big jotedars threatened the peasants if they dared to join the "red flag party"[97] and frequent evictions, refusal to record the names of the sharecroppers, forced labour led many sharecroppers to cultivate smaller landholdings while in extreme cases they were reduced to agricultural labourers[98]. The administration, very much alike the British period favoured the big

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[92] West Bengal Estate Acquisition Act of 1953 replaced Permanent Settlement Land-Tenurement System to implement land ceiling. But this policy failed to redistribute land and ended in proliferation of 'Benami' land acquisition. Benami is a method of transferring the land excess of the ceiling limit in the names of the relatives or subservient peasants. In 1950 Siliguri Krishak Sabha (Siliguri is a subdivision in Darjeeling district of West Bengal) did forcibly occupy some Benami land and the police arrested 861 peasants. See Amiya Kumar Samanta, *Left Extremist Movement in West Bengal: An Experiment in Armed Agrarian Struggle*, (Calcutta: Firma KLM Private Limited, 1984), p-54.

[93] See Partha N. Mukherji, p-29.

[94] See Partha N. Mukherji, p-30-37.

[95] See Amiya Kumar Samanta *Left Extremist Movement in West Bengal: An Experiment in Armed Agrarian Struggle*, p-67-68.

[96] Wolf Ladzensky, "Land Ceiling and Land Reform" in *EPW*, Annual number 1972, pp-401-408.

[97] See Partha N. Mukherji, p-38.

[98] Partha N. Mukherji writes that the percentage of agricultural labour to total workers increased from 2.9% to 9.2% within the decade of 1961-71. p-80.

landlords and legal help was out of reach for poor peasants[99]. In 1967 a peasant rebellion erupted in the Siliguri Subdivision of Darjeeling. Peasants were supported by the tea-garden labourers. There were as many as over 30 tea-gardens in that region with four police stations in Kharibari, Phansidewa, Naxalbari and Siliguri. The tea-garden labourers were mostly indentured tribal people from Chottanagpur region of Bihar and Orissa[100]. The communist leaders and party-workers of this area were the part of the pro-China section and joined CPIM in 1964. Inspired by the militancy of the peasantry and the tea-garden workers they were politicizing the exploited in favour of an armed uprising and organizing a revolutionary situation. Charu Mazumdar and Kanu Sanyal were the main architects of this peasant uprising. Both of them were the veterans of Tebhaga movement and had immense popularity among the peasantry. When the U.F government came into power the leaders thought that the time was ripe for an uprising since they already had considerable control in the state government. On 24th May 1967 in Barajharujot of Naxalbari Police Station hundreds of peasants claimed the harvest and decided to take the crop to their home forcibly if the jotedar resisted. Confronted by a virtual army of peasants with bows and arrows the jotedars called police. During the confrontations police inspector S. Wangdi was injured by bow-shots and succumbed to his injuries that evening. On 25th May 1967 in Prasadujote police opened fire on a nearly 2000 strong peasant army, killing seven women, one man and two children. This incident instead of repressing, added more fire to the smouldering rebellion. Peasants and labourers of the entire Siliguri subdivision erupted into an armed rebellion. Naxalbari was no more a police station but a name, a hallmark of a new dream of peoples' war[101].

In Calcutta *Naxalbari O Krishak Sangram Sahayak Samity* (Naxalbari and Peasant Struggle Assistance Committee-NKSSS) was formed under the leadership of

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[99] The records in the office of the Junior Land Reforms Officer, Naxalbari shows that during the period extending from 1965 to the end of April 1967, the landowners instituted 160 cases against sharecroppers for eviction from their lands, while during the same period no sharecropeer instituted any case against a landowner on the same ground. See Amiya Kumar Samanta, p-55-56.

[100] They were casual labourers who had regular work for only six months in a year abd suffered from extreme poverty. Some of them became agricultural labourers and also bought or cleared cultivable land. By 1961 about 55% of the total tribal population was engaged in agriculture while around 38% was engaged in tea-plantations. See Amiya Kumar Samanta, p-57-58.

[101] Amiya Kumar Samanta, p-87. Later a Hindi poet wrote a poem titled "The Name of Village", where the last four lines echo the significance of the four syllabled word–Naxalbari...."This simple word/ Of four syllables/ Is not just the name of a village/ But the name of the whole country." See Sumanta Bannerjee, *Thema Book of Naxalite Poetry*, p-15.

Sushital Roychoudhury of CPIM. Many intellectual and creative artists showed solidarity with the victims of police firing and students became deeply involved in this peasant struggle[102]. The U.F government was reluctant in the beginning to launch a police crackdown on the rebellion. 133 incidents of agitation took place between 25th May and the end of June in entire Darjeeling district[103]. But after an influential big landlord Nagen Roychoudhury was killed on 10th June 1967 the situation reached alarming heights. "The National Parliament and the State Legislature took serious note of these events as the Chinese media heralded the advent of the 'Spring Thunder' over India. The West Bengal government was quick to send a Cabinet Mission to enquire into the affairs of north Bengal"[104]. The Cabinet Mission reviewed the situation with the view to settle the land-reform policy and restoring law in that region. However, the peasants and their leaders responded with more violence and finally the Cabinet Mission prioritized law and order situation. Though strong police action curbed the movement in Siliguri Sub Division the appeal of the movement reached far and wide. CPIM felt embarrassed by the militancy of the local leaders like Charu Mazumdar and Kanu Sanyal. Failure of the Cabinet Mission in reaching an amiable solution resulted in expulsion of these leaders from CPIM. "It was at the initiative of the NKSSS, which had gained the recognition of the expelled members of the CPIM of Darjeeling District Committee under the leadership of Charu Mazumdar, Kanu Sanyal and Souren Bose---that the formation of the Coordination Committee of the Revolutionaries (CCR) was spearheaded and came into existence in 1967. This was before the Madurai meeting of CPIM Central Committee on 18th August 1967. The establishment of the CCR led to similar situations and formations in the states of Punjab,

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[102] Actor, artist Utpal Dutta visited Naxalbari region immediately after police-firing to collect material for his new theater production on this revolt---*Teer*(The Arrow). So he was boycotted by CPIM. In protest of this boycott the Peoples Artists Forum published a leaflet, where along with the general secretary of the Forum, Jochhon Dastidar, Nirmal Ghosh, Prateem Chatterjee, Bijay Guha, Kaliprasad Roychoudhury and A.K. Chatterjee signed. The leaflet said that as artists they support the Naxalbari peasant movement and it was their duty as Peoples Artists to spread the message of this movement through their creation. In Calcutta, in Minerva Theatre Hall the *Shilpimon* group presented their new theatre production—*Toofan* (The Storm) in support of the peasants. In the same hall Ajit Pandey, Bingsa Satabdi (20th Century—a group) and Ishak sang revolutionary songs. Shambhu Bhattacharya and Shakti Nag presented dance productions. In many theatre halls Gyanesh Mukherjee's *Carebbeaner Swapno* ( The Dream of Caribbean) and Utpal Dutta's *Kallol* (The Raging Tide) were enacted. See, See Amar Bhattachrya, *Naxalbari Andoloner Pramanya Tathya Sankalan*, (Calcutta: Naya Ishtehar Prakashani, 1998), revised edition, 2000,p-78.

[103] Amiya Kumar Samanta, p-87.

[104] See Partha N. Mukherji p-51.

Bihar, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Jammu Kashmir and Kerala. The extremists in Andhra Pradesh deferred the formation of a Coordination Committee until they were expelled by the CPIM in their Burdawan plenum in April 1968. By November 1967 at the initiative of West Bengal CCR, the different state coordination committees resolved to form the All India Coordination Committee of the Revolutionaries (AICCR). Thus, the extremists within the various states were organized with amazing rapidity and this was followed by their coordination at the inter-state-level. By 22nd April 1969, the process had reached its logical culmination with the formation of the third communist party of India on the birth centenary of Vladimir I. Lenin, the chief architect of the Russian Revolution. The formation of the new party was announced by Kanu Sanyal at a May Day rally in Calcutta"[105]. Their mouthpiece was *Deshabrati* (Dedicated to the Country), edited by Sushital Roychoudhury.

The new party, Communist Party of India- Marxist-Leninist (CPIML) inspired a considerable section of young intelligentsia and students to become a part of the historic struggle to overthrow bourgeois state power through armed revolution. *Deshabrati* was calling for a total armed revolution and in its reports on the spreading movements across the world it repeatedly emphasized on the Maoist character of the student rebellions. May 16th 1968 issue of *Deshabrati* published a long report on the student rebellions in Sorbonne and Columbia universities[106]. May 30th 1968 issue published a detailed report on the role of student-worker strikes in France and the revisionist role of French Communist Party. The report read "In early May, when the spontaneous outburst took place the revisionist Marxist leaders were apprehensive. They condemned the student rebellion as 'anarchist', 'Trotskite' and even 'CIA agents'–just the same way our very own revisionist Marxist leaders like Sundaryya, Ranadive, Harekrishna Konar and Promode Dasgupta criticized Naxalbari movement"[107]. The principal point of reference was to identify the revisionist character of established

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[105] See Partha N. Mukherji p-26

[106] Columbia University students under the leadership of SDS (Students for Democratic Society) rebelled against the dictatorial University authority and demonstrated against Vietnam War. They captured several buildings and placed their demands to the authority. The authority in return called the police and after a prolonged battle between the police and the students, the student leaders were imprisoned and more than 300 hundred students were wounded. See *Times* , May 10, 1968.

[107] See, Ebong Jalarka (eds.), *Deshabrati Sankalan*, (Collected Deshabrati) vol 3, (Calcutta: Dileep Chakrabarty, 1999), p-125. For more reports on May 1968 in France see, vol 4, pp-19-20, 58-60.

Communist Parties in these countries, who followed the Soviet line and draw similarities with CPI and CPIM. In cases of reports on Indonesia, North Korea and Vietnam the central concern was to expose the imperialist character of Soviet Russia, its fall from being the leader of world people's revolution to a decadent bourgeois state, following America and establishing the undisputed supremacy of Maoism in China as the 'true' communist country. July 4th 1968 issue of *Deshabrati* published two reports on the fallout of the tremendous 'white terror' in Indonesia since 1965 under the military dictatorship of Suharto and the continued struggle of the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) following Mao's path of agrarian armed revolution[108]. July 25th 1968 issue of *Deshabrati* published a report on the celebration of Vietnam Day on 20th July in Calcutta, where it concluded that condemning Naxalbari movement actually amounts to opposing the spirit of Vietnam war, where the peasants of a seemingly poor, powerless country resisted the most powerful neo-imperial America through armed agrarian struggle[109]. Charu Mazumdar wrote in an essay that the 'so called revolution' in Czechoslovakia in 1968 was nothing more than the exposure of failure of Soviet imperialism. Charu Mazumdar wrote in an article as a response to a CPIM leader's assessment of Czechoslovakian rebellion of 1968 as a similar incident to Hungarian revolt in 1956. In his opinion the rebellion in Czechoslovakia was nothing more than an imperialist invasion on part of Soviet Russia to another capitalist country, Czechoslovakia. For Mazumdar equating Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 is a gross mistake in understanding Communism, since in 1956 in Hungary Soviet army under Stalin resisted a counter-revolutionary take-over, but in 1968 the Soviet republic had lost its communist character and thus its puppet government in Czechoslovakia was also turning that country into another capitalist country. In this context the popular revolt in Czechoslovakia in 1968 reflected the general discontent against the Soviet leadership. He wrote, "It is true that the popular revolt had no proper party guidance. But the Czechoslovakian revolt should not be ignored for that, since the popular character reflects the general

[108] It is required to be mentioned in this context that despite being one of the strongest communist parties in Asia PKI was caught completely unaware by the military dictatorship of Suharto in September 1965 and under the cover story of an alleged coup by PKI the military government annihilated more than 300,000 socialists between 1965-66. See, Ebong Jalarka (eds.), *Deshabrati Sankalan*, (Collected Deshabrati) vol 4, (Calcutta: Dileep Chakrabarty, 1999), pp-41-44, pp-50-51.

[109] See, Ebong Jalarka (eds.), *Deshabrati Sankalan*, (Collected Deshabrati) vol 4, (Calcutta: Dileep Chakrabarty, 1999), pp-61-62.

discontent"[110]. The leaders of Naxalbari movement considered the entire East European Bloc as a mere second rate reflection of Soviet Russia and thus for them 'Prague Spring' of 1968 was another case of youth-student led popular armed rebellion against Soviet Russia.

The call for armed agrarian movement motivated many students from urban areas to go to the villages and build up revolutionary bases. After Darjeeling district, Debra and Gopiballabhpur in Midnapur district was the area where the Naxalite youth-student leadership concentrated. Debra and Gopiballabhpur presented a very good social and political ground to construct the base since a great disparity between the traditional landlords (they were the rent-collectors of colonial period under Permanent Settlement and established considerable stronghold over most of the cultivable land, which they did not relinquish after the land reform laws of 1953) and small peasants, some of whom were sharecroppers, and the rest were agrarian labour (a substantial section of the agricultural labour was tribal). Moreover there was little political base of any other party. The Naxalite organization started in Gopiballabhpur at the end of 1967, when Santosh Rana, a local youth leader and Ashim Chatterjee, the young Naxalite leader from Presidency College (Calcutta) started organizing the local peasants. A group of students from Presidency College (most of them belonged to Presidency Consolidation, a group formed initially in support of Naxalbari movement and later merged with CPIML) joined Ashim Chatterjee by the end of 1967. These students earned living as daily wage labourers, traveled from village to village, lived with the peasants and organized armed uprising[111]. Their organization (District Co-Ordination Committee) was popularly known as the Red Guards. Throughout 1968-69 the organization continued and the mass-base gained much popular support. With the establishment of CPIML the revolutionaries identified themselves as a part of the party and recognized Charu Mazumdar as their leader. The annihilation programme or killing the identified individual class enemies began in this area sometime after the party was established. In Magurjan, a village at Bihar North-Bengal border a police camp was attacked on 27th October, 1970. 6 rifles and some rounds of ammunition were looted. Charu Mazumdar wrote in

[110] See, *Charu Mazumdar Rachana Sangraha* (Collected works of Charu Mazumdar), (Calcutta: New Horizon book Trust, 2001), pp-64-68.

[111] For all the details on Debra Gopiballabhpur uprising see Amiya Kumar Samanta, pp-150-179

*Deshabrati* (1st December 1970) that with this looting PLA (People's Liberation Army) was formed. A police camp at Rupsakundi was attacked by 18 revolutionaries on 9th march 1971 and 9 rifles and 105 rounds of ammunition were taken away while one policeman was killed. Police camps in Sulipada and Bhola in Orissa were also attacked. Gun-looting from landowners and forcible harvesting of crops by groups of armed peasants also started. On 29th November 1969 thousands of peasants confronted a police patrol on the issue of forcible harvesting. Their radical mood and the sheer number drove the police patrol away[112]. However, the police retaliation started soon and the mass exodus of the landowners stopped. The programme of annihilation became counter productive in many ways as the secret organization and separation of political organization from guerrilla squads alienated the people from the movement and dissociated the revolutionary groups from each other. Gradually the severe police repression whittled down the movement.

In Birbhum district another center of the movement was established[113]. Though in Birbhum students from Presidency College did not lead local youth leaders like Bharatjyoti Roychoudhury led the campaign. The intra-party feud in this district became quite strong as some students opposed the implementation of the annihilation programme immediately after organization started. Here also red terror reigned for a period between 1971-72 as the local youth received great support from peasantry, which proved itself to be extremely militant. However here also the annihilation programme could not sustain itself and police terror soon took over Naxalite terror.

Within CPIML differences between the leaders ensued as the party-workers in the district areas began to lose mass support. Sushital Roychoudhury began criticizing the effectivity of the iconoclasm programme as the cultural front of the movement was demolishing the statues of Rammohan, Vidyasagar, Rabindranath to pull down the reverence held in Indian society for them. The overall argument was that these doyens of Bengal Renaissance were actually collaborators with the colonial power and

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[112] Amiya Kumar Samanta has given the details of the number of violent attacks by the revolutionaries in Midnapur District (Except Jhargram Sub division)—Total Number of persons killed– 38, Total Number of attempted murder–11, Total Number of forcible harvesting–17. See, pp-167-168.

[113] See Amiya Kumar Samanta, pp-180-200.

thus they should be exposed and dispensed with like the bourgeois education system[114]. Ashim Chatterjee's report from his area of action also questioned the infallibility of this programme as he was losing valuable comrades in these isolated actions against class enemies[115]. But Charu Mazumdar was unrelenting. The tension came to a final end when in 1972 Mazumdar was arrested and on 28th July 1972 died in police custody.

By 1973 the number of Naxalite activists and supporters held in different jails all over India had swelled to 32000[116]. More than 20 conspiracy cases were instituted by the government. Apart from lack of medical treatment, police torture was a regular lot for many of these prisoners. There had been several instances of firing inside the jails. Sometimes the Naxalite prisoners attempted jailbreak, which often resulted in a skirmish within the jails and killed many prisoners[117]. By 1974, conditions in Indian jails and the treatment of Naxalite prisoners there had become a matter of international scandal. More than 300 academics from all over the world including Noam Chomsky and Simone de Beauvoir signed a protest on 15th August 1974 to the Indian government. The Amnesty International prepared a report on the illegal detention and ill treatment and torture of Indian political prisoners, and sent it to the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi[118].

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[114] Sushital Roychoudhury expressed his disagreement with this line of thought and asked for a more careful evaluation of history and culture before tearing down the statues. However Charu Mazumdar refused to pay attention to such kind of criticism since he was convinced that there was no need to reevaluate the history of comprador (collaborator) bourgeois character of colonial intelligentsia. See, *Deshabrati Sankalan*, (Collected Deshabrati) vol 4, pp-160-161.

[115] Ashim Chatterjee asked several questions regarding the party policy on Bangaldesh War and the modes of conducting guerrilla warfare in sometimes during mid of 1971. See *Deshabrati Sankalan*, (Collected Deshabrati) vol 4, pp-160-161.

[116] Sumanta Bannerjee, *Thema Book of Naxalite Poetry*, (Calcutta: Thema, 1987), p-96-7.

[117] Protests against poor condition and autocratic prison regime ranged from the symbolic to the militant. On 22nd April 1972, in Presidency Jail 8 prisoners were wounded by the jail protection force for putting up a red flag to commemorate Lenin's birth day. In DumDum Central Jail prisoners on hunger strike were beaten up brutally on 23rd January 1973. In early August 1972, the jail protection force launched another severe attack on Naxalite prisonrs. There occurred as many as 15 incidents in the four and half years between December 1970 to May 1975 in West Bengal in which while 102 prisoners escaped, 68 were killed and 310 wounded. For details see Ujjwal Kumar Singh *Political Prisoners in India*, (Delhi: OUP, 1998) p-230-238.

[118] Sumanta Bannerjee, *Thema Book of Naxalite Poetry*, (Calcutta: Thema, 1987), p-96-7.

## 2

The massive political upheaval became an inspiration for a rich crop of literature. Poems and songs written and sung by the activists; short stories portraying their pitched battle against the state were written by sympathetic observers and many revolutionary novels, many short stories and poems were translated, especially from Chinese[119]. Some of these literary productions were published in smaller magazines, which were the mouthpiece of Naxalite group working in Calcutta and in different districts[120]. I shall discuss specific articles, short stories and drams published in the literary magazine *Aneek* from 1969-72. *Aneek* used to be published from Murshidabad district and attained a high status among the extreme left intellectual circles. Regarding the poems and songs I have greatly depended on the excellent collection of "Thema Book of Naxalite Poetry" by Sumanta Bannerjee. These short stories, articles, poems and songs reveal the cultural aspect of the Naxalite movement, which so intricately shaped the ideology of this movement.

