Narratives of the Naxalbari Movement: A Study of Selected Literary Works

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled "**Narratives of Naxalbari Movement: A Study of Selected Literary Works**" is the result of research carried out by me in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, under the supervision of Prof. Rohini Mokashi-Punekar, Professor in English in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences. The research findings and the information derived have been acknowledged duly with necessary citations and a list of references provided.

IIT Guwahati

August 2022 (Halim Hussain)

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Certificate

This is to certify that the research work for the thesis entitled "**Narratives of Naxalbari Movement: A Study of Selected Literary Works**", submitted by Halim Hussain for the award of Doctor of Philosophy at the Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, was carried out under my supervision. No part of it was submitted or presented to any other institution for a degree or a diploma.

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~THIS THESIS IS DEDICATED TO YOU MAA~

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Contents

List of Abbreviations

- CPI: Communist Party of India.
- CPI(M): Communist Party of India (Marxist).
- CPI(M-L): Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist).
- CPC: Communist Party of China.
- CPSU: Communist Party of Soviet Union.
- PIFRC: Price Increase and Famine Resistance Committee.
- AIKS: All-India Kisan Sabha
- AICCCR: All India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries'
- APCCCR: Andhra Pradesh Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries
- MCC: Maoist Communist Centre
- UCCRI (M-L): Unity Centre of Communist Revolutionaries in India (Marxist-Leninist)
- PSCC: Progressive Students Coordination Committee
- AICCR: All-India Co-ordination Committee of Revolutionaries

Abstract

Narratives of Naxalbari Movement: A Study of Selected Literary Works

Literary as well as non-literary writings on the first phase of the Naxalite movement help locate many facets of this powerful resistance to the political and social establishment. The fictional and non-fictional representations of the Naxalite movement of the 1960s and 1970s in West Bengal highlight key issues which reveal the factors leading to the rise and fall of the movement. These writings are testimonies to the long-standing exploitation and ruthless suppression undergone by tribal communities and the rural poor in India. Literary representations of the Naxal movement also bring to light its ideological underpinnings as well as the conflict within its leadership arising out of caste and class differences.

The Naxalite movement began in 1967 with violent clashes between the police and the peasants in the Naxalbari area of the Darjeeling district of West Bengal. Several reasons accounted for the open rebellion of the poor and the landless, the most crucial being the atrocities and exploitation suffered by the poor peasants at the hands of the rich and landed gentry. Prior to the Naxalbari uprisings, there were other similar peasant rebellions such as the Telangana movement (1946-1951) and the Tebhaga movement (1946-1947). These, however, could not withstand the might of the state for a long duration. The Naxalite movement though has been a long-standing and continuing resistance, that has lasted in some region or the other of central and eastern India for more than five decades. The so-called 'Red Corridor' covering states like Andhra Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, and West Bengal is still operational. However, the movement has changed dimensions with changes in time and place, and has much less in common with its early forms.

Fictional representation of the Naxalite movement is a significant research area, because of the inherent literary excellence of the works as well as for the numerous socio-political issues that they portray. However, this body of literature may not have received the attention it deserves in terms of a full-length literary analysis. This thesis will make a systematic study of the literary texts based on the West Bengal region (both in English and

in translated works from Bengali) that have been published in recent decades in the wake of the movement. The selected list of writers includes Mahasweta Devi, Manoranjan Byapari, Bappaditya Paul, Joya Mitra, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Neel Mukherjee.

This study focuses on analyzing literature representing the first phase of the Naxalite movement from and in the West Bengal region of the country. The selected texts attempt to present the struggle and pain of young people who joined the movement in rural and urban areas of West Bengal. A generation of youth, as well as many from tribal communities belonging to bordering areas of West Bengal, fought and died for an ideological cause. The present thesis therefore examines the politics of ideology and the challenges such politics faces in the face of violence.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The Naxalbari uprisings are more popularly known as the Naxalite movement. This is one of the longest continuing peasant uprisings in India. Although it began during the initial years as a peasant uprising, it changed dimensions later from a peasant struggle to a struggle reflecting class conflict in the entire state of West Bengal. This movement played an essential role in the political scenario of India in general and West Bengal in particular, and dominated the politics of West Bengal for more than three decades. The Naxalite movement not only dominated the rural landscape but was also able to change the urban scenario as the movement was soon picked up by young university students and the urban intellectuals of the capital city of the state, known then as Calcutta. Considering the time period and the widespread terrain that the movement covered, it has been studied widely by academics and the intelligentsia to understand the diverse set of causes that led to it, and the consequences that unravelled as a result. It has been studied from multiple ideological lenses. Alpa Shah and Dhruv Jain, in the article "Naxalbari at its Golden Jubilee: Fifty recent books on the Maoist movement in India" (2017) write:

> Though the initial uprisings were violently repressed by 1972, the Naxalbari movement has continued to inspire new generations of youth in India. It has presented a captivating political imaginary— that of a society free of exploitation and injustice—and has moved thousands to sacrifice their lives for revolutionary change. The revolutionaries have come to represent those neglected by Indian politics: they have given them a voice and are fighting not only for them to have control over their means of subsistence but also for the dignity that has been denied to them for generations. (2)

The movement that began in the spring of 1967 can be studied from various perspectives. The most common is the interrogation of a long-standing exploitation of the poor and the landless by the elite class and the people in power. There have been several instances of similar uprisings in India but these could not withstand the test of time. However, the Naxalite movement of the 1960s has survived in some form or the other-for more than 50

years. The movement is still operational in the central and eastern parts of the country though with less similarity to its progenitor.

This thesis examines the literary representations of the Naxalite movement in West Bengal in the 1960s. In order to do this however, it is necessary to understand the Naxalbari uprising as a radical movement and to be acquainted with urban and rural conditions in the state of West Bengal which sections I and II of this chapter attempt in brief. Section III of this chapter focuses on the representation of the Naxalite movement in literature. Section IV discusses the choice of texts, methodology used and the structural layout of the thesis. Section V briefly summarizes the chapters incorporated in the thesis.

I. Naxalbari Uprising: A Radical Movement

The Naxalite movement can be considered a successor of the Telangana and Tebhaga movements since it is marked by features which are similar to the earlier movements. The Tebhaga movement was formed in Thakurgaon and spread to Jalpaiguri, Rangpur, and Malda, which are places adjacent to Naxalbari, Kharibari, and Phansidewa, in the year 1946. The Naxalbari uprising marks an important landmark in the history of Indian peasant revolts. The supporters of the movement saw it as a significant protest contradicting the line of peaceful transition to socialism. It opposed the principles of the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU)[1], which was adopted by the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) CPI(M) (Dasgupta 1978). The Naxalite movement opposed the parliamentary means of democracy and supported armed struggle to achieve political power. In its effort to make peasant struggle a success in the attainment of armed struggle and denunciation of parliamentary politics, it has been able to add a new dimension to the post-independence political movements.

The term ‘Naxalite’ came from the word ‘Naxalbari’, an area in the district of Darjeeling, West Bengal, where the peasant uprising saw its first spark in the first half of the year 1967. Although it began as a clash between a jotedar and a farmer, it soon turned out to be a revolutionary movement aiming to sweep away the existing political, economic and social structures. These revolutionaries followed Marxist-Leninist ideologies and took the

teachings of Mao Tse-tung as their guiding principles. They understood the present stage of Indian revolution as people's democratic revolution and considered agrarian revolution as their main agenda. The Naxalites shun the parliamentary process of democracy and favour the path of armed revolution. They oppose revisionism and neo-revisionism, consider Soviet policies as revisionist and acknowledge China as the central force of a global revolution. Thus, the Naxalite movement seeks to bring Maoism into action in the Indian context by means of peasant rebellion and marks its distinctiveness by emphasizing the need of an armed agrarian revolution in India, based on the thought of Mao Tse-tung and the Chinese revolutionary experiences[2]:

> The truths that the politics and the time of Naxalbari produced hence were destined to have and still have a long life – durable but unstable. For this among other reasons Naxalbari, praised and reviled alike, has come to occupy a singular place of significance in the annals of radical politics in post-independent India. Much has been written on what had happened in that remote place in North Bengal fifty years ago, why and how the politics of Naxalbari engulfed the whole of West Bengal and quickly spread to other parts of the country, the massive participation of students and youth in the mobilisations, the movement's non-conformism, and heavy state repression on the movement. Journalists and chroniclers have also written on how the movement in a different form, more known as the Maoist movement, continues. (Samaddar 153)

The ideological base of the Naxalite movement was very strong from the beginning of the movement led by leaders like Charu Mazumdar, Kanu Sanyal, Kondapalli Seetharamaiah, Nagabhushan Patnaik and T. Nagi Reddy. Their stated aim was to work towards supporting the poor and the downtrodden, especially the tribal people. However, there were instances when the villagers had to suffer the violence perpetrated against them by the Naxalites. Alpa Shah in the article "The intimacy of insurgency: beyond coercion, greed or grievance in Maoist India" (2013) records incidents where the the Naxalites forced the villagers to join the protest against the state. These protests often turned violent and proved costly to the rural and urban poor:

> Read in the context of participating in organized protests alone, such situations may lead one to argue that these villagers were 'sandwiched' in between the forces of the state and the Maoists. Indeed, in the context of the rallies, some people described their predicament in terms of increasingly becoming footballs kicked on the one side by the state and on the other by the Maoists. (488)

With time it did lose some support it previously enjoyed among the sections of urban intelligentsia, but Maoism still has considerable depth. M.K. Narayanan in the article *The Forgotten War* (2016), states that, after almost four decades from its beginning, slogans such as 'China's chairman is our chairman' may not incite the youth of the country, but the Maoist movement has not lost its vigour entirely. Though its presence is significantly less in the urban areas, in many parts of the country, especially in the remote areas, the movement is still a force to fight with. A look into the recent violence level shows signs of Maoist revival in the country. Keeping aside West Bengal where economic and developmental measures have weakened the movement somewhat, elsewhere in the country there are few signs that the movement is in retreat. The entire Dandakaranya region, which covers places like Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, parts of Chattishgarh, large space of Odisha and also some places of Jharkhand and Maharashtra show signs of Naxalite revival (Narayanan 2016). Sumanta Banerjee in the chapter "Radical and violent political movements" (2010) considers the imposition of Emergency (1975-77), by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi as the last blow to the first phase of Naxalite movement in the year 1975. He writes:

> "Looking back at the brief but tumultuous phase of the Naxalite movement in the 1960s' period, a contemporary political observer cannot but acknowledge that it was a watershed in the recent history of India in more than one sense. For the first time in post-Independence India (barring the short lived Telangana struggles in 1947-51, mentioned earlier), the movement set forth the demands of the poor and the landless peasantry in a way that shook the atrophied Indian political scene. (388)

Undoubtedly, there is very little in common between present-day Maoists who are often seen indulging in gruesome acts of violence, and the progenitors of the movement like Charu Mazumdar, who began the movement in the hope of bringing about 'A Spring

Thunder over India' (Narayanan 2016). However, there is a connecting link between the latter-day and today's Maoists that cannot be ignored. Though profound changes can be seen between the first phase of Naxalism (1967 to 1972) and today's Maoist movements, the movement has been able to retain at least some of its foundational ideology. It has turned into a highly rigid and militaristic movement, involved in terrorizing segments of population than supporting people's cause. Over the past decade Maoists are seen involving in brutal ambushes causing severe casualties to the defense forces as well as to the civilians. Sumanta Banerjee writes:

> The Indian Communist were inspired by the Communist resistance in countries like Indonesia, Burma, Malaya, Philippines and Vietnam. Their inspiration was also largely inspired by the victory of Chinese Communists. The adoption of armed insurrection came from these countries in their aim "to overthrow the Congress government, which it considered to be an agent of "Anglo-American imperialism." (383)

Maoists in the twenty-first century, have very less in common with the ideological movement that started half a century ago. At its inception, it had proper credentials to be termed as Marxist-Leninist movement. But today it suffers from a lack of leadership as well as ideological base. D. Raja in "The Naxal Movement: A Realistic Approach", questions the theoretical base of the Naxalites as he believed that it was the ideological differences/clashes between the leadership for which the movement collapsed during the initial days. He also opines that "violence at the village level will not take Naxalites far" (8). Hence, according to him, the Naxalites should adopt broader strategies for long-term goals. Nevertheless, the movement cannot be wiped off from history as it still has reservoirs of support in many rural and tribal areas of the country. Recent attacks on the armed forces bear testimony that Naxalites are still active in the tribal and forested areas of the country. Raja further criticizes the central and state governments and urges to stop looking into the issue from a purely law and order situation and at the same time speed up in improve the living conditions of the tribals if the movement is to be effectively checked. He condems the use of violence to control Naxalism in India and urges the government to take necessary steps of land reform and help the rural poor to come out of the long standing debts that has been the real problem in the life of the peasants. He further adds:

> A law and order situation can only be a short-term measure of doubtful success. A permanent solution to the Naxalite problem can only be achieved through political action, accompanied by very concrete measures such as breaking the feudal/semi-feudal social systems through land reforms and continuously striving for democratization of civil life. It is all the more necessary to have a comprehensive plan for the development of backward areas, provide universal literacy to the entire population and continue welfare measures. The political empowerment of Dalits and adivasis is imperative in the Indian context. The empowerment of women cannot wait any longer. (9)

Sumanta Banerjee states that in South Asia violent radical movements date back to the 1940s with the distribution of powers among the nationalist leaders by the British. The conflict over land distribution, uneven concentration of power among ethnic groups as well as religious contentions between minorities and majorities soon erupted in the postcolonial era. He blames the governments of various South Asian states for not being able to resolve the issues through democratic means. He further states:

> Violence often becomes the ultimate and extreme response of the most desperate segment of population who have remained deprived of the benefits of development following Independence, and who find that the prevailing ruling system has failed to fulfill its promises. The history of Communist radical movements in India testifies to the will of the poor peasantry and the landless to opt for violence as the last resort in their attempt to improve their lot when all other means (such as Gandhian satyagraha, or parliamentary reforms) have failed. (Sumanta Banerjee 382)

The Naxalite movement began as a radical violent uprising and its central aim was the seizure of state power through violent means. In the rural areas class enemies were annihilated in order to capture the excess land from the rich landlords as well as to destroy the land deeds that perpetuated their oppression. As CPI (ML)'s programme was an agrarian revolution and the mobilization of the proletariat, the resultant violence in the city was unexpected and unplanned in the initial days.

II. Rural and Urban Scenarios of the Naxalite Movement

The Naxalbari uprising was the result of the prolonged exploitation done to the rural poor. Its seeds had been sowed way back in the year 1946 when the peasants revolted in the Tebhaga movement. The first clash that ignited the revolutionary fervor was recorded in the first half of 1967 in a remote area which falls under the Darjeeling district of West Bengal. The movement in the 1960s and 1970s that swayed the emotions of a large section of people caught the attention of both the rural poor and the urban youth of West Bengal. These two sections of the society went on to frame the future of the Naxalite movement in West Bengal. As the thesis concentrates on the literary narratives on the first phase of Naxalism in West Bengal, this section locates the movement both in the rural and the urban areas connecting it through the political activism carried out by the youths of Calcutta and the peasants in the rural areas during the colonial as well as postcolonial times.

The rural scenario of West Bengal plays a crucial role in the history of the Naxalite movement as the movement began in the rural areas during the violent clashes between the landless peasants and the jotedars[3]. The primary aim of the Naxalites during the initial days of the movement was the redistribution of the excess land from the oppressors to the peasants. Naxalbari, the birthplace of Naxalism in India became the center of revolutionary activities that was soon supported by the communist leaders. Even after 20 years of Independence, the colonial land tenancy system still existed in many parts of the country through which the landowning class extracted maximum profit from the landless peasants. These peasants who were at the bottom of the hierarchical structure lived in heavy debts Along with economic exploitation, these rural dwellers also suffered social menace like caste discrimination as they mostly belonged to the lower caste and aboriginal tribes. Sumanta Banerjee writes:

> The general picture that emerges from all this is one of nightmarish poverty, humiliation and oppression, inflicted upon more than half of India's rural population by a minority of rich landlords and moneylenders, through squeezing out inch by inch, both land and labour from them, and paying them in exchange just enough to keep them working on the lands. At times of crisis, like the difficult years of 1966-67, even this subsistence wage or meal is not

made available to them. As a result, many die of malnutrititon or starvation. (8)

An analysis of the colonial and post-independent Indian peasant movement reveals that the ruling class has always feared the rise of the peasants and the workers. The peasants and the tribal forest dwellers have been the victims of the exploitative system threatening their livelihood and identity. The peasants also suffered when there was a crop failure, which paved the way for debts. The result of incurring heavy debts led to the loss of their lands at a very nominal price. The peasants had to work in these lands as enslaved people to repay their debts. The pattern has been the same in almost all the rebellions, where the peasants resort to violence as a last means to escape the vicious cycle. Dipak. K. Gupta in his book *Understanding Terrorism and Political Violence: The Life cycle of birth, growth, transformation, and demise* (2008), brings an analogy between the colonial and postcolonial land tenancy system in India. According to Gupta, due to unequal land distribution, peasants rebelled in the state of West Bengal. Naxalbari was but one example of the innumerable places where most of the land was occupied by the rich landlords. He further added that these "rural poor ended up becoming sharecroppers, working for the landlords without any tenancy rights. The situation was typical for other neighbouring areas where the Maoist movement found its firm footing" (118).

Apart from the peasants and the rural poor, the tribal population also played a significant role in these uprisings. The tribal communities of India known as the 'adivasis' or the aboriginal tribes had been the victims of colonization as they were ousted from their lands with the advent of traders and moneylenders who collaborated with the feudal landlords. These tribal people later went on to lead many peasant uprisings, such as the Munda uprisings, the Santhal uprisings, the Kols, and The Oraons, to name a few[4]. While discussing the role of Maoist ideology in the Naxalite movement, Arnab Roy Chowdhury also considers the pitiable condition of the tribal people which was responsible for the rebellions. Though the communist leadership and the Maoist ideology played as a catalyst, but "it was due to their extreme marginalized conditions—living and livelihood was difficult due to ongoing 'tyranny' of extreme feudal exploitation—that the tribals participated in protest movements. It was a rebellion of the helpless, neglected and the 'hopeless'" (84).

West Bengal during the first phase of the Naxalite movement witnessed multifaceted violence between the Naxalites, the CPI (M) cadres, the police and the local goons of the landlords in which the Naxalites and their sympathizers were left alone to face the wrath from all sides. With the Naxalbari uprisings, the revolutionary fervor which already existed in the rural areas ignited to turn the peasants' uprisings into a mass movement. The armed struggle that started from the rural areas begun with the aim of destroying the bourgeois superstructure, but in many ways it turned out to be the reason for the destruction of the base areas where the students and the youths turned to revolutionary activities. Soon it was seen that these youths started coming back to the city as they found it difficult to survive in the villages. Moreover, they also left the countryside to evade arrest, as the police and the military raids intensified with increased violence in the rural areas:

> These fractured understanding created untranslatability and incommensurability of discourses between the leaders and the led, and in the representation and translation of this discourse the essence of indigenous life, their voice and demand were lost (or sidelined), in the hegemonic left ideologies and ideas propagated mostly by the educated and radical Bengali bhadralok guerillas. (86)

The articles published in *Deshabrati* stated unequivocally that the revolution in Naxalbari should not be limited to a few students and youngsters from urban regions. However, carrying out the campaign solely with the support of rural communities proved challenging. As a result, it was crucial for the urban segment to join forces with the rural poor and workers, using clear methods and propaganda to develop the uprisings into a mass movement.

After the return of these students from the villages, Calcutta witnessed massive violence which even Mazumdar and his aides were not prepared for. These students left the rural areas soon as they were not able to cope with the rural dwellers. The other common reasons were the difficulty in the living conditions in those areas. Some left the rural areas as they were abandoned by the villagers, while others fled because they were easily located by the police. The movement soon shifted its base to the urban areas.

Calcutta had been a hotbed of protests since Independence. One of the major causes behind these protests was the arrival of millions of refugees after the partition. The issue

gave extra weightage to the other issues along with the peasants' rights. These protests were led by the students, the urban middle-class population and the labourers whose issues were picked up by the left political parties to convert these protests into mass-scale movements. The movements prior to the Naxalite movement played an important role in igniting the fire amongst some urban dwellers of Calcutta.

The government had been harsh on the protestors during the several protests. Some major political upheavals when the government took arms against the protestors were the refugee movement of the 1950s, the tram movement in 1953 and the teachers' movement in 1954. The protestors of these movements were handled harshly by the government, resulting in the death of several protestors and injuring many others. These movements spoke up for the poor and the oppressed and brought together various Left-leaning political parties to fight for a common cause against the Congress government. The Left-leaning political parties were able to bring all the protestors to a common platform to give them a collective identity; as Dipak K. Gupta says, behind "the root of all social movement there is the presence of a collective identity" (23).

Apart from this, the food crisis during the 1950s created additional spark as peasants migrated to the cities in search of food. The streets of Calcutta witnessed large-scale protests and meetings demanding food. The rallies and meetings were organized by the PIFRC (Price Increase and Famine Resistance Committee). The Committee was backed by the Communist Party of India and it comprised of representatives from the Left parties. The movement reached its peak by the year 1959 when Calcutta witnessed massive rallies with participants ranging from students to teachers, peasants to workers, and the refugees, all working under the leadership of PIFRC. The government responded to the rallies with a heavy hand that resulted in hundreds of casualties. The battle between the protestors and police became violent and engulfed the streets of Calcutta. Many prominent personalities came forward to support these protests. These movements in Calcutta were the precursors of the Naxalite movement that shook the entire state of West Bengal after a year.

Dipak K Gupta cites the theories of Karl Deutsch and Neil Smelser. In the opininon of these scholars mass movements occur not only because of the deprivation and alienation of certain sections, but also through the mobilization of the disaffected section of the society. Deutsch

also considered the creation of national identity as an exponential component of mass movements:

> He theorized that mass movement and ethnic conflicts are produced when a nation fails to assimilate a portion of its population. These people facing a gap in assimilation develop a separate national identity based on their desire to belong to a group in order to cope with the fears of economic, political, and psychological insecurity. When mobilization outspaces assimilation, according to Deutsch a violent movement is born. (24)

Calcutta, during the 1960s, witnessed mass movements in the form of strikes called by workers' unions. Their reprisals resulted in political mayhem. It also importantly saw the rise of middle class intellectuals. The immediate aftereffects of the uprisings in Naxalbari was seen in the students of the urban areas of West Bengal. These young students though belonging to a privileged class of the society were seen joining the Naxal movement. Calcutta played an important role in nurturing the political thought of the communists since its students and intellectuals turned themselves into instruments of communication, and ignited the new ideology amongst the rural masses. The CPI (M-L) cadres not only created a base in the rural areas, they also took over the streets and colleges of Calcutta. The city of Calcutta became the base for the rise of Left ideology in the state of West Bengal:

> No body willed that the Naxalbari movement would soon overflow the confines of a particular place called Naxalbari. No complex outcome ever results from the operation of a single causal mechanism. The diffusion of the mobilization techniques and the ascendancy of the street in politics were partly 'non-relational' that is to say they had no direct correspondence with the actual land movement in Naxalbari. But organizational networks of students and youth and other political cadres took up the model of confrontation, street life, and spiritual interrogation of elite institutions. These mechanisms combined into processes, processes led to new coordination. Repertoires built up as a consequence of this collective process. (Samaddar 158)

Several reasons can be accounted for the rise of revolutionaries in the urban areas of West Bengal. Unemployment among the college and university educated was one among them. Indian students and intellectuals were also fascinated by the growing discontent among the students in the United States over the Vietnam War. Inspiration also came from the anti-establishment campaigns by the agitating students in places like Rome, Paris, Berlin and many other parts of Europe. The agitating students in India "found in the Naxalite movement an echo of the international rebellious spirit of the time" (Banerjee 387).

The violent measures adopted by the Communist revolutionaries were recorded as early as 1948 when Calcutta witnessed violence between students and police. These urban revolutionaries initiated armed action and were instrumental in destroying government properties, conducting railway strikes, jail breaks and other revolutionary acts. These young revolutionaries left everything behind only to fight for the cause. To understand the rural scenario, they left their homes and studies to join the peasants and gain expertise in guerilla warfare.

The Naxalbari uprisings began in a small village on the foothills of the Himalayas in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal. The fire that lit in the Naxalbari area is still burning in the form of Maoist movement in many parts of Central India. The peasants and the tea plantation workers were exploited by the rich and the landowners for centuries. The Naxalbari uprising was the result of these exploitations.

Although the Naxalite movement came as a ray of hope amongst the poor and the downtrodden, the large scale violence associated with it cannot be ignored. Sumanta Banerjee in "The Crisis of Maoist Theory of Agrarian Relations in India" (2017), criticizes the adoption of Maoist strategy in the Indian soil keeping in mind the differences of conditions between India and China both historically and politically. "The Indian Maoist wanted to replicate a Maoist-type guerrilla-based agrarian revolution in India, forgetting that the contemporary Indian situation was far removed from the Chinese scenario" (129). One of the most important questions that the Naxalite movement faces till today is the nature and the strategy of the movement. While writing about the Naxalite movement K.P. Singh in "The Trajectory of the Movement" (2008), differentiates between other political movements and the Naxalite movement in India. As the latter was solely dependent on violence both in theory and praxis, Singh considers the Naxalite movement to be a terrorist movement. At a

very alarming rate the violence of the Naxalite movement soon engulfed not only the entire state of West Bengal but also parts of Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Punjab, Kerela, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir and Delhi:

> The violence perpetrated by the Naxalites rose steadily to peak in 1971, when over 3,650 violent incidents were reported, involving the killing of some 850 'class enemies'—landlords, moneylenders, police informers, political activists—who they termed were reactionary, and police officials. (11)

It was this violence for which the movement soon spiraled out of control, and the Naxalites had to face the wrath of the state and the central government through severe police and paramilitary repression.

III. Representations of the Naxalite Movement in Literature

Literary and non-literary representations of the Naxalite movement play a vital role in documenting the movement and locating it in the lives of the people associated with it. These writings, whether in the regional language or English, have crossed boundaries to reveal the bitter truths of the Naxalite movement. Though the movement began as peasants' uprising in the rural areas of West Bengal, it was soon taken up by the students and intellectuals from the city of Calcutta as discussed above. Several reasons can be accounted for the young graduates and college students joining the movement. Unemployment, financial insecurity, social and economic disparity in the urban areas made the youth of West Bengal restless and visualize a dark future ahead. Hence, they found a ray of hope in the Naxalite movement through which they were able to envisage a just and equal society.

Mahaswta Devi's pioneering work on the Naxalite movement *Hajar Churashir Maa* (1974) translated as *Mother of 1084* (1997) opens up many possibilities of understanding the movement through the actions of its protagonists. This work not only presents the ruthless domination of state forces while dealing with the Naxalites, it also opens up a fresh terrain of debates on the various other roles played by female cadres associated with the movement. Mahasweta Devi shows the circumstances which led young people like Brati to get involved

in the Naxalite movement. On one hand Sujata (Brati's mother) fights a lonely battle in search of the truth behind her son's death, while on the other hand, there are other family members of Brati who are even reluctant to accept Brati after his brutal encounter by the police. In the introduction of *Mother of 1084*, Samik Bandyopadhyay writes:

> In *Mother of 1084* even while Mahasweta evokes and re-creates the killings of the Naxalites, she concentrates on the later reactions—and lack of reaction—of a cross section of the survivors, both those who bear the scars and wounds—both literally and figuratively—of those horrible days and those who had lived through the days of violence in simulated insularity. (xiv)

While in *Mother of 1084*, Mahasweta Devi discusses the Bengali Bhadralok society and their alienating role in the Naxalite movement, the two other works where she takes up the participation of the tribals in the Naxalite movement are the short story "Draupadi" (2002) and the novella *Bashai Tudu* (1990). Mahasweta Devi envisioned the important role that the Adivasis played in the revolutionary movement through such works. "Adivasis have been always entwined with India's Maoist movement. The origin of India's contemporary Maoist movement traces back to a 1967 Santhal tribal uprising in the Naxalbari area in West Bengal" (Ganguly & Oetken, 102). Both "Draupadi" and *Bashai Tudu* are intricate literary examples that depict the role of the tribals in the Naxalite movement:

> In Mahasweta Devi's story 'Draupadi' (translated into English earlier), the tribal Naxalite heroine Dopdi, after being gangraped by the minions of the law, overcomes her humiliation by standing naked before their senior police officer, laughing and spitting blood at him, and pushing him with her two mangled breasts—making him afraid for the first time of an unarmed target. In 'Body', the heroine is ravished and used by the makers of the law—a politician and his cohorts. Both Dopdi and she are victims of the predatory male Establishment. Incidentally, both are of tribal origins. Yet, the girl fails to take revenge—both for her own humiliation, and for the capture of her beloved. (Banerjee, xx)

While Draupadi pays a hefty price both for being a Naxalite and for her gender, in *Bashai Tudu*, Devi focuses on the period between 1967 and 1977, and illustrates the fierce

agrarian revolution led by the landless labourers in the Naxalbari region in the north of Bengal. Mahasweta Devi acknowledges the role of the tribals in the events taking place in Naxalbari and its adjoining areas in shaping the political structure of the country. The role of the tribals was as important in the Naxalite movement as were the several movements for an independent nation prior to Independence. Draupadi and Bashai Tudu represent the tribal population in Devi's writings. She writes, "Bashai Tudu and Draupadi and their peers are the products of these events, and their makers as well; for it is they who change the society and come to symbolize the time and the place, transcending their names and the local situation" (xvii)[5]. But their role has always been excluded in the representations of the movement. Arnab Roy Chowdhury in "'Revisiting Naxalbari': Narratives of Violence and Exclusions from the Marginal Spaces" (2017) writes about the selective representation of the Naxalite movement both in cinema and literature. He says:

> After the fervor of the revolution ended in 1972, Naxalism was commemorated in Bengal with great sympathy and fervor in in films and literature, which is hegemonised by the Bengali bhadralok (gentlemen). This literature reifies the 'Calcutta Jacobians' or the middle-class student perpetrators of ideological and terroristic violence mainly from colleges like Presidency in the position of main 'protagonists', 'ideologues' and 'leaders' but purges the participation of Santhals (a group of indigenous tribes who inhabit certain parts of present –day West Bengal, Bihar and Jharkhand). (83)

Manoranjan Byapari's *Batashe Baruder Gundho* (2013) translated as *There's Gunpowder in the Air* (2018) narrates the story of the planning of a jailbreak of five Naxals. Byapari throughout the book not only describes the inhuman tortures perpetrated on the Naxalites inside the prisons but also delves deep into issues of relative deprivation and the intertwining of caste into politics. He gives a darkly comic touch to the book through the story of Bandiswala (the ghost who love to eat puri and mutton curry) to lighten the horrendous environment prevailing inside the jails. Through this fictional account Byapari was narrating his own experiences merely by changing the names of the characters. During the 1960s and 1970s many were thrown in jails either for their involvement in revolutionary activities or on the allegation of being a Naxalite. Manoranjan Byapari in his introductory note writes:

> I was arrested by the police in late 1974 or early 1975. The charges included use of guns, use of bombs, disturbing the peace, and so on. I did have some connection with Naxals at this time, though the police did not know of it. They arrested me as a miscreant. Even the political party with which I had links did not consider me a party worker. To the police I was an antisocial goon. I used to consider myself a Naxal, as did my companions. But Naxals did not consider us one of them. They called us the lumpen proletariat. (v)

In addition to the works of Mahasweta Devi and Manoranjan Byapari, Bani Basu's Bangla novel *Antarghat* (1989), translated by Jayanti Datta in English as *The Enemy Within* (2002) is the story of a group of young friends who participated in the Naxalite movement in West Bengal. The novel narrates the story of their experience in the movement and the scars which they carry. Shuttling between different timescapes, this novel takes its reader into the turbulent past of the region. Sunil Gangopadhyay takes up the theme of restlessness prevailing in Calcutta during the 1960s in his novel *Pratidwandi* (1974). This novel is about a family which undergoes a severe financial crisis after the death of the father. The central character Siddhartha gives up the idea of becoming a doctor due to the crisis. Siddhartha's unemployed status leads to constant bickering and fights in the family. While trying to find an escape from the hardships, his sister Sutapa is forced to find questionable means. The novel ends with Siddhartha moving into another city in search of a future. While writing about the cinematic adaptation of *Pratidwandi*, Suranjan Ganguly writes in the article "Becoming Father: The Politics of Succession in Satyajit Ray's Pratidwandi (The Adversary)":

> Given Siddhartha's devotion, as a student, to Che, one would expect him to join the ´ fight at once. But true to his vacillating self, he stays aloof, deeply aware of the situation unfolding around him, but unable to move forward. In fact, Ray places him constantly in relation to people who live actively in the present, and, who, despite their separate agendas, believe in acting with purpose and force. His younger brother Tunu, a Naxalite, berates him for having turned his back on his political beliefs. Then there is his friend, Adinath, who describes himself as a "doer" and puts down Siddhartha as weak and wavering—a "thinker" who agonizes over what he'll never do. But

> neither the former's amoral pragmatism nor Tunu's ideological agenda can shake him out of his apathy. He remains the same passive but thoughtful spectator who still can't come to terms with his insecurities and define for himself a meaningful form of self-expression. (322)

Samaresh Majumdar in his novel *Kaalbela* (1980) narrates the story of a young boy Animesh who comes to Calcutta from North Bengal and plunges into fiery politics. Though he tries to keep himself away from politics he ends up becoming a communist and later a political prisoner. He is only freed when the Left Front Government decides to release every political prisoner.

Many from the Naxalite cadres also took up the pen to share their horrendous experiences. In the aftermath of the political upheaval of the 1970s, members of the cadre were tortured and locked up for many years in jail. Some of them have recounted the ruthless tyranny of those dark times in their prison memoirs. Some of the published works in the late eighties and nineties include works like *Hanyaman* (1989) (translated as *Killing Days*) by Joya Mitra, *Jeler Bhitor Jel* (1993) by Minakshi Sen and *Women in Indian Politics* (1999) by Kalpana Roy. *Hanyaman* translated as *Killing Days* (2004) is a prison memoir not of Joya Mitra alone, but of several other women with whom she met and shared her experiences and pain throughout the period of her imprisonment. As a political convict Mitra had to face more exploitation and oppression than other crime perpetrators. Most victims were poor, illiterate, friendless women who had no other to support and fight for them. *Killing Days* narrates the stories of such inmates of prisons and describes their pathetic condition and the brutal exploitation that exists in the prisons.

Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* (2013) departs in certain ways from the writings of the regional writers on the Naxalite movement. *The Lowland* at the same time becomes a crucial addition to the other narratives as it also shows the beginnings of the Naxalite movement along with the portrayal of the immigrant family in the United States. The Mitra brothers, Udayan and Subhash, grow up in a middle-class family in Tollygunge's neighbourhood. As both brothers grow, they attain stark differences both in terms of ideology and the selection of career. Udayan who gets caught between the two extremes of the Indian society, joined the peasants in their revolution keeping faith in the philosophy of Mao Tse Tung both in ideology and practice. While on the other hand Subhash turned to a different kind of life as

he moved to the United States to pursue a career in academics. Udayan's first target is the Tolly club as he cites Che Guevara and the Cuban revolution in condemning the leisurely activities going inside the club. "He pointed out that Che, who had worked as a caddy on a golf course in Argentina, had come to the same conclusion. That after the Cuban revolution getting rid of the golf courses was one of the first things Castro had done" (30)[6]. The entire family later faces the consequences of Udayan's involvement in the Naxalite movement. After Udayan's brutal encounter right in front of his family members, the narrative shifts to the United States where Jhumpa Lahiri constructs his brother's personal commitments in lifting the family out of the political consequences.

In *The Lives of Others* (2014) Neel Mukherjee takes up the issue of class hierarchy and workers' protests in the factories of Calcutta, while in *A State of Freedom* (2017) he tells the stories, amongst four other interconnected lives, of Milly and Soni, two tribal girls from central India. Mukherjee revisits the central theme of the earlier novel, when he narrates the story of Soni who joins the Maoist movement to take revenge for her sister's rape by the people in power. Supratik in the novel *The Lives of Others* like other youths of his age during the 1960s and 1970s joins the Naxalite movement and leaves his ancestral home for the rural areas to mobilize the masses for a revolutionary change in Indian society. The first phase of Naxalism saw a large number of participation from the students and the unemployed graduates in the urban areas. These students who followed Charu Mazumdar's dictates which said "he who has not dipped his hand in the blood of class enemies can hardly be called a communist" (Mazumdar), left their comfort zones to join the peasants in the rural areas to enhance the revolutionary activities of the movement. Sumanta Banerjee writes:

> Significantly enough, the movement was also able to draw a large number of urban youth and intellectuals, who were inspired by its egalitarian values, and, more importantly, by its restoration of revolutionary humanism in the Indian Communist movement that valorized individual courage and readiness to sacrifice for a cause. (Banerjee 387)

Both Udayan and Supratik are reflections of the younger generation that took part in the Naxalite movement despite being from the well-to-do bhadralok families of Calcutta. Their fight against the oppressive structures of the feudal lords took the movement a step further in connecting the rural movement to that of the urban scenario.

The turbulent period of the 1960s and 1970s finds expression in the poems and songs composed by the Naxalites and those sympathetic to the cause of the revolution. These works may not have been published by the poets in anthologies, but were seen in obscure small magazines, and many of them were remembered by word of mouth and sung in villages (Banerjee 2012). These poems do not follow conventional metres and the traditional poetic images are not included by the poets. Rather they address issues related to the problem of repression and social justice. The Naxalite movement created opportunities to fill the gulf between the two cultures- the culture of the city as well as that of the village. An attempt to fill this gap was made in these poems, as both the middle-class poets of the city and the folk-poets of the countryside tried to enrich each other. Though the tone of these poems is often flat, yet they are often able to picture their agony. The imagery brings into light the unspoken quandary of the Naxalites. Bipul Chandra's poem included in *Thema Book of Naxalite Poetry* (2012) edited by Sumanta Banerjee brings into light the torture which the prisoners had to face. Consider the following poem:

Whip me
So that the Scars
Remain embedded
For days together.
Whip me again and again,
So that
When you are finished with your whipping,
I rise up
Looking like
A striped tiger!

IV

This thesis will analyse literary works on the Naxalite movement of India. A study of these works, therefore, requires a basic understanding of the social, economic and political background of the decades immediately after independence. In order to get a clear picture of the movement, it is necessary to understand the divisions inside CPI, which led to the formation of various smaller groups and units. As a movement, it was able to arouse the support of the mass but had to be curtailed after severe police repression and the lack of proper leadership. The conflictual relationship between the peasants turned violent and the movement spiraled out of hand killing many people both on the side of the Naxalites as well as the state forces. For an understanding of the relationship that went violent it is necessary to reveal the reasons for the failure of the movement. Further, Naxalites were also part of the patriarchal mindset prevailing in the Indian soil. The women involved in the movement, both directly and indirectly were oppressed under the mantle of patriarchal hegemony. The objective of the study is to locate the first phase of the Naxalite movement in the literary narratives to carve out the many issues that have remained sidelined for generations.

Methodology/Theoretical Perspectives

In examining literary works on the Naxalite movement of India, it will be important to incorporate critical approaches from postcolonial studies, as the proposed study area portrays characteristics relevant to the postcolonial domain. The peasant rebellions come under the purview of subaltern studies. Given the nuanced understanding of conflicts that postcolonial theory and subaltern studies offer, the study will draw critical aspects from postcolonial theory, especially subaltern studies. As the peasants revolt against the State, peasant rebellions have always been considered as a threat to the nation. Therefore, a critical understanding of the issues of nationalism will be fruitful while addressing questions on peasant politics. Gender studies will be helpful in dealing with the conditions of women in the movement. Besides, readings on the history, politics and economy of the West Bengal region and adjoining areas will help in the proper understanding of the different perspectives to be studied in the Naxalite movement. The present study employs relevant insights from these historical and theoretical perspectives.

V Choice of Texts:

The present study will examine the representation of the first phase of Naxalite movement as reflected in the literary narratives both in Indian Writing in English and the translated works of the regional writers from the state of West Bengal. While many writers have taken up the issue of the Naxalite movement in their writings in contemporary times, Mahasweta Devi's *Hajar Churashir Maa* (1974) translated as *Mother of 1084* has earned a unique position in portraying the bitter realities of the Naxalite movement. The movement which witnessed an alternate history of the poor and the working class, not only aroused class consciousness among the masses but also provided a different worldview for the people who were forced to live in abject poverty and were oppressed for ages. These narratives on the Naxalite movement not only deal with the excruciating stories of the Naxalites but also shed light onto several factors that resulted in intital setback of the movement in its early phase. The primary texts selected for the present thesis are Mahasweta Devi's *Hajar Churashir Maa* (1974) translated as *Mother of 1084* (2010), "Draupadi" (1978) translated in 2002 into English, *Bashai Tudu* (1990) translated into English in the year 2002, Manoranjan Byapari's *Batashe Baruder Gandha* (2013) translated as *There's Gunpowder In The Air* (2018), Joya Mitra's *Hanyaman* (1989) translated as *Killing Days* (2004) Kanu Sanyal's *The First Naxal: An Authorized Biography of Kanu Sanyal* (2014), Sumanta Banerjee's edited poerty collection *Thema Book of Naxalite Poetry* (2010), Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* (2013) and Neel Mukherjee's *The Lives of Others* (2014).

This thesis does not attempt to examine the Naxalite/Maoist movement of the present day. It also does not trace the linear development of the Naxalite movement in India. Rather it aims to trace the development of the first phase of Naxalism in the state of West Bengal i.e., from 1967 to 1975 by focusing on the translated works of Bangla writers and two diasporic Indian English writers. While Mahasweta Devi writes about caste and class domination, keeping the Naxalite movement at the forefront, Manoranjan Byapari pens a fictional account of his stay inside the jail as a Naxalite. Though there is a considerable gap between the time period of their writings, both take up the issue of the turbulent times of the 1960s and 1970s in their writings. Caste and class issues were the connecting link between both the writers. Moreover, it is with Mahasweta Devi's help that Manoranjan Byapari could claim the recognition of a writer after his chance encounter with the former. Apart from the fictional accounts of the

regional Bangla writers, many Naxalites wrote about the ghastly memories of their experience during the turbulent times. The prison memoirs were essential as they were able to throw light on the torture and the injustices meted out to the arrested people on charges of involvement in the movement. Joya Mitra, a female Naxalite, had to face double subjugation: on the one hand for being a gendered subaltern and the other for being a revolutionary. Her prison memoir also sheds light on the Indian prison system and the sorrows of numerous prisoners, deprived of their basic rights. The other life narrative included in this thesis i.e., Kanu Sanyal's biography is able to trace the history of the communist movement in India on the one hand and the Naxalite movement on the other. Kanu Sanyal's narrative gives voice to the many pitfalls and setbacks the movement faced at different times. From ideological clashes to the formation of many splinter groups, Kanu Sanyal minutely records the crucial happenings of the political scenario connecting those with his life struggles in being a revolutionary. Sumanta Banerjee's edited poetry collection records the testimonies of the people associated with the Naxalite movement. These songs and poems are the quintessence of the sufferings of the poor and the exploited. They throw light on the various forms of exploitation during the troubled times of the first phase of Naxalism. While the translated fictional account of the Bangla writers mostly deals with the Naxalite movement of the 1960s and 1970s, Neel Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri's works are an intricate account of the lives of the Naxalites and the after-effects of the Naxalite movement on the family members and acquaintances of the Naxalites. While Neel Mukherjee's *The Lives of Others* prime focus is on the hierarchical differences among the different sections residing in Calcutta and its suburbs, Jhumpa Lahiri in *The Lowland* narrates the struggles of an immigrant family living in the United States connecting its precedents with the Naxalite movement of West Bengal.

The selected list of writers and their works chosen for the present study offers an interesting combination of positionality and perspectives, even as all the writers focus on the caste/ class distinctions that led to the triggering of the Naxalite movement in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal. This thesis examines these conflictual relationships within the movement arising out of the clashes between caste and class hierarchy. Moreover, there were conflicts among the Naxalites residing in the rural areas with the intelligentsia, who later joined them to provide an ideological base to the movement. There were also gender discrimination occurring within the the movement. Moreover, an examination of the selected works also

reveals the similarities as well as the distinctive elements between the representation of the movement in Bangla and English.

VI Chapter Division

This section discusses the chapter division and summarizes briefly the chapters included in the present thesis.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: A Historical Overview of Peasant Rebellions in India

Chapter 3: Naxalite Movement in the works of Mahasweta Devi and Manoranjan Byapari

Chapter 4: Miscellaneous Writings on the Naxalite movement

Chapter 5: Naxalite Movement in Indian Writing in English

Chapter 6: Conclusion.

VII Chapter Summaries

Chapter I offers an introduction to the study.

Chapter II titled "A Historical Overview of Peasant Rebellions in India" narrates a historical and sociological mapping of peasant rebellions in India with special emphasis on the Naxalite movement. Peasant uprisings in India have played a major role in reshaping and restructuring the political as well as the economic status of the country. Hence, considering the size and time period these movements have covered, they fall under the category of social movements and have been able to put forward the questions of poverty, deprivation, injustices as well as the long standing exploitations done to the peasants and the landless laborers. Along with the issues underpinning peasant rebellions in India, this chapter aims to answer several questions related to the rise and fall of the Naxalite movement in India.

Section I of this chapter is a brief history of the peasant struggle in the historiography of India. Discussing the works of marxist historians, the chapter points out the dominance of the elite or hegemonic historiography over its subaltern counterpart. Peasant movements in India have been essential in contradicting the dominance of the elite in the Nationalist movement in India. These movements brought class consciousness among the peasants and the workers and were also able to uproot the long-standing land revenue assessments such as zamindari and ryotwari systems[7]. The Telangana movement and the Tebhaga movement are considered to be the precursors of the Naxalite movement as these two movements were able to bring together people of different sections to fight against the injustices meted out to the poor.

Section II is a brief history of the Naxalite movement in India. This section provides details of the first phase of the Naxalite movement in West Bengal. It traces the origins of the Naxalite movement and connects its links with the communist movement in India. The Naxalbari uprising soon turned out to be a massive campaign for class struggle in the entire state of West Bengal. It was able to arouse the sentiments of both the rural and the urban populations. But the movement faced severe setback in the initial days due to police repression and the internal clashes among the party members. Section III briefly records the history of the Communist ideology in India. The communist movement began way before the Naxalbari uprisings took place. The pioneers of the Communist movement in India provided an ideological base to the toiling masses. Hence it was with the thinking of leaders like M.N. Roy and P.C. Joshi that communist ideology was adopted during the initial days. However, there were differences of opinions among the Indian communists on the question of the ideology to be followed in India. It was the West Bengal party unit that strongly opposed the revisionist policies and supported the radical line. The Naxalbari uprisings were picked up by these revolutionary leaders who opposed the revisionist line of policy to be followed. Section IV records the issues behind the rebellions of the poor and the downtrodden. India has a long history of exploitation of the poor by the rich and the people in power. These poor people were kept in dark for ages arose to fight for their rights. Subaltern historians like Ranajit Guha and Partha Chatterjee record these conflictual relations between the peasants and the landlords in their writings. The Naxalite movement grew out of the violent clashes between the peasants and the landlords. The movement gained wide momentum during the initial days with support from the masses. But soon it was

ruthlessly dominated with the help of the state forces. In the name of controlling law and order situation the Naxalites faced backlash as they became targets of not only the police and the paramilitary forces but also from the goons of the landlords and the moneylenders. Section V discusses gender issues prevailing both inside and outside the Naxalite movement. The movement came as a ray of hope not only to the peasants and the working class but also for the womenfolk who found it liberating to join the Naxalite movement. But the movement was not able to accommodate women equally, and the female cadres had to face discrimination while staying within the movement. Srila Roy and Mallarika Sinha Roy write about the struggles of the female Naxalites and how they had to adjust to the patriarchal mindset inside the movement.

