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**VIOLENCE, THE NAXALBARI MOVEMENT (1965-1975) AND ITS REPRESENTATION IN INDIAN LITERATURE IN ENGLISH: A RE-READING OF HISTORY THROUGH *THE LIVES OF OTHERS* (2014)**

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**ABSTRACT**

In this article, the objective is to read *The Lives of Others* (2014) by Neel Mukherjee as a representative text of the Naxalbari movement (1965-1975) of Bengal. The Naxalbari movement was the first peasant insurgency within twenty years of Indian independence that developed into a movement of dissent (1965-75), opposing the existing class hierarchy. The article analyses how violence became one of the chief tools in the movement dedicated to creating an egalitarian society and the state's response to it in order to maintain the political status quo. For this purpose, the article gives a brief overview of the political movements in India, followed by the Naxalbari movement through the lens of violence. Through *The Lives of Others*, it shows the aporia by showing the futility of violence. Thus, the argument of the article is centred on an interaction between the historical narrative regarding violence in the Naxalbari movement and its depiction in one of the texts of Indian Literature in English.

**KEYWORDS:** Naxalbari movement, violence, subjective violence, Indian, Indian English literature, annihilation doctrine.

**RESUMEN** *Violencia, el movimiento Naxalbari (1965-1975) y su representación en la literatura india en inglés: una relectura de la historia a través de The Lives of Others (2014) [Las vidas de otros]*

El objetivo de este artículo es leer *The Lives of Others* (2014) [Las vidas de otros], de Neel Mukherjee, como un texto representativo del movimiento Naxalbari (1965-1975) de Bengala. El movimiento Naxalbari fue la primera insurgencia campesina en veinte años de independencia india, y se convirtió en un movimiento de disidencia (1965-75) contra la jerarquía de clases existente. Se analiza, pues, cómo la violencia evolucionó hasta convertirse en una de las principales herramientas de un movimiento dedicado a crear una sociedad igualitaria, y la respuesta del Estado para mantener el statu quo político. Con este propósito, se ofrece una breve descripción de los movimientos políticos de la India, seguidos por el movimiento Naxalbari, bajo la óptica de la violencia. A través de *The Lives of Others*, se demuestra la aporía de la sinrazón de la violencia. De esta forma, el artículo gira en torno a la interacción entre la narrativa histórica sobre la violencia en el movimiento Naxalbari y su reflejo en uno de los textos de la literatura india en lengua inglesa.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** movimiento Naxalbari; violencia; violencia subjetiva; literatura indo-inglesa; doctrina de la aniquilación

## Introduction

In this article, the objective is to read *The Lives of Others* (2014) by Neel Mukherjee as a representative text of the Naxalbari movement (1965-1975) of Bengal in the light of violence. The article analyses how violence became one of the chief tools during the Naxalbari movement, the first peasant insurgency within twenty years of Indian independence that developed into a movement of dissent in opposition to the existing class hierarchy. The tool of violence was utilized by the contradictory powers: the movement dedicated to create an egalitarian society as well as the state in order to maintain the political status quo. This article first gives a brief overview of the history of violence in the political movements of India, followed by the Naxalbari movement through the lens of violence. Besides the narratives of violence employed in the movement, the article also explores the measures adopted by the state machinery. Thereafter, this study deciphers how a particular representative text within Indian Literature in English, *The Lives of Others*, engages with such contradictory historical narratives. Thus, the novel depicts how the conflict between the state machinery and the dissenting movement resulted in the victimisation of individuals who were not involved in either group. By studying historical narratives through *The Lives of Others*, the article seeks to unveil the aporia that was created from the use of violence by the two contradictory forces.