Ideology has been one of the most debated terms in the Marxist thought. So it becomes important to comprehend briefly how the concept has developed in Marxism and is reflected in Naxalite movement. Influenced by Feurbach, Hegel and French Materialism Marx embarked on analyzing the philosophy of consciousness. "[I]t is necessary to consider the concept of ideology within the context of various stages of Marx's intellectual development while denying any dramatic 'epistemological break' between them. A basic nucleus of meaning finds new dimensions as Marx develops his position and tackles new issues"[121]. In the first stage the critique of Hegelian ideas and Feurbach's analysis of religion, Marx takes the argument further. For him creation of religion and God are not only a philosophical alienation but expresses the sufferings and contradictions of the real world. "Marx affirms that the real problems of humanity are not mistaken ideas but real social contradictions and that the former are the consequences of

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[119] For instance, in *Aneek* October 1970, poems by U.S. poet Victor Cruz, New Zealander Rewey Alley's poems and a four Chinese short stories and poems were translated and published. In the same issue a translation of a Peking Opera production "Red Lantern" was also published.

[120] "Chinta" group and their magazine in Calcutta was an influential mouthpiece of Maoist ideology and Marxist extremism in 1967. "Puber Hawa" (Eastern Wind), "Red Flag", "Dakshin Desh" (Southern Country), "Kalapurush", "Aneek" and many such journals marked a spurt in analyzing the socio-political situation. Some of them took up the responsibility of creating the cultural front.

[121] See Tom Bottomore (ed.), *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985) p-219

the latter"[122]. Hence ideology appears as a negative and restricted concept. It is restricted because it involves a distortion, a misrepresentation of contradictions. It is restricted because it does not cover all kinds of errors and distortions. With the writing of *Grundrisse* in 1858 Marx had already arrived at the conclusion if some ideas are distorted or 'inverted', reality itself is upside down. But this relationship is mediated by a level of appearances of reality, manifested in capitalist market. "This world of appearances constituted by the sphere of circulation does not only generate economic forms of ideology but is also a 'very Eden of the innate rights of man. There alone rule Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham' (Capital 1, Chapter 6)[123]. Thus in Marx the complex interrelationship between the double inversion of reality and consciousness emerge as the concept of ideology.

Lenin provided a new edge to this concept as he extended the meaning of ideology. Ideology became the political consciousness linked to the various classes and the particularly focused on the opposition between bourgeois and proletariat ideology. With Lenin, therefore, ideology became a neutral term referring to the political consciousness of different classes rather than the production of distortions in perception of contradictions in reality through misrepresented ideas. With Gramsci and Lukacs the concept became more chiseled. The notion of 'reification' developed by Lukacs and 'hegemony' by Gramsci, the relationship between consciousness and reality attained newer meanings. Gramsci's ideas of 'organic ideology' is more than a system of ideas, it is a terrain on which men acquire the consciousness of their position and struggle[124]. Rabindra Ray's book on Naxalite ideology begins with a differentiation between 'literate' and 'existential' ideology. Drawing from Sartre's Existential philosophy and the Critical Sociology of Frankfurt School, Ray embarked on bridging the gap connecting idea and behaviour, consciousness and reality. His project involved tracing the internal existential domain through which the two are related by the participants themselves. The distinction among literate and existential ideologies can perhaps be suggested by indicating that, while literate ideologies are connected with the nature of the world or the cosmos, existential ideologies pertain to the most intimate and

[122] ibid, p-220
[123] Tom Bottomore, p-220
[124] For details refer Bottomore

immediate experiences of identity. The context of these experiences makes the cosmology presented in literate ideologies meaningful[125]. Thus existential ideologies mediate the ideas of the world and construction of self. For Rabindra Ray, "[t]he pathos or urgency of the Naxalite events does not lie so much in the abstract theoretical principles they espoused but in their existentializing the theoretical enterprise"[126]. The ideology of Naxalism involves a question of life, of existence and for the Naxalites a particular perception of life assumes significance. So ignoring this facet of the movement would fail to capture the intellectual and moral crisis of that period as felt by the Naxalite activists.

The call of Charu Mazumdar to go to the villages was answered by many urban youth-students[127]. However going to a village and living with the peasants was not an easy task. Accepting the hardship of rural life involved the ability to communicate with the peasants at an intimate level, without sounding like the alien, urban vote-catchers. Folk songs proved to be one of the best communicating methods. Moreover, the urban youth, some of whom had flare for creativity, composed songs in tune with the folklores. Their poems portrayed their dream of creating a new society without exploitation. In these songs and poems the questioning of the existing social, political and cultural order bears the marks of existential ideology.

From the end of 1960s till the early years of the 1970s marks the height of Naxalite movement and in this period both resistance to the oppressive system and state terror were at their peak. The poems written Naxalite activists and sympathizers capture a multitude of dimensions engraved in these tumultuous years. The following poems and songs describe the woes suffered by the peasantry because of the economic and social

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[125] See Rabindra Ray, *The Naxalites and their Ideology*, (Delhi: OUP, 1988), p-45

[126] ibid.

[127] See Suniti Kumar Ghosh (ed.) *The Historic Turning Point: A Liberation Anthology,* (Calcutta: S.K.Ghosh, 1993) p.-316. "Those youths and students, who are more advanced in theory and practice must go to the villages, unless circumstances make it impracticable for them, to work there among the peasants as whole time workers under the guidance of the revolutionary party." From Charu Mazumdar's article. "Today the basic task is to liberate the rural areas through the revolutionary armed agrarian revolution and encircle the cities and finally, to liberate the cities and thus complete the revolution through out the country." From *Draft Political Programme For the Revolutionary Student and Youth Movement*, p-314

oppression[128]. Some of them are composed by peasant activists, echoing their own experiences and sung to the traditional folk tunes.

**1**

*Sudhama's wife weeps and complains---------*
*Days are lean / No Sattu to eat*
*No hut to live in / Days are lean*
*No shoes on our feet / Days are lean*
(Bhikhari Ram, a peasant poet from Bengal-Bihar border area).

**2**

*This night is endless*
*The rice jars are empty*
*My eyes fill with tears,*
*And my heart is anguished.*
*How will I look after my mother?*

*I cannot stay much longer.*
*I hear the mountains tremble*
*As the people march on them*
*And the mansions of the rich crumble.*

*Do not keep me, then, mother,*
*As I too must go*
*To make the bright sun rise.*
(Composed and sung by the prisoners in Midnapur Jail in West Bengal).

The poems of rural poverty by middle-class poets often adopt the style of folk allegory. There are some poem like the ones written by Subbarao Panigrahi of Andhra Pradesh, who adopted typical folk-tunes and metaphors. Sometimes, to shed the class identity, they wrote poems where they called the toiling mass of the country as their brothers and

[128] All the poems cited in this chapter are taken from Sumanta Bannerjee, *Thema Book of Naxalite Poetry*, (Calcutta: Thema, 1987)

their tunes resonated with more truthfulness as they physically shared the sufferings of the mass.

**3**

*Oh peasant brother!*
*Why do you weep?*
*Will weeping help you to be free?*

*Oh peasant brother!*
*You've been robbed off your land,*
*You've lost your bullocks,*
*You've lost your crop.*
*And now*
*You sit drooping in your hut.*
*Will weeping help you to be free?*

*Your mother is weeping*
*Your wife is weeping*
*What is the way out?*

*Hark!*
*Listen to the call of the rebels*
*Come out and join them*
*March forward*
*And break the chains of servitude*
(Nitya Sen, an activist)

The call for war against the oppressors featured in every poem and song. The following poem by Saroj Dutta, portrays the violent anger against the failed promises and perpetuated exploitation. Saroj Dutta was one of the leaders of the movement and a well-known poet. He was killed by the police in 1971.

***The Night of Full Moon***

*Those who try to bind me------*
*With their flutes, herbs and rituals,*
*Those who hold me inside the choking basket*
*And break my poison fangs,*
*Those who wind me round their necks*
*And kill me now then--------*
*Warn them that the night of the full moon has arrived!*

*How often have I swayed my entranced hood*
*To the tune of their flutes.*
*How often have I sought for a pit to hide my tired self.*
*Lashed out with my useless fangs,*
*Pounded my head against the earth!*
*They merely watched amused, and laughed.*

*In every marrow of my being today*
*A deep pain runs.*
*The sensitive skin slips away, the fever of pain*
*Rocks my body.*
*The two eyes are still----------*
*Two drops of extracts of hatred*

*The skin is shed at last.*
*I come out,*
*Afresh, smooth and dangerous!*
*And in the revelry of their games*
*They have forgotten---------*
*My sack of venom is full to the brim tonight.*

Poems were written in support of the Vietnamese revolutionaries, paid tributes to all the people fighting the class war at every corner of the world. Satirical poems mocked not

only the right oppressors but also 'left' revisionists who could not refuse the lure of power. The following two poems by Srijan Sen depict this sentiment.

***Das Kapital***

*Karl Marx wrote Das Kapital*
*His readers swelled their own capital.*

*The lesson that they drew from his pages*
*Was invested in building palaces.*

*Then they made the profound assertion:*
*Das Kapital needs full revision.*

***The Mourners***

*The fire weeps for the oil,*
*The flood for the drought,*
*And here weeps Jawaharlal Nehru's daughter*
*For the outcasts who sleep in the gutter.*

*The snake weeps for the frog,*
*The handloom for the cotton.*
*And all the Marxist Ministers weep*
*For the fate of India's Revolution.*

Some poems were written to express the Naxalite ideology, some to remember the killed comrades, some to describe state terror. Many of these poets were killed by the police. The following lines were inscribed on the walls of a cell in the Presidency Jail, Calcutta, with a piece of stone---since papers and pens were not allowed inside, by some political prisoners after they heard of the killing of their comrade, Prabir Roychoudhury, in Howrah Jail, on 3rd May 1975, when firing by warders led to the death of five Naxalite prisoners.

*Silence!*
*Here sleeps my brother*

*Don't stand by him*

*With a pale face and a Sad heart*

*For he is laughter!*

*Don't cover his body with flowers*

*What's the use of adding flower to a flower?*

*If you can*

*Bury him in your heart*

*You will find at the twitterings of the bird of heart*

*Your sleeping soul has woken up*

*If you can*

*Shed some tears*

*And----------*

*All the blood of your body.*

The direct appeal of these poems reflects a certain condition of the society but the cultural contours of Bengali society housed various other diverse strands. Though almost every intellectual, poet, novelist were engaging with Naxalbari movement the modes were varied. Moreover the cultural front of the movement had a definite, often rigid notion of revolutionary literature and thus different styles of writing evoked certain critically disputed areas in literature. The assaulting tone of the Naxalite intelligentsia towards what they considered decadent bourgeois literature bear blind faith in Naxalism and lose the critical voice of the creative artist. The blindness borders on naiveté sometimes. In *Deshabrati* several articles used slang to describe the revisionist Marxism and the intellectuals they did not approve of[129]. Some articles in *Aneek* reveal the unilateral view of creation of revolutionary literature and thus fail to appreciate creativity. Beginning with a critique of colonial culture and education they went on to critique nationalism with its mixed economic approach. The failure to understand and appreciate art as freedom of expression and denouncing any creative piece which do not follow the

[129] The language of most of the reports in *Deshabrati* was loud, rhetorical and aimed at stirring the sentiments of the readers with certain extreme words like using ' ghrinyo dalaal' (hated agent) to describe CPIM, putting the adjective 'mahan biplabi' (great revolutionary) to every incident against state authority and printing everyday slang like 'had bajjat' (callous bastard) in regular columns. This style of writing was most evident in the reports 'Patrikar Duniyay' (In the World of Journals) by Sasanka (pen name of Saroj Dutta), which was a regular feature of *Deshabrati*.

formulaic revolutionary literature is a hallmark of most of the articles published in this magazine during the 1968-70 periods. In the July-1969 issue, the editorial of the magazine emphasizes that no creative artist can remain unaffected by the choice between 'progressive' and 'reactionary' creation. The editors even charted out a formula to write literature for the people and their inspiration was Cultural Revolution in China[130]. In most of the short stories published in *Aneek* the hero is a Naxalite, who can be killed but never defeated. It is interesting to note that in most of these short stories the central character is a man, though in *Red Lantern* (a hugely popular Peking Opera production, which was translated and published in *Aneek*, October 1969 and also staged in many places by the cultural front activists of Naxalbari Movement), the central character is a young girl, who finally waves the red flag on the stage.

The leading poets of that period responded with enthusiasm to the movement but many of them criticized this rigid formulation of a revolutionary literature. Shankha Ghosh, a leading Bengali poet wrote in deep sympathy for the martyrs "*A heavy fog envelops the expanse/ The route march fades into the horizon/ Amidst all–does a Krishnachura*[131] *lie forsaken? / I kneel down to pick up/Your severed head–Timir*". Suneel Ganguly, one of the most respected poets of today was a young poet then and felt the need to join the rank of the revolutionaries but also felt the inescapable doom that hung heavily on them, wrote, "*Che, your death makes me a criminal/ Childhood to a mature youth–I look back/ Even I was to stand by you and armed/ Even I had to be in a jungle and marshland and a cavern–seeking refuge...hiding/ Gearing up for the final struggle.*" Poet Birendra Chattejee, who became an icon of those times, wrote, "*The world stealthily walks into your sleep like a bread!/ In your revolting blood the world reflects a bread...world and bread/ What a deep slumber! Your crooked face/ Soaked in the rains of dream—'Hunger! Hunger! World! World!'*. In the novels written during this period the crisis faced by the middleclass (however amorphous the category may be) was

[130] Cultural Revolution (1966–76) was mass mobilization of urban Chinese youth inaugurated by Mao, attempting to prevent development of a bureaucratized Soviet style of communism. The movement for criticism of party officials, intellectuals, and "bourgeois values" turned violent, and the Red Guard, the principal group of youth-student who led the movement split into factions. After several setbacks Mao called off the movement finally but it had a lasting impact on Chinese society. The actual outcome of this drastic action to combat bourgeois intellectualism is yet to be analyzed but the excess it caused was damaging in many ways.

[131] Krishnachura is name of a red flower, which blooms in summer.

depicted sometimes with clinical precision, like in the novels by Narayan Ganguly (The Door Nearby), Moti Nandy (A Few Unnecessary Hallucination) and Ramapada Choudhury (Dismissed, Seed and Shame) and sometimes with a self-mocking, pretentious seriousness, like Shirshendu Mukherjee (The Bug). But the genre of novels about the downtrodden, about the outcastes and their struggle gained a new breath of life through the writings of Mahasweta Devi. She not only portrayed the contemporary period in novels like *Operation Basai Tudu, Mother of 1084* and *The Fire Within* but also gave historical fiction a new turn by tracing the Munda Rebellion during the end of 19th century against colonial aggression in *The Right Over the Forest.* The Naxalites heavily criticized many of the creative works on middleclass as they seemed to lack class hatred and often resorted to an unrealistic solution of the problems, which skirted the theme of class struggle. But their repeated emphasis on making every form of art a weapon for revolution actually made their criticism immature. Many novels featured a Naxal protagonist (in most cases they were male, except for a few stories like Mahasweta's *Draupadi*), but rather than portraying them as victorious, most of them tried to bring out the dilemma, the impotent anger against an unjust society leading to the violent path of annihilation. The Naxalite intellectuals considered these writings as bourgeois alienation but the grain of truth embedded in these bourgeois imaginations of the revolutionary revealed itself remorselessly once the dust over the movement settled down[132]. The influence of 'beat' counterculture of America also had an impact over the young poets of Bengal. But the Naxalites considered these young poets as irresponsible decadent bourgeois, who refused to follow the path of revolution.

The understanding of gender, as reflected in Naxalite literature, never became a central theme of debate. Thus taking insights from Rabindra Ray's concept of existential ideology it becomes quite clear that the Naxalites never questioned the existence of womanhood in a particular form in society and were not much perturbed by the reigning debates regarding the woman question in Marxist revolutionary thought. However the absence of women-specific issues in Naxalite politics must not be evaluated only from a negative standpoint. The high percentage of women's participation in this

[132] For detailed analysis of the principal novels written during the decade of the 70s, see, Iraban Basuroy, "Sottor Dasaker Bangla Upanyaser Dhara" (Main trends in Bengali novels during the decade of the 70s) in Anil Acharya (ed.) *Sottor Dasak* (The 70s Decade), (Calcutta: Anushtup, 1980), pp-174-200.

movement spelt freedom for many women. This movement attacked the existing normative structure of conservative familial ideology as it criticized the entire established social system. This inspired women to come out of their pre-determined familial roles. The underground nature of the movement broke many social and cultural barriers as it enabled them to take part in the movement as conscious individuals. In the third section of this chapter I shall concentrate on the general nature of women's participation in Naxalbari movement.

**3**

In this movement women joined principally from three different backgrounds----------

1. Many women who were involved in Communist Party and Communist student politics joined the movement during the tumultuous days of 1966-67. Most of them had some practical experiences of party organization and were quite well-versed in political literature.
2. Many sisters, friends and lovers of male Naxalites were inspired and joined the movement. However once they became a part of the movement they followed their own decisions. In some cases, even when they had to choose between their male idol and own political consciousness they followed their consciousness[133].
3. Women from youth-student movement and rural peasant movement joined politics for the first the time in their own terms as party-workers and supporters. They formed the major section of women participants in this movement[134].

The peasants showed indomitable courage and political maturity in Naxalbari movement in the same way they played their leading role in Tebhaga Movement in 1946-7[135]. Sunil Sen has given a brief sketch of the nature of peasant women's participation in his "The Working Women and Popular Movement

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[133] For instance a woman comrade in South Calcutta was romantically involved with a CPIM party-worker and she severed the relationship when Charu Mazumdar was expelled from CPIM, as she was a follower of Charu Mazumdar. See Debashish Bhattacharya *Sottorer Dinguli* ( Calcutta: Ekhon Bisngbad, 2000) p-73

[134] See Maitrayee Chattopadhyay (ed.) *Esho Mukto Koro: nareer Adhikar o Adhikar Andolan Bishayak Prabandha Sankalan*, (Calcutta: Peoples Book Society, 2001), p-163

[135] See for the details of women participants in Tebhaga, Peter Custairs, *Women in the Tebhaga Uprising :Rural Poor women and Revolutionary Leadership 1946-7,* (Calcutta, 1987) and Kunal Chattapadhyay "Tebhaga Andolan-e Kriskak Meyera" in *Esho Mukto Koro: nareer Adhikar o Adhikar Andolan Bishayak Prabandha Sankalan*, (Calcutta: Peoples Book Society, 2001), p-145-158

in Bengal". They attended village meetings, led rallies and confronted police with remarkable courage. They remained at the villages when the male-activists took shelter in the forests and kept contacts with guerrilla squads. They formed a nucleus of militants and sometimes took part in the guerrilla actions. The tribal women organized meetings and carried bows, arrows, sharp instruments to abort any advance from the police. Sunil Sen has given brief sketches of the lives of some of these women. Suniti Biswakarmakar, sister-in-law of an important activist Babulal Biswakarmakar became a martyr. She became a local leader and mobilized other women. Krishnamaya, a Nepali girl attended meetings and gave shelter to the absconding activists. Dhaneswari Singh, who was killed in the police firing of 25th May at Prasadujote, was an agricultural labourer. While her husband was a sympathizer of the movement, Dhaneswari was a leading cadre and traveled distant villages spreading the word of 'Krishi Biplab' (agrarian revolution). Sonamati Singh, another martyr of 25th May was the joint organizer of the rebel meeting along with her husband. Nayaneshwari Mallik was another local leader, who mobilized women at Prasadujote. Nayan was also killed in the police-firing, along with her child tied at her back. There were many other women, who were flared up by the 'Spring Thunder', whose stories remain untold.