Chapter Three of the thesis is titled "Naxalite movement in the works of Mahasweta Devi and Manoranjan Byapari". This chapter primarily focuses on the fictional accounts of Mahasweta Devi and Manoranjan Byapari on the Naxalite movement. The Naxalite movement embraced people from different strata of life. It came as a ray of hope not only for the people fighting class struggle, but also for students and college graduate students who had lost all hope in the existing system. Apart from the peasants and the working class people, several women also joined the movement in the hope of a better future. This chapter concentrates on the three literary narratives of Mahasweta Devi namely, the novel *Mother of 1084*, the short story "Draupadi" and the novella *Bashai Tudu*. It also includes a discussion of Manoranjan Byapari's *There's Gunpowder in the Air*. Section I is a brief account of the life and important works of Mahasweta Devi. As a writer Mahasweta Devi lends voice to the oppressed in her writings. Through her writings Mahasweta Devi was able to bring into light caste, class and gender oppression prevailing in the Indian society. Section II of this chapter focuses on the seminal work of Mahasweta Devi i.e., *Mother of 1084*. Written against the backdrop of the Naxalite movement, this novel narrates the anguish of the mother of a martyred son and her journey in breaking the shackles that have restricted her for years before her son's death. It also reveals how the young revolutionaries were brutally killed in the streets of Calcutta during the first phase of the Naxalite movement. Section III narrates the story of Dopdi Mejhen, a tribal Naxalite in the forest of Jharkhani who along with her husband Dulna Majhi fought against the landlords and the police forces. Dopdi becomes a metaphor for the resistance of the gendered subaltern in the movement. Her struggles and her torture at the police custody reveal the struggles of a female Naxalite. Section IV analyzes

the novella *Bashai Tudu*. In this work Mahasweta Devi dwells on the role played by the adivasis of West Bengal in the Naxalite movement. Bashai represents the forest dwellers and their role in the revolutionary movements in India. Bashai's contribution towards the movement establishes the role played by the subalterns in the class struggle. Section V briefly records the life and struggles of Manoranjan Byapari. Section VI describes in detail the novel *There's Gunpowder in the Air* written by Manoranjan Byapari. This novel is a fictional account of the jailed Naxalites and the severe torture they had to face during the 1960s and 1970s. The jailed Naxalites came from different backgrounds comprising of different castes and class. Hence, the movement was able to unite people of different background for a common cause, even if this was for a brief period.

Chapter IV "Miscellaneous Writings on the Naxalite Movement" is an attempt to record the life writings of the Naxalites. Apart from the fictional narratives on the Naxalite movement, many prominent Naxalites wrote about their experiences and struggles during the late 1960s and early 1970s. This chapter clubs together a prison memoir, an authorised biography, and poetry written by the revolutionaries in an attempt to bring to light the truths which remained side-lined for years. These life writings by the revolutionaries reveal many bitter truths for which the movement had to face setbacks. Along with the brutal torture by the police and the goons of the landlords, the Naxalites themselves had differences of opinion on sensitive issues. These differences led to the formation of different groups dividing the unity of the Naxalites. Section I deals with Joya Mitra's prison memoir *Killing Days*. This prison memoir narrates the horrific experiences of a female Naxalite inside the jail. Joya Mitra like other Naxalites of her time was kept behind the bars for four years without trial. Moreover, the inhuman torture prevailing inside the jails added to the sufferings of Joya Mitra. As a political prisoner she was left alone to suffer like other female Naxalites who had to face imprisonment either for being directly involved in the Naxalite movement or for being Naxalite sympathisers. This prison memoir not only narrates the story of Joya Mitra inside the jail, but also goes on to describe the lives of many other jailed female inmates. Section II attempts to analyze the authorised biography of Kanu Sanyal *The First Naxal: An Authorised Biography of Kanu Sanyal*. This biography is pertinent to the Naxalite movement as it records the history of the communist movement in India along with the life and struggles of Kanu Sanyal. Kanu Sanyal's biography not only brings to light the journey of a revolutionary, but also narrates the ideological differences between the communist

revolutionaries because of which the Communist Party of India was in the end divided into many splinter groups. Section III of this chapter analyses the songs and poems recorded in the collection *Thema Book of Naxalite Poetry* (2012) edited by Sumanta Banerjee. The Naxalite movement was the outcome of the resistance showed by the poor and the exploited against the long standing oppression done in the name of caste, class and gender. These poetic writings by the Naxalites and their associates records the suffering of the Naxalites. The inhuman torture and exploitation done to the Naxalites in the name of controlling law and order situation reveals the authoritarian stance taken by the state and the central government. The literary voices coming from the revolutionaries document the pain and anguish of the Naxalites.

Chapter V titled "Naxalite Movement in Indian Writing in English" attempts to locate the Naxalite movement in the two fictional accounts of Jhumpa Lahiri and Neel Mukherjee respectively. Set in the turbulent times of the 1960s and 1970s both the novels *The Lowland* and *The Lives of Others* deal with the involvement of the urban youth in the Naxalite movement. While the regional writers have written exclusively on the local and regional issues while narrating several aspects surrounding the Naxalite movement, Lahiri and Mukherjee take the movement into global scenario through the immigrant characters as well as writing for a wider range of readers. In both the novels, Lahiri and Mukherjee are able to pinpoint that class difference was one of the chief reasons for which the young generation jumped into fighting the class war during the Naxalite movement. While *The Lowland* is a gripping tale with intricate details of the convergence of the political and personal, *The Lives of Others* narrates the family saga of the Ghosh family providing each and every detail of the central character's involvement in the Naxalite movement. Section I discusses Jhumpa Lahiri's works as well as the important transitions in her career as a writer. Being a diasporic writer Jhumpa Lahiri portrays the immigrant characters residing in the West. In the novel under discussion she goes back to the tumultuous phase of the Naxalbari uprisings to shape the fate of Subhash and Gauri in the United States. Section II discusses the novel *The Lowland*. The consequences of the Naxalite movement were not only paid by the people involved directly in the movement, but it had a deep impact on the family members as well as the people associated with the revolutionaries in one way or the other. *The Lowland* narrates how the ideological fervour of the left leaning political parties were able to catch hold of a certain section of youths. At the same time Subhash by defying the existing political

scenario went on to fulfil his career in the United States. People like Gauri in *The Lowland* suffered as they were not able to take a proper stand during the Naxalite phase in West Bengal. Section III gives an account of the life and works of Neel Mukherjee. Section IV analyses the novel *The Lives of Others*. Supratik in *The Lives of Others* becomes an epitome of the young revolutionary during the Naxalite movement as he follows Charu Mazumdar's dictat of moving into the rural areas to mobilize the poor and the landless peasants. In this novel, Mukherjee takes up the turbulent times of the Naxalite movement to describe the class war going in and around Calcutta. The intricate details of the wealthy Ghosh family in the city of the Calcutta and Supratik's revolutionary activities in the rural areas form the two central threads with which the writer reveals the social as well as the political condition of West Bengal. This multi-layered narrative brings out many untold secrets that remained hidden behind the four walls of the big mansions of Calcutta. Finally, Mukherjee also links the first phase of the Naxalite movement with the present day Maoist movement that exists in several parts of central India.

Chapter VI, the final and the concluding chapter, briefly sums up the central arguments of the thesis. The movement that began as a conflict between the peasants and the jotedars turned out to be massive campaign against class discriminations embracing people from different strata. The class struggle went on to challenge the existing hierarchical structure but also questioned the long standing caste discriminations prevailing in the Indian society. Moreover, defying all the societal norms as well as the biological differences, the movement was able to embrace the womenfolk reverberating the gendered notions of our society.

The next chapter is an attempt to locate the theoretical deliberations behind the peasant movements in general and the Naxalite movement in particular. This chapter also delves deep into the rise of revolutionary movements like the Naxalite movement. Finally, critical approaches from gender studies have been incorporated into the chapter to highlight the subjugation of the female cadres in the movement.

Notes

[1] In the twentieth congress of the CPSU (Communist Party of Soviet Union), Nikita Khrushchev in his "Secret Speech" criticized Stalin. This speech was considered to the major reason behind the Sino-Soviet split under the leadership of Mao Tse Tung. Mao condemned Khrushchev for his revisionist policies.

[2] Maoism or the thought of Mao Tse Tung was the guiding principle of the Communist Party of China. Mao Tse Tung developed a variety of Marxism-Leninism based on the Chinese revolutionary experiences and propagated armed insurrection in order to capture State power.

[3] In the agrarian structure of West Bengal during the British rule in India, Jotedars were rich and wealthy peasants who owned large tracts of land and they provided their land to the poor peasants under land tenure system.

[4]*Munda Uprising* or *Munda Rebellion* was a tribal uprising in the 19th century led by the tribal leader Birsa Munda. They were fighting against the exploitative system of the rich merchants and moneylenders who were trying to destroy the previous rent rate system enjoyed by the Munda tribes. *Santhal Uprisings* was a rebellion against the exploitative measures of the British East India Company and the zamindari system (land revenue system) by the Santhal tribe in the state of West Bengal and Jharkhand in the year 1855. The *Kol Uprisings* of Chhota Nagpur (1829-1839) was a rebellion of the tribal Kol people against the exploitative land tenure system introduced by the British East India Company. This uprising was also joined by the other tribes such as Mundas, Oraons and Hos.

[5] Mahasweta Devi, *Bashai Tudu. Translated from the Bengali by* Samik Bandyopadhyay and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. 2002. (Thema: Kolkata, 2002). Henceforth, all citations are from this edition of the collection.

[6] Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Lowland*. 2013. (Random House: Haryana, 2014). Henceforth, all citations are from this edition of the novel.

[7] Also known as the Permanent Settlement system, Zamindari system was introduced by Cornwallis in the year 1793. In this system of land sharing, zamindars were considered as the owner of lands and had the right to collect rent from the peasants. It was introduced in Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and Varanasi. Ryotwari system was introduced by Thomas Munro in 1820. In this system of crop sharing,

ownership rights were handed over to the peasants. The British government collected tax directly from the peasants. Madras, Bombay, parts of Assam and Coorgh provinces of British India were major areas to introduce Ryotwari system.

Chapter II

A Historical Overview of Peasant Rebellions in India

"A social movement is a deliberate collective endeavor to promote change in any direction and by any means, not excluding violence, illegality, revolution or withdrawal into 'utopian' community" (Shah *Social Movements,* 19). These movements seek to empower the oppressed masses in order to resist atrocities from the advantaged and help in bringing social change. They are carried out by large number of members working primarily against certain political or social issues. Analyzing the concepts of Relative Deprivation, Social Movements, and Social Change, Denton E. Morrison states that social movements develop and flourish "when group of persons experience relative deprivation" (Morrison *Some Notes*, 675). Similar views were presented by Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani in the book *Social Movements: An Introduction* (2006). On the basis of individual behaviors and psychological analysis, they defined social movements "as the manifestation of feelings of deprivation experienced by individuals in relation to other social subjects, and of feelings of aggression resulting from a wide range of frustrated expectations" (07). Raka Ray in her book *Fields of Protest: Women's Movement in India* (1999) and J. Criag Jenkins and Bert Klandermans in *The Politics of Social Protest: Comparative Perspectives on States and Social Movements* (1995) mention that social movements are oppositional to the state or the existing government and are also engaged in protest activities. According to J. Criag Jenkins and Bert Klandermans these movements have the potential to oppose the existing political system and can also "play a major role in restructuring the relationship between the state and civil society" (05).

Among the various social movements during the colonial era, peasant uprisings were seldom recorded in official history and were often regarded as acts of banditry and dacoits. Though the movement began as a peasant uprising in the Naxalbari area, it soon erupted in many parts of the country and was able to embrace people of different strata. Though 50 years have passed since the inception of the movement, the ideals still remain the same, which was to fight against the dividing forces of the country to create a classless society. In post- independence India, the Naxalite movement posits a unique position, as the consequences and the ongoing mobilization of the movement loom large in many parts of

the country. The rise in attacks on the security personnel and the lack of success in controlling the Naxalites, calls for an urgent need to change the approach and rethink on the issues behind the rise of the Naxalites.

How can then the Naxalite movement be identified and defined? What is Naxalism? Who are the Naxalites and why are they fighting a continuous battle with the Indian state? Is this movement similar to other peasant rebellions of India or is it different in terms of ideology and perspective? What role did the Communist Party of India (CPI) play in the movement? What is the relationship between the urban Naxalites and rural Naxalites? How did the movement spread to other parts of India and why is it still a force even after the completion of five decades from its inception? What role did the female cadres as well as dependents of the Naxalites play throughout the movement? These and a similar set of questions need to be answered for a better understanding of the movement. By looking at the depth of the movement and the time period it has consumed, it will be better to look at the movement in connection with the preceding peasant rebellions as well as with the strife within the Communist Party of India.

The present chapter will try to answer some of the above questions by tracing the history of peasant rebellions in India as well as locating the issues behind these rebellions with the help of various thinkers on class struggle and on peasant rebellions in India. It will also look into the history of Naxalites as well as the history of Communists in India. Section I deals with the struggles of peasants in the Indian history, while section II and III will look into the history of Naxalite movement and communist ideology in India respectively. Section IV will look into the issues behind these movements. Section V will examine the gender issues of the Naxalite movement.

I. Peasant Struggle in the Indian History

Marxist historians assert that the historiography of Indian nationalism is dominated by elitism. As products of the British rule, ‘colonialist elitism’ and ‘bourgeois-nationalist elitism’ have survived and been assimilated into the neo-nationalist and neo-colonialist forms of discourse. Ranajit Guha in his paper “On Some Aspects of the Historiography of

Colonial India" (1982), states that the making of the Indian nation and the development of the consciousness on nationalism are considered to be predominantly elite achievements. Following the colonialist and neo-colonialist historiographies, the achievements in the Indian nationalist and neo-nationalist writings have been credited "to Indian elite personalities, institutions, activities and ideas" (Guha, *Subaltern Studies I*, 1). Based on such perspectives, nationalism was considered as the sum of activities and ideas by which the elite in India responded to all the establishments generated by colonialism[2]. The historians of the left perceive the Anti-Rowlatt upsurge of 1919 and the Quit India movement of 1942 as movements dominated by the elite.

Peasant Movements in India have led to the recognition that the peasants, who constitute a major part of the Indian population and have played an important role in shaping the destiny of this country. To compete with elitist historiography, there existed another domain where the principal actors were understood as neither the dominant sections nor colonial authorities but the lower classes constituted by the laboring population and the peasants. Historians such as Irfan Habib, D.D. Kosambi, R.S. Sharma and Daniel Thorner were the initiators to bring peasants as an active subject into the study of Indian history. Peasants have existed in human history ever since agriculture became the major source of food. With the formation of peasantry, different social organizations also came into existence. Habib states that the clearing of extensive tracts in the Gangetic basin was the next stage in the history of Indian peasantry. Social formations of peasant communities created within tribes, combined with settlements of servile and semi-servile labourers working under land-owning masters, was seen by the middle of the first millennium BC. These social relations are evidence of the power systems working in agriculture. The peasants alone had to pay the levy in grain (Habib 1983, 21-30).

Peasantry under colonial rule was directly affected by the transformation of the agrarian structure. It was most affected by colonial economic policies and the destruction of the handicrafts sector, which resulted in land overcrowding, a new land revenue system, and harsh colonial administrative and judicial systems. Peasants in Zamindari areas faced high rents, illegal levies, arbitrary evictions, and unpaid labour, whereas in Ryotwari areas, the government levied high land revenue[3]. Local moneylenders extracted high rates of interest on the money lent to poor peasants on mortgage of their land and cattle, enabling the

moneylenders to seize their property on non-repayment of loan. As a result, cultivators were reduced to the status of tenants-at-will, sharecroppers and landless labourers. Soon the peasants realized that their real enemy was the colonial state, and they began to resist the exploitative measures of the former. Sometimes the peasants even resorted to crime when the situation became intolerable. These crimes included robbery, dacoity, and what has been termed as 'social banditry'[4]. Countering the colonial historiography about peasant rebellions in India, Ranajit Guha in "The Prose of Counter-Insurgency" (1994) states:

> When a peasant rose in revolt at any time or place under the Raj, he did so necessarily and explicitly in violation of a series of codes which defined his very existence as a member of that colonial, and still largely semi-feudal society. For his subalternity was materialized by the structure of property, institutionalized by law, sanctified by religion and made tolerable-and even desirable-by tradition. (45)

Among the various movements during the colonial period, mention may be made of the Indigo Revolt (1859), the Pabna Agrarian Leagues (1873), the Deccan Riots (1875), the Kisan Sabha Movement (1929), the Ekka Movement (1921), the Mappila Revolt (1921) and the Bardoli Satyagraha (1928).

These movements during the colonial period created an environment for post-independence agrarian reforms and aimed to abolish structures such as the Zamindari and the Ryotwari systems. They weakened the landed class's power, contributing to the transformation of the agrarian structure.

However, in elitist historiography, the politics of mobilization finds very little representation. In fact, the mobilization of the elite is perceived to be more legalistic and constitutionalist than the mobilization of the subaltern classes. Subaltern mobilization is considered to be violent in nature. Kathleen Gough in "Indian Peasant Uprisings" (1974), states how these uprisings were sidelined from the mainstream literature and were often "obscured under the headings as 'communal riots' between major religions, fanatical religious cults, or the activities of 'criminal' castes and tribes" (1392). C.A. Bayly has rightly pointed out in the essay "Rallying Around the Subaltern" (2008) that "in official discourse, tribal resistance

movements, poor peasant protests and working class rising could be bundled into the category together of archaic disturbance, communalism or Naxalism" (113).

Tebhaga and Telangana movements, originating in 1946 in the Bengal and Andhra regions respectively, are considered to be the two major peasant rebellions in India prior to the Naxalite movement. Debal K. Singha Roy, in his book *Peasant Movements in Post-Colonial India: Dynamics of Mobilization and Identity* (2004) argues that Tebhaga and Telangana movements had striking similarities with the Naxalite movement, though these movements took place in different places and at different periods of time. All three movements were backed by Communist party organizations and leadership. In terms of strategy, these movements were radical in nature. Considering the violent nature of these movements Roy states how these movements helped to raise the voices of the peasants which was suppressed for ages. According to him:

> These radical peasant movements provided the peasantry with the required space to articulate their issues and express their discontent against deprivation, which had remained legitimized in society for ages. Their economic and social deprivation, namely landlessness, poverty, starvation, low wages, gender-based wage discrimination, downward occupational mobility, hardship, illiteracy, etc., were legitimized by the prevalent ideology and other institutional frameworks operating both at the micro- and macro-social processes. (177)

Ambedkar in "Caste in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development" (1917) remarked that caste and class are very closely associated terms and that caste came out of a certain class, "a Caste is an Enclosed Class" (Ambedkar 12). E.M.S Namboodiripad in the book *The Frontline Years: Selected Articles* argues that caste oppression is due to the presence of the "socio-economic and cultural domination of the big feudal landlords and their political representatives, feudal chieftains and ruling families" (Namboodiripad 2010). In the book *Essays in Indian History: Towards a Marxist Perception* (2002), Irfan Habib considered the entire caste system as a vicious cycle of exploitation benefitting mostly to the usurpers or outsiders.

Questioning the power of landlords, and the state, these movements sought a radical change in the existing society dominated by caste and class hierarchy. Though urban intellectuals and upper-caste groups backed these movements, it was the poor peasantry who formed the grass-roots. These movements also saw widespread participation of women (Singha Roy 2004).

P. Sundarayya in his book *Telengana People's Struggle and its Lessons* (1972) discusses the issues which led to the beginning of the Telangana Movement as well as the factors behind the failure of the movement. The Telangana Movement was backed by the Communist Party of India (CPI). The CPI started working in Telangana in the year 1936. Prof. N.G. Ranga was the initiator of the regional-level peasant organization in Telangana. This regional organization was affiliated to the AIKS (All-India Kisan Sabha) which was an organ of CPI. The CPI had established a stronghold in Hyderabad by 1940. Its activities increased with every passing day and by the year 1946 it was prepared to launch a peasant movement in Telangana:

> In this flood of people's movement, the government could not collect the levy grain. The officers and men who used to collect it were not even allowed to step into the village. So also, *vetti* was automatically brought to an end. The deshmukhs and village officials who used to get *vetti* done had either run away from the villages, or even if they remained in the village, they could not raise their head. The movement spread within a few weeks to about 300-400 villages in Nolgonda and neighbouring Warrangal (and Khammam) districts. (32)

Considered to be one of the largest armed peasant uprisings in the history of modern India, the Telangana movement began in July 1946 in the Telengana region and soon turned into a massive violent uprising after the news of the rebellion spread like wildfire. It had a population of 3 to 4 million people and covered an area of about 15,000 square miles at its peak. Peasant rule was established in 2000-3000 villages and was defended by a guerilla army of around 2000 regular members and 10,000 activists. But soon the movement had to face a setback because of weak organizational structures. Barry Pavier in his paper "The Telengana Armed Struggle" writes:

> With such a lack of political organization and lack of self-activity by those whom they were supposed to represent, it is not surprising that the village committees collapsed so abjectly. The Army simply moved in, arrested the committee and anyone who was known to be sympathetic to the CPI – often anyone else who just happened to be around – and there was no organization left to carry on underground work. The cadres were exposed, and those who could, had to get out never to return except as tiny touring groups constantly on the move and capable only of individual assassinations. (1419)

The movement's participants were a diverse group of peasants. Though the rich peasants, or Brahmins, were involved in the struggle, one major accomplishment of the movement was that it brought tenants, sharecroppers, and landless labourers together on a common platform. The rich class of peasants, such as the Kammar and Reddy castes, benefited greatly from the movement, but it also consolidated the strength of the poor peasants, particularly tribals who were victims of the vetti system, i.e., bonded labour[5].

The Communist Party of India gained credibility amongst the peasants and it was able to exercise a say over the entire state for a long time. The Communist Party had its own losses too, as the party split from top to bottom on the grounds of ideology. One group supported the struggle whereas the other group distanced itself stating that the struggle was similar to terrorism. The ideological rift that was enveloping the entire party in the country was particularly sharp and acute in Telangana:

> It is relevant to mention here that during the course of the struggle, particularly during the phase of its last two years, the Communist Party from top to bottom was sharply divided into two hostile camps, one defending the struggle and its achievements and the other denouncing and decrying it as terrorism, etc. (Sundarayya 1972, 10)

The movement was a failure in terms of the demands made by the poor agricultural classes. The gains of poor peasants such as the sharecroppers were quite meager compared to the gains made by rich peasants such as the Kammar and the Reddy castes. However the movement became a source of inspiration for the Communists and for the other peasant-resistance movements which followed thereafter.

In the paper "Tebhaga Movement in Bengal: A Retrospect" (2001), D. Bandyopadhyay records some of the important incidents of the Tebhaga Movement. The Tebhaga movement was led by the sharecroppers of West Bengal, who demanded two-thirds of the produce for themselves reserving one-third for the landlords. The word "Tebhaga" came from the system of harvests. It meant three shares of the total produce. Earlier the crop sharing system was known as barga, adhi, bhagi etc, in which the total produce was divided into two equal shares between the sharecropper and the landlord. In this system of crop-sharing the sharecroppers were called bargadars or adhiars. D.N. Dhanagare in his paper "Peasant protest and politics: The Tebhaga Movement in Bengal (India), 1946-47" (2008), describes how the newly-created tenures and sub-tenures helped the higher caste people and urban interest-groups to exploit the peasantry through investing money and acquiring land. These men of high caste and class included lawyers, merchants, traders, land speculators or brokers and urban moneylenders. These people who were considered to be the *Bhadralok*: the urban middle class of Bengal took the opportunity and became *jotedars* and under-*raiyats* in this process[6]. The peasants protested against the crop-sharing system:

> The movement started first in a village-Atwari (North-west Dinajpur)-where several *bargadar* volunteers cut the paddy crop and carried it to their own *khamar* (thrashing-floor) instead of taking it to their *jotedars' khamars* as they used to do in the past. When the police intervened peasant-police clashes followed. Fearing mass arrests, the *Kisan Sabha* and communist leaders, who spearheaded the movement, went underground. The resistance of sharecroppers was initially more intense in the Thakurgaon sub-division of Dinajpur district, but within a fortnight the movement spread to several villages covering nearly three-fourths of that district. (369)

There were two major reasons behind the Tebhaga movement. First the sharecroppers asserted that the demand for half of the produce was not justified as the labour was done by the peasants. As the landowner's participation was minimal, they had right only to one-third of the crop share and not to half of it. Second, the tenants demanded that the granary should be shifted to their own fields.

The Communist Party of India supported the movement, and under its leadership, peasants declared their zones as Tebhaga areas, and many Tebhaga committees were formed

to govern the area locally. In the conclusion of his paper Dhanagare asserts that the movement was not able to turn into a massive peasant uprising laying the blame squarely on the large-scale politicization of the movement. According to Debal .K. Singha Roy, the movement ended without any immediate result:

> The bloodshed, death and torture faced by the sharecroppers and the poor peasants and their families came to an end in the face of the repressive measures of the state. Indeed the state showed all urgency to establish so-called law and order in this area by ruthlessly demolishing organized resistance of the peasantry against the domination of the landlords and the administrative apparatus of the state itself. (67)

These radical movements aimed to overthrow the power structure prevailing in society. It also gave the peasantry an alternate worldview to fight the oppressive system. In the initial stages these movements were not inclusive of other important issues faced by the lower castes and women per se, but gradually they gave enough scope to articulate issues related to caste and gender oppression. These movements helped the lower-castes and tribal communities to unite for a common cause and the women of these groups also began to play a militant role.

In his paper "Caste in Itself, Caste and Class or Caste in Class" (1999) Ramakrishna Mukherjee debates the relationship between caste and class in Indian society. He says that during the colonial period the high castes were essentially the landlords, big landowners, wholesale traders, moneylenders, etc. The middle castes comprised self-sufficient peasants, small-scale artisans, petty traders, etc. At the lowest stratum were the marginal peasants, landless workers, etc, who generally belonged to the lowest castes and the tribes. According to him this is how "the caste structure had invaginated itself into the class structure evolved in colonial India" (Mukherjee 1759). Deepankar Basu and Debarshi Das in the paper "The Maoist Movement in India: Some Political Economy Considerations" (2013) state that though the Maoist documents considered caste oppression as an "indicator of semi-feudalism", the traditional understanding of the Indian communist parties showed that they did not embrace caste as a "component of either the forces or relations of production" (Basu and Das 373). In fact, caste was understood as a 'superstructural component' prevalent in the Indian society that strengthened the existing mode of production. Writer-activist

Manoranjan Byapari in an interview with Prasun Chaudhuri of The Telegraph expressed his discontent over the communists ignoring caste issues in India. Byapari stated "Communist lost their ground in India because they go by books and theories scripted abroad. Since Marx, Lenin or Mao never spoke about India's caste system, Communists in India worry about class struggles, but ignore the bitter reality of Dalits" ("Communists in India worry about class, but ignore the bitter reality of Dalits").

II. A Brief History of the Naxalbari Uprising

The formation of the United Front Government on 2nd March 1967 in West Bengal strengthened the position of the Left faction in the state reducing the Congress to a minority position. But the newly elected government was not able to find ways to distribute land to the poor and landless peasants. Sumanta Banerjee's book *In the Wake of Naxalbari: History of the Naxalite Movement in India* (1980), recounts the events preceding the incident which led to Naxalbari uprisings. Meanwhile, Charu Mazumdar was organizing the peasants against Harekrishna Konar, a veteran CPI (M) leader and the Minister in charge of Land and Land Revenue in the new United Front Government. Mazumdar explained to his followers that the new land distribution measures were dangerous to the landless peasants and the future of peasant movements. A peasant's conference was held in Siliguri on March 18, 1967 immediately after the formation of the United Front Government. The conference asked the peasants to be prepared for armed resistance to end the monopoly of the landlords and to redistribute the land with the help of peasants' committees and organization:

> The first serious clash between the peasants and the State machinery occurred on May 23, 1967, when a policeman named Sonam Wangdi was killed in an encounter with armed tribals, after a police party had gone to a village to arrest some wanted leaders. On May 25, the police retaliated by sending a force to Prasadjote in Naxalbari, and fired upon a crowd of villagers, killing nine, including six women and two children. While the police version of the incident was that the rebels had attacked them from behind a wall of women and children, forcing the police to open fire, the dissident Marxist leaders alleged that the police deliberately killed the women and children. (Banerjee 112-113)

The Naxalbari uprisings had far-reaching effects. It did not stop only with the violent clashes between the jotedars and peasants. Soon the movement spread like wildfire to the other parts of the region and was able to gather support of the masses. The two chapters "Naxalbari-I: The Hunan of India" and "Naxalbari-II: Battleground of the CPC" from the book *The Spring Thunder and After: A Survey of Maoist and Ultra-Leftist Movements in India: 1962-75* (1975) written by Asish Kumar Roy, describes in detail the happenings during the time of crisis as well as the international support the movement was able to gather for the revolutionary activities. Strikes were organized by the tea garden workers extending support to the peasants. On July 19, 1967, a large number of paramilitary forces were deployed to control the situation. Hundreds were beaten and over a thousand arrested during a ruthless cordon and search operations. Leaders such as Jangal Santal were arrested, while others such as Charu Mazumdar went underground. Many leaders were assassinated. Sobhan Ali, Tribheni Kanu, Tilka Majhi, and Gorkha Majhi were prominent among them.

The Communist Party of China supported the uprising. On June 28, 1967 Radio Peking announced in a broadcast:

> A phase of peasants' armed struggle led by the revolutionaries of the Indian Communist Party has been set up in the countryside in Darjeeling district of West Bengal state of India. This is the front paw of the revolutionary armed struggle launched by the Indian people under the guidance of Mao Tse-tung's teachings. This represents the general orientation of the Indian revolution at the present times. (Roy 103)

A week later, on July 5, 1967, the People's Daily published an article titled "Spring Thunder Over India," which stated:

> A peal of spring thunder has crushed over the land of India. Revolutionary peasants in Darjeeling area have risen in rebellion. Under the leadership of a revolutionary group of the Indian Communist Party, a red area of rural revolutionary armed struggle has been established in India. The Chinese people joyfully applaud this revolutionary storm of the Indian peasants in the

> Darjeeling area as do all the Marxist-Leninists and revolutionary people of the world. (Roy 105)

Willem van Schendel in his book *The Bengal Borderland: Beyond State and Nation In South Asia* (2005) states that the Naxalbari uprising was the first rebellion in Bengal to establish international links. Although it began locally against the exploitation and oppression in the agrarian structure, soon it developed into an international event. In their paper "The Disputed Naxalism in the Present Scenario," Shayamvar Deb and Madhurjya Jyoti Gogoi (2013) describe how revolutionaries in Calcutta launched a massive campaign in support of the Naxalbari uprisings. They even plastered the walls of colleges and streets saying: “Murderer Ajoy Mukherjee (the Chief Minister) must resign.” In a meeting held in the Ram Mohan Library Hall in Calcutta, ‘Naxalbari Peasants Struggle Aid Committee’ was formed which later became the centre of the party (Deb and Gogoi 94).

In addition to the police action, the CPI(M) expelled a large number of its members. Sushital Ray Chowdhury, a member of the West Bengal State Committee and editor of the Bengali party organ, was prominent among them. Other members who were expelled included Ashim Chatterjee, Parimal Das Gupta, Asit Sen, Suniti Kumar Ghosh, Saroj Datta, and Madhav Mukherjee. Darjeeling district and Siliguri sub-division committees were disbanded. The Naxalbari revolution engulfed Birbhum, Debra-Gopiballavpur, Srikakulam, Lakhimpur-Kheri and Mushahari. West Bengal, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, and Uttar Pradesh saw a significant increase in Naxalbari-inspired struggles, and Maoist foundations sprang in almost every corner of the country. (Roy 1975, 116-117).

Naxalbari was able to restore the revolutionary spirit of Marxism on the soil of the Indian subcontinent challenging the ideological stand of the CPI(M). Prakash Karat in the Marxist document “Naxalism Today; At an Ideological Deadend” (1985) states:

> In 1968, when the naxalite left-adventurist deviation challenged the CPI(M)’s Marxist-Leninist-based stand on ideological and programmatic issues, they put up a left-sectarian position on a whole range of question pertaining to the international communist movement and the path of the Indian revolution. The naxalite condemned the CPI(M) as ‘neo-revisionists’ on the question of the

> character of the Indian state, stage of the revolution, strategy tactics, assessment of the Soviet Union and the international correlation of class forces. (Karat 1985)

Naxalbari became a role model both in terms of ideology and praxis. The movement was able to rouse the sentiments of many people in West Bengal, but finally it had to go underground due to some tactical errors. One of the reasons for the miscalculations in the movement can be ascribed to the dominance of upper-castes in the peasant movements of West Bengal. In fact, Charu Mazumdar himself was from an upper middle-class well-to-do family, who left his life of ease and joined the revolution to mobilize the peasants. Marcus. F. Franda in the book *State Politics in India* (1968) edited by Myron Weiner discusses the issues of caste in the movements and organizations of West Bengal. The dominance of upper-caste in the organizations of peasants can be seen in West Bengal since the 1920s. In the paper "The Naxalites and the Maoist Movement in India: Birth, Demise, and Reincarnation", Dipak K. Gupta discusses the continuation of this dominance in the Naxalite movement. He states:

> Like all other mass movements, the Naxalite movement was launched on the backs of the youth. Based on an intelligence report we note that 78% of the participants were below 30 years of age. However, despite the efforts of the Party to portray this as a movement of the poor, tribal people, and belonging to the scheduled caste, the vast majority of them (65.33%), in fact came from upper caste Hindu families. Also, 41 percent of them had post-secondary education (college students or graduates), and over 41 percent had high school education. Less than 20 percent were illiterate. (Gupta 2007, 171)

The result of this dominance is seen in the organizational difficulties where at many times the upper-caste leaders tended to articulate their own interests in the name of peasant movements.

According to P. Routledge's paper "Space, mobility, and collective action: India's Naxalite movement" (1997), the Naxalbari uprising was a reaction to the CPI and CPI(M)'s revisionist concepts of India as a capitalist country with "feudal remnants and analysis of

India as a semi-feudal country." The founder members of the CPI (ML) contested the revisionist theory that India's ruling bourgeoisie is national in nature and that India achieved genuine independence in 1947. Rather, they stated unequivocally that the ruling bourgeoisie is comprador, Indian independence is bogus, and India is a semi-colony. The supporters of the Naxalite movement defined the revolution as the new stage of democracy, they considered the enemies of this revolution as imperialism, feudalism, and comprador bureaucrat capitalism, and the revolution's friends to be the peasants, middle-classes, workers, and the national bourgeoisie. The peasants were regarded as the main force, with the working class as the leading force. The followers of Naxalism opposed the CPI and CPI (M)'s path of 'peaceful transition' and supported a protracted people's war. They stated unequivocally that the path to liberation lay in guerilla warfare, the formation of a people's army, the establishment of liberated base areas in the countryside, and the gradual encirclement and capture of cities. Hence, the immediate goal of the revolution was the establishment of a people's democratic dictatorship (of the four classes) as the first step towards socialism. The final and ultimate goal being communism[7].

The paper "Political Ideas of Marxist-Leninist Communists in India" (1971) by J.C. Johari illustrates the theoretical dimensions of radical communists in India. Politically it rejected the parliamentary form of government and called for a boycott of elections. It fought against economism, legalism and reformism in methods of work and organization. It was against the two superpowers, US imperialism and Soviet imperialism, and considered them to be the main enemies of the people of the world. It exposed the modern revisionist character of the Soviet Union and declared India as a multi-national country and supported the right of nationalities to self-determination including secession. In terms of ideology, it fought revisionism and all forms of bourgeois ideology within the working-class movement, and strongly supported Marxism-Leninism-Mao Ze Dong ideas as modern Marxism. It established Mao's thought as a development of Marxism-Leninism in particular, and launched a large campaign to popularise it. This had a long-term impact, particularly on the country's students and youth. Although the Naxalbari uprising had to go underground for a short time due to tactical errors, it left an indelible mark on the country's revolutionary movement (Johari 1971, 07-08).

P.C. Joshi in his book *Naxalism: At a Glance* (2013) discusses the origins, programme and social composition of the movement. Charu Mazumdar was able to turn the peasants' struggle into a massive militant movement with the help of his counterparts. Though the Naxalbari movement was crushed, the politics and ideology that drove the uprising remained alive. In a conference held by the 'Naxalbari Peasants Aid Committee', the 'All India Coordination Aid Committee of Revolutionaries of the CPI(M)' was formed on November 1967. This committee propagated Marxism-Leninism and the thought of Mao ZeDong and united all communist revolutionaries on Mao's party line. The coordination committee was renamed the 'All India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries' (AICCCR) at its second meeting in May 1968, on the eve of the first anniversary of the Naxalbari uprising, with Sushital Ray Chowdhury as its convenor. "*Deshabrati* was brought out in Bengali. *Liberation* was edited by Suniti Kumar Ghosh" (Joshi 22). While describing his experiences of the Naxalite movement Arun Prosad Mukherjee in his book *Maoist 'Spring Thunder': The Naxalite Movement (1967-1972)* (2007), discusses the ways in which these papers propagated class annihilation:

> Kolkata and its suburb had the harrowing experience of witnessing the handiwork of many such murder maniacs created through the above booklet and many other writings in the CPI(ML) mouth-pieces Deshabrati (edited by Saroj Dutta) and Liberation (edited initially by Sushital Roy Choudhuri and later by Suniti Ghosh). Deshabrati in particular used to whip up the murder mania by presenting distorted and glory accounts of the 'heroic deeds' of such Action Squads ('guerrilla bands' in CM's words), thereby creating a dangerous competition among the action squads in regard to their 'success rate' (i.e. number of murders committed). A number of youths belonging to such squads confessed to police about this trend. (Mukherjee 2007, 13)

The circulation of *Liberation* touched 2500 and *Deshabrati* reached 40,000. Throughout 1968, the Naxalbari fire spread far and wide, and the struggle in Srikakulam was also escalating into a major uprising. Meanwhile, on February 8, 1969, the AICCCR passed a resolution to form a new party. The Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) was established at the AICCCR plenary session meeting on April 19-22, 1969. To draught the Party constitution and prepare for the Party Congress, a coordination committee was

formed. Kanu Sanyal announced the party's formation at a May Day rally at the Calcutta Maidan (Deb and Gogoi 96).

Rajat Kujur in his paper "Naxal Movement in India: A profile" (2008) discusses the formations of many new groups and organizations inside the party. He also describes in detail the political agenda of these groups and organizations. The Dakshin Desh group and the APCCCR (Andhra Pradesh Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries) were opposed to the decision and refused to join the party's formation. The Dakshin Desh group objected on the grounds that it was premature to form the Party at that time, and it was also opposed to the method of formation of the Party, whereas the APCCCR disagreed with the CPI's political line (M-L). The Dakshin Desh Group later formed the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC), while the APCCCR maintained its rightward deviations, eventually splitting into two factions—the T. Nagireddy-D.V. Rao faction of the UCCCRI (M-L) and the C.P. Reddy faction, which merged with the revisionist Satyanarayan Singh faction of the CPI(M-L) in 1975, only to split again (Kujur 2008, 11).

The government by mid-1969, took strict action against the leaders of the CPI(M-L) by deploying para-military forces to hunt them down. The movement went completely underground. Even the circulation of *Liberation* and *Deshabrati* had to go underground because of continuous government raids.

The Naxalbari movement was joined by the youth, mainly college students. University and college campuses in Calcutta turned into breeding ground for revolutionary activities. In the introduction to his book *Red Sun: Travels in Naxalite Country* (2008) Sudeep Chakravarti describes how college and University campuses turned into battlegrounds between the police and the students:

> Walls, especially near college and university campuses, were covered in graffiti, in angry letters and exhortations against 'oppressors', red flags, depictions of police firing and torture in lurid blood-red. Studies would be blanked for days, even after the Bangladesh war of 1971, the euphoria of victory forgotten as violence peaked in the streets. (Chakravarti 16)

Presidency College and the Hindu Hostel were main centers of Maoist activities. These activists were able to win many student union elections and emerged as a strong power to protest against the authorities during the period 1967-70. The student wing—the Progressive Students Coordination Committee (PSCC) was able to capture almost all the student's union of different institutions in and around Calcutta. Later at a call from the party hundreds of students from these colleges gave up their studies and threw in their lot with the poor peasants. They became victims of the brutal massacres unleashed by the government during 1970-71. Apart from the colleges in Calcutta, it was the students of Andhra Pradesh's Guntur Medical College who were the first to support the Naxalbari uprisings. Thousands of young people were drawn to Maoism in Punjab, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and even on the campuses of Delhi and Bombay. Naxalbari came to represent justice, truth, equality, humanity, and self-respect for the oppressed.

III. A Brief History of Communist Ideology in India

Communist Party was formed in the year 1920 in Tashkent with Ambani Mukherjee and Manvendra Nath Roy (M.N. Roy) as its founding members. In India, it was formed in Kanpur (UP) in the year 1925 as the Communist Party of India. Although the Kanpur conference could not define a proper policy to be adopted, it adopted the resolutions forwarded by the CPI at the Gaya Congress. Nonetheless, this conference bought together the representatives of some of the early Communist groups which were formed in Calcutta, Bombay, Madras, Punjab and the North[8]:

> It was this central committee with subsequent changes which acted as a guiding centre and functioning on an all-India plane in the next period of 1926 to 1929 (up to Meerut arrests), initiated a new mass movement in the country- the building of the first militant mass trade unions based on class struggle and a peasant movement fighting against landlordism. (Adhikari 2)

The activities of the CPI became prominent from the year 1939 when World War II broke out. With the Soviet State's entry into the war, the communist party's leadership declared that it was a people's war, and that India should take up arms and cooperate with the British government to fight the fascists. The CPI opposed Gandhi's "Quit India" movement as well

as all Congress party anti-British activities. The Muslim League's demand for separate homelands for Muslims was viewed as 'sectarian arrogance' by P.C. Joshi, the then CPI Secretary-General.

The year 1945 can be regarded as the beginning of differences amongst the CPI members, when P.C. Joshi, the Secretary-General of the communist party, advanced a new set of guidelines. He decided to opt for the parliamentary method and to fight the provincial assembly elections of 1945. This led to large scale differences among the CPI members, where one faction supported and justified P. C. Joshi's assessment, while the other faction opposed vehemently the electoral strategy. The ruling party's prestige was very high because of the good name it carried leading the long history of freedom struggle whereas the CPI drew inspiration from external powers[9].

In the book *The Naxalite Movement in India: origin and failure of the Maoist revolutionary strategy in West Bengal, 1967-1971* (1979) Sohail Jawaid unfolds the issues that fragmented the CPI into various smaller units. The process of division started way back in the year 1945, when CPI decided to fight the elections for the 'Provincial Assemblies' to be conducted by the British. The party believed that by fighting the elections it would be able to replace the government formed by Jawaharlal Nehru with a democratic front of the people and accordingly it published an election manifesto. While Joshi was busy preparing the strategies for election, the country was facing serious internal disturbances in the form of "strikes of workers, communal riots between Hindus and Moslems, the Mutiny in the Navy etc" (Jawaid 09). Leaders like B.T. Ranadive opposed Joshi's recommendation of participating in the elections, suggesting deploying strikes instead and transforming these into revolutionary actions to throw out the Congress government. These differences in ideological approaches between the CPI members took a serious turn during the second congress of the Communist Party, with Calcutta as its venue beginning from February 28 to March 6, 1948. Many members backed Ranadive's version and saw Joshi's policies as rightist revisionism. Following the rifts between the revisionists and the radicals, the second Congress of the CPI held at Calcutta in 1948 seemed, "as a battleground for Joshi's group versus Ranadive's group on the issue as to what strategy should be adopted to achieve political power" (Jawaid 16). As a result, Joshi was sacked from his position of Secretary-General and B.T. Ranadive was elected as the new Secretary-General.

The new policies of Ranadive were based on two factors; one was the worker's strikes in the urban areas and second factor was the Telangana peasants' insurrection. But Ranadive laid more emphasis on the struggle in the cities rather than in the countryside. Jawaid asserts that "While the proletarian revolution in the cities failed, the relative success of the agrarian struggle in Telengana had a profound impact upon the Communist Party" (Jawaid 10). As a result, at the conference comprising members of the Central Executive Committee in May, 1950, Ranadive was put down from the post of Secretary-General by Rajeswara Rao who supported the Chinese line of revolutionary strategy. However, the policy conflict persisted, and it was during the clash between Ranadive and Rao that the CPI received instructions from the CPSU to use the parliamentary method to oppose government policies. These suggestions put forward by CPSU were welcomed by leaders like Ajoy Ghosh but on the other hand leaders like Rao totally rejected them. As such there were many internal conflicts on ideological perspectives which paved the way for a split in the CPI.

With significant successes in the legislative assemblies of Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, the CPI shuffled its policies and thought that it would be able to replace the Nehru government through parliamentary politics. After attending the Communist Party of the Soviet Union's twentieth Congress in February 1956, Ajoy Ghosh proposed far more flexible policies to the CPI's Central Executive Committee. As a result, the party decided to avoid revolutionary tactics and declared that it would fight for socialism, then communism, in India through peaceful means. As such the party decided to lay emphasis on the struggle for strengthening of democracy:

> By the fifth Congress of the CPI, held at Amritsar in April, 1958, the leadership was confident that the parliamentary takeover as in Kerala could be attained also in other states. It was at that session that, for the first time, the party accepted the perspective of a possible peaceful transition to communism in the country. The party declared that a situation in the entire world was created where, due to the phenomenal advance of popular forces and of the socialist camp, possibilities existed for a peaceful transition to communism. There was no need for civil wars or insurgent movements to advance communism in this world of the atomic weapons. (Jawaid 14)

The Chinese line Revolution implemented in 1949 created complications among several Indian communists. Revolutionaries from Andhra Pradesh such as P. Saundarayya and Rajeshwara Rao pointed out that the Indian revolution differed from the Russian Revolution in many ways and was similar to that of the Chinese Revolution. They insisted on following Mao's concept of 'New Democracy' in India. The international factors concerning the ideological questions which created a rift in the Communist party of India since the later 1940s is discussed by Tarun Kumar Banerjee in his book *The Naxalite Movement: Currents and Crosscurrents* (2010). This polarization created more complexities among the party members. P.C. Joshi, who was against the policies put forward by Ranadive, found himself in conflict with the group of communists from Andhra Pradesh. This led to the formation of three groups within the party, i.e. Leftist, Rightist, and Centrist. Rajeshwara Rao replaced Ranadive as the Secretary-General in May 1950. This replacement symbolized the reception of the Maoist line of strategy for the CPI instead of the revolutionary tactics adopted in Russia.