## Violence at the Centre in the Political Movements

Political violence, primarily through peasant insurgencies, has been in practice in India since colonial days. There is evidence of numerous peasant uprisings in colonial India: “No less than 110 violent peasant uprisings have been recorded between 1783 and 1900” (Guha, 1997: 6). Though the Indian National Congress, spearheaded by a section of the nationalist leaders, tried to exclude subjective violence in their movements, other organisations adopted subjective violence as a form of protest against the government. This can be verified by witnessing the extremist groups such as the Calcutta Anushilan Samiti, Jugantar which emerged throughout the country such as . Thus, violence was adopted as an important tool by many nationalist leaders outside the domain of the Indian National Congress in order to to achieve their goal. Other than the famous extremist triumvirate of the Indian national movement, namely Lal Bahadur Shastri (1904-1966), Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1871-1920) and Bipin Chandra Pal (1858-1932), with their goal of ‘swaraj’ or complete independence, there were several other freedom fighters who preferred violence. Some renowned nationalists following the path of violence were Aurobindo Ghosh, Bhagat Singh, Jatindranath Mukherjee, and

Khudiram Bose, to name but a few. Bengal witnessed the development of a large number of extremist groups, like the Jugantar Party, the Dacca Anushilan Samity, and the All India Forward Bloc. So, from colonial days on, India, especially Bengal, witnessed several extremist groups too who opted to use violence as a response to the oppression of the British government.

Other than the leaders themselves, peasant insurgencies also displayed the use of violence on a mass scale. The Tebhagha movement of Bengal is a case in point. Though it is often conceptualised as the first agrarian post-independence movement, historical studies on the Tebhagha movement have confirmed that the movement began in the last phase of the colonial era in 1943. Even after independence it continued, leading to the Bargadari Act in 1950, which recorded the names of all the *bargadars*.<sup>1</sup> It was followed by the Land Ceiling Act in 1953, according to which “no farmer or landlord is entitled to hold land beyond 25 acres” (Joshi 1975: 447). The Tebhaga movement proves that Bengal had always witnessed violence<sup>2</sup> in any endeavour dominated by the peasantry.

In this context of political violence, it becomes interesting to read the use of violence in the light of Slavoj Žižek’s subjective violence. Žižek has delved into the roots of violence to differentiate between subjective and objective violence. As Žižek states:

Subjective violence is seen as a perturbation of the normal, peaceful state of things. However, objective violence is precisely the violence inherent to this normal state of things. Objective violence is invisible since it sustains the very zero-level standard against which we perceive something as subjectively violent” (Žižek, 2008: 5).

So, objective violence, mostly in the form of systematic violence, usually is not in the form of “direct physical violence” (Žižek, 2009: 10) but can be perceived in the “more subtle forms of coercion that sustain relations of domination and exploitation” (Žižek, 2009: 10). Thus, the use of subjective violence in any movement is a response which endeavours to end the regular objective and systematic violence experienced by the people. If considered through this lens, the movements in the Indian nation-state that used subjective and objective violence are primarily a response to the systematic violence that resulted in the oppression of one group of people by another. Hence, a deeper study into the movements reveals that subjective violence had always been a core element for the peasantry. This subjective violence had also been beneficial for the peasantry since they were mostly concerned about immediately solving the problems that concerned their locality.<sup>3</sup> However, with the middle class coming to a leadership position, the insurgencies were united in the form of pan-India

<sup>1</sup> Bargadar means a person who, under the bargadari system, cultivates the land of another person, i.e., the landlord.

<sup>2</sup> D.N.Dhanagare has worked on it in his paper “Peasant Protest and Politics --- The Tebhaga Movement in Bengal (India), 1946-47”.

<sup>3</sup> Sumit Sarkar (1983) has explored and argued how locality had been a major characteristic of peasant insurgencies which were then united into a singular movement.

movements, where it was impossible to manage subjective violence on such a large scale (Chatterjee, 1993). So, the middle-class leadership rejected using any form of subjective violence, as it would not help them attain their goal.

