

**GENDER AND THE NAXALITE MOVEMENT IN
INDIA: A SURVEY OF DEBATES**

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KSHIPRA SHARMA



**CENTRE FOR POLITICAL STUDIES
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI-110067
INDIA
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JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY

Centre for Political Studies

School of Social Sciences

New Delhi-110067 INDIA

Tel. : 011-26704413 Fax : 011-2671603

Date: 26.7. 2010

CERTIFICATE

Certified that the dissertation entitled “**GENDER AND THE NAXALITE MOVEMENT IN INDIA: A SURVEY OF DEBATES**” submitted by me is in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of this University. This dissertation is original and has not been submitted in part or full, for any other degree to this or any other University, to the best of my knowledge.

Kshipra Sharma

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

PROF. GOPAL GURU

(Chairperson)

Chairperson
Centre for Political Studies
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110067

DR. MANINDRA NATH THAKUR

(Supervisor)

SUPERVISOR
Centre for Political Studies
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110067

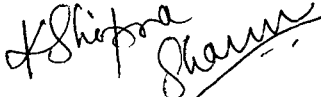
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The responsibility for errors and shortcomings in this work lie solely on me.


Kshipra Sharma

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INTRODUCTION

'Naxalite movement' is a product of communist ideology of Marxist-Leninist variety, which emerged in India as a revolutionary political creed in the spring of 1967, at Naxalbari, West Bengal.¹ The term 'Naxalite' since then, has continued to "symbolize" any rebellion for attainment of one's rights against the "...established order in India."² Naxalite movement is essentially a political movement with its ultimate aim at capturing state power and establishing an alternative regime. Charu Mazumdar has articulately summed up its aim as: "*Militant struggles must be carried on not for land, crops, etc. but for the seizure of State Power*".³

Today, even after much churning, the movement appears to be a potent political force in the country. The influence of the Naxalites extends (by a government estimate) to about 125 districts, spread over 12 states of the country.⁴ Issues of agrarian transformation, tribal people's rights, resisting imperialism and globalisation add up to what they identify as 'People's Democratic Revolution', the prime strategy for changing the very character of the Indian state and society.⁵ In view of the issues they raise, the movement seems to have a strong social base that has sustained it throughout the repressive tactics pursued by the state. In fact, over the past decade the movement has spread to new areas such as parts of Orissa, Uttar

¹ I use the phrase, 'Naxalite movement' to broadly encompass all the major struggles inspired by Marxism in India, particularly after 1960s. However, instances from the preceding communist led struggles like that of telangana, tebhaga are also drawn upon for better positioning of the Naxalite movement. Though there are several streams within the Naxalite movement in India but I will mainly concentrate on Marxism-Leninism (ML) stream. CPI (ML) particularly was formed in 1969 on the question of opposition to participation in electoral politics. For greater details see chapter two, section 2.1. Also, in this dissertation the term 'Naxalites' is generally used for referring to members of different Naxalite groups who have their common history in Naxalbari, a place on the north-eastern tip of India, situated in the state of Bengal.

² Sumanta Bannerjee, Introduction to *India's Simmering Revolution: the Naxalite Uprising*, (London: Zed Books, 1984), i.

³ Charu Mazumdar, "One Year of Naxalbari Struggle", *Selected Works of Charu Mazumdar, Liberation*, (June, 1968), <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mazumdar/1968/06/x02.html> (accessed on June 20, 2010).

⁴ As mentioned in the *Report of an Expert Group, Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas*, Government of India, April, (2008), 3. http://planningcommission.nic.in/reports/publications/rep_dce.pdf (accessed on October 15, 2009).

⁵ *The General Programme, The Party Constitution*, adopted at Eighth Party Congress Report, (CPI-ML Publication, 2007), 9-14.

Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Karnataka.⁶ Noticeably, within its social base, women population form a large part. They are drawn into the movement either out of zeal to be part of a revolutionary phenomenon or out of necessity against social miseries.⁷ In present times, character of women's participation within the movement seems to have undergone change. Beside the increasing percentage of women in cadres (in different Naxalite groups), quality of their participation has also transformed tremendously.⁸ Latest pictures, primarily from underground Naxalite camps show a rather militant character of the women members. Heavily armed in uniforms, they are seen as part of ranks and receiving formal military training.⁹ They even head squads, which was confirmed by a recent abduction of Atindranath Datta, the office-in-charge of the Sankhrail police station. Importantly, this operation was led by two young women of this stream.¹⁰

Keeping in mind the growing participation of women in the movement, it is important to explore the place of 'gender' within the movement's forwarded alternative model of society.¹¹ An alternative organising principle of society as claimed, comprises of a system based on equality and justice, where there shall be an end to "all kinds of exploitations of man by man."¹² Though the vision behind such an alternative looks unique and progressive, it makes one curious to know whether the movement's claim for an alternative society based on equality, plausible and adequate for women. Here, case for weighing the model's sustainability in context of gender question also fits relevantly into the critical

⁶ Details of the influenced states is taken from Prakash singh , 'The Naxalite Movement in India', *Yojna*, a special issue on Naxalism, Vol 51, (February, 2007): 23-27.

⁷ U.Vindhya, "Question of Revolutionary Identity and Sexuality in the Contemporary Radical Left Movement in Andhra Pradesh", *Psychology and Developing Societies*, 15, 2 (Sage Publications:New Delhi, 2003): 148.

⁸ See Abhijit Dasgupta, "Equally Extreme", *India Today* , Nov 9, (2009), 32-35.

⁹ Pictures supplemented in the articles of Arundhati and Navalakha clearly show women in uniforms and carrying guns. See the two articles:

Gautam Navlakha, "Days and Nights in the Heartland of Rebellion- Maoist land"

<http://indianvanguard.wordpress.com/2010/04/02/gautam-navlakha-days-and-nights-in-the-heartland-of-rebellion/> (accessed April7, 2010). and

Arundhati Roy, "Walking With The Comrades"

<http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?264738> (accessed on April 2, 2010).

¹⁰ Dasgupta, 34.

¹¹ According to the World Health Organization, "gender" means "the socially constructed" roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women. The term 'gender', in this dissertation is broadly used to denote the issues concerning 'women' in India

¹² *The General Programme, The Party Constitution*, adopted at Eighth Party Congress Report, (CPI-ML Publication, 2007), 5.

category of emancipatory politics. Reason being, realm of emancipatory politics is very often criticized for pushing aside important issues like gender in the name of larger goals. It's widely believed that they subordinate women's emancipation project to the political whims of those in power within its own working. Such marginalization of issues concerning half of human race obviously raises doubts over the emancipatory claims of the movement and highlights the possibility of a continuous internal and external struggle within its own model. This very point of internal and external struggle within Naxalite movement is the entry point for my dissertation.

Interestingly, modern studies on political movements have marked a new form of women's movement attempting to recognise and restore female footprints in its history. This new form significantly aims to acknowledge lives and contribution of women who have dedicated their life struggling against patriarchal mindsets. Writings like *We Were Making History...Life Stories of Women in the Telangana People's Struggles*¹³ are commendable efforts in this direction, opening new possibilities for analysing, understanding and rereading history from women's perspective. It gives us the chance to relocate the hidden elements, giving adequate attention to individual identity vis-à-vis collective identity. This research study pays prime attention to such critical efforts in the context of Naxalite movement, to make the exploration even clearer.

In view of the overall theme of dissertation - 'Gender and the Naxalite Movement in India: A Survey of Debates'- I will briefly trace the genesis of the Naxalite movement, highlighting the emergence of Marxism and Marxist bodies in India. Importantly, the ideology of Marxism found its roots in India in the early twentieth century. CPI was formed in 1925 with a view to fight for national independence and a future of socialism. Its birth was the result of tremendous historical developments at home and abroad.¹⁴ Later, following the Indo-China war, CPI later split into CPI(M) in 1964 on serious ideological and tactical lines.¹⁵ Within this backdrop of

¹³ Stree Shakti Sangathan, *We Were Making History: Life Stories of Women in the Telangana People's Struggle*, (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989).

¹⁴ Brief History of CPI, <http://sites.google.com/a/communistparty.in/cpi/brief-history-of-cpi> (accessed on April 8, 2010).

¹⁵ Vinod Mishra, *Selected Works*, (NewDelhi: CPI-ML Publication, 1999), 281.

communist developments in India, a small peasant uprising at Naxalbari transformed the history of communism in India. Apparently, what had started as a Communist led peasant struggle in the form of Tebhaga movement and Telangana struggle in the 1940s later intensified in the form of Naxalite movement in 60s. Use of political violence (in Naxalbari) as a means to achieve radical goals is said to have defined the contours of future political struggles in India. Such a historic manifestation at Naxalbari, according to Sumanta Banerjee was a result of “...worldwide impulse among the radicals to return to the roots of ‘revolutionary idealism’, and more importantly ‘rereading Marx’, worldwide.”¹⁶

Despite the movement’s repeated claims for revolutionizing the entire system, it seems incapable of putting to rest the major feminist anxieties. Feminists repeatedly highlight inadequacies within revolutionary agendas saying the movement has not made efforts to “.... coalesce into any significant mass mobilization of women on gender issues.”¹⁷ Even in the phase of mass mobilization, it found itself questioned on several inner contradictions on patriarchal lines. Thus, though the participation of women kept on increasing within much zeal and radicalism, the question of gender seemed increasingly marginalized. Even today, the movement seems to be entangled between its theory and practice, between its public and private image.

Noteworthy, besides probing into the condition of the women within the movement, I also intend to look into the attitude of the Naxalites towards women in general. For the overall position of the movement, three issues central to the relationship between Naxalites and gender like violence, economic rights (equal wages and land rights), and collective action are examined. These issues are carefully chosen as priorities, keeping in mind the theme of situating gender within the contours of Naxalite movement.

Violence in whatever form it may be, is dangerous and degrading. Women in India have essentially been victims of violence due to its vulnerable position in society. It

¹⁶ Sumanta Banerjee, Introduction to *India’s Simmering Revolution: the Naxalite Uprising*, (London Zed Books, 1984) ii, iii.

¹⁷ Samita Sen, “Towards a Feminist Politics: the Indian Women’s in Historical Perspective”, *Working Paper Series* No. 9, 22. <http://www.onlinewomeninpolitics.org/india/indian.pdf> (accessed on March 6, 2010).

is one such thread that connects women of all castes, classes and communities. Position of Naxalite movement on violence against women will be explored in every chapter. The idea here is to examine the attitude of the movement on three forms of violence: violence on women within the movement, violence on women in society, in general, and violence caused by Naxalites, directly or indirectly.

On the question of economic rights, land and wages are under main focus. Feminists widely believe that economic rights - equal wages and women's ownership of land - are a crucial mechanism of women empowerment, to which Naxalites seem to have not paid much attention. According to scholars like Sarbani Bandhyopadhyay, while its members have continued with their demands for payment of "...stipulated minimum wages", they appear to have not given as much attention to issue of equal wages for women and men.¹⁸ In case of land, although they have fought for land-ownership rights for the labouring castes in the past, entitlements in the names of women seems not such a comfortable idea for male comrades, after all.¹⁹

On the question of collective action, women's role and position within Naxalite movement is often questioned by feminists. It's generally criticized for confining women to routine activism, debarring them from important decision making process. Question of negligible women leadership within the movement is a major concern. Women's experience, subjectivity in the form of feelings, emotions and aspirations, generally appear sidelined in their socialist expedition.²⁰ Democratic centralism is yet another debatable issue linked to the concept of collective action. It is one of key principles within collective activism which aims to maintain party solidarity in the form of 'unity of action'.²¹ Feminists, time and gain have drawn

¹⁸ Sarbani Bandhyopadhyay, "The Revolutionary Patriarchs"
<http://www.pragoti.org/node/2053> (accessed April 11, 2009).

¹⁹ See Madhu Kishwar and Ruth Vanita, ed, *In Search of Answers: Indian Women's Voices From Manushi*, (New Delhi: Manohar, 1999), 139-148. and Sarbani Bandhyopadhyay.

²⁰ U. Vindhya, "Question of Revolutionary Identity and Sexuality in the Contemporary Radical Left Movement in Andhra Pradesh", *Psychology and Developing Societies*, 15, 2 (Sage Publications: New Delhi, 2003): 149.

²¹ *The General Programme, The Party Constitution*, adopted at Eighth Party Congress Report, (CPI-ML Publication, 2007), 19.

attention to the apparent authoritarian character of this principle saying it leads to subordination of women's voices within parties.²²

Keeping in mind the multidimensional nature of the Naxalite movement in India, the relevance of this gender-based study lies in studying its historical groundedness with a critical view towards fundamental conditions moulding the movement's attitude towards gender. Though innumerable studies on the causes, nature, and impact of the Naxalite movement have been done in the past; attention to the question of women in theory and practice of the Naxalite movement - their role, their aspirations, their existence - looks negligible. This dissertation therefore, is an effort to incorporate 'gender' as an important analytical category for the study of Naxalite movement.

Importantly, in order to have a deeper understanding of the Naxalite movement- its evolution, nature, role - I shall locate it within the historical framework of Marxist struggles in India.²³ To be more specific, any study on the Naxalite movement cannot overlook the importance of the rise and fall of the Marxist struggles preceding Naxalbari like Telangana (1946-51)²⁴ and Tebhaga (1946-47)²⁵. Case becomes even more relevant in view of the overall theme of the dissertation, 'Gender and Naxalite movement in India', because such historic struggles were testimonies to the tremendous contributions made by women under communist guidance. Here, it is important to note that this dissertation is primarily based on examination of the overground ML stream. However, since there's a visible continuity between different Naxalite groups in the movement, I shall also look upon the available material produced by Maoists in order to have larger understanding.

²² Ibid.

²³ I have consciously used the phrase 'Marxist struggles' to encompass all the struggles, small and big, which have been inspired by the ideology of Marxism. Within this broad framework, I have chosen to examine only the Naxalite movement in India.

²⁴ Communist led Telangana struggle was started in the late 40s as a reaction against exploitative feudal regulations of the Nizam of the region. Women's participation in this movement was one of its significant features. Andhra Mahila Sabha (AMS) in 1930 and Mahila Nav Jivan Mandal in 1937 brought women cadres into left front. See Stree Shakti Sangathan, 8.

²⁵ Tebhaga struggle was basically a revolt by the sharecroppers of the Bengal for reduction of rent, demanding the retention of the three-fourths of the produce for themselves and playing only one-fourth to landlords. See Prakash Louis, *People Power: the Naxalite Movement in Central Bihar*, (Delhi: Wordsmith, 2002), 44-45.

One of the major objectives of this research work is to map out the terms of debates concerning gender question within Naxalite movement. In order to better appreciate the research objective, following broad research questions is probed: *‘Whether the Naxalite movement addresses the gender question in a way that confirms to the ideals of Universal human liberation?’*

‘Universal human liberation’ is the main parameter used in this research project to test the movement’s liberatory and progressive claims. My attempt here is to explore whether the ‘alternative’ model forwarded by the movement has enough space for addressal of women’s issues, particularly in terms of freedom of expression, choice, etc. It’s important to find out if the movement can truly revolutionise the society against its old norms and values, which have contributed to the perpetual oppression of the women. Validation of its model is further checked by posing the sub-question: if the movement has the capacity to construct and follow a standard systematic framework based on the maxim of ‘equality’.

This dissertation primarily makes use of the method of survey of available literatures and ‘interviews’. Method of survey is used for analysing two kinds of literature – available Naxalite literature and literature produced by autonomous women’s movement. To be precise, method of ‘content analysis’ will be used for the survey of Naxalite literature whereby certain concepts identified with the ‘gender question’ will be located in Naxalite texts, publications, in order to check adequacy of its addressal. Interviews of selected individuals like ex-naxalites, and activists, academics well known for their writings on the Naxalite movement are also conducted to have comprehensive understanding of the subject. Information gathered from other secondary sources like newspapers, magazines, journals, seminars is also incorporated within this research work.

For analytical convenience this research is divided into following three major chapters. The first chapter aims to showcase some of the national and international reactions to the debate between Marxism and Feminism starting right from the early twentieth century. It captures the dynamic discourses between the two patterns of thought, highlighting the strands of divergence and possibilities of convergence (if any) between them. By invoking concepts of ‘recognition’ and ‘identity’, I will also

try to map out such Marxist-Feminist debates within Marxist struggles in India, particularly, the Naxalite movement. Importantly, I've tried to focus more on the main issues of contention between the two ideologies rather than concentrating on different categories of Feminism and Marxism, in order to give a theoretical entry point for my overall theme of the dissertation.

The second chapter principally focuses on the attitude of the Naxalite politics towards a number of debatable gender issues inside and outside the movement, to check the credibility of its revolutionary model for the society. Amongst all, problems of women participants are under prime concern in this chapter. In order to find answers to the principal questions, this chapter primarily surveys the available Naxalite literature in the form of CPI-ML(Liberation). It is however, supplemented by other sources like the literature produced by autonomous women's movement, journals, magazines, etc.

Third chapter is based on some real experiences relating to the Naxalite movement. It basically analyses the personal interviews and conversations conducted by myself or published in the print media. The sample consists of ex-naxalites, academics known for their deep understanding of the subject, contemporary party members and social activists. The chapter, broadly, is an attempt to test whether there are adequate debates taking place on such issues at different levels or not. If not, what are the possible causes for silencing of such debates, if any.

Today, Naxalite movement seems to be fighting a double struggle - internal and external. Beside the visible external struggle to end the outside 'forces of oppression', the movement appears to be in constant struggle with certain internal forces as well. Meaning, in addition to the on-going broader gender debates outside movement's working, there seems to be increasing number of debates within its own stream, questioning its inner contradictions. Even after four decades of its working, doubts are raised on the emancipatory maxim of 'equality' presented by the Naxalites. On the parameter of gender question, the movement looks far from

convincing to the feminists. It would be interesting to see and find out 'how' and 'why' even after repeated reports, analysis by ex-naxalites, academics, analysts on inadequacies within the movements, the movement appears to be dwelling in a state of silence or denial.

Chapter One:

MARXISM AND FEMINISM : Critical Engagement

The relationship between Marxism and feminism has been a long, contested one with numerous possibilities of interpretation. Though their equation has evolved over the years, streaks of suspicion between the two don't seem to have ironed out fully. In this chapter, I plan to follow the history of this relationship, to find out the major issues of debate. Importantly, I've tried to focus more on the main issues of contention between the two ideologies rather than concentrating on different categories of feminism and Marxism, in order to give a theoretical entry point for the overall theme of this dissertation.

The idea behind this chapter is to explore the literature available in the realm of Marxism and Feminism to find certain answers relating to the sustainability of Naxalite model. To be more specific, since the Naxalite movement claims to be based on the ideology of Marxism, such a background will allow me to construct the theoretical framework within which the larger question of gender (within and without the movement) shall be probed. An exploration of this kind becomes more relevant keeping in mind the movement's repeated logic of resisting 'deviations' and adherence to ideological principles, particularly in matters relating to gender.

Closer examination of some of the Marxist struggles in India like Telangana (1946-51), Naxalbari (1967-75)²⁶, shows rise of a fresh kind of literature that needs to be explored from the angle of relationship between Marxism and Feminism. Whether it's the literature produced by Naxalites themselves or by the feminists, analysis from the perspective of women opens myriad possibilities of restoring lost, ignored elements of the movement. Recent feminist literature (like *We were...*) has made an effort in this direction by making a gender based studies of some of these struggles inspired by Marxism to showcase the level of troubled Marxist-feminist

²⁶ Naxalbari struggle in 1967 was basically a peasant struggle led by communists, against the oppressive landlords over the issue of 'land to the tillers'. It is this incident which later manifested into what is called as the 'Naxalite movement' in India. Details are given in chapter two.

relations in practice. These literatures have highlighted the indifferent attitudes of the male comrades towards women, particularly towards those who were part of the movement. It brings to light the movement's desperate attempts to underline 'what women contributed to the movement?' not 'what the movement gave to the women?'²⁷ Such efforts are not only crucial for investigating the so called embedded antagonism between the two ideological groups in practice but also presents a fresh approach to history, individual space and recognition within collective activities.

1.1 Marxism and Feminism: An Overview

In order to probe into the sustainability of the Naxalite alternative model of society, I will start with the examination from the point of its ideological placement. For this, I shall begin with broad understanding of Marxism and Feminism along with the summarised debates between the two. However, here I would like to state the fact that, realistically, it is far from easy to produce compact, noncontroversial explanation of Marxism or Feminism because two categories are immensely vast and prone to myriad interpretations. In this regard, I agree to Erik Olin Wright's line: "boundaries of each are contested, both by intellectuals committed to these traditions and by their critics."²⁸ So, following is an attempt to give only a brief description of the underlined theoretical structures and the debates between the two.

Broadly speaking, Marxists and feminists hold two fundamentally incompatible worldviews. Marxism as such can be broadly outlined as a "general theory of the world... and human society as part of that world".²⁹ Based on real experiences, Marx basically aimed to sketch a scientific understanding of society by uncovering the governing universal laws. Marx's economic theory of capitalism for which he is widely known basically looked at the different stages of society from the point of

²⁷ Stree Shakti Sangathan, *We Were Making History: Life Stories of Women in the Telangana People's Struggle*, (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989), 20.

²⁸ Erik Olin Wright, "Explanation and Emancipation in Marxism and Feminism", *Sociological Theory*, Vol 11 no. (1993): 39

²⁹ Emile Burns, *What is Marxism*, (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 2008),1.

view of 'production' relations.³⁰ Marxism, right from its inception claimed for propagating female equality and women's rights. It considers the struggle against capitalism as the only way for the liberation of women.³¹ Marxists maintain that class conflict is the "...motor force of history, and reject the notion that there are irreconcilable differences between the interests of men and women".³² They are solely concerned with the strategy of uniting all those exploited and oppressed thereby providing a bulwark against intrinsically oppressive capitalist system.

The term 'feminism', on the other hand, has attained different meanings for different groups over time. Feminism, in the most generic of definitions, is defined as the "theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes, and organized activity on behalf of women's rights and common interests."³³ Feminists basically believe that the fundamental division in human society is "between the sexes, rather than between social classes."³⁴ It essentially views feminist struggle as something entirely "separate from the class struggle", which according to them is nothing but a different form of "patriarchal rule."³⁵

Universally, the feminist movement has come a long way. There are many feminists and many different theories. However, feminism can be broken up into three waves; First-wave which spans from the nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, Second-wave which spans from the early 1960's through the late 1980's, and the Third-wave which started in the early 1990's, and is continuing through present time.³⁶ The 'First Wave' feminists were those who fought for the basic identity rights like for access to higher education, equal property rights and the vote prior to the First World War. The 'Second Wave' feminists on the other hand broadened its

³⁰ Ibid., 1, 15.

³¹ *Women's Movement and Communist Party: Ideology, Programme, Practice*, (Delhi: CPI-ML publication, 2008), 15-16.

³² "Marxism, Feminism and Women's Liberation", 1.

<http://www.bolshevik.org/1917/no19fem.pdf> (accessed on August 20, 2009).

³³ *Feminism in Waves: A Brief Overview of the First, Second and the Third Wave*, http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/392800/feminism_in_waves_a_brief_overview.html?cat=75 (accessed on January 19, 2010).

³⁴ "Marxism, Feminism and Women's Liberation", 1.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ "Three Wave of Feminism: From Suffragettes to Grrls", *Gender Communication Theories and Analyses*, 1 http://www.sagepub.com/upm-data/6236_Chapter_1_Krolokke_2nd_Rev_Final_Pdf.pdf (accessed on June 10, 2010).

span of attention - entering into the personal sphere, into the realities of women's lives. Prior to the resurgence of the women's movement in the late 1960s, personal sphere received little attention from social critics. This period (Second Wave) was essentially dominated by emergence of 'Radical feminists' advocating the slogan 'personal is political'. Coming to the 'Third Wave', feminists belonging to this phase seek to "...overcome the theoretical question of equity or difference and the political question of evolution or revolution, while it challenges the notion of "universal womanhood" and embraces ambiguity, diversity, and multiplicity in transversal theory and politics."³⁷

The main problem according to the feminists lies in Marxism giving less importance to the issues of women. It's widely believed that a Marxist analysis of capitalism is conceived around a primary contradiction between labour and capital and operates with categories that can be termed as 'sex-blind'. Feminism, in contrast, precisely emphasizes on the relations of gender – largely speaking, of the oppression of women by men – that Marxism has tend to pass over in silence.³⁸ In words of Heidi Hartmann, the main concern of Marxism is the question of relation of "...women to the economic system, rather than that of women to men..."³⁹

Noticeably, the gap between the two ideologies peaked with the inception of 'Second-wave' feminism in the late 1960s. During this period, emergence of other radical groups like naxalites gave rise to an open antagonism between women's movement and Naxalite movement, particularly in India. The main area of contention between the two groups was on the issue of recognition to gender-specific issues. Feminist groups insisted on attention to 'subjectivity' and 'experiences' as ways to gain and form knowledge rather than mechanically following textual ideas.⁴⁰ This of course posed challenge to the Marxist struggles whose ends and means have always revolved around their ideologues and party

³⁷ Ibid., 2

³⁸ Michele Barrett, *Women's Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist Analysis*, (London: Verso, 1980), 8.

³⁹ Lydia Sargent, ed, *Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage Marriage of Marxism and Feminism*, (Boston: South End, 1981), 3.

⁴⁰ U.Vindhya, "Question of Revolutionary Identity and Sexuality in the Contemporary Radical Left Movement in Andhra Pradesh", *Psychology and Developing Societies*, 15, 2 (2003): 148-149.

texts. Adherence to 'subjectivity' in the form of individual experiences, their interaction with the external conditions/objects, were scoffed off in the name of threats to the party principle of "selflessness" and "collective commitment".⁴¹ Furthermore, feminist insistence on issues questioning personal/public discourse gave birth to the artificial, defensive logic of 'diversion' or 'deviation' within the movement.⁴²

Question of personal-public thus, has always been a crucial issue in the debate between the two groups. Substantively, it's thought that injuries arise only in violating the private sphere, meaning injuries do not arise within the sphere or by and because of the sphere. Feminist consciousness, in contrast, wishes to unveil the private. For them, the area of the intimacy has very often been the area of deepest oppression; the 'personal is political' meaning the private is public. Mackinnon articulately summarises women's sentiments saying, "...Privacy is everything women as women have never been allowed to be or to have; at the same time the private is everything women have been equated with and defined in terms of men's ability to have."⁴³

Importantly, the exchanges between the two ideologies can be broadly summarised in the form of three main predominant feminist theories: Radical, Socialist and the Marxist feminism. The relationships between these three feminist theories were sometimes strained, often antagonistic. At other times each clearly drew support from the others. Radical feminists primarily describe a historical struggle between men and women just like the Marxist conception of class struggle. It believes that primary oppression was the patriarchal sex oppression. That men use social systems and other methods of control to keep non-dominant men and women suppressed.⁴⁴ Strategically, for them, the elimination of sex oppression would bring about the

⁴¹ Ibid., 149.

⁴² Feminists often insist that logic of 'diversion' has been repeatedly used by the revolutionaries to avoid questions relating to gender, arguing it leads to subordination of central concern of class exploitation. This kind of attitude is evident from several instances available in recent feminist literatures like Stree Shakti Sangathan, *We Were Making*, (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989)

⁴³ Catharine A. Mackinnon, "Feminism, Marxism, Method and the State: Towards Feminist Jurisprudence", *Signs*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (Summer, 1983): 656.

⁴⁴ "Marxism, Feminism and women's Liberation" 1-2.

elimination of all other oppressions. Radical Feminists are the most vocal groups, advancing the slogan 'personal is political'. Marxist feminist believed in the importance of women in the struggle against capitalism as 'workers' but not as 'women'. They began to define women's role in the reproduction (domestic labour) in a way that gave women an importance in Marxist analysis and extended Marxist categories. Socialist feminist on the third front agreed with the radical feminists that there was a system of oppression called patriarchy and, agreed with Marxist feminists that there was a class oppression defining the situation for all workers.⁴⁵

Out of the three categories defined above, Radical feminist group of 1960s is under main focus in this research as it comprised of the most radical voices for women empowerment and was in an open clash with the Naxalites in India. Ironically, even though both Marxists and radical feminists appear to seek a total and radical change in social relations, as ideologies, Marxism and radical feminism have generally opposed one another. In this dissertation, radical feminism is the prime thread that introduces the different gender related tensions associated with the Naxalite movement.

1.2 Principal Marxist Theories: Feminist Anxieties

In order to have a conceptual understanding of Marxism in terms of position of women within, I shall now explore some of the major theories of Marx. Production, Alienation, Ideology, as forwarded by Marx, are such theories that give insight into the mechanism of oppression/exploitation as understood by Marx and its implication for women.

1.2.1 Theory of Production - 'Production', 'reproduction' and the relation between the two, is one debate that has bothered the feminists for years. Here, I shall briefly examine the Marxist connotation of these terms to have a greater understanding of the position of women within his framework. Noticeably, Marx is often criticised by feminists for presenting narrow propositions denying the deserved position for

⁴⁵ Sargent, xx-xxi.

women. His concept of 'production' and 'reproduction' which is said to have focused primarily on the production of things leaving aside the procreational activities, is a major irritant for the feminist groups. According to most feminist scholars, 'Reproduction of means of production' in Marx's understanding is restricted to economic level leaving aside other important categories.

In Marx's work, 'Contributions to the Critique of Political Economy', he writes:

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. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.⁴⁶

In the above passage Marx looks purely concerned with materialist analysis of 'production' without giving much attention to the 'relations' involved. Here Marx yet again seems to have failed to recognise familial activities as part of the broader relations of production and thus, an inevitable component of economy. Theorisation of domestic labour in such a situation becomes even more difficult as labour in social reproduction is hardly given any importance.

