

September 2021

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Recommended Citation

Sarkar, Pritha (2021). Patriarchy, 20th Century Bengal and the Naxalbari Movement (1965-1975): Tracing the Roots through Lives of Others. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 22(9), 160-173.

Available at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol22/iss9/11>

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Patriarchy, 20th Century Bengal and the Naxalbari Movement (1965-1975): Tracing the Roots through *Lives of Others*

By Pritha Sarkar¹

Abstract

The objective in this paper is to identify the roots of patriarchy in the Naxalbari movement (1965-1975) through one of the texts in Indian English Literature. The Naxalbari movement is the first peasant revolution within twenty years of Indian Independence that initiated in a small village named Naxalbari situated in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal. Through *Lives of Others* (2014) by Neil Mukherjee the paper analyses the patriarchy of the 20th century urban Bengal society and how it seeped into the movement. Therefore, it exposes the androcentric underpinning of a movement dedicated to creating an egalitarian society. While the scholarly studies on the movement have recognized the dominating gender inequality, its cause has not yet been traversed upon. This paper addresses the gap by exploring the source of this patriarchy. Thus, it tries to examine the seeds of the concealed patriarchal framework within the dissenting Naxalbari movement.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Women, 20th century Bengal, Movement

Introduction

In this paper, the objective is to explore the gender hierarchy in the urban middle-class families of the late 20th century Bengal and its intrusion within the Naxalbari movement (1965-1975) through *Lives of Others* (2014) by Neil Mukherjee. The Naxalbari movement aimed to create an egalitarian society where every individual would receive equal opportunities. However, the limited vision of the movement's egalitarianism is studied in this paper. It endeavors to engage with the problematic and contradictory location of women within the movement due to its patriarchal framework. For this purpose, the patriarchal characteristics dominating the movement have been documented. Though the earlier studies related to the movement have discerned the inequality on accounts of gender preference within the movement, the scholarly studies have not yet explored the cause of this patriarchy. This paper addresses the gap by unfolding the roots of this patriarchal approach. By tracing these roots, the paper analyzes the reason for the change in the attitude of the members towards women and the consequent change in the position of women from center to periphery within the movement. Thus, the research tries to examine the seeds of the concealed patriarchal framework within the dissenting Naxalbari movement through a representative text within the broader field of Indian English Literature.

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The Naxalbari Movement: A Brief Study

The Naxalbari movement is the first peasant revolution within twenty years of Indian Independence that began in a small village named Naxalbari situated in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal. According to historical records, the Tebhagha² movement of 1946 resulted in the passing of Land Ceiling Act in 1953 according to which “no farmer or landlord is entitled to hold land beyond 25 acres” (Joshi, 1979, p. 447). Despite the act, the situation of landless peasants and sharecroppers in the rural Bengal remained unchanged. Usually the agricultural bourgeois escaped the act either by bribing the government officers or by entitling excess lands to their wives and children. The Naxalbari movement was thus an outburst of the excessive tyranny enforced upon the landless agricultural laborers and sharecroppers by the rural bourgeois class consisting of zamindars or big land-lords and money-lender, “The farmers, sharecroppers and landless agricultural laborers of one of the villages of Naxalbari were largely against a tyrant landlord Buddhiman Tirke. When he killed a farmer named Bigal Kishan, the farmers of the area rose against him” (Das, 2014, p. 50).

The movement’s first organized action took place after the Tarai Krishak Sabha in 1967. Following the sudden murder, a Tarai Krishak Sabha was organized by Communist Party of India (Marxist) shortened as C.P.I. (M) on 18th March 1967 where four doctrines were adopted: 1) no allowance of police in village, 2) taking away arms from landlords, 3) taking away the excess lands from landowners to distribute it among the peasants, and 4) land for tillers (Mukherjee, 2014). The principles of the meeting were adopted by the villagers and peasants of North Bengal who raised the slogan ‘land to the tillers’ and prevented the police from entering the villages of Naxalbari, Khoribari, and Phansidewa. In response to the protest of the villagers the state deployed large number of police in the area.