### **Tracing Violence through the Annihilation Doctrine in the Naxalbari Movement**

It was only in the Naxalbari movement that India witnessed the use of subjective violence being promoted by the leaders with the aim of disrupting the objective violence of class hierarchy that was systematically present within the society. As mentioned earlier, the Naxalbari movement was the first peasant insurgency post-Indian independence that developed into a movement. It officially began with the four resolutions passed in the Tarai Krishak Sabha on the 18th March, 1967: 1) The prohibition of police in the village 2) The confiscation of arms from landlords 3) The confiscation of excess land from landlords and 4) Land for tillers (Bhattacharjee, 2018; Banerjee, 2009; Singh, 2006; Ghosh, 2009). At the initiative of Charu Majumdar, Kanu Sanyal, Khokon Majumdar and other leaders, who were then members of the Communist Party of India, shortened as C.P.I.(M): “camps were organised to take political classes among tea workers and peasant activists” (Bhattacharjee, 2018: 9). The most crucial aim of these camps was to bring a transformation from “class in itself” to “class for itself” among the peasants. Such camps and meetings enabled the peasants to form committees to voice their problems, and there were several local peasant movements in Bengal:

From 1951, there was continuous movement; the Kishan Sabha built up its organisation during 1951-54; in 1955-56, the bonus struggle in tea garden labourers went hand in hand. Responding to the call of the West Bengal Kishan Sabha, the Naxalbari Unit carried on the movement for the occupation of Benami land during 1958-62; clashes occurred between jotedars and peasants, and about two thousand peasants were arrested in 1958-59 (Sen, 1982: 215).

Hence, there has been a history of armed clashes between the farmers and the landowners or jotedars. Indeed, the attempt by the peasants in North Bengal to collectively attain their demands by violent means had preceded the Naxalbari violence. As Kanu Sanyal, one of the pioneers of the movement, writes, “In Chatar-Hat area efforts were made to set fire to *jotedars*’ houses, some paddy was harvested at night, and plans for snatching guns were made” (Sanyal, 1978: 331-333).<sup>4</sup> So, even before the official declaration of the political organisation, violent tussles could be recognised

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<sup>4</sup> A jotedar is a small landlord who was also the local money-lender. He is called jotedar in Bengali and the term is largely used in many scholarly works on resistance literature on Bengal.

between the peasantry and the state machinery supporting the landlords. The Naxalbari incident and the popularity it gained only enabled them to be organised efficiently.

The resolutions passed in the Tarai Krishak Sabha were meticulously followed in Phansideoa, Naxalbari and Khoribari of North Bengal. However, no resolution regarding the annihilation doctrine was passed at this meeting, “The line adopted in Naxalbari was not to annihilate the landlord physically but to wage a struggle to get rid of the feudal system” (Bhattacharjee, 2018: 24). But when one of the landlords refused to give away the excess land and killed a farmer, the landlord was killed: “The farmers, sharecroppers and landless agricultural labourers 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, 2015: 50). A sudden increase followed this incident in the armed demonstrations against the landlords and land redistribution among the tillers. The actions of North Bengal attracted the attention of the state machinery that attempted to put an end to the insurgency: “In May, Hareprasad Konar, the Land Revenue Minister met Sanyal, and the Superintendent of Police proposed that armed demonstrations should cease” (Mukherjee, 1978: 46-48). Following this, police forces tried to enter through the Bijay Nagar Garden area on the 19th May, 1967 and again on the 22nd and 23rd May. However, both times, they were compelled to retreat in the face of armed resistance by the peasants (Bhattacharjee, 2018: 24). After that, two violent incidents took place in Naxalbari:

On the 24th of May, the peasants ... resisted the police party that went to a village ... and a policeman called Sonam Wangde was killed; the next day [25<sup>th</sup> May] the police party ... fired eighteen rounds killing ... seven women and three infants<sup>5</sup> (Sen & Panda, 1978: 217).