The Communist politics drew women activists from the beginning. But till the middle of 1960s, no students' unions with directly elected bodies were there in most of the girls' college[136]. The death of students like Nurul Islam and Anand Hait in police firing in 1966 and martyrdom of workers like Ashish and Jabbar broke the political silence in women's educational institutions. In Clacutta and in many sub-urban colleges girl students formed unions, participated in popular movements, sometimes defying the college-governing authorities. In the next chapter one of the personal narratives, of the women participants of the Naxalbari movement would reveal that even in girls' schools students were inspired and they consciously evaluated political choices in front of them and demonstrated their sympathy for Naxalbari movement.

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[136] See Maitrayee Chattopadhyay (ed.) *Esho Mukto Koro: nareer Adhikar o Adhikar Andolan Bishayak Prabandha Sankalan*, p-165

Women, who joined the movement through a male relative or a friend, also became resourceful cadres themselves. Kalpana Sen has written about two such cases[137]. Molina's elder brother was an activist and so in their house many secret meetings were held and often absconding activists took shelter. Gradually Molina herself became a sympathizer. She was only 15 or 16 but she became a professional revolutionary by devoting all her energy to the party. She changed quickly from a peace-loving young girl to a conscious political-worker. She followed Charu Mazumdar's line of action till the end and was arrested from Durgapur sometime in 1973. Though she was tortured and was sentenced with capital punishment she refused to divulge any information to the police. Although, she was not hanged ultimately and later released, but she went on with her ideology by joining another Naxalites organization after coming out of jail.

Jhuma's elder brother, sister and younger brother were CPIML, party-workers and so their house was a shelter. She was introduced into revolutionary politics by her siblings and absconding other activists. Jhuma was homely and quiet but showed her unflinching faith to the revolution in the most critical times. She was arrested by the police when the police raided their house in search of her elder sister. As the elder sister successfully escaped the angry police search party arrested her and her young brother. She was 14 and a minor but that did not stop the horrors of the torture room. Despite prolonged torture for quite a few days Jhuma kept her mouth shut. She was released later but suffered from excruciating pain due to torture. One woman political activist from Burnpur joined the movement with her husband. She had two children but went underground leaving them with a relative. She lost contact with them as she was drawn into the revolutionary action. She was arrested, suffered torture and was released later. After some years when she again met her children, she was an invalid[138].

The account of women participants of Naxalbari movement will remain incomplete without the significant role played by shelter-givers. Many

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[137] See for details, Maitrayee Chattopadhyay (ed.) *Esho Mukto Koro: nareer Adhikar o Adhikar Andolan Bishayak Prabandha Sankalan*, p-163-4

[138] All the life-stories are taken form Maitrayee Chattopadhyay (ed.) *Esho Mukto Koro: nareer Adhikar o Adhikar Andolan Bishayak Prabandha Sankalan.*, p-163-165.

inconspicuous middle-class and lower middle-class women showed courage and patience in front of severe police crackdown. They provided food and shelters to the hunted activists at anytime. Not only that, these women maintained perfect façade of non-interfering, apolitical average women while confronted by the police. Often they lost sons, husbands, and brothers but never opened their mouth or bend down to any threat.

In the next chapter I shall elaborate five personal narratives of women participants, who suffered but never forgot to dream about a brave new world.

## Chapter— 3

## "Remember Ahalya of Chandanpiri?"[139]:

## Memoirs of Five Naxalite Women Activists

### 1

The main theme of this chapter is a thorough and detailed analysis of the personal narratives of five women, directly or indirectly involved with the Naxalbari movement. In Bengali literature several novels portray women participants and those portrayals have been instrumental in creating the character of women Naxalites in popular imagination. I shall begin with short sketches of some of these literary characters to unveil the overall socio-cultural approach towards these women.

Mahasweta Devi's *Hajar Churashir Ma* (Mother of 1084)[140] has been one of the most acclaimed as well as popular portrayals of a middle-class middle-aged mother's journey into the life of her dead Naxalite son. Through an emotionally charged narrative the mother gradually discovers the intensity of revolutionary commitment of her son. The very title of the novel suggests that number 1084 (the number put into the toe of her son's dead body in police morgue) is preceded by nameless 1083 persons and thus the reader immediately feels that this is not one singular story but a fragment of several thousands. In the course of her journey to understand the life and eventual death of her son, the mother encounters several people, among whom is Nandini, who actively participated in the movement, was arrested, tortured and later released. Though the story is not about Nandini, she emerges from an array of minor characters with her undaunted resolve to fight back even after her incarceration. However, as she is not the central character the reader cannot differentiate how her commitment, involvement and revolutionary will developed or whether she, as a woman shared any difference from Bratee, the dead son. The gender lens of this novel is decidedly focused on the mother-son relationship, where the mother, with her quiet defiance of patriarchal familial

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[139] This is the first line of a Bengali folk song popular among Naxalite activists. Ahalya was a peasant woman who was killed by the police during a communist-led upsurge in Chandanpiri in the south of West Bengal in 1949.

[140] *Hajar Churashir Ma* (Mother of 1084) was first published in 1974. It is one of the best-known works on Naxalbari Movement and has been translated in several languages. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has translated the book in English and it has been made into a film in 1996 by Govind Nihalni.

ideology, economic independence and apolitical but sincere effort to uphold women's position in society influenced her Naxalite son. Thus the reader can locate the emergence of Naxalite movement in certain characterization of womanhood, significantly communicated through the character of the mother. The same characterization can be found in *Kalbela*, one of the most popular Bengali novels on those turbulent days, by Samaresh Mazumdar[141]. In his short preface to the novel, Mazumdar wrote that his attempt was to portray the period rather than the stories about particular characters. In this novel also, the Naxalite activist is male but he draws emotional strength to plunge into the vortex of revolution from his apolitical lover. Animesh, the central character communicates the fierce rage against an unjust society, the grim resolution to bring a sweeping change through political violence and the final helpless confusion emerging from dangerous fratricide, misguided leadership and state terror. Embedded in all the upheavals in his life is his love for Madhabilata, who curiously refuses to understand his politics but stands by him with an almost blind faith. Madhabilata rejects all kinds of social security to support her love as she comes out of her parental home, starts earning as an independent woman and does not flinch to bear a child out of wedlock. Throughout the novel it seems that these two characters are working towards bringing revolution in political and socio-cultural spheres but their positions never communicate with each other. Madhabilata's one-woman rebellion is never articulated in Animesh's politics and vice versa and so the parallel lines of women's movement and Naxalbari movement never interact. I would further like to mention that in this nearly 400-page novel there is no mention of a single woman participant. The third novel of this discussion is Bani Basu's *Antarghat* (The Enemy Within)[142]. This novel came out long after the dust had settled over the Naxalbari movement in West Bengal but it asked some serious questions about the failure of the movement, as the title would suggest. Written in the form of a psychological thriller, the novel sets the stage for many untold secret betrayals. In this novel, the protagonist is a woman. Here the reader can trace the development of a

[141] See for details, Samaresh Majumdar, *Kalbela* (Age of Doom) (Calcutta: Ananda Publishers, 1983). *Kalbela* is actually the second part of a trilogy depicting the life of a Bengali man, Animesh Mitra, who joined Naxalite movement. Though it is a part of a trilogy, *Kalbela* can be read as an independent novel and is arguably the best of the three novels.

[142] See for details, Bani Basu, *Antarghat* (The Enemy Within), translated from Bangla by Jayanti Datta, (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2002). The original was published around 1989.

revolutionary, who is also a woman and her questions to the leadership in times of crisis express, to some extent, how women Naxalites felt and acted during that period. In the novel, the young girl, who was initiated into the movement was an articulate student, a dissenter by nature. She puts questions not only to her professors but to her leaders as well. But after some unfortunate incidents of mindless violence she wants to quit the movement in dismay and then she is informed by her leadership that she was too deeply involved and thus there was no way out. However, this novel becomes more of a dramatic unveiling of sin and retribution and thus the nature of anguish of the woman activist is not fully explored, only hinted at.

From this discussion I would like to draw a provisional general conclusion that the image of the woman Naxalite activist remains in deep shadow, indicated but not described. Rather than the actual activists, the qualities of an independent womanhood, supporting, nurturing the political activism can be located. The jail narratives of some of the woman activists are worth mentioning to probe further into the extent of their involvement both in terms of consciousness and actions. I would like to discuss Joya Mitra's work *Hanyaman* (Memoirs of my days in Jail)[143].

This book unveils the growth of an activist's consciousness, when she is debarred from practicing freedom. The title of the book means, very loosely, people who are meeting death continuously but actually the narrative talks about continuous overpowering of the looming shadow of death, in a hostile condition through the sheer will to live. In the Preface Mitra wrote that the conscious revolutionary activists had their place in the heart of the people, for whom they put their lives at stake, but those petty criminals who commit crime only for survival remain out of the purview of everyday life. Thus her years in jail taught her to pick up small fragments of vitality of life spirit from those very 'petty criminals'. Mitra's reminiscences map out broadening of her revolutionary consciousness, her commitment to challenge oppression and her gender sensitivity reaches new levels through her interaction with many women-prisoners who have varied backgrounds. The similar kind of broadening of view can be traced in

[143]See for details, Joya Mitra, *Hanyaman,* (Calcutta: Dey's Publishing, 1989). This book is principally a memoir but more than talking about Joya's own life in jail it talks about the people she met during her years behind the bars. Joya is one of the major poets of current Bengali literature and this book won her critical acclaim as an author.

Meenakshi Sen's *Jailer Bhitor Jail* (Jail Within Jail)[144]. Meenakshi's narration of life-stories of several women is enriched with her own perception. She recalls many brave young women, who found their voice after interacting with women Naxalite activists like her. These two accounts reveal the gender bias of the penal system in which women prisoners on the whole were given unequal treatment. Though sometimes a distinct patronizing note can be felt in these books, where the interaction with other prisoners become only tales of lessons given by Naxalite women to these ordinary criminals, both Mitra and Sen stated in clear terms that the simple survival spirit of these women (non-Naxalites) were infectious, which could blur any theoretical boundaries they cherished before coming to jail.

These two narratives open up the entry point to the five narratives, which deal with narrators' involvement into the movement from their particular locations. Personal narratives are important as they cut across the distinction between discourse (in which events seem to tell themselves) and narrative (a manner of speaking characterized) where subjectivity of the author expresses it in terms of certain objective situations[145]. The author's subjective consciousness narrates certain events and so the reader can relate to them at an interpersonal level but at the same time events stand out in front of the reader, out of the narrators' interpretation. At this point Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's contention that first person narratives are impregnated with far more nuanced meanings than third person narratives, is important[146]. Spivak claims that in third person narratives, the narrator tells a story with all its tensions but does not get involved and that makes the narrative more susceptible to a seemingly neutral rendering based on reason. This

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[144] See for details, Meenakshi Sen, *Jeler Bhitor Jail* (Jail Within Jail), 2 vols., (Calcutta: Pratikshan Publications, 1994). Sen's portrayal of the inmates of Presidency Jail (Calcutta) shook the literary audience of Bengali with strong revelations of violence committed to the inmates right at the heart of Calcutta.

[145] See Hayden White, *The Content of the Form,* (Baltimmore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p-2 and 3. For Hayden White narrative is principally a meta-code, which must be taken as a multi-layered text and read to uncover the nuances of multi-dimensionality beyond its mesmerizing capacity of story-telling. In every form of narrative, a certain politics of telling the story takes its course and in that course of action reading must involve not only pointing out what is told, but also what is left out. While construction of narrative might seem 'complete', it depends on a specific choice of events to be told and thus locating the discontinuities creates insights into the nature of the very process of construction of the narrative. The subtext of this choice of events involves a strategy of legitimization and a historical narrative has, as its latent or manifest purpose the desire to moralize the events of which it treats. Thus analysis of any historical narrative must question in the beginning how and why certain events are remembered. See for details pp-1-25.

[146] See Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean (eds.) *The Spivak Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), pp-53-74.

submission to the monolithic macro-structure of rationality is partially absent in first person narratives. Since, in first person narratives the narrator is involved in the story, the micro-reference points of discreet events break the chain of a comfortable sequential rationalistic meaning structure. The embedded fluidity of meanings in first person narratives create layered understanding of events and endorses the existence of several points of departure for reason rather than a fixed one. Thus the micro/macro opposition gets blurred and the personal/political, private/public boundaries become less discernable. However, personal narratives are not a happy hunting ground for scattered innumerable meanings since personal narratives, especially memoirs depends on 'traces' of facts stored in memory. Thus Ricoeur's understanding of narratives, being one of the chief ways in which human beings cope with the experience of temporality, becomes important in analyzing personal narratives[147]. Personal narratives are at the same time history (as it depends on memory and events occurring in the narrator's life in the integrated context of the society) and imagination as it relates interpretation of the same events in the way Spivak argues about the fluidity of meanings inherent in that interpretation. Anthony Giddens' concept of discursive consciousness articulates that besides the ability of communicating the knowledge about social conditions, social actors have a reservoir of practical knowledge, which enable the actors to cope up with many social conditions but cannot be expressed[148]. Personal narratives illuminate some of these unexpressed areas as they amalgamate memory with imagination.

Joan Kelly's contention that it is not enough to restore women to history but must be substantiated by restoring history to women is a significant point of departure for the analysis of these personal narratives. Since restoring history to women involves a far more dialogic relationship between history writing and gender perspective,

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[147] Ricoeur's discussion of historical writing occurs in his major study *Time and Narrative*. Narrative, he argues, offers a practical solution to the aporias inherent in the subjective experience of time. He contends that memory perceives the present in a threefold consciousness where present, past and future interact. He makes the major difference between fictional and historical narratives that history relates a certain chronology of events on the basis of 'archival traces', where construction of these archival traces can be questioned and evaluated but in absence of any archival trace narrativisation becomes impossible. Moreover for him the first-order entities of a historical knowledge, despite being individuals refer to a collective entity since their existence and knowledge of the present create a bridge between individual and collectivity. See for details, Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* (3 vols. Chicago, 1984, 1985, 1988)

[148] See for details Anthony Giddens, Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis, (Delhi: Macmillan Press, 1979), pp-49-95.

is an important point of departure for this particular analysis[149]. In the context of Naxalbari movement it will never be sufficient to add the names of women activists, who are not included in many volumes, written on the movement, as, such a practice would fail to capture the subtext of their consciousness. Though the research involved in recovering the names of these activists is of immense value, it will only restore the 'lost' count of women but not their significance. Personal narratives give the opportunity to shed light on their version. These narratives encompass not only what these women did during this movement but also how they felt and what they thought. Experience enriched with retrospection has the quality of challenging even their activities in that period. The interaction between memory and imagination thus create the required multidimensionality of meanings in their identity, identification with that period and the consciousness level of their participation. In these life-stories the solid, uncontested, sanctioned macro-history of Naxalbari movement become porous with micro-reference of a very different aspect of challenging centuries of silence, not only from the aspect of class, but also from that of gender. For Hayden White a narrative has to have two different points of departure for meaning-structure inherent in it to qualify as a historical narrative[150]. Naxalbari movement's narrative has been articulated from the angle of political and ideological analysis but they rarely took account of gender in both these realms. So to move towards a more comprehensive understanding of this movement it is required not just to place women's history alongside men, but attend to the re-evaluations, reformulations and reorientations that it demands[151].

## 2

The narratives to be discussed here reflect on these dimensions and my focus is to put them under the spotlight of gender consciousness. Five women, Krishna (Burdawan, a

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[149] See for details Joan Kelly-Gadol, "The Social Relations of Sexes: Methodological Implications of Women's History", in *Feminism and Methodology* (ed.) Sandra Harding, (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Milton Keynes: Indiana University Press, Open University Press, 1987), pp.-15-28.

[150] See Hayden White, p-19

[151] Stree Shakti Sangathana, *'We were making history.....': Life stories of women in Telengana People's Struggle*, (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989) is one of the important pioneering studies in this direction.

big town in south of West Bengal and also a district headquarter), Krishna (Calcutta), Deepa, Aneeta and Rajlakshmi are the authors of these life-stories. Certain dimensions of these narratives emerge as points of reference for analysis. They belong to different age groups and the nature of their participation varies from active underground life as members of CPIML party to shelter-givers. Their socio-cultural background and the subsequent political consciousness, emerging from such social locations, have played a major role not only in their identification with the movement but with ideas about gender sensitivity, which was involved within the revolutionary politics of the movement. Situating the authors within their immediate milieu sets the perspective of their surroundings, which acted as catalysts between their selfhood and participation in the movement. However it has to be kept in mind that all these narratives are part memory and part introspection, written nearly three decades after the actual movement died down. At the time of writing these narratives Krishna (Burdawan) was around forty five years of age, Krishna (Calcutta) around fifty, Deepa around fifty, Aneeta seventy-five and Rajlakshmi eighty two[152]. The age of the authors are important to note since reminiscences of an explosive past after thirty years illuminate the present of these authors in a refractive manner. Sometimes they could not articulate all the turmoil they felt while baptizing the people in armed revolution but those inner confusions are expressed in these narratives and these kind of introspective descriptions are valuable for probing the dialogic relationship between the political worker and the movement.

Krishna (Burdawan, henceforth referred as B) grew up in a lower middle-class family. Her father fought in the anti-colonial struggle and so in her family there was an environment of political consciousness. "in my childhood I loved to listen to the stories of heroics of nationalists against the British from my father", with this statement Krishna reveals the ideas that nourished her young mind. She was influenced by the refugee crisis as she saw the daily struggles of the people living in the camps nearby her house[153]. "I was greatly influenced by the women of these uprooted families who struggled with the

[152] These narratives are collected by Kalpana Sen and published as an appendix of her essay 'PashchimBanglay Naxal Andolan-e Meyera' (Women in Naxalite Movement in West Bengal), in Maitrayee Chatterjee (ed.) *Esho Mukto Koro* (Let Us Be Free), (Calcutta: Peoples Book Society, 2001), pp-159-186. Appendix, pp-169-186. All the translations are mine.

[153] After the Partition of India in 1947, numerous refugee families from then East Pakistan now Bangladesh came and settled in West Bengal. Many of these families lived in camps and had to fend for their lives in an alien situation without any resource. Calcutta's suburban areas housed several refugee camps.

police and the strongmen of the local landlords"[154]. Her maternal uncles were members of different political parties, engaged in ushering in a new society. Her eldest maternal uncle was a member of 'Yugantar' group[155], who became a Gandhiite later. Her youngest maternal uncle was a member of Indian Communist party, which was then underground. "I first heard poet Sukanta's[156] writings from him". Her parents were always encouraging in making women self-reliant and educated.

Krishna (Calcutta, henceforth referred as C)'s background also shows a similar kind of an environment. She wrote about her life and experiences as a Naxalite activist in greater details later also. So in this discussion I shall draw not only from the short piece written in this essay but also from the enlarged version[157]. In her narrative a strong quest for identity as a woman can be located as she felt the discrimination on the basis of her sex from quite an early age in her family. The apparently normal practice of giving preference to young boys in the family hurt her little girl's mind as she groped for the cause of her humiliating condition. She recalls one such instance "from my childhood I have seen many social and religious festivals and ceremonies in our house. Quite obviously the center of such festivals and ceremonies were my brothers, uncles and other men. One ritual was throwing grains of barley in the morning of *Chaitra Sankranti*[158]. My paternal aunt (she was extremely beautiful but became a widow only after one year of married life and was dependent on her brothers for the rest of her life. She strictly followed all social codes though she herself was denied all kinds of enjoyment. Why she was like this I realized later but I shall talk about her later, not here.) used to give barley grains on one hand and ashes on the other hand, to all the young boys of the family and told them to throw barley for the friends and ashes for enemies in the front gate. One of my boy cousins was of my age and seeing barley and ashes in his hands I used to nag to make me a part of the ritual. "give these to my hands also, I shall throw them for friends

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[154] See ibid, p- 170.