Due to the firm protest of the farmers, the animosity between the local state authority and the villagers augmented. As a result, two violent incidents took place on 24th May, 1967 and 25th May 1967 simultaneously in the Naxalbari and Phansidewa villages. “On 24th May the peasants, armed with bows and arrows, resisted the police party that went to a village to arrest ... and a female policeman [by the name of Sonam Wangde] was killed” (Sen, 1982, p. 217). From the protesters, a pregnant woman from Naxalbari village was also killed in the incident (Banerjee, 2009). The death of the woman led to a major march of the villagers of Naxalbari against the state authority and was led by another woman named Dhaneswari Devi³. The next day [25th of May] the police party ... fired eighteen rounds killing the peasants that included seven women and three infants (Sen, 1982, pp. 217-218). As Abhijeet Das (2014) records, “the police fired at a gathering of women ... killing ten women and a child. One of the bullets went through the breast of Dhaleswari and killed the child who was wrapped in a sling on her back” (p. 51). This acted as a catalyst and the movement spread from the rural villages to cities embracing thousands of people from different sections of the society. Thus, the beginning of the movement witnessed the

² The term Tebhagha literally means ‘three shares. The Tebhagha movement was a peasant movement that erupted in certain North and North-Eastern districts of Bengal during the year 1946. It consisted chiefly of sharecroppers and landless labourers. Their demand was to retain two-thirds of the share of the whole produce.

³ This lady is named as Dhaleswari Devi in certain books like *Footprints of Foot Soldiers* of Abhijeet Das and *Spring Thunder* of Arun Mukherjee. But in most of the other books about the movement, including Sumanta Banerjee’s *In the Wake of Naxalbari* she is named as Dhaneswari Devi. In the mouthpiece journals of Naxalbari Movement, named *Liberation* and *Deshabrati* her name is written as Dhaneswari Devi. Further in my personal interview with her son, Pavan Singha of Naxalbari and with other surviving members of the movement I found the name of the lady as Dhaneswari Devi. Hence, in this research she is addressed as Dhaneswari Devi. But in quotations, the name is kept as the author had written.

dominant presence of women. Firstly, it was the death of a woman led to a march or gathering organized by the women of the village and led by a woman named Dhaneswari Devi. Secondly, the death of women and children in this violent encounter acted as a catalyst in spreading the revolution in several villages, cities, and university campuses of Bengal alike.

Patriarchal Traits in Bengal and the Naxalbari Movement

To understand the dominance of patriarchy in the movement, it becomes important to define the term and discern few of its features that were dominant in 20th century Bengal. The term patriarchy has been defined by several feminists all over the world and Indian feminists are not an exception. Patriarchy in the simple terms can be defined as unequal power distribution grounded on biological essentialism (Beauvoir 1972; Bhasin, 1993, 2000) whereby qualities putatively belonging to males are held superior to the qualities putatively belonging to females. Several Indian feminists like Nivedita Menon⁴, Kamla Bhasin⁵ have identified the different characteristics of feminism that holds relevance in Indian society. For instance, Menon has found patriarchy as “power distributed along gender and age hierarchies, but with adult men trumping older women” (Menon, 2012, p. 32). This argument of Menon echoes the definition of patriarchy by the feminist anthropologist, Gerda Lerner⁶ (1987). She has defined patriarchy as the “manifestation of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in the society in general” (Lerner, 1987, p. 239). Lerner also observed how paternalism developed as a norm in families and is one of the dominant characteristics of patriarchy. Lerner (1987) has given an explicit description of the term:

“Paternalism or more accurately paternalistic dominance describes the relationship of a dominant group, considered superior, to a subordinate group, considered inferior, in which the dominance is mitigated by mutual obligations and reciprocal rights. The dominated [person] exchange submission for protection [from the superior one]” (pp. 239-241).

When patriarchy becomes the normal order, unconsciously it becomes institutionalized. Kate Millet (1970), one of the pioneers of second wave feminism, has spoken at length about it in her *Sexual Politics* where she insists that “sex is a status category with political implications” (Millet 24). This institutionalization of patriarchy is evident in the Naxalbari movement that wanted to create an egalitarian society where every individual would receive equal opportunities. The organizational structure of the movement shows that it followed unequal power distribution with mostly men holding the key positions in every committee (Roy, 2007, 2010). This indicates the

⁴ Nivedita Menon is an Indian feminist scholar who has written and edited several books on the feminist discourse in Indian social structure. *Recovering Subversion* (2004), *Seeing Like a Feminist* (2012), *Gender and Politics* (1999) in India are some of her works. In this paper her application of the terms patriliney, virilocality in Indian society has been used.

⁵ Kamla Bhasin is another Indian feminist activist, poet and social scientist who spoke against capitalism as being one of the major tools in promoting patriarchy. Her notable works include *Understanding Gender* (2000), *What is Patriarchy* (1993). Her argument of how patriarchy gets institutionalized in Indian society has been extensively used in this paper.