This incident led to a sudden rise in the number of active members favouring subjective violence (Sen, 1982; Sanyal, 1978). As Sunil Sen records, “Nagen Roy Chowdhury, another *jotedar* was killed on 10<sup>th</sup> of June” (Sen, 1982: 216-217). These incidents added to the spread of the movement.

But as the insurgency took on a more violent turn, the central committee of the C.P.I.(M) refused to take responsibility. The North Bengal leaders of the C.P.I.(M) were warned to give up their stand with the peasants. Since the leaders refused to withdraw their support, they were ousted from the party. Following this, the All India Co-ordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries

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<sup>5</sup> There is a lack of consensus about the exact happenings on the day. While a few books, like, *The Naxalite Movement* (1974), *The Naxalite Movement: A Maoist Experiment* (1974), *The Naxalites and their Ideology* (1993) mention that the police attacked during a meeting of women, some like, *Awakening: The Story of Bengal Renaissance* (2007), *Naxalbari Before and After: Reminiscences and Appraisal* (2009), *Shaat-Shottore Nadia Naxalbari er Nirman* (2004), *Peasant Movements in Post-Colonial India: Dynamics of Mobilisation and Identity* (2004) mention that the police fired rounds to scare away the mob that gathered around the police station and the deaths were accidental. However, the record of the death of Dhaneshwari Devi (or Dhaleshwari Devi as she is mentioned in a few texts and records) along with the other women and three infants by police bullets coincides in all the records.

(A.I.C.C.R.) was formed in 1968, later developing into a new political party, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> April, which was officially declared on the 1<sup>st</sup> May, 1969 (Bhattacharjee, 2018; Ray, 1993). This newly-created political organisation, namely the Communist Party of India (Marxist Leninist), shortened as C.P.I.(M.L.), believed in armed revolution. They were confident that non-violent modes of revisionism could not be a valid/satisfactory way of changing the social structure and preferred armed revolution following the path of Mao Zedong, Marighela and other left extremist leaders. Indeed, six documents out of eight written by Charu Majumdar in *Eight Historical Documents?*, which formed the political organisation's essential texts, spoke against the revisionist policy. However, only one talked about the annihilation doctrine that could be followed in extreme situations: when the landlord refused to give up the land or against the abuse of the highest authorities in the state machinery, or to protect themselves against the attacks of the state police force (Bhattacharjee, 2018: 23-24). Therefore, an analysis of the events in the movement reveals that violence was an integral part of the Naxalbari movement from its early days. Indeed, the violent clashes between the state machinery and the peasants brought about the suspension of the district committee members of the North Bengal C.P.I. (M) district committee and the formation of the C.P.I. (M.L.).

The profound preference towards subjective violence (the method of protest naturally followed by the peasant population) can be gauged from the inclusion of armed barricades<sup>6</sup> and annihilation doctrine<sup>7</sup> within the tenets in *Eight Historical Documents*. So, through his documents, Charu Majumdar proposed an alternative to revisionist policies. Through the use of armed barricades and a doctrine of annihilation, he reaffirmed that the movement wanted to remove the objective violence of class hierarchy by using subjective violence. Analysing the Naxalbari movement and its use of violence through the lens of Zizek reveals that this movement also used subjective violence as a tool in order to overcome the objective violence that manifested itself through the class hierarchy. While most socialist agendas tried to provide charity, the Naxalbari movement aimed to strike at the

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<sup>6</sup> In the Naxalbari movement or any left political movement, the term barricade means a defensive barrier. Barricades in left literature in general means barricades of people who would protect each other and thus form a defensive barrier either against the authority or the opposing force. What made the barricades of the extreme left movements, like the Naxalbari movement, different from the barricades of the other left movements was that they were armed in nature. However, these armed barricades were not meant to attack, but only to defend themselves against the armed attacks of the opposing forces. These barricades of peasants were very small and local (consisting of one or two villages). Since violence had always been an intricate feature of the peasant insurgencies or any movement of the masses in the nationalist movements, the concept of armed barricades within the very tenets of the movement was quite suitable for the peasantry and made the movement all the more popular.