Andrea Nye on this issue clearly highlights the indifference of Marx. She shows how without any hesitation, Marx labelled women's labour in home and in fields like welfare, teaching, nursing as 'unproductive' labour. Marx called all such activities as "subsidiary to and parasitic on the productive base of capitalist society."⁴⁷ She further highlights the fact that "the wife, in Marxian terms, produces 'use value' for immediate consumption not value" in real sense, because it lacks 'exchange value'.⁴⁸ In her eyes, Marx's theory seems to have failed to include many facets of social production like "nurturing, services, production for

⁴⁶ "Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy"

<http://www.marxists.org/subject/women/index.htm> (accessed on July, 2009).

⁴⁷ Andrea Nye, *Feminist Theory and The Philosophy of Man*, (New York: Croom Helm, 1988), 56.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 56.

use, education..' because such activities, apparently, have no element of 'production' and 'relations of production'⁴⁹

Such inadequacy on the part of Marx is questionable, keeping in mind, his repeated assurances of gender equality within class struggle theory. Exclusion of women and their contributions from the 'productive' category raises obvious doubts on his treatment of 'class'. Essentially, Marx's class theory lacks in terms of both explaining gender inequalities and incorporating women adequately into the explanation even of class inequalities. Keeping in mind the male-centric class categorisation and restricted understanding of work as wage labour, Zillah Eisenstein stressed that it's necessary not only to "re-examine the way women have been fit into class categories" but also "redefine the categories themselves."⁵⁰ This project seems relevant in today's time keeping in mind the growing entrance of women into various so called 'productive', occupational fields. Now class differentiation does not appear limited to males of the family, women too are demanding a proper space within such a class framework.

1.2.2 Theory of alienation – According to traditional Marxist view, increasing control of man over nature is paralleled along the increasing alienation of the man, peaked in a capitalist society. Alienation in general terms can be described as estrangement, apathy, indifference from something or somebody like society, religion or even himself for that matter. According to Marx, work is the most vital, primary human activity because "it can provide the means either to fulfil man's potential or to distort and pervert his nature and his relationships with others."⁵¹ Actually within a capitalist system man starts losing his identity as a living being and gets confined to being a mere producer. Personal relations start losing meaning; he feels like a stranger in his own world. In the due course "... in the production of objects, man objectifies himself, he expresses and externalises his being"⁵² Such objects directly or indirectly starts controlling his being (his existence) making him

⁴⁹ Ibid, 63.

⁵⁰ Zillah Eisenstein, ed., *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979), 31.

⁵¹ Michael Haralambos and Robin Heald, *Sociology: Themes and Perspective*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980) 228-229.

⁵² Ibid., 537.

lose himself in the object. Such an act of production thus results in man's alienation.

Traditional Marxism particularly restricts this phenomenon to persons in capitalism, although certain features of it may exist in other modes of production. Consequently, those who do not participate in social relations of capitalist mode of production are supposedly not alienated. Peasants and servants apparently, do not experience such phenomenon. Women in turn may be its victim only if they are part of the capitalist production circle.⁵³ Rest of the women are excluded from the category showing it's a gender-specific theory of alienation. Close examination here shows that though Marx's theory of alienation has managed to capture the complexities of exploitative conditions prevalent in capitalist society but from the point of view of feminists the theory falls short. Nowhere has Marx clearly specified the position of women within his theory of alienation. He never bothered to explain whether his theory is applicable to housewives or not.⁵⁴ Despite Marx's assertion that women shall be liberated in a capitalist society when they go out of their houses and earn without depending on their husbands,⁵⁵ he seems to have failed to realise the possibility of women's own alienation like their males counterparts at different dimensions of production as well. Marx seems to ignore the fact that women in capitalism were under two kinds of control i.e, of the housework and wage work. He seems to ignore the difference between experiences of men and women under capitalism. Overall, his proposed theory looks inadequate for the analysis of women's conditions.

Now, I shall examine some of the important critiques and interpretations of the concept of 'alienation'. Some socialist feminists, building on radical feminist insights have explored this problem and said that women's experiences in contemporary society is a perfect example of alienation (whether its in the role of mothers or wives). Linda Phelps and Sandra Bartky explore another aspect of alienation of women in the form of heterosexuality. According to them, women are

⁵³ Allison M. Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*, (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1983), 308.

⁵⁴ I use the term 'housewives' to broadly identify those women who are chiefly engaged in domestic labour and not paid any wage.

⁵⁵ Haralambos and Heald, 390.

under constant pressure for “economic survival”, which in turn forces them to present themselves as “sexually pleasing to men.”⁵⁶ For them “best chances of economic security for most women remains the sale of their sexuality in marriage.”⁵⁷ Men seem to control every aspect of women’s life. Here, one may find a women’s situation similar to that of the alienated worker where workers get alienated from the process and product of their labour and women are getting alienated from their own body and their own self.⁵⁸

Bertell Ollman noticeably, has pointed out at the relevance of the concept of ‘alienation’. In his famous work, *Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society*, he rereads Marx’s theory of Alienation from the point of view of human nature. He explores what is so distinctive in Marx’s conception of human nature; how does he perceive the individual- who’s at the centre of his every socio-economic-political situation. According to him, Marx’s concept of alienation conveys the capitalist forms of the four basic relationships which structure his analysis of man in society. These are the “...relations between the individual and his activity (particularly in production), his product (particularly the commodity), other people (particularly those who control his productive activity and its product and the species.”⁵⁹ He basically tries to show how Marx comes in grips with human conditions.

Highlighting the gap between Marxism and feminism on the theory of alienation, Catherine M. Mackinnon says that Marx aimed to make a distinction between ‘objectification’ and ‘alienation’ while feminists equated ‘objectification’ with ‘alienation’. Marxists defined objectification as one of the pillar of human freedom, a process whereby a subject becomes embodied in products while alienation was defined as its distorted version, a reification of products and relations which prevent them from being.⁶⁰ For feminists on the other hand, both objectification and

⁵⁶ Jagger, 308.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 306-309.

⁵⁹ Bertell Ollman, “Comment on Kelly’s Alienation”, *Political Theory*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (February, 1973): 52. Also see Introduction to Bertell Ollman, *Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society*, <http://www.nyu.edu/projects/ollman/books/a.php> (accessed on 1 June, 2010).

⁶⁰ Mackinnon, “Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: An Agenda for Theory”, *Signs*, Vol. 7, No. 3, Feminist Theory (Spring, 1982): 540-542.

alienation mean the same. The reason being, females have never authored objects rather been one. Women are the nature, matter, the acted upon.⁶¹ In simple words, women have always been the dependent object in every situation, never in control of conditions – internal or external. Thus, a woman seems alienated just by being born a ‘woman’.

After looking at all the aspects, it seems Marx presents a male-centric theory without giving the required weightage to women as a category of analysis. In my opinion Simone De Beauvoir in this area has made a good argument.⁶² She explains that the theory forwarded by Engels in *Origin* presupposes individuals not as whole man but as ‘Homo economicus’.⁶³ For her, Marxism ignores ‘subjectivity’ of individuals and confines them to mere ‘objectivity’. Beauvoir opines that all this leads to no proper Marxist discussion of the two very important concerns of women i.e, ‘oppression’ and ‘liberation’ because such strong terms can be dealt only through ‘subjectivity’ not objectivity.⁶⁴ Going deeper into the private life, Beauvoir manages to touch the very essence of a woman’s somewhat alienated self in the form of ‘*the other*’ within the self-other conflict. Rejecting psychoanalyst’s claims of female tendency to identify themselves with mother or father, “...torn between ‘viriloid’ and ‘feminine’”, Beauvoir talks of hesitation of making even the choices “...between the role of *Object, the Other* or the assertions of liberty”.⁶⁵ She rejects psychoanalysis as an explanatory framework for a number of reasons. First, “she refuses to accept the notion of sexuality as a given, and argues that the psychoanalytic paradigm gives short shrift to female sexual subjectivity, casting it only as a passive, pre-determined... ..More importantly, she proposes that the psychoanalytic model imposes a normative determinism on women's sexual development, removing all possibility of conscious action.”⁶⁶ Moreover, giving abstract, insufficient solutions like withering away of marriage and family in socialist community for emancipation of women are not at all convincing for

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Simone De Beauvoir was a French author and philosopher whose work, *The Second Sex* is said to be a foundational tract of Contemporary Feminism.

⁶³ Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley (London: Pan Books, 1973), 87.

⁶⁴ Andrea Nye, *Feminist Theory and The Philosophy of Man*, (New York: Croom Helm, 1988), 78.

⁶⁵ De Beauvoir, 83.

⁶⁶ Simone De Beauvoir, <http://www.stumptuous.com/comps/debeauvoir.html> (accessed on June 24, 2010).

Beauvoir. She wishes for a broadened Marxist understanding of women. Lastly, after looking into some of the major points of Marxism along with the later comments and critiques, one can see the possibility of his conception being partial or incomplete, in view the apparent inadequacy of space for women within his understanding.

1.2.3 Theory of Ideology - According to feminists, Marx's conception of 'ideology' was yet another attempt to confine women to 'subjection' and 'subordination'. Importantly, place of women in his framework appears unclear.

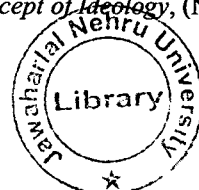
In the *German Ideology*, Marx defined ideology as a false representation, reflected in consciousness, of material reality. Marx apparently believed that even if women's oppression is ideological – that is, located in “...literary, philosophical, theological, and historical representation that define women's nature and role - these representations, distorted or not, must be a reflection of the economic reality.”⁶⁷ Further, he insists that “...ruling ideas are the ideas of the ruling class”.⁶⁸ Plus, those who lack the means of mental production are 'subject' to these ruling ideas. The basic essence of his idea is to highlight the fact that those who control the means of material production are the ones who control the means of mental production; and that they are successful in convincing rest of the classes of its relevance.

Such a proposition is not very convincing to feminists due to the simple reason that point of 'subjection' (those who lack in mental production are 'subject' to these ruling ideas) invokes a number of unanswered questions; plus, nowhere in his theory he seems much bothered to address the woman, not even to the women of the ruling classes. Apparently, he does not think the women are capable of 'thinking' and producing worthwhile ideas.

Thus, looking into all the three major conceptions of Production, Alienation, Ideology as forwarded by Marx, shows a gender-specific approach within. Marx in his analysis seems to fall short in including women as an important category of

⁶⁷ Nye, 60.

⁶⁸ Karl Marx, *German Ideology*, cited in George Larrain, *The Concept of Ideology*, (New Delhi: B.I Publications, 1980), 50.



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analysis. In the next section I shall discuss the past experiences of some of the famous Marxist feminists of the world, in order to support my arguments, plus, explore the point of inadequacy of Marxism in practice, as well.

1.3 Marxism and Feminist Thinkers: Some Experiences and Analysis

This section is actually an attempt to examine position of some of the feminist thinkers of the past and the recent times- their experiences and analysis. It will be interesting to locate the position of different categories of feminists on Marx's theories to have a larger picture on theory and practice. In the initial section, I intend to look into some of the real experiences of feminists closely associated with Marxism (belonging to the early nineteenth and late twentieth century) in order to weigh women's position within Marxist practice. In the later section, views of more recent feminists are analysed for clarity.

First, I shall start with examination of experiences of Marxist feminists like Clara Zetkin⁶⁹ (Germany), Alexandra Kollontai⁷⁰ (Russia). Both the activists supported Marxism for emancipation of women and identified it as the basis of the new women's movement. This exploration is relevant in view of the fact that even if one ignores certain biases in traditional Marxist theories, flaws detected among the those influenced by Marxism are equally intriguing. Clara Zetkin positively advocated Marxian methods for analysis of women's situation. For her, Marxism successfully identifies the real motor force behind the familial exploitation of women i.e, the economic forces. But her zeal was not very much appreciated by Lenin himself. Lenin warned Zetkin against any kind of diversions and openly

⁶⁹ Clara Zetkin was a prominent figure in the German and international workers' movement, most notably in the struggles women's workers' movement. Zetkin fought for unrestricted suffrage, and against the 'bourgeois feminist' position supporting the restriction of the vote by property or income. As given on <http://www.marxists.org/glossary/people/z/e.htm#zetkin-clara> (accessed on September 5, 2009)

⁷⁰ Alexandra Kollontai was a major figure in the Russian socialist movement from the turn of the century through the revolution and civil war. She was a major activist for fighting for women's cause within Marxist framework. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/kollonta/into.htm> (accessed on September 5, 2009).

criticised for holding discussion on issues of “sex and marriage in meetings with her comrades in the German Social Democratic Party.”⁷¹ According to Lenin, Sexual theory was just another way to “justify perversion” and leads to distraction. Such discussions for him had no place within the party.⁷² Rejecting “women’s spontaneous feelings and experiences” as “unscientific”, Lenin advocated studying authentic texts, perhaps, “..Engels and Babel..” for clarity.⁷³ Lenin made clear that basis of meetings on women related issues, if any, should consult the authorities and then have discussions. For him, women’s organisations are nothing but a method of “rousing and organising the masses of women around established Bolshevik dogma.”⁷⁴ In Lenin’s famous interview with Clara Zetkin, Lenin says at one point, “Our ideological conceptions give rise to principles of organisation. No special organisation for women. A woman communist is a member of the party just as a man communist with equal rights and duties” But more or less in the next line he adds “The unpolitical, unsocial, backward psychology of ... (women)., their isolated spheres of activity, these are facts. It would be absurd to overlook them. We need appropriate bodies to carry out work among women, special methods of agitation and forms of organisation. That is not feminism, that is practical revolutionary expediency.”⁷⁵ This illustrates clearly both the fear and the felt need of separate forms of organisation for women. Whether such an attitude was due to his urgency for total revolution is still a point of debate for analysts worldwide. According to feminists, these tendencies control the communist bodies even today.

Alexandra Kollontai on the other hand also faced a similar fate in Russia. Though she (just like Clara Zetkin) saw Marxism as the theory that would solve women’s specific problems such as child care, maternity and housework, right as the Russian Revolution proceeded, women’s question did not get resolved as she had had predicted. Under Stalin’s regime, military, industry, order were major areas of focus

⁷¹ Nye 46. An account of the conversation between Zetkin and Lenin is in the translated version of Clara Zetkin’s work known as ‘My Recollection of Lenin’ and Appendix to Lenin’s, *The Emancipation of Women* (International Publishers, New York, 1966) as cited in Nye, 68.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., 47.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 47-48.

⁷⁵ Ilna Sen, “Feminists, Women’s movement and the Working Class” *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 24, No. 29 (Jul. 22, 1989):1640.

leaving the issue of women somewhere behind. During this time, *Zhenodtel*⁷⁶ was dissolved; programmes and reforms initiated by *Zhenodtel* were cancelled. The very premise, on which women's organisation was based, was being questioned again and again. The claim for special women's problem to be solved by women themselves was offensive for the party- theoretically and for male members as well. Nye explains that "nothing outside materialist economics, nothing unexplained and unconnected to economics" could be included within their scheme.⁷⁷

Taking into account the above experiences of Marxist feminists, Clara Zetkin and Alexandra Kollontai, it seems that rigid interpretation of ideologies like Marxism has always existed in order to serve the immediate goals of revolution, even if it was at the cost of crucial issues of 'gender'. The difficult participation of such feminists within Communist parties shows that women in such struggles "may not be welcome and when accepted, may be limited."⁷⁸ During the time, such disparity between the feminist hopes and communist practice was recorded in most encounters between feminists and the male leaders of the party. The new sexual and familial relation based on 'sex-love' promised by socialism was at the centre of these discussions.⁷⁹ Chasm between the Marxist Feminism and the Marxist leadership, by that time was out in the open.

Now, I shall discuss the position/analysis of some of feminists belonging predominantly to the twentieth century. Here I will look briefly into the works of Catharine A. Mackinnon and Nancy Fraser to find their analysis of the relationship between Marxism and Feminism. A possibility of convergence between the two groups of Marxists and Feminists is the major area of concern of this section. Importantly, here I have tried to understand conflicts and possibilities of convergence between Feminists and Marxists along with the task of finding space for women within Marxist movements, in terms of respect and 'dignity'.

⁷⁶ *Zhenodtel* was the women's branch of the party, the means for the realisation of most of Kollontai programme for women. See Nye 43.

⁷⁷ Nye, 43-44.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 63.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 44.

Catharine A. Mackinnon defines the contours of the theoretical debate between Feminism and Marxism, in her words, “Sexuality is to feminism what work is to Marxism: that which is most one’s own, yet most taken away”⁸⁰ According to Mackinnon, Marxism and feminism, both are theories of “power and its distribution- *inequality*.”⁸¹ As both the theories appear to work within the common concern, Mackinnon investigates if the two can be reconciled.

She constantly brings to light the inability of feminists to come up with a comprehensive theory for weighing the conditions of women. She particularly, explores the attempts of synthesis of the two and the inherent flaws within past works.⁸² Instead of weighing the superiority of sex or class, she advocates exploration of the conflicts and connections between the methods which analyze the same social conditions from different angles.

Elaborating the major Feminist lines, she argues that consciousness-raising is the way of expression for the feminists whereby the impact and consequences of male dominance are brought to light and analyzed through the collective speaking of women’s ‘experiences’.⁸³ All this gives rise to a different kind of feminist method (away from a scientific method) - a method for appropriating realities of women. Significance of this method of appropriating ‘experiences’ is not hidden, social scientists have been utilising it to recover voices of those omitted and overlooked in historical accounts.

In terms of relation between thought and thing, Marxism and feminism differ a great deal. Marxism falls under the category of being objective while feminism falls under the category of subjective and objective.⁸⁴ This method stands “inside its own determinants in order to uncover them, just as it criticizes them in order to

⁸⁰ Catharine A. Mackinnon, “Feminism, Marxism, Method and the State: An Agenda for Theory” *Signs*, Vol 7 No. 3, Feminist Theory (Spring, 1982): 515. Catharine A. Mackinnon specialises under sex equality under international and constitutional law. She is said to use Marxism for critiquing certain points in Feminist theory and uses Feminism for critiquing Marxist theory.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 516.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 517- 528.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 542-543.

⁸⁴ Materialism (Marxism), falling under the category of being ‘scientific’, it refers to a reality outside thought which is objective in nature. Consciousness raising (feminism) in contrast, investigates into social situation, into that mixture of thought and materiality which is women’s sexuality in the most general sense. See Mackinnon (1982): 534-537.

value them in its own terms.”⁸⁵ Mackinnon after discussing this asserts that the gender relations are a collective fact, no more simply personal than class relations. Meaning, “class relations may also be personal, no less so for being at the same time collective.”⁸⁶ Lastly, taking account of all the arguments mentioned above, there appears a possibility of reciprocity between the two ideologies at certain levels particularly that of methodology.

Now I shall discuss the ideas of Nancy Fraser in context of gender question. Her model of justice is crucial to understand the practical intersection of politics of recognition (generally associated with Feminism) with the politics of redistribution (generally associated with Marxism), in context of ‘gender’ question in Naxalite movement in India. In this section, her study is supplemented by Avishai Margalit’s model of justice based on the concept of ‘humiliation’ so as to have deeper understanding of the mechanism of oppression of women.

Central to her model was a normative distinction between injustices of distribution and injustices of recognition. Her main concern is to conceptualize two equally serious and real kinds of injuries that any just social order must eradicate. Fraser further explains ‘misrecognition’ not simply as being “looked down upon or devalued in others’ conscious attitudes..” but rather denied the status of a complete “...partner in social interaction and prevented from participating as a peer in social life not as a consequence of a distributive inequity (equal distribution of resources), but rather as a consequence of institutionalized patterns of interpretation and evaluation that constitute one as comparatively unworthy of respect or esteem.”⁸⁷ When such patterns of disrespect are institutionalized, for example, in law, social welfare, medicine, and/or popular culture, they interfere with parity of participation, same as do distributive inequities.⁸⁸ Here Fraser’s analysis of disrespect in an institutionalised form shows similarity with Margalit’s normative conception of humiliation where institutions themselves give individuals ‘sound reason’ to

⁸⁵ Ibid., 543.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 542-543.

⁸⁷ Nancy Fraser, “Heterosexism, Misrecognition, and Capitalism: A Response to Judith Butler” *Social Text*, No. 52/53, Queer Transsexions of Race, Nation, and Gender (Autumn - Winter, 1997): 280.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 280-282.

consider himself/herself humiliated.⁸⁹ Fraser further asserts that in a precapitalist state 'status' order and 'class' hierarchy may somehow fuse. However, in a capitalist state, where the institutionalization of specialized economic relations frequently leads to "the relative uncoupling of economic distribution from structures of prestige", and where "status and class can therefore diverge."⁹⁰

Significantly, Fraser's understanding went into changes at the later stages. In an interview of 2004, she herself clears her position on the recognition-distribution debate. She explains that what started in the name of 'the politics of need interpretation' in the mid-1980s was nothing but an intersection of recognition and redistribution in the form of economic inequalities and problems in culture/discourses, which she assumed to converge naturally.⁹¹ In the 90s however, the equation seemed dramatically interrupted. By that time, fissures between the cultural and economic dimensions of emancipatory struggles seemed to have developed.

The gulf was very much visible in practical politics where survival politics based on distributive issues were getting even more distanced from politics promoting identity issues like women's culture, etc. Such cleavages had its effects on social movements worldwide particularly, women's movement. In the early developing phase of second-wave feminism, the movement easily encompassed a host of different issues, some more focused on distribution, and other more focused on recognition. Later, however, as the movement entered a less expansive phase, the tensions between those lines became visible, and conflicts began to erupt. The most significant development during his time however was the deepening rift between "...trade unions and labour parties on one hand, and the multiculturalist or 'difference' movements on the other hand."⁹² Time and again, she clarifies that though it may seem that she's shifting her stand but one aim that has always been

⁸⁹ Avishai Margalit and Naomi Goldblum, *The Decent Society*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 10.

⁹⁰ Fraser (1997), 280.

⁹¹ Nancy Fraser, Hanne Marlene Dahl, Pauline Stoltz, Rasmus Willig, "Recognition, Redistribution and Representation in Capitalist Global Society: An Interview with Nancy Fraser" *Acta Sociologica*, Vol. 47, No. 4, Recognition, Redistribution, and Justice (December, 2004): 373-375.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 375.

consistent in her works, is her defence of an approach to the politics of 'recognition' that synergizes with the politics of egalitarian redistribution.⁹³

I think the concept of recognition propagated by Fraser is beneficial for analysing the dynamics of women's oppression; their constant struggle for recognition and identity, worldwide. It can particularly be utilised for investigating adequacy of space for women in society - social levels, social fields and socio-political movements for that matter. The disadvantaged position in which women often find themselves comes across as a combination of Fraser theory of 'misrecognition' and Avishai Margalit's concept of 'humiliation'. It's a helpful ground to understand the deep rooted consequences of perpetual oppression and ignorance, which goes beyond the visible injury.

After going through the ideas of the above two scholars, Catharine A. Mackinnon and Nancy Fraser, one thing that strikes the most is the fact that there are obvious possibilities of convergence between the two. Feminist movement and Marxist movement (inspired by Marx's tenets) can benefit from taking positives from the other category. Feminists for example can take help of historical and materialist methods (Marxist contribution) for exploring women's conditions.⁹⁴ Marxist on the other hand, can also appreciate the fact that successful transformation of the society is possible only through the equal support of women; without women's support their endeavour would look partial. Finding about such a possibility is beneficial keeping in mind the growing demand for liberty and equality all over the world, across all borders.

Relating the above analysis to the larger theme of this dissertation, it's important to understand that if there is greater affinity between Feminists and Marxists, there are greater chances of emancipation of women within and without Marxist struggles (Naxalite movement in this case). However, due to occasional internal chaos and so called ideological dilemmas, greater emancipatory projects of such struggles are

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Valerie Bryson, "Marxism and Feminism: Can the 'Unhappy Marriage be Saved?'" *Journal of Political Ideologies*, Vol 9 no 1 (2004): 14.

blurred. This very condition of 'dilemma' and inadequacies is the core point of investigation in this research.

1.4 Critical Issues

This section basically aims at sketching out the theoretical base for the major areas of feminist concern relating to the Marxist struggles in India. Questions of violence, economic rights and collective action hold special relevance for this dissertation because, first, they are mostly associated with Marxist struggles and second, these have been the major cause for feminist anxieties towards such struggles particularly, Naxalite movement. Such issues seem to articulately define the relationship between Marxism and Feminism in practice.

1.4.1 Question of Violence - Violence as such is a broad concept assuming myriad forms ranging from public to private forms. The concept is of utmost importance to the chapter, in view of its strong connectivity with feminists and Marxists. Violence essentially is a thread that helps to investigate the position of women within the Naxalite movement, which is strategically based on revolutionary ideologies for attainment of their goals. Collective violence has been subjected to widely varying interpretations- ranging from interpretations rooted in Durkheimian frameworks to those drawing on Marxian interpretations of society, history and collective action.⁹⁵ Marxism particularly, advocates collective action with evolutionary and revolutionary methods for the establishment of Socialism. Though not much is written by Marx on the question of 'violence' particularly, yet violence is indicated as the last resort for the overthrow of capitalism. Though he openly advocated violence for proletarian achievements (in *Communist Manifesto*), he along with Engels and Lenin (later) on many occasions referred to *peaceful* revolution, that is, attained by class struggle not violence. His major concern was identifying the right time for the revolution.

⁹⁵ Kalpana Kannabiran ed. *The Violence of Normal Times*. (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2005), 35.

It's important to understand here that Marx and Engels, especially in their youth, were certainly influenced by the fiery elements of French Revolution and the revolutionary struggles in the first half of the nineteenth century. Armed struggle was the only way known and possible way of making revolutions during the period. Though Marx did not reject the prospects of a violent struggle, he did not glorify it either. Especially in the later stages of his life, he advocated that peaceful and democratic transition to socialism was possible under appropriate conditions. He particularly, indicated positive signs towards advanced democratic countries like United States of America, Britain and France.⁹⁶

Coming to the ideas of Lenin on revolution what we see is a somewhat rigid view, particularly in his early stages. He preferably sticks to violent revolution. Taking lessons from Paris Commune of 1871 and his abortive attempt of 1905, he confidently asserts that all tactics of a revolution are justified if they help in achieving the goal. Noticeably, the theory of revolution forwarded by Lenin takes into account the possibility of creating a revolution in any country of the world, provided a revolutionary situation existed and a strong leadership of revolutionary party was present that could guide the society on the path of socialism.⁹⁷ However, in the later stages, Lenin (in *The State and Revolution*) said that the violent revolution was a necessity as the exceptional conditions of England, the United States, and the Netherlands which Marx had referred to, had ceased to exist, nevertheless "...he did not exclude the possibility of a peaceful transition to socialism in the new epoch, and he even strove to put that idea into effect at one stage of the Russian revolution".⁹⁸

Keeping in mind the above ideological design of 'revolution', it's not difficult to understand that these ideological frames are not bailed from distortions and deductions. It's widely accepted that Marxist struggles worldwide, interpret such Marxist-Leninist tenets according to their needs and convenience. In a desire for

⁹⁶ Adam Schaff, "Marxist Theory of Revolution and Violence", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol.34, No. 2 (April-June, 1973): 263-270.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

attainment of immediate goals and increasing their area of influence they resort to violent strategies in the name of their so called ideological ground.

On the feminist front, violence has been a focal point of its analysis and theorisation, mainly because it has been the unifying ground for much feminist activism. Existent but invisible, violence is the ground on which much gender discrimination is staged in the social life. In India particularly, it was the focus on violence against women, beginning in the late 1970s, that propelled the women's movement forward and endowed it with much strength. The discourse of women's rights in the seventies started with the state violence in the form of custodial rape in the aftermath of emergency of 1975. Gradually its area of concern expanded, giving a comprehensive understanding of violence- in the form of identity politics, caste violence and displacement, etc.⁹⁹

Moreover, combination of Marxist tenets with that of other radical ideologies like Leninism and Maoism, in the form of Naxalites movement in India, made it even more suspicious for feminists to sail along. Between permutations and combinations of such movements, what is perhaps overlooked, is the increasing alienation of the public and the members of movements, themselves. Thinkers, analysts particularly with feminist bent of mind have repeatedly accused such movements of damaging the trust, hopes of the participants and civilians especially women, as far as violence is concerned. Naxalite movement's very foundational agenda of preserving the 'dignity' of women ('izzat') and rights of the poor, backward women seems stunted in view of its violent strategies.

1.4.2 Question of Economic Rights - Marx clearly differentiated between property and capital. In his views, property only becomes capital in the economic sense when it is used to produce 'surplus value'; that is, when it is, used to employ workers, who in the course of producing things also produce surplus value. It is instructive to note that Lenin, the great disciple of Marx, hardly mentions about surplus value.

⁹⁹ Kalpana Kannabiran and Ritu Menon, *From Mathura to Manorama: Resisting Violence Against Women in India* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2007), 13-15.

Following the revolution, Marx argues that there should be nationalisation of all means of production, distribution and exchange. Land, factories, machinery, means of transportation and the like are to be owned and controlled by the state. Further, he proposed abolition of all rights of inheritance along with confiscation of property of all emigrants and rebels. Nationalisation was recommended by Lenin as well. He says nationalisation is 'ideally' pure development of capitalism in agriculture and that it should be applied at initial stages not necessarily at a very high stage of development of capitalism in agriculture means.

Marx essentially linked subordinate position of women with private property. In *German Ideology* and the *Capital*, he spoke of the natural and spontaneous division of labour within the family. The natural relationship paved way for a social one, and the first property relationship was the one when the man regarded his wife and children as his slaves. Importantly, Engels in the *Origins* provided a detailed materialist account of the origin of patriarchy and the different stages therein.¹⁰⁰

Marxist Struggles particularly in India, have taken up issues ranging from seizure and redistribution of crop and land to the landless poor to nationalisation of land. But between such endeavours, they are said to have paid not much attention to the question of women's ownership of land.¹⁰¹ Though some Naxalite groups¹⁰² have advocated common ownership between husband and wife in the form of 'joint pattas' but their efforts too look artificial knowing that "joint pattas" eventually mean upper hand of the husbands, defeats the whole aim of women's rights in the family.¹⁰³ Seemingly, for most revolutionaries, it's not property but participation in the labour force that is the way to empowering women. With regard to wages, revolutionaries are very often criticised for giving less importance to equal wages in comparison to open demands for minimum standard wages. Due to the above mentioned reason, revolutionaries are tagged as gender-insensitive by feminists, knowing economic security is the most effective means of women empowerment.