Prior to the 1952 General Elections, the Communists of the centrist faction led by Joshi and Dange believed that India was not prepared to launch a Maoist revolutionary strategy. However, the Leftist faction opposed them, claiming that India was prepared for an armed uprising based on the Chinese revolution. As the centrists attained a strong position within the party, Ajoy Ghosh became the Secretary-General on July 1, 1950. Ghosh was against an armed uprising and insisted that the members of the communist party should wait for the results of the electoral process to come to a conclusion. Ghosh's proposition was highly applauded by party members "when the party appeared as a second largest party in the Parliament after elections" (Jawaid 17).

Sanjay Seth in the article "From Maoism to postcolonialism? The Indian 'Sixties', and beyond" (2006), pays attention to the divisions between the Indian Communists that led to the rise of ultra-leftism in West Bengal. Describing the inner conflicts in the CPI, it illustrates the developments that led to the division of CPI(M) into CPI(M-L). It shows how the Communist party was divided in itself and how the strife amongst its leaders led to the formation of various smaller units resulting in the Naxalbari uprisings and the developments thereafter. As West Bengal was the state that gave birth to Seth focuses his attention primarily on this region while dealing with the political changes.

Further complications arose after the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of Soviet Union at Kremlin in February 1956. The Chinese faction and the Kremlin faction contradicted each other: where the Kremlin faction saw the possibility of peaceful transition, the Chinese faction opposed it. The Chinese delegation led by Mao Tse-tung disagreed with Kremlin's assessment and saw Nehru as the leader of the bourgeoisie class. The paper "The Maoist Insurgency in India: between crime and revolution" (2012) by Prem Mahadevan describes the conflict between the CPSU and CPC which in the end divided the Indian Communists on the grounds of ideology. "Upon the emergence of tensions between the Soviet Union and China, the militants split into pro-Soviet and pro-Chinese factions. It was the latter who subsequently formed the vanguard of the Maoist rebellion in India" (Mahadevan 204). The Left faction on the other hand was far away from the Kremlin position, although it did not publicly commit itself to the Chinese thesis. It stated that although the party had chosen the parliamentary process to attain power, it would remain ever ready to launch revolutionary tactics if the ruling class resisted the change.

During the second General Elections held in 1957, the Communist Party of India with other leftist forces launched campaigns. The CPI gained a dramatic victory and was able to form government in alliance with Indian National Congress. Despite such achievement, the Left forces opposed the idea of achieving power through parliamentary means. Finally, on July 31, 1959, the Central Government imposed President's Rule over Kerala and dissolved the Assembly, solidifying their position.

The party was further divided into two schools on the controversial issue of the border between India and China in the late 1950s. One of the schools was led by Ajoy Ghosh which supported and justified the standpoint of the Indian government, whereas the other group, led by R. Ramamurti, A.K. Gopalan and E.M.S. Namboodiripad, opposed Ghosh stating that the party would oppose any kind of aggression from the Indian side:

> In fact, while in the days following the India-China border war of 1962, the West Bengal State Unit of the CPI presented a squalid scene of unprecedented factionalism between the Bhowani Sen–Somnath Lahiri faction, on the one hand, and Promode Das Gupta–Jyoti Basu–Harekrishna Konar faction, on the other, it was the second-grade leaders of the party in the West Bengal who

were carrying on a struggle on the ideological front against the "revisionist" leadership of the party. (Roy 1975, 28)

The Communist Party of Soviet Union supported India on this issue and on October 31, 1959, Khrushchev opined that China should be liberal enough in resolving the disputes with India. The Sino-Indian border issue was largely ignored in the sixth party Congress, held at Vijayawada in the year 1961.

The Central Committee of the communist party responded to the situation much later on November 1, 1962, and condemned the Chinese aggression. As a result, the three most important leftist leaders, Jyoti Basu, P. Saundarayya, and H. K. S. Surjeet, resigned. This was the first open demonstration against the CPI's revisionist and anti-Chinese policies. The resignations clearly indicated that there would be further split in the party if it did not abandon its support to Kremlin and Nehru and adopt for the electoral process. The passing away of Ajoy Ghosh on January 1962, the Secretary-General at that point of time, was a major blow to the party. It created such competition among the three groups within the party that the constitution had to be amended and the post of Secretary_general was divided into two with a Chairman and a Secretary-General instead of only one Secretary-General. Meanwhile, Dange became the Chairman from the rightist faction and the position of Secretary-General was handed over to E.M.S. Namboodiripad of the centrist faction.

Several changes occurred within the party prior to the dissenters convening their first session at Tenali in July 1964. On behalf of the other members, Jyoti Basu declared that they were the Communist Party of India and rejected Dange's group. He went on to say that the next party meeting would be held in Calcutta in October 1964.. The division within the CPI was complete with the formation of a new Communist party named, Communist Party of India (Marxist)- CPI(M).

The inner-party ideological struggles (1953-1967) of the Maoist radicals within the CPI and CPI(M), is well documented in the book *Towards Naxalbari 1953-1967: An Account of Inner-Party Ideological Struggle* (2012), written by Pradip Basu. It must be mentioned that the West Bengal unit of the party was strongly against revisionist policies since 1947. Strong opposition came from the communist party unit of West Bengal when the Secretary-General of the party decided to form an alliance with the Nehru government and

the Congress party in 1947. The West Bengal communists even stated that they would not follow the instructions laid by the Central leadership and circulated pamphlets instructing the communists of the state to adopt the revolutionary line to fight the fascist Congress regime and other corrupt officials. These ideological struggles finally resulted in the Naxalbari peasant uprising in 1967.

The election results of the Legislative Assembly in West Bengal discredited the policies of the rebel groups as the party had decided to contest the general elections of 1952 and was able to win 38 Legislative Assembly seats in West Bengal. The schism between the Central leadership of CPI and the West Bengal State Party unit reached a climax when Hare Krishna Konar, a member of the West Bengal unit, visited China without the Central Executive Committee's permission. The Central Committee asked Konar to explain why he should not face disciplinary action. To support Konar, the state unit responded that any action taken against Konar would be interpreted as an attack on the entire West Bengal unit.

On April 11, 1964, at the CPI's National Council, Dange declined to agree with the demands made by the members of the CPI. As a result, the West Bengal unit's Secretary, Promode Das Gupta, and other members refused to accept Dange's leadership. To take note of the situation and find a solution, the leadership of the central committee of CPI directed Bhawani Sen Gupta to visit Calcutta, but no progress was recorded. As a last resort, the Central Executive Committee suspended the state unit and established a new committee under the leadership of Bhawani Sen Gupta. The split within the Communist Party of India was completed with the formation of CPI(M). At the CPI(M) delegates' conference in Calcutta in October 1964, the party unanimously elected a Presidium of three members: Jyoti Basu, A.K. Gopalan, and T. Naggi Reddy.(Basu 41-67).

The paper "The Naxalbari Movement" (1990) by Amitabha Chandra gives a detailed account of the division in the CPI(M). The rift in the CPI(M) started soon after the Naxalbari movement. The militant members of the CPI(M), who participated or actively supported the movement were expelled by the CPI(M) leadership. Many other members also left the party for its policies. These dissident members later went on to form the third Communist party of India, "The Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) CPI(M-L) on April 22, 1969" (Chandra 32).

The CPI(M) radicals were not happy with the programme adopted to achieve the objectives of the party through "peaceful means". The Calcutta Congress on the other hand was able to defeat the amendment of the Andhra Pradesh State Party adopted on the conference on the eve of the 1964 Calcutta Congress. The Calcutta Congress also rejected similar kinds of amendments put forward by some delegates from West Bengal which characterized the Indian state as 'neo colonial' and emphasized the adoption of the programme of 'armed struggle'. One of the notable dissident members was Charu Mazumdar, who had written significant articles between the years 1965-67, putting forward a theoretical structure to these dissident views. These papers were later published by the CPI (M-L) in the form of booklet, entitled "The historic Anti-Revisionist Eight Documents written by our respected Leader, Immortal martyr Comrade Charu Mazumdar" (Chandra 1990, 24).

The Naxalbari peasants' uprising created stir among the members of the CPI(M). After the formation of the United Front Government in West Bengal, two of the CPI(M) leader, Jyoti Basu and Hare Krishna Konar became the Home Minister and Land Revenue Minister. Soon after the swearing-in ceremony Konar took up the policy of quick distribution of surplus land among the landless and stop the eviction of the sharecroppers in order to implement the land reform measures which were long overdue. Despite the Home Minister's call to distribute the surplus land to the landless, a peasant's conference was held on March 18, 1967, by the dissident members of the CPI(M) of the Siliguri sub-division in the Darjeeling district. This conference gave a clarion call to the peasant committees and organizations to end the monopoly of ownership of land by the landlords and to arm the peasants to destroy the resistance put forward by the landlords or any of their associates. Two main organizers of the conference were Kanu Sanyal, a member of the Darjeeling District Secretariat of the CPI(M) and Jangal Santhal, a tribal peasant leader of the CPI(M) and the President of the Siliguri sub-divisional Krishak Samity (Chandra 1990, 25).

The Conference created an immediate stir among the peasants mobilizing revolutionary activities against the landlords: "By May 1967, the rebellions peasants could establish their control in the Naxalbari, Kharibari and Phansidewa regions in the Darjeeling district" (Chandra 26). The clash between the police and the armed tribal peasants on May 23, 1967, turned violent injuring three policemen. The police inspector, Sonam Wangdi, died in the

hospital two days later and in return the police opened fire on a crowd on May 25 1967 in Naxalbari killing ten persons, including seven women and two children. The attempts to control the extremist members by the CPI(M) leadership went in vain. In order to control the dissidents, the CPI(M) leadership decided to take stern action against the rebels. Thus, the West Bengal State Committee of the CPI(M), in its meeting in June 1967, expelled nine leading members of the party. It also expelled the Editorial Board of the *Desh-Hitashi*, the Bengali Weekly of the CPI(M), which included Charu Mazumdar, Saroj Datta, Kanu Sanyal, Souren Basu, Asit Sen and Parimal Dasgupta. Not only this, the Darjeeling District Committee was disbanded and around 400 members were expelled for anti-party activities. The expelled members condemned the CPI(M) leadership and considered it as "neo-revisionist" (Chandra 30).

The AICCR (All-India Co-ordination Committee of Revolutionaries) was formed on November 13, 1967 out of the All-India Naxalbari O Krishak Sangram Sahayak Committee, which acted as as a liaison between the Maoist groups both outside and inside CPI(M). The AICCR transformed itself into the All-India Co-ordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries (AICCCR) which on the very day issued two documents and gave a call to boycott elections. It was Charu Mazumdar, the supremo of AICCCR, who thought that enough ground work had already been done, and decided to form a new party. It was in a plenary session meet of the AICCCR that the dissolution of committee was declared and a new party was formed, the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), CPI(M-L)[10].

> It was therefore, in pursuance of the unanimous decision taken in the first week of February 1969 that the AICCCR met in a plenary session in Calcutta between April 19 and 22 and formed India's third Communist Party-the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), "based on the thought of Mao Tse-tung", on April 22, the one hundredth birthday of Lenin and also announced the dissolution of the Committee itself, after setting up a Central Organising Committee to hold the first Congress of the Party at an appropriate time. (Roy 1975, 147-148)

On the same day, i.e. on April 22, 1969, the Central organizing committee of the CPI(M-L) adopted the Political Resolution and the Resolution on Party Organization. The formal announcement of the formation of CPI(M-L) was made on May 1, 1969, at a huge May Day

meeting, attended by more than 10,000 people "at the foot of the Octerlony Movement (now Sahid Bhawan) and was presided over by Asit Sen and Kanu Sanyal" (Chandra 12).

IV. Issues of Conflict: Repression, Rebellion and Violence

Peasant uprisings in India have a long history and during the period 1783-1900, over hundred different cases of violent peasant uprisings took place in India's vast countryside. Although the Naxalbari peasant uprising of 1967 is widely regarded as India's first major peasant uprising, its roots can be traced back to two major peasant struggles that occurred prior to India's independence from British rule in 1947—the Tebhaga movement in Bengal and the Telengana struggle in Andhra Pradesh. The conflictual relationship of dominance and subordination between peasants and landlords during the colonial days is very well discussed in Ranajit Guha's seminal book *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (1999). Challenging the idea that peasants are powerless, Guha proposes that "Insurgency was thus the necessary antithesis of colonialism during its entire phase between its incipience and coming of age" (02).

In the paper "The Fire Within: Naxalite Insurgency Violence in India" (2007), Pratul Ahuja and Rajat Ganguly state that the grinding poverty, exploitation and inequality which have prevailed in the rural areas for centuries, are the root causes of the Naxalite insurgency in India. This conflict between the rich and the peasants was the result of 'too much land concentrated in too few hands' with widespread inequality in the ownership of land in the rural settings:

> The magnitude of the inequality in ownership of land could be gauged from the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) data for the 1950's which showed that over one-fifth of all rural households were landless and another 25 percent owned tiny fragments of lands smaller than one acre. (253)

Along with land ownership inequality, the lack of land tenure reform, combined with a surplus rural labour force, ensured that agricultural labourers' wages remained significantly lower than factory workers' earnings. So, to meet agricultural needs such as fertilizers and seeds or to pay for festivals and other such occasions, small farmers were often forced to borrow money from moneylenders and the farmers with rich background. They were forced to pay exorbitant rates for the money borrowed, pushing them into a malicious cycle of debt.

The lack of any institutional credit gave a freehand to the moneylenders and the big farmers. To overcome the situation the peasant had no choice but to mortgage his small plot of land and gradually give it up to the big farmers to repay the debts, "thereby reducing his status to that of a tenant or sharecropper" (Ahuja and Ganguly 253).

At the backdrop of India's long history of peasant rebellions, lies the unbearable economic domination and social humiliation that the tribals, Dalits, and the poor peasants had to face for centuries. In his paper "For an Indian History of Peasant Struggles" (1988), Partha Chatterjee talks about the challenges that lie in the historiography of peasant struggles in India. Describing the conflicting relations between the peasants and upper-class sections of society in historical terms he says:

> To the colonial mind, the Indian peasants were simple, ignorant, exploited by landlords, traders and moneylenders, respectful of authority, grateful to those in power who cared for and protected them, but also volatile in temperament, superstitious and often fanatical, easily aroused by agitators and troublemakers from among the Indian elite who wanted to use them for their narrow political designs. (07)

These agitations highlight the Indian state's inability to improve the socioeconomic conditions of the oppressed. Along with the failure to improve the condition, there is also the tilt of the Indian state towards the corporate sector while implementing agrarian reform policies, which later turns the poor masses to rebel against the state and forces them to adopt violent measures: "The collusion between sarkar and zamindar was indeed a part of the common experience of the poor and the subaltern at the local level nearby everywhere" (Guha 1999, 07). In the paper "Adivasis, Naxalites and Indian Democracy" (2007) Ramachandra Guha examines the deprived condition of the adivasis during the six decades of democracy and development in India. He further states that it is not cultural or ecological distinctiveness, but their economic and social disadvantage that unites adivasis the most. Land alienation or the expropriation of forests, lesser representation of the adivasis in the cabinet, are some major reasons behind the protests of these peoples. Finally, Asish Kumar Roy sums up "that in India imperialism and feudalism constitute the common enemies of all the classes of people except the feudal landlords" (Roy 1975, 63).

Partha Chatterjee in his book, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (1993) analyses the dialectical relation between the peasants and the landlords. He states that they are situated at two ends of the same pole, at one end he places the dominators (the state or the landlords or moneylenders) and at the other end the peasants. Further he describes the power relations that exist between the peasants and the representatives of the feudal structure:

> If domination is one aspect of this relation of power, its opposed aspect must be resistance. The dialectical opposition of the two gives this relation its unity. This opposition also creates the possibility for a movement within that relation, and thus makes it possible for there to be a history of the relation of dominance and subordination. (161)

Jonathan Kennedy and Sunil Purushotham's paper "Beyond Naxalbari: A Comparative Analysis of Maoist Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Independent India" (2012) describes in brief the waves that led to the Naxalbari uprising and the spread of the movement to other parts of the country. With the political turmoil in the entire country and in the state of West Bengal in particular, many new parties entered the political arena. The Congress was able to win the 1967 elections but had to face defeat in the subsequent elections in many states including West Bengal, where the intra-elite tussle to obtain state power was taking a new form. The CPI(M), taking the portfolios of Home and Land Revenue, was able to form the first United Front coalition government. This led to the intra-CPI(M) conflict, where the radicals accused the party of indirectly strengthening the state system.

Insurgent activities were documented on the same day that the United Front was sworn into office in March 1967. The Maoist faction did this to distinguish itself from the mainstream CPI(M) and to demonstrate its autonomy:

> Over the next few months, the Naxalbari cadres occupied lands, harvested crops, burnt land records, cancelled debts, and passed death sentences on oppressive landlords. By May 1967, the high point of the movement in Naxalbari, the rebels claimed to control three hundred square miles of territory, although the police reports suggest it was not more than seventy. (Mohanty 1977; Banerjee 2008; qtd in Kennedy and Purushotham 2012)

At the beginning, the United Front government handled the situation moderately and tried to negotiate with the radicals. But upon pressure from the central government, it cracked down the rebellious activities with severe police operations. Though the rebellion in Naxalbari was crushed yet their activities continued during 1967-1971 in West Bengal. The AICCCR was formed to bring together supporters of the Naxalbari type of revolution. The AICCCR later turned into CPI(M-L) and joined the United Front government when it came back to power after the President's Rule. Under increasing state pressure, the insurgents were forced to abandon their original strategy of a rural-based movement fueled by mass support from sharecroppers and an agrarian revolution.

The revolutionaries were largely unsuccessful in gaining widespread support and establishing rural bases. This was due in part to the rural population's reliance on the CPI(M). Looking at the support from the rural masses:

> the CPI (Marxist) dramatically increased their support base over the period of the insurgency: they won 43 out of 280 seats and 2,293,026 votes in the 1967 state elections, and 80 seats and 2,676981 votes in 1969—making them the largest political party in West Bengal. (Kennedy and Purushotham 846)

Moreover, the CPI(M-L) committed multiple errors at strategic levels as Mazumdar believed that the rebellious activities would turn into mass movement spontaneously. Thus, the rebels failed to take Mao's most basic point regarding the importance of mass support in guerrilla warfare. The inability to generate mass support and build base areas had several consequences in the long run.

The very first consequence was change in the strategy by the revolutionaries. In 1969 the leadership emphasized the annihilation of class enemies as the highest form of class struggle indicating that there were other alternatives as well. Finally, throughout 1970 and 1971 the leadership considered annihilation as the only means that could solve their problems. But due to the lack of mass organizations to mobilize and spread awareness among the population, the 'annihilation line' was not well adopted by the local people. This posed a great threat to the workings of CPI(M-L) cadres and leaders contributing to the breakdown of the movement. (Kennedy and Purushotham 847)

The second consequence led to the urban middle class joining the movement, particularly students from various colleges and universities. Drawing inspiration from the Chinese line of struggle Mazumdar encouraged students to join the movement instead of wasting energy in examinations. Many students went to join the movement in the countryside and helped in forming a support base of the revolutionaries, because of which "the insurgent organization became unbalanced and overly reliant on those who were referred to by their rivals as "middle class romantics" (Ray 2002:4; qtd.in Kennedy and Purushotham 847).

The third consequence came in the form of state repression against students residing in the rural areas. Due to police pressure these students started coming back to their native places such as Calcutta and other towns in West Bengal from 1970 onwards, and continued their activities in the urban centers. As a result, their focus shifted from the class enemies to the political rivals. Tension between the CPI(M) and CPI(M-L) increased during the 1971 elections. This political rivalry affected the revolutionaries, reduced their middle-class support base and finally helped the Congress party to strengthen their position.

The state's approach in controlling the movement continues to remain the same. While dealing with the Naxalite militancy, the state's prime action is the physical elimination of the cadres either during the 'combing operations' or fake encounters. Apart from that, "detention and questioning of suspected Naxalites sympathizers has become a routine feature of police action" (Ahuja and Ganguly 268). Throughout the movement it was not only the militant cadres who faced brutal torture from the opposite side but also the sympathizers as well as any suspected man by the state forces. In the Introduction to the book *The Maoist Movement in India: Perspectives and Counterperspectives* (2013) Santosh Paul narrates instances of violence and counter violence between the state forces and the Maoist rebels. In the name of raids, the state forces carried out massive atrocities not only on the suspected families but also on other poor villagers who came under their eye. In order to escape from the ravages of the state, the poor people often complied with the police and acted accordingly. This resulted in killing of the villagers who acted as the agents of state forces. Hence "the violence often does not end with of the police or the armed constabulary as the sufferers. The victims of Maoism are often the very people the movement seeks to protect" (09).

Apart from the state's own actions, it also engaged the local villagers who were not in support of the Naxalites. The 'people's court' in the Naxalite dominated areas and people had to accept the judgements of these courts. These people were even frustrated at some decisions of the Naxalites and hence had a grudge against the rebels. When the state was not able to tackle the rebel groups, it tried to engage the local tribal people, who were well aware of the area covered by the Naxalites and also the tactics used by them[11]:

> The battle against Maoist moved from intensive military and police action to the bizarre. The state of Chhattisgarh began arming thousands of illiterate and barely literate youth from the tribal tracts with little or no training and with even lesser clarity on the chain of command to battle with the Maoist. (Paul 12)

Life in the underground was a tumultuous one as the Naxalites were in constant threat of either being caught or killed in the name of encounter. The cadres who were caught by the state forces were released half dead or killed in the process of interrogation. Female cadres met an even worse fate as they were raped in order to demean the other community. They were not even safe with their fellow male cadres as in many cases they were raped and tortured by their own group members. Protecting the legacy of the movement, these women were often silent when it came to speaking about the atrocities they faced. As a result, these terror stories remained untold, and thereby unknown, in the long run:

> So, while the figure of the raped woman is exemplary of the ravages of terror, the gendered vulnerability that structured the underground life of the movement has scarcely been included in historical understandings of Naxalbari violence (for example Banerjee 1984, and Ray 1998). (Roy 2013, 12)

The armed forces not only fought the rebel forces, they also occupied the lands inhabited by the tribal people. The local indigenous people were mobilized from their lands in the name of development projects. Often these people were at loss as the compensation paid for their land was not sufficient. Moreover, these episodes of land occupancy affected the tribal ways of life[12]:

> Brutal state repression of peasant mobilizations against the creation of industrial projects and Special Economic Zones (SEZs) on agricultural land in Nandigram and Singur in West Bengal in early 2007 (see Menon and Nigam 2007) was further reminiscent of the Naxalbari episode. (Roy 2013, 26)

The Naxalbari uprising was considered to be the beginning of extreme left-wing movements although the country had seen peasant uprisings like the Telengana and Tebhaga movements. The movement was basically against the corrupt practices of the landlords and the moneylenders, but the state intervened with ruthless search operations and indefinite killings with an aim to curb the movement. In the three-tier battle, the Naxalites were left alone to face the atrocities both from the landlords as well as from the agents of the state.

To keep the Naxalite movement under control, the state has always used heavy-handed tactics. As such, the state's goal was achieved by detaining or eliminating the leadership of the movement and banning the organization. The state used terror tactics of every kind to silence any opposition. Though the issue of equality was largely neglected by the Communist revolutionaries, it was well adopted by the state forces as they used the same means of torture for both men and women to extract the required information.

Thus, the state was always at war with the rebels as well as the local inhabitants. It used each and every form of violence to fight the Naxals. In this fight, it was the local people who faced the onslaught.

V. Gender Discrimination within the Movement

The Naxalbari uprising took the form of a war announced against the class enemies. Charu Mazumdar, the mastermind of the movement, gave a call to the youth to join hands in the 'annihilation of class enemies'. Though women had no separate agenda encouraging them to participate, nevertheless, they joined the movement in large numbers. However, issues related to gender were almost always neglected when it came to the larger aspects of class struggle. Female cadres were always deprived of equality in position in comparison to their

male counterparts and were tested at every stage. Very soon women struggled to attain some parity with male cadres within the movement.

Mallarika Sinha Roy in her paper "Metropolis and its Others: Reading Women's Speech and Silence in the Naxalbari Movement (1967-1975)" (2003) gives a gendered perspective of the movement. Women threw themselves into the movement since the very beginning. They "played a pivotal role in the very first uprising at Naxalbari. They were some of the first victims of police firing, where seven peasant women were killed, during a mass meeting of the armed peasants in Naxalbari in 1967" (10). There were women combatants, peace builders, activists, politicians in addition to the more passive role of sympathizers in the movement. They were affiliated to the movement as friends, family members, wives, and lovers, some of whom joined as full-time cadres later, but their safety was the biggest question as women, according to Charu Mazumdar, should not be included in squads because they require a place to stay at least for the night. (Roy 2003, 16).

In the book *Remembering Revolution: Gender, Violence, and Subjectivity in India's Naxalbari Movement* (2013), Srila Roy investigates sexual and everyday interpersonal brutality as part of political violence and how it is embedded in revolutionary movements. She also examines the various roles played by women throughout the movement. This movement provided several women with a ray of hope for elevating their lives from the mundane to the heroic. Many well-educated middle-class girls joined the movement in the hope of effecting political change. Their bodies became the site of torture—physical assault left permanent scars that discouraged them and future generations from joining the movement. However, they were recruited only to assist men in various ordinary tasks:

> It makes clear that the entry and presence of marginalized subjects like women in male-dominated spaces does not make them more inclusive; on the contrary, women remain 'matter out of place' and often internalize their own difference in modes of complicity and denial. (11)

Women in the movement were given inferior positions as they were considered fragile and not fit for the battleground. Although they were the first victims of the Naxalbari uprising as "the greatest martyrs of the movement were the women adivasis that the state fired upon at Naxalbari when the 'Spring Thunder' first broke" (Roy 2013, 56), their participation in the

movement in academic history has been largely considered as 'supportive' rather than positioning them in the front-ranking revolutionary list by the leadership of the Naxalite movement:

> The principal conceptualization of women's role in the movement was subsumed under a singular idea of being 'supportive', where woman's independent decision to join the movement was equally disregarded as their protests against a patriarchal imposition to work for the movement. (Roy 2003, 13)

The specific reasons behind women joining the movement is a question largely ignored. However, it may be mentioned that the same reasons that led men also attracted women to the movement. As a matter of fact, women participated in the Naxalbari uprisings under the impact of their male partners but could not get an equal position both on and off the field. In the paper "Contesting Calcutta Canons: issues of gender and mofussil in the Naxalbari movement in West Bengal (1967-1975)" (2009), Mallarika Sinha Roy takes into account the stories of non-metropolitan women activists to give an idea of the metropolitan-male-middle-class ideals and sensibilities in the memory and historiography of Naxalite movement. In another paper, "Magic Moments of Struggle: Women's Memory of the Naxalbari Movement in West Bengal, India (1967-1975)" (2009), she describes women's memories of participation in the Naxalbari movement of West Bengal. These memories not only helped her to capture the revolutionary zeal among the female cadres, but also the experiences of fear and violence and the patriarchal domination within the movement. The urban male "consider women's participation inconsequential because they believe very few women 'joined', and those who joined merely followed their male lovers into the movement" (164).

Several women joined the movement in hope of a "new, liberatory gender order, outside the stronghold of patriarchal society epitomized by the middle-class family" (Roy 2013, 76). They saw the progressiveness of the Naxalites and joined the 'andolan' as they saw in it "the opportunity to breathe in the air of liberation" (Roy 2013, 76). But they could not attain a secure position as the patriarchal mind-set of the movement was deeply entrenched in the male cadres. To regard women as objects of violence and subjects of fear, and thus to take a protective stance towards them, demonstrates the patriarchal belief that

women were not, and can never be positioned in equal status in a revolutionary uprising like the Naxalite movement:

> As in the case of Second World War, the category of woman was contradictorily constituted and put into political use in the context of Naxalbari. The revolutionary domain was a strictly masculine one where women activists were, by and large, 'matter out of place to use Puwar's (2004) evocation of Mary Douglas' (1991) pertinent coinage. (Roy 2013, 08)

Women in the Indian society are ascribed to specified roles dictated by tradition. Though they might resist these prescriptions yet it is very difficult to demolish established norms of the Indian society. Traditional Indian (Hindu) nationalism fixes them in the roles of the chaste wife, heroic mother, and celibate warrior[13]. "All three rest on the control of women's sexuality as per 'ideals of heteronormative chastity" (Roy 2013, 46-47).

Be it the battleground or the respectable position inside the home, women had putatively an important role to play throughout the Naxal movement. The first female in the family is the mother of a revolutionary who always had to bear the loss of a son. The role of a mother is always considered superior and with her blessings the revolutionary sets his foot outside the house. She is asked to be strong and bless her son even though he is going to sacrifice his life for the cause of revolution:

> As in the anti-colonial movement, the burden of awakening and inspiring their sons to battle and even death falls on a collective of Bengali mothers or mayerjati. In a series of published letters from a jailed Naxalite to his mother, we find a son repeatedly urging his mother to dry her tears and bless, enthuse, and inspire the sons of the revolution. (Roy 2013, 59)

As a wife, she had to support her full-time activist husband who was busy with the political activities and had no time for earning their livelihood. It was the wife "who seemed to support their full-time activist husbands with part-time or full-time employment in a model common to political, especially communist, families in Bengal where the husband does rajniti and the wife chakri" (Roy 2013, 39)[14].

Relationships of love often occurred among the cadres throughout the movement. In the works on Naxalbari uprising we see love playing an important role in the life of a revolutionary. This love is extended and is provided meaning with the help of the revolution. Politicization of love keeps it away from the ordinary prospects and helps in the greater cause. "Revolution, on the one hand, determines love, thus politicizing love and dissociating it from the ordinary realm of private pleasure or sexual desire" (Roy 2013, 101):

> In a range of novels such as Basu's Antarghat (The Enemy Within, 1983), Devi's Hajar Churashir Ma (Mother of 1084, 1997), Majumdar's Kalbela (The Omnious Hour, 1983) and Mitra's Manabputri (1993), the relationship between the male and the female protagonist is characterized by friendship and mutuality, giving meaning to a form of love-as-comradeship. (Roy 2013, 103)

The females of the Naxalite movement can be divided into two groups. On one hand, there were female participants who were directly involved in the Naxalite movement and on the other hand there were women whose husbands were actively engaged in the movement. A discussion on the contributions of these women has appeared in the chapter "Political Participation" written by Vidya Munshi in the book *The Changing Status of Women in West Bengal, 1970-2000: The Challenge Ahead* (2004) edited by Jasodhara Bagchi. The women who joined the movement came from different strata of the society—peasants, tribal women, urban young women and students from various institutions. While peasants and tribal women were directly involved in the movement, students and urban young women were mostly sympathizers and helped in hiding and acting as couriers of literature and arms. Though the state chose to approach the situation from two distinct perspectives, the police made no distinction when it came to gathering information. The suspects would be apprehended, searched by male cops, tortured, electrocuted, and raped. "Imprisonment (and torture) was central to female agency given that women had, at their disposal, fewer modes of political subjectivity than men" (Roy 2013, 78). The second group of females had to face similar kind of treatment and the reason for such ill-treatment was quite surprising. The police inflicted torture upon the wives of Naxalites to extract suitable answers from them. At some cases it was done to fulfill the police's anger towards the Naxalites. "The sexual victimization of peasant women at the hands of the state and the 'ruling classes' was a major justification of

armed struggle, discursively configured as a battle for honour or izzater lorai" (Roy 2013, 58)[15].

Contradiction existed in the very foundation of the movement as differentiation was done on the basis of class. Women from the upper middle class/caste had a better position than women from the lower middle class/caste. In a special article published in Economic & Political Weekly Shoma Sen mentions that the Maoist Party itself accepted the presence of patriarchy in the party's Ninth Congress which was held in 2007. The wife of a leader was granted a higher position automatically. Senior positions were reserved for the male leaders. "The emphasis on the 'supportive' role of women, therefore, was a self-reflection of urban male Naxalites" (Roy 2003, 19). The male members of the movement readily adopted prevalent societal ideas and practices to impose on their female counterparts. Pratibha Singh in her paper "Women in the Maoist War in India: Two Sides of Spectrum" (2011), talks about how gendered equality has remained a second-class category and how it has been subverted by larger ideals of class equality throughout the movement. To overcome such perception towards them, the middle or high-class Bengali women had to surpass the barrier. Henrike Donner in his paper "The significance of Naxalbari: accounts of personal involvement and politics in West Bengal" (2004), talks about the lawlessness and corruption among the party members. He says:

> though the CPI(M) successfully portrayed itself as a guarantor of law and order in the state, many blame the leadership for what they see as a loss of control over cadres, which in their view explains the decline in public services and increased corruption (02).

Amit Bhattacharyya discusses the domination of the patriarchal behavior among the Naxalites in his book *Storming the Gates of Heaven: The Maoist Movement in India-A Critical Study, 1972-2014* (2016). He says that all the patriarchal forms of thought and behavior like looking down upon women, treating them as objects to fulfill sexual desire, beating and abusing wives, considering woman as personal property etc. "are prevalent to some extent among the male members of the party" (310). As a result, it can be said that the very group that brags about a classless society could not abandon its gendered outlook, casting doubt on the capability of its female counterparts.

Naxalites continue to support the notion that women are the epitome or reservoir of a community's culture and traditions, and that they must be protected. As a result, rape is used to denigrate the opposing community, in this case, the warring side. A Naxalite woman could be raped by state forces, or if a woman chooses to support the state or leave the Naxalite cadres, she could easily fall victim to the Naxalites' brutality. Srila Roy in her paper "The Everyday Life of the Revolution: Gender, Violence and Memory" (2007), talks about this constant threat to the life of female cadre. The atrocities on women were recorded in the writings by the female cadres of the movement. "Several of their leaflets, distributed after annihilation campaigns, contain recurrent references to the victims as women's sexual oppressors" (Roy 2003, 18). Thus, physical torture and sexual assault were used to suppress women in the very institutions which considered themselves to be their protectors. In another paper "The Grey Zone: 'The Ordinary' Violence of Extraordinary Times" (2008), Srila Roy discusses the gendered sexual violence, which is often neglected in the name of revolution:

> While little has been said about sexual harassment at the hands of male party comrades, feminists have critiqued left political practices for instituting techniques of discipline and punishment in the name of upholding group morality, the objects of which are invariably women. (Roy 2008, 317)

However, the inferior position ascribed to female cadres was not new; it has been in practice since the inception of the movement. The differentiation between the genders may also be observed while assigning martyrdom to male and female comrades. For instance, male cadres were glorified on the basis of the sacrifices made by them, women for resisting "sexual assaults".

It was initially difficult for Bengali middle-class girls to find safe shelter in the 'underground,' and even if they did, they were still vulnerable to 'sexual harassment.' So, in order to feel safe and protect their modesty, they entered one of the socially accepted roles, such as marrying their male comrades. Despite these safeguards, there have been reports of sexual harassment and humiliation within the party. Whatever be the situation, it was the female cadres who always suffered most:

> While for male activists, the shelter was a refuge from 'outside' terror in which they enjoyed the nurturance of women, for women, it invariably

> functioned as a domestic space that enforced regulatory control through the authority of the family. Their security in turn, hinged upon a submission to the middle-class values of normative femininity. (Roy 2013, 89)

The Naxalite women whose male counterparts were killed by the state were given a moral high ground. They were expected to follow the dominant ideas about widowhood prevalent in society, despite the fact that it was the same society that they considered bourgeois. They would face harsh criticism if they crossed the line and chose a second partner. Their roles were confined to being the widows of martyrs.

Two critical points should be raised in relation to the role of women in the movement: first, both within and without the movement, violence against female participants has been multifaceted. Secondly, experiences of violence by the female cadres during the Naxalite movement highlighted the fact that gendered markings of violence fused torture, martyrdom, suffering, and duty on their bodies. As a result, women were subjected to various levels of physical violence in order to demonstrate their loyalty and ability to protect any type of information. However, the same act received no recognition or appreciation other than the label of "sexual assault.".

For a long time, the issues behind gender discrimination in the Naxalbari movement remained covered under the larger goals of class struggle in the academic discourse. As resistance against the state, the movement has received widespread positive publicity in progressive sections of society. However, in the run to destroy the class enemies, the Naxalites more or less neglected the deeply entrenched gender aspects and encouraged multidimensional discrimination inside the very party that was formed on the promises of classlessness and equality. Thus women had to fight the war both inside and outside the movement.

The next chapter of the thesis will examine the literary narratives on Naxalite movement in the works of Mahasweta Devi and Manoranjan Byapari. Apart from her various works on the tribals of India, the chapter's prime focus will be on *Mother of 1084*, "Draupadi" and *Bashai Tudu*. Along with the three works of Mahasweta Devi this chapter will also focus on Manoranjan Byapari's *There's Gunpowder In The Air*.

Notes

[1] The term *Operation Green Hunt* was used by Chhattishgarh police to describe the operation to wipe out Naxalites by the government of India by deploying state and paramilitary forces in the Red Corridor. The operation began in November 2009. *Salwa Judum* was a local militia trained and mobilized by the state forces to fight the Naxalites as a part of the anti-insurgency operations in Chhattisgarh India. It was started in 2006 consisting of local under-educated and unemployed youths. On 5 July 2011, the Supreme Court of India ordered to dissolution considering it to be illegal and unconstitutional.

[2] In "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India" (1982), Guha defines Indian nationalism in connection with the Indian elites. He states that the nationalism in India was considered to be the activities by which the elites in India responded to offers given to them by colonialism.

[3] Cornwallis introduced the Zamindari system, also known as the Permanent Settlement system, in 1793. In this land-sharing system, zamindars were considered landowners and had the authority to collect rent from peasants. It was first made available in Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, and Varanasi. Thomas Munro introduced the Ryotwari system in 1820. Ownership rights were transferred to peasants under this crop-sharing system. The British government collected taxes from peasants directly. Ryotwari was first introduced in Madras, Bombay, and parts of Assam and Coorgh provinces of British India.

[4] The term *Social Banditry* was used by Eric Hobsbawm in his book *Primitive Rebels* (1971) and considers it as a kind of violent peasant protest against oppression and poverty. In such type of protests revenge is taken from the class enemies in order to fulfill the dream of righting the wrongs done by individuals.

[5] The *Vetti* system or forced labour was implemented in tribal and socially backward areas. In Telengana it affected the lives of almost all classes of people in varying degrees. In this system the harijans had to send send one family member to work in the houses of upper caste people like the *patel*, *patwari mali-patel* or *deshmukh*. Their works also included to carry report to police stations, taluk office (tehsil) and also to keep watch on the village *chavadi* and the poundage.

[6] *Bhadralok* as a term was used for the new class of Bengali 'gentlefolk' during colonial times. These people were mainly from upper class and upper caste. *Jotedars* were wealthy class of peasants in the Colonial Bengal. They owned large tracts of lands. *Raiyat* also used as ryot, rait or ravat were terms used to denote peasant cultivators in different provinces of India. As landless peasants, raiyats worked as tenants and cultivators and also as hired labours.

[7] The Party Congress held in May 1970 adopted some resolutions and programme for the Communist Party of India. It stated that people's democracy can be established with the dictatorship of the working class, the peasantry, the petty-bourgeoisie and a section of small and middle bourgeoisie under the leadership of the working class as they constitute majority of the Indian population. The text is available in http://web.archive.org/web/20020614102349/http://www.maoism.org:80/misc/india/cpiml/cpiml_progr.htm

[8] In the book *Documents of The History of The Communist Party of India (Part-I)* (1922), G. Adhikari mentions that the representatives of the various Communist groups came together for the first time at the Kanpur conference in December 1925. This led to the political and class consciousness of the toiling masses resulting in morchas and demonstrations by the peasants and the working class.

[9] The debate over the strategy to be applied in the Indian soil existed since the very beginning of the communist movement in India. In the book *The Sino-Indian War of 1962: New perspectives* (2016), Subho Basu points out this debate regarding policy implementation. This debate had a lasting impact on the CPI as those who were against the Congress party chose the revolutionary line. The government was able to suppress the revolutionaries using the revisionists and also on the internationalist stance during the Sino-Indian border issue.

[10] In the book *Left Radicalism in India* (2014), Bidyut Chakrabarty states that after the Naxalbari uprisings were crushed within seventy two days from its inception, these radical groups finally went to form the All-India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries (AICCCR) in support of the armed struggle and against fighting elections. However differences of opinion were seen very soon and it split into two groups: one led by T. Nagi Reddy and the other by Kanai Chatterjee. The Kanai Chatterjee fraction had serious objections on the issue of class annihilation. After facing opposition from the majority The AICCCR went ahead to form the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) in 1969.

[11] Upon failing to control the Naxalites, the government started using the local youths as they are well aware of the area and the tactics. In the name of *Salwa Judum*, the government started arming these people to fight Naxalites.

[12] The tribal ways of life is hampered by the large scale industrialization, privatization and globalization. For the extraction of minerals and other natural resources by the State and Multi-National Companies (MNCs), the tribals and the forest-dwellers are forced to lose their land and their age-old eco-friendly ways of life

[13] In the Indian society women are ascribed with specific roles. Following the interest and values of the traditional Indian society, women are easily accepted as someone's wife. She has to grow up in order to get married and create a home with a partner, raise her children and run the household works. Apart from that women are also accepted in the religious roles abstaining marriage and sexual relations.

[14] In order to run the family, the wife of communist revolutionary had to work either full-time or even as a part-time worker. In the article "Charu and Son: Revisiting the Legacy of a Revolutionary Father 50 Years After Naxalbari" published in *The Wire* Charu Mazumdar's son Abhijit Mazumdar recounts the days of revolution when he was child. On the question of the financial position of the family, he says that his mother Lila Mazumdar worked as an LIC agent and that was the sole income of their family.

[15] With the growing atrocities and sexual victimization of women, the leaders of the movement tried to include the issues of pride and honor along with class consciousness.

Chapter III

Naxalite Movement in the works of Mahasweta Devi and Manoranjan Byapari

West Bengal has a long history of political violence. With time such violence has changed form and transformed itself. From anti-colonial movements during the pre-independence era to resistance against the injustices meted out to the poor and landless agriculturists in post-independence times, political violence seems to be endemic in the region. In the pre-independence period clandestine groups like Anushilan Samiti, Jugantar[1] and the Tebhaga Peasants' uprisings struggled to uproot colonial authorities as well as fought for the rights of the peasants. These groups paved the way for further organizational protests in the state. The feudal zamindars have dominated the agrarian structure of West Bengal for a very long time. These zamindars were exploitative and manipulative as they always functioned as the ultimate agents of authority. Sumon Kumar Bhoumik in the introduction to his paper "Peasant Uprisings in Bengal: A Case for Preference Falsification" (2002) throws light on the reasons behind peasant uprisings in West Bengal. He states that although there were exploitations of the peasants in the Mughal era, peasant rebellions under the Mughals were hardly seen. It was only after the permanent settlement that the clash between the peasants and the landlords gained momentum:

> Some historians have put forward a nationalist view of the emergence of peasant uprising in Bengal. The basic argument underlying the nationalist story has been that the permanent settlement (an act of land legislation) and allied colonial revenue policies were responsible for shocking the agrarian structure of Bengal. On one hand, it destroyed the self-sufficiency of the villages. On the other hand, it established a new feudal structure in which the landlords were no longer the rural patriarchs but rather the pre-industrial entrepreneurs whose sole motive was surplus extraction. It has been argued by the nationalists that these two phenomena led to peasant discontent and, hence, peasant rebellion. (4742)

West Bengal of the 1960s and 1970s was a tumultuous period as the state witnessed a specific form of violence from the state and its agents. The Naxalite movement of the 1960s and the 1970s remains unique in the way it started as well as for its aim, which was to overthrow the state and its political objectives. The movement that started in the rural areas soon spread to urban locations, covering various sections of society. Apart from the exploitation by the upper sections of the society, there were several other reasons for the rise of the peasants in the Naxalbari area which soon engulfed the entire state. Shortage of food, large scale unemployment and grinding poverty led the spark into a massive fire which is still in continuation in large tracts of the country during contemporary times.

On May 25, 2017, Naxalbari uprisings completed its 50 years. Within these 50 years of time, the movement has seen many changes be it in terms of ideology or in the shift in its location from time to time. The only thing that has remained constant during these years is the condition of the depressed classes as it can be seen that their status has remained more or less the same even after several decades of the movement. As West Bengal was the progenitor of the Naxalite movement, it becomes necessary to examine literary narratives based on events in West Bengal to have a better understanding behind the rise and fall of the movement.

This chapter focuses on the translated works of Mahasweta Devi and Manoranjan Byapari both writing on the first phase of Naxalism (1960s-1977) in West Bengal. Mahasweta Devi is considered to be one of the "most widely trsanslated Indian writers" writing in a regional language (Salgado 131). Through a career of political activism and writing spanning several decades she engaged with the disenfranchised and marginalized sections of society. Mahasweta Devi is credited with an enormous output of works in which figure novels, plays and collections of short stories. She spent over thirty years working with and writing for the tribal people of West Bengal and the bordering districts of Bihar. She has also worked as a political anthropologist, investigative journalist and an editor of "people's magazine" (Bortika). She claimed that she found "endless source of ingredients" (Salgado 132) while writing for the tribals. Mahasweta Devi's writings on Naxalite movement bring to light the pain and pathos of a generation of brilliant youth who killed and died without thinking of the consequences, the anguish of the helpless parents as they become mute spectators of the fates of their sons and daughters, and the ruthless domination of state and

police forces to control the situation. Manoranjan Byapari, on the other hand, was jailed and underwent the experience of fighting as a Naxalite. His writings bring into light the issues of poverty, inequality as well as large scale exploitation existing on the Indian soil. His narrative works also give us an insight into the clash between ideological commitments and personal emotions.

Mahasweta Devi's *Hajar Churashir Maa,* translated as *Mother of 1084* is a Bengali novel written in 1974 against the backdrop of the Naxalite movement in West Bengal. *Mother of 1084* showcases the atrocities and injustices meted out by the state to the Naxalites. The story deals with a mother, whose son, termed as corpse number 1084, was brutally killed by the state forces for his involvement in revolutionary activities. *Mother of 1084* portrays the turbulent political activity of the youth of West Bengal, and how the same was crushed by the state forces to bring the situation under control.