<sup>7</sup> The term annihilation means elimination. Charu Majumdar's doctrine of elimination referred to eliminating the class hierarchy by removing the majority of the bourgeois class, consisting of industry and factory owners in the city and landlords in the villages, to attain a classless social structure. Since the government supported the latter sector, the doctrine also included terminating the individuals holding an official position or supporting the state machinery.

roots of the objective violence that systematically allowed charity by one group of people over another. Since the ruling government was not making any effort to diminish the social gap, the movement also attempted to overthrow the governing political parties to pave the way for a government that would not condone such systematic violence. Against this background, the violence accompanied in this post-independent political movement can be interpreted as a response to the objective violence of class inequality within the social structure.

So, though subjective violence had always been an integral part of any peasant movement, this was the first movement after Indian independence sanctioning violence within its structure. However, with the movement's progress, the doctrine of annihilation became so dominant that it was accepted [?] by the young members, as Abhijeet Das records: "Whoever has not dipped his hand in the enemy's blood was not a revolutionary" (Das, 2015: 57). With the centre focused on annihilation, the task of awakening class consciousness, organising the peasantry and working-class received a setback. These became secondary while murdering the identified enemy became the primary goal of militant [?] youths. The prominence of the doctrine of annihilation brought about the disassociation between subjective and objective violence. While the doctrine aimed to eliminate objective violence, it gradually lost its aim and killing became a motive in itself. The result was that the targeted individuals could be as simple as traffic policemen or sub-inspectors who represented the state authority in the cities or small *zamindars* and *jotedars* in the villages. Thus, there was a series of unorganised violent murders by youths: "It was pointed out that no stress had been given to agrarian revolution; without mass struggle and mass organisation the peasants' armed struggle cannot be sustained; the C.P.I.(M.L.) did not focus on the agrarian programme" (Sen, 1982: 231). The emergence of Charu Majumdar gave the movement a more urban colour while it lost its connection with the peasantry. In his *Naxalbari and the Peasant Revolt in North Bengal*, Partha Mukherjee has pointed out: "The movement was no longer based on peasant worker solidarity but urban-based youth" (Mukherjee, 1978: 69-70). Moreover, the over-use and misuse of the annihilation doctrine attracted more attention from the government that sought repressive measures to suppress the dissenting movement.

### **Repression by the State Machinery**

The use of subjective violence, especially the doctrine of annihilation, created violent, repressive responses by the state authority. However, following the argument of Slavoj Zizek,<sup>8</sup> the

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<sup>8</sup> Since this article looks into the violence through the lens of Slavoj Zizek's subjective and objective violence, this section does too. If considered through the lens of other thinkers, the representation of the movement as well as the role of violence can be interpreted in different ways.

government's repressive activities would not count as subjective violence towards individuals since they are part of the systematic and objective violence that cannot be perceived superficially. Instead, the violent measures of the government are recognised as the means to maintain peace in society (Zizek, 2009: 4). In 1972, the political party was banned, and its activities became illegal. Even before the official ban, the arrest of prominent leaders, identified as incurring violent acts, became common. In 1970, a state of emergency was declared and West Bengal was subjected to the president's rule. As Dipak Gupta noted:

Under this sweeping declaration, they suspended the freshly elected state government and imposed from the centre a "President's Rule" in March 1970 ... Under the new rule, there was no ambivalence toward the Naxalites, exhibited previously by the United Front government ... In April, a joint campaign was launched by the Indian military (Eastern Frontier Rifles), the Central Reserve Police. They coordinated their efforts with the local police rifles (Gupta, 2007: 196-197).