¹⁰⁰ See Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, Trans by Ernest Untermann, (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishers & Company, 1902).

¹⁰¹ *Political Organisational Report* adopted at the Fifth All India Party Congress (1992), CPI-ML Publication, 46-48.

¹⁰² Naxalite here is broadly used to address all the major revolutionary groups (prevalent in India) who are said to be in continuity after the Naxabari struggle.

¹⁰³ Gautam Navlakha, "Days and Nights in the Heartland of Rebellion- Maoist land" <http://indianvanguard.wordpress.com/2010/04/02/gautam-navlakha-days-and-nights-in-the-heartland-of-rebellion/> (accessed April 7, 2010).

1.4.3 Question of Collective Action: Collective action is one of the foundational tenets of Marxism and something that feminists have always been concerned about. Reason being, women are often said to be subordinated and not given ample space within collective actions. Recent feminist literature on Marxist struggles has brought to light several issues relating to ‘women’, which seem to have been ignored in the shade of the familiar logic of selflessness and larger political goals.

On the question of collective action, traditional Marxism expected nineteenth-century workers to organise collectively and combat the evils of capitalism, eventually overthrowing the entire system. With time three factors i.e., “...concentration, homogenization, enlightenment...”, according to him, create ripe conditions for a total revolution.¹⁰⁴ Actually, exploitative effects of capitalism are said to ensure similar experiences, aspirations and feelings among the workers, bringing commonality and strengthening their confidence.¹⁰⁵ Growing strength in the form of rising number of riots and local trade unions is defined as one of the positive signs. Solidarity for Marx is indispensable. Traditional Marxism time and again urged for ‘self-sacrifice’ and ‘heroism’ of the workers.¹⁰⁶ It seems that collectivity weighed more than individuality, for traditional Marxism.

Feminists mostly criticise traditional Marxism for giving no real position to the women in its theories. On the question of collective action, position of women within traditional Marxism is not sufficiently carved except that women workers must be part of the overall revolution to give it greater strength and success. According to Marx, particularly, men and women of the proletarian class shall work on equal platform to finally overthrow capitalism.¹⁰⁷ Such claims according to some scholars like Barrett, was nothing but overestimation because in actual practice division of labour between men and women resulted in weakening of the working

¹⁰⁴ Daniel R. Sabia Junior, ‘‘Rationality, Collective Action and Karl Marx’’
American Journal of Political Science, Vol. 32, No. 1 (February, 1988), 53.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 51-55.

¹⁰⁶ V.I. Lenin, Speech At A Joint Plenum of The Moscow Soviet of Workers’, Peasants’ And Red Army Deputies, <http://www.marxistsfr.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/nov/06.htm> (accessed on June 20, 2010).

¹⁰⁷ *Women’s Movement and Communist Party: Ideology, Programme, Practice*, 16.

class.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, these assertions point to incompetency of Marxists in judging the strength and “flexibility of patriarchal forces and an overestimation of the strength of capital”.¹⁰⁹ Terms like ‘heroism’ in addition point towards masculine labels and expectations, that are so designed to allot women subordinate places.

Keeping in mind the overall theme of the this dissertation, I shall now further look into two very important aspects of collective action - identity and emotion- in order to chalk out position of women within collective activities. The aim is to see whether they are given equal status in such activities and their needs are adequately heard or not. I shall begin with the ‘identity’ factor and then move to the element of ‘emotion’.

Identity - Collective identity is defined as an individual’s cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community. It signifies shared status or relation which may be imagined more than experiences and distinct from personal identities.¹¹⁰

Linked to collective identity framework, is the individual identity. Generally, it’s believed that there are two main factors due to which an individual participates in a political movement- first, the expectation of personal benefit; second, because movement organizers frame issues to match or change individual’s frames.¹¹¹ The main aim of such collective actions/movements is identified as convergence of individual identities with collective identities for greater success of their endeavours. Many political movements in an attempt to gain collective benefits often ignore individual needs and aspirations (working within the movement) forgetting the fact that collective identities are made up of these individual identities and that they can never be called truly ‘emancipatory’ in nature if they crush individual identities within. Here I shall draw upon Allison Weir’s understanding that in order to sustain oneself and collective identities in social movement “...in the face of resistance from without; strife, disillusion from within, it’s necessary to

¹⁰⁸ Barrett, 162.

¹⁰⁹ Sargent, ed. 31.

¹¹⁰ Francesca Polletta and James M. Jasper, “ Collective Identity and Social Movements” , *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 27 (2001): 285.

¹¹¹ Randy Stoecker, “Community, Movement, Organization: The Problem of Identity Convergence in Collective Action” *The Sociological Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (Winter, 1995): 113-114.

avoid enforcing sameness across group members.”¹¹² This makes a relevant case for the study of such movements, particularly Marxist struggles in India, who often seem to subordinate, subside and silence issues belonging to individual and minority (identity) within and outside (primarily women in this case), in the name of ‘self-sacrifice’ and greater political causes.

Emotions - The place of emotions within the collective action is crucial especially for feminist activism. Study focusing on this aspect helps to enhance the understanding of the emotional experiences of women as they “...alternate between participation in feminist organizations and events and interaction in non-movement settings.”¹¹³ This aspect of collective action is relevant for this research project as emotions are predominantly associated with women participants in political movements like Naxalite movement. This section will basically make an attempt to explore the adequate availability of space for women within Naxalite movement – in terms of their emotions, feelings.

Among all the zeal and enthusiasm associated with collective action, anger is essentially the driving force behind the collective actions; which legitimises the expression of righteous anger directed toward injustice. Not very surprising, emotional quotient of collective actions are also gendered. There exists a gender division of emotion that expects women (due to being subordinated), more than men, to suppress anger; and when women express anger they are said to be engaged in so called ‘emotional deviance’.¹¹⁴ With regard to emotion also, Marxist struggles are said to exhibit certain biases. Personal Narratives like *We Were Making.....* have showed sceptical attitude of the movement towards women and emotions associated.¹¹⁵ Most of the times, male comrades are said to refrain from entering into the line of ‘subjectivity’ in the form of feelings and emotions. Emotions according to them, belong to the personal sphere where the movement refrains itself

¹¹² Allison Weir, “Global Feminism and Transformative Identity Politics”, *Hypatia*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (October–December, 2008): 117.

¹¹³ Cheryl Hercus, “Identity, Emotions, and Feminist Collective Action”, *Gender and Society*, Vol. 13, No. 1, Special Issue: Gender and Social Movements, Part 2 (Feb., 1999): 35.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹¹⁵ Stree Shakti Sangathan, *We Were Making History: Life Stories of Women in the Telangana People’s Struggle*, (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989).

as it claims to have larger, more important issues in hand. Moreover, liberation in private sphere apparently would only follow after liberation in public sphere.

Democratic centralism is another such principle identified with the concept of Marxist idea of collective action. It is a fundamental principle within most Marxist bodies which aim at maintaining solidarity at every level. Feminists often criticise such principle as authoritarian and an excuse to subordinate, push aside women's question. Due to the density of the issue it is dealt with in detail, in the next chapter.¹¹⁶

The above factors are of great importance for analysis of Marxist movements from the angle of 'gender', keeping in mind its repeated claims for an alternative regime based on liberty and equality. Look into the Marxian approach and the stand of movement shows that there may be several aspects embedded in such debates demanding proper exploration. In order to understand its implications on women, I shall deal with these three issues in context of Naxalite movement in detail, in the next chapter.

Conclusion

After looking into the arguments between feminism and Marxism, it seems that theoretical antagonisms between the two ideologies do exist. Often, it has been suggested that Marx in his expedition to socialism, has not given as much attention to women's question. Allegedly, Marx's stand on women's question is either not very clear or at times, missing. Feminists appear majorly disappointed with the inadequacies within classical Marxism and its interpretations in the form of political movements such as Naxalite movement in India.

From a different perspective, I would say that there is definitely hope for partnership between Marxism and feminism, particularly in practice, for the greater social cause. Noticeably, both these ideologies belong to the emancipatory

¹¹⁶ See chapter two, p.66.

traditions and envision formation of a new society free from oppression or exploitation.¹¹⁷ After going through the major feminist and Marxist line of arguments in this chapter, I can positively say that there are definitely chances of coordination between the two camps, keeping in mind the historical equation shared right from their inception.¹¹⁸

In terms of finding answer to the main research question of this dissertation- '*Whether the Naxalite movement addresses the gender question in a way that confirms to the ideals of Universal human liberation?*', I will have to look into the movement in practice, besides examining it on theoretical grounds. Although, here one can say that Marx appears no less a humanist (in theoretical terms) and seems to generally believe in the ideals of Universal human liberation. Reason being, man always appears at the centre of all his theories. Marx's theory of 'production' and 'alienation' essentially brought to light his understanding of human nature driven by external environment. More importantly, through the relation between man, nature and past historical experiences, he put forward a model for eradication of human exploitation of all kinds. But despite such apparent sensitivities, he's still criticised for certain loopholes on the question of gender within his model. Whether his approach to women was result of his preoccupation with the desire of social revolution is still a subject of debate.

Lastly, in order to have a holistic understanding of the subject the next chapter shall examine the revolutionary practices of the Marxist struggles in India. The idea will be to explore the lively debates between feminist movement and the Naxalite movement primarily with the help of the Naxalite literature and autonomous women's groups' literature to throw light on the major gender debates.

¹¹⁷ Bryson 14.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

Chapter Two:

GENDER QUESTION AND THE NAXALITE MOVEMENT : Major Debates

In view of the long, contested relationship between Marxism and Feminism, it's important to look into the status of such equations in actual practice too. Noteworthy, various feminist groups and Marxist struggles like Naxalite movement till today seem to share an uncomfortable relation on the issue of gender.

Autonomous women's group argue that while the Naxalite movement have brought many women mass fronts over the years, it seems sceptical of any open analysis of patriarchal dominance within its own working.¹¹⁹ Particularly, on the question of women's land rights, women leadership, female sexuality, etc, it seems not very active. Moreover, reinforcing traditional Marxists thoughts, theoreticians of the movement have, time and again, not shied away from challenging feminists groups for creating division within working class on sex lines. Thus, my main concern is to explore, 'whether the movement has adequate consciousness and willingness to address gender question knowing the significant, inspirational contribution made by women in the movement, over the years?' and 'why'? Here I shall look into the gender debates relating to the movement, more on the basis of actual practice of the movement than in theoretical terms.

Objectively, the chapter will make a survey of the major debates surrounding the gender question in Naxalite movement in a general form without necessarily dividing the movement in exclusive phases. I will analyse the available Naxalite literature, primarily, that of CPI-ML(Liberation) along with the literature produced by autonomous women's groups to explore some of the unanswered debates in the previous chapter.

¹¹⁹ Autonomous women's groups are basically names given to those bodies working for the cause of women, that do not have any kind of affiliation to political parties and governments. Moreover they declare themselves financially and ideologically free at all levels. See Anjali Sinha, "Wither Autonomous Women's Movement?" As given in <http://www.countercurrents.org/anjali130407.htm> (accessed on March 13, 2010).

2.1 Background of the Naxalite movement

It all started at Naxalbari (1967), a remote village in West Bengal, where simmering discontentment peaked in the form of peasant revolt led by revolutionary communists belonging to CPI(M).¹²⁰ According to Manoranjan Mohanty, this particular revolt was not a sudden outburst that acquired “symbolic meaning”, rather it was a “consciously planned agrarian revolt by communist revolutionaries” who subsequently “seized political power” in that small area.¹²¹ Though the revolt was suppressed by the government, it had visible long-term effects. The incident acquired tremendous support all over India. Reason being, the agrarian conditions of Naxalbari was not peculiar to that area alone, entire Indian countryside was experiencing stagnation due to the persistent feudal exploitation, rural poverty and ineffective state reforms.

Noticeably, the rising radical socio-economic-political development was said to be a desperate step taken by Indian youth/ students, intelligentsia alongside peasants and industrial workers to challenge the existing hierarchical power structure.¹²² The movement particularly, had an unmatched appeal among the dispossessed and underprivileged rural population who saw in it hope for all their miseries. Not surprisingly, it was the “...Dalit, Adivasi and low-caste sections – and women among them..” – formed the Naxalite base.¹²³ As far as women were concerned, the movement had successfully attracted them in large population because deteriorating agricultural conditions had started to affect them equally. Moreover, with the changing social environment, women were slowly starting to question the exploitative norms and learning to say ‘no’.

The issues raised by Naxalite movement included the “..underclass’s right to own land, to minimum wages, to a life of dignity and, specifically for women, to an end

¹²⁰ *Three Glorious Decades of Naxalbari: As Saga of Revolutionary Heroism, Supreme Sacrifice and Absolute Determination* (CPI-ML Publication, 1997), 1.

¹²¹ Manoranjan Mohanty, *Revolutionary Violence*, (New Delhi: Sterling, 1977), 45-46.

¹²² A.N.Das, *The Republic of Bihar*, (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1992.) 78-120.

¹²³ Sarbani Bandhyopadhyay, “The Revolutionary Patriarchs”
<http://www.pragoti.org/node/2053> (accessed April 11, 2009).

to sexual abuse perpetrated by the dominant-caste landholders.’’¹²⁴ The perennial, haunting question between all such radicalism, however, was- “who owns the land?” The man who inherits or buys it or the man who tills it?¹²⁵ To this crucial question, Naxalites have always championed the idea of ‘land to the tillers’, as a sole solution to end all kinds of agrarian exploitation.

In the year 1968, all the Naxalite units of the country united to form All India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries (AICCCR), advocating two cardinal principles- ‘allegiance to the armed struggle and non-participation in the elections’.¹²⁶ In 1969, AICCCR gave birth to Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) and defined the objective of the party as ‘seizure of power through an agrarian revolution’. By this time, ML stream working along primary guirella zones had appeared at Debra-Gopiballavapur in West Bengal, Mushahri in Bihar, Lakhimpur Kheri in Uttar Pradesh and above all Srikakulam in Andhra Pradesh.¹²⁷

Obvious fissures within the movement was witnessed on the question of ‘annihilation of class enemy’, which led to adherence to respective forms of ‘armed struggle’.¹²⁸ Even before Mazumdar’s death, debate on the annihilation line compounded the differences over strategy. The CPI-ML was vertically split in 1971 with a section led by Bihar’s Satya Narayan Singh dissociating itself from Charu Mazumdar. By 1973, about ten Maoist groups were in existence. In coming years, though some groups initiated unity, there was still enormous gulf between various wings of CPI-ML. Among all the factions, CPI-ML(Charu Mazumdar group--pro-Lin Piao faction), CPI-ML(Charu Mazumdar group-anti-Lin Piao faction/Liberation), Maoist Communist Centre were some of the prominent ones.¹²⁹

Noticeably, one of main streams of the movement shifted gears in the eighties, in an attempt to broaden its mass base. CPI-ML(Liberation) adopted the parliamentary

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Sachidanand Pandey, *Naxal Violence*, (Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1985), 79.

¹²⁶ Rajat Kujur, ‘Naxal Movement in India: A Profile’ IPCS Research Papers, (2008), 3 http://www.ipcs.org/pdf_file/issue/848082154RP15-Kujur-Naxal.pdf (accessed on August 17, 2009).

¹²⁷ *Three Glorious Decades of Naxalbari: A Saga of Revolutionary Heroism, Supreme Sacrifice and Absolute Determination*, (CPI-ML Publication, 1997), 2.

¹²⁸ Kujur, 3.

¹²⁹ As given in Manoranjan Mohanty, *Revolutionary Violence: A Study of Maoist Movement in India*, (New Delhi: Sterling, 1977), xviii-xxi.

path with the launch of Indian People's Front at the Delhi Conference in 1982. At the end of the year the third Congress of CPI (ML) was organised at Giridih (Bihar), which decides to take part in elections and later recorded its first electoral victory under the banner of IPF in Bihar assembly elections (1989).¹³⁰ The main motive behind this strategic shift as proclaimed, was to intervene in the political scene as the 'third front' in order to create space for progressive politics.

Marxist-Leninist stream basically adhered to the Marxist-Leninist line of thought having strategic inspiration from Mao Zedong. Drawing heavily from the works of Mao Zedong, Ideologue Charu Mazumdar directed the lower classes to fearlessly overthrow the upper classes.¹³¹ Even in the present context, scholars like Gaurang Sahay believe that, "...ideological underpinning of the Naxalism have not changed, the Charu Mazumdar doctrines remains plausible as ever."¹³² For him, agrarian revolution seems to be the top priority of the movement even today. Recent developments in the form of CPI(Maoist) in 2004, with the merger of People's War (PW) and Maoist Communist Centre of India (MCCI) and growing nexus with other resistant groups like LTTE, ULFA are testimonies to its growing strength and support.¹³³

At present, the dispersed character of the early Naxalite movement seems to have evolved into three streams of fairly organised formations - CPI-ML(Liberation), CPI(Maoist) and CPI(ML). Focus of this research work is primarily on the first group. Second group's study is peripheral due to non-availability of Maoist literature.

Regarding the ideological base of the movement, Manoranjan Mohanty states, "Revolutionary ideology states radical, socio-economic and political goals and reflects a commitment to the widest possible means including armed struggle"¹³⁴

¹³⁰ *Three Glorious Decades of Naxalbari: A Saga of Revolutionary Heroism, Supreme Sacrifice and Absolute Determination*, 5-8.

¹³¹ Gaurang R.Sahay, Freedom From Fear Vs. 'Freedom From Want': Understanding Human Security in the Context of Rural Violence in Bihar", 6. <http://humansecurityconf.polsci.chula.ac.th/Documents/Presentations/Gaurang.pdf> (accessed on September 8, 2009).

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Manoranjan Mohanty, *Revolutionary Violence: A Study of Maoist Movement in India*, (New Delhi: Sterling, 1977), 10.

Marxist revolutionary ideology, in particular, “...pursues materialist method to analyse history.”¹³⁵ Without going deeper into the vast literature on ‘Naxalite’ ideology, I will stick only to its general understanding which links to the larger theme of this dissertation.

As mentioned earlier, the Naxalite movement is based around Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. Right at the initial years, Ideologue, Charu Mazumdar defined their objective as “seizure of power” in a higher form of class struggle through guerrilla warfare. The dominant strand of the movement essentially was the “annihilation of class enemy (*dushman varg*)”¹³⁶. On the international front, they sided with China while condemning Soviet’s revisionist (social imperialist) character, suspecting of its collaboration with the US imperialism.¹³⁷ Naxalite leaders believed in radical doctrine such as the source of powers lies in the ‘barrel of the gun’ and that parliament is a pigsty where revisionists and the reactionaries conspire with the bourgeoisie to relentlessly oppress the proletariat classes by institutionalizing a mode of production whose productive forces adversely condition the uneven relations of production.¹³⁸ In the alternative model presented by the Naxalites, the orthodox socio-economic political norms are aimed to be replaced by revolutionary ethics. Maxim of ‘equality’ lay as highest priority within the socialist agenda. Here, socio-economic-political equations of the society are aimed to be transformed completely.

At the ground level, method of revolutionary violence (use of arms) gave them what they call “Shakti” or power.¹³⁹ According to them, violence was the only alternative for ensuring people’s protection. They justified violence on the claim that poor oppressed labourers have been at the receiving end of upper caste violence for centuries. Now, it was their turn to seize the opportunity to protect themselves.¹⁴⁰ They pointed out that such drastic measures were all the more important as the state

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Vinod Mishra, *Selected Works*, (New Delhi: CPI-ML Publication, 1999), 273.

¹³⁷ Kujur, 2,3.

¹³⁸ Sumanta Bannerjee, *India’s Simmering Revolution: the Naxalite Uprising*, (New Delhi: Zed Books, 1984), 74.

¹³⁹ The term ‘shakti’ is borrowed from Bela Bhatia’s work , “The Naxalite Movement in Central Bihar”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 40, No. 15, (2005): 1547- 1548.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 1537-1541.

failed miserably to perform its duties. Instead of guarding the oppressed, they sided with the oppressor. They characterized the state essentially as “..semi-colonial” and “...semi-feudal” in nature.¹⁴¹

According to Bela Bhatia, the ideology of the movement can also be understood from the assessment of the followers of the movement. From this angle two distinct categories i.e. ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ can be observed. Under the ‘formal’ category the people join the movement as they have a sense of identification with the proposed ideology. They have full knowledge of the movement’s ideological base along with their revolutionary agenda. ‘Informal’ category on the other hand, attracts people on the basis of “instinctual identification.”¹⁴² These are individuals who have an instinctual urge to fight against injustice and get attracted to the revolutionary message of the movement.

Understanding of Naxalite ideology was taken to another level by Rabindra Ray. In his book, “Naxalites and their Ideology” taking the backdrop of Bengal’s Naxalbari episode, Ray categorises two kinds of Naxalite ideology- ‘Literate’ and ‘Existential’, where ‘literate’ ideology broadly means what the leadership gave as statements and other documents and ‘existential’ ideology means what the Naxalite movement meant to the participants.¹⁴³ He further shows how these two strands are related and transformed into each other.

Looking into the above interpretations of ideology, it makes one curious to know: where does the gender question fit into the so called ideologically polished alternative model presented by Naxalites? The case becomes even more serious on account of some reports of killing of innocent civilians (particularly, women and children) in Naxal violence (direct or indirect) on one side, and the repeated socialist claims for gender equality on the other side. Noteworthy, in recent past, though the cases of ‘aberrations’ of cadres have been regretted by Naxalite groups, it has opened way to vast criticisms questioning its ideological underpinning. In this

¹⁴¹ *The General Programme, The Party Constitution*, adopted at Eighth Party Congress Report, (CPI-ML Publication, 2007), 6-7.

¹⁴² Bhatia, 40-41.

¹⁴³ Rabindra Ray, *The Naxalites and Their Ideology*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988) 9-16, 43-50.

dissertation, examination of the maxim of equality presented by the movement from the angle of women's liberation, is part of the broader objective.

2.2 Gender and the Naxalite Movement: Debates

In this section I shall begin with a background on the equation between gender and mass movements in India. Such an assessment is essential in order to have a better understanding and analysis of the adequacy of space for gender question within Naxalite movement.¹⁴⁴ Since the field of gender in India is too vast, too complex, and too contested to be contained within a single section, I will consciously stick to giving only glimpses into the trajectory of women's movement in India, concentrating particularly on its relationship with the Naxalite movement.

Gender has been a central 'issue' in India since the colonial encounter. An overwhelming engagement with the 'woman's question' arose from the 19th century social reform movement, crucially informed anti-colonial nationalism, and remains to be a point of crisis in contemporary Indian space.¹⁴⁵ The recognition of gender as an issue forms the basis for India's women's movement. The contemporary study of gender in India arose within a specific socio-historical context: the establishment of a nation-state in 1947 after two centuries of British colonialism. Resistance of foreign power united women from all sections, instilled them with confidence and created space for gender-specific knowledge generation. However, post-colonial period driven by changing socio-economic, cultural matrix witnessed divisive tendencies within women's movement. Leslie E. Calman in an essay, "Women and Movement in politics in India" (1989) clearly differentiates between two essential organizational and ideological clusters within the highly diverse Indian scene. One, which is "largely urban-based, focuses on issues of rights and equality; the other, with both urban and rural components, emphasizes empowerment and

¹⁴⁴ Naxalite movement can be broadly located in the category of mass movement as it reflects collective effort of the masses(over the years) to bring about total 'change' in the society. The fact that it has sustained for more than 40 years is generally believed as a proof of its broad mass base.

¹⁴⁵ Ilina Sen, ed, *A Space Within the Struggles*, (New Delhi: Kali For Women,1990) 1-6.

liberation.”¹⁴⁶ According to him, both seek to raise the consciousness of women and men to make them realize that the inferior position allotted to women is unjust and unacceptable.

Mid 70s was quite a turning point for India. It was not only the starting point for mass politics in India but also signified the advent of new social movements within which popular women’s voices got their first platform. The first of these was the Shahada movement in the Dhulia district of Maharashtra, initiated by Bhil (tribal) landless laborers.¹⁴⁷ In 1972, with help from activists of the new left, the labourers formed Shramik Sangathana, which initiated a vigorous campaign against domestic violence. Gradually, new women’s movement got momentum in the form of localized struggles (like Chipko movement and Bodhgaya movement) and autonomous women’s organisations (like Progressive Organisation of Women, Stree Sangharsh, Manushi, Saheli, Kali for Women).¹⁴⁸ In addition to such concerns, women’s groups got equally active in demanding gender-sensitisation of government policies and programmes. Thus, women’s mobilisation ranged from local, rural issues to broader Universal gender-specific issues.

An overwhelming participation of women (particularly rural) in mass struggles is mostly in need for procuring the most basic necessities of life as food, fuel and water.¹⁴⁹ The situation gets even more desperate, owing to their inferior position allotted, where they are not even in control of their own body. Scholars like U.

¹⁴⁶ Leslie J. Calman, “Women and Movement Politics in India”, *Asian Survey*, Vol 29, No. 10, (1989): 942.

¹⁴⁷ Shahada movement was a movement for the restoration of the social and economic dignity of the disinherited tribal peasantry of Shahada whose lands and assets had been appropriated by settlers from outside. It was a reaction against the degrading conditions where tribal people worked for less than subsistence wages on lands that were formerly theirs, plus, tribal women were being subject to frequent humiliations in the form of sexual violation. See Sen (1990), 7-8.

¹⁴⁸ Ilina Sen, “Women’s Politics in India” in, *Feminism in India*, ed. Maitayee Choudhari, (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2004) 187-208. and Ilina Sen, ed, *A Space Within the Struggles*, (New Delhi: Kali For Women, 1990) 1-18.

Chipko movement(1970s) was a movement started in Uttarakhand Himalayas where village women resisted commercial forest felling. It basically raised issues of ecological balance and development priorities. Women constituted large part of this movement on the basis of the argument of larger responsibility and concern for the preservation of life and ecology.

Bodhgaya movement was a movement led by Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini(a youth organisation) against the feudal order of Bodhgaya Math, (Bihar). Women constituted large part of this movement whose main aim was to fight for equal rights of men and women.

¹⁴⁹ Gail Omvedt, “Women and Rural Revolt in India: Part Two”, *Social Scientist*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Sep., 1977): 33. and Debal Singha K. Roy, “Peasant Movement and Empowerment of Rural Women”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 30, No. 37, (1995): 2307.

Vindhya attributes high participation of women in such “collective protest actions” as part of their efforts to come out of their “own situations”, or “...in response to “abstract” ideas of freedom, justice and equality”.¹⁵⁰

Women’s desperation can be scaled by the fact that they are seldom part of decision-making process (at home or outside) and never in control of conditions and products of their labour.¹⁵¹ Rights in terms of land, property, and wages are hardly on equal terms with males in view of entrenched patriarchal web at every social corner. Thus, women seem to keep performing non-rewarding activities as part of landless labourer category. A United Nations report in 1980 came to the conclusion that women perform nearly, “two-third of the work hours in the world”.¹⁵² Most of this energy in India, is basically spent not on income-generating activities but on survival tasks- gathering firewood, fetching water and cooking, along with other everyday domestic works such as sweeping, washing clothing, cleaning utensils, etc.

On account of the above paragraphs, one can possibly say that the real potentialities of women cannot singularly be weighed by the literature produced by contemporary feminists, conferences organised by educated urban middle-class women on gender issues but also by analysing the vast women’s participation and contribution at the ground level (in rural areas). No doubt the contributions by the urban educated feminists in expanding the area of gender question is commendable but the achievements and quality of rural women’s mobilisation brings comprehensive understanding of the diversity in lives of women in different parts of the country and within different caste, class, religious groups.

Further, looking into the aspect of empowerment of women through mass movements, it’s important to examine the availability of adequate space for women within such platforms. I feel that every such movement has its own objectives and

¹⁵⁰ U.Vindhya, “Question of Revolutionary Identity and Sexuality in the Contemporary Radical Left Movement in Andhra Pradesh”, *Psychology and Developing Societies*, 15, 2 (2003): 148.

¹⁵¹ Kanchana Mahadevan, “The Virtuous Woman: Law, Language and Activism”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol XLIII No 17, (2008): 44-51.

¹⁵² Madhu Kishwar and Ruth Vanita, ed, *In Search of Answers: Indian Women’s Voices From Manushi*, (New Delhi: Manohar, 1999), 4.

through such mobilisations, women particularly become part of the process of social interaction, in a true sense. Moreover, such movements as forwarded by Debal Singha K. Roy give “scope for empowerment of women by denying the norms, values and institutionalised bondage...”¹⁵³

Twentieth century has borne witness to several mass movements particularly, the radical peasant movements like Tebhaga and Naxalbari movement (which later paved the way for Naxalite movement) where participation of women was phenomenal. First time, women along with men were fighting against exploitation. However, very often such movements led by communists were accused of narrow mindedness in terms of sticking to a fixed area of work and calling every other concern such as gender a ‘deviation’. On such occasions, scholars like Debal Singha Roy have repeatedly asserted the need for creating enough space within such movements for the “articulation and expression of the perceptions of women involved.”.... Therein, they would be able to “...define the form and extent of their empowerment by themselves”.¹⁵⁴

Knowing the density of the issue of gender question within mass struggles (primarily political), I am going to deal with the subject in the context of Naxalite movement (in detail), in following paragraphs. Relationship between Marxists and feminists forms the backdrop for this kind of exploration. For some, the on-off relationship between feminists and marxists is rooted in the uneasy theoretical equation between the two while others look beyond such conventionalities. They envision a real partnership between the two in practice, in hope of generating greater capacities to handle social complexities in today’s reality.¹⁵⁵ Scope for adjustment between the two is perhaps, one of the most intriguing research areas for scholars worldwide.