Mahasweta Devi's writings on the Naxalite movement continued with the short story *Draupadi* (1976). Here she narrates the story of a young tribal Naxalite, who is first widowed and later gang-raped by the state forces in a police lock-up. *Draupadi* creates an unsparing image of state brutality similar to that portrayed in the novel *Mother of 1084*. In an inversion of the Mahabharata's story, where Draupadi was saved from her assailants by Lord Krishna, who miraculously ensured that she stayed clothed in the sari that kept on unfolding even as it was pulled off her by the Kauravas, the tribal Draupadi refuses to be clothed and stands stark naked in front of the army officials[2]. For the first time the army chief is afraid to stand in front of an unarmed target. In *Bashai Tudu* (1990), Mahasweta Devi continues her writings on tribal uprisings by bringing Bashai as the central figure and also as a kind of replacement to Birsa Munda of *Aranyer Adhikar*. The hero of the story fights for his comrades without a party membership. Manoranjan Byapari's *Batashe Baruder Gundho* (2013), is a political satire set inside a jail in West Bengal. Narrating the planning of a jailbreak, Byapari dwells on the aspects of class difference present in our society. In the attempt to free themselves from jail, five Naxals were brutally killed which was a common practice inside the jails of Calcutta during the 1970s.

These selected works of Mahasweta Devi and Manoranjan Byapari on the Naxalite movement witness the beginning of the political revolution in West Bengal. They trace almost all the key issues behind the rise of the movement in the state. Through these texts,

Mahasweta Devi records the social and political turmoil prevailing in the state after independence. The State's ruthless torture of the revolutionaries, inhuman treatment of the female cadres, family feuds in terms of ideology, and the deteriorating condition of landless agricultural labourers are the underlying concerns that these texts address.

Section I of this chapter focuses on the life of Mahasweta Devi and discusses selected works of this celebrated author on caste, class, and gender oppression. Section II examines the novel *Mother of 1084*. It will look into the issues of gender discrimination in the Bengali bhadralok society of Calcutta during the time of the movement. Taking Naxalite movement as the central theme, Mahasweta Devi brings out various forms of injustices meted out to the revolutionaries. Section III will analyze the radical depiction of the young tribal Naxalite Dopdi in the story *Draupadi*, who is first widowed and then gang-raped in a police lock-up. Section IV concentrates on the novelette *Bashai Tudu* (1990), where Mahasweta Devi takes the period between 1967 and 1977, and illustrates the fierce agrarian revolution led by the landless labourers in the Naxalbari region in the north of Bengal. Section V is a brief biography of Manorajan Byapari. Section VI analyzes *Batashe Baruder Gundho*, written by Manoranjan Byapari and translated as *There's Gunpowder in the Air*. This novel is a fictional tale of a jailbreak by five Naxals during the tumultuous period of the 1970s. These works raise many important questions prevailing in Indian society. Mahasweta Devi throws light on many important issues such as injustice over the land distribution, inhuman torture on the revolutionaries, caste and class discrimination in the Indian society and the long struggle of the sons of the soil to retain their land rights, keeping the Naxalite movement at its centre.

I

Mahasweta Devi popularly known as the 'voice of the oppressed' used her writings to speak truth to power portraying the dark realities of Indian society, and as a social activist her writing was a means of resisting oppression. Her works speak widely of her concern for society. Devi's role as a writer, narrator, dramatist, historian and social activist lends voice to the underprivileged, bringing into the forefront various forms of injustice and exploitation

prevailing in society. Through her writings, she portrays the multidimensional form of subordination in the Indian society as she firmly believed that it is because of the caste, class, and gender oppression that India and a majority of Indians faced destitution and were marginalized from the mainstream. While handing her the Jnanpith - the highest literary award in India, Dr. Nelson Mandela observed that "she holds a mirror to the conditions of the world as we enter the new millennium" (Ghatak xii). As a writer with a social cause, Mahasweta Devi's writings provide radical commentary on the social, political, and historical trajectory of India since independence.

Born in 1926 to a highly educated and renowned Hindu Brahmin family, Mahasweta's first schooling was in Dhaka, but later the family shifted to West Bengal, India after the partition of Bengal. She was admitted to Tagore's school in Shantiniketan in the year 1936. She was enrolled at a point in time when Rabindranath Tagore was very involved in the teaching and administration of the school. She was a voracious reader right from childhood, and she read "an impossibly high number of books" during her school life (Chakraborty 287). The nature of education was different in the school where she attained her primary education as novel methods of teaching were adopted for effective learning. She says, "We didn't have to write anything; we had to be able to recognize it by sight, we had to know what a particular flower smelled like when it blossomed in the evening" (Chakraborty 287). It was her schooling at Shantiniketan that led her to understand the world and the people at large. Apart from that, she also learned about many other things, including plants, birds, and the surrounding nature, not only just by name or picture in the book but through real-life experiences.

During Mahasweta's formative years India witnessed some of its most important political and social upheavals such as the Quit India Movement, the Bengal Famine, the Partition of India, to name a few. Her social and political consciousness was shaped by movements like the Tebhaga movement and the Naxalite movement of West Bengal:

> As a writer, she is on record as saying that her commitment involves documenting the past and the continuing struggles of the people in their historical perspective. But Mahasweta is much more than a narrator of social reality and people's struggle. (Ghatak viii)

Mahasweta's yearning for the knowledge of history goes back to her childhood when she used to listen to the stories narrated by her grandmother. Her first published work *The Queen of Jhansi* (2003), originally published in the year 1956 as *Jhansir Rani* in Bengali, is the result of listening to the stories of her grandmother. She mentions that "in her gentle voice by the dim light of a lantern, it did indeed seem like the most amazing fairy tale" (ix). Because of such clear and artful narration, the Queen of Jhansi remained fresh and alive in Devi's mind. She says that after completing her education and gaining some consciousness about history her "curiosity about our national life increased and a wish arose to write an entire book about the Queen of Jhansi" (ix).

In *The Queen of Jhansi*, she presents Lakshimibai as a heroine who fought bravely against the atrocities of the colonial administration. The queen who died fighting against the British on the battlefield caught the attention of the writer. The result was a work that traced the growing resistance of the Indians against the colonizers. She undertook extensive research that comprised family reminiscence, oral literature, local histories, and more traditional sources. Combining all the resources, she was able to sketch the tale of a heroine- an unusual woman widowed at an early age, who grew up as a free-spirited child, and turned out to be one of India's dynamic leaders.

The tribals of India have a long history, though undocumented; they are seen as the original inhabitants, the sons of the soil, inhabiting mostly in the forest areas. In Indian history, the tribal societies came into conflict with the British regime after the British administration made incursions into the tribal areas. In order to strengthen their position, the British administration tried to bring all regions, including the tribal areas under a single administrative unit (Guha and Gadgil 144). The British administration faced strong resistance from the tribal population of Chottanagpur in today's Jharkhand, when a policy was promulgated to disintegrate the rural structure by imposing the zamindari system of land tenure in the tribal areas. Apart from the land tenure system, the natural and mineral resources of these places began to be extracted without providing any benefit to the tribal inhabitants. Along with the exploitation of the mineral resources, modernization and rapid industrialization added woes to the already deprived conditions of these communities. Backward and oppressed as they already were, large scale changes at the macro level brought in untold miseries. Large influx of the non-tribal people created more tension in the already

stagnant economy of these regions. Finally, the tribal people found no other way than to attack the system they considered responsible for these conditions. These conditions gave rise to various rebellions in the last two centuries, especially from the latter half of the nineteenth century.

In the nineteenth century, the uprisings of Santals, Kols and Mundas are examples of how the tribals in India fought bravely against the exploitative system. The uprising led by Birsa Munda is considered one of the major tribal uprisings, considering the size and degree. This revolt of the Munda tribes forms the central focus of Mahasweta Devi's novel *Aranyer Adhikar*. On being questioned about the identity of the tribals, Mahasweta says:

> Yes, they want a tribal identity. That's why I am so dear to them, so near to them. They treat me as their own. All over India. Because for the first time when I wrote that book on Birsa Munda (*Aranyer Adhikar*) they say that for the first time they have got their place in history. Indian history did not recognize the tribal fights, tribal rebellions. Never recognized them. Never wrote about them. Never mentioned them. (Collu 148)

Large scale intrusion of outsiders into the cultural as well as geographical sphere of the tribals has led to the destruction of their ways of life. Their discontent and resistance surfaced in the form of various uprisings and movements.

Taking note of Birsa's Ulgulan, which comprises a series of tribal uprisings that began in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Mahasweta Devi sets the backdrop of her novel *Aranyer Adhikar*. The immediate consequence of this uprising was seen in the revision of some of the anti-tribal laws and the implementation of the Chottanagpur Tenancy Act that was passed in the year 1908. *Aranyer Adhikar* is the first novel by Mahasweta Devi that deals with the issues of tribals. Placing Birsa Munda at the epicenter of the novel, Devi traces the life of Birsa Munda right from his childhood till his death in the prison of Ranchi due to police atrocities. Apart from recounting the Munda uprising of 1899, this text also provides an insight into the life and culture of the Munda tribe.

The history of tribal oppression is not a new phenomenon as the position of the tribals has always remained the lowest in the hierarchy of society. Uprisings like 'The Santhal Uprising', 'The Munda Rebellion' and 'The Naxalbari Uprisings' largely depict the outcry

of the tribal people for their fundamental rights[3]. This oppression continues into present day society even after seventy years of India's independence. Along with economic insecurity they suffer destitution, unemployment, undernourishment, illiteracy and human trafficking. Though free from the clutches of foreign rule, the tribals continue to suffer at the hands of their new masters:

> The long history of peasant insurgency in India (where the landless peasantry number nearly fifty million and constitute 26.33 per cent of the country's total labour force) has shown up, time and again, the nature of exploitation that has been the fate of the peasants. The uprsings, from the Sannyasi revolt, the Wahabi movement and the Indigo revolt to the Naxalbari rebellion, have voiced almost the same fundamental demands. (Devi xv)

Her novel *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* written in the year 1980 can be considered a continuation of *Aranyer Adhikar* as Birsa Munda's death coincides with Chotti's birth in the year 1900. This novel is described in the following way by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak:

> "Remarkable for the manner in which it touches on the vital issues that have in subsequent decades, grown into matters of urgent social concern. It raises questions about the place of the tribal on the map of national identity, land rights and human rights, the 'muesemization' of 'ethnic' cultures, and the justification of violent resistance as the last resort of desperate people, amongst others." (39)

This novel raises the issue of misuse of the bonded labor in which the Munda tribe was imprisoned and bound. It traces the life events of the protagonist Chotti covering India's transition from colonial rule to independence and then to the unrest of the 1970s.

There are some chapters in the history of national resistance to imperialism that do not get equal recognition. These chapters cover the role of the indigenous subalterns who were seen constantly challenging the consolidation of territorial imperialism by working at the grass root level. The indigenous people frequently organized protests against the growing exploitation of peasants and the rural folks. While comparing the mobilizations of the elites with that of the subaltern classes, Ranajit Guha is of the opinion that the mobilization of the

former was 'cautious and controlled' whereas mobilization of the latter was spontaneous. Guha further says that:

> Popular mobilization in the colonial period was realized in its most comprehensive form in peasant uprisings. However, in many historic instances involving large masses of the working people and petty bourgeoisie in the urban areas too the figure of mobilization derived directly from the paradigm of peasant insurgency. (04)

The Narkelberia Uprising (1830-1831) against the British in Bengal, led by peasant leader Titu Mir, is one such event which celebrated the power of the subalterns. Mahasweta Devi depicts the story of this legendary hero in her book *Titu Mir* (1997). In this book she takes up the issue of the Permanent Settlement Act of 1793 and its impact on poor farmers. She presents the life of Titu Mir and his struggle against exploitation. Devi gives us an account of the Sanyasi Revolt in *Titu Mir*, an attack on the company's plantation that ran for 18 long years.

Mahasweta Devi was very concerned about the plight of tnhe suffering people, especially the peasants and the workers. Through her writings she attempted to bring to light issues which remained either unnoticed or were not given due importance. After covering some important historical figures in her early writing, her attention shifted logically to the contemporary conditions of the poor in India. She asserts that:

> The tragedy of India at Independence was not introducing thorough land reform. A basically feudal land system was allowed to stay. A feudal land system can only nurture and sustain a feudal value system. A feudal value system is anti-women, anti-poor people, against toiling people. It is the landowners who formed the ministry, and became the rulers of the country, why should they do anything else? (Devi xiii-xiv)

The irregularities in the land reforms in post-independence India created space for the peasants and the tribals to represent their case and speak for their rights. Among the various peasant uprisings, the Naxalite movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s had a great impact on Mahasweta Devi's imagination and conscience. The movement that began in the Naxalbari area and which was backed by the left parties soon turned out to be a massive

uprising covering all urban centers. Devi immediately took up the cause in her writings to depict the continuing injustice. She says:

> Beyond the direct relevance to my stories, the happening in Naxalbari and their background constitute the most significant and inspiring events in the life of the country over the last few decades. Bashai Tudu and Draupadi and their peers are the products of these events, and their markers as well; for it is they who change society and come to symbolize the time and the place, transcending their names and the local situations. (Devi xvii)

While "Draupadi" and *Bashai Tudu* deal with rural and tribal Naxalites, Devi's *Hajar Churasir Maa* (*Mother of 1084*), tells the story of an upper-middle-class urban woman and her son who is killed for his involvement with the Naxalites. Sujata Chatterjee, the mother of the protagonist Brati Chatterjee represents the plight of a mother whose son was labeled as a rebel for holding on to the communist ideology and was ruthlessly killed in a police encounter. Sujata's efforts to understand her son and his revolutionary zeal, lead her to reflect on her own alienation from the hypocritical and bourgeois society against which Brati was at war.

Mahasweta Devi's short story collections are piercing accounts of the privations of tribal life and the ruthless suppression they have to face from upper class people. In the collection *Imaginary Maps* (1995) Devi recounts the stories of tribal women and the atrocities perpetuated on them by the high class society. While the story 'The Hunt' deals with the sexual exploitation of Mary Oraon at the hands of a government contractor, the second story, 'Douloti the Bountiful' traces the account of the struggles of tribal women after India's independence. 'Douloti the Bountiful' clearly states that decolonization and independence have only profited those within the superstructure. In *Breast Stories* (1997), she locates the breast as a symbol connecting three different stories namely "Draupadi", "Breast-Giver" and "Behind the Bodice". The story of *Rudali* (1997) revolves around the central character Sanichari, a poor and low caste woman of rural Rajasthan. The life of Sanichari reveals the levels of torture, exploitation, and survival of the central character in the face of insurmountable odds. The anthology *Bitter Soil* (1998) is a collection of four short stories by Devi. In each of the stories in this collection Devi describes the degradation of

various tribal groups at the hand of the dominating community and depicts the injustice meted out to them.

In the collection *Outcast: Four Stories* (2002), Devi focuses on the stories of four marginalized women characters. These women are doubly suppressed - firstly for being from the marginal section and secondly for their gender. In these short stories, Devi tries to excavate and unveil the gendered cause that is very much prevalent in the socio-political and economic exploitation of the women belonging to the backward community. In the novel, *The Book of Hunter* (2002), she recounts and attempts to revive the history of the Shabar tribals, one of the oldest nomadic tribes of India. This tribe practiced hunting and gathering as a mode of livelihood. Unlike the larger tribes such as the Santals and the Mundas, this tribe never took to agriculture and was solely dependent on forest resources. Their identity came under threat when the forests were taken away from them.

Mahasweta Devi also tried her hand at writing drama in the quest to explore new and challenging forms of representation that would be true. Her plays represent a significant concern for the human predicament and sincere hope for a better future for mankind. It is significant that Devi restructured the novel *Mother of 1084* into a play, she must have noted the dramatic possibilities that the novel presented. This novel/play was also made into a film. Uma Parameswaran discusses how Mahasweta Devi connects her works with the socio-political issues prevailing in the country in the following works: *Five Plays*, *Mother of 1084* and *Breast Stories*. She observes that through these works, Mahasweta Devi:

> Re-creates a span of history, imbuing her narration with trenchant satire against government and the city people and soul-stirring poignancy for the peasants, tribal and student idealists… While Naxalites can be seen by historians as ruthless terrorists, Devi's focus is on the young intellectuals who were drawn to the cause because of their idealism, and on peasants and tribals who were drawn to it because they were victims of centuries – old oppression. (457)

These works present a dark picture of rural India where the barbaric system of bonded labor was still prevalent. Mahasweta Devi was very much conscious of the fact that even after decades of freedom and enlightenment, Indian society refused to acknowledge the

contributions of the toiling masses and give them their due importance. Furthermore, the condition of these people worsened because of the age old rituals and the traditions of the dark ages. To that, Mahasweta added:

> The lower middle classes, the workers and the agricultural labourers have profited little from the economic progress accomplished in post-Independence India. It is the rich that have become richer. A whole new rich class emerged, reveling in its ignorance, arrogance and ruthlessness. (xvii)

Besides engaging with her creative writings, Devi was also an involved activist, associated with various tribal organizations. Her associations with the Palamau Bandhua Mukti Morcha, Lodha Shabar Kalyan Samiti and The Kheria Shabar Kalyan Samity are witness to the activist zeal inside Mahasweta Devi. As she had very less faith in the Panchayat system[4], she emphasized that the developmental works in the tribal areas should be assigned to the grassroots organizations that work for the welfare of the tribal people. She wrote extensively in newspapers and journals on the burning issues of the unequal Indian society. Issues such as deprivation and discrimination of the tribal and the rural poor, police atrocities, the struggle of the poor for survival, identity and dignity, illiteracy, unemployment, irrigation, sanitation, non-payment of the minimum wages to the workers, flaws of the government programmes found space in her non-fictional writings. After she took charge of *Bortika*, which was a well-known journal of poetry run by her father, it immediately became:

> a forum where small peasants, agricultural laborers, tribals, workers in factories, rickshaw pullers, could write about their life and problems. Many of the Lodha and Kheria tribals in Medinipur and Purulia districts, on whom there is a section in this volume, have written for this journal. (Ghatak xiv)

Mahasweta Devi's vast range of works covers almost all the important issues which the downtrodden sections people of the Indian population have been facing for ages. Along with her creative writings, her activism made her stand out from the other writers of her era. Mahasweta Devi's writings give voice to the violence that the downtrodden face in India, which exposes the vicious oppressive systems of Indian society.

II

Hajar Churashir Maa, translated as *Mother of 1084,* written against the backdrop of the Naxalite movement weaves together the seminal loci of discrimination in contemporary India, viz. gender and class. While recreating history through this novel, she deals with the tyranny of the state forces in dealing with the problems of the peasants, the lower caste people, the tribals and the younger generation, who went to fight against the state forces without bothering about the consequences. Mahasweta Devi shows her narrative skill with a compressed plot in this novel. This novel is a social commentary on the political history of West Bengal when the region witnessed one of its most turbulent years. While both the play and the novel deal with the theme of Sujata's awakening from an apolitical mother to an engaged woman amidst all the hardships, the play is a shorter version of the novel and focuses more on the relationships of Sujata with other characters seen through dialogues. To give an effective understanding of Sujata's psyche it will be pertinent to use excerpts from both the novel and the play. This chapter does not engage with the formalistic distinction between the two versions of the work, focusing more on the thematic aspects.

In this work, Mahasweta Devi creates the character of a powerful mother, who instead of mourning her son's death, keeps him alive through her investigations about his last days. She does not let his memory fade away with time. Instead, her search helps her to know many hidden truths, and also helps her to overcome her own fears which she kept suppressed for many years. Though the theme of the novel revolves around the character of Brati and his death, Mahasweta Devi skillfully creates three compelling women characters from different strata of life. In the introduction of the translated version of the novel Samik Bandyopadhyay writes:

> It goes to the credit of Mahasweta's penchant for realism that she is able to convey, with the utmost precision and economy of detail, the family structures and their economic implications as they go to define the individualities of the three women to the point of setting up of hierarchy of self-assertion/independence: from Somu's mother at the lowest rung to Nandini at the highest, with Sujata at an intermediate level. (xvi)

Bandyopadhyay further writes:

> Nandini is the one who knows, and has decided while Sujata is in the throes of learning/knowing, and edging towards deciding. In fact, it is only on her return from her daylong odyssey that Sujata confronts/challenges Dibyanath for the first time – a step up the hierarchic ladder- 'Her words hit him like a whiplash. Dibyanath went out tamely, wiping the nape of his neck.' (xvi)

Sujata is a mother whose son has been killed by the forces of the state. She throws light on the issues of maltreatment and oppression of the innocent prevailing in our society. Sujata is presented as alienated from her family; not only does she have a profession that takes her outside her home, but she feels estranged from the priorities that the other members of her family privilege. Only Brati was different from the rest; and she was very close to him. She misses him acutely and her waking mind is full of fond and painful memories of Brati even after two long years of his death. By the daily act of going out to search for the truth of Brati's death, Sujata finds fulfillment.

Brati, like other youths of his time, was engaged in the class war waged by the supporters of Maoism in West Bengal. The difference between Brati and his friends was that he was from a rich and well to do family. His other friends from the movement were from the middle and lower-middle classes. Brati had many similarities with his mother. He was not attracted to the luxurious and wealthy life his father and siblings enjoyed. Instead by joining the movement he worked for the oppressed masses of society.

The opening of both the play and the novel gives us a glimpse of the complexity of the plot and also introduces the principal characters Sujata, Brati, and Dibyanath. The novel is written against the backdrop of the Naxalite movement and its repercussions. It focuses mainly on the process through which a grieving mother finds some meaning in understanding her dead son's commitment to the social cause. Other characters play minor roles; Brati, Sujata and Dibyanath are the prominent characters in this work. Though Brati is mainly present as an absence yet the entire theme of the work revolves around his character. At the very beginning, he is presented as corpse number 1084; it is through a series of flashbacks that some of his interactions with his mother, his friends and with Nandita are evoked by the author in short interjections.

There are slight differences between the novel, the play and the movie. While the novel and the play end as Sujata succumbs to appendicitis, the film goes a step further to depict Sujata's further course of action. She overcomes the disease and is seen working for society. The scenes narrating the tortures that Nandita had to face in the name of interrogation, the killing of Brati and his other comrades, and Sujata's confrontation with Saroj Pal in between the engagement party of Tuli allows us to understand the brutality of the state forces in dealing with the Naxalite Movement. Pahlaj Nihalani, the director of the movie *Hazaar Chaurasi Ki Maa* (1998), makes the character of Sujata all more powerful at the end of the movie when she overcomes her fear and with tremendous courage holds on to the killer of Neetu, who was once a close associate of Brati and in the end is seen working together with Sujata.

Sujata is seen in conflict with her husband and other children. She opposes the lavish ways of Dibyanath's life. She is in constant battle with her family members, especially with the death of Brati and his involvement with the movement. As the novel begins, she is seen taking a different stand when there is telephone call from the police with information about Brati and a request to identify their son. Dibyanath's character is portrayed in negative terms from the very beginning: even in the face of his son's death, he refuses to compromise his own safety and status. He takes the step of disowning his son in order to protect his reputation. He refuses to identify the dead body. Being a loving mother, Sujata is anguished and deeply agitated about the truth of the death of her son, whereas Dibyanath tries to escape the situation and wrap up things only to save his reputation.

Except for her affectionate relationship with Brati, Sujata is depicted as someone who has suffered enormously. Beginning with the pain of seeing her husband Dibyanath disown his own son to be a witness to his immoral activities, Sujata goes on to experience differences with her other children. These are some of the key issues that lead to her suffering. She is well aware that Dibyanath is disloyal to her, but she decides to remain silent and carry on with her duties. Dibyanath's indifference to his dead son is a sign of his aloofness and selfishness: the typical characteristics of upper-caste and upper-class people who do not want to let go of their elite status and self-esteem. "For men of the bhadralok class and higher castes, hegemonic masculinity is defined through its association with intellectual labour and concomitant distance from menial labour, the perverse of the chotolok, the 'serving' or lower

caste-class that works with its hands" (Roy 57)[5]. Brati's espousal of the working class means little to his father.

Sujata's engagement with all kinds of people in her quest to find the truth of her son, people whom she would normally never have encountered in normal times, is itself a mark of protest against her self-preserving class. With every step of her protest, Sujata is able to know her son better. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak highlights and points to such confrontations as it "takes place across the cleavages of hierarchies of power, of class and commitments" (viii). In *Mother of 1084*, we can see that through these meetings and exchanges, Sujata not only comes close to people from different strata of society, but in this way she also realizes her own true self. This realization of herself may be considered as the beginning of her rebellion. With such realization, she changes from a passive mother into an active agent, which results in alienating her further from her family and the upper class society of which it is a part. In the beginning, she is seen adjusting to the traditional and patriarchal mindset of the people around her. Consciously or unconsciously she is seen accepting all those social norms which prevent a woman from thinking freely and independently. She does not even dare to fight back against those norms and bring about a change even in her household. As a result, she is not able to understand Brati's rebellion against the age-old beliefs. It is through her conversation with Nandini that Sujata is able to understand her condition:

> NANDINI: I loved Brati
>
> SUJATA: I know. (Pause). It leaves one so empty when you think of it, Nandini. Brati was the soul of my life, yet I knew him so little.
>
> NANDINI: Did you ever try?
>
> SUJATA: Is it a relationship where you have to try?
>
> NANDINI: It's a deadly time when people do not belong to one another by virtue of kinship or ties of blood. Everyone remains a stranger these days to everyone. It's a crime to allow this to persist. It's an obligation these days to know one's son.
>
> SUJATA: Is it an obligation for parents alone?

> NANDINI: (smiling) It's for you to take the first step. Isn't it your obligation to set a model for the younger generation to follow? Why do you demand loyalty by virtue of relationship? Why don't you try to earn it by virtue of your integrity? You won't be honest, won't forget relationships and then you put the whole blame on us. (Devi 28-29)

Nandini is portrayed as an angry young woman, a survivor of the cruelty and brutality of the state and the police. It is through her confrontation with Nandini that Sujata is able to realize her inner self. Though the Naxalite Movement in West Bengal slowly lost momentum after a certain period of time, it left behind survivors with horrendous memories. Nandini had to suffer because of her ideology. While talking with Sujata about her condition, Nandini says:

> Oh, so you haven't guessed! My optical nerves were damaged from the exposure to the glare of the lamp for forty-eight, seventy-two hours at a stretch. My right eye is totally blind. One can't tell by looking at me though. (Devi 86)[6]

Somu's parents are people whose only hope was crushed by the state forces. Somu's father is a simple man who has lived all his life in fear. He is innocent and does not have much idea about power politics. He feels cheated about the fact that his son became a victim of the atrocities of the state forces backed by the police and local goons. As an ordinary citizen, his first assumption was that the police would come to rescue his son and his friends. His hopes were shattered as the police van came only to collect the dead bodies. Somu's mother revealed to Sujata how the police did not even bother to go inside in time. While narrating the incident to Sujata, Somu's mother says:

> He had such faith in the police, but they wouldn't even take down his complaint. They didn't do a thing. They only sent their vans when it was all over to collect the dead bodies…They didn't do a thing. That was more than he could bear, and he died of the shock. O God! Is there no justice in this country? God! No justice? He went on and on asking till he was dead. (Devi 22)

Although Somu's mother had lost the last hope of her family, she tries to console Sujata. They are at the lowest rung of life, and the grievances she makes to Sujata are heart-rending. Through the conversation, Mahasweta Devi portrays the terrible condition of those who are not only victims of poverty but also of state brutality. Still, Somu's mother tries to find a ray of hope when she discloses how her daughter encourages her by trying to compare their situation with that of their counterparts. She says:

> My daughter tells me, don't cry. Will he ever come back? Think of Partha's mother, sister; she handed her son to death. Partha's younger brother can't come back home. They'd kill him too if he came back…How can there be quiet with the mothers' heart burning like bodies on fire? …it's not easy to…feed two souls, mother and daughter…You have yet another son. You can still hold him to your breast and forget your grief. (Sujata shakes her head) I lost my son, my son's father and I, with this tortoise's life of mine, shall live on forever, the two funeral pyres burning within! (Devi 12, 22)

On the one hand, we have Sujata and Somu's mothers who try to discover their son's sacrifice. On the other hand, Sujata's husband and her other children are happy in their cocooned existence even as they understand that the people of their class are responsible for Brati's death. On the occasion of a family celebration, Sujata goes through immense pain, discovering her inner self as well as understanding her dead son Brati. The more she comes to know about Brati's hidden life, the more she realizes the truth about her situation. By coming closer to Somu's family, Sujata is able to find Brati and the reasons for which he fought and died. The struggle and the sacrifice of Brati bring Somu's family and Sujata closer. Somu's mother reveals to Sujata how Brati sacrificed his life to save his friends:

> SOMU's MOTHER: Your son, sister, gifted his life away. He had come to warn Somu and his group. They had got wind that the four of them were there in the colony, there was the fear that they wouldn't survive that night…
>
> SUJATA: I hadn't ever seen them. (Pause) Brati had never brought them home. (Pause) I wasn't home all the time.

> SOMU's Mother: (draws a breath). You're a working woman, you have a rich home, I wonder why Brati chose such a course! Didn't you ever realize what your son was up to? (Devi 12, 14)

Initially, Sujata is unable to connect with the mothers of Nandini and Somu. But gradually she draws closer and is able to share her sorrow with them. But Sujata's visit to Somu's mother is not liked by those connected to state forces as they were able to visualize a rebel in her. They warn Somu's family members and order them to stop Sujata's visits. While narrating her emotions, Somu's mother tells Sujata to avoid visiting their place as the perpetrators tell her, "Why does she come to your house? Forbid her. It will be dangerous otherwise" (Devi 23). Sumanta Banerjee in his article "Sting of Betrayal" (1983) rightly points to the repercussions that the poor had to face because of the Naxalite movement:

> There are thousands of sufferers who are not being allowed to lead a normal life. For years the police have been trained to suspect every young man as a potential rebel, and they find ready preys even among those unfortunate youth who were perhaps once on the fringe of the Naxalite Movement but have no political connections whatsoever now. (176)

By becoming a working woman, Sujata is in a way able to come out of the clutches of her dominant husband. She begins working on a job to support the family; however, the job soon becomes a form of self-assertion and gives her mobility to move freely outside the constraints of her home. During her youngest daughter Tuli's engagement party, which takes place on the anniversary of the day Brati was killed, Sujata is tormented. The people who surround her, many of whom are complicit in Brati's killing, fills her with anguish. She even has to face Saroj Pal, the DCDD- Deputy Commissioner, Detective Department, who is a close associate of Sujata's son-in-law Tony Kapadia. Mahasweta Devi shows how elite society is deeply entrenched in the oppressive state forces and has a stake in its perpetuation.

Somu's mother and Nandini are in a way able to raise the consciousness of Sujata. Her meetings with Somu's mother and Nandini help her to understand the dark realities of the Naxalite Movement and the sacrifices made by its followers. Nandini was in a piteous condition since the loss of her vision after police torture. She is released only on medical

grounds, saving her from sure death in lock-up. Looking at Nandini's state Sujata is able to realize the level of brutality that the police perpetrated on the revolutionaries.

After her meeting with Nandini, Sujata turns rebellious. She finds ways to fight the social system. This resistance coming from her new knowledge makes grow as a woman and as a mother. Her day-long meeting with Somu's mother and Nandini allows her to know the grim realities faced by the revolutionaries. While talking about the transformative works of Mahasweta Devi and speaking about the changing roles of women in Indian society, S. Prasanna Sree says:

> Mahasweta Devi's *Mother of 1084* expose the subjugation of women crosses the boundaries of classified schooled Feminism. Subverting the traditional portrayal of Mothers are (sic) literature, she portrays 'Mother' as the symbolic significance and representation of the Revolution. For the writer 'Mother' is the centrality of Revolution. (77)

On the surface level, *Mother of 1084* seems to document the distress and grief of a mother and her journey towards knowing her son better. But at a deeper level, it reveals how an apolitical mother rises up to resist social and political oppression. It is the same repressive structures against which her dear son had struggled and given up his life. His death teaches his mother a lesson of political resistance.

III

Mahasweta Devi's translated work "Draupadi" in the collection *Breast Stories* (1997), is set against the backdrop of the Naxalite movement. The story is located in the tumultuous period when the tribals of West Bengal joined forces with the Naxalbari uprisings and took up arms to fight the landlords and moneylenders who had been exploiting their resources since time immemorial. This story also brings into focus the fiery politics of Bengali identity and the questions of Indian nationhood. "Draupadi" is a story about a Santhal woman Dopdi Mejhen who, with her husband Dhulna Majhi fights the wealthy landlords to access the wells which were the primary source of water for the village. In the

name of enforcing law and order, the government launched operation Bakuli only to kill the tribal 'rebels'. The agents of the state used various strategies to subjugate the tribals viz, kidnapping, murder and rape. In "Draupadi", Mahasweta Devi portrays vividly how Dopdi is captured, tortured and raped in order to tame her spirit and quell the tribal resistance.

Mahasweta Devi engages powerfully with the issue of the subjugation of women. Through the portrayal of unforgettable female characters in her short stories, Mahasweta Devi shows that the common ground for female subjugation is caste and class. Brave and strong as they are, the women are hunted down by the reactionary and oppressive forces. Her works show women being doubly marginalized on two oppressive axes, on the axis of caste as well as gender. It can be seen that both caste and class play an integral part when it comes to gender discrimination. Srila Roy says that rape in the Naxal movement did not take place merely out of sexual desire, but it was considered as a symbol of power to prove superiority over the female cadres:

> Class for the Naxalites, was central to the recognition of gendered power and powerlessness but not in unequivocal ways. So, while the rape of peasant women by landlords or repressive state forces was politically acknowledged as a form of class oppression, that of middle-class women at the hands of lower-class/caste men was routinely denied. Violence against women came to be cognized and mediated through an axiological understanding of 'class' and 'class oppression' and as a reflection of and response to the political violence that the revolutionaries were organizing against. (129)

Amartya Sen in the *Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian History, Culture and Identity* observes the interdependence of these three sources of marginalization in Indian society. According to him, "These different sources of vulnerability are each significant, but no less importantly, we must see that they can strengthen the impact of each other because of their complementarity" (205). Considering the diverse culture of Indian society, Amartya Sen says that "class is not the only source of inequality, and interest in class as a source of disparity has to be placed within a bigger picture that includes other divisive influences: gender, caste, region, community and so on" (205).

Mahasweta Devi was very well aware of the prevailing inequalities of society. So her writings portray the various kinds of subjugation prevailing in society giving utmost importance to the discrimination faced in the name of caste, class, and gender. She believed that it was class discrimination which has resulted in "the influences of other sources of disparity (such as gender inequality) much sharper" (Sen 205). In her writings we see class playing an important role when it comes to discrimination in the name of caste and gender. Her female characters undergo immense pain because of their caste and class. Be it the character of Sanichari from *Rudali*, or Gangor from "Behind the Bodice", both are subject to maltreatment because of their caste, class, and gender.

Like other characters of Mahasweta Devi's short stories, Dopdi in the short story "Draupadi" suffers because of her caste location and gender. Both Dopdi and Dulna had to work for Surja Sahu as bonded labours because Dulna's great-grandfather had taken a bit of paddy from him. "My great-grandfather took a bit of paddy from him, and I still give him free labour to repay that debt" (30)[7]. The exploitations by feudal lords went generation after generation, and Dopdi and Dulna were the victims of inter-generational bondage system. Surja Sahu's eyes were also at Dopdi as "his eyes watered when he looked at" (30). Dopdi. It was due to the lower economic status that Dopdi became an easy target for Surja Sahu.

The clash between them broke out when Surja Sahu arranged to build two tube-wells and three wells inside his compound. Dulna and others like him were completely opposed to it, and in that scuffle, Surja Sahu is killed. The fight between them was for the fundamental rights which every citizen should get. Dopdi and Dulna run for life as their names are flashed in the wanted list. While Dulna gets killed, Dopdi is caught alive, only to worsen her condition in police custody. Her capture results in the brutal experience of being gang raped by police.

The story of Chuni from the book *Dust on The Road* reveals many facts about the prevailing injustices in the Indian society. Her suicide exposes the brutal tyranny that lower caste people have to face:

> Chuni's death has revealed what West Bengal truly is. Brutal caste and class hostility and persecution has been allowed to continue. The government allowed the district babus to abuse her. Nothing was done to change her

> working conditions. She was kept a slave of her department. Why not? Was she not a Lodha? Was she not given a job? She should have remained eternally grateful for that. The university authorities did nothing to throw out the caste baiter. And the commission appointed by the government, apparently sleeping so far, suddenly became very active and submitted its report. Only a few days after her death, when there was a hue and cry in the media. (Devi 195-196)

Sexual violence was one of the key issues faced by the females who joined the movement. It was through sexual violence that the agents of the state tried to break the female rebels who were associated with the movement in any form. To depict the level of exploitation Mahasweta Devi portrays the ravaged bodies of female characters in her stories. In "Draupadi" Dopdi's body is mutilated by those in power multiple times. Once Dopdi is caught, she is brought to camp within an hour's time. She is questioned for another hour where nobody touches or tries to harm her modesty. But immediately after that her worst nightmare begins as Senanayak orders to "make her" and "do the needful" and gradually disappears.

The process of shaming Dopdi continues till the dawn, till the time nearly every man in the camp fulfills his sexual desire on the ravaged body of Dopdi. After regaining consciousness, Dopdi is able to feel the pain as to what was being done to her body in the name of making:

> Trying to move, she feels her arms and legs still tied to four posts. Something sticky under her arms and waist. Her own blood. Only the gag has been removed. Incredible thirst. In case she says 'water' she catches her lower lip in her teeth. She senses that her vagina is bleeding. How many came to make her?....Shaming her, a tear trickles out of the corner of her eye. In the muddy moonlight she lowers her lightless eye, sees her breasts, and understands that, indeed, she's made up right. Her breasts are bitten raw, the nipples torn. How many? Four-five-six-seven-then Draupadi had passed out. (Devi 35)

Mallarika Sinha Roy in the paper "Rethinking female militancy in postcolonial Bengal" (2012) takes up the interviews of the female rebels to describe their conditions. While the

entire idea of the movement was based upon equality, yet discrimination prevailed on the basis of gender. Female cadres were not allowed to take decisions as this was kept reserved for the male cadres. Mallarika Sinha Roy discusses the story of Jyoti who killed a jotedar. Jyoti was the victim of his sexual desires. But her decision to kill the sexual exploiter was considered by the local Naxalite unit to be "an act of personal revenge rather than a political act." (127)

> What made Jyoti's case problematic for the unit, however, was not that she had sought the death of a sexual exploiter, but she herself had taken the initiative to 'annihilate' him. Instead of taking her (possible) story of suffering to chivalrous male activists, she stepped out of her gender role. (127)

Srila Roy describes how sexual abuse of female cadres was often neglected by their own party members. At times, these female cadres also had to prove their legitimacy to be declared victims of sexual violence. While there are only a few examples where women participated actively in political campaigns, the division between male and female cadres was always present among the radical groups and "women were, by and large, considered as auxiliaries to male revolutionaries" (321). Roy says:

> This gender role within the movement was rigidly demarcated: many of my women interviewees asserted that they were usually excluded from decision-making roles. The fraught questions of sexuality in Naxalite discourse come to the fore in this context. Suman explained Jyoti's 'annihilation campaign' in terms of her personal experiences of sexual violence. This explanation became a strategy both to mark the pathology in women's performance of premeditated violence and to situate that pathology within the familiar terrain of sexual violence, instead of the more ambiguous revolutionary violence. Labelling Jyoti a victim of sexual violence—segregating her from the 'normal' category of women and designating her action as personal revenge—was a method of reintegrating abnormal victims' unusual reactions within a generalized presumption of aberration. (Sinha Roy 127)

Coming back to the story under discussion, after Dulna's death Dopdi was left alone to take decisions. The harrowing experience that she had to go through that night illustrates how rebellious women are treated in the revolutionary movements. It was not for one or two hours but the entire night that Dopdi had to face the experience of being gang-raped:

> She turns her eyes and sees something white. Her own cloth. Nothing else. Suddenly she hopes against hope. Perhaps they have abandoned her. For the foxes to devour. But she hears the scrape of feet. She turns her head, the guard leans on his bayonet and leers at her. Draupadi closes her eyes. She doesn't have to wait long. Again the process of making her begins. Goes on. The moon vomits a bit of light and goes to sleep. Only the dark remains. A compelled spread-eagled still body. Active *pistons* of flesh rise and fall, rise and fall over it. (Devi 36)

The maimed body of Dopdi signifies the level of brutality meted out to the gendered subaltern in revolutionary movements. Moreover, such cruelty is done solely with the motive of teaching a lesson to the revolutionaries and to show the might of the state in repressing any form of resistance to its power. The brutal treatment the revolutionaries faced was an example of power relations which remained even after decades of Indian independence. Tony Beck and Tirthankar Roy have rightly pointed out that rape is socially constructed "rather than a product of fate or nature or innate flaws of character" (447). Moreover, the "raped woman in particular becomes the symbol of the kind of suffering that is not an accident of history but a condition actually required by the power relations of an expropriative society" (447). Through these depictions, Mahasweta Devi was able to portray the extreme level of exploitation, torture, and violence of severe form that has been inflicted to the women in Indian society. There has always been an unequal situation between the men and women in Indian society. Be it in wage discrimination or the working hours, it was always the women who had to face discrimination. Moreover, the women from the lower caste also had to go through various kinds of sexual exploitation at the hands of masters from upper caste and upper class. Mahasweta Devi was able to portray that picture of society with the pitiable conditions of women characters in her stories. She was able to illustrate the subtle differences between the two societies where on the one side, women had no place of honour,

and the other side her beauty and image was glorified because of her caste and class. In this context Uma Chakravarti opines that:

> Apart from such marriages, upper caste men have had sexual access to lower caste women, an aspect of the material power they have over the lower castes. Thus while a lower caste man's alleged, or actual, sexual relationship with a 'higher' caste woman causes hysteria, and brings swift and violent retribution upon the lower caste man, and often on both persons….the upper caste man's casual or continuous use of a lower caste woman is naturalized. (81)

In Dopdi's case rape was used as a tool to settle scores.

In the vast literature produced by Mahasweta Devi, she gives a clear picture of the inhuman treatment in the form of gender inequality through the depiction of brutal violence inflicted on poor women. The vulnerability of the victimised people is brought out by Mahasweta Devi in her works. Long term deprivation, hunger, superstition, exploitation by the caste authorities, makes the oppressed classes more vulnerable and prone to rebellion. In "Draupadi" Mahasweta Devi not only bring into the forefront the sufferings of women but at the same time shows that women can also protest and resist against the oppressive system.

Through her writings, Mahasweta Devi sheds light on those issues which have always remained subsumed under other problems of society. Depicting grim reality, her female characters to go through immense torture and harassment, showing the reality of which society is always in denial. However, though poor and marginalized, Devi's women characters have the strength and courage to fight back against all the odds. While analyzing the women characters in Mahasweta Devi's novels, Soumitra Chakravarty is of the opinion that these women are "black, barbaric, and beautiful-monolithic, with the primeval purity of the black stone and the red soil they spring from" (16). According to him these female characters are symbol of power and their power comes "from the drab of grueling poverty of village life" (16). The female characters from the stories of Mahasweta Devi are sources of power and courage not only for the gendered subaltern but also for their men.

The female characters in Mahasweta Devi's stories break all the barriers and are able to prove their position fighting all odds. They break all the traditions to battle against the establishment. They fight the "establishment with whatever they can wield – the sickle, the

hatchet, or simply their beautiful black bodies and their regal detachment" (Chakravarty 17). In "Draupadi", Mahasweta Devi portrays powerfully how Dopdi uses her body to fight against Senanayak. Subverting the role of Draupadi of the Mahabharata, Dopdi of the modern era relies only upon herself and fights back the authorities. Mahasweta Devi deconstructs the mythical character of Draupadi of Mahabharata. Here in the modern-day, Dopdi refuses to be clothed again as she was very well aware that there is no one to save her modesty. She refuses to be clothed back again, and tears her clothes "with an indomitable laughter (36)." In her introductory remarks while comparing the character in the epic, Draupadi with the modern day Dopdi, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak writes:

> The men easily succeed in stripping Dopdi—in the narrative it is the culmination of her political punishment by the representatives of the law. She remains publicly naked at her own insistence. Rather than save her modesty through the implicit intervention of a benign and divine (in this case it would have been god-like) comrade, the story insists that this is the place where male leadership stops. (12)

Even after facing torture and humiliation for the entire night, Dopdi stands straight in front of Senanayak with her ravaged body. Her confrontation with Senanayak where she asks, "you asked them to make me up, don't you want to see how they made me?" (36) reveals the signs of subaltern resistance. Her defiance in refusing to cover her body and the confrontation was the biggest challenge that Senanayak faced during his tenure. The fear in Senanayak is clearly seen on his face when Dopdi questions as she "wipes out the blood on her palm and says in a voice that is as terrifying, sky splitting and sharp as her ululation, What's the use of clothes? You can strip me, but how can you clothe me again? Are you a man?"

As a writer who has worked for and has written on social causes, Mahasweta Devi denies accepting the simplistic version of the Draupadi's story in the original epic. Her version of Draupadi is strong, brave and has the capacity to almost defy all the traditional notions about woman that are embedded in the Indian psyche. At the end Dopdi's spit of a "bloody gob" at Senanayak's shirt and her challenge to Senanayak to encounter her: "come on, kounter me- come on counter me-?" is a symbol of the gendered subaltern defiance to any kind of torture and humiliation. In fact, it gives Senanayak the shock of his life as he is

seen standing afraid for the first time "before an unarmed target, terribly afraid" as Dopdi pushed Senanayak with her "two mangled breasts."

IV

Mahasweta Devi's concern for the rights of the tribals can be seen in the novels like *Aranyer Adhikar* (1977), *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* (1980) and *Bashai Tudu* (1990). These three novels are written in continuation of the struggles of tribals from the pre-independence era to the post-independence India. In *Aranyer Adhikar*, Devi presents Birsa Munda who rises to fight against colonial policies. Birsa Munda was a tribal hero who led the uprising from the front against the colonial authorities to retain tribal rights over resources. *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* ends in 1970 when the Naxalite movement found momentum and covered almost the entire state of West Bengal. The end of *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* is significant as it paved the way for *Bashai Tudu* to pick up the momentum of the Naxalite movement. Prior to the Naxalite movement, the people of West Bengal witnessed many uprisings during the colonial era. Through the portrayal of the unrest in West Bengal, Mahasweta Devi was able to outline the socio-political and economic background of the state. Even after several years of Indian independence, the tribals of the country were at the lowest rung of society as they formed the majority of landless agricultural labourers and the working class. They were even denied the minimum wages which was fixed by the government in the year 1968. Through her writings, Mahasweta Devi shows up that part of the society which has always been in a privileged position and has exploited the poor with the aid of the state and its machinery. She also attacks the leftist government who came in power with the promise to uplift the poor and the downtrodden, but did very little for them after it came to power:

> Constituting the lowest rung of agricultural labour, the migrant labourers were not affected in the least by the orders on the MW or the *Minimum Wages for Agricultural Labourers*, as declared by the Labour Department to the reverberation of slogans like 'Workers of the World Unite!' 'It's no Independence till the workers have their own State!' and 'The workers are

> the rightful owners of the world!' With the omniscience of the ancient sages, they knew that laws are made only because they have to be made, that they need never be enforced, and that those for whom the laws are made need never reap the benefits. But when they were asked what they were, they doggedly replied, 'We are agricultural labourers nonetheless.' (Bandhopadhyay and Spivak 61)

The novella *Bashai Tudu* is written against the backdrop of the political and social upheaval of the Naxalite movement in West Bengal between 1967 and 1977. The Naxalite movement of the 1970s was largely inspired by the Tebhaga Movement of 1946. Though the government approved the land ceiling acts in 1954 and 1971, it was neither accepted nor implemented. The condition of the landless agriculturists deteriorated with every passing decade. In the preface to the book *Bashai Tudu*, Mahasweta Devi writes, "the problem is not always confined to land. The peasant as an agricultural labourer is denied his legitimate wages. He has to struggle continuously for water, for seeds, for fertilizers, and live his life out in hunger and poverty" (Devi 1990, xxii).