From 1970 there were mass arrests of suspected youths from villages or cities: "By August 1970, forty-four leaders including Kanu Sanyal, Kadam Mallick and Jangal Santhal were arrested" (Sen 1982: 218). The family members of the Naxal youths also underwent brutal police torture. The case of Archana Guha, sister of Saumen Guha, a Naxal youth, is illustrative in this connection. The use of repressive measures to restore the state power became more brutal in the wake of the election: "In 1971, at the height of Naxalite troubles, when fear in the city was paramount, elections were held. On the crest of her popularity, Indira Gandhi and her coalition became victorious in West Bengal" (Gupta, 2007: 176). In 1975 Charu Majumdar was arrested in Kolkata and immediately transported to Lalbazaar police headquarters, where he died from cardiac arrest during police interrogation. The Indian government took full advantage of his death and suppressed the remaining movement (Banerjee, 2009). Therefore, the historical incidents reveal that the movement that began with violence and had violence at its theoretical base also underwent repressive measures from the state authority, contributing to its demise.

### **Estimating the Significance of the Annihilation Campaign**

As the historical section depicts, the subjective and visible means of violence employed in the movement was a response to the systematic violence that divided the society into different classes. Though the use of violence had several ill effects on the movement, this section looks at the use of violence through *The Lives of Others* (2014) by Neil Mukherjee in gaining independence from the tyranny of the *zamindars* and instilling courage with hope in the minds of the sharecroppers and landless farmers. *The Lives of Others* explores the tumultuous period of Bengal from the 1960s-1970s,



chiefly through the middle-class Ghosh family. The novel provides a detailed structure of the joint family, headed by Prafullanath followed by his son, Adityanath, who resides in Bhowanipore, one of the oldest areas of Kolkata. Supratik, the eldest son of Adityanath and Ghosh's third generation, is the protagonist of the text and represents the movement. He is depicted as a very meritorious student in Presidency College, who joins the action. The text revolves around him and his experiences in the movement.

After the initial activities of painting the walls of the streets with slogans, he is given a task "in the village of Majgeria, between the borders of Purulia and Medinipur" (Mukherjee, 2014: 105). The text explores the activity of Naxal youths in the villages through the letters written by Supratik during this period. Supratik and his comrades' goal was to include the peasantry in the movement by freeing them from the rule of the *zamindars*. Through the murder of Senapati, a corrupt money lender of the village, together with the help of a minimum of information from a few villagers, these youths succeed in attaining the villagers' trust and arousing class consciousness among them. Before the murder of Senapati, the villagers were partially sceptic about the urban youths (Mukherjee, 2014: 286-289). But once Supratik and his comrades have accomplished the murder, the villagers faith in the youths is restored completely. It is made manifest through their endeavour to protect Supratik and the other comrades from the police. When the police force entered Majgeria, the villagers helped Supratik and his comrades escape to the neighbouring village after passing relevant information regarding their protection. Even when brutally attacked by the police force, they did not reveal the names or identities of the youths (Mukherjee, 2014: 305). Thus, the youths were successful in gaining the confidence of the villagers. It eased their work in the next village, and during their second venture, Supratik and his two comrades were joined by many villagers, "The noise brought other farmers here ... they have lathis and tangis and spears" (Mukherjee, 2014: 310). The second murder of the *zamindar* followed the redistribution of land and granary stock among "the farmers [who] were busy filling their sacks ... gamchas with the grain" (Mukherjee, 2014: 311). Thus, the first murder acted as a catalyst in gaining the confidence of the villagers, while in the second act, the peasants themselves took on the violence that was their natural tendency, as broadly discussed in the historical section of the chapter.