For many, mere mention of the name of ‘rural India’ conjures up visions of inequality, lawlessness and mindless violence. But there appears to be a definite

¹⁵³ Debal K. Singha Roy, “Peasant Movement and Empowerment of Rural Women”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 30, No. 37, (1995): 2307.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 2311.

¹⁵⁵ Valerie Bryson, “Marxism and Feminism: Can the ‘Unhappy Marriage be Saved?’” *Journal of Political Ideologies*, Vol 9 No. 1 (2004): 13-14.

history to such conditions. The violence that grips most parts of the country is said to have its basis in the existing order, which is increasingly being challenged by the labouring poor, tribals under the leadership of the Naxalites.¹⁵⁶ But, often the Naxalite movement is criticised for ignoring extra-class concerns like caste and gender, raising serious questions on adequacy of class as an analytical tool. Moreover, the movement is said to have failed to adapt itself to new movements based on gender, environment and other issues, highlighting its narrow framework.¹⁵⁷ Several feminist groups openly demand self-introspection by such movements in order to cope with the changing times and need. They feel that the women's issue is “..part of the democratic struggle which is central to left parties and groups, and which is a struggle they have theorised about for decades.”¹⁵⁸ They argue that a predominantly socialist movement is not truly socialist if it fails to recognise and take up oppression of women as a question at the centre of democracy and socialism. The class-based movements on the other hand, perceive the feminist movements largely as movements of the elite and blame them for not having specific understanding of the problems of women of lower classes, since feminists treat all classes with the same parameter of gender. Further, they are criticised as “apolitical having a narrow world-view, not being interested in seeking state power.”¹⁵⁹ What's ironical in middle of such constant debate is the fact that despite the historic relationship between the two, where issues of women's rights were taken up by socialist groups right from their inception, today the two groups seem stuck in an awkward position.¹⁶⁰

Reluctance and failure to insert gender issues into the existing revolutionary practice of movement, is one of the major concerns of the feminists. Time and again, they have drawn attention to “liquidationist” approach of the revolutionaries towards gender related issues within the movement or outside. The movement is said to have limited itself to the peripheral line of female landless labourers avoiding all the other gender issues needing urgent solutions. Whether it's the

¹⁵⁶ D. Bandhyopadhyay, “Rural Unrest”, *Yojna*, a special issue on Naxalism, Vol 51, February, (2007): 11-14.

¹⁵⁷ Sarbani Bandhyopadhyay.

¹⁵⁸ Kumari Jayawardhane and Govind Kelkar, “The Left and Feminism”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 24, No. 38, (1989): 2123.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 2124.

¹⁶⁰ Sen, ed. (1990), 3

question of women's land rights, women's leadership within the movement, violence and its consequences on women (cadres and civilians), all such concerns seem to be treated as secondary or openly ignored. More importantly, according to feminists groups, women's experience, subjectivity in the form of feelings, emotions and aspirations, generally appear sidelined in their socialist expedition.¹⁶¹

Though, some Naxalite groups in response, may argue for its visibly sympathetic attitude towards gender question in view of its overground front organisations and foray into the mass politics (since 80s), it does not seem to have solved all feminist queries. On the one hand the movement is said to raise questions against the institution of marriage, monogamy and family as agencies of gender oppression while on the other hand appears to patronise the denial of equal status to women within their own working group, reigniting the long contested relationship between Feminism and Marxism. Even under its mass mobilisation the Communist Party found itself questioned many times on its patriarchal leanings. "To the now famous question of a peasant woman,... 'Why should my comrade beat me at home? (referring to her husband), the party had no answer.'" ¹⁶² The members of the party, thus, at some point or the other seemed stuck in between its private and public life.

Veiled life of women within the party started becoming public in the form of certain narratives shared by female ex-naxalites. In the book, '*We were making History...*' , Mallu Swarajyam says that-

Certain Sacrifices have to be made (for Telangana movement). But the question came up of why it was always women who had to make the sacrifices. The reply was 'if you consider this struggle as a whole though it is a struggle of the working classes, the peasantry is also involved and they are making sacrifices that will ultimately benefit the proletariat. That is how the women should regard this sacrifice'. It was difficult to swallow this. What are they saying, we wondered. But gradually it became necessary for us to give it up. We never got the freedom we wanted.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ U.Vindhya, "Question of Revolutionary Identity and Sexuality in the Contemporary Radical Left Movement in Andhra Pradesh", (2003): 149.

¹⁶² Adrienne Cooper, (1988) cited in Samita Sen, "Towards a Feminist Politics? Indian Women's Movement in Historical Perspective", *Policy Research Report on Gender and Development*, Working Paper Series No. 9, 22.
<http://www.onlinewomeninpolitics.org/india/indian.pdf> (accessed on March 6, 2010).

¹⁶³ Stree Shakti Sangathan, 240.

Such narratives highlight the short-lived hopes and gains of the women participants. It's often said time and again that such revolutionary movement whether Tebhaga, Telangana, Naxalbari, or the Kerala's naxalbari (in the form of Thalassery-Pulpally, Kuttiyadi and Thiruneli revolts) seem to have failed to do full justice to the contributions made by female members of the party. Most astonishing feature of most of these movements was the fact that women were asked to go back to their families and homes, even to small jobs, after the movement had disintegrated.

According to some scholars like Sumanta Banerjee, the continued silencing of gender debates within the movement, is attributed to the lack of women's attempt at writing a history of the movement i.e, their own interpretation of the movement is missing.¹⁶⁴ Pointing at yet another aspect, it's also believed that literature produced by Communist parties on past struggles like Telangana and Naxalbari, are insufficient in terms of recognition to women's contribution, leaving alone acknowledgment and addressal of the other general social issues concerning women. Mallarika Sinha Roy in context of Naxalbari movement says "CPI(ML) did not only erase from the official documents the physical presence of women in organising and leading the movement, but, equally important, it obfuscated the ideological possibility of redefining women's role and status in the larger social context.."¹⁶⁵ Such indifference gets confirmed in wake of experiences shared in personal narratives by ex-naxalites like Krishna Bandhyopadhyay and Ajitha.¹⁶⁶

For greater clarity of the subject, let us now look into three major areas of feminist concerns: violence, economic rights and collective action, in detail. For this purpose, as mentioned earlier, Naxalite literature, primarily CPI-ML(liberation) along with literature produced by ex-naxalites, autonomous women's groups, academics shall be used.

¹⁶⁴ As cited in Mallarika Sinha Roy's article (2006): 216.

¹⁶⁵ Roy, 212.

¹⁶⁶ See Krishna Bandhyopadhyay, "Naxalbari Politics: A Feminist Narrative", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol XLIII, No. 14, (2009) and Ajitha, *Kerala's Naxalbari, Ajitha: Memoirs of a young revolutionary*, trans, Sanju Ramachandran, (New Delhi: Srishti, 2008).

2.2.1 Question of Violence - Violence, in whichever form it may be, public or private, directly or indirectly is degrading and has far-reaching consequences. Women for ages have borne the brunt of violence in different forms owing to either their identification with their mere physical body or their subordinate position in society as a whole. They have always been denied the emotional, psychological and physical spaces within the social set up. In a country like India, there have always been traditionally defined moulds which women are supposed to fit into, inflicting violence upon every aspect of their lives. Today violence in most forms has been “normalised” in so many *avataars* that it’s difficult to identify it as violence.¹⁶⁷

Different forms of gender based violence ties women of different classes, castes and communities into a variety of intersecting lines. Kalpana Kannabiran in this regard says that, through – “...policing of culture, the cry of nationalism/liberation, matters of family honour and war...women’s bodies are used as spaces for inscriptions in the form of rape, sexual assault, honour killings and the straight-forward denial of equality claims”.¹⁶⁸ Post-colonial period in India, particularly, has witnessed a variety of violence ranging from caste, communal violence to violence by the state and its agencies.¹⁶⁹ From Gujarat (2002), Kashmir, Tripura, Nagaland to Manipur, what we see is brutal violent manifestations against women in name of terrorism or internal security.

Another aspect of violence against women raising survival questions is the conditions of adivasi women. Adivasi community in contemporary India suffers from a number of violent situations leading them to alienation, displacement, state repression. Within this community, situation of women is worse. Their subordination and deprivation within the community or state needs proper analysis. Kannabiran in this regard puts up a study which highlighted five aspects of gender-based violence against adivasi women in India- physical assault, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, forced sterilization and abuse of the girl child. Besides such forms, adivasi women are also victims of state repression where they

¹⁶⁷ The term “normalised” is borrowed from Kalpana Kannabiran’s interpretation of gender violence in her edited book, *The Violence of Normal Times: Essays on Women’s Lived Realities*.

¹⁶⁸ Kalpana Kannabiran ed. *The Violence of Normal Time: Essays on Women’s Lived Realities*. (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2005), 2-3.

¹⁶⁹ Kalpana Kannabiran and Ritu Menon, *From Mathura to Manorama: Resisting Violence Against Women in India* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2007), 21.

are often taken into police custody and raped violating “...humanitarian and procedural prescriptions...”¹⁷⁰ Such situations obviously put women in a situation of extreme vulnerability and destitution.

If one tries to apply the above framework of violence against women to Naxalite movement, it would be interesting to see how the movement reacts to such questions of violence, within and outside the movement. Feminist groups often criticise naxalites for ignoring incidents of gender based violence and sometimes being part of the whole mechanism of violence. Besides addressing the issue of sexual abuse of labouring class women by the upper caste landlords, movement is said to have ignored the intimate space between man and woman where equations of power play exists in the most strategic and covered forms.¹⁷¹ Under the logic of ‘diversion’, they always seem to avoid all other gender-specific forms of violence. Alexander states their attitude saying, “To imagine that there might be subjectivities present in history other than those of class was to transgress the laws of historical materialism in the socialist tradition.”¹⁷²

Coming to the other forms of violence against women, the movement’s own violent strategies have been challenged repeatedly. Adherence to violent means is generally believed to have had serious consequences for women. Even though only selective cases of aberrations are reported today, it’s no hidden fact that when atrocities are committed on Dalits (in reaction to Naxalite actions on landlords) or when police raid villages in search of naxalites, it is the women who suffer the most. Women are subject to torture, molestation and rape, thus, paying the price for being the most vulnerable. Throwing light on this angle in context of Bihar, scholars like Arun Kumar argues that radical Left groups have slowly “..picked up the argument of the ‘inevitability of violence’ and turned it into a party-line.” He maintains that Naxal violence in “..no matter what name courted - tactic, expediency or compulsion – blurs the distinction between emancipatory and retrogressive politics”.¹⁷³ Clearly

¹⁷⁰ Kannabiran, ed. (2005), 12.

¹⁷¹ Kannabiran and Menon, (2007), 13-35.

¹⁷² Alexander S. (1980) cited in U.Vindhya, “Question of Revolutionary Identity and Sexuality in the Contemporary Radical Left Movement in Andhra Pradesh”, *Psychology and Developing Societies*, 15, 2 (2003): 148.

¹⁷³ Arun Kumar, “ Violence and Political Culture: Politics of the Ultra Left in Bihar”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 38, No. 47, (2003): 4977.

these points make the case all the more important for us to find out adequacy of the space within Naxalites' forwarded model.

Today, the general belief is that in its quest for 'annihilation of class enemies', the question of women gets lost somewhere. The *Jan Adalats*, particularly, have been under scanner for individual annihilations in the name of justice. Some attribute such manifestation as having "...no Marxism" and being mere "vulgar individual terrorism."¹⁷⁴ Though certain Naxalite groups (particularly Maoists) proclaim to have amended the annihilation policy by adding other line of actions like "mass movements, social boycott of culprits, and various developmental works." they continue to be accused of being "...gangs of paranoid being 'revengeful killers'" today.¹⁷⁵ Violence is said to be considered as a conscious tool by naxalites to eliminate all kinds of differences. According to Arun Kumar, such interpretations are "...illusory" because "...violence can only eliminate the person who differs but not the difference itself. Ideas, having lives of their own, are replaced by ideas alone"¹⁷⁶ Today several security analysts accuse these groups of resorting to mindless violence for glory and creating immediate impact. Though they have sworn by serious review of their mistakes and apology on the killing of non-targets (like women and children, poll officials), they have not convinced the critics by far.¹⁷⁷

Now coming to the issue of violence against women within the movement (particularly within CPI-ML(Liberation), not much is mentioned in the available party documents. Here are again different kinds of violence experienced by women participants within the party. Sexual and psychological violence come across as the main two categories that have affected the women participants, the most. As mentioned earlier the movement has been criticised many times by feminists for its patriarchal leanings and rejecting questions in the name of deviations. CPI-

¹⁷⁴ Mishra, 273.

¹⁷⁵ Statement based on interview, Suhrid Sankar Chattopadhyay, "To Establish A Liberated Area" *Frontline*, Vol 26, No. 22.(2009), 23. and See Sumanta Bannerjee, "Critique the Programme of Action of the Maoists", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol XLIV No. 46(2009): 77.

¹⁷⁶ Kumar: 4977.

¹⁷⁷ Spokesperson, CPI(Maoist), "On the Election Boycott Tactic of the Maoists" *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol XLIV No. 38 (2009): 74.

ML(Liberation) itself has confessed of “feudal and male chauvinist tendencies” within its party.¹⁷⁸ In the Fifth Party Congress of the party, it was clearly announced that there have been “..recurring incidents of violation of dignity of our women members and supporters.”¹⁷⁹ Vinod Mishra, a cult leader of CPI-ML(Liberation) also brought to light such incidents of “..extreme misbehaviour by some male cadres against women.”¹⁸⁰ These instances seem to point towards the inability of these struggles to crush feudal remnants within their own working.

Actually within the party CPI-ML(Liberation), violence has been more implicit than explicit. Whether it's mocking against affairs/liaison, disrespect of revolutionary marriages or question over motherhood, women's hopes and promises seem to have been violated in several ways. In the more visible category we have violence inflicted upon women cadres in the form of sexual abuses. Regarding sexual abuses and misbehaviours, ex-naxalites like Ajitha and Krishna bandhopadhyay have openly shared experiences. Ajitha, the covergirl of Kerala's Naxalism writes, “...male comrades considered women as slaves and sex objects”.¹⁸¹ Krishna Bandhopadhyay too has brought to light the unpleasant, “lecherous” behaviour faced while taking shelters with peasants. She says how the party would give a mechanical response to such incidents saying, “..you are losing your capacity to view things from the class perspective, comrade.”¹⁸² In view of such experiences it does appear that there is an obvious attempt by the movement to silence such sensitive issues behind the logic of public, political commitments.

Noteworthy, such feminist questions seem to have not only shook the male comrades but also the women comrades who apparently internalised patriarchal hegemony in every aspect of their life.¹⁸³ Similar to the normalised mechanisms of violence against women within the society, the movement too seems to suffer from the normalised ways of subordination. With the past records it's seen that those

¹⁷⁸ *Political –Organisaional Report* adopted at Fifth Party Congress Report, (CPI-ML Publication, 1992), 60.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ Mishra, 166.

¹⁸¹ Ajitha, *Kerala's Naxalbari, Ajitha: Memoirs of a Young Revolutionary*, trans, Sanju Ramachandran, (New Delhi: Srishti, 2008), 284-285.

¹⁸² Krishna Bandhyopadhyay, 57.

¹⁸³ Sarbani Bandhyopadhyay, “The Revolutionary Patriarchs”

women revolutionaries who challenged the patriarchal currently prevalent in the movement were very often labeled as deviants or as “... immoral, ‘loose’ women.”¹⁸⁴

Yet another aspect of violence within Naxalite movement is that of psychological violence, inflicted upon women in the form of subordination of issues like female sexuality, marriages/affairs, motherhood, etc. Though denial of recognised positions can also be counted into this category but due its density and importance, I shall deal with it under the section of ‘Collective Action’. In Naxalite groups, marriage and sexuality have been dealt with in less structured ways. Women narratives of the Telangana People’s Struggle led by communists, show how women continued to be the bearers of old, orthodox tradition, and held the status of an object of moral policing. The experience of the Srikakulam movement, a contemporary of Naxalbari, displays similar discomfort to questions of interpersonal relationships and sexuality. U.Vindhya gives several instances within the Srikakulam movement where Party leadership had incoherent policy towards man-woman relationship.¹⁸⁵ Two trends were seen within the Srikakulam movement wherein one was dominated by “..pre-capitalist patriarchal norms” while the other was based on “..equality and friendship in a sort of inarticulate manner”; both these trends were actually antagonistic in a “..subdued manner”¹⁸⁶ Liaisons, affairs, marriages between comrades gave rise to endless comments and scrutiny. In context of Andhra Pradesh, U. Vindhya gives an account of party documents where “...district committees speaks of the spillover of ‘bourgeois and false notions about romantic love, sexual desire and need for marriages’ into the party and decries the ‘corrupting influence’ of such notions on its members.”¹⁸⁷ Such instances show the apparent conservative mindset of the male leadership who seemed bent on preserving the so called morality of the party.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ U. Vindhya, “The Srikakulam Movement”, *A Space Within the Struggles*, ed. Ilina Sen, (New Delhi: Kali For Women, 1990), 39.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ U.Vindhya, “Comrades-in-Arms : Sexuality and Identity in the Contemporary Revolutionary Movement in Andhra Pradesh”, *A Question of Silence? The Sexual Economies of Modern India*, ed. Mary E. John and Janaki Nair, (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998), 171.

Marriage in the movement was a sticky issue. Though on theoretical level, the movement (particularly as mentioned in CPI-ML(Liberation) documents) emphasised on man-woman relations based on love and rejection of traditional, arranged, monogamous marriages, there's no concrete party stand on the issue of revolutionary marital relations. However, Vinod Mishra's writing on sexual discrimination within so called revolutionary marriages says much about the hypocrisies within party members. He says that "...democratic marriages mean freedom for woman, freedom of choosing her partner herself and sharing family responsibilities after the marriage. However, not to speak of democratic marriages, even among the so called revolutionary marriages performed within the Party, probably in most of the cases these policies are rarely observed."¹⁸⁸ These lines show the obvious cleavage between revolutionary ideals and the revolutionary practice. Vinod's doubt over its own party members signals that male comrades had still not managed to come out of the traditional biases which they have been so used to. The traditional allocation of work between husband and wife within such marriages seemed far from altered.

Regarding the practice of revolutionary marriages, Srila Roy says "...Individuals could declare themselves husband and wife through an exchange of Mao's Red Book in front of the Party"¹⁸⁹ Though such marriages were claimed as a revolutionary steps towards man-woman equality based relationship by the movement, it is important to remember that everything else, especially love and sexuality were regarded as secondary to this essential revolutionary goals. Several broken and betrayed relationships (as in the case of Krishna Bandhyopadhyay and Ajitha) can, of course, be counted as psychological violence as it violated their hopes and desires.¹⁹⁰

Elaborating on the issue of marriages and children within the movement Laxmi, an ex-naxalite (A.P) says, "the concept of family planning is a basic pillar of the Maoist movement. Naxals at the time of joining take a vow not to enter into family

¹⁸⁸ Mishra, 166.

¹⁸⁹ Srila Roy is a scholar on gender issues in general and 70s left, Naxalbari movement in particular. See Srila Roy, "Revolutionary Marriage: On the Politics of Sexual Stories in Naxalbari", *Feminist Review*, No. 83, Sexual Moralities (2006): 104.

¹⁹⁰ This aspect is discussed in details in the third chapter under the first section named 'Experiences of Ex-Naxalites: gender difference'.

life, at least during their membership of the dalam... However, if the members wish, they can live like a couple. They are married and given free time to live as partners. But there is a strict ban on children.”¹⁹¹ Apparently, motherhood was yet another issue which did not go well with the revolutionary agendas of the male comrades. Many at times women comrades were ordered to leave their children behind, in order to avoid any liability and attract attention of the police.¹⁹² Though such measures were valid from the point of view of movement’s undercover tasks but other gender-sensitive solution could also be applied. In the heat of the struggle such orders were accepted by women themselves, but those are often criticised as violation of womanhood.

Looking at all the aspects of violence linked to the Naxalite movement, I would say that even after four decades of working, the movement still seems to be surrounded by inner contradictions. Though the situation essentially appears better than the early phases as the parties particularly CPI-ML (Liberation) has come up with several new policies and guidelines to attract greater women participation. As far as other Naxalite groups are concerned, reports of increase in women cadres can be sensed through the statements given by Maoist leaders, death of women cadres in retaliatory situations or the pictures available in print and electronic media.¹⁹³ Nevertheless, violent tactics by Naxalites in present time, seem to have ironically turned women into victims and its perpetrators.

2.2.2 Question of Economic Rights – This section basically looks into the condition of women in terms of equal wages and land ownership rights. Essentially, in an agrarian economy like India, land confers personality to an individual or a group. It imparts social identity and is a means of political empowerment, hence, a just and fair distribution of land resources is of utmost importance. Apart from direct production from fields, land titles increase access to credit and serve as a saleable asset during crisis.

¹⁹¹ Aisha Khan, “Stories of Women Naxals”, http://www.indianmuslims.info/articles/special_reports/articles/stories_of_women_naxals.html (accessed on December 21, 2010).

¹⁹² Vindhya, Ilina ed. (1990), 38.

¹⁹³ See Abhijit Dasgupta, “Equally Extreme”, *India Today*, Nov 9, 2009, 32-33.

Though over the years as a reform measure, lands were distributed among the poor landless labourers for agricultural purposes out of ceiling surplus land or bhoodan land or *gair majarua khas* land (common land) but new settlers were often dispossessed by the landlords or the latter were in practical possession of these lands.¹⁹⁴ Further, Exploitative developmental projects, draconian laws regarding wildlife protection, forest reservation policy made the lives of vast number of tribals miserable. Rights of tribals over land and resources on which they had subsisted for centuries without formal ownership title were curbed in the name of development process. Having lost their control of traditional livelihood resources, they are displaced, homeless, landless and jobless.¹⁹⁵ Such endless miseries filled them with frustration and anger forcing them to join movements like Naxalite movement in hopes of some change.

Within such equations, women's land ownership right is an important area which needs further explorations. Owning land not only enhances women's self-confidence but also builds the ability to demand gender-sensitivity in government programme. Moreover, strengthening their economic situation also means changing gendered norms and perceptions. Bina Agarwal in this regard rightly points out that "...recognising that women could have common gender interests which, in particular contexts, could outweigh divisive class/caste interests, opens up the possibilities of broad-based collective action by women for changing existing gendered structures"¹⁹⁶

It's no hidden fact that although access to land remains important for most of rural households, it is critical for women. Tribal women among all sections are the worst hit. Reason being, most of these women are equally responsible for their family livelihood and by being detached from their tradition resources- land, forest, water, their very survival/existence is endangered. Rising demand for rights made by tribal

¹⁹⁴ D. Bandhyopadhyay, "Rural Unrest", *Yojna*, a special issue on Naxalism, Vol 51, February, (2007): 11-14.

¹⁹⁵ *Report of an Expert Group, Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas*, Government of India, April, (2008), 3. http://planningcommission.nic.in/reports/publications/rep_dce.pdf (accessed on October 15, 2009), 8-11. and Ajay K Mehra, "India's Gordan Knot", *Yojna*, a special issue on Naxalism, Vol 51, February, (2007): 37- 40.

¹⁹⁶ Bina Agarwal, "Disinherited Peasants, Disadvantaged Workers: A Gender Perspective on Land and Livelihood", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 33, No. 13, (1998): A1.

women are not only an insurance of their livelihood but recognition of what Sagari R. Ramdas “..their knowledge and capacities to nurture the forest space and ecosystem”.¹⁹⁷ Moreover, according to Sagari R. Ramdas, state initiative in the form of Forest Rights Act, 2006 (FRA) have resulted into nothing concrete. Such a legislation on face may look like providing new meaning to gender and environmental justice but the truth is, its nothing but a means for the “..state to execute its hegemony over these forest resources and regulate freedoms to its citizens, by retaining the powers of final decision regarding governance of the forest resources.”¹⁹⁸

Today, under fluctuating national economic, climatic conditions, women are automatically pushed into the category of low paid or rather unpaid ‘peasantry’ and bear the burden of family subsistence and reproduction. The male members of the family migrate to cities in search of jobs due to two probable reasons- first, crop destruction due to no rain or bad climatic fluctuations; second, alluring employment opportunities in cities (effects of liberalisation). Thus, women are left home, totally dependent on themselves. Their increasing involvement in the agricultural field is nothing but sign of changing face of rural women or more importantly, “feminisation of agriculture.”¹⁹⁹ However, there’s still a lack of concrete gender-sensitive government policies supporting and encouraging women. The powerlessness and degradation of women is reflected in women’s denial of rights over land due to the exclusive male control over such assets. Near total disinheritance from property rights in land, is perhaps, the main factor in the inferior position allotted to women in India. Bina Agarwal rightly points out that opposition to women's inheritance is grounded on the argument- “...it will reduce output by reducing farm size and increasing fragmentation.”²⁰⁰ Moreover, some argued that land should only go to those who actually tilled the land. Meaning, it could only be owned in the name of males of the family as women in mostly communities are confined to the domestic chores and limited domestic occupation.

¹⁹⁷ Sagari R. Ramdas, “Women, Forestspaces and the Law: Transgressing the Boundaries”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XLIV No. 44, (2009): 66.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, 66.

¹⁹⁹ Sumita Acharya, Hrusikesh Patro, Ranjan Kumar Tarai, “Role of Women”, *Yojna*, Vol 52, July (2008): 60.

²⁰⁰ Agarwal (1998): A5.

Even the movements (particularly communist led) promising radical socio-economic political changes failed to recognize women's plight and inferior position due to non-ownership of land. As early as the Telangana struggle in 40s, communist leaders failed to evolve a long-term policy for women's upliftment. In terms of distribution of land, women were not counted as individuals. Hence land was not allotted to them except for the widows.²⁰¹ In another case, during the 1970s, women especially illiterate, ill-treated and toiling women took part on a big scale in the land-acquisition movement being waged by Party Unity, at the time one of the main Naxalite groups in Bihar, against the head priest or mahant of the Bodh Gaya temple (one of the biggest landowners in the area).²⁰² Subsequently, however, the women's demand for entitlements in their names seemed unpalatable to the male activists. They prepared a long list of the criteria for distribution of land among women, according to which, only widows and women belonging to the landless family were given priority. The line of argument forwarded by the male counterparts for countering women demands for entitlements was the age old logic of 'land to the 'real' tillers' and that such demands would "...weaken class struggle and unity",²⁰³ When the women subsequently refused to be involved until this demand was met, the party leadership compromised by registering in the name of women only few acres of land that had been won. Such tokenism on the part of male Naxalite leaders does not fit with their analysis of gender inequality being rooted in the economic structure of society.²⁰⁴

After a survey of the major feminist anxieties on women's land ownership rights, it's important to look into the stand of the Naxalite movement on the basis of the available Naxal literature i.e, CPI-ML(Liberation). In the 80s the party started creating mass front including 'women fronts' in order to have greater mass appeal and support (open party system). Its efforts were visible at different levels of

²⁰¹ Sangathan, 15-23.

²⁰² Prakash Louis, "People Power: The Naxalite Movement in Central Bihar", (Delhi: Wordsmith, 2002), 142-144. This struggle led by Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini was seen as part of the Total revolution called by Jayaprakash Narayan. Noticeably, though the struggle was mainly on the question of land yet it was also picked up related issues focusing on the man-woman relationship both within the family and in the existing patriarchal agrarian relations.

²⁰³ Madhu Kishwar and Ruth Vanita, ed, *In Search of Answers: Indian Women's Voices From Manushi*, (New Delhi: Manohar, 1999), 145.

²⁰⁴ Relation between gender inequality and economic structure is explained in the following document. See *Women's Movement and Communist Party: Ideology, Programme, Practice*, (Delhi: CPI-ML publication, 2008), 9-16.

organisation. Third Congress of the party in 1982 for the first time took the issues of women seriously.²⁰⁵ Later Fourth Party Congress held in 1-5 January, 1988 put forth concrete propositions on the character of women's oppression in India; put together the broad policies for work among women; and gave directives for the nature of such work.²⁰⁶ In later Party Congress also, CPI-ML(Liberation) made arrangements for strengthening the women's organisation, educating and training the party cadres especially women(through party education departments), initiating trade unions having significant female membership (Fifth congress onwards), and launching new women's magazines.²⁰⁷ However, despite the above mentioned initiatives, policies and guidelines, issue of women's land ownership rights has not been given much attention. Though Liberation was quite vocal regarding the process of bourgeois nationalisation of land in the 90s but role of women in between all such propositions were not put forward. Visibly, none of congress reports talk about this aspect of women's deprivation. The party themselves talk about a number of states (particularly Bihar) where land and crop seizures at a large scale is carried out but nowhere have they mentioned the need for distribution of land in the names of women.²⁰⁸ Even in the case of tribal people's issue of displacement and deprivation, tribal women are not given much attention. Coming to the issue of wages, the movement though has raised issues of minimum wages, question of equal wages has not been raised with the required seriousness. CPI-ML(Liberation) although has mentioned the need for equal wages in some of its party documents, but nothing concrete has come out of such efforts.²⁰⁹

Lastly, going through the whole equation between women and the movement via the issue of land ownership rights and equal wages highlights many factors. Apparently, the movement itself has not been able to identify and address the main factor for the depressed status of women in the society. If the movement was truly

²⁰⁵ Documents of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) adopted by The Fourth All-India Party Congress, (CPI-ML Publication, 1988), 1.7.25

²⁰⁶ Ramji Rai, "Communist Party Programme and Women's Liberation Movement: Some Broad Points." *Women's Movement and Communist Party: Ideology, Programme, Practice*, (Delhi: CPI-ML publication, 2008), 40.

²⁰⁷ Two popular women's periodicals that run even today are *Adhi Zameen* (hindi), *Women's voice* (English).