[155] Yugantar was a nationalist association, which became a powerful political group in Bengal and led various anti-British movements since 1920s.

[156] Sukanta was a poet, greatly influenced by Marxist ideology. His poems became very popular and synonymous with the youth consciousness against colonial government and nationalist bourgeoisie. Though he died at a very young age in early 1950s his writings and poems have had a lasting impact on the student and youth of Bengal.

[157] This version, 'Abirata Larai' (Relentless Struggle) was published in a smaller magazine *Khonj Ekhon—Manabi Chetanar Patrika* (Search Today—a journal on women's consciousness) Summer 2002

[158] Chaitra Sankranti is a socio-religious festival on the last day of the Bengali calendar year.

and foes". My aunt, in her east Bengali dialect told indignantly "from when do women have friends and foes– they are not even complete human beings." Everybody used to laugh at her words, and I understood everybody felt like her. Tears used to come to my eyes. I always felt humiliated and wept secretly"[159]. Some of her uncles were related to the Communist Party and thus she grew up listening to the debates on the proletarian revolution. The events in North Bengal in 1967 generated frenzied discussions among her elders. She heard about the new concepts, read pamphlets and magazines. Though all of these concepts were not very clear to her, she was excited. Then she read a pamphlet on the condition of poor women and noticed that women's problems were being discussed from a different, more serious angles. This made her excitement a resolution and finally she became involved in Naxalite politics.

Deepa came from a relatively upper middle class family. She grew up in a joint family where there were nearly thirty-five family members. She was drawn into the Naxalite movement during her college days. She was a medical student and regular meetings of Naxalite activists in her college first attracted her to this movement. In her words "I always had an inclination to look at things from new angles. I became a medical student with a wish to serve people"[160]. Deepa's parents were quite liberal and she earned her father's affection as well as respect as she continued with her studies and refused to take allowance from her father. She had a very close relationship with her mother and her mother willingly supported her political activism. Her father was a staunch Congress follower since his participation in the anti-colonial struggle. Her father commented on her politics as "Communism is not bad, you have chosen the wrong time"[161], but never deterred his daughter from her own chosen path. Deepa rarely had any interaction with her extended family and so could immerse herself in her politics. In her narrative the refrain of her father's fierce pride in his daughter's courage to choose a political path of sacrifice reveals the tender side of the father-daughter relationship but at the same time a reading against the grain points at her longing for paternalistic approval for her actions.

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[159] See 'Abirata Larai' (Relentless Struggle) in *Khonj Ekhon—Manabi Chetanar Patrika* (Search Today—a journal on women's consciousness) Summer 2002, p-86

[160] See Kalpana Sen , 'PashchimBanglay Naxal Andolan-e Meyera' (Women in Naxalite Movement in West Bengal), in Maitrayee Chatterjee (ed.) *Esho Mukto Koro* (Let Us Be Free), p-178

[161] See ibid, p-180

There is no scope to derive a fairly detailed understanding of Aneeta's and Rajlakshmi's backgrounds as they do not talk about their childhood or young age but the crisp depiction of their nature of participation in the movement as shelter-givers shows the development of a distinct political consciousness based on the value of serving the poor from their activist children and other activist friends of their children. They come from lower middle-class families, where women of their age and role had no option to talk about politics and ideology, but their chance involvement in the movement depict their ability to absorb ideological principles in the light of their vast reservoir of everyday knowledge.

Self-perception of these women both as a woman and as a revolutionary activist formulates the next important theme of analysis of their narratives in the perspective of their respective backgrounds. In Krishna (B)'s narrative except for her mentioning of her drawing inspiration from the struggles of refugee women and her parents' liberal attitude towards women's self-reliance and education her gender identity is almost invisible. She never mentions her difficulties as a woman participant in the movement, whether within the party or in the larger society apart from a single sentence "in underground life, which was full of doubt and indecision there were certain difficulties as a woman. As the party had no mass-based political agenda, there were no definite work for women"[162]. It seems accepted in her narrative that women would face complexities as political workers in such a secret organization but she does not give details of such a precondition. Thus from her narrative it is not possible to obtain any analytical point into the gender issues involved in Naxalite politics. But a significant derivation can be a considerable absence of gender sensitivity even among the women participants themselves. Since her piece is a personal narrative and not an examination of the nature of women's participation, it can also be thought that as she did not face any overt discrimination or never felt like being discriminated against, she does not mention about this dimension. However, her self-perception as a revolutionary activist is replete with a reproach towards the mode of violence in Naxalite movement. "My life in underground has no appeal for me now. My daughter has asked several times to tell her about those days. But I felt choked while telling her. Excluding the painful memories of

[162] See, Kalpana Sen, p-172

sacrifice, death and the police trails there are nothing fruitful...I want to forget that once I was a part of the 'annihilation line' of killing individual people"[163]. Despite her critique of the particular politics of the movement she has not lost faith in the overall appeal of people's emancipation through Marxist ideology and continues to be a part of a marginal group called *Mazdur Mukti* (Labour Liberation). Thus her self perception as an activist has undergone a qualitative change in terms of deciding the mode of operation of an ideology but she remains firmly rooted in her identification with the cause which at one point of time inspired her to be involved in Naxalite movement.

Krishna(C)'s self perception as a woman and as a revolutionary activist is almost intertwined. From her narration it becomes quite clear that one of the major factors of her participation in the movement was her hope to realize women's position in society by creating a new society. She believed in being active in the party as a woman comrade, not by demanding any differential treatment but by raising the issues related with gender. She and some other fellow women activists did an 'action' in a local school on Lenin's birthday by writing slogans on the walls, reciting Sukanta's poem on Lenin and by giving a short speech on the hypocrisy of celebrating Gandhi's and Lenin's birthdays at the same time. They did not blast bombs or smash the photographs of revered nationalist leaders but their daredevilry created a ripple in the neighbourhood. But no daily newspaper, be it bourgeois or revolutionary considered it news worthy. Krishna felt cheated as she thought this independent action, which did not spill blood but involved a strong protest would catch the attention of the people. She wanted to be recognized by her enemies–the bourgeois and the police. She and her comrades expected that they would be taken seriously both by the police and the party after this 'action'. But the inattention led her to think that it was still a tall order to achieve for women activists though their 'action' required same amount of courage and determination that young men in several colleges were showing in same kinds of actions and creating headlines.

She was following the orders of creating class consciousness among village women but could feel that mere lecturing on class theory was deficient without an in depth understanding of socio-cultural embeddedness of land and property-ownership systems in villages. She recalls "I went to a village as a friend of one of the village young

[163] See Sen, p-172

women.....then one day the local 'jotedar' (landlord) saw me. I was terrified– I must have committed a grave mistake. The party will terribly suffer.....but the woman, who was my friend told me "don't be afraid. If a woman like you are hiding, there will be a constant fear that somebody will see you. Let me introduce you to him." She went up to the man and told him that I was her student (she used to teach in a local school). The man was pretty satisfied and just said 'oh, I see.' The matter was settled quite peacefully. We used to think that all the village people would have a class hatred against the landlords– that they would like to see the landlord's blood at any point of time– it was not at all like that. The landlords were well off and that might have caused resentment but I do not know whether that was class hatred. They used to call that landlord 'grandpa' and he also used to go to their houses and chat up...he used to tell Kanak (my friend's elder sister) 'do not forget you are my bride'. In this simple shared joke there was a true grandpa-grand daughter relationship– not any intention of forcing the women into sexual submission...I am not saying that the landlords were not repressive but we never thought about the nuances of the landlord-tenant relationship....I did not protest regarding this issue within the party but could sense that was a gross misunderstanding"[164]. Krishna was romantically involved with another activist Dronacharya Ghosh. In both of her narratives her love for Dronacharya is expressed with sincerity and passion. Dronacharya was killed during a jailbreak in 1972. She was heartbroken but continued with her activism. At the fag end of the movement in '72 Krishna was hiding from police and trying to organize the fragmented parts of what once was CPIML. "at that time my role was to inspire other comrades as the wife of a martyred comrade. Dronacharya's death gave me a new 'status' in party and there was an environment, which emphasized that he should be the 'only' man in my life. So nobody could accept my second relationship....I was angry and hurt and said–do you want to go to pre-Vidyasagar period? Now I understand why the head of his statue was demolished[165]. My comrades did not take this remark lightly but after that

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[164] See Sen, p-175

[165] Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-1891) was one of the leading social reformers and an educationist. He was at the forefront of introduction of modern education for women in colonial Bengal. He was the principal supporter of John Bethune in establishing Hindu Female School, the first girls' school in Bengal in 1849-50. His relentless struggle to make widow-remarriage socially acceptable and legal succeeded in 1856 when British Government passed the widow-remarriage act. During Naxalite movement iconoclasm was a principal mode of defying colonial modernity as a decadent bourgeois reformist movement and the head of Vidyasagar's statue in Calcutta was demolished. It can be argued that these reform movements were translated into 'civilising mission' of the colonial master on one hand and on the other were appropriated by the nationalist patriarchy to superimpose its enlightened benevolence. Neither recognized women's active agency in producing a fitting response to these initiatives.

nobody talked about this"[166]. Krishna confessed in her narrative that she did not feel comfortable to go into these personal details but she feels that it is necessary to understand the moral stagnation among the Naxalite activists. She recalls an incident of alleged sexual harassment of a woman comrade by a male comrade. As they used to sleep in the same room in a shelter one woman was sexually assaulted at night by the man lying next to her. This caused a wave of revulsion among everybody else and in a meeting the assaulted woman asked for that male comrade's death as the punishment for this 'heinous crime'. There seemed to be an unquestioned agreement among all the others. But Krishna felt that they were getting unnecessarily bloodthirsty and asked for some other less violent punishment. She became the target of wrath instantly for her lenience but she said firmly if sexual assault could be a crime to be punished by death there were many other male comrades present in that meeting who deserved that. The meeting fell silent as nobody could meet her eyes. " I said it as a representative of all the women activists because I knew many women had such unpleasant experience. A male comrade told me softly–where did you get such courage, but anyway be careful afterwards"[167]. However there had been other instances of loving camaraderie among male and female comrades and Krishna herself had many such memories. In different occasions she played the role of a 'wife' in shelters to male comrades to shake off police trail. In these situations she never felt insecure or vulnerable to sexual assault. Thus the experiences of the women activists are varied under different conditions–the threat to their sexual autonomy was not totally absent but such a threat was neither all pervasive nor restricted their movements all the times. The remarkable aspect of this particular narrative is that it takes account of both the aspects and tries to evaluate why in certain circumstances the threat was felt and in certain situations that could be easily avoided. The question was whether that depended entirely on persons involved or whether the structures and attitude of the party had a role to play. At the end of her narrative she asks the vital question why women comrades could never attain the same respect in the party, why they could not reach the positions of decision-making in either theoretical or practical fields of action and feels that such questions require serious analytical attention in the light of their experiences as part of the Naxalbari movement. If they could attend to

[166] See Krishna Bandopadhyaya, "Abirata larai" (Relentless Struggle), p-95
[167] Ibid, p-97-8

these questions at that point of time "then the history of Naxalbari would have been different"[168].

In Deepa's narrative the gender issue is discussed with an instance of harassment she recalls "....we were told by the party to go to the villages and create 'bases' of action. But there was no clear order how to create them. We were only told to go and create bases according to our capacities. Actually it meant to enter the villages by befriending the women vendors, who used to come to the city regularly. I had a shock in the beginning– how could I remove the urbanity from my countenance! .....on Bongan railway line there is a small town–Machhlandpur. There I went to a woman vegetable vendor's house by an evening train...her family was extremely welcoming and she herself was very nice. An urban lady has come to their house–in the beginning her husband was a little hesitant. But they decided to keep me in as much comfort as they could. Though they knew why I was there, they could not think we would be really able to help them....they were very poor....at night I slept in a room next to their room...it had no doors–late at night two men came to my room and one of them clasped my throat. I got up and tried to scream. All of the women vendor's family came from the next room. Nobody could understand why these two men came. Whether they had any political intention or wanted to rape me remained unclear. The very next morning the husband saw me off in the first train and I never again went to work in the villages"[169]. She felt that the party was not enough concerned about the safety and honour of the women activists. "I can talk about women– where they were staying–they could have been victims of rape at any shelter. There was no political analysis of these kinds of difficulties.....I had an easy friendship with all comrades. In some cases the men shelter-givers behaved badly and party did not take notice of that." Her experience about working in the village and anger towards the party for not being concerned enough about women's honour (she uses the term *izzat*) speaks about her (and many others like her) notion of women's participation in a revolutionary movement without seriously questioning her identity, not only as a city-bred youth but also a woman, who has enjoyed a certain kind of respect in upper-middleclass Bengali society. The limitation of realizing gender identity only through the

[168] Ibid, p-100
[169] See, Kalpana Sen, p-179

instances of harassment actually paralyses critical inquiry about women's role in a movement, which aspires to change the entire society.

In Aneeta and Rajlaksmi's narratives there are no direct references of their gender identity but a firm conviction to support the movement, as individual sympathizers can be located. Both of them refer to their role as shelter-givers as their choice, not being forced by anybody else. Their command over their decision to make the households shelter for runaway Naxalite activists becomes clearer when they faced police raids and threats with guile and dignity, without ever divulging any details which they knew. Both of them became involved in the movement through their children, who were activists. Rajlakshmi's husband was also an activist but from her narrative it can be derived that though initially she had no choice but to let her husband's and children's friends to come and stay at her house she felt proud of these young men and women, when she came to know about their activities and welcomed their stay wholeheartedly. But she did not flinch from asserting her own thoughts while talking to them. It is true that both of them felt motherly compassion for those who stayed at their homes but their mother roles were inspiring in combating state terror that descended upon all those who were involved in the movement.

The language of all these pieces follows almost oral form– short, brisk sentences, often the temporal dimension moves back and forth though a chronology is distinguishable. Such a style does not seem deliberate as none of the narrators are directly linked to the production of literature. Their writing communicates exactly the way they talk in a conversation. In almost all these pieces a passionate involvement with the promises of social change and a certain standard of social values can be located. Quite predictably the movement was a point of departure from ordinary everyday life for all these women but they react to the politics of Naxalbari (both in terms of gender politics and party decisions) very differently. For Krishna (Burdawan) Naxalbari movement was the inspiration to question status-quo, to challenge establishment. Though she very clearly dissociates with its politics of violence now she salutes the encouragement it gave her to dream of a new social order and continues to work towards the fruition of that dream. In Krishna (Calcutta)'s piece the critique of Naxalite politics comes alive with all her personal relationships, where gender plays a major role. Her language resonates with

controlled anguish that even the most progressive revolutionary party could not come out of patriarchal mode. 'Women' as a category and as a consciousness is woven in the entire text of her narrative. In Deepa's case the honour of women becomes the focus of criticism on gender insensitivity within the party. Thus in spite of her revolutionary role during the movement and pioneering contribution to the 'freedom for Naxalite prisoners' movement in the period of Emergency, the limitation of perception and awareness about women's position in society among women party members lies exposed. The narratives of elderly shelter-givers are extremely short. These narratives hardly capture the background of these women but their level of consciousness comes crystal clear in these sentences– Aneeta, who was 75 years old when she was writing this piece, writes "Gradually I realized they were revolutionaries, fighting to change the society"– the association of revolution with rapid social change and welcoming that turbulence speak about Aneeta's political maturity. She ends with "Those in opposition have power, money and arms. Still.....some of them are trying even now and I support them. I wish they become successful"[170]. Rajlakshmi was 82 years old and she writes, "Then I understood. They were Naxalites. Struggling for the country". Thus Joya Mitra's contention that the Naxalites had place in the hearts of the millions is complemented by Aneetas's and Rajlakshmi's statements that the movement succeeded in associating Naxalite dream of revolutionary social change with the country's progress even among these lower-middle class, so-called apolitical minds of middle-aged women. The reader can almost touch the existence of mothers of 1083, 1084 and many more thousands of martyrs. These narratives stand in stark contrast with Keralite woman Naxalite activist K.Ajitha's "Reminiscences from Wynad"[171], where she wrote that women shelter-givers were very active in providing food and shelter but had no interest in the issues involved and "they took their involvement in this movement as their fate"[172]. In quite stark contrast to Ajitha's experiences, Aneeta writes, "I did not like some of their activities. Like vandalizing the statues, burning down of schools and colleges as bourgeois educational institutions. I told them– you have to come in public view. Otherwise how the people

[170] See Sen, p-184
[171] See K.Ajitha "Reminiscences from Wynad" in Ilina Sen (ed.) *A Space Within the Struggle*, (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1990), pp-19-24.
[172] Ibid, p-24

would know you? They listened– we never had any uncomfortable disagreement. I became one of them while providing shelter. I was a part of the highs and lows in their lives"[173].

## 3

All the three active participants in the movement, Krishna (B), Krishna (C) and Deepa have expressed strong critique of the violent mode of operation, particularly the political line of annihilation of 'class-enemies'[174] in their narratives. This critical note is the point of departure for an analytical overview of all these narratives in the perspective of interaction between Marxism and Feminism, both at the international level and the Indian scenario. None of them however have disapproved of armed revolution but they emphasize on the mass involvement in taking up arms against the state, not creating an atmosphere of political murders committed by one group of revolutionaries. This dimension reflects the nature of their political maturity and socio-cultural consciousness. Here it is not being argued that women have a natural aversion to violence or had they been at the decision-making level of CPIML they would have chosen a much more explicitly peaceful method to bring revolution, but rather their conscious critical evaluation of a political line deployed at a juncture of the Naxalbari movement.

Krishna (B) writes, "Naxalite politics pointed out the ills of revisionism. It taught us to protest against parliamentarism. But it was suicidal for the movement to avoid mass base. Charu Mazumdar's authoritative leadership took away the

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[173] See Sen, p-184

[174] The political line of annihilation of class enemies in reality generated a lot of criticism within CPIML but Charu Mazumdar held on to the view that until and unless the class enemies are annihilated one by one there cannot be liberation. He wrote, "It must be understood that the battle of annihilation is both a higher form of class struggle and the starting point of guerrilla war.....Without class struggle–the battle of annihilation–the initiative of the poor peasant masses cannot be released, the political consciousness of the fighters cannot be raised.....Only by waging class struggle–battle of annihilation–the new man will be created....who will defy death.....That inspires and creates new men out of the fighters, fills them with class hatred and makes them go close to the enemy and snatch his rifle with bare hands". See 'Comrade Charu Mazumdar's speech introducing the Political-Organizational Report at the Party Congress', in *Liberation*, vol. 3, Nos. 7-9 (May July 1970).

rationalist philosophical base from the party's rank and file[175]. The party leadership told us that one could become a revolutionary after reading three articles by Mao-tse-Tung and writings of Charu Mazumdar.–This kind of approach blocked the way to develop political analysis, to develop a culture of discussion and debate. I evaluate the Naxalbari Movement and CPIML party separately. Naxalbari movement took a form of rebellion, which drew a rough sketch of emancipation in front of the youth...provided with an indomitable courage to demolish structure of repression embodied in the government"[176].