⁶ Gerda Hedwig Lerner was an American historian who revisited the history through the feminist lens. Her book *The Creation of Patriarchy* (1996) where she has traced the roots of patriarchal dominance has been referred a few times in this paper.

institutionalization of patriarchy in the movement recalling the definition of patriarchy by the Indian feminist Kamla Bhasin. Bhasin (2000), taking the cue of Millet, has defined patriarchy in the Indian context as the unequal power distribution in the society with males remaining at the superior positions (pp. 88-91). This structure was followed in the Naxalbari organization too. It proves that even in this movement women were asserted the secondary pedestal. Due to this, women in the movement were restricted from exploring themselves thereby limiting their abilities. Hence, though the Naxalbari movement with its claim for creating an egalitarian society gave new dreams to the urban women of breaking the chains of subordination, the operational norms of the movement unfold how the movement actually failed to include gender equality within their egalitarian ideology. Thus, like the larger society of urban Bengal, the movement subconsciously adhered to the patriarchal norms. Through *Lives of Others*, this paper unfolds how the patriarchal features governing the 20th century middle-class Bengali society was inherited by the members from their families and seeped within the Naxalbari movement as well. For the purpose, few observations of Partha Chatterjee (1993, 2010) and Sumit Sarkar (1989) on the historical surveys of 20th century middle-class society of Bengal has been included in the paper for studying the movement through a feminist lens by chiefly using the theoretical views of feminists like Menon, Bhasin, Millet and Lerner.

Patriarchal Structure of 20th Century Middle-Class Bengali Families

Lives of Others by Neil Mukherjee recounts the manifestation of patriarchy in the movement through Supratik, the protagonist of the text and an active member of the Naxalbari movement. It is through Supratik that the text recounts the dominance of the Naxalbari movement among the urban educated youths of Bengal. Thus, the activities of Supratik and his comrades represent the movement and its mode of working. The novel sketches the socio-political scenario of the 70s Bengal. Parallel to this, the text also weaves the story of the Ghosh family. To seek the roots of patriarchy in Supratik and his comrades, it is necessary to engage with the family of Supratik. The Ghosh family is portrayed as an upper-middle-class family residing in the metropolitan city of Kolkata. The family is headed by a patriarch Prafullanath which later passes on to his son Adinath. It was expected that Supratik, their son and the eldest grandson of Charubala and Prafullanath would take on the reins of the family business. However, it is interesting to note that the core business belonged to the father of Charubala, wife of Prafullanath. After the death of his father Prafullanath suffered ill-treatment by his elder brother and left his ancestral home. He then started working with the family of Charubala who owned a small paper mill. Being the only daughter and trusting Prafullanath, Charubala's father gave her daughter in marriage to Prafullanath. After the death of her father, Prafullanath inherited the paper mill as per the final legal will of Charubala's father and expanded the business. Gradually the Ghosh family became the owner of three factories and two mills.

The inheritance of Charubala's filial property by Prafullanath, the son-in-law, instead of the Charubala, the daughter with the complete consent of Charubala and her family proves the patriliney dominant in the urban middle-class family. Patriliney has been defined as passing of property from father to son, that is, among the male members of the family. In the absence of son, the property passes on to the son-in-law instead. Females have no role in it (Menon, 2012, pp. 31-33). This feature of patriliney can be located within other social structures as well. Hence, even Kate Millet identified it in her *Sexual Politics* (1970): "Female heads of household tend to be usually regarded as undesirable; the phenomenon is a trait of poverty or misfortune" (Millet, 1970,

p. 36). The presence of patriliney was a norm in the 20th century Bengal. Though Bengal witnessed several reformative movements, they were within the patriarchal framework which never questioned these patriarchal structures. Sumit Sarkar (1989) has thus argued, “The activities of the social reformers were through objective socio-economic pressures, some post-Independence legislation, rather than clear-cut ideology or really autonomous struggle. Mental attitudes and values have consequently [had] changed very less” (p. 58). Though there had been a fight to abandon Sati, child-marriage and introduce widow remarriage, women’s education as an endeavor to improve the condition of women in the early nineteenth century, the patriarchal constraints within the family did not witness any change. Thus, even post-Independence patriliney was the norm in Bengal and the upper-middle-class Ghosh family of the city was no different. Charubala therefore happily accepted the transfer of mills and other properties of her father to her husband.