²⁰⁸ *Political Organisational Report* adopted at the Fifth All India Party Congress, (CPI-ML Publication, 2007), 46-48.

²⁰⁹ Party Congress Report, CPI-ML Publication.

aware of the women's plight and keen to reach out to them, they would have definitely put women's land ownership rights and labour rights as one of the highest priorities within their larger agenda. Importantly, such lack of attention is believed to be disheartening for those women who have for years identified themselves with this movement in hopes of emancipatory or rather survival benefits. Such stand of the party may sometimes be justified in the name of traditional Marxist opposition to private property ownership but distribution of land to men should also be prohibited in that case.

2.2.3 Question of Collective Action - Collective action in itself is a dense area of research. Role of women within its mechanism is an important part of the theme of the dissertation. The idea here is to explore whether there is enough space for women within such platforms, for the articulation of their ideas and expression. As seen in the previous chapter, they may play a special role in linking the thread of emotions with the mass movement. Anger towards injustices is the major force behind most collective actions which women symbolise suitably. Example of such a possibility and potential of women in collective action was evident in the Nari Mukti Sangharsh Sammelan held in Patna, February 5-8, 1988. It basically aimed to bring about the diverse kinds of women's organisations and individuals to deepen the analysis of the structures of women's oppression within the cadres and mass base of ongoing movements.²¹⁰ Though the sammelan was entirely successful, it brought to notice the need for larger political collective efforts for their work to have meaning.²¹¹

The Naxalite movement over the years has been accused of denying the deserved position to its women participants. Case becomes stronger in view of the limited or missing women leadership within its top circles. Apparently, they are not seen as a trusted weapon for concrete outputs. There are instances when they were not even informed about important plan of action²¹² Krishna Bandhopadhyay while narrating her experiences states that “..never in the party has a woman received the same status and respect as a man” She shows how women were seldom given directives

²¹⁰ Ilina Sen, ed. *A Space Within the Struggles*, (New Delhi: Kali For Women, 1990), 16-17.

²¹¹ Gail Omvedt, Chetna Gala, Govind Kelkar, “A Unity and Struggle: A Report on Nari Mukti Sangharsh Sammelan”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 23, No. 18 (1988): 884.

²¹² Vindhya, Ilina.ed. (1990),40.

as to what their role was expected to be. She asserted that the chaos of 1970 due to line of action taken by CPI-ML “..left no room for women’s decision-making”.²¹³ Ajitha, the cover girl of Kerala’s Naxalite activities also admits of “deep roots of male domination in left movement” and non-involment in the decision-making process and how usually their opinion were “scoffed at and rejected”.²¹⁴ Apparently women were attracted mainly for giving volume to the movement and leading rallies, providing shelter, couriering message, doing chores, nursing males and providing emotional support at the time of injuries.²¹⁵ Here I agree to Ilina Sen’s view that the “...leadership quite clearly used this visible women’s presence as a symbol and provided actual guidance regarding strategy and tactics from the background .”²¹⁶ Apparently women were used just symbolically in order to project its democratic face based on gender equality.

Though, the aggressive streak of women at the time of crisis, hardly needs explanations owing to their tremendous contribution in several mass struggles yet leadership of Marxist struggles have often been sceptical of women’s capabilities in an armed struggle. Here, Tebhaga movement (1946) can be an excellent example of women’s courage and determination where women refuelled the movement under the name of ‘Nari Bahini’. They demonstrated ‘semi-militia’ features and carried natural weapons like sticks, spears, broomsticks to shield their villages against the brutal police raids.²¹⁷ This shows that women have not shied away from adopting new techniques for assertion of their demands. Such zeal and enthusiasm automatically doubled the hopes of the struggles.

Throwing light on another aspect of subordination of women within collective actions U.Vindhya, in the essay, ‘The Srikakulam Movement’ says that role of women in matters related to arms and ammunitions remained a controversial one. She explains how women were deprived from most of such jobs which needed knowledge of chemicals, arms, explosives.²¹⁸ Such protective or patronising

²¹³ Krishna Bandhyopadhyay, 53-54, 59.

²¹⁴ Ajitha, 285.

²¹⁵ Krishna Bandhyopadhyay, 54.

²¹⁶ Ilina Sen, ed. *A Space Within the Struggles*, (New Delhi: Kali For Women, 1990), 16.

²¹⁷ Peter Custers, “Women's Role in Tebhaga Movement”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 21, No. 43, (1986), WS-102.

²¹⁸ Vindhya, Ilina ed. (1990), 41.

behaviour proved detrimental as many at times lack of basic chemical knowledge led to explosions hurting them, plus, often they were left helpless at the time of raids and attacks.

Looking into the party documents particularly that of the CPI-ML(Liberation), it's clear that in the early phases (particularly pre-1982) women activism were appreciated but not much was done to raise the gender question.²¹⁹ However, in post-1982 period women fronts were opened and a lot of innovative steps were taken to ensure more and more women participation, even though within the framework of connectivity between liberation of women and liberation of proletariat. Particularly after the historic Diphu Conference held in 1995, the question of women's recognised position has been given greater importance. Noteworthy, an All India Organisational Plenum was held at Diphu in July to streamline the Party's organisational network and functioning.²²⁰ The conference called for the target of 20 percent of women membership in the party and 10 percent at party structures at all levels.²²¹

Despite the efforts made at organisational level, women's position did not undergo much change in the coming years, as was expected. In one of the party document, 'Women Movement and Communist Party: Ideology, Programme, Practice'(2008), CPI-ML(Liberation) clearly accepts that “..the party is still not conducive to the emergence of a large number of women cadres and their taking up responsible party positions...” and calls most of its efforts as “formalistic” and “superficial”. The three basic goals presented in the document are: first, recruit, train and organise in party branches large number of women; second, take special care to develop women

²¹⁹ I've used the phrase 'early phases' to denote pre-1980s period, particularly the pre-1982 phases. Here, the year 1982 is significant because it was only in this year that the Liberation launched Indian People's Front as its open political platform actively intervening in national politics. Also in the same year, Third Party Congress was held which gave much required impetus to women's issues, for the first time. See *Documents of the Communist Party of India(Marxist-Lenin)*, adopted at the Fourth Party Congress, 1988, 1.7.25 and *Three Glorious Decades of Naxalbari: A Saga of Revolutionary Heroism, Supreme Sacrifice and Absolute Determination*, 5.

²²⁰ *Three Glorious Decades of Naxalbari: A Saga of Revolutionary Heroism, Supreme Sacrifice and Absolute Determination*, (CPI-ML Publication, 1997), 10.

²²¹ Ramji Rai, Party Programme and Women's Liberation Movement: Some Broad Points.', 43.

cadres; third, boldly promote them to responsible party positions.²²² Another aspect highlighted in the same document is the harsh reality that only 10 percent women membership is maintained in each committee.²²³ Moreover, even after the Bardhaman Conference and the Eighth Party Congress not much seems to have been achieved in terms of giving women their deserving positions in the form of leadership.²²⁴ Such features lead to gap between the party and mass organisations where former appear to be dominated by men while women seem to be confined into the latter.

As mentioned earlier, democratic centralism can also be examined as an interlinked concept to the collective action. It is the basic principle that aims to combine the different units of the party in solidarity. It is this attempt at solidarity that slowly led to doubts in minds of feminists regarding the adequacy of space for women within their larger model of working. What is called as ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ by Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin becomes ‘democratic dictatorship of proletariat’ at the hands of Mao. While Lenin advocated ‘people’s democracy’ with no room for any element of feudalism and capitalism Mao advocated a ‘new democracy’ wherein feudalism and capitalism of small and medium scales are allowed if these elements are prepared to live under the direction and control of the communist party.²²⁵

Different communist groups have different approach to democracy and democratic principles. In context of CPI-ML (Liberation), the ‘General Programme and the Party Constitution’ circulated at all the party congress, comprises of major sections with ‘democratic centralism’. The organisational system of the party is essentially based on this principle wherein it calls itself “monolithic” with a “single will” and warns against being a “union of groups and factions which make contracts with one

²²² “A Women’s Question for the Communist Party?”, *Women’s Movement and Communist Party: Ideology, Programme, Practice*, (Delhi: CPI-ML Publication, 2008), 31.

²²³ Rai, 43-44.

²²⁴ An All India Cadre Convention of the CPI(ML) was held at Bardhaman town in West Bengal on 12-13 september, See *Documents of the All India Cadre Convention*, (CPI-ML Publication, 2006), 18-19. Here once again the attention was brought towards the imbalance in party membership due to under-representation of women.

²²⁵ J.C. Johri, *Principles of Modern Political Science*, (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1996), 747.

another and enter into temporary alliances or agreements”.....“Freedom of thought and unity of action is the underlying message of democratic centralism”.²²⁶

For Maoists in India, ‘democracy is a sham’. Exercise of democratic rights like voting are nothing but a “...sham-drama”²²⁷ They have repeatedly boycotted polling in several Naxalite areas and proclaim people’s full support in validating futility of parliamentary democracy. Scholars like Aditya Nigam have tried to throw light on this ongoing debate. He explores the possible way out by seeing “...democracy not as a fully formed end product of liberal – constitutionalism but as its tamed other- the mass politics which escapes and exceeds the Law and the injustices of Order.”²²⁸ According to him, the Maoist strategy is actually mimicking the repressive state and detrimental to the democratic upsurge (mass politics) and needs to be resisted. He explains that democracy is ‘untamed’ as it pronounces power as an empty space; wherein instability is the order contained through different mechanisms. One of the mechanism for taming of such disorder is done by “revolutionaries through democratic mechanism and proletarian dictatorship.”²²⁹ According to him, revolutionaries fill the vacuum created by a democratic system.

Regarding the principle of democratic centralism, Javeed Alam is of the view that such a fundamental block of communist organisations is half-heartedly applied where centralism dominates democratic elements. He blames democratic centralism (DC) for “..throttling of democracy inside communist parties (CPS)” where democracy was not “systematically concretised nor ...given a clear definition”²³⁰. The only democratic feature within communist parties i.e, elections from the lower to the higher bodies is also governed entirely by the representatives of the higher bodies. Another aspect highlighted by Alam was that of shrinking information and understanding from higher bodies to lower bodies depriving them of independent decision-making, assessment or judgement. Apart from this, democratic centralism

²²⁶ *Political –Organisaional Report* adopted at Eighth Party Congress Report, (CPI-ML Publication, 2007),19.

²²⁷ Spokesperon, CPI(Maoist), “On the Election Boycott Tactic of the Maoists” *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol XLIV No. 38 (2009), 73.

²²⁸ Aditya Nigam, ‘Democracy, State and Capital: The ‘Unthought’ of 20th Century Marxism’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol XLIV No. 51, (2009): 35.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

²³⁰ Javeed Alam, “Can Democratic Centralism Be Conducive to Democracy”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol XLIV No. 38 (2009): 37.

was a principle introduced in the revolutionary period to maintain secrecy and discipline and it cannot be used as a weapon to carry on dictatorial works at all times.²³¹

Now after looking into the above arguments, one can say that such rigid centralism may also affect the women organisation, fronts, cadres in the similar fashion. If we talk about CPI-ML(Liberation) particularly, adequate availability of freedom for independent decision-making looks doubtful. As mentioned above higher bodies have to be informed for most of the activism, meaning, women organisation must be mostly dependent on the higher bodies for approvals and direction. Such conditions automatically undermine the whole purpose and urgency of the issues raised by women organisation. Within the party, women as it is are a minority and as the party constitution says minority are subordinated to the majority, there's every possibility that women are always sidelined. Such situations obviously can hamper flow of new ideas, expression and make the party stagnant. Alam here rightly points out that today there's a "...straitjacketing of the relationship of the leadership, both with the cadre and the class and mass organisations and of all these with the people at large"²³²

Lastly, looking at all above points it wouldn't be wrong to say that inspite of the rising consciousness within the Naxalite groups on the question of women, there are certain feudal remnants within the movement, which need to addressed urgently so that imbalance in the ratio of men and women is recovered as soon as possible. After going through the above debates of violence, economic rights and collective action, there seems to be a gap within the movement at theoretical and practical level. With regard to gender related issues it still looks inadequately structured.

Conclusion

Political movements like Naxalite movement no doubt give the oppressed sections the opportunity for articulation of grievances/expression, giving impetus to the politics of dignity. But the alleged miscoordination between their internal and

²³¹ Ibid., 38.

²³² Ibid., 39.

public discourse raises several questions on party's position on crucial issues like gender. As far morality is concerned whether sexual or theoretical, the movement seems to be entangled within fixed, traditional parameters. The members still look torn between their personal and public life.

Though there are evidences of increasing percentage of women within the movement today, various researches by autonomous women's groups and past narratives by women ex-naxalites point out at gender-insensitivities within parties at some point or other. Whether it's Priyamvada, Anasuyama, Kamalamma, or Acchamba in the Telangana people's struggle, all of them admitted to variety of discriminations. Some state that the party feared losing its reputation or considered women physically inferior while others believed that party was not comfortable with the consequences of entry of women (in form of affairs, pregnancy, childbirth, etc). They were treated as the 'others' and considered as embarrassing and burdensome! They apparently were not able to "...realise the significance of the connection between ideology and everyday life, especially for women."²³³ Such details clearly point towards the indifferent attitude of communist led movements. CPI-ML(Liberation), itself has not shied away from admitting of certain feudal, patriarchal attitudes among their own male comrades depriving the women comrades on certain political, organisational and emotional grounds.²³⁴

No doubt, today there's a visible amount of innovations undertaken by parties, particularly, CPI-ML(Liberation), for the addressal of women in areas of educating, training, allotting greater responsibilities to women, introducing women's magazines, supporting women's organisations, but a lot more needs to be done particularly in the field of women leadership and women's ownership rights over land. With regard to Maoist groups, though there's increasing consciousness on the question of gender discrimination,²³⁵ they seem to be preoccupied with the strategies of self- defence leaving very little time for any other cause.

²³³ Stree Shakti Sangathan , 263.

²³⁴ See Mishra, 166 and *Women's Movement and Communist Party: Ideology, Programme, Practice*, (Delhi: CPI-ML Publication , 2008), 43.

²³⁵ Consciousness seems to be rising, this is evident from oct 19, 2004 conference between the Maoist parties and women's groups in Andhra Pradesh. See Vasantha Kannabiran, Volga and Kalpana Kannabiran, "Women's Rights and Naxalite Groups" *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 39, No. 45 (Nov. 6-12, 2004).

All the above examinations thus, point towards the possibility of the argument of 'class subsuming gender', in context of Naxalite movement. With the Naxalite use of terminologies of 'class consciousness', 'annihilation of class enemies', class rigidities become even more evident subordinating 'gender' as a category of analysis of exploitation and oppression. These characteristics, obviously raises questions on its 'liberatory' claims. Ideals of Universal human liberation, in turn, seem somewhat interrupted with the marginalising tendencies of revolutionaries towards the question of 'gender'. Lastly, survey of the major feminist and Naxalite arguments in this chapter confirms that the theoretical divergence between the two groups exists in practice too. However, the main point worth notice between the on-going debates of present times, is the real possibilities of coordination between the two groups, as mentioned in the previous chapter. The case stands greatly true for India as feminist movement owes its growth to the socialist movement in the country.²³⁶ Today, more can be achieved by complementing each other not competing with each other.

²³⁶ Ilina Sen, ed. (1990), 3.

Chapter Three :

GENDER QUESTION AND THE NAXALITE MOVEMENT : **Analysing Experiences**

This chapter aims at exploring the complex issue of gender-sensitivity within the Naxalite movement on the basis of 'experiences' and perceptions of the various groups. 'Experience' will be used as part of the wider mechanism to see the larger picture. The idea here is to test whether adequate debates on the subject are taking place at different levels or not. If not, what are the possible causes for silencing, if any. Importantly, experiences of ex-naxalites, contemporary naxalites and participants, suitable academics and activists are followed in order to make a holistic examination of the problem. My methodology for this chapter consists of first, the method of interview and informal interaction with ex-naxalites, active women party members, academics, etc. and; second, drawing upon archives of reports, autobiographical accounts, debates related to Naxalite movement's perspective on gender.

The chapter is divided into four sections. **First** section analyses experiences of some of the ex-naxalites of the early phase of the Naxalite movement, both men and women. I have consciously made a comparative study of male and female experiences in this section to find out if both, males and females perceive the movement in the same way, on the same parameters; **Second** section analyses experiences of contemporary Naxalites and party members (male and female) to find out if there is any change in the attitude of the movement, over the years; and the **Third** section deals with the analysis of views of academics, analysts and social activists who have good knowledge of the subject and have themselves had certain experiences with the Naxalites.

3.1 Experiences of the Ex-Naxalites: The Gender Difference

This section shall make an attempt to investigate the position of gender within the Naxalite movement through the comparative analysis of the experiences of male

and female ex-naxalites. All the ex-naxalites belong to the early phases of the movement to find out if there's continuity in the approach that the movement had towards the gender issues during the early years.²³⁷ As seen in the previous chapter, the early stages of the movement were not so open about the debates concerning the gender question.²³⁸ The argument of women's liberation following liberation of the proletariat was the sole comfort line. Though not much of the Naxalite literature relating to the early phases is available, several personal narratives of the female ex-naxalites and archival reports do bring to light this approach. At first let us first try to capture the degree of normalised biases within the movement by the help of the experiences shared by ex-naxalites. This would make an interesting task, helpful in exploring the broader issues in hand.

As I mentioned earlier, not much literature is available relating to the early phase of the movement and its stand on the question of gender. Liberation itself admits to its lack of seriousness towards gender questions during this period in the documents of later years.²³⁹ Reasons for such negligence, perhaps, may be the conscious attempt by the parties to silence debates surrounding women's question in the fear of 'diversion' or the simple fact that not many women were made in charge of important events or allowed to voice their demands and take decision, apparently this is why they hardly made it to the pages of movement's history. More importantly, male ex-naxalites in their writings, till today, seem to give negligible attention to this problem, perhaps, due to their non-acceptance of sexual differences within their line of relevant questions.

²³⁷ I've used the phrase 'early phases' to denote pre-1980s period, particularly the pre-1982 phases. Here, the year 1982 is significant because it was only in this year that the Liberation launched Indian People's Front as its open political platform actively intervening in national politics. Also in the same year, Third Party Congress was held which gave much required impetus to women's issues, for the first time. See *Documents of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)*, adopted at the Fourth Party Congress, 1988, 1.7.25 and *Three Glorious Decades of Naxalbari: A Saga of Revolutionary Heroism, Supreme Sacrifice and Absolute Determination*, 5.

²³⁸ See Chapter two, pg 61, 64-65.

²³⁹ In a document published by CPI-ML(Liberation), it clearly says, "...our party did not take up the women question seriously since its inception although several women comrades led the peasant struggles and became martyrs. It was only at the Third Party Congress(1982) the women question was duly and seriously taken up.." See *Documents of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)* adopted at Fourth Party Congress, 1-5 January, (Liberation Publication, 1988), 1.7.25.

Interviews of the two ex-naxalites - Dilip Simeon and Sumanta Banerjee have been conducted in this regard to verify the above possibilities.²⁴⁰ Noteworthy, these two individuals have been consciously chosen to explore the debate of movement's perspective on gender knowing their history as naxalites in pre-1980 period, plus, their present interest in social activism.

If we take a look at both the interviews and conversations, it's clear that these two ex-naxalites were not very elaborate on the question of gender-sensitivity within the movement. Both focused more on the contemporary times and less on their own activism period. Much to my disappointment, none of them drew instances from their own experiences (in the movement) into their statements. Apparently, they don't have many memories of women's issues being addressed during their own period in the movement or it's just a case of conscious silencing of gender debates.

On the question of relationship between gender and Naxalite movement, Dilip Simeon's arguments were basically anchored in the historical positioning of 'warfare'. 'Warfare', which is a dominant feature of the movement, according to him, is essentially a "male activity". He explains that most Naxalite groups have an army-like culture of its own, wherein women are used "...symbolically.." to achieve "...conservative masculine ends".²⁴¹ Meaning, women seem to be used in what looks like a so called progressive journey to achieve conservative ends. According to Simeon here "...public are used for anti-public goals."²⁴² He defines all Naxalite formations as patriarchal in nature, and harvesting anger of women for their own motives.

²⁴⁰ Dilip Simeon is a well known labour historian and a public intellectual in India. He was a student of Delhi University, who joined the movement in 1970s. Later, he left the movement and returned to the University as a lecturer of History. Currently, he's the chairperson of an NGO called Aman Trust. His organisation basically works for peace initiatives closer to Gandhian ideology. As given in <http://www.sacw.net/auteur24.html> (accessed on March 30, 2010) Sumanta Banerjee on the other hand, became part of the Naxalite movement in 1970s. After lifting of the Emergency (1975) and coming out of the jail, he published his famous work, 'In the Wake of Naxalbari: A History of the Naxalite Movement' in 1980. At present, he is working as an "independent researcher" engaged in research on a popular culture and social history of colonial Bengal. As given in <http://www.zcommunications.org/zspace/sumantabanerjee> (accessed March 30, 2010).

²⁴¹ As told by Dilip Simeon in a brief conversation, See Appendix, pg.117.

²⁴² Ibid.

Coming to Sumanta Banerjee, though his arguments were well-framed, it did not bring out anything entirely new.²⁴³ In certain parts, he seems to just agree to my broad contentions (signalled within the questions) without much elaboration. For instance, on being asked if personal narratives by female ex-naxalite can be a 'trusted source for drawing conclusions' on a contested subject of gender-sensitivity within the movement, he simply agrees to my own broad assertions, adding ".....they (narratives) should be texts for the male comrades and leaders, who should learn to respect the women and recognize their individual rights."²⁴⁴ On another instance, on being asked about the non-distribution of seized land to the women and absence of proper agenda for women's land rights within the movement, he seemed not really aware of such occurrences.²⁴⁵ This kind of reaction is surprising because demand for land rights by women is a recorded phenomenon in the early phases of the movement. Moreover, it's no hidden fact that naxalites have often advocated redistribution of seized crops and land among the landless poor, but entitlements in the name of women are hardly ever part of their larger agenda.²⁴⁶

On the question of democratic centralism within Naxalite parties, both the individuals believe in its ill-effects. Sumanta asserts that such a principle "...may not work in favour of the women, or other under-privileged groups who may not be adequately represented at the top decision-making level."²⁴⁷ Simeon on the other hand, rejects the principle's authenticity saying there is more centralism and less democracy. He seemed to focus on it more in terms of a party principle and less as a possible mechanism for subordination of women's issue. However, one can say that his selection of strong words (in the interview) like "authoritarianism" may be indicating towards sure possibilities of women members and their problems being pushed aside by male dominated central bodies.²⁴⁸ More importantly, the

²⁴³ Sumanta Banerjee's interview was taken via email.

²⁴⁴ As told by Sumanta Banerjee in an interview via email. See Appendix, pg. 111.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Sarbani Bandhyopadhyay, "The Revolutionary Patriarchs" <http://www.pragoti.org/node/2053> (accessed April 11, 2009) and Madhu Kishwar and Ruth Vanita, ed, *In Search of Answers: Indian Women's Voices From Manushi*, (New Delhi: Manohar, 1999), 135-148. and Political Organisational Report adopted at the 5th All India Party Congress, CPI-ML Publication (2007), 46-48.

²⁴⁷ As told by Banerjee in an interview, See Appendix, pg. 111-112.

²⁴⁸ As told by Dilip Simeon in an interview, See Appendix, pg 118.

condemnation in his voice on the issue of Maoists line of violence and counter violence was perhaps a reflection of his own experiences.

Now coming to the section of experiences of female ex-naxalites, the idea is to try and revive some of the voices of female participants and activists so that the important deadlocks on the question of gender within the movement can be examined. Experiences of women participants like Volga, Ajitha, Krishna Bandhopadhyay are under prime focus.

Noticeably, women associated with the movement over the years, have openly shared their positive and negative experiences in the movement, in the form of autobiographies and interviews. One thing that seems common in most of these accounts is the feeling of betrayal experienced by them. Disappointments at several levels are expressed owing to their high expectations from the movement, particularly in terms of commitment to social transformation and socialist ideals of gender equality. Disillusioned by unfavourable revolutionary practices, most female participants like Ajitha, Volga finally quit the movement in the later stages. Though narratives are mostly considered as a complementary source of research yet another perspective on such narratives is the fear of 'subjectivity' wherein women participants are said to exaggerate the happenings in an attempt of recovering self-identity within the collective identity.

To begin with, the early phases of the movement particularly look unfavourable for the revolution-minded women in the party and seems to betray a patriarchal mindset.²⁴⁹ Female participants have often accepted the overt or covert forms of patriarchal settings within the movement. They seem utterly disappointed by the restrictive definition of 'empowerment of women' which resulted into subordination of female members. They were mostly expected to carry out all the chores, act as couriers, take care of injuries but seldom trusted for any kind of

²⁴⁹ Connotation of the phrase 'early phases' is given in initial pages of this Chapter , see p.71.

decision-making. Further, they were hardly given proper “directives”, leaving them with a sense of “ignominy” and insignificance.²⁵⁰

Ajitha, who became the face of the Marxist struggle in Kerala (1960s) has put public some of her experiences in her memoir. Though in most places, Ajitha raves about being surrounded by supportive, helpful male comrades, who called her a “source of inspiration...”²⁵¹, yet she has not shied away from confessing some of her degrading experiences. After years of work within the movement, she declares that “male domination has deep roots even in left movements..”, and she had felt “...discriminated against for being a woman”.²⁵² After dissociation with the movement on the question of annihilation doctrine, Ajitha looks back and weighs the position of women in the movement saying - “...male comrades considered women as slaves and sex objects. Women were never involved in decision making process. Usually, their opinion were scoffed at and rejected”.(Italic assigned)²⁵³ Cementing the sentiments of Ajitha, another ex-naxalites, Krishna Bandhyopadhyay says that sometimes they became so desperate that being on enemy list of police gave them what she calls a “..sense of relief..”²⁵⁴ Any call for responsibility was honoured by them and all resentments “...evaporated..” on such occasions.²⁵⁵ Here, I think this feeling of evaporation of resentment may also have contributed to the subordinate position of the women in the movement. Had they been more assertive for their rights and positions right their and then, they could have achieved their deserved recognition. Further, arguments like “..revolution first, gender equality only after that” as pointed out by Volga in an interview, cements possibilities of lack of gender-sensitivities within the movement during that period.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁰ Krishna Bandhyopadhyay, “Naxalbari Politics: A Feminist Narrative”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol XLIII, No. 14, (2009), 53-54. Krishna Bandhyopadhyay was a woman participant in Naxalite movement of the late 1960s/early 1970s period in Bengal region.

²⁵¹ Ajitha, *Kerala's Naxalbari, Ajitha: Memoirs of a young revolutionary*, trans, Sanju Ramachandran, (New Delhi: Srishti, 2008), 81.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 284-285.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 284.

²⁵⁴ Krishna Bandhyopadhyay, 54.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁶ G.Thilakavathi, “About Women’s lives and tears” *Frontline*, Vol 22 Dec 31 (2006) <http://www.flonnet.com/fl2227/stories/20060113000608000.htm> (accessed march 4, 2009)

-----Volga is the pen name of the soft-spoken but fiery artist Popuri Lalitha Kumari, who holds a special place for herself in Telugu literature. She had her share of political action as a member of the Students Federation of India (SFI) and also the Naxalite movement (for a definite period).

On the question of adequacy of recognition of women within the movement, the picture looks blur. In spite of tremendous contributions, women seem conveniently denied their deserved place the pages of revolutionary history. Such an indifference gets confirm from Volga's statement that though "...women created 150 years of Andhra history ...there is no place of women in history".²⁵⁷

On the question of violence in the form of sexual abuse, denial of sexual freedom and discomfort on the issue of love, revolutionary marriages, there have been numerous experiences shared by female ex-naxalites. Ajitha in the conclusive portion of her memoir openly admits her love and desire to marry late comrade Varghese. She also brings to light some of the obstacles in committing her relationship. Her father, despite being a rational man and the biggest support for his daughter, was "dead against the idea".²⁵⁸ In his words, "...you'll not only ruin yourself but also comrade Varghese, who is very important for the movement." Ajitha's father was a committed revolutionary whose attitude towards her marriage is explained in her following statement- "...if my marriage meant harm to the movement, it was better that I remained unmarried."²⁵⁹ Apparently, once again the so called commitment to the party was placed above one's personal desires proving the disability of balancing the private and public sphere. Guilt in case of catering ones personal desires was so high that there seemed to be a constant struggle within comrades on the issue of party and personal commitment.

Similar experiences are shared by Krishna Bandhyopadhyay about her relationship with comrade Dron. Though their relationship was known to the most, Dron seemed sceptical of taking any step. She questions the conscious attitude of Dron saying, "perhaps the notion of two people becoming intimate went against his idea of revolution!"²⁶⁰ Questioning the perspective of the movement on the sexual freedom of women, she wonders, "...Does one really have to stifle one's natural sexual desires in order to effect a revolution?"²⁶¹ Such questions within one's mind appear as indications of dilemma and disappointment. Krishna probably was expecting

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Ajitha, 282.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 281.

²⁶⁰ Krishna Bandhyopadhyay, 56.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

Dron to be more open about their likings and wished to observe greater revolutionary changes in terms of choosing one's partners within the party.