These two events prove that the annihilation campaigns of the Naxals were necessary in some cases to win the trust of locals and instil self-confidence in them. The murder campaigns were also required to make the peasants believe in the possibility of living a life free from the slavery of landlords. As Supratik states, regarding the mental condition of the villagers: "The embers of anger we had thought of fanning had burned down into ashes of despair. They were already dead within their lives. They

had no hopes, no sense of future, just an endless playing out of their illness of the present tense into the culmination of future” (Mukherjee, 2014: 173). Thus, pushed to the edge of repression, the landless farmers had lost every hope of bringing change in their lives. But the annihilation of their class enemies installed in them a belief in the possibility of living better lives by escaping the clutches of slavery through the movement. Therefore, these two incidents show how the use of subjective violence had a constructive effect on the movement. Had it not been for the killing of Senapati, the villagers would not have gained confidence in the youths. Their attempt at joining the youths in the second venture reinforces their support. It also confirms how the action of Supratik and his comrades helped to spread the movement from one village to another. However, it has to be noted, that this is completely from the perspective of Supratik, and his comrades, all of whom emerge from middle-class families. Indeed, the narrative of the peasantry is almost negligible in the text: “Although the subalterns, especially the peasants, played a significant role in the Naxalite movement, they are at the margins of the novel and are rarely given a voice” (Beretta, 2019: 65).<sup>9</sup> This incident, as projected through the narrative of Supratik, is in alliance with the historical assertion of the veteran peasant leaders about the movement and its modus operandi:

The practitioners of Marxist revolutionary ideals, such as Lenin, and Ho Chi Minh, were emphatic in their assertion that class-consciousness must be painstakingly taught to the peasants and the workers through the active leadership of the Communist Party. In contrast, other revolutionaries, particularly in Latin America, such as Che Guevara, Mao and Carlos Marighela assumed that class identity was present among the minds of the exploited workers and peasants (Gupta, 2008: 169).

Charu Majumdar believed in the opinion of Guevara, Mao and Marighela. As Prakash Singh notes, “After working with the landless peasants for years, Majumdar and Sanyal were convinced that the objective condition in India was ripe for a massive uprising against an oppressive social and political system” (Singh, 2006: 72-73). He argued that building the mass organisation throughout India was unnecessary under the prevailing conditions, and a simple spark in any part of the rural community would unite the peasants. Quite in cue with the argument, the villagers joined the youths during their second venture, involving murdering the landlord and then redistributing crops and excess lands. Finding a ray of hope through these youths’ attempts, the villagers readily opted for subjective violence to end the systematic violence that pushed them to the edge of oppression.

However, these incidents also prove that the villagers joined the youths not in the hope of joining the movement or having any pan-India vision, but because of solidarity and territoriality

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<sup>9</sup> Since this article concentrates on looking at the novel and the historical incidents through the lens of violence, it chooses not to focus on the class conflicts and prominence awarded the middle class.

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(Guha) and were focused solely on their local problems<sup>10</sup>. Though it might appear that the venture of the farmers in joining Supratik and his comrades during their second mission, followed by the support they received seeming to be a positive factor for the movement, a deeper analysis reveals how it was only limited to local problems. Indeed, the annihilation campaigns freed the peasants from the tyranny of the landlords, yet to say that they joined the movement seems far-fetched. What they did was only to support the youths in their second mission. There is no follow-up in the text regarding their joining the movement or influencing farmers from other villages to support it. There is also no evidence of Supratik and his comrades sharing further contact with the farmers after the former left the village. Thus, beyond boosting courage and self-confidence among the farmers, the annihilation campaigns did not help the movement achieve any of the long-term goals.

### **Representation of the State Machinery's Role**

As the historical section reveals, the dissenting movement was met with heavy repressive measures from the state machinery. However, following the argument of Zizek, it has been established that the actions of the state machinery are not counted as violence. Instead, it is viewed as the means of preventing subjective violence and maintaining peace and order in society. *The Lives of Others* (2014) by Neil Mukherjee narrates the repressive measures used by police to tame the dissenting Naxal youths. It is illustrated in two ways: firstly, the text depicts the brutal torture of Naxal youths in police custody, and secondly, by showing the murders of these youths through illegal forced encounters.