The Naxalite movement originated because of the differences in the class structure. The sole motive behind the movement was to do away with the class structure prevalent in Indian society. Raju J. Das in his article "Radical Peasant Movement and Rural Distress in India: A Study of the Naxalite Movement" included the book *India's New Economic Policy: A Critical Analysis* (2001) is of the opinion that while there were issues related to caste and gender inside the party, but it gave utmost importance to the issues related to the traditional left. As a consequence, larger issues of gender and caste were always pushed to secondary positions. He further states that women were always kept in a subsidiary position and that the lower castes members of the party were relegated to perform level jobs. Even a majority of those killed and martyred to the cause belonged to the lower castes. Though the "tribals, Dalits, and other lower-caste people comprise the bulk of their support base" (298), their representation in the party's higher positions was very low when compared to that of the upper-caste people:

> That was their destiny. In a democracy the government would never violate the fundamental right of a small peasant to be victimized by his jotedar or his moneylender. The Indian Constitution respected every citizen's fundamental

> right to become whatever he could by dint of his guts. The poor therefore had the right to become poorer still. A peasant today had the right to be a landless agricultural labourer tomorrow. There was no governmental agency or strong organization to stand by these men who made a living by cultivating other people's land. The government and the official peasant organizations were within their democratic rights to deny any kind of support to these people. (*Bashai Tudu*: Devi 87)

The dominance and the oppressive reign of the jotedars was permitted and supported by the state and its agencies. The government in power, whatever its ideological affiliation, never really questioned the limitless powers of the jotedars. In fact, the government was seen suppressing the rebels to give a free hand to the oppressors.

In the introduction to the novella, Samik Bandhopadhyay states that Bashai Tudu, a Santhal tribal, along with the other tribal revolutionaries, "stands outside the Naxalite movement as well as the constitutional political parties, to fight exclusively and doggedly for the cause of the agricultural labourers" (xi)[8]. Bashai, in the novelette, fights with the landlords for their exploitative measures against the tribals. He plans and executes the killings of the landlords. Though he is not a declared Naxal and remains outside the party membership, his name keeps coming up in the wanted list as the police force is always in search of his whereabouts. "Operation Bashai Tudu" was launched to find and kill him. Every time he is killed, he rises again 'like a phoenix', "who dies at every encounter and is reborn to lead the next one." (xi). Mahasweta Devi delves deep into the issues of class struggle involving the lives of the peasants and tribals. In *Bashai Tudu* she draws the character of Bashai as a free-living Santal, who is seen in an uncompromising position to fight against the injustices meted out to the tribals. Along with Bashai, Mahasweta also focuses on the character of Kali Santra who is present at every stage to help and support Bashai in his moves and tactics. In *From Popular Movements to Rebellion: The Naxalite Decade* (2019) Ranabir Samaddar writes:

> The two protagonists, the rebel Bashai Tudu, and his counterfoil Kali Santra, a critical member of the bourgeoisiefied CPI(M), are locked in a non-antagonistic relationship and their reflective dialogues create the necessary foundation on which the revolt will happen. (116)

Kali Santra knows Bashai well and is entrusted with the job of identifying Bashai every time there is the news of Bashai's death. Kali Santra and Bashai had been working together from the formation of Kishan Sabha. But later Bashai realized the realities of class distinctions inside the party and left it to fight alone. Kali and Bashai's conversation in a meeting reveals the reasons why Bashai left the party and also his support of the violent ways adopted by the Naxalites:

> They never had a thought to spare for the agricultural labourers. There was a big lie behind their slogans for peasant unity. If the agricultural labourers ever spoke for their rights, they'd be treading on the toes of the rich and the middle peasantry and incurring their ire. The Kisan Sabha went on nurturing the unity of the rich and middle peasantry, while the marginal peasants lost their meagre plots to the landowner-moneylenders and ended up as agricultural labourers.' (Devi 45)

Though Bashai and Kali knew each other for years, yet they had differences on ideological and tactical lines. The major difference between the two of them was in terms of class. While Kali belonged to the middle-class morality and had also inherited some landed property, Bashai was born a Santal and a landless agricultural labourer. Despite the differences, Kali had a deep sense of respect for Bashai, as he knew that Bashai represented the revolution for almost all the tribes who worked as landless labourers. Though a loyal party worker unlike Bashai, Kali went on to support Bashai and his revolution, going against the party lines. However, Kali himself was not able to come out of the vicious cycle as Bashai did:

> There was something of a strain in this endeavour on Kali's part to understand. For he could never be Bashai, to understand it all from Bashai's perspective. For he was no tribal. No upper caste Hindu can ever share the sense of deprivation a tribal is born with. It is a deprivation that dates far back. The dark tribal was the first child of a dark India. The rest mere followed. But they snatched everything away from the tribal and shared it out among themselves. That was the beginning of a process of deprivation that has continued relentlessly. (Devi 118)

Kali clearly had differences with the ideals of the party. He was able to recognize that Bashai's disillusionment of the party was because of the injustice done to the landless agricultural labourers. Though he was actively engaged with the party but a sense of guilt and remorse was present inside Kali:

> A searing sense of failure and waste. All his life he had only touched the fringes of the problems. Did Marx, Engels or Lenin ever advise anyone to do anything like this? What about trying to solve larger problems? The problem of caste remained as great a menace as ever. Water for the thirsty and food for the hungry remained fairytale dreams. And yet there were all those parties, with all their ideals, with all of them addressing each other in their parties as comrades, and feeling a thrill whenever they sang, 'It's the last battle beginning, Comrade', and reveling in a sense of belonging-'This India's mine, mine, mine!' The way it all vanished. Water had been poured into a vessel with a hole. Knowing it all, one still had to go on wearing the mask of loyalty. Otherwise it could be considered an act of treachery. Such a *strain* it was. A strain that set off a corrosive process. *Erosion*. *Corrosion*. *Pulmonic disease*. Waste. (Devi 84)

Bashai is the result of the long-term deprivation of the depressed classes and the lower castes of Indian society. He rebelled against the state and its policies. He joined the party but very soon left it when he came to know about the discrepancies inside the party on the basis of class. He was very well aware that the party kept on "bypassing the demands of the agricultural labourer so consistently" (Devi 50). However, he continued his fight against the state and the landlords. Bashai was always critical of the role and policies of the left parties in bringing change to the fate of the tribals. He asserted that though the Kisan Sabha was formed to redeem the pains of the agricultural labourers, it failed miserably to address the issue. The people from the lower caste and class formed the majority and were the biggest asset of the party, but in return the party did very little to improve their status. Although not a Naxal in the strictest terms, Bashai was aware of his fate going against the state and its policies. He knew that the post-colonial Indian authorities followed the legacies of their colonial masters. He was ready to face every kind of repercussion that has always been inflicted upon the revolutionaries by the state and its machinery:

> 'Call me a Naxalite if you like. Doesn't matter in the least. Before we were born, whoever *challenged* the authority would be branded *terrorists*; then they were called Congressites. When the Congress came to power they were branded as Communists. Now the Front calls them Naxalites. That's what they'll call me. Doesn't matter to me in the least. How can one show the truth to one who feigns blindness?' (Devi 49)

Alaknanda Bagchi in "Conflicting Nationalisms: The Voice of the Subaltern in Mahaweta Devi's Bashai Tudu" (1996) writes that "Working within this space of displacement, Mahasweta in Bashai Tudu tries to "write in" the history of the dispossessed, the disinherited, and the displaced adivasis or tribals who have been almost "written out" of Indian history (42). Mahasweta Devi raised her voice against these powers through her writings. Bagchi states that while dealing with the questions of nation "Mahasweta focuses on the "split" between the "pedagogical" and the "performative" and lays out the actions of Bashai Tudu in this liminal space of the "in-between" (44). Kali Santra stands in between as he belongs to middle-class mentality but is seen working for the dispossessed.

By representing different aspects of the socio-political condition, Mahasweta Devi brings to light the magnitude of exploitation and suppression in Indian society. Through her writings she establishes her belief that Naxal violence was in a way justified when it is seen from the perspective of the exploited peasants. The movement spread to other parts of the country like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Bihar and Andhra Pradesh, and was eventually crushed, making the condition of the peasants worse than before. It is here that Mahasweta Devi's mythical figure Bashai Tudu attains a special position: though the figure may be crushed, it re-appears like the hope of the poor who are suppressed by the powerful. The poor face exploitation repeatedly, and from generation to generation covering village after village; at periodic intervals Bashai comes in to rescue the poor, re-appearing after every defeat. Kali is a close associate of Bashai and realizes that Bashai's rising from the ashes is a strategy that Bashai had evolved by learning the tactics of guerilla warfare. Kali also helps Bashai in keeping this myth alive since it becomes a symbol of resistance for the oppressed classes to fight class exploitation.

V

Manoranjan Byapari was born in Barishal, Bangladesh in the year 1950. Following Partition, his family moved to West Bengal, India when he was around three years old. Manoranjan Byapari had to face the hardships of a refugee before his family decided to move to Calcutta for a more stable life. He was barely ten years old when he left home, not able to tolerate the sufferings of hunger and poverty. After that, Byapari took up some petty jobs working in tea stalls and police quarters across the cities and towns in North India. Nevertheless, he was exploited and abused by those in power. He came back to Calcutta after ten years of exile. At that point of time, the Naxalite movement was spreading all over West Bengal, with the educated youth and the intelligentsia joining hands to bring about a change in the existing class-dominated society. Young Manoranjan Byapari was driven by the waves of the movement without understanding much about the ideological commitments of the communist revolutionaries. As a result of a clash between the rival gangs of communists and the police, Byapari was arrested and jailed for two years. Inside the prison, Byapari learned to read and write by being encouraged by a fellow prisoner.

Manoranjan Byapari, a Dalit by birth, has written extensively about the struggles of the Dalits in India. His life has been a struggle right from his childhood. From a rickshaw puller to a cook and then to a novelist, he struggled all his life to eke out a living. Manoranjan Byapari has risen from being helpless, powerless and humiliated into a position today whereby he can give voice to class and caste discrimination prevailing in our society. According to him:

> It is only in the case of the poor and the illiterate that the question of caste comes up. No one cares about the caste of the wealthy, whose only identity is that they are rich. (Byapari ix)

Manoranjan Byapari's life changed when he happened to meet Mahasweta Devi in a chance encounter. Byapapri was a rickshaw-puller during those times, and by a stroke of luck, Mahasweta Devi boarded his rickshaw on a summer afternoon. His enquiring and curious mind was reflected in the way he asked questions of his passengers. When he could not understand the meaning of some words while reading, it was his practice to ask for the

meaning of such words. In this chance encounter with the author, he asked the meaning of the word 'jijibisha'[6], which he had come across in a book. Mahasweta Devi was surprised as the word is not of common usage. The conversation introduced Mahasweta Devi to Manoranjan Byapari. Mahasweta Devi came to know about his reading habits and asked him to write in her journal *Bortika* where several other working class people were given a chance to write. This opportunity came as a turning point in the life of Manoranjan Byapari who began to write only as a result of this chance. The first piece that he wrote was titled as 'Riksha Chalai' (I Pull a Rickshaw) under the pseudonym Madan Dutta. In his autobiography, Byapari says it is his good fortune that he did not have to run in search of publishers to get his works published. In fact, he wonders whether it was as a result of Mahasweta Devi's affection towards him that his writings were published easily. So he started sending his works under the pseudonym 'Jijibisha'[9] to other periodicals:

> "So I sent my works under the pseudonym of Jijibisha to five other periodicals, Runner, Hatiyar, Lok Vigyan, Sisrika and Banga Barta. They accepted the writings. My confidence touched the sky" (Byapari 224).

Manoranjan Byapari's anger spills out in his works. Upon being asked about non-Dalit writers writing Dalit literature, Byapari rejected it, saying that a non-Dalit writer can never write the actual experience of the life of Dalit. He says that the person can never feel the same experience unless and until he has gone through the same pain, anger and humiliation in the life of a Dalit. So it is the Dalit himself who can write best about his experience:

> No learning or sympathy can bring that experience to him. So we believe that only a Dalit with the talent for writing can write Dalit literature. One needs to possess not only compassion, but also a kinship; not only sahanabhuti (saha + anubhuti) but also samanubhuti (saman + anubhuti). (Mukherjee 18)

As Byapari belonged to a Dalit refugee family, his childhood was spent in hard labour tending to cows and goats and working in roadside tea stalls and restaurants, making it impossible for him to have any formal education. Byapari was marginalized by both caste and class. His autobiography reveals the dark realities of living as a Dalit in India. The autobiography *Itibritte Chandal Jiban* won him the Sahitya Akademi Award. In a scholarly article titled "Nana Chokhye Manoranjan Byapari," Mahasweta Devi wrote that

"Manoranjan Byapari is not merely a 'Dalit' writer. He is an icon of another generation—alive, dissenting, and a symbol of hope and aspiration of ordinary people" (Bag). Sipra Mukherjee, in her introduction to Manoranjan Byapari in the book *Dalit Text: Aesthetics and Politics Re-Imagined* (2019) writes:

> His life vividly reveals the contentious but intimate connections between the Dalit movement and that of Marxism, revealing the complex equations between caste and class. His meteoric rise into the world of letters has caused him to be popularly hailed as the 'Miracle Man' in Bengal, and as 'the rickshaw-puller-turned-author'. (16)

Struggling to lead a normal life with the little earning he has, Manoranjan Byapari considers the system responsible for the inequalities existing in our society, and attacks it vehemently in his writings. Byapari has had to adopt multiple identities since his childhood. He was born a Namashudra[10]. The urgency to find a livelihood drove him to take up work in a crematorium; that is, society compelled him to become a Chandal[11] and finally the political consequences of the partition made him a refugee. Byapari's writings reflect the differences in our society engendered on the basis of caste and class. His autobiography *Ittibrite Chandal Jeeban* translated as *Interrogating My Chandal Life: An Autobiography of a Dalit* is a gripping narrative of Manoranjan Byapari's life struggles. The narrative is based in Calcutta, and its suburbs as Byapari struggles through social and personal experiences as a refugee and as a Dalit by birth. Dayabati Roy in her article "Caste and power: An ethnography in West Bengal, India*" (2011), writes extensively on the caste division of people in West Bengal. In the Bengali society differentiation is made on the basis of caste as well as societal groups thereby placing people in the positions of Bhadralok and Chhotolok (Roy 953). Byapari is cynical of this division between the chhotolok and bhadralok in his writings. According to him:

> Their impressionable minds are etched with this 'we' and 'they' division of class. This is a mindset that has polluted the tree from its roots to its highest branches. No poor man can think of himself as a gentleman today. They are scared of doing so; they are embarrassed of doing so. (Byapari 121)

Manoranjan Byapari's association with the Naxalite movement goes back to the first phase of Naxalism when Byapari was twenty-four years old. The romanticism associated with the Naxalites compelled Byapari to join the movement rather than any ideological commitment. Apart from students and youths, Byapari and his associates who joined the movement were mostly from poor families. As analysts assert, their involvement in the revolution "was not an elitist luxury" for them (Mukherjee 17). However, Byapari believed that they also deserved a decent and stable life.

At the age of 70, Manoranjan Byapari has very recently made an advent into a new role. Byapari has been projected as a new face by Mamata Banerjee as a candidate of Trinamool Congress for the 2021 Assembly elections. He was elected to the West Bengal Legislative Assembly from the Balagarh constituency and is currently serving as an MLA (Member of Legislative Assembly). After writing about caste and class distinctions in his books, Byapari has come out to fight against the "bibhajaner rajniti (divisive politics)" (Chakrabarty), which according to him is gripping West Bengal with rise of the right-wing forces in the state and their threat of divisive policies such as the National Register of Citizens and Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

VI

Batashe Baruder Gundho (2013), translated as *There's Gunpowder in the Air* in 2018 by Arunava Sinha, is a fictional tale created by Manoranjan Byapari recollecting his days at the prison during the tumultuous phase of the 1970s. Both in the suburb and in the central part of Calcutta, the young generation was full of revolutionary fervor and wanted to free society from the clutches of feudal landlords. But in the process of fighting for the rights of the landless people, they were caught by the police and put into high-security jails. This novel is located within the tumultuous times of the 1960s and 1970s where the jails were turned into concentration camps for those who stood up for equal rights and followed the ideology of the communists.

The novel starts with Bireshwar Mukherjee's appointment as the new jailer of the prison where the entire plot is set. Bireshwar Mukherjee, on the verge of his retirement, does not want any untoward incident to happen until he retires. The novel shifts from the prison dynamics as it begins to describe the background of sympathizers like Bhojon and Bhogoban. The stories of oppression and exploitation that have been constant in Indian society even without any political or ideological underpinning are shown as the core root of the repression.

The conditions of Indian jails are horrific. During the time of Byapari's incarceration, though the capacity of the jail was for twelve hundred prisoners, the total number of prisoners was four to five times higher because of the large number of detainees suspected of being Naxals. The cells in all jails were choked with enormous number of prisoners four to five times higher than their capacities. The substandard quality of food was one of the significant reasons of clashes between the authorities and the Naxals. Men who were routinely imprisoned and knew jail life were used to low quality and quantity of food inside the jails. Providing third-rate food to the prisoners was one form of punishment that the regular inmates accepted without any complaint. However, it was different in the case of prisoners arrested for revolutionary acts:

> But the Naxal prisoners were not willing to accept this age-old tradition. They made a huge fuss over the bitter chinre, rolling it into balls and flinging it at the jailer who was on his rounds, shouting slogans at the same time. Was this food fit for humans? This lead to a skirmish with the guards, which quickly escalated into a pitched battle, followed by death and a divisional enquiry. (Byapari 6)[12]

Illegal killings of the Naxalites and their sympathizers were common during the 1960s and 1970s. Inhuman torture of the Naxalites within jails was often recorded by the human rights activists. These prisoners who were kept in solitary confinement inside the jails were the political detainees either caught as Naxalites or in connection with the movement. Organized murder and planned torture of the Naxalites were used as an instrument by the State to curb Naxalism. As the Naxalites posed a serious threat to the State apparatus, the elites in power took the help of the police and paramilitary forces to oppress the movement:

> What is even more legendary is the state's violent onslaught that followed. Notorious 'encounter' killings, arbitrary jail firings and deaths, and custodial abuse and torture have rendered the early 1970s one of the darkest periods in the history of independent India. Popular constructions of the movement are replete with images of the victimization of young Naxalites at the hands of the state. (Roy 149)

Kalyan Chaudhuri in his report "'Law and Order' Killing" (1977) records many incidents of mass murder in the name of encounter. These people were either picked up from their house or from the streets and were killed in an unconscious state or were taken to somewhere else in isolated places. According to the report of Bandimukti-o-Ganadabi Prastuti Committee between 1970 and 1976:

> 76 political prisoners were killed inside jails alone. Besides, "dead bodies were found everywhere in the city of Calcutta - bodies with' heads cut off, limbs lost, eyes gouged out, entrails ripped open. They were there in the streets in broad daylight. Later, they were carried in rickshaws and handcarts and thrown into the river Hooghly. The tidal bore came in handy; the bodies were washed away..." (1134)

Arindam Sen in his "Tebhaga - Telangana to Naxalbari – CPI (M-L): The Movement – Party Dialectic" (2017), writes about the differences between the three movements that shook the entire nation. The Naxalbari movement differed from the previous movements as it spread to the other parts of the country. Charu Mazumdar, the mastermind behind the Naxalbari uprisings gave directions on the larger aims and goals. The Naxalite movement saw participation not only from the toiling masses but also different sections of the society that came forward to fight the class structure. Prominent among them were students and intellectuals along with a large number of women who left behind their comfortable lives to join the movement:

> Hundreds of young professional revolutionaries—mainly from middle-class and peasant backgrounds and a good many also from the working class—emerged as the backbone of the underground communist party. Andhra

> Pradesh, West Bengal and other parts of the country witnessed a great flourish in revolutionary people's culture, inspired by the advancing waves of radical peasant movement. (41)

This novel takes us back to the turbulent times of the late 1960s and early 1970s when the youths of the nation came forward to fight the oppressive regime. The response of the state was equally harsh as these people were put behind bars, keeping them aloof from the other prisoners of the jail and inflicting them with torture of various degrees. These youths were fearless, and they stuck to their ideology even inside the jail. Whereas other petty criminals were seen to be obedient and docile inside the jails, it was the Naxals who kept on challenging the jail authorities. Moreover, the planning of jailbreak was agreeable to their ideological standpoint as they did not want to hire legal aid and appeal for bail.

At a simple level, Byapari seems to have recorded his experience inside the jail in the novel under discussioin. However, a close observation reveals the economic deprivation and social oppression prevailing during those times. The anecdotes narrated by the author give a connecting link between the existing present and the tragic past of characters like Bhojon and Bhagoban. While Bhojon was a guard inside the jail, Bhagoban was a thief; both turned into sympathizers of the Naxalites in the end. Bhagoban had seen the worst of exploitation and was well aware of the systems prevailing in his times:

> After a pause Bhagoban continues, 'Once, I was this small, I went with my father to steal. Two years after the China war. Famine everywhere. Gormen thike ekhane okhane langorkhana khulise. All these government camps serving a spoonful of khichuri to everyone. Just like in jail. Two-mile-long queues. How to describe it, dada, millions dying of starvation. You've heard of Chowdhury-babu? They sacrifice a pair of oxen at Dugga Pujo. I went there to steal with my father. . .' Bhagoban stops to glance at the deputy jailer. 'You're government, sir. But still I can swear even your godowns don't have so much rice. So much! Mountains of rice. Sack upon sack upon sack upon sack. Thousands of sacks. They knew the famine was coming. So they bought rice from everywhere and hoarded it in their godowns. As prices rose, they. . .' (Byapari 52)

Bhagoban comes to jail only to find sustenance on jail food. Though he is a thief, he cannot survive outside because of the back breaking poverty rampant everywhere. So he decides to get caught and stay in jail at least to get his meals regularly. The deputy jailer uses him as a spy to snoop on the Naxals who are conspiring to break out of prison. However, after spending time with the young revolutionaries and listening to them, Bhagoban realizes that they are not bad people. Bhagoban sacrifices his life during the jailbreak only to get recognition as a revolutionary. He had faced humiliation all his life on being called a "chorer chhabal": son of a thief (Byapari 120). He has a son whom he admits to a missionary school because he was not able to raise him. Bhagoban never wants people to call his son too as a son of a thief. When Bhagoban comes to know about the conspiracy, he insists on letting them join him so that he could sacrifice his life for the sake of the Naxals:

> 'Don't imagine I'm doing it for you. I have something to gain too. After this, no son of a bitch will dare call me a chorer chhabal. Everyone will say Bhagoban Sardar was actually a Naxal. I've seen outside how they respect Naxals. My son won't be ashamed of his father anymore.' (Byapari 120)

The Naxalites were fighting for the politics of dispossession. For centuries the rural poor and the working class of the urban population had been deprived of their rights. The rich were becoming richer and the poor poorer. This knowledge of inequality was already there among the masses. However, it was with the advent of the Naxalite movement that a certain section of the population came out to fight against the deprivations. The Naxalite movement brought together these revolutionaries to a shared platform to fight for a common cause.

An important point in connection with the Naxalite movement was that the revolutionaries were not necessarily from a poor background. Many college students and educated people from well-to-do families joined the movement. These people renounced their comfortable lives to join the Naxalites only to die for the cause. Haridwar Rai and K.M. Prasad state the reason behind these people joining the movement. Rai and Prasad were of the opinion that:

> they found their affluence "an oasis in the desert of misery surrounding them, 'engulfing them, overwhelming them… Consciously, deliberately, they

> renounce the comforts and privileges available to them by accident to birth in particular families and take a life of hardship." (456)

The novel shows how young and talented boys like Goutam and Ashutosh sacrificed their lives. Goutam's father is a manager in a tea garden, and he could have easily arranged for his bail. However, he chose to stay with the Naxals because he had seen the extreme poverty of the tea garden workers and he had also witnessed the lavish lifestyle of the rich that sucked all resources from the workers. He turned into a revolutionary not for his personal benefits but for the betterment of society. Ashutosh Mandol, on the other hand, was a bright student who always topped in his class. Ashutosh's father, Abhiram Mandol, who himself was a revolutionary during the Tebhaga movement, wanted his son to continue with his studies and become a doctor. Because of the failure of the previous agrarian revolts, Abhiram believed that it was not so easy for a revolution to take place without the necessary groundwork. People needed to be educated first for a revolution to be successful. Hence, it was not the right time for Ashutosh to spend time in revolutionary activities. Abhiram also stated that due to the lack of unity among the masses, it was difficult for an agrarian revolution to get momentum in a vast country like India. Abhiram stated:

> 'You may say it's the age of revolution, that the entire nation is reeling from the labour pain of giving birth to a new society. But I think this is an unrealistic analysis. India is a huge country. So many languages, foods, clothes, mentalities. So many problems. The greatest of which is caste. All the poor and oppressed people have been fragmented into a thousand factions over thousands of years. Each of them is fighting for control of their own little fragments. And the enemies are applauding from a distance. They don't want the poor to unite. Nor do the poor themselves. (Byapari 88)

Bhojon Biswas is portrayed as an easy going, prisoner-friendly guard in the jail whom no one takes seriously. While the other guards are always finding a pretext to beat the prisoners, Bhojon is easy going. He does not scold the prisoners for small errors. He does his duty and leaves at the scheduled time. The conversation between Nemai and Bhojon reveals the family background of Bhojon. Bhojon's motherless son, who grew up in a boarding school, has lost hope in the system: educational and societal. So he does not wish to continue his studies:

> Bhojon looked at his son in wonder. A lanky, rather thin boy, with the first faint signs of adulthood on his chin. Innocent, unwavering, wide eyes. Such a loveable boy. . . And then a suddenly grown-up Pujon, who appeared just a little bit unfamiliar. He said, 'Baba, this education system was set up by the British for the people of this country to be their servants, so that we consider slavery honourable. The British have left, but the educational system has not changed. Look at the number of fine young boys and girls studying madly day and night. But to what end? To get a job. To serve. Which is what servants do. And this service has been glorified so much that everyone believes securing a job is the ultimate achievement of life. (Byapari 114)

Bhojon somehow becomes a hero after the doomed jailbreak. "The IG (Prison) congratulated him personally" (153). But he is not happy and thinks of leaving the job to become a farmer. Bhojon considers farming better than staying in jail and participating passively in the game of murders. On being questioned about the hard work involved in farming considering his age, he says:

> 'Maybe. Still a thousand times better than killing people. Fresh as flowers, all those boys. All dead. They'd laugh and sing, so cheerful all the time. All of them beaten to death like snakes. The empty cells make me cry when I'm on duty there. There was a boy named Bijon. Just like my Pujon. When I remember his face, I feel like screaming.' (Byapari 154)

Pujon sacrifices his life in the battle for ideology. When the village chowkidar informed Bhojon about the murder of four young boys, he immediately runs to the police station. Bhojon is able to connect the murders of the four boys with those of the Naxals in the jail. He was reminded of Porimal, Bijon, Bablu, Nemai, Kalyan and Ashu. To know about the identities of the dead bodies, Bhojon directly went to the officer-in-charge:

> 'Who are they, sir?'
>
> The officer had a sense of humour. 'Can't you see? Corpses.'
>
> 'Have they been identified?'
>
> 'Corpses have no identities these days. Only serial numbers. Probably

thousand eighty-five, eighty-six.'

'Sir, I. . .'

'Yes? Are you the father of 1085?'

'There's been no news of my son for a long time.'

'Like many others.'

'May I see their faces?'

'They have no faces. Identical. Even if one of them is your son, you won't be able to tell. They've been under water for ten days. . . Why do you think your son's among them?' (Byapari 157-158)

G Haragopal in his article "Maoist Movement: Contexts and Concerns" (2017), condemns the use of force to tackle Naxalism. He is of the opinion that the state's failure in controlling the Maoist movement was due to a lack of understanding of the movement. The state justified its use of force to maintain law and order because no organization other than the state machinery had the authority to use armed people. On the other hand:

> The Maoist justification for violence hinges on the notion that weapons wielded by the state forces are in support of the exploitative classes and the masses are left with no option other than resistance. (71)

The movement brought a ray of hope not only for the revolutionaries, but also for large sections of people who were suffering in the clutches of the system. The redemption of Bhojon Biswas and Bhagoban at the end proved that the movement belonged to all categories of people. While Bhagoban sacrificed his life only to attain fame, Bhojon Biswas took sides of the Naxalites seeing the inhuman killings inside the jail after the failed attempt of jailbreak by Ashu, Nemai, Goutam, Kalyan, Porimal, Bijon along with Bhagoban. Bhojon was caught writing slogans on the walls of the jail.

These five Naxals along with others take the risk of breaking out of prison and running away, knowing the fact that the slightest of mistake could take away all their lives. But they were ready to take the risk as death was inevitable to them. In fact, they consider

martyrdom necessary for the revolution to continue. “Martyrdom enabled the creation of the perfect revolutionary, fighting the cause of the oppressed, representing the future utopian world, the abstraction of an ideal to lead the revolutionary struggle” (Shah 95). The slogan for which Bhojon was fired from the jail is apt in connection to the sacrifices made by the young revolutionaries:

> Udayer pother shuni kaar baani
> Bhoy naai orey bhoy naai
> Nihsheshe praan je koribek daan
> Khoy naai taar khoy naai
> On the road to dawn I hear a voice
> Do not fear, oh, do not fear
> There are some who’ll give their entire lives
> Death is not a word they will hear
>
> (Byapari 159-160)

This slogan did not fetch Bhojan any rewards, only punishment. While recording these slogans and many other words and terms, the translator Arunava Sinha retains the original Bengali words only to give the reader a sense of the ground reality of the sacrifices made by these young revolutionaries. Manoranjan Byapari is able to bring back the revolutionary fervor through the untold stories of the revolutionary times. Apart from the slogans in Bengali, the theme song of Communist-International, references to Mao Tse-tung, John Reed and Mao’s Red Book find references in this book. Byapari also brings in Indian historical figures and revolutionaries such as Bhagat Singh and Khudiram Bose while comparing the sacrifices made by the Naxals. Along with the ideological stands of the Naxals, the counter perspective is presented through Ashutosh Mondal’s father and the village chowkidar whom Bhojon meets towards the end.

Conclusion

Fictional works on the Naxalite movement portray numerous socio-political issues underpinning the rise of the movement. Along with these important factors, such works also bring to light numerous issues of inhuman torture and illegal killings of the revolutionaries in the name of enforcing law and order. Literary representations of the movement have been helpful in bringing out key issues which have been ignored throughout the movement. These issues central to the movement find dramatization in the writings of Mahasweta Devi and Manoranajan Byapari. Mahasweta Devi and Manoranjan Byapari write about caste and class discrimination prevailing in the Indian context. Their works on the Naxalite movement have been instrumental in throwing light on issues of caste-class binaries and on gender aspects within the movement.

This chapter has explored the issues of violence perpetuated by the state forces on the Naxalites in the name of enforcing law and order in the state. *Mother of 1084* revolves around the pangs of a mother whose son was brutally killed by the state forces and its henchmen. It also explores how a section of the young generation was tortured and killed by the state forces. "Draupadi" signifies subaltern resistance towards the might of the state. It demonstrates how the lower caste gendered subaltern was treated if caught alive by the police. *Bashai Tudu* signifies the contributions of the tribals in the fight against the landlords and their agents. Bashai represents the lowest rung of society, which has been exploited for ages by the people in power. *There's Gunpowder In The Air* brings to light issues of inhuman torture and illegal killings inside the jails of Calcutta. It also revolves around the issues of inequality and social injustice prevailing in the Indian society. These fictional works by Mahasweta Devi and Manoranjan Byapari bring to light the inhuman torture and gendered atrocities on the revolutionaries by the state forces and their agents.

The next chapter will discuss at length the non-fictional works such as prison memoir, authorized biography and some poetry written against the backdrop of the Naxalite movement.

Notes

[1] Anushilan Samiti was an organization that existed in India in Bengal whose two wings were Dhaka Anushilan Samiti situated at Dhaka and Jugantar group whose center was at Calcutta. These aim of these groups were to fight against the British empire through revolutionary violence. It was established in the year 1902.

[2] In one of the important incident in the Indian epic Mahabharata, Lord Krishna is seen saving Draupadi, the wife of the Pandavas when she was lost in the game of dice to the Kauravas.

[3] Sanyasi revolts of the 1970s were led by the sanyasis and fakirs (both Hindus and Muslims) in places like Murshidabad and Baikantapur. Some historians claim that it was one of the early revolt against the British administration.

[4] Panchayat system is a miniature form of government working locally at the village level.

[5] In a Bengali society, Bhadralok is referred to gentlemen belonging from upper-caste and upper-class. People belong from lower caste and class and people who are engaged in menial works on the other hand are referred to as Chotolok.

[6] Mahasweta Devi, *Mother of 1084;* Translated by Samik Bandhopadhyay. 1997. (Seagull Books: Calcutta, 2016). Henceforth, all the citations are from this dition of the novel.

[7] Mahasweta Devi, *Breast Stories;* Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. 1997. (Seagull Books: Calcutta, 2014). Henceforth, all the citations are taken from this edition.

[8] Mahasweta Devi, *Bashai Tudu*; Translated by Samik Bandhopadhyay and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. 1990. (Thema: Kolkata, 2002). Henceforth, all the citations are taken from this edition.

[9]Jijibisha is a Bengali term meaning desire for living or love for life.

[10] Namasudra, also spelled Namassej, Namassut, and Namojon, is an avarna community from southern and central Bengal. Previously, the community was known as Chandala or Chandal, which was considered a slur. Traditionally, they worked in agriculture

[11] Chandal or Chandala is a Hindu lower caste, traditionally considered untouchable, and is a Sanskrit word for someone who deals with corpse disposal.

[12] Manoranjan Byapari, *There's Gunpowder In The Air*; Translated by Arunava Banerjee. 2018. (Eka: Chennai, 2018). Henceforth all the citations are from this edition.

Chapter IV

Miscellaneous Writings on the Naxalite Movement

The Naxalite movement of the 1960s and 1970s shook the entire country as the country's impoverished peasants and tribals joined hands to fight the State, the landlords, the police and administrative officials. These peasants were guided by revolutionaries comprising both the members of the Communist Party of India and the urban intellectuals from Calcutta. When caught, the revolutionaries fighting for the rights of the poor had to undergo severe torture and police brutality. They were in constant threat of either being killed in an encounter or kept in prison for an indefinite period of time. Along with state terror, these movements also saw a large number of detainees inside the jails of West Bengal. Once imprisoned they were denied basic human rights inside the jails.

Fictional and non-fictional narratives on the Naxalite movement have been instrumental in bringing out many facts about the movement. These writings primarily focus on the lives of the revolutionaries and deal with the hardships which they had to face both inside and outside the movement. While the previous chapter examined the fictional narratives authored by Mahasweta Devi and Manoranjan Bajpayi in translation, this chapter focuses on miscellaneous writings on the movement. It includes a biography, a prison memoir and poetry emanating from the Naxal movement, which represents the voices of the underprivileged and wretched.

The biography of Kanu Sanyal *The First Naxal: An Authorised Biography of Kanu Sanyal* (2014) is a lived experience of the Communist movement in India at large and West Bengal in particular. Apart from some personal details of Kanu Sanyal's childhood, the biography reveals many unknown facts about the Naxalite movement and the history of Communist movement in India. Joya Mitra's *Hanyaman* (1990) translated as *Killing Days* (2004) and Minakshi Sen's *Jailer Bhetor Jail* (1993) are two prison memoirs which deal with horrendous memories of the female revolutionaries inside the jails of West Bengal in the seventies. Both *Hanyaman* and *Jailer Bhetor Jail* are memories of unspeakable experiences of the female revolutionaries inside the jail in the late sixties and early seventies. While Joya Mitra was arrested and detained in 1968 for four years when she was a college

student, Minakshi Sen was arrested in 1973 and was detained without a trial for four years until she was released in the year 1977. Along with the non-fictional works, the movement also gave rise to poems and songs which described the pain and the ethos of the movement. Sumanta Banerjee has attempted to record such poems coming out in the wake of the movement in his book *Thema Book of Naxalite Poetry* (2012). While writing about the poems and songs that he translated in this book, Banerjee states:

> that it is necessary to remind people that hand in hand with those political happenings, there flourished a rich crop of literature—poems and songs composed by the participants themselves as well as sympathetic observers, some published in obscure small magazines, many remembered by word of mouth and still sung in villages. To understand India today, it is essential to listen to these poets—both the middle class writers of the cities and the more earthy poets of the villages. (2)

These selected works on the Naxalite movement bring into light many vital issues pertinent to the movement. Ideological differences, atrocities on the jailed Naxalites, gender discrimination in the movement are some of the issues that the chapter will discuss at length, keeping the Naxalite movement in the background. Section I of this chapter focuses on the prison memoir of Joya Mitra, which is translated into English as *Killing Days*. This memoir is a witness to the large scale atrocities that existed in the jails of West Bengal during the 1960s and 1970s. The memoir also addresses gender issues prevalent in the Naxalite movement. Section II of this chapter analyses the biography of Kanu Sanyal. The authorized biography titled *The First Naxal: An Authorised Biography of Kanu Sanyal* is a running commentary on the Communist movement in India. This book not only describes the rise and the fall of the Communists in India, but also attempts a severe critique of the Communist movement in India. Moreover, the biography narrates the life history of a revolutionary along with the social history of the Communist movement in India. Section III deals with the poems and songs of the revolutionaries. Sumanta Banerjee's translated collection of poems *Thema Book of Naxalite Poetry* brings together the songs and poems of the rural and urban revolutionaries and sympathizers to describe the various stages of the revolution. These works on the Naxalite movement throw light on the issues of atrocities and injustice meted out to the revolutionaries of the movement. Apart from various fictional works on the

Naxalite movement, these works stand apart as they are testimonies of the lived experiences of the revolutionaries.

I

The term 'Political Prisoner' has always been contested as there has been no legal definition of it. In India, political prisoners are those detained not for any crime committed with a motive of personal benefit or personal motive but with a larger and collective objective, i.e., waging war against the State for its wrongdoings. Generally, such people are detained under section 124A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), which comes under the purview of political prisoners. Prisoner of Conscience, a term coined by Peter Berenson in 1961– refers to a person who is imprisoned for his political beliefs. In the Naxalite Movement in India, many people were imprisoned for their political beliefs. People at large are generally ignorant about these political prisoners, unless the media intervenes or the prisoners themselves write about their experience inside the prison. Human rights activists, some political organizations, or people supporting the same cause also draw attention to these detentions and to the abuse in prisons.

Imprisonment without trial has been the practice since colonial days; freedom fighters of the national movement for independence were often the worst victims in colonial prisons. In post-independence India political prisoners are detainees who fight for the people's rights or who have political differences with the State.

Apart from the leaders and active members of the party, innumerable common people such as the Adivasis, the Dalits[1] and the people belonging to the marginalized sections of the society are held captive for fighting in support of the struggle to protect their land and livelihood. The question arises why is so much torture is meted out to the political prisoners:

> This problem is interwoven with the issue of why so many political prisoners exist and why they exist in the particular countries they are found. A simple

> answer can be suggested: political prisoners exist, and the use of torture and terror against them continues, because revolutionary struggles are intensifying in the world, and these struggles are most threatening to the unbalanced and desperate state structures of the Third World Countries (where most of the prisoners are to be found). (Ekalavya 5)

Hanyaman by Joya Mitra (translated as *Killing Days* by Shampa Banerjee), narrates the author's experiences as a young student. She was put behind bars for four years without trial for her involvement in the Naxalite movement. It is a prison memoir not of Mitra alone, but of all those people in prison with whom she met and interacted, and who shared their pain and grief with her. As most of the inmates were poor, illiterate, and without anyone to take care of, they had to face various kinds of oppression and exploitation. *Killings Days* narrates the horrifying conditions of prison systems, and the people imprisoned in Indian jails during the 1960s and 1970s. Joya Mitra has penned down her traumatic memories inside the jail in this book.

Joya Mitra was just 18 years old when she joined the Naxalite movement. Even after decades of joining the movement, she remains committed to the cause, though the nature of revolution has changed with time and place. Joya Mitra grew up during the turbulent times of the 1970s. As a college student during the Naxal movement, she made common cause with other students, a cause in which they were all involved. In an interview with the *Times of India,* she says "I was initiated in 1967, a few months after the Naxalbari incident. I had read Marx and grew up on the tales of Swadeshi" ("Rebel"). After joining the movement, she had many adventures shifting her locations from urban hideouts to rural hideouts. During one of those adventures, she was arrested by the police and spent four long years in jail. Her personal life is full of many trials and tribulations. Her husband, also a senior comrade in the movement, left her on the accusation that she was a CIA[2] agent and perhaps a spy. Her father's position in the bureaucracy and her fluency in English made her a suspect in the eyes of her husband. Further, her revolutionary life changed when the party refused to welcome her back into the party after she became mother. Keeping in with the party's philosophy, she moved to Purulia and took to educating the masses in the village. She recounts how the villagers helped her to escape the police raids during her stay at the village hideouts.

The Naxalbari uprisings attracted a large number of women both from rural and urban middle-class societies. Along with them, peasants and tribal women also joined the movement in the hope of an end to their exploitation by the landed classes. However, their recognition as active members in the movement's historiography was ignored for a long time. The importance of the role of women in furthering the cause of the movement has received scant attention in any historical understanding of the movement. Therefore, these writings by women, recording their own personal documentation of the events, are essential to get the real picture of how women had to deal with the state forces during their arrests. These works bring to light stories of women's active participation in the movement, the gender relations amongst the cadres, patriarchal domination and sexual violence within the movement. These memoirs play a prominent role in establishing the identity of the female Naxalites within the movement. Through these self-writings the female cadres are also able to counter the male dominated historiography of the movement and as a result their narratives "also becomes an act of resistance" (Kamra 3):

> "*Killing Days* is several kind of text at once: it is history, social critique, ethnography, literature, political testimony – providing many ways to understand the 'truths' of experience by recounting lives of pain and persecution. Mitra realizes the futility of making sense of her own life in a context that imposes senseless suffering on the less fortunate women. She makes a powerful case for legal literacy and political awareness. She finds most of the women helpless and unable to extricate themselves because they have no access to the law. As a pro-life activist text, *Killing Days* compels attention to a sorely neglected subject. It is an important text because it presents and tries to interpret women's experience in exceptional circumstances. It constitutes an articulation of the unvoiced, a recovery of forgotten selves. A paraphrase of the often-cited remark by Marx may illuminate this claim: Women make their own lives (and life histories), but they do so under conditions not of their own choosing. (Mukherjee 269)

Mitra was arrested after she spent a year in the village and city hideouts. In four years of imprisonment from one jail to another she was able to speculate about those people whom she met either in the hideouts or in different female wards of the jails where she was

transferred. In her years of imprisonment, she was witness to the persecution of the poor and the patriarchal domination among the poor. In the introduction to *Killing Days* she writes:

> I could see at the same time all these forms of oppression more glaringly evident in the female wards, where a woman in labour remained chained and died screaming in pain. What was worse, in this latter case, was that both the victim and the person who kept her chained were women, proving once for all that in a power structure, the power relations rise above gender identities. (Mitra xii-xiii)

Srila Roy in her article "Testimonies of State Terror: Trauma and Healing in Naxalbari" (2009) writes the experience of three female Naxalites imprisoned between 1971 to 1977. All the women imprisoned during that period in Presidency jail suffered custodial violence during the process of police interrogation. Along with physical torture the women, who were kept in prison for an extended period, suffered from various diseases and malnutrition. Not only did they suffer from custodial torture, they were also witness to the painful sights of other prisoners being punished (151).

Through the various stories inside the jail, Joya Mitra addresses issues of sexual harassment, domestic violence and exploitation prevailing in Indian society. Those victims who were able to come out of the shackles of patriarchy landed in prison. The authoritative nature of the state officials such as wardens, constables, and other officials can be seen in the political prisoners' treatment. Women political prisoners were locked up in terrible conditions and were often beaten and sexually assaulted by both male and female guards inside the prison:

> This is not nostalgia. It's more like turning the page of an album. In the fold of the long, dark four years, a magnitude of faces. I look at them, over and over, the sparkling stars on the black, moonless night. I brush the dust off them where they live in my heart. I try to bring them out of there, to tell people about an outlandish world, that stands cheek by jowl with the town, the marketplace. A brick wall just eleven feet high separates the real from the unreal. Many of them said to me often: "You won't forget us, will you?" In my mind I tell them: "See- I haven't forgotten you- Ganga, Jayalakshmi,

> Maya, Itoari, Haneefa, Ayetamai- not a single one of you. There are more of you still behind bars; maybe you've lost your mind, or are dead by now; maybe you are walking the streets like Bapidi, Mala, Moyna, and Noorjehan. I know you can't hear me. But I know you, too, haven't forgotten. (Banerjee 4-5)

Joya Mitra was barely eighteen years old and a college student when she joined a group of agitating students out of her courage and idealism. She was arrested with along her companions when she suffered a spinal injury during a police encounter. As the memoir begins, Joya Mitra is seen in a very pitiable state. She is not able to sense whether she is in a hospital or in a jail. The very opening lines describe the pathetic condition of Joya Mitra. "I spat next to the car; the phlegm still had flecks of blood in it" (Banerjee 1)[3].

The unpredictability of her final destination causes the narrator to struggle with her mind even as she suffering physically in her tormented body. As she is transferred from the hospital to the jail at the very beginning of the memoir, she is worried even in her half-conscious state. Her constant worry is about the possibility of being encountered in the jail. "Are they taking me there to shoot me? In the lock-up they had said: "Shoot her and throw her into the Kansai. She'll float straight to her holy land, Medinipur" (Banerjee 3).

Through the story of Shanta, Joya Mitra brings out the atrocities perpetuated upon the female prisoners in the 1960s and 1970s inside India's jails. Shanta was serving her punishment in jail for stabbing her husband. Shanta was in possession of a nail clipper, which she used to clean the children's nails. But the warder considered it to be a threat. When she refused to hand over the nail clipper to the warder, the very next morning "before the doors of other wards were opened, in front of the staring eyes of her little daughters who had forgotten how to cry, Shanta was stripped, shackled and strung up in a cell as punishment for not surrendering her "knife"" (Banerjee 26).