For her the CPIML party line of 'battle of annihilation' failed to give a proper direction to this movement as it failed to develop mass base, became alienated from workers as well as from the people by and large of rural areas. She felt that the very movement, which gave the youth to question all kind of establishment, could not face challenges from within as it forbade questioning the leadership. Her realization came much later and then she felt that to participate further in politics she would have to start from scratch again. This is a vital realization since her question is not only towards a few orders given by the leadership but to the entire conceptualization of the mode of political action required to bring revolution in a particular society. Krishna supports the political culture of debate within the organization and putting this larger theme within the context of gender can provide for some answers towards the major inadequacy in dealing with the gender dimension on the whole in radical Marxist social movement strategy. Though she has never mentioned gender as a possible separate area of discussion, it can be derived if gender is made out as a distinct quarter of argument in the perspective of political action she would have considerable insights to offer.

Resonance of the same kind of critique of CPIML can be located in Krishna (C)'s narrative. Her detailed descriptions of the months spent among peasants, sharing of their sorrows and anger bring out the picture of a dedicated political worker but her dedication was not unquestioned. She felt uneasy with the annihilation line and though her lover and comrade Dronacharya Ghosh urged her to become a

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[175] I am not exactly sure what she means by 'rationalist philosophical base' but I imagine that she wants to point at the absence of critical evaluation of theoretical issues involved in conducting the movement when Charu Mazumdar declared that guerrilla actions must start from a conspiratory style, without involving even the political meetings of the party units. (See Charu Mazumdar, "Notes on Guerrilla Action" in *Deshabrati*, 15th January, 1970). Such a mode of revolutionary action very quickly alienated not only the people from the movement but dissociated different party units from each other.

[176] See Sen, p-171

pioneer for women by leading an action and killing a class-enemy, she found no analytical support to just become a 'pioneer'. Krishna's gender consciousness was quite developed as she could feel the discrimination within the party and resented the absence of women in the leadership. But she could not lead an 'annihilation action' to prove to the party that women were capable of such masculine roles. This was not meekness or submission to the party leadership but a deeper political analytical realization of being alienated from the people for whom they were accepting all the hardships. She felt that often the peasants, whom they thought would be their allies in leading guerrilla actions, were the informers of the police as many of the peasantry became insecure after such actions by CPIML cadres. Krishna did not blame this apprehension as timidity or lack of class-consciousness but tried to get into the root of the culturally embedded social psyche of these people. The haste of CPIML leadership to make the 1970s the decade of liberation could not accommodate critical, poised voices like hers[177]. She was delighted as she was beginning to be successful in following Mao-tse-Tung's ideal of becoming a part of the people just the same as a fish in water. She was sharing the life of the village women and they were trusting her but she felt the lack of understanding among her comrades to build up this relationship of trust on a long-term basis and that partly answered her own doubt about why they were failing to gather sustained help from the peasants. After Dronacharya was arrested and tortured she was completely devastated and then she accounts, "I thought there must be something terribly wrong. We are losing many people like Dronacharya one after another. I could understand that for liberation there must be sacrifices made for that cause, but at that point I could not find any cause for these sacrifices"[178]. Thus it becomes clear that she was not only questioning the party line for annihilation campaign but also the huge losses of human life that the party had to suffer as a retaliation from the state and bourgeoisie for adopting this line. It must be kept in mind that all her doubts were surfacing not in the safe shelter of home or in the secure democratic set up of political debate but in a life fraught with danger, continuous running from one place to another to shake off police trail, and arranging meetings among the

[177] Charu Mazumdar wrote an article in *Liberation*, February 1970, titled "Make the 1970s the Decade of Liberation", where he urged the revolutionaries to shake off all doubts and plunge into action just with sheer determination and class hatred against the enemies of the people.
[178] See Sen, p-176

people of the villages where she was working. These doubts have concretized her present critique. Krishna was arrested around 1973-4. She suffered torture and was in jail for years. She has now moved away from active politics and is not attached with Naxalite groups. She edits a journal on gender issues and concentrates on political analysis of present scenario.

Deepa has not given any direct critique of CPIML party line of annihilation of class-enemies, probably because she was more involved in the publication of pamphlets rather than organizing action squads in villages, but she also recounts, "then it used to said that we must become a part of working class. God knows how far away they were"[179]. Her experience in the publication section of the party was also not completely free from questions, as she felt that many issues were being written without proper analysis. "Then we started publishing some leaflets–though they had very little similarity with the party line they were being circulated as the writings of Charu Mazumdar. There was some discussions around that–dissent was there regarding such leaflets. But I could not gather why such things were happening–first of all nobody knew and there was no suitable answer to these questions. At that time an incident took place in Keshpur[180]–one of our party comrades was suspected and killed. Naturally I wanted to know which was the actual party line and which was not. There was a sense of insecurity. But if I had put up these questions I did know how I would have been treated"[181].

From all these nascent doubts and debates in the rank and file of CPIML, it can be gathered that the party was heading for a political crisis. However, the result of this crisis has been dealt with later in the numerous formal and informal gatherings of the activists after the dust settled on the movement in post-Emergency period. But the answers they sought did not exactly include the questions based on gender aspect and put across by the women activists of the movement. I would like to stress in this context that the women activists were not thinking any differently regarding the stifling authoritative political culture of CPIML and they were as politically matured as male activists to feel and sometimes articulate their doubts to the leadership. Thus there was nothing naturally feminine in their conduct against violence or destruction of life but

[179] See Sen, p-179
[180] Keshpur is a small town in Medinipur district in south of West Bengal.
[181] See Sen, p-180

rather critical views. It must be kept in mind that their participation in a movement fraught with political violence and their subsequent critique of violence neither emerge from their instinctive non-violence nor their irrational thirst for blood at a particular point of time and then becoming conscientious. This disrupts the common metonymical chain of femininity/peace/submission and leads us to explore the split image of womanhood, divided between dangerous/submissive categories[182]. Mystifying womanhood as either benevolent or terrifying (but always unreasonable, irrational, impulsive) has been one of the strands of scholarship on South Asian women[183]. In this image, which is principally drawn from the myths, violence is attached to the terrifying category of women and their penchant for violence is explained as an innate trait of character rather than a quality to evaluate the necessity of the situation and then selecting the violent mode of action. This process of selection is not an easy one since the legacies of the myths produce a particular socio-cultural situation where women continuously go through a cultural reproduction of being associated with peace and submission. The historicity of women's participation in radical political action, often embracing violence as the chief form of operation, from the days of anti-colonial struggle, reveal that women activists in such movements have underwent psychologically traumatic conditions of choice while associating themselves with these movements and trying hard to prove themselves worthy of such movements. I would like to cite an instance from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay " Can the Subaltern Speak?"– " A young woman of sixteen or seventeen, Bhuvaneshwari Bhaduri, hanged herself in her father's modest apartment in north Calcutta in 1926. The suicide was a puzzle since, as Bhuvaneshwari was menstruating at that time, it was clearly not a case of illicit pregnancy. Nearly a decade later, it was discovered that she was a member

[182] Understanding of womanhood as an essentialist category, with distinguishable marks of behaviour and thought process has come under serious scrutiny since the oppositional categories of man/woman, where woman is exactly what a man is not and vice versa, fail to capture the multiplicity of meanings embedded in realization and experience of these identities. The myth of Indian womanhood, as a singular expression of Indian women has become a site of challenge in recent decades, since it forecloses the multiplicity residing in a vast range of experiences. This multiplicity is manifested through various forms of agency, acting sometimes overtly and sometimes covertly; to give expression to otherwise silenced voices. See Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (eds.) *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, (Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989) for detailed analysis of the women's question in colonial period and also see Mary E. John and Janaki Nair (eds.) *A Question of Silence: The Sexual Economies of Modern India,* (Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998) for an understanding of sexuality and particularly female sexuality in independent India.

[183] For a short and succinct discussion on this split image see A.G. Raheja, and G.G. Gold, *Listen to the Heron's Words*, (Delhi: OUP, 1996), pp-30-38.

of one of the many groups involved in the armed struggle for Indian independence. She had finally been entrusted with a political assassination. Unable to confront the task and yet aware of the practical need for trust, she killed herself"[184]. Spivak has interpreted her suicide to locate her effort to reinscribe her sexual agency in her body as she unsettled the generalized sanctioned motive for female suicide (she was not married so she knew her death would be immediately diagnosed as an outcome of illegitimate passion) by choosing the period of her menstruation to commit suicide and thereby emphasizing existence of other forms of passion in a woman's life. Her death rewrote the text of women's agency at a particularly volatile political moment. But, as Spivak puts the question——Bhuvaneshwari's rewriting got lost in the hegemonic binary image of womanhood, where woman is either the nurturing mother or the blood thirsty *shakti*. Ultimately the woman as a subaltern continues to be mute and invisible. This very point of disruption (or the futility of it) in a straight jacketed binary of femininity provides with an entry-point into the realm of female sexuality, which has been another important area of debate, never really openly discussed but always acting as a subtext to the nature of participation of women in the movement. The sexuality debate, seen from the angle of sexual harassment (as this has been the notable theme about any discussion on sexuality, clearly shown in the personal narratives) initiates a serious probe into a significant point of interaction between Marxism and Feminism. Moreover Spivak's point of emphasizing of women's agency and particularly sexual agency attributes this discussion with an aspect of decision-making, which is not always overt.

Sexuality has become a significant theme of political movements and academic discourses as women's rights over their mind and body is becoming more and more a central point of concern. However as Mary John and Janaki Nair have pointed out "...feminism in India has overwhelmingly highlighted women as victims. Women have been victims of patriarchal sexual practices, whether through the exploitation of the landlords, during caste atrocities, in marital rape, in state policies concerning reproduction or as bearers of the violent marks of political change"[185], the resonance of

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[184] See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak "Can the Subaltern Speak" in C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1988) pp-271-313.
[185] See Mary E. John and Janaki Nair "An Introduction" in Mary E. John and Janaki Nair (eds.) *A Question of Silence: The Sexual Economies of Modern India*, p-9.

the same metonymic chain equating femininity/victimhood/submission can be found in the present discourse on women's rights in India. Thus though the issue of sexual harassment of women activists by the state and sometimes by their male comrades (as Deepa and Krishna C's narratives point out) can be an entry-point to the theme of sexuality, Spivak's interpretation of sexual agency must substantiate the theme from a different angle. Here female sexual agency must not define itself as against male sexuality but emerge a disruption to the entire discourse of such binaries.

A century of feminist discourse on sexuality have produced an array of questions and Carole Vance argues that from these questions what has emerged as the hallmark of sexuality is its complexity–the multiple layers of meaning entrenched in the experiences, ideas and attitudes towards sexuality. Rather than creating a moral panic by vilifying male sexuality as lustful and female sexuality as an object of women's honour, which has to be preserved and protected, it is necessary to take account of both pleasures and dangers involved in sexuality[186]. From the early periods of Feminist movement female sexuality became a topic of debate as the sexual autonomy of a woman was an intensely contested ground (issues of wage labour, contraception, abortion were bitterly fought over). Against the discourse of autonomy the dangers of sexual assault were repeatedly emphasized. As women began to speak out about rape, harassment and sexual violence, the threat of sexual attack served as a powerful reminder of patriarchal structures. "The cultural mythology surrounding sexual violence provided a unique and powerful route for it to work its way into the heart of female desire"[187]. Unfortunately the feminist debates have not concentrated on encountering such threats roundly but in many cases have crystallized the dangerous image of male sexual lust and vulnerability of female sexual desire if it is represented without reservation. As a result female desire is a suspect from the beginning–questionable until proven safe and harps on the victim theme when assaulted rather than arguing from a point of view of right. In Marxist Feminist discourse sexuality has been principally addressed by questions of reproduction, resulting a whole debate on reproduction being taken as a part of production process. Rarely one comes across writings on sexual rights for pleasure (here pleasure indicates at dislocating

[186] See Carole Vance, "Pleasure and Danger: Towards a Politics of Sexuality" in Carole S. Vance (ed.) *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), pp-1-27.
[187] See, Vance, p-3

the inexorable link between sexuality and reproduction) or personal narratives like Alexandra Kollontai's "The Autobiography of a Sexually Emancipated Communist Woman". In India, women in Marxist movements have scarcely concentrated on this issue, considering it as only secondary to real, material problems of poverty, dispossession and repression. But in doing so they fail to take account of the fact that the issue of sexuality is not a merely cultural issue but is a part of the larger debates on women's rights and women's agency. Judith Butler has pointed out in her essay 'Merely Cultural' that the regulation of sexuality was systematically deployed to the reproduction of the normative heterosexuality serving as a corner stone of the gender discriminatory political economy[188].

In case of Naxalite movement the women tasted sexual freedom in many ways as they broke down the structures of arranged marriage, familial ideology, religious restrictions and even they knew that their political involvement might lead to sexual violence like rape, harassment by the police and opposition but did not step back from their commitment to the ideology of people's revolution. But the rooted insecurity of being sexually vulnerable could not entirely be fought over. It cannot be expected that each one of them would be as sexually emancipated as women like Krishna (C) was, who dares to question the patriarchal attitude of the comrades in times of crisis and did not flinch from being stigmatized by her fellow revolutionaries after she accepted a second relationship as her first relationship ended in the death of her lover. From Deepa's account of her single visit to a village to build up peasant support and her hasty flight after she was attacked by two men reveals how deep-rooted the sexual insecurities were and that not every woman activist was ready to sacrifice honour for the revolution. The inspiration of Naxalbari movement to question every establishment is reiterated in their personal narratives. But rarely the theme of sexuality comes up as a possible area of establishment to be severely questioned and critiqued though as far as Deepa's case suggests that sexual vulnerability restricted the mobility and subsequently actions of many women activists. Thus it appears that the realm of sexuality played a major role in

[188] Judith Butler wrote "Merely Cultural" in *New Left Review*, Jan-Feb, 1998, pp-33-44, to answer the critique posed against her treatment of the question of sexuality. She argued that sexuality must not be dismissed as something trivial or, to use Marxist terminology, superstructural, which her critics hinted at, and showed the intimate relationship between political economy and the question of sexuality.

allocating tasks for men and women activists–and immediately the much-debated topic of division of labour, which can be addressed more generally as 'work' becomes important.

Marxist feminism concentrated on conceptualization of domestic labour and women's wage labour to approach the issue of work and that has yielded many fruitful insights in reviewing the intersection points between Marxism and Feminism. However, the division of labour within the Marxist and socialist parties was rarely put under scrutiny. In her "Introduction" to *Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism* Lydia Sargent asked a simple question–during the 1960s, which was a period of resurgence of Marxism as a theoretical premise and Marxism and feminism began interaction from the changing conceptual frameworks in both the paradigms—the important questions of political struggle were to stop U.S imperialism and the struggle of the working class to overthrow capitalism; but nobody asked who cleans the office of these Marxist parties, who serves the tea during meetings and who takes care of the nourishment and health of the struggling activists. The male comrades appreciated women's work but hardly ever extended a helping hand. Beginning with these apparently trivial issues the stark division of labour within the Marxist parties easily continued the binaries of mind/body, housework/professional work on the basis of masculine/feminine. It went without challenge that male revolutionaries would go and change the world for the better while their women comrades would help them in such a task by serving them timely meals, supplying them with required emotional energy and extending help in not-so-dangerous (most often that is translated into not-so-important) tasks like checking proofs of the leaflets, organizing other women in their 'supportive' role and generally rallying behind their male comrades into the streets when the need will be felt. Thus it did not change the image of womanhood drastically by investing or even allowing practice of agency, of choice, however limited they might be. Issues of gender were always kept at the fag end of the discussions and regarded as compensations to the more vociferous women activists, who did not submit to the greater cause without making their voices heard.

The history of women in Left movement in India often reiterates the same culture of silence. Amrita Basu has done an evaluative critique of Left women's

movement in West Bengal in her *Two Faces of Protest*[189]. She argues that CPIM has deliberately blunted the radicalism on gender issues while blaming the lack of revolutionary options due to structural constraints. For Basu the women activists of present Left look much tepid in comparison to their 1940s counterparts. She claims ".....they clearly struggled harder to resolve contradictions between their public and private roles."[190] The first generation communist men and women attempted to organize their personal lives in an emancipated fashion. Breaking with traditional practice, they rejected arranged marriages, lavish weddings and dowry and often married across caste and religion. But the CPI increasingly absorbed dominant cultural values once it became incorporated within the formal political arena. In Gita Mukherjee's view, from the 1950s the CPI undermined the autonomy of mass organizations among women and other groups relying upon them. This had a direct relationship with electoral politics since challenging patriarchal systems openly could result in massive failure in elections. Thus in West Bengal gradually, even with two splits in Communist Party of India, women's movement in public became reduced to mobilization during political crises. However, keeping in mind the power held by CPIM in West Bengal for the last thirty years, the shift in the gender-based movement must be understood in terms of the changing scenario of parliamentary democracy in India. PBGMS (Pashchim Banga Ganatantrik Mahila Samity), the largest women's forum in West Bengal, led by CPIM, has shown its spirit of survival, through its journey from the days of anti-colonial struggle in pre-independence India (MARS) to the present context, where it has the ability to reach many distant corners of Indian society. This has been possible due to Left participation in electoral politics and emanating a certain political culture. But the success of Left women's movement cannot overshadow its failure in making gender a theoretical issue and building up of bigger women's forum, which are not mere auxiliaries to the main party. Raka Ray's exposition on women's movement in Calcutta under CPIM rule also reveals the subordinated state of women's organization and mobilization[191]. Through a comparative analysis of an independent women's group, based in Calcutta, *Sachetana* and PBGMS, Ray tries to show the limitations of both the forums. Whereas in *Sachetana* the members are more conscious about the theoretical issues involved in women's

[189] See Amrita Basu, *Two faces of Protest: Contrasting Modes of Women's Activism in India*, (Delhi: OUP, 1993), pp-54-78.
[190] Ibid, pp-55-57
[191] See Raka Ray, *Fields of Protest: Women's Movements in India*, (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1999), pp-45-101.

movement their reach is only within middle-class, urban, educated women; PBGMS does not have the authority to challenge the party in issues of gender insensitivity within the party. While *Sachetana* possesses the cultural capital as its members include leading academics, PBGMS has gained popularity and resources to reach women living below the marks of middle class. The dividing line between cultural and other resources has crippled the overall women's movement as no fruitful mutual solution could be reached. PBGMS activists are passionate and disciplined about their mission of achieving emancipation of women but the organization lacks the necessary autonomy. Ray conducted several interviews with PBGMS women, among whom some admitted having family problems. But prodding them to talk about these problems as theoretical issues, which are required to be addressed by a communist party, yielded no results. These women gently but firmly added that these were their personal battles. In an interview, a young PBGMS activist told "....my in-laws are nice but they cannot stand what I do, even though they are a political family"[192]. She decided to continue with her political activism in spite of her in-laws disapproval but this is a personal struggle for her and she refused to discuss it further. She added later in the interview "this is a fight *I* have to fight". Though many of these women acknowledged that they had supportive husbands, who were liberal enough to encourage them in political activism, sharing of domestic labour, sharing of traumas in confronting patriarchy in the public arena were not very common. Even the issue of domestic violence gets sidelined, when a male party-worker is involved. These women still do not question the party, though it cannot be called a total absence of consciousness. Long back in 1944, during the Tebhaga movement a peasant woman activist's question rocked the party– she asked in a party meeting to her leaders "comrade, does the party have any rules for men, who hit and abuse their women? Why should my comrade at home hit me? I want redress"[193]. Sadly, these voices have become rarer today. This situation is hardly different form that of 19th century 'reform movements' where benevolent patriarchs were eager to uplift women from their plight but turned away from realizing equality in every walk of life.