The atmosphere in the party never appeared conducive to the idea of love, affair, marriages. The discomfort with such questions become clearer on account of Ajitha's statement- "other comrades had confronted him (Varghese) with slanderous allegations of an affair",²⁶² Similar unpleasant incidents also took place in the case of Krishna. After Dron's death, Krishna's life took a turn for worse. She was bound within limitations wherein other members expected her to refrain from "second relationship." Further they kept on making insulting comments at her.²⁶³ Clearly, party members were driven by prejudices and seem too cautious on preserving their so called 'morality'. Whether the same 'morality' applied to the males of the party is hardly clear. Cases of sexual misbehaviour, teasing seem to be part of the movement culture for years. Even today cases of misbehaviours are reported by surrendered female naxalites plus mentioned within the party documents.²⁶⁴

Looking into both the incidents, I think both the female ex-naxalites faced the brunt of patriarchal mindsets. There are obvious similarities between both the cases even if they were set in different backgrounds (i.e, Bengal and Kerala). Taking up the case of Ajitha, I think Ajitha's father was committing the same mistake as the other male comrades, for which her daughter was greatly disappointed. I think what her father did was yet another form of male domination under the cover of the typical revolutionary argument - 'movement comes before personal needs'. As mentioned earlier such typical contentions are often used as a mechanism to push aside women's issues within the movement. Cases involving comrade Varghese and comrade Dron suggest towards defeated dreams of the female comrades keeping in mind the expected commitments from the party, at personal and public level. Examination of both these cases help us draw broad patterns wherein we see the inability of the male members to establish link between personal and public life; and more importantly, the probable fear of consequences in the form of pregnancy,

²⁶² Ajitha, 282.

²⁶³ Krishna Bandhyopadhyay, 57.

²⁶⁴ Mishra, 166.

children, etc. The worst part is that even though most of them could not fulfill their partner's aspirations, they used their emotional connection in order to make sure women members stay in the movement. In an incident shared by Krishna, one can see how Dron before leaving for another programme said, "...Don't ever move away from the revolution. I won't be able to take if I learn you have forsaken the revolution''²⁶⁵ Such statements according to me, seem more mechanical than inspirational. Party members time and again kept convincing women to stick to the party, which was really not needed because staying with the party should be entirely their own choice. Though here some may argue that Dron had showed his affection and signalled her as a source of inspiration in the form of poetry but the question posed here is, whether she was seen just as a passive source or not, is not really clarified. Literatures by party members in the forms of stories and poetry suggest that seldom have the male comrades paid tribute to the contributions made by women as active members. Most of the time, women seem to be used symbolically and denied attention to their active presence in party working.

Coming to other forms of subordination, complaints of abuses in different forms were scoffed off as "...losing capacity to view things from the class perspective.''²⁶⁶ In my opinion lack of open discussions on issues of marriage, sexual freedom resulted in increasing number of misbehaviours. If the party had made a little more effort to look into the subject, such incidents would have decreased plus, women's support would have been even stronger.

After a comparative analysis of the experiences of male and female ex-naxalites, one can clearly mark the difference. Women participants' account of the movement comes across as vibrant and informative while that of male ex-naxalites' looks dry. Throughout the interview and the conversation, the male ex-naxalites hardly give any particular account of their personal experiences. Though here one may point out that direct questions relating to their activism period were not posed, yet I would say that there was definitely possibility for incorporating examples of some of their own experiences in the course of their analysis, but very little of that happened in the interview. In fact, both the interviews of male ex-naxalites seem to suggest the

²⁶⁵ Krishna Bandhyopadhyaya, 56.

²⁶⁶ Ibid. 57.

fact that either these male ex-naxalites were not ready to reopen the emotional baggage relating to their experiences in the movement or that it may be a case of 'silencing' of gender related debates. Whatever the case may be opinions expressed by them were definitely limited. This as mentioned in the previous sections also indicates lack of consciousness over the gender issues in the early phases which automatically left few memories and interest in the minds of the two personalities.

Women ex-naxalites, on the other hand, have shared a vibrant and more elaborative account of their experiences. Personal narratives by Ajitha, Krishna Bandhyopadhyay, Volga have been a complementary source for greater understanding of the theme of this dissertation. These women have not shied away from sharing minute details associated with their own experiences in the movement. Paying attention to another aspect I would say that though autobiographical accounts of women ex-naxalites of the early stages are often available but narratives by male ex-naxalites is negligible, and whatever account is available it does not throw much light on the position of women in the movement. Lastly after looking into the accounts of both male and female ex-naxalites, I think observations seem to point towards existence of gender difference in treatment of the movement and their own experiences in the movement.

3.2 Active members of the Naxalite Movement

This section basically analyses the statements/interviews given by active male and female members of the movement. Due to limited access, only selective active male and female members are traced in this section. The aim of this section is to basically examine the changes in the attitude of the movement towards gender, if any.

Though Naxalites over the years have gained confidence of the people by campaigning against cases of rapes, molestation, murders by upper caste-class, state agencies but they themselves are challenged for ignoring the idea of presenting any concrete plan for women's upliftment. They have always assumed that the liberation of proletariats will automatically result lead to women's liberation.

Ironically, in most of the available interviews, the Naxalite leaders have not given much detail about the relationship between male and female comrades nor the existing conditions of women members. They have always talked about increasing the participation of women in their struggle for transformed, progressive India but they refrain from commenting on questions relating to women's land rights, female leadership, female sexuality, revolutionary marriages, etc within the movement. Except for few accidental addressals, they hardly seem to have the will and time to pay attention to such issues keeping in mind their preoccupation with "strategic defence" in present times.²⁶⁷ Even the word 'women' is hardly noticed in these interviews.

If one looks at the recent interviews of contemporary leaders like Ganapathy, Koteshwar Rao, Azaad, following points can be noted. Ganapathy's²⁶⁸ most interviews constitute of long agenda bound by revolutionary quotes. Even though there are promises of change for the poor, landless but nowhere has he bothered to bring to light their party's stand on women's cause. Except for expressing his accomplishment at Lalgah (in his recent interview) where he pointed out "...high degree of participation of women..", the word 'women' is hardly seen in his interviews.²⁶⁹

Coming to Kishenji²⁷⁰, same attitude is seen here too. Nothing much is said regarding women's cause except they have been fighting against state, police atrocities like rape, molestation, murder, etc.²⁷¹ On the question of female members of their party, they have nowhere shared anything. However, certain revelations made by kishenji clear the picture. Sumanta Banerjee shared an incident in an interview, where he narrates how in order to avoid children (due to party pressures)

²⁶⁷ The term 'strategic-defence' is borrowed from Ganapathy's interview, taken from Oct 17, 2009 issue of 'Open', Rahul Pandita, "We shall certainly defeat the government", <http://www.openthemagazine.com/article/nation/we-shall-certainly-defeat-the-government> (accessed on December 11, 2009).

²⁶⁸ Ganapathi is the general Secretary of the CPI (Maoist); he replaced the founder of the People's War Group, Kondapalli Seetharamiah in 1991.

²⁶⁹ Pandita, *Open*, pg 3.

²⁷⁰ Kishenji, is the national chief of the People's Liberation Army and a politburo member of the banned CPI (Maoist). He is said to be the leading man behind the Lalgah movement.

²⁷¹ Suhrid Sankar Chattopadhyay, "To Establish A Liberated Area", *Frontline*, Vol 26, No. 22.(2009), 22-23, [Interview of Koteshwar rao] and Snigdhendru Battacharya, "We Support Islamic Terrorism", <http://www.hindustantimes.com/News-Feed/interviews/We-support-Islamic-terrorism/Article1-419804.aspx> (accessed on October 21, 2009).

Kishenji got his wife sterilised.²⁷² At first this looks as a modern attempt for birth control but if one thinks over it deeply one would like to ask- why he made his wife undergo the operation? Why couldn't he get operated? It seems like a case of patriarchal fencing wherein husband controls wife's sexuality; where the woman is not even in control of her own body.²⁷³ Here it's not only violation of a woman's right over body but also violation of her right by virtue of being a human being. Such conservative details seem to make the case for the movement even weaker.

Coming to Azaad, his interviews also lack the much-needed gender-sensitivity.²⁷⁴ Regarding killing of the innocent civilians (presupposing women too) in the due course of violence-counter violence, Azaad says that he does feel sorry but this is how things will be in a "war zone" as there are no rules.²⁷⁵ Though there have been talks about the apology made by his party whenever such mistakes take place, he does not elaborate on this. He only cites an example of the recent "...aberration..." on the part of cadres leading to an unfortunate killing of poll officials in Kasamsur (in Manpur area of Kanker district in Chhattisgarh (Dandakaranya)) after which "a serious review of the mistake was also made by the concerned committee."²⁷⁶ Such stands obviously do not give a clear picture of their approach to women in general but in all fairness, attacks designed especially to target women is not yet reported.

Coming to yet another frontline Naxalite leader, Kobad Ghandy, he has showed respect and admiration to the women leader in the form of recent tribute to his late wife Anuradha Ghandy.²⁷⁷ He cites how his wife, comrade Anuradha emerged from being "...an ordinary cadre to that of a well known figure and big leader." After

²⁷² As cited in the Interview of Sumanta Banerjee. See Appendix, pg 110-111.

²⁷³ Here the opinion expressed are mine and only takes into account the incident cited by Sumanta. Some similarity with Sumanta Banerjee's views is purely coincidental.

²⁷⁴ Azaad is the spokesperson of the CPI (Maoist) and has been lately responsible for most of the party's formal statements.

²⁷⁵ Siddharth Varadarajan, "INTERVIEW: 'A ceasefire will create conducive atmosphere for talks'" <http://svaradarajan.blogspot.com/2010/04/interview-ceasefire-will-create.html> (accessed on April 17, 2010).

²⁷⁶ Spokesperson, CPI(Maoist), "On the Election Boycott Tactic of the Maoists" *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol XLIV No. 38 (2009): 74.

²⁷⁷ Kobad Ghandy, "Anuradha Ghandy: The Inspiring Life of a Maoist Leader, Remembering Anu on her Second Death Anniversary"

<http://indianvanguard.wordpress.com/2010/04/13/anuradha-ghandy-the-inspiring-life-of-a-maoist-leader-remembering-anu-on-her-second-death-anniversary/> (accessed March 24, 2010)

become a professor in Sociology, she became a well known militant trade union leader. She led many a “worker’s struggles and even went to jail a number of times.” Kobad points out the immense potential and will power of the lady saying she had “...deep impact on the intelligentsia—lecturers, students, lawyers, writers and social activists.” Further in the last years of her life, she focused on the “..oppressed women of our country, educating them and arousing them for their emancipation and liberation from poverty.”²⁷⁸ Though here I appreciate Kobad’s honesty and recognition of women member’s contribution, such a tribute on death anniversary of his wife was expected. It would have been more commendable if Maoist literature had paid tribute to the contribution made by women comrades all these years.

Coming to the female active members, I got the opportunity to interview only one such member named Kavita Krishnan²⁷⁹, due to limited access. Noticeably, perception of this active female member of CPI-ML(Liberation) is entirely divergent from that of the female ex-naxalites. Position of women in the movement is not perceived in terms of what Kavita calls “..party versus women..”²⁸⁰ According to her, for those who serve the movement it is a “..live process....not a finished product”.²⁸¹ Talking about the different aspects of gender question within the movement, she does not deny the existence of “..certain aberrations in daily practice..” but also repeatedly brings to attention the efforts of the leaders and their faith on activists like her, in overcoming patriarchal trends, if at all.²⁸² Rejecting attempts of “over-simplifng” things, she appreciates her party on every occasion saying, efforts at the microlevel whether in the case of land, mobilisation of women at grassroot level are hardly recorded. Ruling out dominating effects of democratic centralism, she says this principle has helped women to connect with the party even more because gender-sensitive decisions taken at the top are made to follow at lower levels under supervision.²⁸³ This sounds commendable but the fact remains

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Kavita Krishnan is the national secretary of the All India Progressive Women's Association and former president of the All India Students' Association. She is also a central committee member of the Communist Party of India-Marxist-Leninist (CPI-ML-Liberation) and the editor of Liberation magazine.

²⁸⁰ As told by Kavita Krishnan in an interview, See Appendix,pg 119.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 124.

²⁸² Ibid.,119.

²⁸³ Ibid., 124-125.

that majority rules minority under this principle and clearly women who are a minority often get subordinated.²⁸⁴

On a related context, I can recall Kavita telling me on an informal note, somewhere in the second half of the interview that the leadership of the women's front was under a senior male leader! This admission, to my mind was rather ironical after hearing her talk about the party's commitment to enhancing women's position within the party. Though she defended the party decision saying it was his expertise and experience that was needed by the women's front but in my opinion such expertise and experience could have been equally or rather more helpful, had there been a senior female leader in his place. Such features suggest difference in theory and practice of revolutionary politics and clearly demonstrate the subordinate positioning of women within the different Naxalite parties.

On the question of revolutionary marriages, female sexuality, children, Kavita was not very elaborate. Though she talked about party's efforts at recognising and eliminating strains on women sexuality in the form of arranged marriages on caste basis, moral policing against women, etc in the society; efforts to encounter party's inner contradictions on female sexuality were not highlighted. Much to my disappointment, she briefed the subject saying party considered these subjects as "...personal issues..."²⁸⁵. Yet again the party's stand on love, marriages is unclear...even the women members of the party seem less interested on such important issues. More importantly, this kind of approach may be vaguely pointing at the possibility of internalisation of the biases (within the movement) by the contemporary women members just like the women participants of the initial phases.²⁸⁶

After going through the views and experiences of the active members of the movement I can say that here too there are visible gender differences. Male

²⁸⁴ *The General Programme, The Party Constitution* adopted at Eighth Party Congress Report, (CPI-ML Publication, 2007), 19 and "A Women's Question for the Communist Party", *Women's Movement and Communist Party: Ideology, Programme, Practice*, (Delhi: CPI-ML Publication, 2008), 43.

²⁸⁵ As told by Kavita Krishnan in an interview, See Appendix, pg 126.

²⁸⁶ Issue of internalisation of patriarchal hegemony by women participants is raised in Sarbani Bandhyopadhyay, (2009).

members appear hardly open about the status of women in the movement. There's perhaps an attempt to silence internal and external debates surrounding 'gender' question. Though very often pictures of women cadres in uniform carrying weapons are circulated, these to my understanding may possibly be part of myth-creation, if I may call it. Experiences of active women members on the other hand are hardly available. Negligible numbers of women have shared their perceptions in the recent years. This kind of absence I think is one trend that needs a separate research altogether.

Although whatever was shared by Kavita shows her understanding of party objectives in terms of women's question, yet she too was not very clear on contested issues of marriage, children and termed it as "personal issues."²⁸⁷ Moreover, despite being in agreement to Kavita's contention that generally one tends to focus more on the negatives than the positives I think it's important to understand that there are reasons for repeated questioning of their alternative model. Repeated irregularities in organisation, practice indicate the need to undertake comprehensive self-introspection at every level to include gender within their larger model.

3.3 Academics and Activists on Gender and Naxalites

This section basically aims to analyse the position of different intellectual strata on the issue of Naxalite movement's perspective on gender. Academics and activists who have deep knowledge and understanding of the subject like U. Vindhya, Manoranjan Mohanty, Bela Bhatia, Gautam Navalakha, Arundhati Roy are under prime focus in this section.

The main contention of the intelligentsia on the subject of 'Gender and the Naxalite movement' is that though the scene in the movement is changing, they still need to improve the conditions within and outside movement. Analysts like U. Vindhya though acknowledge movement's effort, also say that "...we do not hear of any

²⁸⁷ See Kavita Krishnan's interview, Appendix pg 126.

radical changes brought about in actual practice.”²⁸⁸ Bela Bhatia also shares the same sentiment, saying sometimes women’s issues seem to be “...pushed back..”²⁸⁹ Manoranjan Mohanty in this regard says that “...the first challenge for them came in the form of caste, so they started addressing Dalits; then came ethnicity, so they started addressing tribals...” but on the gender question, they still believe in the traditional line - “..only socialism will ultimately lead to women’s liberation”²⁹⁰. He in fact advocates greater understanding of what he calls ‘gendered reality’.

The current scenario gets even clearer if we examine recent experiences of Arundhati Roy and Gautam Navlakha in the Naxalite areas 291

Though not too many particulars are given on the subject of gender-question in movement yet minute details help us draw a better picture of the prevailing conditions. All through their journey, both of them look overwhelmed by the greetings, care and openness of the comrades, both men and women. Equal sharing of work was something that struck Gautam the most.²⁹² Roy every now and then talks about the presence of female comrades carrying guns on their hips, seeing which she looks surprised and impressed.²⁹³ From what she writes, women comrades come across as disciplined, confident and well-informed lot. They were aware of the party’s actions and justified them with full confidence.²⁹⁴ Some of the

²⁸⁸ As told by U. Vindhya in an interview, See Appendix, pg 133.

---U Vindhya is a Professor at CESS (Centre for Economic and Social Studies), Hyderabad. She is mostly associated with Gender studies and her works on relationship between feminist movement and Radical Left movement are quite popular.

²⁸⁹As told by Bela Bhatia in an interview, See Appendix pg 141.

---Bela Bhatia was an associate fellow at Centre for Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), New Delhi. She is a popular activist and is most known for her work on Naxalite movement. She was also a member of an Expert group on development challenges in extremist-affected areas (read: Naxalite-affected districts) set up by the Planning Commission of India in May 2006.

²⁹⁰ As told by Manoranjan Mohanty in a brief conversation, See Appendix pg 138.

---Manoranjan Maohanty is Durgabai Deshmukh Professor of Social Development at the Council for Social Development, University of Delhi and a Research Fellow at the Orfalea Center. He is particularly famous as a political scientist and a human rights activist.

²⁹¹ Arundhati Roy is a Booker prize winner and a social activist. She has been involved in a number of social causes; Narmada Bachao Andolan was one such cause.

Gautam Navlakha is a leading democratic rights activist and a consultant editor of EPW. In January 2010, accompanied with Swedish writer Jan Myrdal, Navlakha visited the jungles of Central India (Dandakaranya region), taking interview of the leadership of CPI(Maoist).

²⁹² Gautam Navlakha, “Days and Nights in the Heartland of Rebellion- Maoist land” <http://indianvanguard.wordpress.com/2010/04/02/gautam-navlakha-days-and-nights-in-the-heartland-of-rebellion/> (accessed April 7, 2010).

²⁹³ Arundhati Roy, “Walking With The Comrades”

<http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?264738> (accessed on April 2, 2010).

²⁹⁴ Ibid., Comrade Joori’s account of party’s action.

females come across as quiet yet fierce, having price on their head (comrade Narmada and Masse).

Both Arundhati and Gautam commend the efforts by the party towards women's cause at every stage. Both confirm how Maoists have been supporting and waging fight against customary exploitations like prohibiting lower class women to wear blouses on the upper part of their bodies. Arundhati further points out that the party in 1986 set up the Adivasi Mahila Sangathan (AMS) which evolved into the Krantikari Adivasi Mahila Sangathan (KAMS). Elaborating on its line of work Roy says "KAMS campaigns against the adivasi traditions of forced marriage and abduction; against the custom of making menstruating women live outside the village in a hut in the forest....against bigamy and domestic violence.In Dandakaranya, even today women are not allowed to sow seeds..... So, the party decided that women would sow seeds on common land which belongs to the Janatana Sarkar. On that land, they sow seed, grow vegetables and build check dams."'²⁹⁵

Despite these claims which make Maoists seem sensitive to women's issues there are certain revelation made by female comrades themselves. While talking to women comrades in the camps, few of them (Rupi and Maase) talk about "...the long years of struggle by women *within* the party, not just for their rights, but also to make the party see that equality between men and women is seen as central to a dream of a just society"²⁹⁶ They admit that despite changes over the years, there's still need for improvement. The bracketed detail that "...party's central committee and politburo have no women yet" is disappointing.²⁹⁷ On another instance, Navlakha highlights that within the maoist party operating in Chhattisgarh, number of women "...is less than fifty percent that the party itself mandates...it is about 40-45 percent"²⁹⁸

On the question of physical violence, most intellectuals assert that women have never been targeted directly, and they have only been victims of a "confrontational

²⁹⁵ Roy (2010).

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Navlakha (2010).

situation”.²⁹⁹ Cases of aberrations at cadre levels, however, have been denounced by most.

Paying attention to another aspect of physical violence where women too are trained as its perpetrator, I think that women along with men are being turned into machines wherein they slowly tend to forget the very purpose of joining the movement. Few intellectuals like Vindhya and Dilip Simeon feel that women very often are used by male comrades for masculine ends. Taking clue from the references made by Vindhya in her interview³⁰⁰, one can see how, quite possibly in an attempt to counter feminist literature, party literature are prepared such that they highlight the image of a strong, self-dependent female comrade-in-arms. Such attempts obviously are made to “..inspire and motivate..” others but more importantly to defeat any obstacle in the name of gender inequality.³⁰¹ Apparently, myth-creation is used as a tool to attract women and create certain image of its own. Invoking the idea of ‘warfare’, she dismisses the strategic use of “‘....imagery of heroic mothers, wives, daughters (..veermata, veerapatni..)’”. She explains how such symbols are exploited by giving women “..essentialist central role..” – “to bear offspring who can be drafted into the revolution, or to ‘release’ their husbands into the call of duty for the revolution.” Here, I agree to her statement that such conservative invocations of war and masculine terms “....do not...take forward the question of gender at all in the movement. In the larger context, the whole emphasis on the centrality of war and armed struggle is fundamentally detrimental to the interests of peace and resistance through other than violent means that feminists champion.”³⁰²

On the issue of other forms of violence within the movement (in the form of sexual abuse, denial of sexual freedom, discomfort on question of marriages, love, children) there is a sense of dissatisfaction among intelligentsia. From the very

²⁹⁹ As told by Manoranjan Mohanty in a brief conversation, see Appendix, pg 138.

³⁰⁰ Two major references made in the interview are - U.Vindhya, “Comrades-in-Arms : Sexuality and Identity in the Contemporary Revolutionary Movement in Andhra Pradesh”, *A Question of Silence? The Sexual Economies of Modern India*, ed. Mary E. John and Janaki Nair, (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998)

U.Vindhya, “Questions of Revolutionary Identity and Sexuality in the Contemporary Radical Left Movement in Andhra Pradesh”, *Psychology and Developing Societies*, Vol. 15, No.2, (2003).

³⁰¹ Vindhya, (1998), 172-177.

³⁰² As told by Vindhya in an interview, See Appendix, pg 135.

beginning such important issues have been scoffed off by the movement as “..diversionary..”, or belonging to a “...bourgeois feminism.”³⁰³ They continue to tag such problems as ‘personal’ saving themselves from any complexities in attainment of the so called ‘larger’ political cause. Vindhya in this regard rightly says, “...the entire feminist thesis of power and control and how power structures human relations has not been understood by the naxalites who continue to regard gender as concerning ‘personal’ issues.”³⁰⁴ Apparently, the fact that power relations are most acute and strategic within human relations (particularly, man-woman) is either ignored or not believed by revolutionaries. Testimony to such an attitude is the indifference of the movement towards gender biases and ‘subjectivities’ within the movement.

Some of Vindhya’s previous works highlight inconsistencies within the movement. On one side she shows how due to external (emergence of women’s movement) and internal (increasing number of women cadres) pressures, women’s issues have found a place on the agenda of the revolutionary movement, but on the other side actual product looks inadequate. Documents and discussion are starting to take place regarding “...women’s health, birth control and contraception, problem of feelings of inferiority in the women activists and around building a strong women’s movement...”³⁰⁵ but the feminist approach in the nation and within the party are still perceived as “...anti-democratic, anti-revolutionary tendencies which limit women’s struggle to family related issues and target men”³⁰⁶

On the question of women’s right over land, there are divergent views. Some women like Bela Bhatia and Kavita Krishnan say that since they do not giveaway *pattas* there’s not much they can do except for make demands for reforms. But others feel differently. In fact, Vindhya accepts lack of attention to the question of women’s right over property such as land. In her response to a question, she explains how empowerment of women, for the Naxalite groups, “...has by and large meant recruiting them to the party and giving them arms. Some of them are also

³⁰³ U.Vindhya,(1998), 169.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ As cited in U.Vindhya, “Questions of Revolutionary Identity and Sexuality in the Contemporary Radical Left Movement in Andhra Pradesh”, (2003), 151.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

taught to read and write, and in general, the skills and wherewithal of how to lead lives on the run.”³⁰⁷ This according to her is mainly due to the stunted understanding of gender by party leadership. Here, Gautam Navlakha’s account of his recent visit is worth noticing. Gautam writes, “...JS constitution mandates the agriculture department under its Article 3(c) to “release joint patta in the name of families and in the name of wife and husband.”³⁰⁸ This latest development within the party is no doubt commendable but knowing that “joint pattas” eventually mean upper hand of the husbands, defeats the whole aim of women’s rights in the family.

Lastly, after examining the position of different groups on Naxalite movement I would say that conformity to the above mentioned inadequacies within the movement is not something new. Several personal narratives, over the years have brought to light some of the crushing experiences of women comrades. Though some may question the authenticity of personal narratives, most intellectuals like Mohanty, Bela Bhatia, U. Vindhya feel that they are an important source of research, which help us to identify certain patterns. Vindhya makes a convincing point within a psychological backdrop, saying, “Memory in retrospective hindsight may serve to heighten or embellish the nuances of the story in the direction the narrator wishes to take, but they are not entirely imagined. Narratives therefore constitute an important source of the intersections between biography, history, and politics.”³⁰⁹ For her, narratives provide the means to look into the actual practices of the organisation- management/division of work, application of party principles, etc.

Conclusion

After studying all the interviews, conversations, references I can say that ‘Gender and the Naxalite movement’ is a complicated subject with many strands attached.

³⁰⁷ As told by Vindhya in an interview, See Appendix, pg.135.

³⁰⁸ Navlakha.

³⁰⁹ Vindhya interview, See Appendix pg 134.

Changing times is giving rise to numerous other agendas which makes the study of gender within Naxalite movement, even more relevant.

To begin with, I would like to say that Naxalite movement over the years does appear changed as it has taken vital steps in promoting greater women's participation. But there still appears scope for innovations in terms of gender issues. Women leadership, sexual freedom, sexual division of labour based on equality, women's land rights are some of the issues that call for more attention. They seem to ignore the fact that women's issues are interwoven in their quest for total transformation of society. It is widely believed that in order to be called a true communist they will have to prove themselves at all levels, particularly in terms of women's liberation. Branding women's issues as 'deviational', has and will continue to validate the arguments of 'class subsuming gender'. Here, I do agree with Dilip Simeon's point that they may be using women 'symbolically' for their larger ends.³¹⁰ This point seems substantiated from the fact that women are not part of the central bodies but merely taught to use arms and serve their convenience.

If we closely examine Arundhati and Gautam's experiences, we can clearly see the present face of the movement. What really comes across is the fact that there is much less done than shown. I say this in context of my earlier contention that all those images possibly may be part of myth-creation. In this context if we research a little on the coming reports, surprisingly, most pictures from the camps comprise of women with guns and uniforms. In case of the referred Arundhati's article (*Walking With Comrades*, 2010) particularly, whether such pictures were clicked by herself or Maoists themselves is not known but, I would definitely say that they seem to successfully create an impact. In addition, if we look into Gautam's contention that one of female comrades led the squad that escorted him and Myrdal, one may say that it may be a pre-planned affair.

On yet another occasion, the case falls under critical speculations when one of the male comrades casually asks- "*Do you know what to do if we come under fire?*" to

³¹⁰ Term, 'symbolically' coincidentally falls similar to Dilip Simeon's use in the brief conversation, See Appendix pg 117. Similarity was not intended, the term was formally framed by me.

Below are the two prominent images of armed women revolutionaries active in Naxalite camps. Pictures are taken from Arundhati Roy's recent article, "Walking With The Comrades."



which Arundhati replies, “ *Yes,...immediately declare an indefinite hunger strike*”.³¹¹ There seem to be certain signs and motives behind the question asked. In fact, if we examine the Maoist pattern throughout most of the visits we see that they seem well planned on what to say and what to project. They seem well aware of the fact that whole world is watching them; that every small detail runs through all newspapers, magazines, websites and news channels; that such visits are going to be highly scanned once visitors return back. So, possibility of use of ‘myths-creation’ and symbols as a powerful mechanism for conveying messages seem high. If not for the visitors then for the villagers and exploited tribal women, it may be used to make them fall in love with the images of a ‘revolutionary woman’. Such an invocation although attracts more and more women towards the movement but does not allow them to explore her capabilities and rights fully. The fact is, female members still seem to be fighting discrimination within the party. In the name of ‘revolution’, women members are often expected to push back their desires, their ‘right to question’. The culture of violence and counter-violence somewhere makes them (men and women) mechanical and leaves the gender-sensitive subjects behind in the chaos.

In conclusion I will say that there seems to be a tendency for silencing the debates surrounding gender within the movement. Despite their continuous claims for greater respect and honour for women’s cause, there seems more of talk than action. Whether the reason behind such a characteristic is the fear that women’s causes may overshadow their political cause or that they themselves are unable to shed their patriarchy masks, they will have to introspect all aspects of their existence. In terms of ideals of Universal human liberation, though their works generally seem within borderlines, occasional reports of sexual violence, denial of women leadership is said to overrun their past records of emancipation.

³¹¹ Roy.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, this dissertation has been an attempt to explore the position of Naxalite movement on the gender question. My attempt was predominantly inspired by the recent literature produced by the autonomous women's movement and the alleged state of perpetual chaos and denial reflected in the Naxalite movement. Naxalite movement is considered as one of the crucial sites for probing into this kind of subject further because it brings to light the apparent undertoned, discriminatory mechanisms very much existent in realm of emancipatory politics.

Works like “ *We Were Making History...* ” are landmarks in exploring this theme as it contributes to a much needed culture of rereading and interpreting history from the point of view of women, plus, highlighting the major gender specific anxieties against the so called emancipatory Marxist struggles. Essentially, experiences communicated through writings are also seen as attempts to underline one's position within the struggle and more importantly recuperate (if I may call it) their invisibility. After examining a number of narratives by the women ex-participants like Ajitha, Krishna Bandhyopadhyay, Volga, I think, survey of such writings give us parameters for weighing struggles (particularly Marxist) on certain gender-specific grounds and act as part of the larger mechanism for exploration of such complex subjects.