Joya Mitra suffered severe punishments similar to those meted out to stubborn prisoners. She also raised her voice against the ill-treatment meted out to the women prisoners and could influence other prisoners to stage resistance against any kind of injustice. Despite all the brutality faced inside, she refused to bow down and sacrifice her ideology. She was frequently transferred only to make sure that she was not able to influence other

prisoners. However, she was able to provoke other inmates into collective defiance against the authority even at the cost of severe punishment and solitary confinement:

> "What also becomes apparent in the narrator's desire to maintain her individual selfhood, yet relate this self to the community of oppressed women and their collective suffering that she is a witness to. The narrative makes an effort to move towards defining a collective identity of womanhood for whom the experiences of domination, subjugation and exploitation within patriarchy are common." (Mukherjee 259**)

Women's marginalization inside the party was a real phenomenon. There were discrepancies in the recruitment process of female cadres in the rural areas. However, many female comrades were often very enthusiastic about becoming full-time cadres, leaving their families behind. But due to severe state repression, the party discouraged female cadres leaving their homes as they could not accommodate them. After her childbirth, the party did not welcome Joya Mitra as a full-time cadre. On the question of the caste-class-gender relationship inside the party, Manoranjan Mohanty states, "patriarchal attitudes and practices persist within Naxal organisations and any programme for women's liberation is still not a prominent part of the people's democratic revolution" (3164).

The condition inside Baharampur jail collectively speaks about the prison life in West Bengal during those turbulent times. According to Mitra it was lifeless, and the two elements i.e., hope and enthusiasm, that generally speak about human nature, are nowhere to be found inside that jail. "The human community that collectively thinks, eats, sleeps, and works here, exists in only one time—the past. And that past is always intimately personal" (Banerjee 37).

In the jail along with their mothers, small children also had to suffer. These children who are either born inside the jail or are taken in by their mothers while at a very tender age, remain deprived of the outside world from a very small age. Sakhi Khatoun and her son's story shows how the little child developed the psyche that his mother should be locked up even after her release. "The child had asked his mother, "Ma, if we don't take the Warder with us, who will lock us up at home?" (Banerjee 41-42).

Writing a prison memoir, be it during the imprisonment period or afterward, the writer has to face many unusual challenges. Inside the prison, writing becomes impossible

for the lack of materials; also the harsh environment makes it an impossible task. Recollecting those traumatic experiences post-imprisonment is also not an easy task. Nonetheless, through the memoir, the writer can document the painful experiences and reflect on the strong bonds attained during the period of suffering.

While writing about the prison memoirs of Joya Mitra and Minakshi Sen, Srila Roy states that these texts are testimonies of state terror over the women's bodies:

> These texts rest on the similar narrative strategies, that is, an effacement of the speaking subject in order to represent 'other' women, that is non-political co-inmates, including a category of criminalized 'lunatic' women with whom these Naxalite prisoners shared the overcrowded prison space. It is the everyday structural brutality of women's lives, supported by a patriarchal, paternalistic state, to which these prison memoirs bear witness. (154-155)

The Communist movement was based on the grounds of equal rights for everyone. It had struggled for years for the cause of the poor and the downtrodden of the earth. Many thousands of revolutionaries sacrificed their lives for their dream of an equal and just society. On the path of an egalitarian society, thousands were martyred and had to fight many forms of violence meted out to the revolutionaries by the State in the form of illegal detention. These cadres who were kept behind bars had to undergo immense torture and harassment. They were denied the basic minimum rights upon which the entire Communist movement was based on:

> But the ongoing brutality in the jails has by and large simply maximized the worst of the poverty and oppression that exists against the poorest in Indian villages and slums. Where a majority of the population lives at subsistence level anyway, jail treatment can consist of simply and consistently pushing the prisoner below this. (Ekalavya 10)

Denying basic human rights, the jailed political prisoners were given food unfit for human consumption and inadequate to sustain them. Besides meagre quantities of daily essentials to keep themselves clean and clothed were provided. "The ratio of water to sweet corn in the porridge served to us in the morning is more than the ratio of water to land on this planet" (Banerjee 15). They were also deprived of hygiene and sanitary facilities. Atrayee Sen

mentions how several women political prisoners talked about the supreme authority of the wardens, constables, and police officials who constantly reminded them of their position inside the jail. If a woman guerrilla fell into the hands of these people by any chance, nothing could afford them any form of privilege. These women were beaten badly in the name of interrogation, basically to procure any information about their fellow cadres:

> Most political prisoners were ill-treated in (what the women described as) 'regular' ways: they were deprived of food water, sanitation, and visitation and toilet privileges; given excreta in their food, dead fish in their milk, and subjected to unexpected and sudden slaps. (926)

As a prison memoir *Killing Days* narrates the journey of a female Naxalite and reveals the many atrocities were going on inside Indian jails for during the period. Joya Mitra in her memoir is able to portray the injustices meted out to the jailed inmates and depicts the resistance capacities of many females languishing inside the jail for several years. Many girls also had to suffer only because of their innocence:

> This book is not about my comrades who have knowingly suffered torture, imprisonment, and death. There was someone called Papu, who didn't come here with any such knowledge at all. Maybe the police wanted some information from her, maybe they brought her in just because she was young—sometimes it was a crime to be young in those days. The reason why I bring up Papu, who arrived half dead from the Kasba police station, is really because she had no connection with anything at all—not with the information they were demanding from her, not with the charges made against her, not even with any ideology as such. And therefore, like any other ordinary young girl, Papu was frightened. (Banerjee 153)

Many women have voiced their discontentment at the way how their life did not change even after getting married to a revolutionary. In her article "Revolutionary Marriage: On the Politics of Sexual Stories in Naxalbari" (2006), Srila Roy mentions that these revolutionary women joined hands with the revolutionary men and agreed to marry them in the hope for getting an equal position in the society. "Yet what these women's narratives

repeatedly underscore is the disparity between expectations and reality, between ideals and actualization" (109). Moreover, not only did they find that their husbands engrossed in fighting class were ignoring gender equality inside their own homes, many revolutionaries even abandoned their wives. These women who were caught by the police and jailed developed special bonds with other inmates:

> In my multiple personal interactions with Joya Mitra, for example, she reminisced at length about her own life and the experiences of fellow Naxalites who were abandoned by unsympathetic husbands – sometimes the in-laws sent off their small children for adoption, and at other times the husbands kept their children away from the shadow of shamed mothers in prison. Whether stemming from 'radical love' at a particular juncture in urban history, or as compensation for the breakdown of familial relationships, the political women in prison lovingly remembered playing 'happy families', and how the inmates developed sisterly and maternal relationships (calling each other ma or bon or didi). (Sen 127)

There is ample evidence in Joya Mitra's memoir that she developed a familial relationship with other female inmates. The bond shared between the females inside the jail was not because they shared collective torture and punishments in their terms of imprisonment, but also because most of them either lost their husbands or were abandoned by them. Many did not even have anyone to file a bail petition and take them out of jail. The bonding between the women can be seen in the incident when Baroda-Ma was admitted in the hospital after her pressure stroke:

> It is a memorable afternoon. About ten of us stay back in the hospital with Baroda. The rest sit in front of the closed door spending their free afternoon chatting with each other. I crush the boiled rice in one plate for all twelve of us. Shanta brings out her hidden stash of mustard oil. The oil tastes better than the very best mayonnaise. I mix it in the rice and we thoroughly enjoy our picnic lunch sitting together in a prison cell. They have all been in jail longer than I have so my two-year-old stories of the outside world still sound fresh

> to them. As they listen they traverse their own terrain of memories. Just two and a half hours one afternoon—we savour every single minute. At three o'clock, when we are ready to leave, Baroda opens her eyes. She smiles a little, and then strokes my head with affection. (Banerjee 35)

While women joined the movement in the hope of a better and equal society, they themselves were denied the space which generally a male cadre obtained. In the case of Joya Mitra, she was not welcomed as a regular cadre by the party after her childbirth.

The gendered aspect of the Naxalite movement has been neglected for years by the leadership of the movement. Although the movement has seen large scale participation of women, questions of their safety, liberty and equality were largely ignored during the movement. Also when it came to the questions of physical strength, female cadres were never considered equal to the 'revolutionary man'[4] which was the center of the Naxalite ideology. "Majumdar's musings about blood sacrifice, martial prowess, and masculinity make it difficult to visualize the armed revolutionary as a woman" (Banerjee 113). Nonetheless, women came out in large numbers to participate in the movement keeping aside all the discrimination faced by their fellow Naxalites.

Joya Mitra's struggle throughout her involvement with the movement stands as an example of the revolutionary zeal among the female revolutionaries of the movement. She set an example by renouncing the comfortable life under her father and mobilizing the peasants in the rural and urban hideouts to avoid the atrocities of the state. Although her arrest changed her life totally, she did not let her revolutionary spirit die, unlike other comrades post imprisonment. Instead, she started working for various environmental and social causes. Apart from being a successful writer, she was also a part of the UN delegation to Rajasthan and Nepal on the issues of dam crisis and other irrigational methods. She continued to write poetry and short stories. Her translation of *Khanavadosh* (1982), an autobiography by Punjabi writer Ajit Kaur, enabled her to win the Sahitya Academy Award in the year 1999. Her jail memoir *Hanyaman* won the Ananda Puroskar in 1991.

II

"The Adivasis are grieving the demise of their messiah—Kanu Sanyal, the founder of the Naxalite Movement. The messiah is now leaving Sebdella Jote village, forever. He is leaving the hamlet that had been his address for the past 30 years" (Paul 02).

Kanu Sanyal's authorized biography, *The First Naxal: An Authorised Biography of Kanu Sanyal* (2014) written by Bappaditya Paul is an important piece of work as it reveals many facts about Kanu Sanyal's life and works covering a span of over 60 years. This book is the result of over 121 interviews with Kanu Sanyal by the writer, on the subject of the social history of the Naxalite movement. This book describes Sanyal's involvement with the CPI, CPI-M, finally leading to his becoming the founding member of CPI-ML. Apart from the details of Kanu Sanyal's early childhood, the book also addresses the historical trajectory of the growth of the Naxalite movement.

The role of Kanu Sanyal and his fellow comrades in organizing the peasants and the tea plantation workers throughout the 1950s and 1960s finds a prominent place in the book. Moreover, this book also addresses many shortcomings and ideological differences between the members of the various communist parties of India, because of which the movement soon frittered out and many members of the movement diverted their attention from mass organization to parliamentary democracy.

Kanu Sanyal, a veteran Naxal leader and one of the founding members of the CPI (M-L), was found hanging in his house in Sebdella Jote village in Naxalbari in 23rd March, 2010. Looking back at the revolutionary zeal of Kanu Sanyal throughout his life, it was difficult for many to accept that Kanu Sanyal would end his life in a tragic way. After retiring from active politics, Sanyal made the one room hut cum office of the CPI (M-L) his last abode. After suffering from prolonged illness and loneliness, Kanu Sanyal tried to shift his residence to his relative's house. However, as he did not wish to be a burden on anyone and the fact that he could not guide or communicate with the tribals and the adivasis of the Naxalbari region, he returned to his house in Sebdella Jote.

Kanu Sanyal is often considered as one of the architects of the Naxalite movement. Being born and brought up in a middle-class family, Kanu Sanyal had to struggle for a government job unlike his father, who was a court clerk. For a brief period Sanyal even took up a clerk's job, but later left it to continue his passion in the political field.

Kanu Sanyal dreamt of a classless society. Since the inception of the movement, Kanu Sanyal played a pivotal role in propagating the communist ideology to the masses. Although Charu Mazumdar was the chairman of the party, it was Kanu Sanyal who mobilized the masses in places like Bihar, North Bengal, Assam and Tripura.

Sanyal was behind the many peasants' conferences of the Krishak Sabha organized at various places in the Darjeeling district. During one such conference organized at Ghoshpukhur village under Phansidewa development block, around 600 peasants joined the conference. These people belonged to various castes and sub-castes of the Adivasi tribal and other communities belonging to that area. Their accommodation and food were arranged together. But as these people belonged to different castes, they rejected outright the idea of having a meal cooked in the same earthen range. Kanu Sanyal was shocked to know that the people objecting to the differences in caste were active members of the Krishak Sabha[5]. With the adamant behavior of the peasants, separate earthen ranges were made for the peaceful proceedings of the conference, but Kanu Sanyal did not give up on such differences prevailing among them. "But while giving in to the caste-constraints, Sanyal pledged in silence to eradicate this malady from amongst the farmers—at least from the minds of those associated with the *Krishak Sabha*" (Paul 45)[6]. With such an unpleasant encounter, Kanu Sanyal comprehended that caste-based and religious-based discrimination were the main hindrances in the lack of unity among the peasants and the working classes.

The peasants' conference organized on March 18, 1967, by the CPI (M-L) leadership of the Siliguri sub-division can be considered the final push behind the Naxalbari uprisings. This conference gave a clarion call to all the peasants of the region to end the monopoly of the landlords, and occupy and distribute the excess land among the landless peasants. The leadership also cautioned them that in the process they might have to face opposition from the Central as well as the State governments. So they had to be prepared for armed resistance in order to come out victorious:

> One of the main organizers of this Conference was Kanu Sanyal, a member of the Darjeeling District Secretariat of the C.P.I. (M), who, along with Jangal Santhal, a tribal peasant leader of the C.P.I. (M) and the President of the Siliguri Sub-divisional Krishak Samity, had long been organizing the tribal peasants of the area. (Chandra 25)

The differences between the peasantry and the Naxalite leadership popped up soon after the first clash between the peasants and the police in the Naxalabri area, with the tribals and the adivasis resenting the leadership of the students and the intelligentsia from the plains. Clashes between the students and tribals in Srikakulam and Debra-Gopiballavpore were reported on the accusations that the students were trying to dominate them. The peasants and the tribals also opposed the annihilation line advocated by the Naxalites under the leadership of Charu Mazumdar. Rajashree Dasgupta in the article "Towards the 'New Man': Revolutionary Youth and Rural Agency in the Naxalite Movement" (2006), writes that the peasantry in the movement was not given the front-ranking position and was sidelined to mere auxiliary roles. The decision and policymaking in the movement were primarily controlled by the bourgeois and intellectuals who held dominant positions in the hierarchy of the movement. Kanu Sanyal has talked about these discrepancies inside the movement in his report on the Peasant Movement in Terai Region, published in October 1968 (1925)[7].

Even though Kanu Sanyal considered Charu Mazumdar as an ideal of the communist revolutionaries in the initial days, sharp differences came up on the ideological line between them in later years. Kanu Sanyal was able to meet closely with Charu Mazumdar when he was arrested and put into the Jalpaiguri Central Jail on charges of taking part in anti-national activities in the year 1950. During those times, Kanu Sanyal was an ardent follower and a careful listener of Charu Mazumdar:

> But differences between Charu Mazumdar and Kanu Sanyal began to surface when the former insisted on fighting economism by reducing the role of peasants and workers organisations, which had, according to him, got habituated to making only economic demands and hence were inappropriate instruments for bringing about any qualitative structural changes. Kanu Sanyal, on the other hand, felt that the long established tradition of struggle so assiduously built over two decades could be propelled towards

> revolutionary objectives. While the former denounced the parliamentary institutions and likened them to pig styes, the latter held that these should be utilised for their political ends and their ultimate overthrow. (Mukherji 1615)

In his *Eight Documents*[8] Charu Mazumdar had clearly directed for an armed rebellion. According to him the formation of smaller groups comprising dedicated communist revolutionaries was an immediate requirement to fight the revisionists. These groups would operate secretly, and their target would be to annihilate landlords, police officials and other officials from the administration. Mazumdar rejected Sanyal's idea of organizing the mass and labelled it a revisionist tool, which he considered responsible for weakening the revolutionary zeal among the communists. Although other communists like Keshav Sarkar, Jangal Santhal and Sourin Bose were completely in support of Charu Mazumdar's line of thinking, it was Sanyal who opposed the idea of immediate insurrection. These differences went to the extent of confrontation between Charu Mazumdar and Kanu Sanyal:

> *'No revolution can achieve success and sustenance by remaining isolated from the masses. The formation of small combat groups and the conspiratorial individual killing, which you are prescribing, would only push us towards a wrong direction.* (Paul 86; Italics in the original)

Alpa Shah writes in her article "Humaneness and Contradictions: India's Maoist-Inspired Naxalites" (2014) that in order to understand the relevance of the communist revolution in the Indian soil, it is necessary to look at the role of the dominant caste Naxalites leaders' contribution throughout the movement. According to Shah, what makes the revolutionaries different from others is their ability to renounce their personal life and sacrifice it for the emancipation of the toiling masses. "It is, perhaps, the very hierarchies of Indian society that have produced some of the world's most committed pursuers of a more equal society" (52-53). Charu Mazumdar and Kanu Sanyal denounced their comfortable lives to fight for the cause. Kanu Sanyal left his government job, whereas Charu Mazumdar left the comfortable life of a landlord.

The Indian society was vastly different from Chinese society. But following the footsteps of Chinese revolutionaries, the Indian Maoists were also using the same formula of individual annihilation. Pratul Ahuja and Rajat Ganguly, point out the reason behind the

reduced support from the masses in West Bengal. According to them, the first reason behind it was the strategy adopted by the ideologue Charu Mazumdar. Charu Mazumdar's critique of mass organization demoralized the peasants and the tribals and weakened the support system. The second reason was CPI-M's ability to bring land reforms in the state which they were ruling from last three decades (266-267). Sumanta Banerjee questions the strategy used by the Maoists to capture the political power on the Indian soil. Banerjee blames the foundational strategies for the condition of the Maoist movement in the present times. Continuous raids and encounters by the police and the state forces had already reduced the size of the guerrilla base which is often considered the "Red Corridor"[9]. Moreover, the backbone of the movement was also weakened by the surrender of the Maoist leaders who were earlier committed to the ideology for years:

> These developments persuade us to examine the intrinsic factors within the Maoist movement that have led, to some extent, to its present crisis. What went wrong? Both the political strategy, and the military tactics following from it, was flawed from the beginning. As for the political strategy based on the Chinese revolutionary paradigm, what could have been valid for China in the period 1920–40, was not universally applicable in India with its diversified agrarian society and economy that was fractured by sociocultural values and practices, driven by caste and tribal loyalties. Despite their individual courage and self-sacrifice, the Indian Maoist leaders have remained crippled by a limited understanding of these complexities of the vast heterogeneous Indian society. (45)

Kanu Sanyal's visit to China was an important episode in his life as he was able to have a first-hand experience of the strategies used by the Chinese communists. He was also able to meet Mao Tse-tung in person and learn many things from him. In their conversation, Mao Tse-tung told Kanu Sanyal that the Chinese Revolution and the Naxalite Revolution were similar in character. That was the prime reason why they had extended their support to the Naxalite movement. He also mentioned that his support was for the entire community of the Indian revolutionaries and not for any person or leader. Mao Tse-tung made the most crucial remark towards the end of their conversation regarding the Naxalite movement. Mao Tse-tung asked him to forget everything that they have learned in China. "Once back in

Naxalbari, formulate your own revolutionary strategies, keeping in mind the ground realities over there, Mao had advised,' recalled Sanyal." (Paul 130).

One year of President's rule in West Bengal was lifted on 24th February 1969. Soon after that the United Front Government came to power in the state assembly elections with CPI-M as the leading party in the coalition. The United Front Government lifted all the litigations against Kanu Sanyal and released him from the Darjeeling jail. Hare Krishna Konar, the Minister for Land and Revenue Minister came from Calcutta to talk to Sanyal. But Sanyal refused to meet him and left straight from the jail. Sanyal did not meet Konar for two reasons: Firstly, he was angry with Konar as he paid tribute to Sonam Wangdi, the police inspector killed before the Naxalbari incident. But he did not pay tribute to the martyrs of the Naxalbari incident. Secondly, he was worried that if he met Konar that day, the rival faction maligned his name, accusing him of being an agent of the CPI-M. Sumanta Banerjee in his book *India's Simmering Revolution: The Naxalite Uprising* (1984), writes that the CPI-M leaders were worried about the party's leaders in the militant ranks and this act would be considered a generous act towards the rebels of the Naxalbari Uprisings. But Kanu Sanyal was critical of it and never accepted this act to be a step towards compensation for the previous United Front Government's ruthless actions against the rebels of the Naxalbari uprisings:

> Addressing the 1969 May Day rally in Calcutta after his release, Kanu Sanyal explained why he had been released: "It is not that Jyoti Basu and Hare Krishna Konar and company are kind that this has become possible. Certainly not. It is not a matter of any gracious act of some ministers. This has become possible because of the law of history. It must be admitted however, that although there was a lot of sympathy among the people for the heroes of Naxalbari, there had been no organized mass movement in 1967 and 1968 demanding their release, indicating thereby either the inadequate organized base of the Communist revolutionaries among the masses, or the leadership's distrust of mass movements. (131)

The differences of opinion inside CPI M-L were there right from the very beginning. These differences became apparent as the central leadership of the party was divided into two factions. While one group was in favor of organizing the peasants into guerrilla bases in the

countryside, the other group advocated Charu Mazumdar's line—which was the immediate annihilation of class enemies. This group advocated the path of CPC and considered Mao Tse-tung as their chairman. In a two-day conference of the CPI M-L convened by Charu Mazumdar in Calcutta, the draft for the party's functioning was put forward. Delegates from other states such as Assam, Bihar, Tripura, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Jammu and Kashmir were present. The proposed draft directly stated that the annihilation of class enemies was the prime task of the party. As a result, the delegation from Uttar Pradesh under the leadership of R.N. Upadhaya severely criticized the proposal and also opposed that the Chinese path was the only way for Indian Revolution. Kanu Sanyal, who was also present at the conference, observed that:

> 'The reality was that right from inception, internal democracy was non-existent in the CPI-ML. The party functioned as per the whims and fancy of Charu Da. Quite often than not, he announced party programmes and activities without consulting any other central leadership. But there was none to oppose his capricious style of functioning. Being a minority voice, I also kept mum.' (Paul 147; quoted in the original)

Moreover, Kanu Sanyal was critical of Charu Mazumdar's superiority over the party functioning even before CPI M-L's formation:

> 'On the contrary, some of the central leaders were desperate to instate Charu Da as the ultimate authority in the CPI-ML. Comrade Sourin Bose had in fact placed a resolution at the party congress to this effect. Though the resolution was not adopted on record, Charu Da gradually became a cult in the party. He was put above the party politburo and the central committee.' (Paul 147)

Kanu Sanyal criticized Charu Mazumdar on various grounds. He came out openly against Charu Mazumdar in the article on the Naxalbari uprisings in April 1973[10]. That article was an analysis of the background, progress and reasons for the disintegration of the Naxalbari uprisings. Kanu Sanyal attacked Charu Mazumdar on his policies and strategies. Sanyal condemned Charu Mazumdar and held him responsible for the failure of the movement. This article was smuggled out of jail by his brother Prabir, published and distributed among the cadres. Kanu Sanyal also lamented the fact that he came out against Charu Mazumdar very

late, and had he been vocal about it earlier, the party would not have been in such a fragmented state. Kanu Sanyal, in his biography, further attacked Charu Mazumdar in his lineage. He stated:

> 'So far as my understanding of Charu Da's psyche is concerned, he was not entirely whimsical. Rather, despite being sworn into Communism, he could never betray the traits of the upper-class *Zamindar* nobility to which he originally belonged. He was always desperate to leave his individual mark on the pages of his times.' (Paul 160; quoted in the original)

It was not only Kanu Sanyal who opposed Charu Mazumdar's line; various other senior leaders also opposed Charu Mazumdar on the ideological ground. Prominent among them were Parimal Dasgupta and Asit Sen:

> A second aspect of these uprisings and the annihilation campaign was the split it caused among the Naxalite ranks on various ideological and tactical points. Parimal Dasgupta, Asit Sen, and others branded the annihilation policy as 'Guevarism" and "individual terrorism", as opposed to the idea of "people's war" and as having no support among the people. Mazumdar's reply to this criticism was that whereas Guevara was waging his struggle with the support of petty bourgeois intellectuals and weapons, the Naxalites relied on the co-operation of the masses for the success of their attempt. (Dasgupta 185)

Torture inside the jail was not a new phenomenon for the Naxalites. Following the death of Charu Mazumdar in 1972 and severe state repression by the Government of India, the basic functioning of the CPI M-L almost collapsed. Kanu Sanyal recollects that the Government of India, under the leadership of Indira Gandhi, considered the Naxalites the biggest threat to the integrity of the country and took resolutions to finish off the Naxalites from each and every corner of the country. As a result, inhuman torture began inside the jails to break the Naxalites. The torture went to that extent where the Naxalites turned almost living dead. Because of the inhuman treatment meted out with the Naxalites, almost 300 academicians across the globe came in support of the Naxalites. They wrote a letter to the Government of India to stop such acts. "Prominent among the signatories were Noam

Chomsky from the United States and Simone de Beauvoir from France" (Paul 161). Amnesty International also released a report about the illegal detention and inhuman treatment on the jailed Naxalites across India:

> Amnesty International, in its 1974 Short Report on Detention Conditions in West Bengal Jails, detailed several cases of torture of alleged Naxalite prisoners and expressed serious concern about the occurrence of torture in various Indian states, a concern 'which increased after the 1975 Emergency declaration when allegations of the torture of political prisoners reached the organisation from nearly all over India. (146)

Over the years, the terms Maoism and Naxalism have been used interchangeably, and people are often confused on how to illustrate the fundamental difference between the two. The Naxalite uprisings have their own ideology and are quite different from Maoism. The only similarity between the two is the way both were initiated. However, considering the ideology of Maoism, the Communists in India, except for the faction that represented Charu Mazumdar, were opposed to the individual annihilation thinking. After his visit to China, Kanu Sanyal started opposing the individual annihilation line and stressed the practice of mass organization. Kanu Sanyal was aware that with individual annihilation practice, the scenario of their revolution would only worsen with the mischief-makers continuing their own agenda in the name of Naxalism. In the year 2004, combining the different factions of the Naxalites who were not in support of the CPI M-L's (Kanu Sanyal) policies, the Communist Party of India (Maoist) was formed to carry forward the legacy of Charu Mazumdar. While tracing back their origin, the Maoists are often considered as Naxalites by the media and the administration. Kanu Sanyal opposed it vehemently in the interviews given in his biography and clearly distinguished between the Naxalites and the Maoists:

> The fact is that Naxalism and Maoism are two distinct traits of the Indian Communist Movement. While the followers of Naxalism do not necessarily indulge in armed conflicts and they do participate in elections, those practising Maoism believe that active arms struggle was the prime instrument to realise a Communist revolution in India. Unlike the Naxalites, Maoists abhor the parliamentary democracy. (Paul 181)

Kanu Sanyal was never in support of the Maoists. During present times, the CPI (Maoists) have a strong base in eight different states including Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal and Maharashtra. The Maoist threat in the forest areas of these states is growing day-by-day with the increase in poverty among India's tribal communities. It has grown to such an extent that the Government of India considers it to be the single largest internal security threat to the country. But Kanu Sanyal was never in support of the Maoists. The person who can be considered as the founder of the Naxalbari uprisings criticized the Maoists on the grounds of practicing "Left Adventurism" (Paul 187):

> 'Revolution and terrorism are not the same thing; while the former thrives on mass support and uses arms only as an additional tool, the latter is solely dependent on arms and ammunitions. Hence, taking to arms for a cause does not necessarily mean one is treading the path of revolution; there is always the risk of straying into terrorism and that is what is happening to the Maoists. Despite the Maoists arguably championing the cause of the farmers, the real peasantry in India is still detached from them'. (Paul 182; quoted in the original)

Kanu Sanyal sacrificed his life for a public cause denouncing all material and familial affiliations. His dream was only one—for a communist revolution in India. It is not easy to trace the private life of Kanu Sanyal as most of the years of his life were dedicated to his political career. Sanyal entered politics at the age of 19 in the year 1948. Those days unlike other youths of his age, Sanyal dreamt of a different life. He made sure that his political life should not have any hindrances. From joining an anti-government rally in 1949 to becoming a full-timer in the Communist party, Sanyal came a long way in understanding and implementing the revolutionary structure of India:

> In the eyes of many Indians (and especially Bengalis) Sanyal is one of the few modern political leaders who qualifies as a "genuine revolutionary," seeking the support of "the masses" in order to do away with the electoral system, while the CPI and CPM have compromised their revolutionary fervor by allying with bourgeois parties in joining the Ministries. In this romantic atmosphere, Sanyal and the Naxalbari agitators have frequently been viewed as the vanguard of a new wave of revolutionaries in India, a leadership that

> deserves the support of those who are not yet willing to succumb to the dictates of the Indian political system. (Franda 802)

Sanyal shared an affectionate relationship with his mother. This was unlike his relationship with his father, who was totally opposed to his decision of joining politics. His mother visited him when he was imprisoned in Darjeeling jail and kept track of his political activities. Sanyal always cherished the sacrifices made by his mother in bringing up the children. But as ill luck would have it, he could not attend the funeral of his mother. He knew very well the responsibilities which he owed his family and how short he fell in supporting them. His father's pension was the only source of earning, and as an adult male member, Sanyal realized his duties in helping the family overcome the financial shortcomings. It was during these times that he refrained from becoming a full-time member of the CPI. But after listening to Charu Mazumdar in a group meeting, he returned to his base and became a full-time party worker. As he was very well aware that responsibilities to the family and the party could not be fulfilled together, he gave up the idea of getting married and starting a family of his own:

> This was what Kanu Sanyal was, a man who could have easily found accommodation in the corridors of power if he had only compromised on his ideological stand. But he chose otherwise. Sanyal had turned down repeated requests from the CPI-M top rank to return to the fold of the mainstream Communist Party. Because he considered that the CPI-M was not practicing Communism any more. (Paul 199)

Kanu Sanyal was very well able to differentiate between Naxalism and Maoism right from the very beginning. His idea of revolution was always related to the masses. Sanyal was involved with the Communist Party of India from a very long time but it was the Naxalbari uprisings of 1967 that allowed him to give a new direction to the revolution. Prior to his involvement with the Communist movement in India, Sanyal was an ardent follower of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose. Because the Communist Party abused Subhash Chandra Bose by calling him a *quisling*, young Sanyal "began to nurture a strong hostile feeling towards the Communists" (Paul 12). But soon Sanyal became sympathetic to their cause when the Communist Party was banned by the government of India. As a biography of a Left Revolutionary leader, this book not only covers the dramatic turns that shaped the life of

Kanu Sanyal, but also points out many facets of the Communist revolutionaries of India. Kanu Sanyal's efforts in bringing together the various factions of Communists revolutionaries portrayed his zeal for an undivided revolution in the Indian soil.

The biographer Bappaditya Paul has made the claim that Kanu Sanyal was the founder of the Naxalite movement in India. But the contribution of other leaders of the movement was equally important when it came to mobilizing the masses. The three names that come up in any discussion on the Naxalite movement are Charu Mazumdar, Kanu Sanyal and Jangal Santhal. However, the title of the book states Kanu Sanyal to be the first Naxal. Charu Mazumdar's *Eight Documents* that began to be published in 1965 brought a wave of revolutionary thinking among the people. These publications clearly indicated the need for a revolution in order to create an equal and just society. Jangal Santhal being a tenant farmer on the land of a jotedar had a first-hand experience of the exploitative practices of the landlords. His role in mobilizing the tea garden workers in the Darjeeling area was equally important. "A leaflet signed by Jangal Santhal in 1967, which was widely known as Jangal Santhal's Red Leaflet, proved to be a crucial spark for the peasant movement" (Suresh). Like the *Eight Documents* of Charu Mazumdar, the leaflet by Jangal Santhal asked the peasants to unite against the atrocities of the landlords and the United Front Government.

Even though Kanu Sanyal attempted to unite the communist revolutionaries across the country, these new organizations often ended up splintered in the name of ideology and organizational structures. Kanu Sanyal headed organisations like OCCR (Organising Committee of Communist Revolutionaries), COI (ML) [Communist Organisation of India (Marxist-Leninist)] that gave birth to CPI (ML). "But every time, the organization would start disintegrating before it could acquire any real momentum" ("Comrade Kanu Sanyal", 2011)

One of the major shortcomings in Sanyal's career was his reluctance to move beyond Darjeeling (North Bengal). Except for a few instances of his jail terms in parts of Kolkata and other parts of the country, Kanu Sanyal was hardly seen outside West Bengal. Leading a party of national stature, Kanu Sayal mobilized only the peasants in the regions known to him, even as the spark of the Naxalbari uprisings soon spread to many parts of the country.

Kanu Sanyal was involved in mobilizing the peasants and the landless labourers of the Darjeeling district. It must be noted, however, that wide-scale discontent among the poor sections of the country was present from a long time. Though the Tebhaga Movement of 1946-1947 and the Telangana Movement of 1946-1951 are considered to be the precursors of the Naxalbari uprisings, the biography does not emphasize the role of these two movements in triggering the Naxalite movement in India. Moreover, the omission of international events going around at the same time, such as the Vietnam War, added to Sanyal's lack of far-sightedness in expanding the movement to include a wider participation. The biographer fails to note these lacunae in Sanyal's achievements, and this biography has therefore been critiqued on the grounds of a lack of objective representation in certain aspects of Kanyal's life.

III

The Naxalite movement of the 1960s and 1970s was the result of long-standing oppression and exploitation of the rural poor and the landless peasants by the landholding classes. Not only were the poor deprived of their rights, but they were also exploited in various forms. Social discrimination in the name of caste, the killing of the poor peasants in the hands of the upper-caste landlords and sexual harassment of the women of poor communities were common occurrences. These deprivations and exploitations were going on from time immemorial amongst the rural population. Finding no way out from the clutches of the landholding masters, the peasants and the tribals started revolting under the leadership of the members of the Communist Party of India. Communist revolutionaries like Charu Mazumdar and Kanu Sanyal, along with various others, started mobilizing the masses in order to capture the State's power. These revolutionary voices were severely repressed by the police and the administration. Though the police and paramilitary forces crushed the movement within months from its inception, yet the reasons had that led the people of these regions to begin a journey of revolution was not going to end so soon. During the course of the period, the poor peasants and the middle-class city dwellers were led to question

themselves, the identity of their survival, the relevance of their existence as well as their rights.

In the anthology *Thema Book Of Naxalite Poetry* (2012), Sumanta Banerjee compiles and translates poems and songs covering the Naxalite movement. He has classified the poems into four sections viz., (i) Cups of Sorrows (ii) Resistance and Repression (iii) Poems from Jail and (iv) Retrospection. These poems bring into light the vivid images of the revolutionaries during the first phase of Naxalism and their subsequent imprisonment. In the introduction to this anthology, Sumanta Banerjee discusses the need for bridging the gap between the two cultures—"the culture of the educated middle classes of the cities, and that of the folk poets of the countryside" (4). The Naxalite movement came as a way in which the city-bred urban middle class and the rural tribals came together to fight for the same cause. In this process they not only shared their problems and fought for the revolution, but were for some time also able to exchange each other's cultures:

> In the Naxalite movement, there was a deliberate attempt to bridge this gulf between the two cultures by reversing the direction of literary activities from concentration in major cities to the villages, to make literature a possession of the masses. Thus, in the folds of the movement, there took place a brief encounter between the two cultures—the culture of the middle-class poets of the cities, and that of the folk poets of the countryside. (4)

The literature written by the Naxalites or the activists supporting the cause of the poor is based on the issues of rural society covering poverty, social exploitation, struggles of daily life, unrest among the peasants, and following a different political ideologue. Along with militant resistance, the Naxalite movement also witnessed resistance in the form of literature. Charu Mazumdar's historic Eight Documents stands apart as it gave a call for an armed rebellion. Moreover, literature from other activists also helped the revolutionaries get a clear idea of the thinking upon which the movement was based. While writing about literature as a form of resistance Jasbir Jain states:

> Literary resistance is not necessarily a militant voice: it functions subtly through literary modes such as humour and farce, emotions such as anguish and despair and narrative strategies like interiorization and contrapuntal expositions. Resistance discourse has a socio-political context but at heart it is humanistic: it recognizes the essence of man as a need for freedom and it questions the legitimacy of monolithic power structures. It interprets the term "universal" in a changed context, not as a single normative principle, an all-absorbing, all-controlling ideology or power structure, but as an undercurrent of the new humanist discourse which emerges through resistance struggles, whether these be located in Sartre's *Men without Shadows* or Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, or through male figures like Kali Santra in Mahasweta Devi's Bashai Tudu or a woman like Draupadi in Devi's story "Draupadi". Resistance discourse parallels, reflects and supports resistance movements, movements that do not insist on submergence of individual dreams but become, in themselves, an enlargement of them. (179)

The poetic writings on the Naxalite movement are more humane as they provide an essential discourse about the suffering masses. The resistance was apparent in the poems of the revolutionaries and their sympathizers. Though calling for the resistance of a long history to dominance, these poems also provided the pitiable sight of the toiling masses for ages.

The Naxalite movement was sparked off by the peasants and the landless labourers who stand at the lowest rung of the society. Their exploitation and deprivation was such that they were starved for the food which they had grown themselves. A lack of agrarian reforms was the most immediate reason behind the pitiable condition of the peasants and the landless labourers. Apart from that, the denial of social justice to the Dalits and the tribals were also reasons behind the discontent. Although the Zamindari system was abolished after independence, land distribution was not undertaken under the pressure of the rich landlords. The discontentment was already prevailing in the rural scenario as West Bengal had already witnessed peasants' uprisings such as the Indigo Planters' uprisings (1859), The Pabna uprisings (1873), and the Tebhaga Movement (1946). The Naxalbari uprisings just gave a push to the already discontented peasants of West Bengal. The poem "The Night is Endless"

is witness to the large-scale poverty among the peasants and the poor in rural Bengal. It not only represents the deplorable state of the poor but also records the rise of the revolutionaries and the appeals of a son to his mother to let him join the revolutionaries for a better future:

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

I cannot stay much longer.
I hear the mountains tremble
as the people march upon them
and the mansions of the rich crumble.

Do not keep me, then, my mother,
as I too must go
to make the bright sun rise.

(*This Night is endless*, Composed and sung by prisoners in Medinipur Jail in West Bengal)[11]

The Naxalbari uprisings witnessed massive support from the masses to question the hegemony of the ruthless oppressors. The peasants and the tribals were the primary force behind the revolutionary leaders to resist the suppression. The activists in the movement played the role of mediators in connecting the rural society with that of the urban population. These activists were also able to deliver the urban literature produced in the course of the movement as the rural poor and the tribal were mostly uneducated. To invoke a sense of revolutionary zeal among the peasants, these activists often sang hymns to make the peasants realize their power. “The Naxalites' use of traditional peasant songs was an effective means of mobilization and propaganda because these songs were constantly sung by the labouring and peasant classes” (Routledge 2177). Nitya Sen, an activist, is seen encouraging the peasants to join the rebel forces to break the clutches of the landlords.

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

Oh peasant brother!
You've been robbed of your hand,
You've lost your bullocks,
You've lost your crops.
And now,
You sit dropping in your hut.
Will weeping help you to be free?

Your mother is weeping,
Your wife is weeping.
What is the way out?
Hark!
Listen to the call of the rebels.
Come out and join them.
March forward
And break the chains of servitude.

(*Peasants' Song,* Nitya Sen was a peasant activist of the movement in the 1970s)

The Naxalbari uprisings of 1967 in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal soon turned out to be a massive movement that spread across the region. The confrontation between the peasants and the landlords turned violent, which was soon followed by the clash between the peasants and the police. Over several months the region witnessed violent clashes between the Naxalites and the police. Several revolutionary bases were created for future clashes by the cadres of the movement. The movement was crushed severely within months by the United Front Government. Though the movement was crushed yet it could not kill the revolutionary spirit of the movement which was to continue for decades in the Indian soil. The movement also continued because of the government's inability to curb the discrimination prevailing in Indian society:

> The continuity of the CPI (M-L) movement is explained by the persistence and exacerbation of the basic causes that gave it birth: feudal exploitation, rural poverty, the Indian state's recourse to repression to silence the protests of the rural poor, and its bondage to the two superpowers to maintain the status quo. (Banerjee ii)

The songs based on the theme of resistance and repression witnessed new confidence among the revolutionaries. It was the confidence to overthrow the oppressive regime, which had

been ruling the poor for a very long time. The Communist revolutionaries accused those taking the side of parliamentary democracy. Ideologues like Charu Mazumdar were totally against the revisionists and advocated for armed struggle. In the poem 'Our Paths', Dronacharya Ghosh emphasizes the nature of the revolution and considers armed revolution as the only path to liberation:

> Our paths begin to quake with violent winds.
> They twist into sharper bends—undulating and impassable.
> Yet, we travel by these paths,
> And discover vibrant life lit by class consciousness.
>
> The darkness fades away,
> The red sun spreads its rays.
> Tearing away the fickle scent of juvenility,
> Flares up the ideology of the working class.
>
> This is the infallible age
> Which shakes the throne of the exploiter,
> The wretched hands of the greedy.
> The flags shines in the hands,
> History is being written in letters of blood of toilers—
> —a deathless, luminous history.
> A spirited figure of liberty is being carved
>
> All the old words are discarded today.
> Armed revolution glows firm in belief.
> This is the only path of liberation.
> There is no other word in our hearts.
>
> (*Our Paths*, Dronacharya Ghosh)

In the name of arrest and detention, the revolutionaries of the Naxalite movement had to undergo severe police torture. The bodies of the revolutionaries became the site of torture. Many were martyred in broad daylight. The repressive measures to control the movement were opposed by the masses. The Naxalites not only gained sympathy but also encouraged many youths and students to join the movement instead of completing their studies and taking up a job. Rajeshwari Dasgupta writes that these brilliant students among the most famous colleges of Kolkata also "joined the movement out of a sense of disillusionment with the existing educational system and with the socio-economic conditions prevailing in the urban areas" (1921).

Nonetheless, these revolutionaries were, in a way, able to awaken the revolutionary zeal of many. Their sacrifices became examples for the new generations to join the movement and pursue the dream for which the revolutionaries had fought. In the following poem Avik Gangopadhyay lays down several reasons for not being able to forget the 'revolutionary man' in the Naxalite movement. Along with that, he also asks future generations to wake up for the dream of the martyrs:

We can't forget them,
Their bodies bent under tyranny.
But the earth trembled under their feet
When they walked shooting their piercing arrows of hatred.
We can't forget them.
In their blood was
The deluge of the tameless river.
In their hands was
The dream—
Higher than the skies.
It swung across from one end of the earth
To another,
Like the baby's cradle.

Today,
I'll paint the face of a newborn babe
With one sweep of my brush,
And wake up those who are asleep
And call upon them
To remember
The bright dream of the martyrs—
To dream which
One need not sleep.

(*We Can't Forget Them*, Avik Gangopadhyay)

The United Front government in West Bengal was unsympathetic towards the Naxalites when it came to the question of controlling the movement. To crush the movement, several thousands of Naxalites were arrested and put behind bars. By 1973, the total number of the Naxalites and their sympathizers inside the jail went up to 32000. To keep them inside jail, the revolutionaries were charged with cases of conspiracy. These revolutionaries inside the jail had to face inhuman torture. They were also denied medical facilities along with other

basic needs. Encounters inside the jail became a common scenario, and the news of it never went out of the jails.

The mothers of the Naxalites were amongst those called upon to sacrifice; they had to bear the loss of a son or a daughter. They played critical roles in bringing up these revolutionaries, but fate had something else in store. They had to witness the tragic sight of their sons inside the jails. In the poem, "Clinging to the Bars of the Jail" a son is seen in a retrospective mood while talking to his mother. He continuously asks if she would be able to identify him. The inhuman torture inside the jail has changed the physical structure of the revolutionary in a manner that his mother would not be able to recognize him. The mother's consciousness does not allow her to be aware of the fact that her revolutionary son has sacrificed his life for the cause of the movement:

Clinging to the bars of the jail
you still stand there outside,
Mother of a destroyed child!
From the mangled lumps of flesh,
From the depths of blood and pus,
Bones and muscles and marrow,
You hope to discover
the dear face of
your son.

Do you remember?
Who was the child of your womb?
Have you identified—
which is your son's body?
whom did you carry within yourself?

How will you
make him out of the rest,
Mother of a destroyed child?
It's the same blood which flowed
through everyone.
The sighs of their breath were the same.
They shared the same belief in gunpowder.
They lie today in the same ocean of blood.
They remain the children of the same earth.

Clinging to the bars of the jail,
Dispossessed of all, oh mother!
Whose face do you want to pick out
from the rest?

(*Clinging to the Bars of the Jail*, Dhurjati Chattopadhyay)

While writing about Mahasweta Devi's *Mother of 1084*, Aruna Krishnamurthy analyses the role of a mother in the life of a revolutionary man. She says that:

> the apolitical but oppressed mother, engaged in the quest for understanding her son's mysterious life and death, initiates the middle-class reader into an awareness of the tragic martyrdom of the revolutionary youth whose deaths and arrests were certainly very evident to the public but never talked about openly. (145)

The revolution also witnessed how lovers were separated because of their inability to stay together. The Naxalites who were held captive for a long time almost forgot the outside world. In an attempt to recollect the forgotten past, the revolutionary tries to remember his days spent outside before the capture:

> I remember you even now.
> Do you still dress yourself up
> in the clothes of that dream?
> I don't know
> I don't know
> I don't know
> whether deep down in the heart
> the drum still beats today or not.
> Does the storm shake the forest of the mind every summer?
> Does the cuckoo of the age of ascension
> cry from the cluster of red flowers?
> How can I know?
> In a prison
> Even the cries of birds
> Sound like the clinging of chains—
> Tearing asunder the bars,
> My mind cries out again and again—
> 'Can you on your own now write the bulletins?'

(*To You From Prison*, Srijan Sen)

The second coalition government in West Bengal was formed in 1969. A number of senior leaders, including Kanu Sanyal and Jangal Santhal, were released from jail. With the

formation of CPI (ML), violent clashes broke out between the CPI (M) and CPI (ML). In an attempt to put an end to the Naxalite movement, the United Front government arrested many leaders. The government, which came to power on communist ideologies, arrested the revolutionaries. The release of the Naxalites under trial was one of the biggest questions. It brought together activists, liberals, and the various factions of the Naxalites post-Emergency. "Bipul Chakravarty's song 'We want the release of all political prisoners", composed during this period, came to be sung in the processions in the streets of Calcutta and other places in 1977" (Banerjee 108). Chakravarty compares the Naxalites to the freedom fighters as well as with the tribal leader Titumeer:

They are the brothers of Bhagat Singh,
They are the brothers of Khudiram.[1]
We want the release of all political prisoners. - Refrain

They went to the jails for the country,
Not for any other reason.
Rotting behind the bars
They still dream of the country.
We want the release … - Refrain

They are the brothers of Sidhu and Kanhu
They are the brothers of Titumeer.[2]
We want the release … - Refrain

Why are you sorting out the 'extremists'
from the 'moderates',
If you swear by democracy?
Now that you're in the seat of power
You've started dilly-dallying!
But remember,
You promised us before the elections—
Now keep the promise.
We want the release … - Refrain

Under what law
Will you keep them behind the bars?
The people of the country are roaring in anger.
They'll stick at nothing to bring them out of jails,
Tear up the Black Acts, burn them to ashes,
We want the release … - Refrain

(*We Want the Release of All Political Prisoners*, Bipul Chakravarty)

Many Naxalites, after their release from the jail, had to lead an uncertain life. After their release from jail, some joined active politics while most of them choose to remain out of it as the disillusionment over the ideologies was a major concern for them. Nevertheless, these revolutionaries had to suffer inhuman torture while in detention. The songs and poems composed in jail are witnesses to those tortures and inhuman treatments.