In this perspective of the history and the present of Left women's movement, the Naxalite Movement offers no exceptional advance. Krishna (C) writes "we women activists underwent a nursing training in Medical College, when there was a

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[192] See Raka Ray, p-52

[193] See Kunal Chattopadhyaya's essay "Tebhaga Andolan-e Krishak Meyera" (Peasant Women in Tebhaga Movement) in Maitrayee Chatterjee (ed.) *Esho Mukto Koro* (Let Us Be Free), p-154.

lull in the party policy. Now I wonder–the principal idea behind this was that our male comrades will get wounded and we, the women will nurse them! The most progressive party also thought in this way. Till today when ultimate sacrifice is asked from the people it is promised that through this sacrifice the sister would get back her brother, the wife her husband–as if they only have to sacrifice life, not the women. I felt extremely bitter with this attitude–since I had to encounter this outlook at home and could not escape that even in my party"[194].

From all the narratives and other studies on Naxalite movement it can be pointed out that women were mainly the couriers of secret messages, shelter-givers, acted as wives or sisters of male comrades to shake off police trails. More active women (who were not many) started taking part in everyday lives of working class and peasantry in villages and smaller towns with two chief objectives–to become declassed and be a part of the toiling masses and to produce and send political workers from urban areas to rural areas[195]. Kalpana Sen writes that the key problem of the women activists of this movement, which often became nearly insurmountable, was the underground nature of the party after it was banned. Till the period Naxalite movement was public and legal, women hardly faced any organizational difficulties but when it became necessary to go to the villages and organize the movement from the heart of rural Bengal, women activists suffered a setback as they were mainly from the city of Calcutta. Sen has generalized the women activists as urban, educated, middle-class and does not refer to the peasant women activists, who faced considerably different problems and thus her account of the role of women in Naxalite movement remains one-sided[196]. Her account suffers from some contradictory assessments as well since she writes that in the party meetings women enjoyed the same kind of respect as men though there were no women in the leadership. Krishna (C)'s narrative dislocates Sen's analysis at certain points as she felt the absence of equality in party meetings probably due to lack of women leaders and existence of a subtle form of discrimination.

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[194] See Sen, p-174.

[195] Kalpana Sen has listed these activities in her essay. See p-162

[196] If Sen's analysis suffers from this inadequacy another account of women's role in Naxalbari movement by Sunil Sen only listed out the names of peasant women martyrs and a sketchy description of some peasant women activists without referring to the efforts of urban women to strike a chord of camaraderie with these peasant women in some villages and towns, like Krishna from Calcutta, Jayashri Rana and Rama, who spent months in different villages, running from one shelter to another. See Sunil Sen, "Naxalite Insurgency and Peasant Women" in *The Working Women and Popular Movements in Bengal*, (Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi and Company, 1985), pp-64-65.

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Placing these personal narratives in the background of women's writing in India, especially in 20th century gives an opportunity to look at the levels of meanings embedded in women's consciousness and expression. There had been a tendency in liberal feminism to recover women, hidden from history[197]. This practice is predicated upon the assumption that there has been a continuum of a pristine 'female tradition' in the marginalized quarters of women's existence. This continuum is imaged as a lost city, submerged but intact, unaffected by the crosscurrents of history, waiting to be discovered. It also argues that writing, whether fiction, essay, poem or autobiography is a form of release of that pristine tradition when patriarchal structures tighten the noose on other domains of life. The underlying presumption is an essential difference between man and woman, where 'femaleness' in a mystic manner engulfs womanhood in entirety without leaving any space for disagreement in defining the concept. The patriarchal formulation of femininity, which is equalized with passivity, emotion, nature and body as against agency, intellect, culture and mind; is severely critiqued by every strand of feminism but the practice of 'loss' and 'recovery' of 'female tradition' creates a counter-monolith of womanhood. In the liberal feminist idea of an undifferentiated womanhood the dilemma of contradictory value standards, the covert modes of defiance embedded in the patriarchal formulation of femininity goes unquestioned. On the other hand the problems inherent in Marxist Feminism or Socialist Feminism often limit women's movement within class analysis. By taking account of continuous social and cultural

[197]See Uma Narayan, "Essence of Culture and a Sense of History: A Feminist Critique of Cultural essentialism", in Uma Narayan and Sandra Harding (ed.) *Decentering The Center: Philosophy for a Multicultural, Postcolonial, and Feminist World*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000). Also see Leela Gandhi, "Postcolonialism and Feminism" in *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998). . Both these authors argue that west/non-west binary has been deployed in liberal feminism in terms of cultural essentialism and thus the hegemonic effect of 'western feminism' stunted the growth of contextual meanings of womanhood in different situations. See also Chandra Talpade Mohanty "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses", in Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, Lourdes Torres (eds.) *The Third- world Women and the Politics of Feminism*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991) as she has meticulously pointed out the books, which have adopted such a position.

reproduction of womanhood in different patriarchal societal set-ups, writing personal narratives attains a nuanced approach to these aspects.

The "Introduction" to the two volumes collection of *Women Writing in India* succinctly captures women's writing in all the literary genres as a realization of selfhood through various ideological and experiential discourses[198]. The encapsulated history of Indian women's writing suggests that rather than a 'release' of an already grown selfhood, writing consists of building blocks of self. When writing is conceptualized as a form of agency it cannot be understood only as a completed structure, which is availed by the actor or the agent but also as a process. Agency refers not to the intentions people have in doing things but to their capability of doing those things in the first place, which is why agency implies power[199]. Thus human agency cannot be defined only in terms of intentionality but rather as a capacity of doing, which blurs the neat boundaries of the concepts of motivation, compulsion and tradition. The importance of the very act of doing subsumes the taxonomy of actions, carefully constructed by sociologists. Women's agency as a concept disrupts the singular construct of 'womanhood', taking account of the active participation of women in shaping their own lives and self-perception uncovers a deep-rooted sense of autonomy. For women, writing personal narratives was one of the most important modes of asserting agency since colonial period as the values of chastity, docility and nurturance were redefined on the basis of home/world, feminine/ masculine opposition to produce a counterpart of the emerging middle-class 'gentleman' (Bhadralok)[200]. The remoulding had to blank out the women's traditional oral subculture, which, with its frequent celebration of frank, sensuous femininity, and a critique of patrilinial kinship system became incongruent with new hybrid enlightenment ideals. Autobiographies and personal narratives opened the

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[198]See Susie Tharu and K.Lalitha (eds.) *Women Writing in India: 600 B.C to the Present* (2 vols. New Delhi: OUP, 1993) pp-1-37.

[199] *The Oxford English Dictionary* definition of an agent as 'one who exerts power or produces an effect has been developed by Anthony Giddens to capture this dimension of agency. For details see, Anthony Giddens, *Constitution of Society*, London, New York: Routledge, 1994, p-9.

[200] The mould of the Bhadramahila or the gentlewoman as a counterpart of the emerging middle-class gentleman was formulated according to the male-identified notions of femininity. Rammohun Roy, much of whose fame rests on championing women's cause had quite a paternalistic attitude towards feminine dignity and respect. His hope for dignified, self-respecting women was dependent upon Victorian English Society, where women's 'emancipation' was completely organised and controlled by men. See, Malavika Karlekar, *Voices from Within: Early Personal Narratives of Bengali Women*, (Delhi: OUP, 1993).

way to express the defiance against any singular construct of womanhood by the patriarchal set up. Though during the colonial period most of the women's writings came from gentlewomen of respectable families, which accepted and espoused the ideal image of the newly reformed womanhood, dissenting voices were not completely absent[201]. This historical background of women's autobiographies and personal narratives, particularly in Bengal makes it important to study personal narratives as the principal source of understanding women's agency.

In this context, the personal narratives of five women Naxalite activists (the shelter-givers are also activists as they proclaimed affinity with the movement) articulate the beginning of an analytical introspection and retrospection of their roles in the movement from a gender perspective.

[201] For details see See Malavika Karlekar, *Voices from Within: Early Personal Narratives of Bengali Women*, (Delhi: OUP, 1993). Also See, Shrabashi Ghose, " 'Birds in a Cage': Changes in Bengali social life as recorded in Autobiographies by Women" in Alice Thorner and Maithreyi Krishnaraj (eds.) *Ideals, Images and real lives" Women in Literature and History*, (Mumbai: Orient Longman Limited, 2000). For a concise account of women's writing in colonial and postcolonial India. See Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha (ed.) *Women Writing in India*, 2 volumes, (New Delhi: OUP, 1991). Tanika sarkar has done an excellent evaluation of one of the autobiographies in "A Book of Her Own, A Life of Her Own", in *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation*, (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001), where the subversion of nationalist patriarchy through writing personal narrative is traced.

## Conclusion

My attempt in this thesis has been to understand the importance of 'experience' in rereading a social movement. Reading personal narratives and collection of oral history undercut the neat political analysis of any social movement. The presumed 'reality' of the different entrenched social forces actually reflects multiple dimensions and makes it a flux of realities rather than one fixed point of departure. The study of participation of women in Naxalbari movement is an effort to capture this fluidity of multiplicity of meanings embedded in a social fact[202]. The multiplicity of meanings indicates at the field of critical practices that cannot be totalized and that therefore, interrogates the formative and exclusionary power of discourse. Taking the women's perspective to point at this indeterminacy and multiplicity is also an effort not to apply ready-made concepts to feminist concerns, but to resignify or appropriate them for specific ends. Thus the kind of politics being taken account of in this context is not one particular time frame dotted with specific events defined as 'political'. The question that comes forward asks to clarify the nature of constrains and constituents where certain positions on certain issues emerge.
The point of this dissertation is to raise the question—through what means women are positioned within different institutional frameworks like family, marriage, contexts of class and caste discrimination, colonization of body and participation in collective action at a particular juncture of historical moment and location[203]. If politics is translated as

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[202] Durkheim has defined social facts as 'things', which are external, and general and which must be observed, classified and explained. The social facts exist in the social structure, which is often well articulated and rigid, but the crystallization of the social facts into things is also subjected to free social currents. The interrelationship between the structure and current is not definitely moulded and thus there remains a scope for existence of multiplicity. Moreover he has emphasized that studying social facts must involve a meticulous distinction between 'normal' and 'pathological'. In this context his definition of normalcy extends the domain of multiplicity and opens up an enormous possibility of flexible interpretations. For him though pain is commonly regarded as the index of morbidity the principal theme to be addressed is the insensibility to pain, which is pathological. This very definition of normalcy of social facts helps the researcher to explore the moments of severe social upheaval from multiple other points of views than the hegemonic one. See Emile Durkheim, *Rules of Sociological Method.*

[203] The questions that Judith Butler has listed out for feminist politics to become a rupture in conventional theoretical paradigms on gender are– contest the presumption that women is a ready-made, fixed category, the necessity to theorize about the multiple subjects while, scripting a feminist analysis, since the critical potentiality of interplay of marginalized and dominant discourses is immense, rather than taking indeterminacy as the end of any political commitment it can be taken as a point of departure for articulation of political positions, rather than accepting universal categories it is better to interrogate historically and culturally contingent conditions. In that situation discourses of class, race, caste, gender and sexuality develop multiple meanings and rather than simplifying them into universal categories it is required to contest them with the nuances of complexities involved, this perspective initiates questions towards western logic and movements based on such positions. Thus the intersecting points of postcoloniality and colonial hegemony have the possibilities of building up of critical points of departure rather than sealing the arguments in their fixed locations, the politics of homogenization and binary thinking on the basis of oppositional categories like western/third world, feminine/masculine, colonial/nationalist are needed to be challenged. See Joan W. Scott and Judith Butler (eds.) *Feminists Theorize the Political.* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992).

taking certain positions during certain periods and prioritizing some issues over others then gender politics seeks to disentangle the social and ideological fabric, which relegates the theme of gender to a secondary position[204].

In the context of women's participation in Naxalbari movement my quest has been to look at this situation from the point of view of experience of women participants themselves. Formation of the discourse of their involvement in this revolutionary movement makes their recollection of the movement an analytical point of departure. Experience and recollection of experience in the form of memory seem to be the point of beginning——

> "Knowledge is gained through vision; vision is a direct, unmediated apprehension of a world of transparent objects. In this conceptualization of it, the visible is privileged; writing is then put at its service. Seeing is the origin of knowing. Writing is reproduction, transmission–the communication of knowledge gained through (visual, visceral) experience".
>
> Joan W. Scott

This kind of communication, where writing testifies for the visual, has long been the mission of social scientists documenting the lives of those omitted or overlooked in accounts of the past. This practice has produced a wealth of new evidence previously ignored about these others and has drawn attention to dimensions of human life and activity usually deemed unworthy of mention in conventional histories. "It has also occasioned a crisis of orthodox history by multiplying not only stories, but subjects, and by insisting that histories are written from fundamentally different –indeed irreconcilable–perspectives or standpoints, no one of which is complete or completely

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[204] In Joan W. Scott and Judith Butler (eds.) *Feminists Theorize the Political*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1992) Butler has emphasized that questions must be put to the foundational definitions of the concepts like reality, agency, collectivity and individual. She has asked who qualifies as the 'subject' of history, as a 'social actor' or 'citizen' and what qualifies as 'reality', 'experience' and 'agency' and the domain of 'politics'. What constitutes the foundational definitions of the network of relationships and institutions between collectivities and individuals and how these definitions are validated? Contestations of these concepts expose the exclusion and erasure of certain dimensions to qualify as 'foundational definitions', which seemingly underwrite all possible variations. This has a resonance of Hayden White's idea of narrative analysis where he identified the principal requirement of narrative analysis as exposing the aporias inherent in a supposedly 'complete' narrative. See pp-xiii-xvi.

"true""[205]. The challenge to normative history by using experience and memory of the social actors enlarged the picture, and has acted as a corrective to oversights resulting from inaccurate or incomplete vision. It has claimed legitimacy by emphasizing the validity of direct experience, restored in memory and the analytical power of the social scientist, who learns to see and illuminate the lives of those others in his or her texts.

But when experience is taken as the origin of knowledge, the vision of the individual subject (the person who had the experience or the social scientist who recounts it) becomes the bedrock of evidence upon which the explanation is built. Questions about the constructed nature of experience, about how subjects are constituted as different in the first place, about how one's vision is structured–about language (or discourse) and history–are left aside. Writing the history of those who have been 'hidden' from history takes meaning as transparent and reproduces rather than contests the categories involved in silencing certain voices, invisibilizing certain visuals since such history does not question the ideological edifice on which the hiding place but brings out the lost counts. Thus the project of making experience visible makes sense of repressive conditions, the mechanisms of power and hegemony, the alternative modes of existence and resistance to domination but what it precludes is the placing of these alternatives within the framework of (historically and culturally contingent) legitimating strategies. For that we need to attend to the processes by which not only the subjects but also how their experiences are produced. Experience in this framework does not become the origin of explanations but another tool to critically scrutinize every form of knowledge, produced, under whose eye of enquiry experience itself is not excluded.

Experience as a category has been reintroduced in historical studies in the wake of wide spread critique of empiricism. Unlike 'facts' or 'reality' as foundational categories of historical evidence, experience has varied connotations and can interrogate the limits of interpretation from unorthodox point of views. On the other hand it runs the risk of reductionism and reification.

In liberal feminist theory experience gained a revered position as repeated reference to the experience of womanhood has been emphasized to make

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[205] See Joan W. Scott, "Experience" in Joan W. Scott and Judith Butler (eds.) *Feminists Theorize the Political*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p-24.

women a category of people with agency. The amalgamation of the realms of personal and political into the experience of womanhood finally ended up with a reified universalistic notion of essentialism inherent in femininity. This kind of irreducibility of experience needs to be challenged, as in this feminist formulation experience is almost a precondition for identity formation. If experience goes unquestioned the formation of identity overlooks an important aspect of politics of social construction. The necessity to historicize identity formation includes the process of historicizing experience. Experience cannot be accepted as something always already there but rather be investigated. The treatment of identity as a discursive event does not introduce a new form of determinism; particularly linguistic as language is a necessary but not sufficient precondition for experience. Subject identities are discursively constituted through continuous interactions between contradictory sets of values, which are often covert. These situations offer choices, though not unlimited. Thus experiences cannot depend on fixed order of meanings. Historicity plays a major role in searching and identifying the contingent conditions within which identities emerge with certain experiences. This interplay of meanings (linguistically) and experience (historically) make a creative interchange between literature and history, society and individual, where an interdisciplinary approach enables the researcher to avail the different sources of expression and representation.

I have already mentioned that initially the task of women's history was to reclaim the history of those exceptional women alongside men who fought in the past against an oppressive regime. But that limits the task into extending conventional history to accommodate more women, where the political and cultural biases, which exclude the women, are not taken into account. Compensatory practice of adding women's history to men's history does not question the disciplinary strategies that are deployed to invisibilize women in the first place. Such history writing presumes that women contribute to something, which existed before, and women have just added to that by making individual contributions. Women's history–its intent more political than archival[206].

[206] We Were Making History...Life stories of women in the Telengana People's Struggle, Stree Shakti Sangathan, (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989), p-19.

In India, writing women's history depends a great deal on the methodological importance of experience and the written version of experience—personal narratives. The recent literatures on women's experiences about their contribution to Marxism-inspired peasant rebellions in Telengana, in Andhra Pradesh in southern India (1948-51), have opened new possibilities for analyzing this theme. The assertive voice of the peasant women of Telengana valley is evident in their realization, that during the time of armed conflict with the feudal forces and the colonial British army they were making history, not just as peasants but also as women. They questioned whether their problems were being addressed and solved on their own terms in the Marxist discourse in India. The life stories of women in the Telengana People's Struggle carry meanings of struggle, impregnated with critique against the reluctance of Communist Party to let women fighters go beyond 'supportive' role, to let them engage in actual combat and let them be a part of the leadership, both theoretically and practically. Twenty years later in 1968 the women participants of Naxalbari were facing identical problems and were struggling in the same manner to let their voices be heard, to join the movement on their own terms.

In the case of the Telengana People's Struggle we must keep in mind that not only did the oppressive regime exploit women but also the certain subtle modes of discrimination inherent within the emancipatory politics of the Communist-led movement reinforced women's subjugated role. The authors of *We Were Making History* observe, "[w]omen's chains are not only feudal"[207].

Renu Chakravarthy's *Communists in Indian Women's Movement (1940-1950)*[208] and P.Sundarayya's account of this movement[209] are excellent historical analysis but they treat women involved in the movement and the issues on gender as secondary, as if they were not important enough to be discussed at the same level as religion, feudal system of economy, political exploitation and army repression at the end of the movement. Chakravarthy is a woman and thus it is not true that only men write patriarchal history where women are invisibilized, but the point to be noted is that a certain method of

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[207] Ibid, p-21.
[208] See Renu Chakravarthy, *Communists in Indian Women's Movement (1940-1950)*, (New Delhi: PPH, 1980).
[209] See P.Sundaryaya, *History of Telengana People's Struggle* (New Delhi)

history is patriarchal. So the discussion on writing the lives of women revolutionaries of Telengana include not only the factual 'reality' of patriarchy, be it in the Communist party or Nizam's regime, but also their 'representation' in history. Sundaryya's account can claim a greater share of gender consciousness as he recorded not only the details of resilience, selflessness and heroism of women comrades but acknowledged that in many cases their specific problems were not adequately addressed. He wrote about Narasamma, an energetic woman cadre who tried to perform all the tasks allotted to her by the party successfully and expressed freely in a letter to the party that the leadership must get rid of the double standards set against women cadres, that women should not have to prove twice more than her male comrades that she was a competent revolutionary, that a woman comrade must not be derided on the basis of her gender if she failed in any task, that she should not evoke criticism within the party the moment she tried to enjoy her freedom[210]. Sundarayya's account further noted an incident where a woman comrade had to give up her baby after an action and the main emotion in narrating that event is obviously pain of separating a family[211]. But reading below the surface level of emotion gives thoughts about the theoretical inadequacies in addressing the questions regarding reproduction and overall consciousness about the gender issue. Without denying the severity of the problems faced by a guerrilla squad if one of its members carried a new-born baby the question becomes why enough emphasis was not put on the methods of birth control and child-birth when the guerrillas were given medical trainings like first aid and nursing. The obvious answer seems that either women were never visualized to be squad members or sexuality as an issue was completely ignored during the guerrilla training and party-classes. Both of these answers point at the inadequacy of the party in addressing the gender issue beyond a sympathetic, somewhat benevolent mode. This reflects the entrenched moral patriarchal codes of the Communist Party. The ignorance of the sexuality issues is portrayed in another incident—Acchamamba, who was a valuable comrade due to her vast medical knowledge was once expelled from the party as she was

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[210] An excerpt of her letter is available in *We Were Making History..*, p-23-24.