After carrying out the study in the form of three chapters, I noticed that the Naxalite movement even after coming a long way appears to give only cursory attention to the question of 'gender'. Formalism in the form of mere occasional discussions, pamphlets on the issue of increasing women membership and support base is the only tribute paid by male comrades to women population within and without.³¹² Debates concerning gender-specific issues like female sexuality, land-ownership rights for women, women leadership within the movement still seem to be avoided

³¹² 2004 discussion meeting between Maoists and feminist groups in Andhra Pradesh. See Vasantha Kannabiran, Volga and Kalpana Kannabiran, “Women's Rights and Naxalite Groups” *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 39, No. 45 (Nov. 6-12, 2004) . Also See Vindhya's interview Appendix pg 133.

and silenced in the fear of ‘deviation’. Within their own working groups, participants bear party’s divergent attitude towards males and females (in terms of chores, taking care of injuries, etc).³¹³ Participants are strictly directed to follow their party documents and not allowed exposure to others’ literature. In response to criticism of keeping members in dark, leaders like Vinod Mishra argue that critics “...indulge in such fantasies only to justify their own anarchism...”³¹⁴ Such an approach does seem to suggest an ultra disciplinarian approach within the party working, which may obviously be detrimental for women participants, who are a minority in most Naxalite groups.

Nevertheless, differences do seem to appear between the working of different streams within the Naxalite movement, in the present scenario. Leaving behind few shortcomings in the form of inadequate attention to women leadership, land ownership rights, CPI-ML(Liberation) has taken certain steps for the women. Whether its creation of women fronts, education departments, introducing women’s magazines, their efforts are visible. Maoists on the other hand, still seem lagging behind on the question of gender. Though urgency of using a gender lens to broaden its understanding of oppression intertwined with social equations has been admitted in the past (particularly in the form of 2004 discussion between Maoists and feminist groups, Andhra Pradesh), nothing concrete and radical has been seen in practice.³¹⁵ In the selective statements given by Maoist leaders, even the use of the word ‘women’ is rare.³¹⁶ Some references though made in the past, have only indicated a stunted understanding of women’s issues and identified women as mere ‘passive’ sources. Apparently, women are just seen as secondary members whose active presence is overlooked.³¹⁷ Reports of women revolutionaries are mainly in the form of armed comrades with blurred knowledge of reading and writing. Recent desire and call for merging and rallying of all-India democratic groups by Maoist leaders yet again raises several questions. In the list of all the democratic,

³¹³ See Chapter three, pp 74-75.

³¹⁴ As cited in Arun Kumar, “ Violence and Political Culture: Politics of the Ultra Left in Bihar”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 38, No. 47,(2003): 4983.

³¹⁵ Also noted by U.Vindhya in an interview, See Appendix pg 133.

³¹⁶ See Chapter three, p. 80-82.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 78.

progressive groups and parties mentioned, name of feminist groups is missing.³¹⁸ Apparently, they do not consider feminist groups 'progressive' enough, and still hold prejudices against feminist causes. This way, their proposed agenda seems narrow and concocted.

The building crisis between the state and the Naxalite groups in recent times makes this kind of exploration even more important as the position of women within its proposed alternative model and current line of working appears vague. There seems to be lack of time, vigour and interest among the Naxalite groups (particularly Maoists) in addressing problems other than that of 'self-defence' and self-justification. Moreover, owing to the changing volatile strategies of the Naxalites (particularly cadres) and their alleged links to the so called extremist groups, they seem to be losing the trust and support of people.³¹⁹

One of the other observations made in this dissertation is the level of interpretation within the Naxalite movement. Keeping in mind the above point of its narrow model, it seems that its working is not weighed regularly on the scale of its theoretical groundings. The foundational ideologies seem to be interpreted conveniently (through their actions) to serve their temporary purposes. Though ideological texts are consciously kept as the source of knowledge for the members, trend of interpretation of principles has also been seen. Particularly in terms of women's question, though icons like Mao Tse Tung identified "patriarchal authority of the husband" as one of the four pillars of oppression but interpretations by Indian male revolutionaries seem to have given rise to numerous complexities.³²⁰ They mostly appear to have interpreted ideological framework to place women's oppression as a sub-category of class oppression. Naxalites still seem unable to enlarge its category of oppression (fully) to include gender issues. While going through the selected works of leaders of the Naxalite movement in India like Vinod

³¹⁸ Siddharth Varadarajan, "INTERVIEW: "A ceasefire will create conducive atmosphere for talks" <http://svaradarajan.blogspot.com/2010/04/interview-ceasefire-will-create.html> (accessed on April 17, 2010).

³¹⁹ Links to the so called extremist groups like LTTE, ULFA, are mentioned in Prakash Singh, "Naxalite Movement in India", *Yojna*, (February, 2007): 26 and Siddharth Varadarajan, "INTERVIEW: 'A ceasefire will create conducive atmosphere for talks'".

³²⁰ "Modern China: Mao Tse Tung", <http://www.wsu.edu/~dee/MODCHINA/MAO.HTM> (accessed on March 27, 2010).

Mishra, I found that besides few notes here and there, there are no direct addressals to the women of the country complemented with a fully framed long-term agenda for the liberation of the women.³²¹ His works basically aim at establishing a relationship between the enslavement of women and proletariat and calls only for the unification of toiling women against all kinds of exploitation. Communist women organizations have been repeatedly urged to increase their support base. Today, one of most detrimental type of Naxalite interpretation is said to be in the form of 'aberrations' on the part of cadres. Cases of deaths of civilians including women are seen as nothing but signals at the lack of ideological understanding or simply misinterpretations by cadres.

According to feminist critics, this attitude is an evidence of the fact that it is much easier for male comrades to fight against class enemies but comparatively difficult to fight against the patriarchal set up and privileges that they themselves grew up with. This tendency of interpretation as mentioned earlier puts a question mark on the alternative model based on liberatory claims. In a true liberatory model, one expects highest form of equality (particularly between men and women), where right to expression, making choices is equally distributed. Leaving aside the working of their forwarded alternative model for the society, they are often criticised for not following the maxim of equality within their actual practices. Over the years, it has been under scanner for silencing the issues of gender inequalities in the movement particularly in terms of membership, distribution of work and responsibility. Moreover, it's apprehensions towards issues of marriage, children, birth control suggests its inability to comprehend the relationship between the public and the private sphere. The movement seems to overlook the fact that their larger political goals can be better achieved through a balance between the private and the public. According to general feminist perception, in order to be called true revolutionaries Naxalites will have to pay equal attention to what is 'private'. Total transformation of the society is said to be possible only through the overthrow of orthodox, feudal standards by revolutionary values in every sphere of the society-public and private.

³²¹ Vinod Mishra, "Selected Works", (New Delhi: CPI-ML Publication, 1999), 163-166.

Noticeably, with the changing time we also see some new features within the movement. In present time of satellites, internet, and televisions, there seems to be increasing use of what I call 'myth-creation' as a tool for conveying messages. As mentioned in the third chapter, Naxalites seem well aware of the power of media and technology; they very well understand that every little detail relating to them, in the form of interviews, pictures are going to be examined in minute details.³²² So in order to create positive public image of their own, their every move seems well-planned and well thought of. In the case of women comrades in the movement, pictures of armed females working shoulder to shoulder with male comrades are often circulated. Though creation of the image of 'revolutionary' woman serves to attract toiling women but several reports and personal experiences show that it may affect them unfavourably and subordinate their aspirations in the long run. Reason being, revolutionary males in India, as elsewhere, appear adamant in giving up the privileges that come with masculine, patriarchal authority. Here, I would like to agree with Dilip Simeon's point that Naxalites may be using women symbolically for their conservative masculine ends.³²³ This point is substantiated from the fact that women are not part of the central bodies but merely made to do chores, taught to use arms and serve their convenience.³²⁴ Apparently this is what is understood by male comrades when they talk about women's emancipation.

Lastly, I would say that in spite of increasing women participation, the movement at large seems to still view gender oppression as a sub-category of class oppression. Any politics that questions this suggestion is seen as a major threat to destabilize a progressive, class-based politics. The only special problem confronting women is seen as sexual abuses from upper-caste landholders. On the question of conformity to the ideals of Universal human liberation in relation to women's question I would like to say that they still have to prove themselves at several levels. Though some may argue that naxalites have never consciously targeted women, I would say they have not forwarded any pro-women long-term agenda for women's liberation, either. Their alternative model still appears lopsided and narrow, driven by certain

³²² See Chapter 3, p. 90.

³²³ As mentioned earlier, the term, 'symbolically' coincidentally falls similar to Dilip Simeon's use in the brief conversation, See Appendix pg 117. Similarity was not intended, the term was formally framed by me.

³²⁴ See Chapter two, p. 63.

dogmatic norms of morality. These observations, thus, seem to point towards the possibility that despite a strong role played by women in the Naxalite movement, the latter has not addressed the gender question sufficiently, and it may be a case of 'class subsuming gender'. Though, here I would also like to mention the fact that due to density of this subject further research is required. Paying attention to new dimensions may result into improvements in our estimates of parameters of interest and help us draw clearer conclusions.

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APPENDIX

I. INTERVIEW OF SUMANTA BANERJEE (via email)

Q1. In spite of the constant claims of gender-sensitivity made by dominant Naxalite parties, feminists have constantly criticised their reluctance and failure to insert gender issues into their existing revolutionary practice. Do you think these parties have managed to restructure its agenda, in comparison to its early phases, giving enough attention to the question of gender within and outside the movement?

Q2. In recent times, women and children come across as one of worst affected by Naxalite violence or Naxal invited reprisals. Do you think such incidents are indications of deviation from their own emancipatory claims and causes further alienation of women?

Q3. In several personal narratives whether in the case of the Telangana, Naxalbari or the Kerala struggle, there are instances of violence experienced by women in different forms within the movement, do you think personal narratives are a trusted source for drawing conclusions on a contested subject like the gender question within Naxalite movement?

ANS (1,2,3) : The Naxalite leaders are slowly becoming sensitive to gender issues, and are often taking up problems specifically related to women (e.g. discrimination in the payment of wages, dowry, domestic violence, etc.) . But they have yet to sensitize their male cadres at the ground level. There are allegations of guerilla leaders sexually exploiting women cadres. Instead of retreating to the other extreme of strict 'brahmacharya' (sexual abstinence), the Naxalite leadership will have to develop a sophisticated approach to the issue of gender relationship, by recognizing the rights of women (particularly a woman's right over her body).

On this particular issue of the woman's right over her body, the Naxalite male leaders still suffer from a patriarchal bias. Let me give an example. The Naxalite leader Kishenji (who has been leading the movement in Lalgarh in West Bengal)

has come out in the open, stating in an interview that since his party did not want him to have children, he made his wife (also a party member) to undergo the sterilization operation. Why didn't he himself go for the operation?

It betrays utter insensitivity to the concerns of women – and their children (or desire for children). It is this insensitivity that is reflected in Maoist actions that lead to the killing of women and children. There is of course a serious need for 'self-introspection and reframing of the methods' by the Maoist leaders and their cadres.

The narratives of personal experiences of women participants in the Telengana and the Naxalite movements are of course major sources (and 'trusted' most of the time) for coming to certain general conclusions (like the traditional patriarchal norms followed by the male leaders towards women comrades, sexual exploitation, etc.). In fact, these personal narratives of the female participants should be texts for the male comrades and leaders, who should learn to respect the women and recognize their individual rights.

Q4. Naxalite groups many times have advocated distribution of seized land among the landless poor, but seldom among the women population. Don't you think such instances show movement's 'liquidationist' approach towards core women's issues, reaffirming patriarchal mind set of male dominated Naxalite parties?

Q5. According to some analysts, the principle of democratic centralism within the Naxalite groups should not be used at normal times as it hampers independent decision-making by lower bodies. Do you think such principles may be a cause for subordination of women's question within the movement as women's organisations are dependent on male dominated upper bodies at several levels?

ANS (4,5) : I don't know whether the Naxalites in their areas of control have distributed land in the name of women – recognizing the right of women on land. If they haven't, it surely betrays a patriarchal mindset.

As for the principle of 'democratic centralism', it needs to be modified according to situations and circumstances. I agree with you that at the ground level,

particularly on gender issues, a decision which may have been approved by the (male-dominated) majority (and therefore 'democratic') at the top and so imposed in the shape of 'centralism' on the bottom, may not work in favour of the women, or other under-privileged groups who may not be adequately represented at the top decision-making level.

Q6. Do you think the Naxalite movement, over the years, has carried out its work in accordance with the ideals of Universal human liberation (particularly in relation to women's question)?

ANS (6): I think, generally the Naxalite movement has followed the 'ideals of human expression and liberation in relation to women's question.' But in the course of the movement, the leaders and cadres have often failed to pay adequate attention to the specific needs and concerns of their women comrades, as well as the wider issues of female rights. I hope that with the increasing participation of women in the Maoist movement (as armed cadres and in other roles – as evident in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand), they will assert their rights within the movement and the leadership will reconceptualize the women's question and reformulate its programme in this regard.

Q7. Very often Maoists are accused of exploiting the anger/grievances of poor without giving them any alternative future security, for their own motive of seizure of power. Do you agree to this criticism?

ANS (7): The criticism is partly true. The Naxalites have usually taken up the cause of the poorest among the rural people – the landless peasants, the tribal forest dwellers, the underprivileged Dalits – and fought for their rights while protecting them from police atrocities and oppressive landlords. Such acts should not be described as "exploiting/harvesting the grievances of the poor", since the poor themselves want their grievances to be redressed. But at the same time, it is true that the Naxalites, while fighting for these poor people, are aiming at their higher objective of seizing state power. In this fight, the Naxalites often fail to provide the poor with "alternative future security" – particularly when the police raid the villages, the ordinary villagers are caught in the crossfire between the Naxalites and

the police, their daily life gets disrupted, the means of their livelihood are interrupted, schools and health centres in their villages are destroyed.

Q8. Naxalite groups (particularly ML Liberation) have time and again called India a 'semi-feudal' and 'semi-colonial' country inspite of the vast changes that have taken place aftermath globalisation. Don't you think such anti-feudal and anti-colonial struggles stand irrelevant in the changed times?

ANS (8): Despite what you call "the vast changes that have taken place aftermath globalization", there are vast areas in our country, in the interior villages of many states, where even today feudal social practices continue, as evident from daily newspaper reports - upper caste landlords lynching dalit peasants, village panchayats ostracizing (or even killing) youths who dare to marry outside their castes or religious communities, continuation of child marriages and female foeticide, burning of brides on the issue of dowry (even in urban metropolises), etc. etc. In this sense, a vast expanse of our territory and the bulk of our population still remain under the clout of what the Naxalites term as a 'semi-feudal' socio-economic order. To pose a counter question to you – don't you think that "anti-feudal struggles" should be waged against such practices ? The Naxalites in their own areas of control are trying to abolish these feudal practices. As for the Naxalite description of present day India as 'semi-colonial', it may sound too harsh to the delicate ears of our urban upper class gentry and super-patriotic politicians. But in their daily life style and policies, what else are they doing but introducing a new set of neo-colonial values and abetting in a new form of neo-colonial exploitation (in the name of globalization) ? The Indian government's increasing dependence on the US – in the name of 'strategic alliance' – is invariably leading to growing concessions to multinational companies which are allowed to dominate our economy and grab lands from poor farmers in the course of setting up Special Economic Zones. In such circumstances, the Naxalite stress on "anti-colonial struggles" is very much relevant, since colonialism is re-appearing in the garb of US-dominated economic infiltration and media propaganda of a consumerist culture.

Q9. What, according to you, is the role of arms in the 'politics of change'? Don't you think certain Naxalite groups today have succumbed to the illusions of 'power' acquired through the barrel of the gun? Don't you think it has deviated from the path of people's movement and limited itself to self-defence as asserted by some scholars?

ANS (9): The role of arms in the 'politics of change' has become decisive because of the repressive policies followed by the Indian state. Armed resistance is being resorted to sections of the Indian people (whether in Kashmir, the north-east, or the tribal-dominated areas), because whenever they had tried to voice their demands and grievances through democratic and non-violent means during the last 50 years or so, the Indian state had responded by violent suppression through police actions, leading to the killing of innocent citizens. (This has been well-recorded in reports by human rights organizations like Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, as well as Indian organizations like the People's Union for Democratic Rights, People's Union for Civil Liberties – which should be available to you). Even Gandhian movements like the Narmada Bachao Andolon, or the anti-POSCO agitation by farmers in Orissa, are suppressed by the state through violent means like police attacks, what do you expect from the victims of police oppression but to take to arms for their self-defence? Even when the victims of repression by the police, or otherwise, approach the courts, the judiciary fails to punish the guilty. The three most notorious cases of judicial procrastination are - first, the failure to sentence important Congress leaders and senior police officers, indicted by several commissions, even more than two decades after the shameful massacre of Sikhs in Delhi and elsewhere in 1984; secondly, dragging feet over the punishment of the BJP-RSS-Bajrang Dal killers of Muslims during the post-Babri Masjid massacre in 1992-93; and thirdly, refusal to punish the BJP leaders and police officers indicted for massacring Muslims in Gujarat following the Godhra train burning in 2002.

Coming to the Naxalite belief in acquiring power through the barrel of the gun, their sole dependence on armed resistance has indeed led to their deviation from the path of people's movement all over India, as a result of which they remain confined within a narrow territorial space (the so-called Red corridor of forests and hills stretching from Bihar, Jharkhand, through Chhattisgarh and Orissa down to Andhra

Pradesh). Besieged by the security forces from all corners, they are reduced to a position of mere self-defence.

Q10. In view of the constant criticism for indulgence in mindless, brutal violence, Maoists have not shied away from making public apology for their mistakes. Don't you think such apologies do help to vigour further sympathies for them (making their case stronger) in comparison to the state's reluctance to admission of violence in the name of 'rule of law' and 'development'?

ANS (10): The Maoists occasionally make public apology for brutal murders, or indiscriminate killings (like burning of trains). Such expressions of public apology may make them look less cruel than the state police (which never apologize). But if the Maoists continue to commit similar outrages (as they are repeatedly doing in Bihar, Jharkhand and other areas, e.g. killing innocent villagers and their children, on the suspicion that they are police agents), they will fast lose public sympathy and become indistinguishable from Salwa Judum, or the para-military forces.

Q11. In recent past, Maoists have been tagged as 'revengeful killers' or 'blood-thirsty' group, don't you think by giving such tags chances for misconception/misinterpretation increases, shrinking the grounds of future negotiations?

ANS (11): I agree that by describing Maoists as 'revengeful killers', and using such pejorative terms, both the government and the media are misrepresenting them, and 'dumbing' (i.e. suppressing) their political agenda of bringing about an egalitarian system and a pro-poor model of development. By constantly harping on the violence of the Maoists, the government is trying to turn middle class public opinion against them, and thus reduce the space for peaceful negotiations with the Maoists.

Q12. Maoists have openly declared their aim for seizure of state power, can there be any negotiating point in such a situation when one side's core agenda is to take

total control over the other side? If yes, what could be the initial step for negotiation process in such a complicated situation?

ANS (12): I agree that the respective objectives of the Maoists and the present Indian rulers are totally opposed to each other – while the former aim at seizure of state power, the latter want to cling to state power. But even with such irreconcilable positions, negotiations are possible. In fact, the Indian government is at present holding talks with the Naga insurgent outfit (NSCN-IM), for some sort of settlement of an armed conflict that had been going on for more than half a century – ever since Independence. Unlike the Maoists, who want to remain in India and change its socio-economic structure, the Naga rebel outfit wants to secede from India. In spite of that, the Indian government has already signed a ceasefire agreement with them that allows the NSCN-IM to retain its control over the areas of its influence, maintain its armed cadres, among other privileges. The Indian government has also decided to keep its soldiers within their barracks, instead of raiding villages. The ceasefire has worked well so far – despite a few cases of violation now and then. Why can't a similar negotiation be worked out with the Maoists? A temporary ceasefire can be signed, with the government agreeing to halt the raids under Operation Green Hunt and withdrawing the para-military forces from the villages, and the Maoists agreeing to stop their violent actions, but allowed to retain control over their areas where they can carry out developmental activities like education, medical care, land reforms, etc.

Q13. What are your sentiments on the announcement of 'Operation Green Hunt'?

ANS (13): Operation Green Hunt will lead to a massacre of innocent tribal villagers. It may temporarily halt the advance of the Maoists, but it will sow seeds of revenge among the tribal survivors who will mount a more powerful offensive against the repressive Indian state in the future. I may quote in this connection the warning sounded by a Gandhian social activist, Himangshu Kumar (whose ashram in Dandewada in Chhattisgarh was destroyed by the police recently): "Green Hunt will result in genocide of Adivasis. Those who survive will become Naxalites." (Times of India, Nov. 13, 2009).

II. DILIP SIMEON: Excerpts from the Conversation

Meeting with Simeon was more like a conversation than an interview. Knowing the passionate person that he is, it was an interesting session with dramatic tones here and there. He spoke vividly on different streams of Naxalite movement, particularly the Maoists and their line of actions.

On the question of relationship between gender and Naxalite movement, his arguments were anchored in the historical concept of 'warfare'- a predominantly male activity. Being a dominant feature of the Naxalites, it has an "...army-like culture" of its own, wherein women are used "symbolically" to achieve conservative masculine ends. Meaning, women are used in what looks like a progressive journey to achieve conservative ends. Surprisingly here "...public are used for anti-public goals.'

According to him, groups like Ranbeer sena, Shiv sena, RSS, ULFA, MCC are all examples of armies which are well trained in weapons. They call themselves as armies and behave like armies. They have squads, *dastas* along with high sounding posts within the groups like commander in-chief, etc. He shares the surprising fact that members of retaliatory private armies like Ranbeer sena in Bihar also get paid, compensations and pensions for their service in the army. He defines all such formations as patriarchal in nature wherein they seem to harvest anger of women for their own motives.

On the question of women within the Naxalite movement, he openly accepts presence of patriarchal settings. On the validity of personal narratives, he says that it's a trusted source but "nobody can tell us what conclusion to draw from them,"...mainly because "...truth is a process of discovery'. Narratives should be used carefully by cross-testing and cross-verifying. He elaborates that reading the recent account given by Krishna Bandhopadhyay, one clearly sees that on the question of love, marriage, leadership they have been rigid. What's disturbing according to Simeon is the fact that they call themselves 'revolutionaries' but don't behave like one. They still seem to be trapped in orthodox values when it comes to women.

He outrightly condemns the contemporary trend of unending spiral of violence and counter-violence sketched by state and the radical left. He says such kind of violence feeds upon the other. Focusing particularly upon the naxalites, he talks of their somewhat exploitative behaviour in present times whereby they are no longer working for emancipation of poor (as claimed)...rather they have resorted to “..extortion of poor for money”. How can they be called revolutionaries when they themselves are “using the ones they seek to liberate.”

On the question of democratic centralism, he says that its “..more centralism and less democratic”. If democratic centralism was existing in true form, “...there would never be so much of fragmentation with the movement....Whichever party is made, it breaks eventually. It’s authoritarianism not democratic centralism.”

III. INTERVIEW OF KAVITA KRISHNAN

Q1. In spite of the constant claims of gender-sensitivity made by dominant Naxalite parties, feminists have constantly criticised their reluctance and failure to insert gender issues into their existing revolutionary practice. Do you think these parties have managed to restructure its agenda, in comparison to its early phases, giving enough attention to the question of gender within and outside the movement?

ANS (1): First, I think Naxalite movement is a very loosely used phrase...I am very wary about using this phrase. I can only talk about my party where I can say that ...essentially our party's genesis in many places (like Bhojpur) happened with raising the gender issues; ...the issues of wages, land, noticeably came later. Community *izzat* as alleged, was not the goal (though community aspect did prevail); it was not only the issue of honour of women of the family... it was actually a mass movement against feudal violence. Looking at the movement as a mere masculine phenomenon, working for community honour is not right. If it was only about community honour then the gender problems prevalent within the community would not have got addressed at all. But gender-sensitization (in accordance with Marxist principles) within the landless labour communities were also given equal importance. More importantly, the fact that women participated in these mass struggles itself is an evidence of the changing and breaking of norms. Formation of women leadership as a smooth process without testing the rigid, internal structures of the community is just not a possibility. I think the question of caste and gender were strongly raised by the movement.

The literature generally produced on mass movements like telangana, tebhaga, Naxalbari are sometimes not very comprehensive. Particularly, the personal experiences of the women Naxalites though are a very rich source but are part of the long experience. What I feel is that the movement is a live process...to expect that within the movement everything will be 24 k is not right ..backward approach towards women of the society will definitely be reflected within the party. But the important question is, whether the party is fighting against these trends or not? To say that it's becoming the case of 'party versus women' is not right, according to my personal experiences. Though even today there are certain aberrations in daily

practice within my own party but here Marxist feminists like my self feel very much comfortable within CPI-ML(Liberation) because we are always encouraged and told that ...you are the party.... you represent the party and that backward trends, if at all is entering our movement, we all must fight it as part of the defence of party's position.

Q2. In recent years, although there have been advocacy for increasing the proportion of women members within the parties, there've hardly been occasions exhibiting prominent leadership as enjoyed by male members within various Naxalite groups. What according to you is the reason for such a trend (particularly in context of Liberation)?

ANS (2) : I completely agree that there's a large gap between membership and leadership of the women within the movement. It is a big challenge because... you are not building the party in a vacuum; you are building it in a society. So, the process of building women membership and leadership within the movement becomes difficult simply because the society is structured in such a (patriarchal) way for years. The party is not simply a club of some leaders, it's a mass party, it has a large section of society represented within it...naturally those (backward) ideas will not be wiped out the minute a woman enters the party. In fact, it's not only the women members who are fighting the opposite trends, it's also the party leadership fighting against it. So the repeated allegations that the party is dominated by patriarchal mind set would mean undermining efforts and over simplifying things.

I would like to give you the example of Uttarakhand (and Jharkhand for that matter), wherein the party did not particularly have a very strong grip. If you go there and ask people about our party and the student organisation, you will find that so many of girls, women have run away from their homes and took shelter within the party/student organisation office. Essentially, such cases not only revolved around the issue of love but also in other women problems as well. The fact that they decided to break such bondages and join the party is an evidence of the party's multiplying support structure and trusted reputation. Though not all the women joining the party are well versed with the party ideology but they do see hope and

seek help. Such a wide trust by women is again a testimony of the non-patriarchal atmosphere prevalent within the party.

Moreover, in Uttarakhand itself, four-five years after my national presidency in AISA, the party heads in the state called me 'n' number of times to help the women members in series of programmes (designed for women only) ...to make press release, prepare banner, etc. so that they develop the skills and habits. So, the women's position within has changed a great deal and is changing continuously.

Q3. In recent times, women and children come across as one of worst affected by Naxalite violence or Naxal invited reprisals. Do you think such incidents are indications of deviation from their own emancipatory claims and causes further alienation of women?

ANS (3): The origin of Maoist movement is different from Naxalbari/ ML movement according to me. It was a very conscious decision even in 1969, when debates arose on the question of Maoist ideology. Those who stuck to the maoist ideology, formed MCC (Maoist Communist Centre) while others decided to move ahead with the Marxist-Leninist movement. Maoist movement at that point (1970s) also did not have a mass character.

Charu Mazumdar's advocacy for an armed struggle essentially meant the use of household implements as weapons rather than sophisticated arms. Such weapons were even more important because it was a conscious effort to make common people, including common women to be part of the mainstream revolution. Though not all statements by such leaders are recorded but such efforts are definitely indications of genuine gender-sensitivity within the ML movement.

Today, extreme actions taken by Maoists is definitely not valid. Ever since it took birth it was not really a mass movement. In late 70s and 80s, both, People's War in Andhra and ML groups in Bihar faced a lot of state repression but their ways of responding were completely different. Though both groups started with a mass face...they slowly took separate ways. People's War opted for military actions automatically pushing back mass mobilisation while ML stressed on greater mass mobilisations in answer to every massacre. Balagopal who recently passed away had stressed several times on the fact that if the People War movement had

rethought about their stand they would have sustained as a mass movement and second generation would have identified themselves more with their movement.

The other very important thing here is the fact that Maoist's violent traits have been exploited time and again by feudal and political powers. Though incidents of assassination of women activists (particularly belonging to Liberation) is not acceptable but again I would say... such violence is nothing in comparison to the kind of violence inflicted by state police, armies on women. Salwa Judum for example has violent strategies... far far more systematic and brutal than the Maoists. Women particularly bear the brunt in such situations with increasing number of rapes, molestations, murders in name of Maoist links.

So, though being from an opposite stream myself...I would still say that ... Maoists have no doubt indulged in violent activities but it was never targeted towards women. They cannot be blamed for alienation of women as such.

Q4. Naxalite groups many times have advocated distribution of seized land among the landless poor, but seldom among the women population (not even in the party congress reports of ML Liberation).

(a) Why do you think such a trend is so prominent?

(b) What does your party say about the conditions and rights of tribal population (particularly women) on the question of land, water, forest?

ANS (4): Here, I would agree that this aspect needs greater research and analysis. I would like to say few things in this regard. Firstly, we do not give away pattas so what we can do really is to make demands for fair, gender-sensitive land reforms from the state.

Regarding mass movements....the problem is that though there's visible high participation of women in such *andolans* on the question of land and equal wages but those activities at micro level hardly get recorded. Reports for such activities(even in ML congress reports) do not get framed immediately and easily....and there's definitely need for greater attention and research at micro levels.

On the question of tribal rights, we have already raised issues of *jal, jungal, jameen*, in several parts of eastern UP, Jharkhand, Andhra. These problems essentially become more acute for tribal women because they are equally or fully

responsible for livelihood. So we have been raising such issues affecting women directly and have received full support from them.

Q5. In several personal narratives whether in the case of the Telangana, Naxalbari or the Kerala struggle, there are instances of violence experienced by women in different forms within the movement, do you think personal narratives are a trusted source for drawing conclusions on a contested subject like the gender question within Naxalite movement?

ANS (5): I will not discount personal narratives at all but I am saying that these should be put in certain perspective. I myself don't look at these narratives as an attack on the party, I see it with a broader view. Importantly, though there have also been narratives which have put light on the significantly positive experiences but one tends to pick out the negative experiences more than the positive ones..