Charubala performs her role in the family by looking after the household affairs which were deemed fit for the woman in the 20th middle-class Bengali society. This recalls the sexual division of labor according to which women are accorded works within the household whereas the male becomes the breadwinner of the family (Menon, 2012; Lerner, 1987 et al). They therefore remained within the “*ghor*” (Chatterjee, 2010, p.163). In this context it becomes relevant to discern the dichotomy of “*ghor* and *bahir*” (Chatterjee, 2010, p.163) in the middle-class Bengali families. The *ghor* is the Bengali word for home which was the domain of the female and *bahir* represents the world outside and it was male domain. Even after years of Bengal Renaissance which included many reformations for women like banning of Sati, child-marriage, introduction of widow remarriage and education for women, they remained inside the *ghor* which was a different world from *bahir*. “The family, metaphorically represented by *ghor*, is projected in opposition to the world represented by *bahir*” (Banerjee, 2004, pp. 683-684). In this regard Sumit Sarkar (1989) has argued that despite the innumerable reformations the mental attitudes and values have consequently changed very much less (pp. 236-239). Thus, though women were not thrown into the fire, nonetheless they had to abide by the norms that were embedded with moral traditions. As Partha Chatterjee⁷, the historian who has looked into the multiple facets of the 19th and 20th century Bengal’s history, has profusely dealt with the dichotomy of material (outside) and spiritual (home) that govern the whole of nationalist struggle and was largely prevalent in Bengal and “one of the most important elements of the inner (spiritual) domain remains the family” (Chatterjee, 1993, pp. 8-9).

The home represented by women remained unaffected from the activities of the outside world and no external pressure could be allowed to change its structure (Chatterjee, 1993). Even the education for women was such that it would not change the dichotomy. So, the medium language was mostly restricted to Bengali and the prime motive of educating women was to make them better wives and mothers (Chatterjee, 2010). Further, the opportunity of education was numbered to the elite, educated middle-class women termed as *bhadromohila*, the female counterpart of the *bhadrolok*. “The members of this class comprising the heterogeneous, upwardly mobile, cultural committee of professionals, bureaucrats, and civil servants ... and they claimed to represent the native public opinion” (Banerjee, 2004, pp. 681-684). The women of this class had limited freedom within their domain. “They enthusiastically responded to the spread of education to pursue their interests, which included from reading the scriptures ... to the writings of manuals against the injustice and superstitions of traditional society” (Banerjee, 2004, pp. 687-689). The possession of education made these women different from the lower-class women who did not

⁷ Partha Chatterjee is an Indian political scientist and anthropologist who has very broadly studied the socio-political structure of 19th and 20th century Bengal. Two of his works have been referred in this paper.

have access to education. However, their education also did not mean that they could resemble the western women addressed as *memsahib*. The *bhadromohila[s]* were a class apart from the western women who did not have access to Indian spirituality or religiosity. Hence, women who followed the customs of English family or showed more inclination towards books and sewing were ridiculed by the society. “It was taken up in virtually every form of written, oral, and visual communication, from the ponderous essays of nineteenth-century moralists, to novels, farces, skits, and jingles, to the paintings of the *patua*” (Chatterjee, 2010, p. 153). So, the educated middle-class *bhadromohila* had to follow the Indian tradition and remain indoors occupying themselves with household chores and use their education for reading scriptures or religious texts. This proves that the education of the *bhadromohila* served no purpose other than religious readings and sometimes fighting socially recognized injustices like sati and child marriage. However, the second task was a rare phenomenon. As Chatterjee (1993) has studied in his essays that “any significant autonomous struggle by women themselves to change relations within or outside the family” (p.165) was hardly witnessed in the 19th or early 20th century Bengal. Hence, the prime domain of *bhadromohila* was the *ghor* and looking after the household chores. Charubala was not an exception and though she was literate, she did not even think of involving in the business. She remained inside the house, looked after the household chores, attending to the needs of the family, and using her literacy only in reading the scriptures and providing the primary education to her children.

Chaya was the daughter of Prafullanath and Charubala and belonged to the second generation of the Ghosh family. Being dark complexioned with one cockeye, it becomes difficult to find a husband for her. By the time Chaya had matured she could move beyond *ghor* to *bahir*. With years the social dichotomy between *ghor* and *bahir* had undergone a change and the movement to *bahir* for women was permitted only if it was an extension of the domestic world. Their locomotion outside the domain of home was justified provided it did not hamper their femininity demonstrated through their religiosity, dressing pattern, eating pattern and their chief attention to household chores (Chatterjee 2010). Therefore, the jobs asserted for women were an extension of their domestic task and included professions like teaching and nursing since according to the patriarchal conviction women are designated as the natural caregivers and nurturers. “Nursing and teaching (particularly at lower levels) are predominantly considered women’s profession ... the feminization of teaching and nursing is because such work is seen as an extension of the nurturing work that women do at home” (Menon, 2012, pp. 11-12). Thus, the change in the framework of domesticity:

“made possible the displacement of the boundaries of ‘the home’ from the physical confines earlier defined by the rules of purdah (i.e. seclusion) to a more flexible, but culturally nonetheless determinate domain set by the differences between socially approved male and female conduct” (Chatterjee, 2010, p. 165).