[211] Kamalamma, a Telengana People's Struggle activist said, "I was pregnant again. I kept moving around with them, it was time for the child to be born...I was very troubled by the thought of delivering the child...there was an old midwife and they fetched her. I delivered under a cluster of bushes in the night" and she had to give away her child after six moths as it became impossible for her squad to move around with the baby. See *We Were Making History..*,p-265.

accused of having an illicit affair with another male comrade. The male comrade was not implicated while she was disgraced for having bad morals. Though she was later taken in the party again the episode reveals the patriarchal attitude that women are the carriers of virtue and even during a moment of armed guerrilla movement they were the main source of keeping the moral fibre[212]. This incident has an almost uncanny resemblance with the incident of sexual harassment described by Krishna (C) during the Naxalbari movement and substantiates the assumption that in the issues of sexuality the Communist Party hardly differed from the nationalist patriarchal codes developed during the 19th century. On the theme of work the division of labour among male and female revolutionaries reflect the continuity of private and public divide during the movement, where women kept the revolutionary dens working, couriering messages from one area to another and nursing the wounded male activists—which were the assigned tasks for women in Naxalbari movement also. Some women demanded to be included in action squads and a few of them did become squad leaders also, but for the male leaders they were women after all and battlefields were not the place for women[213]. Again the resentment of Krishna (C) for not being recognized by her party comrades as a serious revolutionary even after conducting an 'action' rings very close to the comments of this leader, which hardly need any explanation for having an explicit paternalistic attitude. For the women participants of the Telengana movement the time was magical since it broke down the four walls of domesticity, made them aware of their selfhood and capabilities, made them bold and articulate just the same way as all three narratives of Krishna (B), Krishna (C) and Deepa communicate the inspiration of Naxalbari movement in their ability to question all kinds of establishment. In both cases the tremendous role played by the Communist Party is acknowledged and appreciated but at the same time the confusion within the party in treating the women's issue with all the involved complexities is clear. In both cases the party gave the women clarity in understanding the socio-political situation but put them in uncertainty when they faced gender-based problems as women activists. The absence of a clear-cut gender programme and proper treatment of sexuality

[212]For the details of the case see *We Were Making History..*,p-267.

[213] Ravi Narayan Reddy, a Party leader and an activist of Telengana Struggle said, "After all they are women is it not? After all they are women; we did not like that women should be taken into the battle fields." See *We Were Making History..*,p-271.

as an important part of life put the women activists in the Left-led radical revolutionary movements taking place in the gap of two decades in the same perplexity.

Apart from the narration of specific incidents and the overall experiences as revolutionary activists, some typical silences and gaps in memory make these women part of a particular type of historical representation. Acchamamba recalled her narrow escapes from police, her heroics during the movement and the adulation she received from her party in minute details when she is asked to talk about her life but does not mention about her vast range of experiences related to her role as the barefoot doctor for the different guerrilla squads and peasant villages. In her memory her revolutionary life both as an activist and as a woman does not accommodate her experiences as a doctor. "Acchamamba, who recognized the public importance of the work she was doing does not seem to have realized the value of her knowledge she gained. The result is that there is barely any space in her narrative for her medical skill"...and she lost her hard earned knowledge once the struggle ended...." [w]e must ask the question–Why?"[214]. This leads the researcher to the problem of shaping of memory, of experience in a particular historical set-up and in similar vein the analysis of narratives of women participants of Naxalbari movement must scrutinize why some women simply do not remember the instances of gender insensitivity or face the issue from the point of view of victims of sexual harassment. What constitutes the gaps in shaping their identities and consciousness requires to be questioned in the same manner as why the patriarchal attitude of the Communist Party failed to give them the necessary space to raise these issues as important points of discussion. Here the grand narrative of Marxism enters into a meaningful interaction with the socio-cultural matrix of Indian society evolving through its colonial experience into a postcolonial moment.

Simplistic historicization of social movements, inspired by Marxist ideology in Indian context, be it in colonial times or post independence period, where the fractures in temporal and spatial dimensions are not taken into account but rather where time is treated as a continuous category runs the risk of ignoring the complex interplay of the global and local at a particular moment and location. The problem of historicism lies

[214] See *We Were Making History*..,p-270.

in its treatment of time as a seamless web and so the probe into the interaction between the ideology of Marxism and Indian society requires to trace the ruptures created by the hegemony of universality of time and local subversive sites[215]. To encounter this problem Dipesh Chakrabarty asks the social scientists to follow a tenuous but potentially strong relationship of this complex interchange in capturing the nuances of the two sets of history. History 1, as he puts it "consists of analytical histories that through abstracting categories of capital[216], eventually tend to make all places exchangeable with one another. History 1 is just that analytical history. But the idea of History2 beckons us to more affective narratives of human belonging, where life forms, although porous to one another, do not seem exchangeable through a third term of equivalence such as abstract labour. Translation or transition to capitalism in the mode of History1 involves the play of three terms, the third term expressing the measure of equivalence that makes generalized exchange possible. But explore such translation or transition on the register of History2 is to think about translation as a translation between two categories without any third category intervening"[217]. Putting this notion of interplay of history one and history two in the perspective of women's participation in Naxalbari movement helps to develop a critical view towards Marxism and Marxist movements in India. Naxalbari movement can be treated in the seamless timeframe of history one where it is interchangeable with the similar movements across the geographical and temporal boundaries but the specificity of the movement; the affective narratives of human belonging must take account of the moment. The particular dimension of women's participation, when analysed need not be distilled through the abstractions of feminism but address the concepts of Marxism from their definite locations and that makes the transition of Marxist debates on women's issues into the Indian scenario capable of

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[215] The term historicism has a long and complicated history. It tells us that social and cultural phenomena are historically embedded and each period has its own set of values, which are not directly translatable into other times. Though historicism typically allows for the complexities arising out of the dynamic interaction between individuals and society the treatment of time is seamless. Ideas about discontinuities, ruptures and shifts have challenged historicism from time to time but till now much of history is written in the historicist tradition. For the details see, Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, (New Delhi: OUP, 2001), pp.22-23.

[216] Chakrabarty has taken Marx's concept of 'abstract labour' to explain the phenomenon of capital as his point of reference to elucidate the interaction between the two histories. For details see *Provincializing Europe* pp-47-71.

[217] *Provincializing Europe* p-71.

generating its own discourse of feminism. This leads back to Judith Butler's position that the requirement of feminist concern is not to use fossilized concepts as the medium of translation of theories into practice in newer locations but rather to reuse them, redeploy them through interrogating these very concepts[218]. It is impossible to move without History since the universalistic notions of are deeply embedded in our institutional lives and thus denying the existence of patriarchy in nearly every institutional set up (with varying degrees of effectivity) with certain common traits will never enable women's issues to resist discrimination. But it is also necessary to develop critiques of institutions on their own terms and so critique of patriarchy has to be addressed from the point of view of its subversive existence as well as its capacity to subsume those sites. But the important point of recognizing between these two levels allow for a scope to continuously criticize patriarchy and also to critically review the positions from where the criticisms are being lodged. This keeps the concepts alive and open. The interchange between Marxism and Feminism has this capacity and deployment of the areas of this exchange in the Indian context put questions to the presumed notions of emancipation of women with liberation of working class alongside the questions of caste, religion, region and language.

[218] See *Feminists Theorize the Political*, p- xiii.

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## Appendix

English translation of the personal narratives of five women participants in Naxalbari Movement.

1. **Krishna (Burdawan)**

I was born in a lower middle-class family. My father took part in the anti-colonial struggle against the British. In my childhood I loved to listen to the stories of heroics of nationalists against the British from my father. I listened to the stories not only of mindless violence of the communal riots between Hindus and the Muslims during Partition but also of trust and harmony between these communities from my grandmother, mother and father. I was quite affected by the refugee problem in my childhood; as those refugee colonies were constructed in front of our eyes. I was greatly influenced by the women of these uprooted families who struggled with the police and the strongmen of the local landlords. My eldest maternal uncle was a part of the *Yugantar* [219]group and later became a Gandhian. My second maternal uncle was also a member of a revolutionary terrorist group during the nationalist struggle and lost an arm while making bombs. Another maternal uncle was a member of the underground Communist Party. I first heard poet Sukanta's[220] writings from him. Our childhood and adolescence was spent in severe economic instability. I learnt to protest against all wrongs from my parents. Both of them encouraged women's education and self-reliance.

The 'Spring Thunder'[221] struck me when I was at home after my B.A examinations. By that time I had already taken an oath by the names of Nurul Islam, Ananda Hyte, Ashish and Jabbar[222]. The resonance of the food riots was there in my

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[219] Yugantar was a nationalist association, which became a powerful political group in Bengal and led various anti-British movements since 1920s.

[220] Sukanta was a poet, greatly influenced by Marxist ideology. His poems became very popular and synonymous with the youth consciousness against colonial government and nationalist bourgeoisie. Though he died at a very young age in early 1950s his writings and poems have had a lasting impact on student and youth of Bengal.

[221] The Chinese Communist Party attributed this epithet to the Naxalbari movement. An article titled "Spring Thunder Over India" was published as an editorial in *People's Daily*, organ of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on 5th July 1967. It was reproduced in *Liberation* vol.1, no.1, November 1967. It read, "A peal of spring thunder has crashed over the land of India. Revolutionary peasants in Darjeeling area have risen in rebellion. Under the leadership of revolutionary group of the Indian Communist Party, a red area of rural revolutionary armed struggle has been established in India. This is a development of tremendous significance for the Indian people's revolutionary struggle."

[222]The year 1966 experienced severe food-shortage and in Bengal violent food-riots blazed over the peasantry, industrial workers and the lower middle-class people of the urban areas. People took to streets in demand of food. The students Ananda Hyte and Nurul islam, and workers Ashish and Jabbar, killed in police firing became folk heroes and students were inspired to engage with radical action against state. . For details see Amar Bhattachrya, *NaxalbariAndoloner Pramanya Tathya Sankalan*, (Calcutta: Naya Ishtehar Prakashani, 1998), revised edition, 2000, pp-56-57

mind. I voted for CPI(M) in 1967. I hoped that the Leftists would stand by the peasantry and industrial labour class when they would come to the power in the state. When the peasant movement in Naxalbari was met with police terror I considered these leftists as traitors and decided that Kanu Sanyal was correct and Harekrishna Konar's arguments were capitalistic and comprador bourgeois[223]. I felt that the Darjeeling District Committee's opposition to the Party leadership was truthful and just. Then I took an admission to Burdawan University for M.A course. There I came across *Deshabrati* (the mouthpiece of the rebellious group in CPIM) and came to know about the Co-Ordination Committee.

At first I started working among the students of Burdawan, then in the semi-rural areas and finally in Durgapur industrial region. I was principally involved in organization. But I could never feel at home with the peasantry. It was better in the industrial areas and I lived with the labour families. In this movement I learnt to question all kinds of establishment. This political involvement encouraged me to challenge the status quo. I learnt to deny the institutions of family, marriage and other institutions with inspiration from this politics.

Once I worked in villages for party organization, but I could not work there clandestinely—I was identified too easily. But in towns I never faced that problem. The women of the labour families became very close to me.

As a woman I faced problems in that uncertain underground life. Our party had no mass-base and mass participatory plan of action, so there was problem for assigning work for women.

According to our party instruction, I used to work for the party organization on my own. Of course I worked in tandem with the local committees. In the villages, as an underground party worker I had to stay inside throughout the day. At night I could go from one village to another and hold party meetings. The possibility of being recognized by the landlords' men during daytime was very high. In the towns there was no need to be so secretive. If the police came to know about one shelter, we could always leave that house and go to another shelter. Now many ask how we lived while in underground. My reply is——very easily and simply, among and with the help of the common people. I had an advantage—the police did not know me and I have dark

[223] See Chapter 2 for the details of the disputes leading to Naxalbari movement.

complexion with very little aristocratic features and so I faced no difficulty in playing the role of a cousin in labour families. I had friendly and respectable relation with other comrades. All of us had no family to fall back on and spent days and nights in unknown shelters but I faced no disrespect. However I cannot speak about others' experiences. Wherever we worked, in towns or villages, we debated on whether female and male party workers should have differentiated tasks. Particularly the young groups always fought against feudal mentality on these issues.

I had no connection with my family during my political life. Sometimes I used to meet them. One of my brothers worked as a party courier for sometime. However, many comrades used to take shelter in our house.

Now I am not related to any streams of Naxalite politics. I work with a group called *Mazdur Mukti* (Labour Liberation).

The Naxalbari movement taught me to identify revisionism and to protest against parliamentarism. But the party policy against mass based organization became suicidal. Charu Mazumdar's leadership alienated the rank and file from rationalistic philosophy of liberation. The party-leadership claimed that one could become a revolutionary just by reading three essays of Mao-tse-Tung and articles by Charu Mazumdar. This move obstructed the culture of discussion and debate to refine political understanding. I evaluate Naxalbari movement and CPIML party separately. The youth movement took the shape of a rebellion. Naxalbari inspired the youth to question establishment in every form and to stand by the oppressed. Naxalbari was an inspiration for destroying the juggernaut of exploitation and oppression with the dream that—freedom would find wings with the liberated people from all over the world. Thus even today all anti-establishment movements are called Naxalite movements.

But CPIML misdirected this entire possibility a revolutionary total social change. The party was alienated from not only the labour class but common people in general. How could it be possible that the very movement, which inspired the youth to question all establishments, could not allow its own members to question the party leadership? Then I realized how great our mistake was, but I had nowhere to go—had no economic security, was hunted by the police and had the realization if I were to continue my political life I had to start afresh.

In the perspective of political thought I can say that there is no relevance between my political understanding of today and the original CPIML party except for the opposition against parliamentarism.

But I still dream of changing the society. The times have changed. Everywhere it is a metanarrative of defeat and loss; there is no inspirational movement. Reactionary influence has become nearly all pervasive. Today's youth do not dream like us. Everybody wants to live his or her individual lives. There is no trace of youthful vigour and that is saddening.

My life as an underground revolutionary has left no positive mark in my memory. My daughter has asked me repeatedly to talk about those days but I felt choked while telling her. There is nothing to say except for police terror, self-sacrifice and death. There was constant fight between two lines of thought within the party—constant suspicion of each other in claiming the true representative of Charu Mazumdar.

I want to forget that once I believed in the political line of individual annihilation. But I like to think about those pre-CPIML days in the university. I like to think about those days of intense involvement of student groups, discussing Left politics in front of our hostel. I like to think that I wrote on the wall after police firing after in Durgapur R.E College—"Jyoti and Chavan are brothers in arms, Don't Forget"[224]. I still fondly remember that I was the part of protest demonstration that stopped the car of a Union-front Government minister after the police firing in R.E College.

I want to forget about the underground party. I would like to end this narrative by describing one of my experiences after I protested against the party line, that is the diktats of Charu Mazumdar—

That day I was informed that I was expelled from the party for going against Charu Mazumdar's line. I was not allowed to use any party shelters. I was traveling from one end of Durgapur town to another by the D.S.T.S bus service, and thinking about where to spend the night. I could not go home since police would be waiting for me there. Then, I had to decide to go to a comrade's home because his parents liked me very much. After much hesitation I knocked on their door with a trembling

[224] These are the names of two political leaders. While one was a leader of CPIM another was of Congress Party. The slogan tried to communicate that the leaders have lost all ideology and they were united by their resistance to any kind of revolutionary attempt.

hand. The other possible shelter was on the other end of the town and transport in Durgapur was quite bad then. His mother opened the door and before I could say anything said, "do not worry, you can stay with us. I have told my son, where will Kajol go? (Kajol was my penname). Do not have political discussions and that is enough." After spending about a week in that shelter one day when I was standing at Benachiti Bus stand I saw from a distance Ranada—he was coming towards me. I thought he would raise some political questions but I was overwhelmed when he spoke to me. He said, "Sister, the day I heard that you have been expelled I was searching for you. I went to some shelters but could not find you. Then I kept an eye on this Bus stand. I knew if you were in Durgapur you have to come here. Please come with me."

Ranada took me to a small shanty near the Bus stand and said—"This is your permanent shelter. Stay here as long as you need to. I was worried about you and feared that this time police must have caught Kajoldi."

My dear Ranada, my comrade Rana, the steel-plant worker Rana, the representative of working class, and the representative of humanity will be an unforgettable person. I have learnt from him that it is a sin to lose faith on humanity. People like Ranada make this world livable and they will be there forever.

## 2. **Krishna (Calcutta)**

When I joined Naxalite politics I was around sixteen years old. My family was not much politically inclined. But there was a general anti-Congress sentiment. One of my maternal uncles, Ashok Ghosh was connected with undivided Communist party. This maternal uncle always inspired me. However he did not renew his membership of the party later. He also became a part of Naxalite politics—in CPIML, but he was part of a different group. There was a political influence of my family, which I remember. In 1967 things were becoming different, there was a strong feeling that something new was going to happen. The overall feeling was that it was time to fight against revisionism, but I had absolutely no inkling what revisionism meant. We had a study circle, produced the play 'Red Lantern' and this was my stepping-stone to join Naxalite politics. Suddenly once we

had a night procession where I led with a torch. I had a friend—Dronacharya Ghosh, he was one of the earliest activists to go to the rural areas. He had an influence over me.

Then the movement spread to the schools and colleges. Many women, mostly girls joined us. The party gave us no directives to function. We worked according to our own sense of responsibilities. At this point of time, we the women led an 'action'. In one of the schools there was a simultaneous celebration of Lenin's and Gandhi's birth centenary. I told one of my sisters—you give a short speech that those who celebrate Gandhi's birth centenary have no right to celebrate Lenin's berth centenary also, and to another girl—you recite the poem 'Lenin' and in between we would do the 'action'. According to our plan, when the celebration started my sister gave her speech and the rest of us went to the empty classes, drew Mao's portrait on the blackboard and wrote the quotes of Mao and Charu Mazumdar on the walls. We neither burnt the books nor blasted bombs. But that does not mean that we did not have bombs —we also did not think that blasting bombs was wrong but creating consciousness rather than destroying books and equipments seemed more sensible way to register our politics.....But the incident was not considered worth reporting by any daily newspaper, be it bourgeois or revolutionary. We wanted that...that publicity. We wanted that our enemy should recognize us as their enemy.