Even if I talk about other movements which has had vast women's participation and are not communist in nature, like Narmada Bachao Andolan; ...they clearly exhibit certain amount of indifference towards women.Several women's issues are dropped silently in the due course of the movement. Some of the main leaders of the movement have openly argued that picking up other relating issues(which may be decisive for women) may create fragments/cracks within the movement.

In contrast to such fears, our movement has not shied away from such issues. In fact, our party has always tried to bring in more and more women into the movement and taken newer responsibilities. It has started several women's organisations, encouraged women's movement against liquor, violence and seeks reports from organisations to ensure proper management and progress.

One thing I am struck by, Kshipra, is that most of the personal narratives that exist tend to be of middle class women, mostly women who are distanced from the movement. I wonder: many men who leave the movement also would tend to be very negative about the party. I ask myself, would we see the voices of such men as being the only authoritative voice about that movement? As far as gender goes, I would stress that one should seek out voices of women who join the movement and

stay with it too - especially those from the oppressed classes. Their experiences, and their ways of dealing with issues, may be very different and may hold some surprises. Because for most of them, the party and the very experience of getting active in the party opens up a range of radical possibilities that their lives and society might not otherwise have held.

For me, as a party leader and a woman, concerned with bringing the mass of women into the movement, I see the party, not as a 'finished product' to be judged, but as a remarkably exciting process, which opens up immense potential and possibilities of liberation. This potential, these possibilities are not always and in every instance perfectly realised; patriarchal trends that exist in society are not automatically eliminated in the party (not just in our party but, as I said, in every organisation in this society of ours, including even feminist groups or non-party people's movements, where as I pointed out (in Narmada Bachao Andolan), voices of landless women are often suppressed). The point is that the party keeps that potential alive, keeps those possibilities open, in the face of immense hurdles. Few can do better than that. Those who leave the movement can look back on the past and the party as a 'finished product' which they can judge; for those (and especially those of us from the oppressed classes) who stay, it is a process which we - and we as women - as *shaping* and we have a duty to shape it by fighting all alien trends like patriarchy.

Q6. According to some analysts, the principle of democratic centralism within the Naxalite groups was strictly framed for the revolutionary period and it should not be used at normal times as it hampers independent decision-making by lower bodies. Do you think such principles may be a cause for subordination of women's question within the movement as women's organisations are dependent on male dominated upper bodies on several levels?

ANS (6): The principle of democratic centralism, according to me is a highly misrepresented concept in literatures. I find these questions 'amusing' because other movements which are not communist and don't follow democratic centralism...how democratic are they?? They are terribly undemocratic...the decision making is totally top-down because there's nothing to guarantee democratic participation. Democratic centralism primarily means ...once a decision is taken collectively,

members have to abide by it in public. One can't have various views in public on the same decision. Nonetheless, one is free to challenge the decision in an institutional way. This in itself is a very powerful democratic means. One needs to understand that is not just a club of opinionated people, such principles are essential to run the party. Importantly, every body of the party is democratic in true terms.

Moreover, to say that women are subordinated in such a process is not right. In fact, women's participation in such a process is even more cemented due to this particular principle. The whole idea behind 'democratic centralism' is to ensure women's adequate participation at lower branch levels. Upper committees are not simply formed to pass important decisions but to keep a watch on lower committees to provide suitable environment for maximum women's participation. We organise separate meetings for new members whereby they are made aware of the party programmes, workings, etc. Separate women organisations in some areas are made for maximum convenience. Every member of the party is encouraged to support the cause of women fully. In one of the instances in Andhra Pradesh, a very senior party member accompanied women just to act as their translator. These things hardly get recorded but are clear evidences of genuine gender-sensitivity.

Q7. You have called AIPWA, a mass organisation having certain 'autonomy' of its own, how would you define this autonomy? And what percentage of involvement or control does the party have over this organisation?

ANS (7): Actually this 'autonomy' goes for most of our organisation whether its student organisation, women organisation, etc. The idea is that more there's direct party control over mass organisation, less there are chances that the mass organisation will be able to function well. Even though important decision, ideological framework comes from the party but mass galvanization, mobilisation is possible only by mass organisations.

For instance if one joins the student organisation, AISA and later decides to join the party...it takes a long period. Plus, after being part of the party one has to follow the party code even within the organisation. It's a very natural process whereby you represent party ideas, orientations...it's not about control by the party. The challenge for the party members within such organisation is to try and give party ideas a mass shape.

Coming back to the question of 'autonomy' of AIPWA...'autonomy' here basically means that you will take up a very broad range of issues, questions and so on. It will comprise of what kind of shape you give, what kind of language you use. It's a flexible process whereby things are not dictated from above...it will have large amount of autonomy. Organisations like AIPWA, AISA have always had comparatively more autonomy than the class organisations like the trade unions, workers unions. Recent programme on the issue of 'love'- its connotations for youth was organised (in view of the arbitrary decisions by the Khap panchayat) which was not really part of the party agenda. Such issues are taken up essentially with a creative grounding.

Q8. In several personal narratives of the Naxalite movement there are instances of apprehension over the question of revolutionary marriage, family, children.. don't you think such incidents are evidences of controlling women's sexuality and violating her individual rights in some ways?

ANS (8): We as a party don't encourage 'revolutionary marriages' very much as we treat it as a 'personal' issue. But as far as 'democratic' revolutionary marriages goes, we stress on democratic relations within marriages (as stressed by Vinod Mishra). Some Naxal groups have innovated new rituals of marriage but our party does not propagate such things in the name of 'revolutionary marriages'. Relations do develop in our party also but they do not necessarily undergo any formal procedure...they live as partners and people know that they are together.

Regarding 'controlling sexuality' through marriage, what I feel is that these trends are of course visible in society and that such phenomenon will also show its face within the party because party members come from society itself. The important question here is whether such trends are recognised and fought or not? To say that revolutionary marriages are somewhat tools of controlling women's sexuality, I don't think so.

We as a party strive to recognise the strains on women sexuality, in the form of arranged marriages on caste basis, moral policing against women, etc. We strive to break these orthodox, repressive norms and encourage pro-women communist values.

Q9. It's always said that women need an extra space for articulation of their demands in the social movement. Do you think the Naxalite movement has successfully provided the adequate space for women?

ANS (9): Regarding adequate space, I would say there's need for dual space. First, it's the autonomous space needed, as I said earlier, for shaping of the movement according to one's own idioms. That kind of autonomy is very much there in our party. Second, is the need to articulate in what is the general space as well ...reason being women can't make a separate ghetto within the party.

I think a lot of effort has been done in this direction in our party. The problem however, is that there's too much of underestimation. The personal narratives that we talked about ...though they are a rich source but they do not put forward the whole story. The uncomfortable questions that the party puts before the society, the constant mobilisation the party initiates...these things are hardly recorded. The whole process of women coming out of the homes, making demands, working actively within the party...this in itself is an intense job that the party takes up.

Q10. Do you think the Naxalite movement, in general, has carried out its work in accordance with the ideals of Universal human liberation (particularly in terms of women's question)?

ANS (10): These movements fought by toiling women, who face the worst kind of exploitations possible is a remarkable phenomenon. Despite the multiple oppression faced by these women, they have come to be an active part of this movement and involved in the leadership. This in itself is a testimony to women's liberation and that their liberation is intertwined with the liberation of other oppressed sections of society. This whole process of realisation of women's liberation and recognition is a remarkably beautiful, creative process which can't be captured in words. It's an immensely amazing process; and getting those testimonies, records, understandings is a difficult process.

Q11. Naxalite groups have time and again called India a 'semi-feudal' and 'semi-colonial' country inspite of the vast changes that have taken place aftermath

globalisation. Don't you think such anti-feudal and anti-colonial struggles stand somewhat irrelevant in the changed times?

ANS (11): Semi-feudal is a term borrowed from Chinese revolution but even there it did not mean half-feudal. Semi-feudal, actually is a characteristic of capitalism...it's like an adjective used to define the nature of capitalism. No country in world can say that it's not capitalist. The important thing with countries like India, China, Nepal, however, is to see what kind of shape capitalism has taken in these regions. To see.. whether the capitalism has attained the modern, progressive turn or not. Progressive here means freedom from feudal bondage for labourers...though of course, this so called 'freedom' as Marx put it, is actually a form of exploitation. I would call this as a double edged freedom. Marx as we know, proposed a critique of capitalism whereby he brought to light the exploitative traps of capitalism in different forms ...but talked of exploitation of a free man not a bonded man.

If we take the example of England we see that capitalism broke myriad bondages of feudalism after coming into existence. The only feudal remain in today's times is that of Royal family- king and the queen.. which stands symbolic in true sense of the term. But in India, capitalism was introduced by the colonial rulers without breaking the feudalist chains. Colonial rule primarily froze the feudal establishment (particularly in land relations) not break it, in order to bring in capitalism. No one can really speculate the kind of capitalism India would have experienced without colonialism.

Even today in India, there are innumerable examples of ruling class trying to make a compromise with the feudal powers. The simplest example is that of caste system existent in India. In any advanced country, division on the basis of class and caste does not exist... but why has it persisted in our country? Why does it exist even among the upwardly mobile, highly educated professionals? These are nothing but the evidences of survival of feudalism...and a very strong survival...with newer stronger forms. Even if we talk about the deteriorating condition of women...it's the result of the feudal remnants in society. No capitalist country in the world has exhibited such thick barriers in the form of female infanticide, dowry, sati as witnessed in our country. Sati for instance today is not just related to the women. It's in fact, more a political, capitalist (related to market) agenda than to women's

agenda. Other issues like that of homestead land in Punjab are again evidences of semi-feudal strands very much prevalent in society. In India clearly, there's like an agreement between the modern capitalism and feudalism.

This issue is not a question raised by us alone...today, every social scientists working on the agricultural economy of the country talks of the acute problem of semi-bondage existing in advanced states like Maharashtra, Punjab. Though our party uses the term semi-feudal instead of semi-bondage, both the terms mean exactly the same.

Coming to the question of semi-colonialism, I would say that in our country the ruling class has a dependent and non-competitive (to a large extent) relationship with global capitalism. Debates on the issue of semi-colonialism keep arising within the different communist parties, wherein CPI-ML-Liberation believes that semi-colonialism in the era of globalisation has not worn out. We believe that the ruling class has come even closer to the global capitalism aftermath globalisation. Today several foreign companies are invited into the country for exploitation of resources at minimum costs...what else can explain such a phenomenon other than semi-colonialism.

Q 12. What, according to you, is the role of arms in the 'politics of change'? Don't you think certain Naxalite groups today have succumbed to the illusions of 'power' acquired through the barrel of the gun? Don't u think it deviated from the path of people's movement and limited itself to self-defence ?

ANS (12): I don't agree to both the arguments. First, I think the phrase 'power flows from the barrel of the gun' is quoted out of context, in the most massive way. Mao not only proposed the phrase in a different context but also said that "...politics must wheel that cart..". Meaning, gun cannot be above politics...political control over the cart. Today Maoist party in India is the one that adopted exclusively the military means and excluded politics from its line. They use highly sophisticated arms in retaliation to state police, etc not against feudal land powers, upper caste armies. Such a retrogressive trend in turn leads to building greater cleavages between masses and Maoists because Maoists no longer see the need to mobilise the

masses. The weakening links between the masses and the Maoists is actually benefitting the state.

Charu Mazumdar did talk of arms struggle, annihilation, instead of parliamentary elections in view of existing revolutionary upsurge. It was meant only for the revolutionary period not normal times. Congress though enjoyed one-party dominance during the period, was failing to come up to the expectations of the people. There was no powerful ruling class existent which could challenge the congress so the party decided to take up arms.

Maoists today, are not hesitant in using sophisticated arms even though they are aware that the revolutionary period has ended. Condemning parliament elections in today's times when a number of ruling class parties are misleading masses on the same causes that Maoists claim to champion, is a utter mistake. Many at times we also see Maoists helping out political parties in their own regions.. ..which is highly deviational on their part. This will become like its fate unless it develops an independent political identity of its own. This identity in turn cannot be created unless it's a mass movement...and a mass movement cannot be created with the exclusive use of arms.

However, in the course of the mass movement, use of implements of the masses as weapons for protection against feudal powers is not denied. The only thing we are against is exclusive military actions, formation of squads, etc.

Another important aspect here, is the fact that the state is looking for an excuse to repress...a pretext and Maoists are doing nothing but providing that pretext. I have said this on several occasions that we should be thinking of denying such pretexts to the state? Protest in places like Nandigram I say has had far more powerful effects (costing the toppling of the CPM government) because it was a up rise of the masses with their local implements not the squads with sophisticated arms (as in the case of Ialgarh). Lalgarh movement in my opinion got out of hand after the entry of the Maoists in the scene. State once again got the chance to repress the mass movement saying the region was under the grip of the Maoists extremism.

Regarding the participation of women in these maoist outfits, I would say that of course women have left their homes, ran away from society and joined these groups

and got great support. But these memberships cannot ensure gender equality in society, in any way. I believe there's no shortcut to the greater gender equality. One has to live within this society and protest against backward societal values, norms, beliefs thereafter. No gun can bring about this kind of change...only a mass movement can strive for this kind of transformation.

Q 13. Maoists have openly declared their aim for seizure of state power, can there be any negotiating point in such a situation when one side's core agenda is to take total control over the other side?

ANS (13): Seizure of state power is the core agenda of every communist party in India and the world, for that matter. We all have the goal of taking over the state power. But our agenda differs in context of achieving the goal only through a mass movement.

Regarding the question of negotiation, I think there's no excuse possessed by the state for not initiating the dialogue. If the government can negotiate with the Nagas and agree to their demands for effective rule in certain Indian territory, so can it with Maoists. Reluctance to negotiation by the state is mainly because they don't want to call off Operation Green Hunt. Operation Green Hunt is actually not an operation for controlling the Maoists...they have already done that! It's basically a political tool to suppress all anti-state groups in India. Maoists actually are a very weak lot, fallen into pieces. It's not at all wide spread as the government exaggerates it to be. Jehanabad jailbreak for instance was an exaggerated incident because incidents like those can be repeated by any group of hundred people ...it does not need a party organisation for it. Today in places like Bihar, Maoists have lost their mass base. In Bengal, some pockets like Lalgarh do have mass base with Maoist support but cannot entirely be called a Maoist movement. It's a tribal movement with certain amount of presence of the Maoists.

Today, what the state is doing after the Maoists have agreed to negotiate, is a childish behaviour. Keeping conditions after conditions, acting stubborn is not at all going to solve the problem. Obviously, when the Maoists have agreed for dialogue, it means that they have gone weaker and surrendered. No group is going to lay down completely. So, the government will definitely have to act more responsibly and at the earliest.

Q14. On one side, government demands halt to Naxal violence, on the other side Maoists demands withdrawal of troops creating a critical cycle in itself. What according to you, should be the initial step for negotiation process in such a complicated situation?

ANS (14): First of all, there should be an absolute calling off of the operations/troops by the government. The kind of devastation the troops are causing among common people is beyond imagination. In the name of Maoists innocent people face various tortures. In places like Bastar, rapes, molestations, murders are a daily phenomenon. Voices against state supported Salwa Judum are suppressed forever. Shockingly, after creating such destructive groups Chidambaram openly denies its existence !

Of course there is scope for talks but the case of Andhra should not be repeated, where after the talks, Maoist leadership was trapped and wiped out from the forest region itself. It was a nasty thing to do and there must be assurances against such happenings in present situation. Having said that there's also a question mark on Maoist agenda. The problem lies in Maoist repeated assertion for revolution. What negotiation can there be when one is outrightly demanding for a revolution! Even if the government agrees on demands of land, izzat (as was in the earlier phases) the Maoists will need a mass movement...which it lacks. We all know that even if the negotiations are successful...real challenge lies in pressurising, keeping an eye on the government for implementation of demands.

This pressure in turn can be created only through a mass movement, which seems pushed under military actions. This I think is the biggest drawback of the Maoists today.

IV. INTERVIEW OF U. VINDHYA (via email)

Q1. In spite of the constant claims of gender-sensitivity made by dominant Naxalite parties, feminists have constantly criticised their reluctance and failure to insert gender issues into their existing revolutionary practice. Do you think these parties have managed to restructure its agenda, in comparison to its early phases, giving enough attention to the question of gender within and outside the movement?

ANS (1): I can speak with specific reference to Andhra Pradesh. Given the pervasiveness and the public ‘buzz’ centred around gender, it is to be expected that the Naxalite groups are not unmindful of the need to pay attention to this question. E.g., when some of the top Maoist leaders in AP came over ground for holding peace talks with the government in 2004, they had a discussion meeting with feminist groups which interrogated them at length about their position and perspective on gender. Given the increasing numbers of women being recruited as cadres now, they said they were aware of the urgent necessity of putting on a ‘gender lens’ to understand not only the specific issues these women cadres were raising regarding division of labour, marriage, children, sexuality, sexual and other forms of violence experienced by them in the party, etc but also to comprehend the entire axis of gender as an organizing principle of social relations. But other than this kind of an admission, we do not hear of any radical changes brought about in actual practice. Several stories of sexual harassment and violence both on the women cadres as well as on women outside (particularly wives of those dubbed as ‘informers), women whose husbands are killed in encounters being forcibly married once again ostensibly under the pretext that they will be ‘protected in marriage’ are repeatedly heard. Leadership is still very much male-centred, although we keep getting reports of increasing number of women being killed in encounters which means that women continue to be foot soldiers. Currently, with the entire emphasis of the Naxalite parties on militarism and expanding its spread and reach through armed means alone, I doubt whether the leadership has any time, energies or inclination to devote to issues of gender equality and equity within the organization and beyond.

Q2. In recent times, women and children come across as one of worst affected by Naxalite violence or Naxal invited reprisals. Do you think such incidents are indications of deviation from their own emancipatory claims and causes further alienation of women?

ANS (2) : Yes, please refer to my two articles on the AP movement :

1. Comrades-in-Arms: Sexuality and identity in the contemporary revolutionary movement in Andhra Pradesh and the legacy of Chalam. In Mary John and Janaki Nair (Eds.) 1998. A Question of silence? The sexual economies of modern India. Delhi: Kali for Women.

2. Questions of revolutionary identity and sexuality in the contemporary radical left movement in Andhra Pradesh. *Psychology and Developing Societies*, 2003, vol. 15, no.2, July-December, 143-164.

Q3. In several personal narratives whether in the case of the Telangana, Naxalbari or the Kerala struggle, there are instances of violence experienced by women in different forms within the movement, do you think personal narratives are a trusted source for drawing conclusions on a contested subject like the gender question within Naxalite movement?

ANS (3): Yes, undoubtedly. Some of these narratives are of women who have chosen to leave the party for whatever reason, and who then decide to go public. Nevertheless, the narratives cannot be dismissed away as stories borne out of personal grudge or animosity. Memory in retrospective hindsight may serve to heighten or embellish the nuances of the story in the direction the narrator wishes to take, but they are not entirely imagined. Narratives therefore constitute an important source of the intersections between biography, history, and politics. It is in fact these personal narratives that have been key sources of researchers' understanding of what goes on within the organization, and to get a sense of how individuals within the party comprehend issues, how they translate party diktats into actual practice, and also how they perhaps distort principles and ideals of the party to suit their own convenience. The self-validation of their experiences that narratives serve

to fulfil does not however in my view diminish the importance of narratives as a research method.

Q4. Naxalite groups many times have advocated distribution of seized land among the landless poor, but seldom among the women population. Don't you think such instances show movement's 'liquidationist' approach towards core women's issues, reaffirming patriarchal mind set of male dominated Naxalite parties?

ANS (4): Yes. Empowering women, for the naxalite groups, has by and large meant recruiting them to the party and giving them arms. Some of them are also taught to read and write, and in general, the skills and wherewithal of how to lead lives on the run. But questions such as enabling women's access to significant resources such as land are not given the attention they deserve. This is perhaps because of the restricted understanding of the party leadership on issues of gender.

Q5. According to some analysts, the principle of democratic centralism within the Naxalite groups should not be used at normal times as it hampers independent decision-making by lower bodies. Do you think such principles may be a cause for subordination of women's question within the movement as women's organisations are dependent on male dominated upper bodies at several levels?

ANS (5): Difficult to say since there are no 'normal times' for the maoist groups in particular.

Q6. Right from its inception, the Naxalite movement looks somewhat uncomfortable with the question of marriage, children, female sexuality, etc within its working.

(a) Why do you think there's so much apprehension on such important issues?

(b) Plus, don't you think there's a need for naxalites (particularly leaders) to balance the personal and public life, giving adequate recognition to rights of women as free individuals, in order to set a good example for the cadres?

ANS (6): Right from the beginning, 'feminism' and the issues it has raised and the debates they have generated in the wider public, have always been viewed with

suspicion by the naxalite groups. They have either been branded as a 'western imperialist import', designed to dilute or short circuit the central aim of the party which is to overthrow the state. Such questions that feminists have raised – on the 'personal/private domain -- are also viewed as individualistic, and of not too much of a significance to the perceived 'larger' and more compelling political issue of capturing state power. Unfortunately, the entire feminist thesis of power and control and how power structures human relations has not been understood by the naxalites who continue to regard gender as concerning 'personal' issues.

Q7. According to historical experts, warfare is fundamentally a male-driven phenomenon having an army-like culture of its own, wherein women are used symbolically to achieve their own conservative masculine ends. Do you think this applies to Naxalite parties (particularly maoists) of India also. Is it a case of woman's anger being openly harvested by the male-dominated Naxalite parties without really giving them any future security?

ANS (7): To a large extent, yes. The association between war and the heroics of masculinity is well known. This association is sought to be foisted on women also with impassioned hymns to 'heroic' women who 'valiantly fight against the enemy' and thus are to be regarded as no less than the male heroes. The imagery of 'heroic mothers, wives, daughters' is also invoked (with terms like *veermata*, *veerapatni*) thereby reproducing the essentialist central role of women – to bear offspring who can be drafted into the revolution, or to 'release' their husbands into the call of duty for the revolution. The poetic eulogies in praise of the martyrs who sacrifice their lives for the revolution are evidence of the high esteem in which the heroics of 'vanquishing the enemy' are held. While it is to be admitted that such invocations are also done with the purpose of inspiring and motivating the cadres, the repeated association between war and the masculine rhetoric do not, in my view take forward the question of gender at all in the movement.

In the larger context, the whole emphasis on the centrality of war and armed struggle is fundamentally detrimental to the interests of peace and resistance through other than violent means that feminists champion.

Q8. One argument championed by Naxalite parties time and again, is that of 'personal sacrifice for collective interests'. Do you think such arguments can sometimes be used as tools to subordinate women's voices within the party?

ANS (8): I have made these arguments in the two papers that I have cited above. The 'political expediency' argument is often used to justify the party's emphasis on sacrifice for 'the cause' that is all-important and all-pervasive. Questions of gender are regarded as subsumed within this larger rhetoric but in my view such a position can only subdue and submerge the specificities of issues that the gender question raises.

V. INTERVIEW OF DR. MANORANJAN MOHANTY

Dr. Manoranjan Mohanty started the session with an emphasis on what he calls 'gendered reality'. He asserted that it makes him no less a Marxist if he talks about these issues. He explains that the political economy approach basically talks of power and production wherein such an equation is clearly interwoven with the gender question.

On the question of gender within the Naxalite movement, Mohanty explains that "...the first challenge for them came in the form of caste, so they started addressing Dalits; then came ethnicity, so they started addressing tribals..." but on the gender question, they still believe that "...only socialism will ultimately lead to women's liberation". He does not deny the existence of inequalities in the Naxalite groups saying "...social inequalities in the society are clearly reflected within the movement. which is unnatural because they are supposed to be revolutionaries-defying the social norms!"

Given below is the part of the informal conversation cum interview conducted by myself.

Q1. What, according to you, is the role of arms in the 'politics of change'?

ANS (1): In the politics of change, arms have been used in history. Democrats, progressives, those who believe in maintaining human order in society...will have to affirm their commitment to peace and non-violence, as I do. I believe in peace and non-violence whole-heartedly. But, in order to attain a society with peace and non-violence...why do some people resort to violence? Why state resorts to repression and violence? Why revolutionary violence is a phenomenon? Why people resist through onslaughts?? We need to find answers to these questions and make a proper assessment of violence in order to understand the larger issues. In the context of revolutionary movement, violence should be resorted to only as a reaction to the state repression. Moreover, they should be doing a number of things in practice reaffirming their faith and duty towards peace and non-violence.

Q2. In recent times, women and children are the most affected by Naxalite violence-directly or indirectly (Naxal invited reprisals). Don't you think such incidents are indications of deviation from their original path of emancipation and causes further alienation of women?

ANS (2): Naxalite violence is not necessarily targeted against women and children. Women and children are sufferers in confrontational situations like in Kashmir, Manipur, Nagaland, etc. So both the cases have happened, meaning they have been victims of retaliatory violence and direct naxal violence like in the recent case of Jamui. But still you cannot say they have essentially targeted women and children.

Q3. In recent years, although there have been advocacy for increasing the proportion of women members within the parties, there've hardly been occasions exhibiting prominent women's leadership as enjoyed by male comrades within the various Naxalite groups. What according to you is the reason for such a phenomenon? Is it a result of the patriarchal mindset of revolutionaries?

ANS (3): I would agree to the existence of patriarchal set up within the movement to some extent. And...that structural loopholes in society are reflected in the movement as well.

Q4. According to some analysts, the principle of democratic centralism within the Naxalite groups should not be used at normal times as it hampers independent decision-making by lower bodies. Do you think such principles may be a cause for subordination of women's question within the movement as women's organisations are dependent on male dominated upper bodies at several levels?

ANS (4): I agree that it may lead to subordination of women's causes. Mao Zedong not only warned against bureaucratic centralism but also promoted opening of mass fronts. But again, it must also avoid 'commandism' and 'tallism'. They cannot command support from people (commandism) or blindly support the spontaneous upsurge by masses (tallism). They must apply their ideological principles and decide how much of the actions they wish to support. Movement has to constantly

reapply the Marxist theory according to the situation. Constantly they must find out what they want and test what they are doing, accordingly.

Q5. In several personal narratives whether in the case of the Telangana, Naxalbari or the Kerala struggle, there are instances of violence experienced by women in different forms within the movement, do you think personal narratives are a trusted source for drawing conclusions on a contested subject like the gender question within Naxalite movement?

ANS (5): Personal narratives, no doubt are a very important source but you have to make a survey of it.

VI. INTERVIEW OF BELA BHATIA

Q1. Your essay, 'Naxalite Movement in Central Bihar' pointed out that the movement in those times didn't distribute seized land among the women. This trend exists even today, why do you think such a trend dominates the movement?

Ans: I don't think 'Pattas' are distributed by the Naxalite groups. So I don't think entitlements are possible in the name of women by the Naxalites. Class movements, no doubt, have helped in the empowerment of the women (in view of their overwhelming participation) by breaking the norms of families and society but still there's scope for improvement. I do think women's issues are sometimes pushed back in the movement but one should not forget the fact that women's movement in India was also strengthened by women who were once, part of the Naxalite movement.

Q2. In several personal narratives whether in the case of the Telangana, Naxalbari or the Kerala struggle, there are instances of violence experienced by women in different forms within the movement, do you think personal narratives are a trusted source for drawing conclusions on a contested subject like the gender question within Naxalite movement?

Ans: I think personal narratives are a rich source. Different narratives, no doubt can be analysed carefully for drawing certain patterns within the movement.

Q3. According to some scholars, women need an extra space within most mass struggles for articulation of their grievances. Do you think this is true and has the Naxalite movement provided adequate space for them over the years?

Ans: Yes, they may need an extra space as they have to work along with men and women. Space becomes an even more important issue if participation and addressal of issues is restricted to lower caste and class women. I think they need to expand their base and agenda to include problems of upper caste-class women too.

Q4. Very often Maoists are accused of exploiting the anger/grievances of poor for their own motive of seizure of power. Do you agree to this criticism?

Ans: I disagree to such accusations. I don't think Maoists are purposely using people...it's not a deliberate attempt. Having said that, there also seems to be a..gap between the people and the Maoists. People lack the understanding but they do have the pain ..which links them to the Maoists. Moreover, people sometimes seem to be 'swayed away' but Maoists cannot be accused of exploiting them.

Q5. Maoists are often criticised for indulging in mindless violence. Cases of individual annihilation particularly, are raising question on their ideological line. Do you think they are actually deviating from their original path of mass emancipation and limited to self-defence?

Ans: First priority must be the true definition of 'class enemy'. That its understanding has become ' ..very flexible..' wherein Maoists sometimes donot hesitate to include those who are not strictly part of this category. Police officers, poll officials are often killed in course of their activities raising questions- "Is it fair to kill someone only because he/she is serving the state?"

Party cadres at local levels, sometimes get out of control (which is quite normal phenomenon) wherein they start considering such officials as their enemy. A movement becomes ' ..dangerous..' if it's armed because it becomes more about ' ..action-reaction.'

Q6. Maoist activities of boycotting election are criticised for denying the fundamental rights of the poor. Do you think these activities are done in consent of the public or arbitrarily done denying their fundamental rights?

Ans: I disapprove of boycott of elections. Democracy is important and so is election. I would say that the methods used by Maoists are sometimes detrimental.

Q7. On one side, government demands halt to Naxal violence, on the other side Maoists demands withdrawal of troops creating a critical cycle in itself. What

according to you, should be the initial step for negotiation process in such a complicated situation?

Ans: The government so far has not at all been sincere. Exercises by the government are basically for show. No specific reasons are given for delays and ignoring the important signs. Reports of government backed groups like the Expert group, for instance, have been out rightly ignored.

Q8. What are your sentiments on Operation Green Hunt?

Ans: I think it's absolutely wrong on state's part. Insurgencies in democracies are possible but insurgencies should be dealt with only by development activities. Situation of conflict as evident today, unleashes a terrorist state not a state based on rule of law.