So, the domain of *bahir* or outside for women was simply an extension of the domesticity followed in *ghor* or inside. Hence, Chaya was educated and moved outside to work in a school which was an accepted profession of females as this was an extension of nurturing deemed fit for women. Further through this profession, she could also maintain her “prime responsibility” (Menon, 2012, p. 13) of catering to the household chores following the sexual division of labor. Indeed, it is the sexual division of labor that formed the ground of *ghor* and *bahir* dichotomy. According to this, the household chores are the tasks of women while the men are the breadwinners of the family. As

Menon (2012) has said “Whether it is their choice of career or their choice to participate in politics, women are to limit themselves to their primary responsibility of family” (pp. 13-14). Their job, if they engage in any, is always an addition to their prime responsibility of house-hold chores and counted as secondary which could and must be discontinued at any moment of household crisis or if the primary task got neglected. The Ghosh family which completely adhered to the patriarchal norms guiding the middle-class society of Bengal also followed the same convention. The case of Chaya who was a member of the Ghosh family was not an exception and she took up the teaching profession which did not challenge the patriarchal construction of the family or the society.

However, the only concern for Chaya’s parents was her marriage and sending her off to her in-laws. The institution of marriage began in the 2nd B.C. as a mode to establish fraternity between two tribes. Women were chosen for their virilocality among most of the agricultural tribes as they were more attached with their children and therefore would not betray the tribe (Lerner 1987, pp. 141-147). The term virilocality is defined as the wife moving to her husband’s home leaving her natal home behind and accepting his relatives as her own (Menon, 2012, pp. 17-18). However even after years of civilization the institution witnessed no change as far as virilocality and marriage was concerned. Instead the norms became more rigid. Thus, marriage became a necessity for every woman with the house of the in-laws being considered as their own home. The text reveals that Chaya’s education was just a matter of chance. Her parents had been searching for her bridegroom since her graduation. As they couldn’t find a suitable match, they let her study master’s degree and undertake a job in school. But the education and job of the daughter was never the concern of her parents. It was only a mode to buy some years to search for a suitable match and avoid the questions of neighborhood. Thus, Prafullanath and Charubala’s concern regarding their daughter, Chaya’s marriage never ceased. At such a juncture when Charubala expressed her fear of not being able to marry off their daughter, her face is clamped by her husband Prafullanath, “Chee don’t say inauspicious things like that” (Mukherjee, 2014, p. 291). The sentences are articulated to prove the degree of parents’ concern regarding the marriage of their daughter. Utterance of the fear of not being able to marry off their daughter is also inauspicious and thus is prevented. For the Ghosh family, the whole identity of a woman lay in marriage. For them, not being able to marry off the daughter would amount to the sin of not fulfilling the filial responsibilities. This reflects the mentality of the middle-class society of Bengal and how marriage of the daughters was the chief responsibility for the parents.

There had been no change in the patriarchal ideology within the Ghosh family with generation. Following the patriliney, it was his elder son Adinath who had inherited the legacy of the head of the family after Prafullanath, while his wife, Sandhya had assumed the role of Charubala and looked after the household chores. For the next generation of the Ghosh family, problem is again witnessed in marriage of Baishaki, the eldest granddaughter of Charubala and Prafullanath. However, this time the problem takes a new dimension due to her pre-marital relationship. Baisakhi is the daughter of Priyo, the second son of Prafullanath and his wife, Purnima. When Baishaki got amorously involved with a neighborhood young man, the family members could not accept it. She was accused by her family of, “Blacken [ning] our face by involving herself with a loafer” (Mukherjee, 2014, p. 209). According to the convention of the middle-class Bengali families, consensual intimacy pre-marriage is a crime as it is only marriage that sanctifies the act of sexual intimacy. Like most of the middle-class families of urban Bengal, the honor of the Ghosh family rested on the conduct of the female family members including the daughters and daughters-in-law. Thus, they maintained their honor by preventing any of the women from engaging in any pre-marital sexual relationship. The fact that Baisakhi had been