I was suffering from inferiority complex. At least at that age I felt that I was suffering from inferiority complex because I was a woman. The enemy did not recognize women revolutionaries....did that mean women were not actually doing anything?....It is not a feeling of today, after so many years....then we, women were mostly working as couriers. The party told us that no work was less important but the party gave us no work only one directive was to become a part of the revolutionary mass. But how does one become a part of mass! And if you cannot do that, sit at home....do not create problems with family....so that you at least have a safe shelter. We women activists underwent a nursing training in Medical College, when there was a lull in the party policy. Now I wonder--the principal idea behind this was that our male comrades will get wounded and we, the women will nurse them! The most progressive party also thought in this way. Till today when ultimate sacrifice is asked from the people it is promised that through this sacrifice the sister would get back her brother, the wife her husband–as if they only have

to sacrifice life, not the women. I felt extremely bitter with this attitude–since I had to encounter this outlook at home and could not escape that even in my party.

Then the party was established. Police terror descended on us heavily. Police came to know my, our name. I was somehow relieved and happy...this is not a lie. We wanted an identity. My friend was getting blacklisted by the police but despite being in the same struggle I was getting spared—then the police must be thinking that I am not a part of the struggle....when the police did come to know my name...I was calmed. I think we must discuss these issues now..it is time.

When the police started searching for me I had to start looking for a shelter. Then women were fighting in Srikakulam and becoming martyrs. Nirmala Krishnamurti, Saraswati Amma laid their lives. It was 1970. I thought that we also could fight like them. I decided to go to the villages...to be a part of the peasantry...to fight along side them. Then Dronacharya called me to go the villages where he was working. I was more than happy and eager to go. It was a small aboriginal village in Bolagor police station, Hoogly district, named Behula. I went there. I used to read out Mao's 'three article' among the women of the village. Though I could not understand properly how to be part of them I was sure that initially I had to live with them and share their food. One day Dronacharya told me that I must form a women's squad and annihilate the local jotedar (landlord). I thought that without making them conscious how could we plan to annihilate the landlord? Dronacharya rebuked me and said—you are thinking about yourself...you want to save your skin...do not spread this middleclass cowardice among them. I was devastated. I was bewildered also—Dronacharya was always a very soft-spoken kind hearted person, I knew him for a long time....how could he change so much? Few other comrades also told me that I must be having some problems. Then I carefully listened to Dronacharya's method of talking to the male villagers, taking part in serious discussions—I felt that I also talked in the same way....then there must be an overall mistake somewhere...why were not they blazing with class hatred? I was trying to look for the answers on my own.

I went to a village as a friend of one of the village young women.....then one day the local 'jotedar' (landlord) saw me. I was terrified– I must have committed a grave mistake. The party will terribly suffer.....but the woman, who was my

friend told me 'don't be afraid. If a woman like you are hiding, there will be a constant fear that somebody will see you. Let me introduce you to him.' She went up to the man and told him that I was her student (she used to teach in a local school). The man was pretty satisfied and just said 'oh, I see.' The matter was settled quite peacefully. We used to think that all the village people would have a class hatred against the landlords– that they would like to see the landlord's blood at any point of time– it was not at all like that. The landlords were well off and that might have caused resentment but I do not know whether that was class hatred. They used to call that landlord 'grandpa' and he also used to go to their houses and chat up...he used to tell Kanak (my friend's elder sister) 'do not forget you are my bride'. In this simple shared joke there was a true grandpa-grand daughter relationship– not any intention of forcing the women into sexual submission...I am not saying that the landlords were not repressive but we never thought about the nuances of the landlord-tenant relationship....I did not protest regarding this issue within the party but could sense that was a gross misunderstanding. Then within the party some quotes became popular...you are lagging behind due to your petty-bourgeois virus...you failed to be a part of the people.....I was scared of these accusations. And this scare made me miserable. I was there in the village but I was scared of Dronacharya and his comrades who spoke like him. All I was thinking was how could I explain to them that I failed....why I could not bring myself to annihilate the landlord? Dronacharya told me— in West Bengal women still have not led an annihilation action, you can be the pioneer. This was continuously playing at my mind....I wanted to do something. Then I started allover again. I tried to make them see my point...but ..

In the meantime Dronacharya was caught. Naturally I was devastated at this news. I joined the Naxalite politics on my own, not following him but I remained within it partially for him. He was my first love, he was my everything. He was inhumanly tortured in police custody. When I heard this I felt that I could not be able to bear that. But I could not go back home. The police knew that I had a relationship with Dronacharya....Then I came back to the city....started working as a courier.

There is another aspect in this whole incident of Dronacharya's capture. Without doubt the peasants were responsible for their imprisonment. I thought there must be something terribly wrong. We are losing many people like Dronacharya one after

another. I could understand that for liberation there must be sacrifices made for that cause, but at that point I could not find any cause for these sacrifices. Then he was tortured. I thought that I would not be able to live with these people. Ashim and SRC (Sushital roychoudhury) were writing about their questions then. I considered Sushital Roychoudhury's much more valid than the path we were following. I started looking for some other job. I wanted to think anew.

It was 1972. The verdict on Dronacharya's case was out. He was condemned for life. Then he wrote me a letter—that letter was published in *Deshabrat*. He wrote—there are only two ways of our freedom, either people will come to free us or we ourselves will become free. He also wrote that we would see each other for certain. I was comforted and reassured after receiving that letter. Then on 7th February 1972, we heard that while attempting a jailbreak Dronacharya had become a martyr. He was not shot at, he was bludgeoned to death. I was overwhelmed with shock. I was so distressed that my other friends, who were not related with Naxalite politics, started telling me that we must take revenge. I listened to them but felt that I had come to the end of my tether. My comrades told me—would you leave so quietly now? Don't you think you should at least think twice about taking revenge to this death? I was groping in the dark. I knew that I had no way to go back. Then Charu Mazumdar was killed in July. I again went back to a village– near Arambagh. That was a Hindu dominated village. I was traveling from one village to another. The party was collapsing allover. Many of our comrades were being caught. Oneday I met Mahadev Mukherjee of Hoogly district. We decided to fight back. We were again traveling to different districts but then with the motive to rebuild the organization. We successfully established connection with Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Delhi. Then came the debate on Lin Piao—the splits were again inevitable. We were the pro-Lin faction. The person with whom I developed a special relationship, Shankar, during those days, became anti-Lin. I was alone and going through a daze. I think everybody at that time was going through a daze.

Then I was arrested, from Uttarpara (a suburban town of Calcutta). We were caught and straight taken to Ultodanga police station. Then I was taken to S.B Office (Special Branch Office). I was not tortured very badly, at least not like what

happened to people like Archanadi and Moloyadi[225]. I think since most of the important leaders were caught by that time they had nothing particular to know from me. I underwent routine beatings. For the initial one-week they did not even know that I was Krishna. They came to know about my identity only after they brought me to Hoogly district. Then I was taken to Burdawan. Me, Mahadev Mukherjee, Benoy, Shanti Singh, Sukanta all of us, who were together were caught. Jitu was with us in Hoogly—he was shot at. While in jail I actually started thinking anew and started having serious oppositions against party leadership. I was released before the movement for the freedom of the captured activists started. I let my family know that I wanted to take a legal bail. Then my family members arranged for the bail. Me, Sumanta, Pulak and Shanti were released. Then I became involved with the movement. I used to sing with a group called 'Arshi' (Mirror).

I feel that the mistakes we did must not be repeated. Those who would come to take our place must avoid these mistakes.

(I have translated Krishna's narrative from the Maitrayee Chatterjee edited volume but as I have mentioned in my analysis there is another detailed version, which I have not translated.)

3. **Deepa**

I came from a relatively upper middle class family. I grew up in a joint family where there were nearly thirty-five family members. I was drawn into the Naxalite movement during my college days. When I was studying in national Medical college CPIML party workers used to come to our college...I used to be fascinated by the ideas they had and the dedication they felt to bring those ideas into reality. I always had an inclination to look at things from new angles. I became a medical student with a wish to serve people.

I completed my Higher Secondary in 1968 and then joined Gurudas college for pre-medical studies. There I became a student representative. I fought the lection.

[225] Archana Guhhathakkurta was arrested and inhumanly tortured by the police during the same period. She became an invalid. After her release she filed a case against the concerned police officer. The case became a famous curtain raiser to the horror of police torture to the Naxalite activists and became a milestone in this issue.

Then we had a few supporters who talked about Naxalbari movement and had progressive ideas. Probably that was the first influence of Naxalite politics on me and the continuity remained. In 1969 I joined the party and from then onwards I was a regular party worker.

My first task was to talk to the students and to increase the student support base. There were some incidents and to protest against these incidents I became more directly involved with Naxalite politics. In 1970, one of my friends, Chandreyee, who was also involved in politics, suddenly left the hostel. She was from Purulia district. She probably went somewhere without notifying anybody. Then her mother came to our house; somehow her mother felt that I knew where she was. In truth I had no idea of her whereabouts. Chandreyee's mother threatened us that she would inform the police. I had some important political papers in my house and so I went to give those papers back to one of my other friend. There I told everybody the whole incident. They advised me not to go back to my home. There was a strange trend then, which I did not realize then but can sense now—you will have to leave your family to join revolutionary politics.

I faced many problems because I could not go back home. Why should I not go back, whether there would any benefit if I do not go back, was not discussed at all. I went to a shelter given by the party. That shelter was known to family somehow. A male member of that family was involved in politics. Then I had a question that the class I come from and the shelter I was given belonged to the same class background—upper middleclass. The lady of that shelter was a highly educated school-teacher. She understood who we were and what kind of dangers we might have—I think because of her understanding I could use that shelter. She sacrificed a lot for us. But I had that question—why I had to leave my home. Then I was told that if I went back the police would catch me. Naturally the fear of getting caught by the police was there and so I did not go back. Then it used to be said that we must become a part of working class. God knows how far away they were.

Initially while I was there in that shelter with that lady I used to spend my days talking to her and listening to music.... Then I was told to publish party leaflets form her shelter and started doing that. In the meantime suddenly we were told by the party to go to the villages and create 'bases' of action. But there was no clear order how

to create them. We were only told to go and create bases according to our capacities. Actually it meant to enter the villages by befriending the women vendors, who used to come to the city regularly. I had a shock in the beginning– how could I remove the urbanity from my countenance! .....on Bongan railway line there is a small town– Machhlandpur. There I went to a woman vegetable vendor's house by an evening train...her family was extremely welcoming and she herself was very nice. An urban lady has come to their house–in the beginning her husband was a little hesitant. But they decided to keep me in as much comfort as they could. Though they knew why I was there, they could not think we would be really able to help them....they were very poor....at night I slept in a room next to their room...it had no doors–late at night two men came to my room and one of them clasped my throat. I got up and tried to scream. All of the women vendor's family came from the next room. Nobody could understand why these two men came. Whether they had any political intention or wanted to rape me remained unclear. The very next morning the husband saw me off in the first train and I never again went to work in the villages. Then we started publishing some leaflets again– though they had very little similarity with the party line they were being circulated as the writings of Charu Mazumdar. There was some discussions around that–dissent was there regarding such leaflets. But I could not gather why such things were happening–first of all nobody knew and there was no suitable answer to these questions. At that time an incident took place in Keshpur[226]–one of our party comrades was suspected and killed. Naturally I wanted to know which was the actual party line and which was not. There was a sense of insecurity. But if I had put up these questions I did know how I would have been treated. I felt that there was no depth in the party.

We were driven by the thoughts who was independent to what extent and how much 'declassed' one could be.

I can talk about women– where they were staying–they could have been victims of rape at any shelter. There was no political analysis of these kinds of difficulties. There was no definite allocation of tasks from the party. But we had a 'take team' and we had to work according to that 'take team'.

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[226] Keshpur is a small town in Medinipur district in south of West Bengal.

I could not even realize how I was caught. I was standing near Deshapriya park, one stop away from Priya cinema hall....suddenly a hugely built man came and clasped my throat. I could feel that something was going to happen. I tried to run away, but by that time they caught hold of me. First I was taken to Beleghata police station. Repeatedly they asked my name. Probably they ask the same question to all the arrested persons.

I had an easy friendship with all comrades. In some cases the men shelter-givers behaved badly and party did not take notice of that. I still feel anguish towards the party for treating the issue of honour of women comrades so casually.

Once my parents were rounded up by the police and taken to Maniktala police station. I was then in that police custody. My mother saw me there and told me—now you have to bear everything with gritted teeth...do not give away.

I had an easy mother-daughter relationship with my mother. She never stopped me from doing anything. My father was a freedom fighter during the anti-colonial struggle and a staunch supporter of Congress. All he had to say about my politics was—Communism is not bad, you have chosen the wrong time. But since I was attached to a politics of sacrifice I left my career. I always bore my own expenses. My father respected me a lot. My parents never tried to pose any obstacle to my chosen path they were very naturally worried about their daughter. I never had a close relationship with my extended family. The larger world and my own greater world of ideas were far removed from my extended family. My parents never asked me to confess anything. The pain and anxiety my father felt for me was necessarily a father's anxiety. He was extremely proud of me that his daughter has shown that for a just cause one can accept all hardships. He used to say that it was far more difficult to bring a revolution that to accept hardships.

We never had any kind of political discussions while we were in jail.....suddenly I was released. At that time many persons detained under MISA were released.

After my release I again had a disagreement with my father. Then I was running around to get myself a job. My father was of the opinion that I should at least finish my medical course—which, many of my friends started. He told me that I could do a lot of social work as a trained doctor also, but I did not agree.

Then I was teaching as a private tutor and working as a sales girl. Gradually I was drawn into the movement for the freedom of Naxalite activists. We established the Legal Aid Committee. I was working with Jayashree Rana, Shankar Bhattacharya and some other activists. We led a small procession of the parents of Naxalite activists.

In the beginning we had an office for the Legal Aid Committee. We only worked for the Naxalite activists, I was looking after the cases in Bashirhat and Barasat. At that time many legal practitioners came to help us. Bareen da and Snehanshu Acharya were with us all the time. They actually wanted to do something for the country. Later we took our office opposite to the High Court. We had to do our work with extreme financial difficulty and we had to bear unnecessary police intervention.

.....I think there was an element of adventurism in Naxalite politics—there was also a chance to dream about future. I think that only the Naxalites had an ideological dedication, which I feel is very necessary to let our next generation know.

Naxalite politics taught many people to sacrifice, gave inspiration to change the society. Still today I feel that change is absolutely necessary. We need ideological commitment and a will to self-sacrifice. But the question remains—can we actually achieve that change through armed revolution? The way presently everybody is thinking about his/her personal career and feels that serving the self in the most materialistic manner is the ultimate goal of life must be demystified as something to be despised. Politics has become a tool to pave personal career. I think only the Naxalites can break this shibboleth—only they can spread new ideology.

(I have omitted a section on her experience during the movement for the freedom of Naxalite activists since that is not directly related to her participation in the Naxalbari movement.)

4. **Aneeta** (aged 75 years)

Most probably that was 1971. A few young men, very closely known to me, started coming to my house regularly. Initially I did not know. Gradually I came to know that they were revolutionaries, struggling to change the society. Some of them were engineering students, some were students of Presidency College, and some had just

joined jobs. They were around twenty to thirty years of age. One or two girls of the same age also used to come.

It was not that I was not afraid in the beginning. But I had not the heart to stop them. The other members of my house also had no problems with them. They put their everything at stake, wanted to change the misery of the working class people and the peasantry—they had not thought about their own future. The police constantly chased them. The central and state government had a strict eye on them. So many of them were killed and underwent such horrible punishment if they were caught! How they were tortured! Many of them were shot at and many others were maimed for life. I thought that if I do not give them shelter where would they go, anyways they did not have many safe shelters to take refuge. They were not doing anything harmful. On the contrary many 'lumpen' (this is the exact word that Aneeta has used) boys became better human beings after coming to contact with them.

Thinking all this I gave them shelter.

There was no problem with them. Whatever we used to have in our house they used to share that food. I have so many memories! They would come suddenly, and then they would share food from the same bowl.

I did not like some of their activities. Like vandalizing the statues, burning down of schools and colleges as bourgeois educational institutions. I told them– you have to come in public view. Otherwise how the people would know you? They listened– we never had any uncomfortable disagreement. I became one of them while providing shelter. I was a part of the highs and lows in their lives

Later when police raided my house they found no one. By that time they stopped coming.

I have sympathy for those who are still trying. But I do not how much so few of them can achieve. If people are not awake how can they win such an enormous struggle? Those in opposition have power, money and arms. Still.....some of them are trying even now and I support them. I wish they become successful.

5. **Rajlakshmi** (aged 82 years)

In 1970 my eldest son joined Naxalite politics. After that one or two activists started coming to our house. I did not understand initially. Later I understood that all of them were Naxalite activists, working for the country. They used to come to our house to take shelter.

They were of different ages. There were youngsters of fourteen or fifteen and also matured men of fifty or sixty. But most of them were young men and women. Daily at least eight to twelve of them used to come. I kept a bowl of rice and kettle of tea ready for them always.

My other children also became Naxalite activists later. My husband also supported them. I was afraid in the beginning since I had no idea how cruelly the police could torture them.

We were not much better off economically but I tried to take care of them as far as I could manage. I spent whatever bank savings we had and sometimes sold my jewelry and crockery also.

We never felt any discomfort as so many of them used to come at any point of time—only I used to be worried about them. One young man had serious asthma—when my children used to share food with him from the same plate I got angry.

In 1972 the police raided our house. During the early dawn after Charu Mazumdar was caught police raided our house. Out of my nine children three sons and three daughters were Naxalite activists. On the day of the police raid three daughters and one son was there in our house. My son was actually quite small and though he supported the Naxals he was not part of any action. Apart from them there were some others who had taken shelter. After the police acme all of them fled. But from my next-door neighbour's place the police caught my youngest daughter and youngest son along with another Naxalite young man. Probably the police extracted this news from somebody through threats. That day I lost consciousness with fear after the raid.

For two long years so many young men and women used to come to our house that possibly the neighbours guessed something. I know that some of them knew for certain and they understood, even helped.

A few days after the raid my husband started living outside the house as it was advised to him. I have already mentioned that he was a supporter but he never did anything directly. He used to say that they were doing good work. Once one of the Naxalite activists went to take shelter to one of his very close friend's house—and the friend refused. Those young men told my husband later of his refusal. After a few days that friend came to stay overnight at our place. At night they (my husband and his friend) slept on the same bed. In the morning his friend told me—your husband has not spoken to me a single word.

After about a month my husband came back to live in our house again. Police got this information and arrested him from our house. I did not even know where they took him. Throughout the day I searched for him in different police stations and in the evening I found him in Entally police station. Then he was taken to the Central Jail—he was sent to the jail hospital after he fell ill. They tortured him inhumanly but could not get any information from him. They tore off his body hair during interrogation—he suddenly became an old man after all these. After three months I could arrange for his release. He became ill again after he came back and I had to take him to hospital. He lost his life there.

In the meantime my third daughter was caught in Durgapur. She was kept in jail first in Asansol and then in Calcutta. My youngest daughter and youngest son were caught also and were sent to Liluah Home for destitute children. Later they were sent to jail. I was running from one court to another and from one jail to another.

From that month of July police used to come to our house regularly. Sometimes they threatened me and sometimes made cruel jokes like bringing my son's dead body to me. I toughened my mind and kept my mouth shut—a few of my neighbours helped me through those days.

I have no regrets. I have never complained to my eldest son regarding this. I did not even think that. My husband was an engineer and used to earn well. He was killed by police torture—that is an irreparable loss. But when I think that he and my children wanted to do good work, wanted to work for the people, poor like us I feel no regret. So many people die of so many diseases but my husband became a martyr. There is a small monument for the martyrs in our neighbourhood and my husband's name is also curved there. When I see that I feel proud.