Conclusion

Non-fictional works on the Naxalite movement have contributed immensely in bringing out the bitter truths faced by the revolutionaries. These works throw light on the issues of maltreatment, inhuman torture to the prisoners, illegal killings, and injustice done in various forms to the people engaged with the Naxalite movement. Apart from writing the lived experiences, these works have also been able to keep track of the revolutionary fervor among the masses during the first phase of Naxalism.

This chapter brings out the Naxalites' lived experiences and the various issues related to the rise and fall of the movement in West Bengal. Joya Mitra's prison memoir throws light on the atrocities done to the female Naxalites inside the jail. It also addresses issues of gender inequality prevailing within the movement. Narrating the various incidents inside the jails, Joya Mitra shows how comradeship among the various female prisoners turned into familial bonding to fight back the atrocities perpetrated by the jail authorities. Kanu Sanyal's authorized biography not only traces the life of a revolutionary, it also covers the social history of the communist movement in India. The biography reveals many ideological clashes among the leadership due to which the movement later got divided into various fractions. Kanu Sanyal considers class difference among the leadership to be one of the reasons behind the differences of opinions and decisions. The poems recorded in Sumanta Banerjee's anthology are testimonies of large-scale exploitation and atrocities done to the

rural poor and the working class in the urban spaces. These poems and songs record the outcry of the revolutionaries and encourage others to resist the repression done by the landed gentry.

The next chapter of the thesis will analyze Jhumpa Lahiri and Neel Mukherjee's works at the backdrop of the Naxalite movement.

[1] Dalits in India are people who belong from the lowest rung of the caste system. They are considered to be untouchables and are excluded from the four fold varna system of Hinduism in India.
The Adivasis are a collection of indigenous tribes in India. These indigenous tribes are considered to be the ancient inhabitants even prior to groups like Indo-Aryans and Dravidians. They are often considered to be the original inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent.

[2] Central Investigation Agency (CIA) is a non-Government crime investigation agency in India registered under Indian Trust Act 1882.

[3] Joya Mitra, *Killing Days: Prison Memoirs*. Translated from the original Bengali *Hanyaman* by Shampa Banerjee. 2004. (Kali for Women & Women Unlimited: New Delhi, 2004). Henceforth, all the citations related to the memoir is from this edition of the memoir.

[4] Aruna Krishnamurthy in the article "The Revolutionary Man in Naxalite Literature" (2017) defines the "Revolutionary Man"—"an idealized urban agent of historical change shaped around Marxist-Leninist and Maoist ideals of revolution and self-sacrifice."

[5] All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) is the peasant's wing of the Communist Party of India. The primary objective of Kisan Sabha is to mobilize the peasants and the farmers against exploitations of the zamindari system.

[6] Bappaditya Paul, *The First Naxal: An Authorised Biography of Kanu Sanyal.* 2014. (SAGE: New Delhi, 2014). Henceforth, all the citations are from this edition of the biography.

[7]Kanu Sanyal, "Report on the Peasant Movement In Terai Region." Translated from the Bengali original, which first appeared in the weekly DESHABRATI, October 24, 1968.

[8] The Eight Documents were written by Charu Mazumdar, a compilation of eight monographs which laid down the guiding ideological principles to be followed by the communist revolutionaries in India.

[9] "Red Corridor" is a region located in India covering the eastern, central, and southern parts, affected largely by the presence of the Naxalites/Maoists insurgents. The states covered by Red Corridor include Jharkhand, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra, West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh.

[10] Kanu Sanyal, "More About Naxalbari" April 1973.

[11] Sumanta Banerjee, *Thema Book of Naxalite Poetry*. 1987. (Thema: Kolkata, 2012). Henceforth, all the poetic excerpts are taken from this edition of the collection.

Chapter V

Naxalite Movement in Indian Writing in English

Literary narratives on the Naxalite movement have played a key role in bringing out many unspoken truths which had remained unnoticed under the broader issues of class struggle. These writings bring to the forefront the struggles of the revolutionaries and also portray the effects of their political involvement on their immediate family members. While the previous chapters dealt with translated fictional and non-fictional narratives written against the backdrop of the Naxalite movement, the current chapter provides a glimpse of the fictional account of the Naxalite movement as seen in the works of two diasporic writers, bringing the movement one step closer to the global context. In the previous two chapters, the movement was addressed at a more local level to point out the movement's consequences. In this chapter, the works of Jhumpa Lahiri and Neel Mukherjee are analysed. These writers expand the scope of the representation of the movement by describing the nature of its association with global factors and its impact on an extended cast of characters.

While Indian writing in English has enjoyed enormous visibility in the national and international literary forums and much debate has ensued regarding this pre-eminence, the issues, with which it has primarily engaged are those of representing the nation. In Fredrick Jameson's much debated and contested formulation, third-world literature tends to be an allegory of the nation (Jameson 1986). Very few novelists have engaged with representing political movements such as the Naxalite movement that resists and interrogates the legitimacy of the nation state. Of late, however, some writing of significance has opened up this terrain for literary representation. Among the bulk of Indian novels in the recent decades, at least a half-dozen have touched upon the Naxalite movement of India. These works include Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English, August* (1988), Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* (1995), Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008), Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* (2013) and *The Lives of Others* (2014) and *A State of Freedom* (2017) by Neel Mukherjee. A novel such as Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English, August* examines and satirizes the Indian bureaucratic apparatus and its unpreparedness in

the face of the complexity of problems that beset rural India. In this novel, the protagonist Agastya Sen, a civil servant meets some Naxal cadres during when on an official visit to a tribal village. Rohinton Mistry investigates the political genesis of the Naxalite movement in *A Fine Balance*. Arundhati Roy, in a key development of the plot in her Booker winning novel *The God of Small Things*, narrates the low-caste paravan Velutha, joining the Naxalites. Another Booker Award-winning novel, *The White Tiger* by Arvind Adiga, is laced with multiple references to the Naxals. However, the theme of the Naxalite movement is peripheral, though significant in the connections it traces, in these novels. Neel Mukherjee revisits Naxal ideology and violence in his 2017 novel *A State of Freedom* and addresses the issue through a significant minor character who is recruited into the underground Naxal cadre. However, since the Naxal movement forms the central core of the historical novel which he published in 2014, titled, *The Lives of Others*, this earlier novel is selected for exhaustive examination in this chapter.

Diasporic Indian writers in English put forth their views on exile in the form of the fictional characters they create. They focus primarily on their homeland with issues such as dislocation, a feeling of loss after their displacement, alienation in a foreign land and the conflict between the cultures of the native land and the host culture. The contemporary diasporic Indian writing in English, irrespective of the language and style, has broadened the scope of their works, crossing all forms of borders. These contemporary writers in English have been instrumental in nourishing the concept of nostalgia or belongingness, which is common in other Diasporic writers. Angelo Monaco writes, “Contemporary Indian writing in English, therefore, re-engages postcolonial allegory, infusing it with social realism and social critique” (13).

More recently published Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Lowland* and Neel Mukherjee’s *The Lives of Others* are significant attempts in the domain of Indian Writing in English as both the authors deal with the Naxalite movement that shook the country in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s, and its after effects on the people associated with the movement both directly and indirectly. *The Lowland* is an important landmark in the growing canon of literature that has emerged from, and in response to, the Naxalite movement in India. The opening pages of the novel, depict the remnants of colonialism in the country club, a green-lawned splendor, where the portrait of Queen Elizabeth II is still present on one of its walls. The two brothers Subhash

and Udayan, born just fifteen months apart, cannot not resist jumping across the compound wall of the club to discover its inner world. One night they are caught in the act, and the punishment meted out to them is harsh and arbitrary. We get a glimpse of the thematic scope of *The Lowlands* in the very introductory pages of the novel. This novel narrates the tale of a family living apart on two continents amidst the political tumult, which not only affected the generation of the protagonist but also left a deep impact on future generations. As the inseparable Mitra brothers come of age amidst a turbulent India, Udayan becomes a fitting recruit for the Naxalite movement. In contrast, Subhash moves to coastal Rhode Island to study oceanography until he receives word of Udayan's death. Back at home Subhash tries to pick up the shattered pieces of his family in the hope of healing the wound of Udayan's death. He marries his brother's wife, Gauri, now widowed, a beautiful philosophy student doomed to a life of renunciation. In this act, Subhash believes that he will be able to free them all as he returns to America with Gauri to raise his brother's child.

Neel Mukherjee's novel *The Lives of Others* is set in Calcutta and near the rice fields on the edge of the jungle in the west of rural West Bengal. The story takes place in the second half of the 1960s when the Naxalite movement had engulfed the region, and centres on the large and wealthy Ghosh family. Like the upper caste, upper class youth of Calcutta which was fired by revolutionary ideology, a scion of the Ghosh household, Supratik becomes dangerously involved in the Naxalite movement. Compelled by a fervent desire to change his life and the world around him, Supratik is seen working secretly to mobilize the peasants against the landlords. Back home, the family rivalry is at its peak, and as the flourishing family business collapses, destructive secrets are revealed. One thread of the narrative is formed by the letters written by Supratik stationed as a Naxal worker in a tribal village to an unnamed correspondent, whereas the other thread is an intricate account of events and relationships on the various floors of the joint household of the Ghosh brothers. This narrative strategy enables the novelist to examine the stark urban/rural; upper class/working class divide in Indian society. In the context of violent political resistance in the novels, Michael Wessels in his article**,** "Representations of Revolutionary Violence in Recent Indian and South African Fiction" (2017) writes:

> In both *The Lowland* and *The Lives of Others*, the structures of caste, gender and class inequality provide the conditions of objective violence that prompt

> their young middle-class protagonists, Udayan and Supratik, to throw in their lot with the Naxal movement, as scores of university students did in the late 1960s and early 1970s, inspired by Charu Majumdar and Kanu Sanyal. Both Udayan and Supratik first experience injustice in the domestic and social worlds in which they grow up, but are politically radicalised at university. The question of individual choice and political commitment is central to both novels. (1034)

Section I of this chapter deals with the life and works of Jhumpa Lahiri. This section discusses how Lahiri, a diasporic writer focuses on the issues of the people of her native country. Section II examines the novel *The Lowland*. It looks into the issues behind the Naxalite movement and its impact on the families of the Naxalites. Further, this section also discusses how Jhumpa Lahiri with her narrative skills connects the Naxalite movement to the global scenario. Section III is a brief biography and an overview of the works of Neel Mukherjee. Section IV examines the novel *The Lives of Others* written by Neel Mukherjee. Neel Mukherjee, in his seminal work *The Lives of Others* raises many important issues that impelled the youth of Calcutta into joining the Naxalite movement. The agrarian crisis in the rural hinterland and the simultaneous organisation of workers' movements in the factories of Calcutta are two important issues raised by Neel Mukherjee in the novel. He goes deep into the family saga to throw light onto the Naxalite movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

These two works bring forth many important social and familial issues pertinent to the Naxalite movement. They go beyond the revolutionary involvement of the central characters to narrate the contemporary Bengali social order and its dominating ideology and ethos at a particular period in history.

I

Jhumpa Lahiri is a Pulitzer Prize-winning Indian-American diasporic writer best known for her English-language short stories and novels. She has recently begun publishing her writing in Italian. She has written two novels and two collections of short stories. Her first collection of short stories, *The Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), won the Pulitzer Prize, the

PEN/Hemingway Award (Best Fiction Debut of the Year), and the New Yorker's Best Debut of the Year in 1999. Her first novel, *The Namesake* (2003), was named a New York Times Notable Book and was a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Prize. USA Today and Entertainment Weekly both named it the best book of the year. Mira Nair's film adaptation of *The Namesake* was also well received in India and abroad. *Unaccustomed Earth*, Lahiri's second short story collection, was released in 2008. It was awarded the Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award as well as the Vallombrosa-Gregor von Rezzori Prize. Her second novel, *The Lowland*, was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize and won the DSC Prize for South Asian Literature in 2013. Jhumpa Lahiri was appointed to President Barack Obama's Committee on Arts and Humanities in February 2010.

Jhumpa Lahiri grew up in London. Her parents were Indian immigrants from West Bengal. When Jhumpa Lahiri was three years old, her family relocated to the United States. Despite the fact that she was not born in the United States, she considers herself to be an American. Jhumpa Lahiri's father was a University of Rhode Island librarian. She grew up in Kingston, Rhode Island, but her parents visited their family in Calcutta frequently because they did not want to lose their cultural heritage.

Jhumpa Lahiri currently resides in Rome with her husband and two children, Octavio and Noor. She joined Princeton University in 2015 as a professor of Creative Writing in the Lewis Center for the Arts.

The collection *Interpreter of Maladies* contains nine short stories. The stories in this collection deal with various dilemmas encountered by the immigrant characters in their daily lives. They address marital harmony or discord, bereavement over a miscarried child, and the lack of connection between first- and second-generation immigrants in the United States of America. The stories set in the United States feature characters of various ages and genders as they grow from children to adults, shifting their identities from Indian to American.

Jhumpa Lahiri’s works are an exquisite representation of the Indian diaspora residing in the United States. She primarily focuses on the diasporic experience, issues of the diasporic people, and the cross-cultural conflicts amongst the Indian diaspora. Through her writings, Jhumpa Lahiri is able to bring out several key concepts of immigrant literature, which not only reflects the host culture but also continuously shifts back to the native land. Due to the

cross-cultural life lead by Jhumpa Lahiri, she is seen constantly coming back to memories of her ancestral land in her writings. Critics suggest that:

> Lahiri's work is informed by her own experiences as a second-generation Indian American as well as her lifelong love of literature, evident in her admiration for writers such as Anton Chekhov, Thomas Hardy, Mavis Gallant, and William Trevor. Her books have attracted academic attention, mostly in studies that focus on cultural contexts and ethnic identities in her work: her central characters are often Indian immigrants or their children, in late 20th- and early 21st-century US settings. (Leyda 67)

Among the diasporic writers across the globe, Jhumpa Lahiri is a widely acclaimed writer in the United States as well as internationally, whose work is enjoyed by a broad swathe of readers from the mainstream general kind of readers to readers from minority groups. Considering the wide scale reception of Jhumpa Lahiri's works, Lavina Dhingra and Floyd Cheung write:

> While her literary works focus on specific ethnic experiences of highly educated, upper middle-class, professionals and cultural elite Bengalis[1] and their children living in the New England since the 1970s, they simultaneously address universal themes that consistently keep them on the New York Times bestseller lists, and that have made the film adaptation of her novel, *The Namesake*, into a transnational phenomenon. (xi)

Jhumpa Lahiri's writings are characterized by a sense of mixed and conflicting emotions as often her immigrant Indian characters have to struggle between dual identities; one preserving the values of their native land and second in adopting and adapting to the host culture. Her fictional works are autobiographical in the sense as they are often based upon her personal experiences, as well as the experiences of the people from whom she draws her characters and the plot of the story. As such her characters struggle at various stages of life. On the question of her characters being autobiographical and having links with the author's past, Jhumpa Lahiri says:

> No, they're not intertwined. To me it's more the art of it and less the – I don't know. I know the stories are about something, and that they're about "issues" sometimes. But I don't approach them that way. I just approach them on the basis of character. It's impossible for me to be in my body, in my head, with

> my history and my past, and say, I'm going to write about an Indian immigrant character. That's part of me, so I myself outside and think that way and be so conscious of it. I've never felt that I had a project as a writer in that sense, in any kind of sociological, cultural, identity based way–I've never felt that. I've always just thought nuts and bolts: character, plot, language, style, form, consistency, and continuity. You know, those ideas, those ideas of the making of it. Perhaps I'm incapable of thinking consciously about the beyond. (Leyda 75)

Interpreter of Maladies is a collection of nine short stories. The stories in this collection deal with the issues of various dilemmas in the lives of the immigrant characters. They address issues of marital harmony or disharmony, the bereavement over a miscarried child and the lack of connection between the first and second generation immigrants residing in the United States of America. The stories set in the United States consist of characters of different age groups and gender and focus on their transformation from being children to adults shifting their identities from Indian to American.

In the novel *The Namesake*, Jhumpa Lahiri dwells on the issues of an Indian immigrant family in the United States. The first generation immigrants Ashoke and Ashima can be seen constantly struggling to inculcate the values and culture of their native land in their children Gogol and Sonia. The children being the second generation immigrants, suffer as they have to struggle to adopt two diverse cultures. They also struggle from confused identities as the two cultures have stark differences from each other. Further, both the first and the second generation immigrants have to face the conflict of adaption and assimilation into the new culture.

Jhumpa Lahiri's second collection of short stories *Unaccustomed Earth* consists of eight stories, with the central characters being the second generation Indian immigrants in the United States. In this collection, Jhumpa Lahiri broadens the scope of her reconstruction of the Bengali immigrant characters in North America to focusing on the complexities of the relationship between several Bengali-American characters. In this collection, she goes a step further to portray the lives of Bengali immigrants who seem to have lost most of their native lifestyles and cultural practices save a few ones such as retaining their the Bengali names. It is only their names that make them different from the natives of the host nation and, at the

same time, make them familiar to the Bengali readers. Antara Chatterjee in "The Short Story in Articulating Diasporic Subjectivities in Jhumpa Lahiri" (2013) writes:

> They are all cosmopolitan Bengalis who grew up in the United States, geographically and culturally mobile, true twenty-first-century 'global citizens' whose 'Bengaliness' seems to have receded so much into the background as to be almost incidental in their busy and demanding 'American' lives. (104).

The Lowland is the second novel written by Jhumpa Lahiri after the publication of *The Namesake*. In this novel, she takes up the theme of the Naxalite movement to portray transcultural exchanges and transnational identities. With the publication of *The Lowland*, Jhumpa Lahiri brought not only the immigrant characters to life like her other novels, but she also projected one of India's most important political conflicts, the Naxalite movement. *The Lowland* in its representation of the Naxalite movement, brings forth issues of colonial as well as postcolonial conditions in India.

II

The Lowland depicts a multi-generational tale covering almost five decades beginning in Tollygunge in Kolkata and shifting to Rhode Island, USA. The entire plot of the novel is based on the after-effects of the Naxalite movement, in which the central characters, Subhash and Gauri, along with the parents of Udayan and Subhash, are shown to bear a terrible loss. The story of *The Lowland* is based on a true event that was narrated to Jhumpa Lahiri during one of her visits to Kolkata. The story of how two young brothers were executed by the state forces in broad daylight in front of their family was recounted to Lahiri. They were killed for their involvement in a revolutionary movement. Lahiri said "That was the scene that, when I first heard of it, when it was described to ultimately inspired me to write a book" (Neary 4).

The Lowland narrates the lives of the Bengali immigrant family residing in the United States. The sections covering the Indian part of the plot serve as the background to the main narrative which mostly takes place in the United States. The plot of the story is not only about the two brothers and their misfortunes, but also about the ideology that shaped the fate of the family. Udayan and Subhash (the Mitra brothers) are born into a middle-class family in a quiet subdivision. They are seen busy with their school textbooks and transistor radios during their school days. The narrative begins in the Calcutta of the 1950s and 1960s and develops from here, though the narrative is non-linear.

The title of the book *The Lowland* symbolizes the two brothers Udayan and Subhash. The lowland which was in the close proximity to the house of the Mitra family, becomes one during the rainy days and separates into two halves during the summer season. Udayan and Subhash also had similar characteristics, as both were outwardly similar but had different perspectives on life. *The Lowland* narrates the different paths selected by the Mitra brothers, as Subhash leaves for the USA to pursue his PhD in oceanography, whereas Udayan stays back and joins the Naxalite movement, working for a radical change. Though miles apart, both brothers stay connected through the strategy of letters exchanged by the brothers. It is through the letters that Subhash comes to know about the happenings in Udayan's life and his marriage with Gauri against their parent's will. Furthermore, through one such letter from Calcutta, Subhash is informed of Udayan's death. The rest of the narrative takes place in Rhode Island and other parts of the United States as Subhash visits Kolkata and departs again for Rhode Island after marrying his widowed sister-in-law Gauri to help her escape the fate of a widow in the typical Bengali society:

> Although The Lowland begins in Tollygunge, a neighborhood of South Calcutta (now Kolkata), the story takes shape in the United States, inter-permeating the global and the local. It explores a microcosm of the global world of the 1960s, characterized by social, political, and cultural movements and uprisings, and their effects on its characters in later decades up to the first decade of the twenty-first century. Lahiri uses real historical anecdotes, incidents, political figures, as well as fictional characters, from different places around the world, all of which coalesce to create a transnational world in which South Asian subjects are active participants in global connections.

> The novel imagines a "glocal" history, ushering the local history into a global context. (Paudyal 19)

After completing their schooling, both brothers were admitted to the two best colleges of the city – Udayan goes to Presidency to study Physics and Subhash is admitted to Jadavpur University to study Chemical Engineering. Though similar in various ways, the two brothers had their unique choices in terms of careers and lifestyles. When asked about the rewards for their accomplishments, "Subhash suggested a marble chess set to replace the worn wooden pieces they'd always had. But Udayan wanted a shortwave radio" (19).

In the year 1967, the news of Naxalbari starts to emerge in the newspapers and on All India Radio. Subhash and Udayan also come to know about the uprisings in Naxalbari, a village in the Darjeeling district, "a narrow corridor at the northern tip of West Bengal. Tucked into the foot-hills of the Himalayas, nearly four hundred miles from Calcutta, closer to Tibet than Tollygunge" (23)[1]. The people in the village were tribal peasants who were workers in the agricultural lands and the tea plantations. These people were deprived and oppressed under the feudal system for generations. When the movement began, landlords and moneylenders tried to suppress it by means of brutal forces at their command. The retaliation ended with both sides killing each other as the peasants and sharecroppers burned the deeds that cheated them for years. The government immediately deployed five hundred officers to crush the movement. "They searched the mud huts of the poorest villagers. They captured unarmed insurgents, killing them if they refused to surrender. Ruthlessly, systematically, they brought the rebellion to its heels" (26)

Both the brothers are in a shocked state as they come to know over the radio of how the government used its might to control the rebellion. Udayan, who is by nature dynamic, idealist and of a charismatic personality, is in favour of the movement. He supports the goal of the movement which is to eradicate poverty for an equal and just society. He is very much affected by the police repression and is not able to calm his reaction to the atrocities. Udayan reacts "as if it were a personal affront, a physical blow" (26).

Udayan Mitra, in the novel, becomes a fitting recruit for the Naxalite movement based on his ideologies as well as his empathetic feelings for the poor and the oppressed. Udayan is courageous as well as rebellious right from his childhood. His first act of courage is seen when he shouts at the policeman to stop beating Subhash outside the Tolly club, which Udayan considered a sign of the colonial remnant. "He crouched next to Subhash,

throwing an arm across his shoulders, attempting to shield him" (10). Udayan, a product of the prestigious Presidency College, is a voracious reader who reads not only the writings of the leaders of the Naxalite movement but also those of leaders from all over the world. The books he reads such as Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* and Lenin's *What is to Be Done* – make him a cosmopolitan revolutionary as he applies the ideas of the leaders such as Mao Tse-tung, Che Guevara and Fidel Castro to the local scenario. Along with the revolutionaries all over the world he also follows Charu Mazumdar's important writings. As one of the characters says of Udayan, "He wanted to see more of India, he said, the way Che had traveled through South America. He wanted to understand the circumstances of its people. He wanted to see China one day" (71). Binod Paudyal in his article "Breaking the Boundary: Reading Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* as a Neo-cosmopolitan Fiction (2015) writes:

> Udayan can be characterized as what Appiah calls a "cosmopolitan patriot," a version of neo-cosmopolitanism, in that he practices different international ideologies while remaining committed to the political culture of India. In his seminal essay "Cosmopolitan Patriots," Appiah states that "the cosmopolitan patriot can enter the possibility of a world in which everyone is a rooted cosmopolitan, attached to a home of his or her own, with its own cultural particularities, but taking pleasure from the presence of other, different places that are home to other, different people" (91). (21)

Udayan's death in police encounter is the result of his involvement in the conspiracy of killing a police officer named Nirmal Dey. His wife Gauri, too is actively involved in the conspiracy as her task is to keep an eye on Dey's movements. Powered by her love for Udayan, she never questions or confronts Udayan for making her spy on a police officer. The ultimate result is the sudden raid on the Mitra house and an open encounter of Udayan in the presence of everyone including the family. The ramifications of Udayan's actions were seen in the lives of Subhash, Gauri and Bela. Angelo Monaco writes:

> Udayan's sudden death makes space in the novel for the affectionate and psychological dimension of human suffering. The narrative abandons the reportage mode about the violent upheavals in West Bengal and it shifts the focus to the individual and isolated lives of Subhash, Gauri and Bela in the United States. The epic and political tone is replaced by subjective insights

> on the alienation of diasporic existences, particularly through the perspective of Bela. (15)

Though Gauri and Udayan are in love with each other, the idea of getting married at once is opposed by Gauri. Instead, she wants to advance her career as a philosophy teacher at a school or a college. Even Udayan has similar notions of marriage as he is more enamoured of the revolution and rejects the idea of an arranged marriage. However, because of their love for each other, they decide to get married secretly against the wishes of their families. Gauri "did not care what her aunts and uncles, her sisters, would think of what she was doing" (351). As an act of rebellion, Gauri goes against the rules set by society when she marries Udayan.

While Udayan devotes his life to the Naxalite movement, Gauri occupies different identities at different points of time. Gauri's relationship with Udayan's parents is fraught right from the time of her marriage with their son. Throughout her stay at Tollygunge, she does not share a cordial relationship with the Mitra family, especially with Udayan's mother. Her mother-in-law considers Gauri to be Udayan's choice and not theirs. As a young girl brought up in her grandparents' home, she is not aware of the customs and traditions to be followed as a daughter-in-law in a family. Yet, she has to adjust to her role as the daughter-in-law of a traditional Bengali family set-up, for which she even has to let go of her ambitions in the academic field. As they had an unconventional marriage, Udayan's mother is totally against it as she considers the union as an attack on their customs and rituals:

> Her in-laws had accused Gauri, as she knew they would, of disgracing their family. Her mother-in-law had lashed out, telling her she'd never been worthy of Udayan. That perhaps he would still be alive, if he'd married another sort of girl. (152)

Gauri, throughout the novel, is an embodiment of an independent woman who does what she likes or what she thinks to be suitable for her. Unlike other female characters of Jhumpa Lahiri, Gauri is a free soul without parental care or restrictions. She grows up in her grandparents' home and is totally on her own to take the decisions of her life without bothering much about parents or relatives. Guangxing Chen, in the article "Diasporic Identity and Ethical Choice in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*" (2015), writes:

> When Gauri chooses to marry Udayan, a Naxalite revolutionist, she is taking both an ethical and political action. Her marriage to Udayan means having an indirect involvement in the Naxalite extremist movement, which might potentially bring harm to her family and herself. She confronts no ethnic dilemma in making up her mind to marry Udayan due to her aloofness from her family. (111)

Gauri loves Udayan so much so that she overcomes her desire to be an independent woman and reconciles to being a docile daughter-in-law. She is aware about Udayan's involvement in the Naxalite movement and is even ready to support and help him in his revolutionary activities. She helps with the task of spying on the daily movements of a policeman who is finally killed by the Naxals; this killing results Udayan being encountered by the police.

After Udayan's death, Gauri's decision to marry Subhash and leave for the United States is a way to escape the isolated life that she has been leading in the Mitra house. However, her escape to the US allows her to pursue her dreams of furthering her academic career. Not only is she able to escape her past but she is also able to follow her passion. "She'd wanted to leave Tollygunge. To forget everything her life had been. And he had handed her the possibility" (152). She took the decision not only to run away from the memories of Udayan, but also to escape from all forms of submission that her in-laws forced upon her as a widow. In the course of her escape from the darkness that has overtaken her life, Gauri struggles to adjust to the new land. She has to overcome her love for Udayan and the memories of their togetherness, and adapt to the new culture. In the article "Politics of In-between Spaces: Diasporic Travails in Jhumpa Lahiri's Fiction" (2015) Chitra Thrivikraman Nair talks about the immigrant characters in the novels *The Namesake* and *The Lowland*. She discusses the conflict portrayed between the native and the host cultures as seen in the two novels' major characters. According to her:

> In both the novels, Lahiri has projected the issues faced by the immigrants in negotiating between the two value systems. Ashima's link with her mother country is deep, but Gauri acts according to the need of the hour. Gauri's experiences of immigration are markedly different from those of Ashima. (144)

Kalyan Nadiminti in the article ""A Betrayal of Everything": The Law of the Family in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*" (2018), states how Gauri's development throughout her stay in the US does not adhere to the typical nuances of the "immigrant biopolitics". Being a victim of the state repression towards the Naxalite movement, she tries to cover up her troubles by continuing her studies at an American University. She disapproves of the life of a widow and also challenges the ideals of the immigrant family structure. In fact, "Gauri's migration to America enacts an important shift from the seditious fields of Naxalite politics to the promised land of American immigrant life" (254).

By marrying Gauri, Subhash defies all the customs and rituals enforced upon them by Bengali society. Though Udayan's mother is against the remarriage of Gauri with Subhash, Gauri re-enters the family as a daughter-in-law only to escape her cursed fate. Pregnant with Udayan's baby, Gauri marries Subhash only to preserve and nurture her love for Udayan. Growing in her womb is Udayan's child, though she is aware of the fact "that it was useless, just as it was useless to save a single earring when the other half of the pair was lost" (153). After she arrives in the United States, Gauri takes the extreme step of changing her looks to assimilate with the culture of the United States. She changes her dressing style and goes a step further to cut her hair short, as a mark of dissent. Subhash arrives from his office to see the transformation that Gauri decides to make in her looks:

> On the dressing table was a pair of scissors that he normally kept in the kitchen drawer, along with clumps of her hair. In one corner of the floor, all of her saris, and her petticoats and blouses, were lying in ribbons and scraps of various shapes and sizes, as if an animal had shredded the fabric with its teeth and claws. He opened her drawers and saw they were empty. She had destroyed everything… A few minutes later he heard her key in the lock. Her hair hung bluntly along her jawbone, dramatically altering her face. She was wearing slacks and a gray sweater. (168)

The marriage between Subhash and Gauri is an attempt to connect with the dead Udayan: Gauri sees Udayan's resemblance to Subhash, and Subhash thinks that by marrying Gauri, he can keep his brother alive as Gauri was also pregnant with Udayan's child. Subhash tries to build his small family by attempting to get Gauri to agree to have another child, but

Gauri is not prepared to do so. His marriage with Gauri comes to an end twelve years later when he and Bela visit Calcutta after his father's death. When they both return to Rhode Island six weeks later, they discover a letter where Gauri writes that she has left for California to join a University, never to come back again into their lives.

Gauri's pain and suffering are seen through her memories of Udayan; the narration continuously shifts back and forth in time. Gauri is angry with Udayan. "Anger was always amounted to her love for Udayan. Anger at him for dying, when he might have lived, bringing her happiness, and then taking it away, for trusting her, only to betray her, for believing in sacrifice, only to be selfish in the end" (197). Her anger for Udayan never allows her to assimilate into the new family, not even with Bela, who was biologically Udayan's daughter. It is because of this feeling of painful nostalgia that Gauri ends her ties with Subhash and Bela in the false hope of attaining inner peace. As a mother, Gauri is callous and does not connect with her own child. Apart from the nostalgic feelings and alienation of the characters, the novel portrays how Subhash, Gauri, and Bela try to assimilate into the host culture of the United States.

While other female characters of Jhumpa Lahiri in The *Interpreter of Maladies* remain attached to their native cultures, Gauri in *The Lowland* does not care for her roots after she moves to the United States. She emphasizes this in her self-transformation and her choice to be free of any emotional ties. Gauri defies all forms of the patriarchal system challenging the typical Bengali societal norms, stereotypes, and ideologies. Esha Shah in "The Self and the Political: A Reading of Jhumpa Lahiri's "The Lowland"" (2014) writes:

> Gauri, therefore looks like a split personality, the part of herself is practicing the avoidance of conflict and detachment like Subhash does and the part is stuck with the dutiful and hence the conflictual identification with the ideological Udayan. And there is a contradiction in the kind of the self that is prerequisite to each of these states. Gauri resembling Subhash begins with the primacy of the singular individual and proceeds to universalise it, and the one stuck with Udayan begins with the general societal whole and proceeds to particularise it. In other words, in the ultra-contemporary world of Subhash you can only be yourself if you keep yourself within yourself and keep others at a distance, but in Udayan's ideological world the ideal societal whole is the most important thing and the individual is worth nothing. It could be read that

> Gauri's instincts towards self-extinction are perhaps a result of this irresolvable contradiction in one personality. (32)

Subhash and Gauri are separated, and are not able to connect to each other; Bela becomes the ultimate victim of that separation. She suffers alienation from a very tender age and decides to step out of the family structure never to marry or be involved in the structure of a family. Bela suffers because of the faults of Gauri and Udayan. She has to pass her childhood with an indifferent mother struggling with the complicated relationship between Subhash and Gauri. When Bela is abandoned by Gauri, it reflects in her academic results to an extent that Subhash is advised by the school authorities to have her counselled. Gradually, Bela starts living the life of a nomad shifting her activities from playing clarinet in a marching band to being involved in ecological issues and recycling campaigns. Unlike her parents, Bela is least interested in academic life or research. "She told him she did not want to spend her life inside a university, researching things. She learned enough from books and labs. She didn't want to cut herself off that way" (269). Bela's dissent shows in her commitment to ecological issues. "Bela's ultimate ecocritical stance[4] represents the conclusive step of her family saga, in search of a cultural collocation in the United States with nostalgic echoes of Bengali history and space" (Monaco 16). At the same time, she also chooses to help and educate the poor farmers about agriculture. She is so affected by the marital discord between Gauri and Subhash that she decides to remain unmarried throughout her life. Her indifference towards marital relationship is reflected in her relationship with Drew:

> She said it was the reason she'd avoided ever being with one person, or staying in one place. The reason she'd wanted to have Meghna on her own. The reason, though she liked Drew, though she was almost forty, she didn't know if she could give him the things he was seeking. (366)

But unlike Gauri, Bela has deep maternal feelings; this is the reason perhaps for her hostility towards Gauri for what she had done with her and Subhash. When Bela becomes pregnant, she does not abort or abandon the child. Instead, she insists on giving birth and taking care of the child.

In Tollygunge, Subhash and Udayan's mother, Bijoli has to bear the pain of losing a son. Being the mother of a revolutionary, she keeps visiting the memorial tablet that was constructed by the party workers to commemorate the martyrdom of Udayan. She recalls

Udayan's acts of charity: how he used to work for the poor, collecting worn-out items and distributing them among the poor families living in the slums. He also used to provide medical facilities to the poorest section of society. Udayan's parents were left with an uncertain future as their house became empty after Udayan's death when Subhash left for the United States after marrying their widowed daughter-in-law, Gauri. For them, their life turned out to be a "mockery of the future they'd assumed" (218). Udayan's father suggests selling the house and moving away to a new place. However, this is not possible for the mother Bijoli as the house was the only thing left that reminded her of Udayan. Udayan's father's sudden death leaves Bijoli all alone on her own to live with the maid Deepa.

The Lowland takes the Naxalite movement further in connecting it with the students and youth movement in the United States against the Vietnam War. Both the movements are shown working for similar goals, for the uplift of the working poor and throwing out class distinctions. Udayan's interest in revolutionary figures starting from Mao, Fidel Castro and Che Guevara gives him the status of a cosmopolitan patriot:

> *The Lowland* reflects how students and youth movements of the 60s, both in India and the United States, shared similar core interests in hoping to build a just and better society. Both movements stressed the working poor and class difference in aiming to overthrow capitalism and feudalism in the United States and India respectively. The student activists in both India and the United States mostly came from either the middle class or the elite class. In the United States, a large number of activists were white students from affluent families who could afford to go to top universities like Harvard, Berkeley, and Columbia. While the primary concern of these students was the Vietnam War, they also expressed solidarity for African Americans who were segregated by Jim Crow laws and victimized by American capitalism. These students visited several cities and small towns in Southern states and tried to make African Americans aware of their voting and other constitutional rights. Largely influenced by the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, student activists advocated for the rights of minority and underrepresented groups. (Paudyal 22)

The Lowland describes how Subhash and Udayan, having been brought up in the same environment could opt for two different ideologies and ways of living. The narrative

sets up a contrast between the two brothers—one actively involved in a politically radical movement, while the other, though aloof to politics, is very connected at the human level to his brother and his child. In the United States Subhash is seen taking a neutral stand whereas his counterpart Richard is seen opposing the United States in its stand against Vietnam. Though Subhash is cautious about explicit involvement in political movements, yet he is not able to escape from the consequences of Udayan's involvement in the Naxalite movement.

The violence and inequality perpetuated in the name of caste, class, and gender compelled the young revolutionary Udayan to throw himself into the Naxalite movement against his father's wishes like scores of university and college students did in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Like Udayan of *The Lowland,* Supratik too, in the novel *The Lives of Others*, leaves his superfluous life in the Ghosh mansion to join the Naxalite movement.

III

Neel Mukherjee is an Indian diasporic writer based in London. He has written three books in English and his works explore the concept of freedom for the marginalized struggling to make things better amidst various hardships. The three novels that he has authored so far are *A Life Apart* (2008), *The Life of Others* (2014), and *A State of Freedom* (2017). He won the Vodafone-Crossword Book Award in 2008 for his debut novel *Past Continuous*, which was later published as *A Life Apart*. *A Life Apart* also won the Writers' Guild of Great Britain award for best fiction. His second novel *The Lives of Others*, was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 2014 and the Costa Best Novel Award, and it won the RSL Encore Award. His recent novel *A State of Freedom*, was selected as a New York Times' Notable Book of the Year. In the year 2018, Neel Mukherjee was elected a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. He is also a part-time Briggs-Copeland lecturer at the Harvard University.

Neel Mukherjee was born in Kolkata, erstwhile Calcutta, in the year 1970. He lives in London but often shifts base to the United States for several months in a year to teach creative writing at Harvard University. Prior to his writing career, he made several shifts in the attempt to select successfully his career path. In the initial stages, he wanted to be a

filmmaker but could not pursue it for several reasons though he had joined the undergraduate programme to study filmmaking at the FTII (Film and Television Institute of India). While doing his graduation at Jadavpur University, one of his professors encouraged him to apply to Oxbridge for higher studies in literature. Thereafter, his focus changed, and his career graph took a shift to academia. He applied and was admitted to Oxford University, from where he did his second B.A. By the time he completed his second graduation, he was selected for the doctorate programme at Cambridge, where he started his Ph.D. By then, his aim was to be a scholar in sixteenth-century literature. After completing his Ph.D., he left Cambridge and went to London. At the age of thirty, Neel Mukherjee started writing his first novel. He was unsure about his prowess in writing as he had just started to explore a new avenue in his career. In an interview with Alessandro Vescovi, Neel Mukherjee states:

> I started writing what became *Past Continuous* or *A Life Apart* at the University of East Anglia in the creative writing school there. That's how it came about. So you can say that I came to writing because I failed in everything else! It was a series of failures: failure to be molecular biologist, failure to be a filmmaker, failure to be an academic, and now I am writing for my writing career to fail as well, and then I'll move on to something else like circus magician… (221)

His first novel was turned down by most publishers in Britain and America. It was published in India as *Past Continuous* (2008). Later, when he gave a copy of it to one of his friends who is a publisher in the UK, it was re-published with the title *A Life Apart* in 2010. Like many other writers, Neel Mukherjee also had to go through a difficult path to find recognition in the field of writing.

In his writings, Neel Mukherjee focuses on the inheritance of violence endured by the marginalized sections of society. His writings are a testimony to the power of resistance offered by the poor and the oppressed. Perhaps few amongst the large number of Indian writers today focus as Neel Mukherjee does in his novels, on the marginal located within both the local and the global contexts; his sympathetic purview extends to the past as well as to the present times.

Neel Mukherjee's debut novel *A Life Apart* narrates two stories. The first story is that of Ritwik. Ritwik is born in Calcutta, but moves to England to escape from his traumatic life in

his home city, and also in search of better opportunities. In search of newer opportunities in a foreign land Ritwik is troubled by memories, remembering his past. In the course of his stay in England, Ritwik falls into patterns of insecure behaviour: he has recurrent episodes of sex with strangers in public toilets. These acts of physical intimacy invade his mind, and he is unable to focus on his studies. In between the bouts of risky behaviour, memories of trauma, of an abusive mother who used to beat him as a child haunt him. The complementing story in the novel is that of Miss Gilby, who is a character in Ritwik's own novel which he is writing at the time. In an interview, Neel Mukherjee agrees that the character of Miss Gilby is drawn from Rabindranath Tagore's novel Gharey Bairey (The Home and the World, 1916) (Vescovi 227), "where she appears in only half a page of the book very early on, like page eight or ten or something, and then never returns" (227). This award-winning novel is non-linear and is set in India of the 1970s and 1980s, in England of the '90s and in colonial Bengal of the 1900s. It explores the themes of cultural trauma, displacement, and alienation through its central immigrant protagonist.

His second novel *The Lives of Others,* is set in the turbulent times of the 1960s and 1970s, when the Naxalite movement was at its peak. It narrates the coming of age of a youth in a wealthy family residing in Calcutta, and in the process describes the revolutionary activities of young Naxalites as the backdrop to the times. Along with various happenings inside the Ghosh mansion, this novel primarily focuses on the hierarchical relationships maintained both inside and outside the house. Patriarchal domination, exploitation of the rural poor by the landlords, and the wide-scale disparity existing in the city of Calcutta are some of the significant issues that the novel addresses. Supratik, the eldest grandson of the house who resists the bhadralok culture into which he is born, is unable to follow the family dictates in quiet obedience. He is inducted into the revolutionary ideology and joins the Naxalite movement.

Neel Mukherjee's third novel *A State of Freedom* is divided into five interconnected stories. One of the complementing themes of this novel narrated through the actions of an important minor character is the involvement of the marginalized people in the Maoist movement. In this novel, Mukherjee expands upon the struggles and dreams of the marginal sections of society. The stories of Milly and Soni portray the abject poverty prevailing among the marginalized sections of India. The paths selected by Milly and Soni are testimony to the different ideals that exist among the rural poor.

IV

The Lives of Others narrates the tale of the many branches of the wealthy Ghosh family residing in 22/6 of Basanta Bose Road in Calcutta. Together with the tensions and everyday conflicts amongst the different members of the household, it sketches a detailed trajectory of the doings of Supratik, the eldest grandson of Ghosh family, who is involved in the Naxal movement. Supratik's activities outside the family are revealed through his letters written to an unnamed person, who is later revealed to be Purba, his youngest aunt with whom he is secretly in love. The novel concentrates on the events of the latter half of the 1960s and the beginning of 1970s, where the owner of the mills and the head of the family Prafullanath Ghosh is seen struggling to retain his power and wealth. The two threads of the narrative are narrated in parallel, until Supratik returns from the rural hinterland to his home in Calcutta to continue his involvement in revolutionary activities that had spread to the urban areas. The narrative is an intricate account of the various happenings inside the Ghosh household, the hierarchal relationships, patriarchal domination as well as the decadent lives etched out inside the house. The novel gives us a detailed account of almost all the characters, paying fine attention to the intricate web of jealousies, sexual insecurities and violent injustices that characterize the family politics inside the Ghosh household. *The Lives of Others* traces and holds in ironic balance the depiction of the extreme poverty of the poor sharecroppers and wage labourers in the mills of Kolkata, contrasting these with the lavish and luxurious lives led inside the Ghosh mansion in Basanta Bose Road. The lack of unity, selfishness, and jealousy over property is seen in the relationships between the different women of the household such as Purnima and Charubala (the mother-in-law) and Chhaya. It can also be perceived in a different way in the lives of the entitled men of the family.

The Naxalite movement began to protect the rights of the sharecroppers and the landless labourers against the atrocities of the landlords. The prologue of the novel sets the tone of the narrative as it describes the pitiable condition of Nitai Das and his family. Nitai Das, a representative of the landless farmers in the novel, takes the drastic step of killing his family before killing himself, as he does not want his family to die from starvation. The

connecting link between Nitai Das and Supratik is seen when Supratik chooses Nitai Das's village as the center of his revolutionary activities.

Supratik, who grows up as the eldest grandson of the Ghosh family, cares about and empathizes with the deprived and helpless people surrounding his own luxurious upbringing. He notices the destitution of the poor masses when he perceives the sight of the people outside the Great Eastern Hotel at Chowringhee, Calcutta. He is moved at the sight of the people sleeping on the pavements outside the grand mansions of Calcutta, which is a visible marker of their extreme poverty and deprivation. Just a little away from the grand luxurious restaurant, the poor people live in a world completely different: "Only ten feet separate them from the world of extreme wealth. Inside-outside: the world forever and always divides into those two categories (32)[2]. The existence of the two worlds, one luxurious and superfluous, lives inside the buildings and mansions, and the other of hardships and suffering on the roadside, haunt Supratik's conscience. Some of the poor people are somehow able to find a place in the slums of Calcutta, but die soon after from the many diseases that afflict the marginalized. Many times, since their identities are not known, even their last rites cannot be done. These are the poor people who migrate from the villages to the city in search of work.