engaged in such an activity had brought disgrace to the entire family. Being a woman, Baisakhi is not allowed to exercise her individual agency in decisions regarding her life. So, she can neither engage in any pre-marital relationship nor exercise her choice in marriage. Being involved physically with a man made Baishaki impure and had put a taint on the Ghosh family. Since in Bengali families a woman's identity is linked to the father and honor of the household before her marriage, any woman exercising her individual choice in choosing her partner is deemed as disregarding the authority of the father (Sarkar, 1987; Sarkar 2001; Chatterjee 1993, 2000 et al). Further, it also destroys her sanctity and is thus reflected as a permanent stain on the woman as well as her family. According to the patriarchal conventions, the sanctity of a woman could be maintained only if she remains physically untouched till her marriage. However, marrying off Baishaki with the same man would remove the taint by reaffirming her sanctity as her identity would get attached to the same man who had touched her (Menon, 2012). It would also save the honor of the family as the authority of the father who is the patriarch as well as the guardian of the family could be maintained. Thus, Baisakhi's marriage with the man is simply a step to ensure her honor as well as the honor of the family.

However, the same Ghosh family assumes a completely different stance while dealing with the sexual engagement of Somnath, the youngest son of Charubala and Prafullanath. The Ghosh family learns about Somnath's sexual engagement with the maid of the house but neither did they accuse their son of "blacken[ing]" (Mukherjee, 2014, p. 209) their face, nor did they consider his marriage with her. As the maid had become pregnant with the son of the Ghosh family, they give her money to get herself aborted to hush up the whole matter. However, since the maid had been sexually involved with a man out of the wedlock of marriage to the extent of getting pregnant, they categorize her as a loose-character (Mukherjee 2014) woman. They held her responsible for alluring their son and thus, she is immediately removed from the job. The fact that their son had also been involved in the act is completely ignored by them. As far as they were concerned with Somnath's engagement in the act, they only blame it to his age and sexual drive. Thus, the Ghosh family arranged for his immediate marriage in order to harness his sexual drive as well as to conceal the whole sexual episode, "He is an adult man, we need to marry him ... everything will be alright then" (Mukherjee, 2014, p. 323). He is thus immediately married off to Purba, sister of a clerical staff of the Ghosh's factories.

The relationship between Somnath and Purba operated on paternalism of Somnath which, as mentioned earlier, was mostly the base for the marital institutions in the middle-class families of Bengal. Paternalism in a relationship is determined by the mutual dominance and subjugation which is adhered by the role of husband and wife. Through the institution of marriage, the husband takes on the responsibility of the women – his wife and becomes her guardian. As the relationship is grounded on dominance and subordination, her entire identity is linked to the husband. Thus, it is not surprising for the husband to exercise his sexual rights on her with or without her consent.

"Once the rapist is the woman's husband, the act of sex is retrospectively legitimized because the consent of women to sex becomes irrelevant then ... the Domestic Violence Act of 2005 recognizes marital rape, but the rape laws of the country do not" (Menon 2012, p. 114).

For Somnath, who unquestioningly adhered to every patriarchal norm of the middle-class Bengali society, seeking consent of his wife seems to be a distant thought. Since he believed that by being her guardian he had complete authority over her, the necessity to seek her consent did not even

cross his mind. Hence, on the first night of their marriage Somnath forced himself upon the young girl and involved in marital rape: instead of interacting with the new bride, he merely satisfied his sexual urge and left the room even without introducing himself. Purba too did not protest as she obliged with the paternalistic dominance where her responsibility as well as her whole identity was dependent on her husband in exchange of complete submission and sexual subjugation which was only a part of it.

After the death of Somnath, the position of Purba in the family became fragile. Being a young widow, she is “shifted to the ground floor” (Mukherjee, 2014, p. 318) to avoid any kind of contact with male members of the family. The idea of sexual desire in young widows was threatening for the entire family. Young widows were susceptible to sexual desire and could seduce the male members of the family. Thus, it was necessary to keep them under strict supervision (Sarkar 2001, 2007). Charubala, being the protector of the patriarchal conventions in the family, believed in similar notions and thus shifted Purba and her children downstairs. Purba was also compelled to give up all kinds of non-vegetarian foods and colorful saris. Through the treatment meted out to Purba, it becomes clear that for the Ghosh family, the whole identity of the daughter-in-law is tied to her husband and his death resulted in making her life superfluous within the family.

However, marriage of Somnath treated as a tool to harness his sexual drive did not rectify him. His attitude towards women remained the same. During a visit to a village of Purulia, Somnath and his friends judged the tribal women according to their value system. Kate Millet had analyzed how class plays a major role in treatment towards women:

“in the lower social strata ... the male is more obliged to share power with the women who are economically productive, whereas in the middle and upper classes ... the men who enjoy such status usually have more power in any case” (Millet, 1990, p. 36).

Thus, when Somnath and his friends witnessed the women’s independence in work, drinking with men and their dressing pattern, it made them believe that they were sexually available. One of Somnath’s friend said, “Have you seen the way they drape only the sari keeping most of the body exposed ... They drink together ... you know, they don’t believe in virgin and are ready for multiple sexual relations” (Mukherjee, 2014, pp. 264-265). Somnath and his friends considered them sexually accessible since they did not follow the norms of *bhadromohila* set by the urban middle-class. Thus, Somnath was sexually drawn towards one of them. While the Santhals were drinking together, he approached her with the suggestion of drinking with her. Initially when he had tried talking with the girl, one of the men answered instead of her, “The staring man now said to Somnath, ‘You bring the liquor here, she won’t go with you.’ Somnath said... come to the girl. The man answered, ‘No, she won’t’” (Mukherjee, 2014, p. 410). However, disregarding the men, the girl went with Somnath for alcohol. This act of the girl proves the independence of the tribal women in taking their individual decisions and acting according to their personal choice. But taking advantage of her alcoholic state, Somnath tried to impose his sexual desires upon her. When the girl rejected his advances Somnath tried to use force. The men were following them, and as soon as he was seen to sexually force himself upon the girl, he was beaten by male members of the tribe. One of the men openly addressed Somnath, “You, city-dwellers think you can come from the city, and do anything with our women” (Mukherjee, 2014, p. 413). This incident and especially the words of the man exposes how the idea of feminine purity is associated with the entire tribe in the tribal culture. As the text exposes, the tribal population too had their own measuring cup of

justifying the sanctity of women. The women were free to follow the same profession as men, drink together and have autonomy over their sexual desire but their limit was within the tribe. Thus, one of the men had answered on behalf of her to Somnath. Further, the words “our women” (Mukherjee, 2014, p. 413) by one of the tribal men proves that the encroachment upon the modesty of a woman from their tribe would be an insult on the whole tribe. Thus, on seeing Somnath force himself upon the girl, they protected her in a unified manner.

Coming from such a family, Supratik, the elder son of Adinath and Sandhya and the third generation of the Ghosh family too grew up with similar conventions. Despite having progressive ideas about creating an egalitarian society, he failed to be progressive in his outlook towards women. Thus, though he held the privileged position of being the eldest son of the third generation, he never questioned the patriarchal framework of his family. Despite of disapproving the behavior of his grandmother towards Purba, he did not indulge in any active protest. He silently gave her children dresses during Durga Puja and tried to help her financially but did not take any initiative to reassert her position in the family. He wanted to put an end to inequality in the social structure and create a classless social structure, but he did not try to meddle with the patriarchal structure which led to inequality within his own family. Hence, even after being the elder son of the Ghosh family, he chose to remain silent to the offences committed by his family members and remained a mere spectator. The fact that he had subconsciously ingrained the patriarchal ideologies becomes manifested in his treatment of women in the movement that is examined in the next section.

Patriarchy in the Movement and Marginalization of Women

During the initial phase of the movement, the rural and tribal women fought together with the males without any gender role division. But, with the urbanization of the movement, it fabricated into a fight against the bourgeois class and the elite state authority led by the urban middle-class intelligentsia. Hence, a new political party was formed named Communist Party of India (Marxist Leninist), shortened as C.P.I. (M.L.). But the dominance of the middle-class also ensured the inclusion of their ideologies within the movement. Though the youths were aware of the class inequality prevalent in the society, they failed to recognize the gender inequality due to the patriarchal social structure. Thus, though the movement worked towards creating a classless society, it could not encompass gender equality within its dimensions.

Hence with the spread of the movement to the cities, women gradually shifted to the periphery. It was primarily because the patriarchal ideologies of 20th century urban Bengal sugarcoated with tradition that had seeped into the movement, asserted women a secondary role in it. Through Supratik the paper unfolds how the members inherited the patriarchal ideologies of the families and profusely employed them in the movement. As mentioned earlier, the gender discrimination is disclosed by the fact that it was mostly men who held key positions in any of the decision-making core committee of the newly formed political party. This historical narration mentioned finds representation through Supratik’s attempt of excluding females. Following the gender role division of urban middle class followed in his family, Supratik too did not find it necessary to include women in the core committee discussing the strategies of the movement. It is realized by the attempt of Supratik and his comrades to include only the men in their tasks (Mukherjee, 2014). This recalls the words of Mallarika Singha Roy (2007, 2010) regarding the participation of women in the movement, “Women’s participation in the movement has perfunctory mention in the academic history and has been largely deemed as supportive rather than front-ranking revolutionary activism by the Naxalite leadership” (pp. 209-210). Supratik also