Judith Suissa in "Pedagogies of Indignation and The Lives of Others" (2017), observes how Supratik is against the superfluous lives lived inside his own home when his mother serves him some delicious dishes that she has lovingly prepared for him:

> Supratik is unable to see their food simply as food. The abundant, cheerful family meals that are such a vital element of life in the Ghosh household, and which are described in mouth-watering detail in the novel, have become a symbol of their complicity in a deeply unjust social order; and a visceral reminder of the hunger of those who are excluded from their social order. (881)

When Supratik comes to know about the sharecropper Kanu's share in the harvests, he is shocked beyond belief at the economic exploitation that prevails in the villages:

> I couldn't make any sense of this logic, that the better off got more and those who had little got less. The world ran on this law, and only on this. Some magnetic field began to develop around those who had a little something – power or money or influence or friends, you name it – and the more these

> things accrued, the more that magnetism increased (it was as if the things that flowed to them had attracting properties themselves), drawing more inside its orbit and away from those whose funds were already depleted, making them even more impoverished, depriving them of even more. It was like gravity: everything flowed, and could only flow, in one direction. Or a type of circularity: the more you had, the more will come to you, the more you will have. (195-196)

The tragic sight of the impoverished people, their poverty, and the hunger of the marginalized people lead Supratik to reflect on the fact that even after so many years of Independence, things remain unchanged:

> The actors had changed; the play remained the same. That great magnetism was still at work: power spoke to and connected only with power; the government and its laws were for the benefit of the landlords, the powerful and the wealthy. Their interests were aligned: they looked out for each other, therefore they would always be looking after each other. That great circularity again. (199)

In *The Lives of Others* Neel Mukherjee records minutely the marginality of the landless labourers and sharecroppers in the borderlands between Bengal and Orissa. Supratik, with his Naxal comrades Samir and Dhiren, forms a group and goes to Majgeria to work with the tribals. This region belongs to the tribal people and is rich in mineral resources such as coal and iron-ore. However, these communities are not able to resist the power of the capitalists and the state: "Who was going to listen to 100, 500, 1,000 or even 10,000 dark-skinned, backward, jungle-dwelling adivasis, the so-called 'scheduled tribes', over the collective might and muscle of Steel Authority of India, Tata Steel and Hindustan Cables? (62). Taking inspiration from the Naxalbari uprisings, these young students are able to recognize the injustice and exploitation meted out to the tribal people of those areas. Their stay at Belpahari at Debdulal Maity's cycle-shed gives them an inside perspective on how the villagers are denied electricity even though there are dams nearby. When Supratik leaves the capital city of Kolkata to understand and experience rural Bengal, his perspective on life and suffering undergoes a dramatic turn after witnessing first-hand the hard lives of the village dwellers. Even as he lives in the village and works for the villagers, he observes that very few relief and development works are implemented. These, however, are done with the

sole purpose of electoral votes. As such, during the initial days the villagers are not able to trust the young revolutionaries and take them to be representatives of some political party. Mukunda Mashan, a villager, accuses Supratik and his other comrades of hypocricy: "We're foolish, illiterate people, we can't read, we don't understand much, but we understand at least this: the bloodsuckers are still there, their skin colour has changed. That's the only change that has happened.'" (98)

The narrative of *The Lives of Others* continuously shifts from the abject poverty of the poor and landless labourers in rural Bengal, the wage earners in urban Calcutta and the luxurious lives led by the family of Prafullanath at Basanta Bose Road. The hierarchical relations in the family are the prime reason behind the family politics inside the Ghosh mansion. Right at the beginning of the novel, we get to know how Purnima, Priyo's wife is not happy with the preferential treatment given to Adinath, the eldest son of the house. She often asks Priyo, "If all the brothers contributed equally, why should Dada get preferential treatment in the family?" (8). Purnima's grudge can be clearly seen when she quarrels with Chhaya and Charubala over the unequal distribution of property.

Purba, the youngest daughter-in-law of the family and the wife of Somnath becomes a victim belonging as she does to a marginalized family. To hide the many faults of Somnath, his family members get him married to Purba even though the bride's family is far removed from their own in terms of class and caste positions. Somnath dies, while attempting to rape a tribal girl in the forest near the village Patratu near McCluskiegunj. He is beaten to death by the tribal community, "a classic act of divine justice with which the political violence of Supratik and his Naxal group compares unfavourably" (Wessel 1038). In keeping with the patriarchal ideology that structures the family, Purba is accused of being ill-fated after her husband's death and is relegated to a set of rooms on the ground floor along with her two children; this is the same floor where the servants of the house live. Purba and her children lead an almost ostracized life through no fault committed by them. Purba has to live a life under complete surveillance. She also has to face rude and abusive behaviour from Charubala. Their servant Malati is able to notice the injustices towards all three of them and shows her sympathy:

> 'Do you think we don't know that Boro-boüdi secretly sends down used clothes and other stuff for your son and daughter? They're growing up on

> leftovers and bones, those two; they'll come good one day, you mark my words. Those who suffer, win.'(53; quoted in the original)

Despite all odds, Sona, Purba's son, continues his studies amidst hardships. Sona and Kalyani have been deprived of all the facilities that the other grandchildren of the house enjoy. Sona is allowed to attend the tuitions given by Dibyendu-Da to educate Sougata. Sona knows his conditions well and has the patience to continue with his studies even in a hostile situation. "Such is the way his world is configured and he cannot yet put a shape to the lineaments of his desire to escape it, let alone articulate the desire. Not yet" (25). While Dibyendu abuses Sona and hurls invectives at him, Sona patiently suffers all the abuses even as he remembers his mother's advice. His mother's advice is to work hard and do nothing but to keep studying and be the top of his class every year. This, she tells him is the only solution for them to escape from their current state of destitution. Sona's mathematical genius is discovered by Ashish Roy, a retired professor of mathematics. Later with the help of Swapan Adhikari, "a mathematics teacher in the senior school of St. Lawrence" (210), and a student of Ashish Roy, Sona wins an award to go abroad and study mathematics on a fully funded scholarship. Epilogue I of the novel narrates how Sona turns out to be a mathematical genius and becomes Professor Swarnendu Ghosh of Stanford University. He is awarded the Fields Medal which is generally considered the Nobel Prize in mathematics.

Supratik is shown to be a symbolic representative of the movement in seizing state power. Along with his friends he plans an armed insurrection of the landlords and the zamindars in order to stop the exploitation of the poor. Thus they attempt to end the existing status-quo. The uprisings in Naxalbari in May 1967 lend the spark as Supratik has already been reading Charu Mazumdar's *Liberation*[3]. He leaves home to work in the rural areas where the rural inhabitants were exploited the most. The movement attempted to involve the participation of the exploited, considered to be the backbone of the revolution:

> Supratik proves to be the quintessence of Charu Mazumdar's student revolutionary who goes through each stage of revolution from constructive development to a bloody endeavor prescribed by him, finally becoming a martyr to the cause. (Sarkar and Manna 388)

Supratik is a representative of urban intellectual youth who went on to be the inspiring force of the movement. Rabindra Ray in his book *The Naxalites and their Ideology* (2012), explores the questions of the role of these youths. According to him, "The root of the Naxalite

phenomenon do not lie in the poverty of India's labouring rural population, but in the psychological traumas of its urban educated young" (xii). When Supratik left home, he joined the rural population for the mass organization of the peasants. In joining the peasants for a mass organization, Supratik was following the ideals laid by Charu Mazumdar. Sumanta Banerjee records what Charu Mazumdar has said in connection to the mass organization of the peasantry. Mazumdar said:

> They must live with the poor peasants, eat with them and help them in all their work - and thus gradually become one of them. The students should remember that while they must propagate revolutionary politics among the peasants, the most important thing for them was to be able to learn from the peasants (Banerjee 53).

However, Supratik could not survive long in the rural areas and had to leave for his home in the city:

> Despite his commitment to revolution Supratik, however, suffers from the same existential angst that he faced during the days in Ghosh mansion. Gradually as days passed in the village, his expectation of revolution and the frustration of his emotions when he encounters actual revolution coax him into the adventurism of annihilation. (Sarkar and Manna 386)

The Lives of Others delineates the extreme steps that the intellectuals took to fight against the injustices meted by the landed gentry to the poor and destitute population. Michael K. Walonen writes:

> "the novel captures the essential ambiguity of the Naxalite movement – the frequent ugliness of its struggle but also the brutality, dehumanization, and desperation it is born of; as well as the unquenchable hope sustaining it that a world different from the structural violence and systematic exploitation of the Indian capitalism is possible. (7)

The labour unrest in the mills of Calcutta backed by the Communist party unfolds an essential chapter in the novel. Being the eldest son and in charge of the important mills Adinath is anxious about the labour union movement that is gathering momentum in the factories of Calcutta. He is also aware of the Communist party's popularity and that it might come to power in the subsequent elections. Already many of the factories were in bad condition and closing up because of the political turmoil in West Bengal. As compensation

for the illegal jobs that Madan has done for the family, Adinath permits Madan to bring his son Dulal to the Ghosh family home in order to enable him to find a suitable job. Dulal is soon employed in one of the mills on the strength of his abilities. But after some years of satisfactory service Dulal becomes the leader of the trade union and starts mobilizing the workers. These protests magnify when the decision to reduce the number of workers is taken because of the mechanization in the mills. Dulal also fights against the decision to replace a worker who loses his hand during an accident in the mill. Dulal leads the gherao outside the mill and calls for an indefinite strike. The confrontation between the workers and Prafullanath leads to the deterioration of Prafullanath's health resulting in the closure of that factory. The clash between the owners and factory workers results in the closing down of many factories which leads to the destruction of the livelihoods of many workers:

> As for tactics, he suggested the transformation of the workers' trade union actions like strikes or "gheraos" (besieging the mill-owners - a form of action that became popular among the working class in the late sixties) into armed confrontation with the employers and the state. (Banerjee 48)

While several factors can be accounted for the downfall of the Naxalite movement, one of the most important reasons was the participation of the urban youth in the villages where they took the important responsibility of mobilizing the peasants and the labourers. While mobilizing the rural population, the urban youth faced difficulties living in the rural areas along with the peasants. In the course of revolutionary activities, it was noticed that these urban intellectuals had the upper hand as they were well educated, and city-bred. Hence a wide-scale gap existed between the peasants and the urban revolutionaries. In *The Lives of Others*, though Supratik goes with his friends to mobilize the peasants, he faces many difficulties in continuing with his work in the rural areas. It can also be noted that the young urban revolutionaries came from different backgrounds in terms of caste and class. The group that Supratik forms with Dhiren and Samir has class differences. Dhiren is the poorest one "who had known only want in his life" (62). Samir also is not from a well-to-do family as "his father was a clerk in the Electric Supply Corporation" (62).

Carlotta Maria Beretta, in the article "Righting the Subalterns? Neel Mukherjee's *The Lives of Others* and the Naxalite Movement" (2019), discusses the two "*siege episodes*" in which the voices of the subalterns are forcefully and intentionally suppressed. In the first siege two domestic servants of the Ghosh household accuse Somnath of rape. To hide the

flaws of her son and save the reputation of the family, Charubala orders them to be chased away from the house. Chhaya takes the help of Madan-da to close the windows and doors of the house to hide the damage that has already been done as there is a huge gathering of neighbours, strangers and passer-by, looking into the hullabaloo created by the maid servants' accusations. In the second siege, the men of the house confront the strike going on outside their mill. Prafullanath visits the mill with his sons in order to bring about a settlement with Dulal, who is the leader of the workers. Instead of controlling the situation and coming to a resolution, the situation turns violent and Prafullanath and his sons are trapped inside their car amidst angry workers. The gherao ends when their driver saves their lives by running the car over some workers. Beretta further says that the role of the middle-class was to be the mediator for the lower classes, but in *The Lives of Others*, the middle-classes is seen always in a dominating position:

> These two *siege episodes* also provide a perspective on subaltern agency. In both instances, the subalterns decide and act for themselves, challenging the authority of the middle-class. However, their *revolutionary acts* are never successful and the subalterns' perspective is always mediated by the middle-class gaze. The same is true for the second narrative strand: in the letters Supratik sends home, we always see the subalterns through his eyes, and never hear their point of view. Also, the subalterns are rarely the protagonists of the struggle: Supratik and his comrades appear to oversee and take part to much of the action. (71)

The Lives of Others clearly demarcates the ideas and values in Bengali society. Regarding Supratik's return to his home after being involved in the Naxalite movement, there is a clear conflict between Adinath and Sandhya's ideas. Adinath has middle-class values and the ideals of respectability and order in his family. Adinath is worried when he is informed by the Superintendent of Police, Mr. Dhar that his elder son Supratik is actively engaged in the Naxalite movement. He is afraid as the respect and position that his family enjoyed for years is gradually decreasing because of the political turmoil hovering around them. His family's neutral stance is not a new phenomenon as they had also been indifferent towards the Nationalist movement in Bengal. They had never participated in any nationalist cause or any anti-British activities as Prafullanath maintained a distance from the revolutionaries and considered them as "patriotic fools" (192). While confronting Supratik about his

revolutionary activities, Adinath considers Supratik to be the reason for the shame he is bringing upon their family. "Yes, no, yes… yes, I do, actually. 'You've blackened our face', Adinath launches in. 'You've brought down so much shame upon us that we cannot show our face to the outside world anymore.'" (420). The Naxalite movement also becomes the reason for the conflict inside the family. By joining the movement, a revolutionary is not only harming his education and future career prospects but is also detaching himself from his family. Henrike Donner in the article "Radical Masculinity: morality, sociality and relationships through recollections of Naxalite activists" (2009), discusses the conflict inside a family in terms of ideals and values. According to this author, "While fathers were often depicted as distant, authoritarian figures, mothers were described as 'worrying', 'suffering' and projecting their own vulnerability through a discourse that made their self-sacrificing sons feel very guilty" (334). While Adinath is indifferent towards his son's activities and consider them as a shame upon his family, Supratik's mother Sandhya suffers after her son's sudden disappearance:

> Her thinning and now greying hair spread out in a pitiful swathe across the bank of stale pillows on which her head rests, Sandhya runs the indelible film of her son's two postcards in her head. She had taken to her bed ever since Supratik left a year ago, only very occasionally leaving it to perform the bare minimum of tasks that would keep her from puncturing a vital divisive membrane and slipping from the world of humans to that of something less-than-human. Overnight she had dropped out of her life and become a spectre, giving up on all her duties and privileges as the eldest daughter-in-law at the helm of the family ship and letting it drift, keelless and rudderless; she didn't care any more about anything. The images of the two postcards burn through her: six inches by four inches (yes, she had measured them with a ruler) of light-beige ordinariness, the imprint of the head of the Royal Bengal Tiger, along with the denomination, fifteen paisa, on the top right-hand corner, just above the ruled space for the address … She knows every atom of those two postcards now. (71)

The police are portrayed as the agents of the State in the novel. Several instances show that the police are merely puppets in the hands of the State and the landowners. During one of his activities in the rural areas Supratik and his friends notice how the police are protecting

the illegal acts of the landowners. Supratik, together with Samir and Dhiren observes the arrival of big trucks in the village, which is very unusual especially at the peak time of the harvests. On following it they find that they go to "the biggest house in Majgeria" (152), the owner being Basudeb Ray who had "more than 250 acres of land in the area" (152). While they watch, they observe the activities of four men who are carrying sacks on their shoulders and are being helped by other four or five others who guide them on the path with lamps to light up the way. With the help of the light of the lamps, they are able to notice that some of them are in police uniforms. They are mystified and wonder about the role of the police in the darkness of the night along with the men:

> Was it a rhetorical question? Did he really not know? Still I felt the need to answer him – They were standing guard. They were protecting Basudeb Ray and his servants as they transferred rice to the lorry to be taken to Calcutta or to cities in other states, Bihar, Orissa, where it will be sold on the black market at prices much higher than the official rate. (152-153)

Supratik's arrest and encounter without trial show the brutality of the police toward the Naxalites. Supratik is detained from his house by the police on the charge of planning a bombing in Shyambazar.

The hierarchal treatment inside the Ghosh house is seen in the treatment given to the servants of the house. When Charubala discovers her son Somnath's sexual affair with one of the domestic servants of the house, Meera, she immediately orders Madan to send Meera away. Madan being the oldest and the most loyal has been part of the Ghosh household right from his childhood. For his long years of service in the house and also for his loyalty towards the Ghosh family, he is given authority to monitor all the other servants in the house. He is very close to Charubala and she always tells the neighbours that "'Our Madan is part of the family' or 'He is like our eldest son'" (319). When Supratik comes back home, it is Madan who tries to explain to him how his mother had suffered because of his involvement in the revolution. According to Madan, Supratik was bringing misery to the family. He says "'Boro-babu, the world does not change, you destroy yourself trying to change it, but it remains as it is. The world is very big, and we are small. Why cause people who love you to go through such misery because of it?'" (426). Later in the narrative when Supratik steals Purnima's jewellery to finance the revolutionary activities, Madan becomes the soft target and is blamed for the robbery. Though initially Charubala supports and stands by Madan, his

arrest is sealed as the police find a missing piece of jewellery inside Madan's room. This piece has been placed by Supratik to compromise Madan. The police conveniently confirm the next day that the burgler was Madan; they say Madan burgled the jewellery in order to support his son Dulal financially. Dulal owns an electrical goods shop which the family knows is not doing well. Madan is released three months later. His reprieve comes after Supratik is arrested, and confesses to having committed the burglary. Under tremendous shock, Madan commits suicide by throwing himself in front of a running train. Madan's loyalty and his final ending are completely tragic, a result of being unable to reconcile to carrying on with his life after the false allegation of theft:

> For Madan-da, betrayed by both Supratik and the hierarchical system he has served so devotedly, resistant violence is not an option; suicide represents his only chance of escaping the fate that objective violence has decreed for him. Supratik's revolutionary commitment here trumps ordinary human decency; it is based on cruelty and petty feelings rather than on a sense of justice. (Wessels 1039)

For Supratik the system of exploitation starts right with his family. For him, his family is the primary structure of exploitation. Along with various other forms of exploitation going around in the society, Supratik is critical about the oppressive and hierarchical system prevailing in his house. Michael Wessels in his article, "Representations of revolutionary Violence in Recent Indian and South African Fiction" (2017), discusses the hierarchical structure prevailing within the Ghosh family, and the deep effect it has on Supratik's mind. The marginalization of the adivasis and the tribals of Orissa which Supratik sees when he goes to work as a Naxalite, bears an uncanny resemblance to the hierarchical structure prevailing in the Ghosh household; visible in a magnified manner in the rural hinterland. The details of these reflections are narrated in the letters which Supratik writes to Purba. The tribals were oppressed by the landowning classes, with tacit and indirect support from the police. However, Supratik's class analysis based on his Maoist ideology is seen to be simplistic because he does not perceive the intricacies of human relationships as seen in the case of Madan elaborated above. Michael Wessels writes:

> These intricate human stories provide a contrast with Supratik's Maoist analysis, which reduces the complexity of human relationships to a Manichaean world of class allies and enemies, a discrepancy between theory

> and life that increasingly comes to accompany many of Supratik's revolutionary actions as well. His increasing dedication to abstract political theory parallels the growing moral ambiguity of his participation in acts of violent retribution against local representatives of institutionalised forms of power. (1038)

Sandhya, in the novel, is seen to be worried about her elder son turning into a stranger through his ideology and the changed outlook of life. When Supratik leaves home to work in the rural areas, Sandhya laments about being late in understanding her son. She recollects how Supratik used to question her about the differential treatment given to the servants and the poor people residing both inside and outside their family. Supratik asks his mother, '"Are you happy with the inequalities of our family? Of the power-on-top-ruling-people-below kind of hierarchy? Do you think it's right? Has the thought ever crossed your mind that the family is the primary unit of exploitation?'" (79). He is also critical of Purba's exile within the household after she was widowed. He accuses his mother on her stance as she takes the side of the powerful instead of the powerless people. In one of his letters to his mother, Supratik talks about his inability to survive in that house:

> *Ma, I feel exhausted with consuming, with taking and grabbing and using. I am so bloated that I feel I cannot breathe any more. I am leaving to find some air, some place where I shall be able to purge myself, push back against the life given me and make my own. I feel I live in a borrowed house. It's time to find my own. Trying to discover my whereabouts won't get you anywhere, so save that energy; you might find you need it for something else. I'll write periodically to let you know I'm alive. Forgive me. Yours, Supratik.* (60; Italics in original)

The sections of the novel covering the events of 1960s and 1970s explore the violent nature of the state forces working against the Naxalites and their sympathizers. But the final epilogue of the novel connects the movement with the current and existing Maoist violence in the Red Corridor of the country. Epilogue 2 describes the events from September 2012, when a group of Maoists plan to derail the Kolkata-Ajmer Express between Kumendi and Kechki. Sabita Kumari, the leader of the group, is a graduate and had dreamed of becoming a school teacher. However, her life takes a violent turn when her two sisters are raped and brutally murdered along with her parents for resisting "the moneylenders' attempts to take

over their land in the village of Pabira" (501). The police acting as the agents of the goons refuse to accept the FIR. Sabita joins the Maoists and takes her revenge on the five officers who had asked for sexual favours in return of her FIR[4]. "Here, the police are cast not only as enablers for rapists and murderers but as exploiting their position of power to demand sex in exchange for legal action in an instance of underpolicing." (DaRiff 123)

The Majhi brothers and their sister come from the Saranda forest to join the Maoists as they lose their ancestral land which is taken away by the State for mining project. The compensation is not enough to settle their lives and they know that their fate after losing their land would be to end up as "daily wage-labourer in the city, maidservant in someone's home, prostitute" (502). Not wishing such a fate and helpless to resist it, they join the Maoist movement fired with an alternative hope. "This is the hope the Maoists offered, the hope of dark clouds gathering over parched, fractured soil; it could rain or it could not, but they brought something new into their lives: possibility" (502-503).

Sabita is trained in combat action. She has learned the technique of derailing running trains by removing fish plates, which is taught to the Maoists by the Naxalites of the 1960s: the name of the original mentor is mentioned as Pratik-Da. This name is a reference perhaps to Supratik, thereby connecting the epilogue to the main plot of the novel, ensuring the circularity of the cycle of events. Sabita, along with her troop, does the job of removing the fishplates in order to derail the Kolkata-Ajmer Express and disappears into the forest. Angela Eyre in her article "Organized Peasant Resistance in Fiction: The Sword and The Sickle and The lives of Others" (2019), questions the hopes of the Naxalites/Maoists for a revolutionary change in the power structure, which is seen to be reviving again in the event recorded in the epilogue. The author dates this event as the year 2012. The forest dwellers/adivasis are evicted from their ancestral lands forcefully; the police and paramilitary forces implement the orders of the State in cohorts with the multinational companies. In the 1960s and 1970s it was the Naxalites who fought for the villagers and sharecroppers; the atrocities documented in the prologue and the main narrative are repeated again in the epilogue that takes place during contemporary times. In the epilogue, the modern-day Naxalites termed as the Maoists are represented by Sabita, who fights for the rights of the oppressed masses, she being one of the victims of the oppression:

> "This creates a bleak certainty that nothing has changed. The temporal structure of the novel and the repetitions in the prologue, main narrative and

> epilogue, embody the cyclical nature of the desperation and violence. The circles are ever-widening: the life of one peasant family in the prologue, several villages in the main section, and the whole of India in the epilogue" (11)

Neel Mukherjee continued his narrative of Maoist resistance in his third novel *A State of Freedom*. One of the stories in this novel, deals with the life of Soni and her friend Milly, delineating the limited options available to the tribal communities, which are seen in the different paths selected by two friends. Though brought up in the same background, both have different perspectives on the path of resistance. Even as the two friends grow up together, Milly is sent to work as a housemaid at the age of eight since her mother is not able to provide for nine people in their home. Milly's father is a drunkard who instead of earning money is a drain on whatever her mother earns. While Milly works as a help for Lewis and his wife Pendo, Soni along with her family suffers extreme poverty in the village. Soni joins the PGLA (People's Liberation Guerrilla Army) in the hope of a radical change. It is not only poverty that pushes Soni to join the party, but also the existing patriarchal domination and the state repression of the tribal village, where villagers become victims. Meghan Gorman-DaRif in the article "Post-Magic: The Female Naxalite at 50 in Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* and Neel Mukherjee's *A State of Freedom*" (2018) elaborates on the role of female guerrilla of the present Maoist movement represented in both the texts. DaRif says:

> Mukherjee builds upon the structural violence of inequality overseen by the state to the culmination that takes place in the forest, where Soni's sister is violently raped by Forest Department officials as she and Soni collect Kendu leaves. The scene is emblematic of the precarity of the tribal villagers as Soni and her sister are made vulnerable by a new rule they were unaware of: needing a license to collect Kendu leaves, a rule, as the text suggests comes from the government making "their lives more and more impossible […] because big companies wanted the land" (2017, 178). (134)

Soni's sister's rape at the hands of the representatives of the state portrays the helplessness of the tribal people. The novel describes how people like Soni and Soni's sister find a ray of hope in joining the Maoist movement to escape from their everyday lives of struggle and

hardships. Neel Mukherjee, through his fictional characters, records how the innocent villagers are pushed into cycles of violence as they are left with no other option.

The Naxalite movement of the seventies witnessed on a large scale educated youth, students from various colleges and the universities of Calcutta joining the movement in the hope for an equal and just society. Though some of the young people were from well-to-do middle-class families there were also several from the lower classes and lower castes. Several factors underpin the reasons why the younger population joined the movement. Sumanta Banerjee notes how examinations and mark sheets of students became meaningless as the entire education system was not only reduced to a farce "but was also a criminal gambling with the fate of the students" (50). These students were able to visualize a dark future looming in front of them. "Moreover in the absence of suitable employment opportunities after graduation, examinations and diplomas became meaningless rituals for the youth" (50). Supratik, and his comrades Samir and Dhiren, are representatives of the young revolutionaries of the 1960s and 1970s who gave up their education, and their families in the cities to fight for the cause of social justice.

Conclusion

Indian diasporic writers have played a key role in providing a wide range of ideas and opinions about India as a nation and its cultural heritage. Though writing from a distant land, these writers successfully depict the "Indianness" in their writings, taking cognizance of the social, political, and historical background of development of events. These narratives provide subtle commentary on the historical trajectory of India and Indians living in a foreign country. Jhumpa Lahiri and Neel Mukherjee are able to address many important issues of the Naxalite movement in their writings. Both writers, taking the Naxalite movement as the backdrop, narrate stories of two different families in the city of Calcutta, as it was called earlier.

This chapter deals with the issues of class hierarchy prevailing in the state of West Bengal in the postcolonial era. As the Naxalite movement originated to curb the class war between the poor and the landed gentry, the two protagonists Udayan Mitra and Supratik Ghosh, are seen fighting for the cause of the poor and the landless. In the fight against class hierarchy in the two narratives many truths such as class and caste divisions between the revolutionaries, condition of the female Naxalites, and tragic incidents which happened to be the reason for the atrocities on the revolutionaries are revealed. *The Lowland* is a kind of bildungsroman of not only Subhash and Udayan but also of Udayan's daughter Bela. Narrating the after-effects of the Naxalite movement on the Mitra family, Jhumpa Lahiri portrays the emotions, beliefs, needs, and struggles of the family that Subhash and Gauri are a part. In *The Lives of Others*, Supratik sacrifices his life while giving up his education and career to the cause of the revolution. He denounces his privileges while trying to be one with the people for whom he has waged a class war. However, the consequences of his own actions spring back on himself and his family. His rather simplistic understanding of social hierarchy and economic inequality, cannot resolve the complexity of systematic oppression. Perhaps Neel Mukherjee, through presenting the futility of his protagonist's endeavours, hopes to mirror the failure of the Naxal movement in addressing the horrors of societal suffering. By presenting Supratik's torture in prison, he shows unsparingly the terror inflicted by the state on the attempts made by revolutionary movements to bring about a just social and political order.

[1] Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Lowland*. 2013. (Random House India: Haryana, 2014). Henceforth, all the citations are from this version of the novel.

[2] Neel Mukherjee, *The Lives of Others.* 2014. (Random House India: Haryana, 2014). Henceforth, all the citations are from this version of the novel.

[3] *Liberation* is the central mouthpiece of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) CPI (M-L) published on monthly basis. The first publication of Liberation came out in the year 1967 when the Naxalbari Uprising was at its peak.

[4] FIR – An FIR or First Information Report is the first intimidation report recorded by an officer-in-charge of a police station for a crime of cognizable magnitude.

Chapter VI

Conclusion

This thesis has attempted a discussion on literary narratives on the first phase of the Naxalite movement, covering in the process a variety of writings: novels, short fiction, authorized biography to prison memoir and poetry. The Naxalbari uprising is a landmark in the resistance against a long-standing history of exploitation of landless laborers and the working poor. Writings on the Naxalite movement bring to light the pain and pathos of the oppressed rural poor, a generation of brilliant youth who struggled and died for the cause without thinking about the consequences and the anguish of the helpless parents as they become mute spectators of the fate of their sons and daughters, and the ruthless domination of state and police forces to control the situation. These writings also give us an insight into the clash between ideological commitments and personal emotions:

> What the novels of the seventies reveal in their symbiotic exchanges with the grassroots political movement is a dialogic process of mutual redefinition and reinscription of politics and literature, which is relevant for the study of radicalism. Reinscribing the revolution through the literary form and within common leitmotifs of disease and time meant releasing radicalism from the well-defined vocabulary of Maoism that sought to contain its singularity and multidimentionality within the Chinese precedent. It meant reconsidering the formation of radical consciousness in the everyday traditions of popular protest that antedate the call for the "annihilation of class enemies," and within the interior spaces of the bourgeois household. In this view, the revolution is continuous with the past and connected to the future. In parallel, the quest for an appropriate literary form for unlocking the meaning of the revolution through the multilayered identity of its foot soldiers yields a whole new aesthetic economy that marks the decisive arrival of modernist stylistics within the vernacular. (Krishnamurthy 140)

In recent times, many writers have come up with vivid formulations about the Naxalite movement in their writings. These writers offer many facts pertaining to the movement which have been ignored while considering the complexity and importance of such movements in the historiography of India. The movement has not only survived through several state measures to suppress it, but also has changed its dimensions reflecting the changes in the larger political and economic landscape of the nation. It was, therefore, necessary to look into the issues surfacing from the origin of the movement.

Peasant uprisings have been influential in shaping the destiny of large numbers of the nation's population. However, they have been denied the deserved visibility considering the critical role such rebellions have played. From the material available on the history of peasant rebellions, Marxist historiography considers peasants as active and conscious subjects of history. The power structure of domination and subordination is prevalent in the consciousness of the peasants. Peasant consciousness can therefore be seen from two contradictory aspects: in one aspect, the peasant accepts the domination and subordinate position, whereas, in the other, he revolts against the condition of his subordination and asserts his autonomy (Chatterjee 1993). However, compared to the historical experiences of medieval Europe and China, the open revolt of the peasantry in India is considered insignificant. This insufficiency has to do with historical records on peasant rebellions because the peasant revolt in India was largely local and brief. Moreover, peasant revolts in India did not have the same political impact as they did in Europe or China (Chatterjee 1988).

Literary narratives on the first phase of the Naxalite movement present a comprehensive view of the movement in West Bengal. These narratives have been fruitful in examining the various issues which remain unaddressed by the mainstream academicians. A comprehensive discussion on the literary narratives on the Naxalite movement reveals the multifaceted nature of the movement. These works are important records in the historiography of peasant rebellions as they address the issues of the rural poor, the educated youths of Calcutta, failure of the strategies, differences of opinion among the leadership, and the poor condition of the female revolutionaries. While the translated works of the regional writers addressed local issues surrounding the movement, contemporary Indian diasporic writers are able to take these local issues into the global scenario through their fiction on the Naxalite movement and its aftermaths:

> Linked directly with the insurgency, these novels redeploy the figure of the revolutionary agent to reveal alternate ways of conceptualizing the gap between intellectuals and masses, theory and practice, elite and base, the private and the collective, the complexities of which allow us to reconsider contemporary debates surrounding the issue. (Krishnamurthy 143)

The second chapter of the thesis provides commentary on the peasant revolts in India in general and the Naxalite movement in particular. Addressing questions of social movements and social change, the Naxalite movement remains the longest running peasant rebellion in India. Though the movement began as a peasant uprising at the initial stage, it soon transformed into a massive campaign for class struggle in India. The progenitors of the movement who were also associated with the communist ideology and organizational structure as it developed in India, tried to shape the movement according to the theoretical base of the Chinese and the Russian revolutionaries. But soon there were clashes and differences of opinion amongst the leaders of the movement, which led to the formation of many splinter groups, which each group following a theoretically different understanding of communist ideology. These groups eventually shaped the Communist movement and the Naxalite movement in India. Prior to the Naxalite movement, the two peasant uprisings: the Telangana Peasants' uprising and the Tebhaga movement, which were able to raise the consciousness of the peasants were also backed by Communist revolutionaries. However, unlike the Naxalite movement, these movements failed to survive as differences occurred amongst the masses based on hierarchical differences in caste and class. But at the same time, these movements were able to unite to some extent, peasants and workers from different castes and communities.

The third chapter discusses the selected writings of Mahasweta Devi and Manoranjan Byapari written against the backdrop of the Naxalite movement. While Mahasweta Devi's writings are powerful illustrations of the caste, class, and gender discrimination prevailing within the movement, Manoranjan Byapari narrates his experiences inside the jail in a fictitious form describing multidimensional forms of exploitations prevailing inside the jails in the name of controlling law and order.

Mahasweta's Devi's writings portray her concerns for the rights of the poor and the downtrodden. In an attempt to come out of the shackles of subjugation, she gives voice to

the subaltern in her narratives. Mahasweta Devi offer a deeply impactful representation of degree of exploitation witnessed in independent India. A discussion of her works forms a central issue in this chapter. Mahasweta Devi primarily focuses on the injustices meted out to the victims in the name of caste, class, and gender. Her works minutely record the subjugation of her characters at various levels. Through her writings on the Naxalite movement, Mahasweta Devi points out the large-scale caste and class differentiation existing both within the movement, and outside in social and political structures of power:

> With this conviction she went on writing with a sharp eye for detail, a sense of humour often grim but devastating, and an uncanny ability to identify the nerve centre of human suffering within the parameter of social existence. These qualities have imbued her writing with rare authenticity and power. (Bhattacharjee 53)

In both *Mother of 1084* and "Draupadi", gender oppression plays a key role in the narrative. In *Mother of 1084*, Sujata falls prey to patriarchal shackles in her home, and keeps on accepting all forms of subjugation and humiliation until she discovers the facts behind Brati's death. While Sujata breaks all the set norms of her home towards the end of the novel, Nandini stays with the permanent scars left on her by the state authorities for being a Naxalite sympathizer:

> One narrative thread moves inward to expose her deeply private angst and her inability to effect closure through mourning; another thread moves outward to politically vindicate the idealism of the new revolutionary man, dramatized as a rejection of his class values. Though a Maoist revolution may have failed to achieve its goal of class annihilation, it sparks off a new political consciousness in the mother. (Krishnamurthy 144)

This chapter also looks into various forms of resistance portrayed, especially by the female characters in the writings of Mahasweta Devi. Mahasweta Devi creates rebel characters who, though surrounded by various forms of oppression, could resist and break all the barriers towards the end of the narratives. The Naxalite movement directly or indirectly inspired the resistance of these characters. Mahasweta Devi's works portray caste and class as inseparable entities. In *Mother of 1084* this is illustrated in the after-effects of its characters

joining the Naxalite movement. As Brati belonged to a high class family, his father was able to do away with all the bad names associated with the Naxalite movement after Brati's death. But Somu's family had to suffer the repercussions even after his death.

In "Draupadi", the social and economic status of Dopdi Mejhen can be considered as an essential factor for her subjugation. It is due to her social and economic status that the landlord Surja Sahu covets her body. When she is caught by the police, the state forces also leave no chances unturned to demean her body for being a gendered subaltern. It was her body that people in power considered as the most vulnerable part of her. Though a particular section of women joined the movement in the hope of safety, their participation endangered them as their safety came to be questioned at every stage of the movement. Srila Roy writes, "the construct of a rapist state not only aided the creation of an illusion of safety, but also placed structural limitations on women's mobility" (321). Dopdi became the victim of the rapist state as she was captured alive after her husband Dulna Majhi was encountered.

The Naxalite movement began for the rights of the poor and the landless labourers. It came into force after violent clashes between the jotedars and the landless labourers demanding equal share for their hard work and labour. These landless laborers and the tribal forest dwellers formed the majority of the force in the initial days. But after a certain point of time these people were side-lined and the movement was led from the front by the intellectuals and the city bred high class people. In *Bashai Tudu* Devi shows how the tribal hero fights for the rights of the tribal people. Though initially he was a part of the movement, he had to leave it on the grounds of the discrepancies inside the party resulting from hierarchies of caste and class. Rather than fighting as a party member[1], Bashai chooses to fight his own battle against the upper caste landlords and the state. The negligence of the Communists towards caste issues was the major point of difference between the Naxalites of the rural areas and the Naxalites of the urban areas. The question of caste was subsumed under the larger domain of class:

> As a complete and comprehensive account of Marxism all of the Indian factions of Communists have left a lot to be desired. Nonetheless in the discourses that they have given shape to they have held on to one thing firmly which is their opposition to caste as the defining feature of contradictions in India. The CPI, CPI(M), CPI(ML), the Maoists and the various factions

> thereof have at once refused to and opposed this as a primary contradiction. They have all sought in deed and in fact to construct it as a matter of the superstructure which will necessarily disappear with the emergence of the classless society under socialism. In turn this has given rise to the strange and paradoxical kind of situation where caste has come to operate with the significance of a religious taboo at times, as something the influence of which has to be feared at once and repressed, the emergence of which into discursive form is thus earmarked also by violence and crime. (Cybil 701-702)

In *Bashai Tudu* "The way in which members of the Communist Party mouth revolutionary words but fail to rise above casteism is also noted by Kali Santra (Bagchi 48)."

In the novel *There's Gunpowder in the Air*, Manoranjan Byapari narrates the horrendous memories of torture and inhuman killings of the Naxalites inside the prisons of India during the 1960s and 1970s. These prisoners belonged to various sections of society. Narrating anecdotes from the prison, Byapari dwells on the important aspects of how people from various sections of the society joined the Naxalite movement in the hope of a better society. Along with the young revolutionaries, the Naxalite movement was also supported by a petty thief Bhagoban who came to jail only to feed himself on jail food and also worked as a spy of the jailer. Upon knowing the greater cause of the revolution, Bhagoban joined hands with the other revolutionaries and sacrificed his life. The inhuman atrocities and the illegal killings of the Naxalites were a common sight inside the jails of India in the first phase of Naxalism. These atrocities led a prison guard like Bhojon to leave his job, and go back to his village only to find that his son has met a similar fate to that of the revolutionaries inside the jail. Apart from the stories inside the prison, this novel raises larger questions about class distinctions prevailing in Indian society, which was primarily responsible for the birth of the Naxalite movement. Although the revolution was meant to readdress wrongs and uplift people at the lowest rung of the society, the participation of such people often went unnoticed as they were given auxiliary roles, whereas people from the upper caste took away all the recognition. Byapari's narrative casts light on this aspect of the movement, and helps bring out the contributions made by people like Bhagoban and Bhojon.

The fourth chapter deals with non-fictional prose writings on the Naxalite movement. This chapter clubs together a prison memoir, an authorized biography, and poetry written

against the backdrop of the Naxalite movement. These writings on the lives of the revolutionaries are testimonies to the several troubling aspects of these times left unwritten in the historiography of the Naxalite movement. Joya Mitra's prison memoir reveals the neglected facts about gender discrimination done within the party. Her memoir narrates not only the atrocities faced by the gendered subaltern inside the jails, but also questions the safety of the female Naxalites who were hopeful about the changes in their condition as the movement gained momentum in the state. These female Naxalites joined the movement to help and support their partners or husbands, as their counterparts were active members. Instead of their safety and equal rights, the female cadres were neglected at every stage of the movement. Joya Mitra's arrest and her abandonment by her husband predict the future of the female revolutionaries in the Naxalite movement. However, Mitra did not lose hope, and even after four years of torture and imprisonment, she continued her fight for the poor and the oppressed in a significantly different manner.

The first phase of Naxalism had to face a setback for several reasons. One of the leading reasons behind the setback was the differences of opinion among the leadership of the movement. Kanu Sanyal's biography is a running commentary on the social history of the communist ideology in India. His biography not only records his life history but also reveals various facts which led to the formation of many splinter groups of the Communist party. Caste differences were seen among the peasants, which was considered a hindrance in the step of revolution. Clashes also occurred between the tribals and the students, since the tribals claimed to be dominated by the students and the intelligentsia (Dasgupta 2006).

Differences between Kanu Sanyal and Charu Mazumdar was on the basis of ideology, as well as the line to be followed. Charu Mazumdar was in favour of individual annihilation. While in the individual annihilation Charu Mazumdar advocated for the immediate execution of the feudal authorities in the villages to establish the rule of the peasants, Kanu Sanyal totally opposed it and was in favour of mass organization of the peasants. The difference between the two went to the extent where Kanu Sanyal started criticizing Charu Mazumdar openly. In his biography, Sanyal recollects those moments when he came forward to point out the faults of Charu Mazumdar in opting for the individual annihilation strategy:

> ‘Speaking at the condolence meet, I appreciated the noble qualities that Charu Da had. But at the same time, I pointed out the mistakes he had committed as regards the call for individual annihilation and negating the role of mass organisations in building up a Communist revolution. I restricted my speech strictly to political criticisms and there was no personal attack aimed at Charu Da.’ (158-159)

Kanu Sanyal opposed this strategy, and considered the mass organization of the peasants and the working class absolutely necessary if the revolution was to find success. Charu Mazumdar’s annihilation line of strategy did not work in India, as India is a land of diversity, where the population is marked by diversity and difference. Though Charu Mazumdar left the life of a landlord, he could not let go of his superiority in terms of policymaking and making decisions. Charu Mazumdar ignored the fact that the Chinese line of strategy was not applicable in a vast country like India with people of different castes, sects, religion and cultures. Along with Kanu Sanyal, various other leaders also opposed Charu Mazumdar’s line of individual annihilation.

Apart from the differences within the leadership, severe police repression from the state in the form of reprisals by police and the paramilitary forces also led to the breakdown of the movement in West Bengal. Moreover, several leaders of the Naxalbari movement also left the movement midway to join the structure of parliamentary democracy. These factions were later formed coalition government in West Bengal along with Congress.

Chapter five examines the building up and consequences of the Naxalite movement in *The Lowland* and *The Lives of Others*. Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Lowland* goes a step further in describing the trajectory of the family saga of the encountered Naxalite Udayan Mitra after the movement is over. Gauri’s marriage with Udayan gets her involved in the Naxalite movement directly. Though Udayan’s punishment is an open encounter, Gauri has to bear the repercussions throughout her life. Gauri’s decision to get married to Udayan changes the course of her life. The loss of Udayan is a direct blow to all the other members of the family; it is not only Gauri’s life that undergoes a tremendous change. His identical brother Subhash also has to face the consequences of trying to change the course of Gauri’s life. The hope of the entire family shatters with Udayan’s death:

> Willfully anticipating, in ignorance and in hope—this was how most people lived. Her in-laws had expected Subhash and Udayan to grow old in the house they had built for them. They had wanted Subhash to return to Tollygunge and marry someone else. Udayan had given his life for the future, expecting society itself to change. Gauri had expected to stay married to him, not for less than two years but always. In Rhode Island, Subhash was expecting him and Gauri and Bela to carry on as a family. For Gauri to be a mother to Bela, and to remain a wife to him. (182)

Udayan's decision to join the Naxalite movement and marry Gauri while knowing that he was risking her life as well, may be seen to be contradictory on his part. Gauri marries him because she loves him, and wishes to be his partner for the rest of her life. But:

> He knew that he was no hero to her. He had lied to her and used her. And yet he had loved her. A bookish girl heedless of her beauty, unconscious of her effect. She'd been prepared to live her life alone, but from the moment he'd known her he'd needed her. And now he was about to abandon her. (413)

With the Naxalite movement as the backdrop, Jhumpa Lahiri in this novel intertwines the gap between the personal and the political, expanding the ambit of her portrayal. The portrait of the young Naxalites that she sketches, give a revolutionary fervour to the readers, as Lahiri goes back in time to depict the conditions because of which there were born revolutionary movements such as the Naxalite movement in the state of West Bengal. Apart from other valid reasons behind revolutionary movements, the Tolly club remains a symbolic remnant of the class difference which caught hold of Udayan's attention right during his childhood. Moreover, his college days at the Presidency College are also significant in shaping his ideological passion.

Following Udayan's death, the characters of Gauri and Subhash develop with the change in time and place. The result of the transformations in Gauri and Subhash affect Bela's life as initially she suffered aloofness though she had both parents with her. *The Lowland* portrays the impact of political violence on the Mitra family, and the immigrant experiences of Subhash, Gauri, and Bela.

In *The Lives of Others*, the setting represents the petty bickering and differences within a family, and describes the wide-scale economic disparity between the haves and the have-nots. Focusing on the Naxalite movement as the theme, Mukherjee narrates how Supratik and his other friends get involved in the movement with the hope of obliterating class differences in society. In the novel, the existing class difference was the reason for revolutionaries like Supratik to join the Naxalite movement. For Supratik, hierarchies and exploitation exist inside his house among the family members and the domestic help. Compared to other works on the Naxalite movement, this novel portrays the family as the primary source of exploitation. Supratik's upbringing in this large family mansion, make him realize the many forms of exploitation prevailing in society. Later, when he was able to visualize the class difference outside the Ghosh mansion, he could not help but join the Naxalite movement in the hope of bringing a radical change in society. Supratik's return from the rural hinterland questions not only the ability of the urban revolutionaries to coalesce with the peasants and the forest dwellers, but also reveals the caste and class difference existing between the revolutionaries of the two sides. The prologue of the novel presents the stark event of Nitai Das's extreme step. Neel Mukherjee narrates how there was no other way but the taking of life, and death for the wage earners and the landless labourers of the country. Narrating the extremes of abject poverty and the superfluity of privileged lives in the novel, Mukherjee deals with marginality and the causal extinction of the two characters residing at the extremes of two different states. While Nitai Das chooses to give up on the life of destitution bestowed on him, Supratik fights his battle for the uplift of people like Nitai Das:

> Nitai Das knows what to do. He lifts the jerrycan of Folidol left over from three seasons ago and drinks, his mouth to the lips of the plastic canister, until he can drink no more. His insides burn numb and he thrashes and writhes like a speared earthworm, thrashes and writhes, a pink foam emerging from his mouth, until he too is returned from the nothing in his life to nothing. (3)

The tragic end of Nitai Das and Supratik, at the beginning and towards the end of the novel respectively, illustrates the connection between identity and violence. The inevitable tragic experience faced by both illustrates the workings of power relations in our society. With regard to the relation between identity and violence, Amartya Sen writes:

> And yet identity can also kill—and kill with abandon. A strong—and exclusive—sense of belonging to one group can in many cases carry with it the perception of distance and divergence from other group. Within-group solidarity can help to feed between-group discord. (1-2)

The present study on the Naxalite movement of India aims to represent the social, political and cultural turmoil affecting oppressed lives in India. Therefore, the foregoing analysis of these works was based on the basic understanding of the background from which these works emanate. Though the Naxalbari uprising began in the instance of a clash between a farmer and a jotedar, its seeds had been sowed long back in the clashes between the members of CPI on the question of the political strategy to be employed on the Indian soil. In order to get a clear picture of the movement, it was necessary to understand the divisions inside CPI, which led to the formation of various smaller groups and units. As a movement it was able to arouse the support of the mass and the intelligentsia, but had to be curtailed after severe police repression and the fragmentation of leadership. The conflictual relationship amongst the peasants turned violent, and the movement spiraled out of hand killing many people, both among the Naxals, as well as the state forces. For an understanding of the relationship that went violent it was necessary to reveal the reasons for the failure of the movement. Further, Naxalites were also part of the patriarchal mindset prevailing on the Indian soil. The women involved in the movement both directly and indirectly were oppressed under the mantle of patriarchal hegemony.

The foregoing chapters have attempted to study all the above issues through an analysis of selected literary works on the Naxalite movement emanating from the region of West Bengal during the 1960s and 1970s. Though a significant body of literature, the literary works studied here form only a part of the larger body of works on the Naxal movement emerging from different parts of India in different languages and across several decades. This subject, therefore, offers great scope for further scholarly study.

[1] Bashai was an active member of the Communist Party at first, but after realising that his work as a member of the tribal community would never be recognised, he decided to leave the party and work solely for the betterment of his community.

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