failed to recognize the individuality of women. Like the middle-class patriarchal conventions, he and his comrades identified them only as the wives of their male counterparts. Thus, they invested their whole labor to win the men in favor of their movement. Following the norms of the middle-class patriarchal families they were certain that the wives would automatically follow the path of their husbands. This presumed from the patriarchal belief that “males were the guardians of every household and protector of all the women in it” (Lerner, 1987, p. 374). Inclusion of the family’s patriarch in the movement would therefore result in the inclusion of all the females from the household in it. This incident proves how Supratik and his comrades inherited the patriarchal ideology of the urban middle-class families and administered it within the movement.

Another aspect of patriarchal domination represented in the text is keeping the women away from every violent activity as they were deemed fit only with care-giving tasks. Krishna Bandopadhyay (2001) has criticized the care-giving and nurturing tasks accorded to women in the political movement on account of the inherent patriarchal ideology of women being the natural caregivers:

“We women activists underwent a nursing training course in Medical College ... Now I wonder the principle idea behind this training was that our male comrades will get wounded and we women will nurse them back to battle condition! These ideas were harbored by the most progressive political party” (pp. 87).

Hence, even the movement which was built to create an egalitarian society regarded women as soft creatures and thus, prevented from participating in the violent activities of the movement like annihilation of class enemies. They were considered too fragile to be involved in these activities or even in the planning committee of these actions. Hence, their tasks remained limited to informers and courier works. Supriya, a female naxal activist speaks how women were reserved for the role of informers and healers:

“In general, female cadres were employed to do tech kaaj (technical work), mostly courier work, including the transportation of papers, arms, and information ... only a few were employed to organizational works like recruiting people for the party, campaigning and forming squads ... fewer women were in local committees and none were in senior positions of leadership” (Roy, 2001, p. 241).

This limitation of women’s participation foregrounds the peripheral position asserted to women within the movement. The text portrays this through the concern of Supratik about keeping the women aloof not only from the violent activities but also from the plan. They repeatedly advised the villagers to hide the Naxalite activities from their wives, “We worked systematically, enjoining them to secrecy at every turn, pointing out the consequences if they opened their mouths even to their wives” (Mukherjee, 2014, p. 305). The activities were hidden from the women as a measure to protect them as well as to maintain the secrecy of the actions. This incident represents how the patriarchal ideology of the urban middle-class 20th century Bengal shaped the framework of the movement. In the urban middle-class societies too, women were mostly excluded from the works of *bahir* neither were they consulted for any critical decisions as they were held as irrational, non-decisive, fragile, and weak creatures in need of protection. Similar trend is followed by Supratik and his comrades in the movement by keeping the women aloof from any dangerous task or meeting and limiting them to the roles of caregivers and healers. Thus, only the men were included

in the activities while the females were kept aloof from it and the men were “sworn to secrecy” (Mukherjee, 2014, p. 305).

Analysis of the incidents, therefore, reveal the partial egalitarianism of the Naxalbari movement. Though the movement’s members claimed to ponder critically over every kind of social inequalities, the study shows their limitation to recognize the gender inequality prevalent in society. Far from challenging the patriarchal structure, the movement imbibed it. Hence, though the movement was engaged in creating a democratic society based on equality, the paper proves that it was limited to a singular aspect of equality.

Conclusion

A gynocritical⁸ study of the text, therefore, brings out a different version of the movement. It depicts how the patriarchal norms of middle-class post-independence Bengali society were inherited subconsciously by the movement following its urbanization. Through a study of *Lives of Others*, the patriarchal elements present in the middle-class society of the 20th century urban Bengal and its intrusion in the movement have been explored. So, this paper analyses the roots of the patriarchal features dominating the movement leading to marginalization of women. The mobility of women from the center to the peripheral position with the progress of the movement is examined in this paper. Thus, this study approaches the very genesis of patriarchy in the movement through a representative text within the broader field of Indian English Literary Studies.

⁸ Gynocriticism or gynocritical is a term coined by Elaine Showalter to describe a female framework of analysing women’s literature. It was later extended to study the texts written by men to uncover the female experiences and the female approach of the text. It endeavours to locate the territory of females left unexplored through other forms of criticism (Showalter, 1999, 2004).

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