Supratik, the protagonist of the text and the chief representative of the movement, is arrested from his house at dawn by the same inspector who had earlier paid their family regular visits and received tributes. Initially, he was taken to a small white-washed room where a “short-heighted, shy looking, middle-aged man” (Mukherjee, 2014: 468) questioned him respectfully about his activities, “Achha, beside Debdulal Maity, you, Samir Roy Chowdhury and Dhiren Chatterjee, can you tell me who else was at the meeting at Debdulal Maity’s home in Belpahari in March/April last year?” (Mukherjee, 2014: 469). The tone of his voice and the exact locations he mentioned proved that he was well aware of the youths’ activities. But Supratik realised that he probably learnt them by interrogating his comrades. The refined and harmless interrogation, categorised as mental torture, continued for a couple of days before proceeding to physical torture. It proves that the state authority moved to physical violence on a secondary level. Since Supratik did not yield to the mental torture

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<sup>10</sup> Locality has been one of the major characteristics of any peasant uprising since colonial days. Consult Sumit Sarkar’s *Popular Movements* (1983) for further reference.

but questioned the police officers, without responding to any of their questions, they resorted to physical torture to prove their upper hand and compel Supratik to yield. Unable to obtain the necessary information, the interrogating officer instructed the superintendent to use every kind of torture to obtain the required information (Mukherjee, 2014: 482). The use of pliers to pull out fingernails, the use of needles to scrap flesh, beating on the soles of feet continued one after another (Mukherjee, 2014: 482-483). Supratik went numb with the pain while they seemed to enjoy their job:

Chubby Cheek laughs and says, 'Did you see how I got it in one go?'

No wonder they call you Doctor Babu. You should preface all this with, it won't hurt all, trust me. I am a doctor; I have been doing this for decades. They burst out laughing (Mukherjee, 2014: 483).

The conversation not only renders how the dissenting youths were subjected to inhumane torture in police custody, but also depicts the authority's satisfaction in torturing the dissenting voices. It proves the degree of violence that the authorities indulged in under the pretext of maintaining order in the society. Thus, to say that the officers were interested only in maintaining law and order proves to be shallow in the light of the above conversation. The satisfaction that the police personnel derived from the torture of Supratik establishes the fact that the police authority used repressive measures to establish their superior position. Indeed, the conversation reinforced the fact that the authorities wanted to suppress the dissenting movement only to maintain their power and privileged position. Another method of violence that the state authority resorted to was illicit encounters with the Naxal youths. Once all the information was exhorted from Supratik, he was not taken to any court for legal procedures. Instead, he was killed in a framed encounter: unchained in an open forest ground and forced to walk away from the police van. At a distance of a few feet, they shot him dead: "A shot rings out, then another. The first bullet enters his skull, the second in his back and left shoulder blade" (Mukherjee, 2014: 490). That there were innumerable cases of illegal encounters during the tenure of the movement has also been established<sup>11</sup> and briefly mentioned in the historical section, above.

During the interrogation session, Supratik's dedication towards the movement is also revealed through his resistance to the torture he is subjected to. This is not an exclusive case since most of the texts projecting custodial tortures represent the youths as bearing the pain, to a large extent. In *The Lives of Others*, too, the policemen agree that the torture meted out to Supratik would have killed them (Mukherjee, 2014: 57), but Supratik resisted, without revealing any names. Though Supratik blurted out information, he made sure that a few days had passed and the news of his captivity was

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<sup>11</sup> It has been repeatedly mentioned in most historical studies of the movement. For example, *Footprints of Foot Soldiers*, *In the Wake of Naxalbari*, *The Naxalite Movement in India* to name a few.

known to his comrades so that they could change their hideouts and safe-houses: “They have surely changed their hideouts now that many days have passed since my arrest” (Mukherjee, 2014: 310). Thus, the use of repression by the police force, considered a tool to re-establish “order”, failed in frightening Supratik and most of the Naxal members. By situating the character of Supratik in opposition to the police officers, the text ruptures the state authority’s mask of orderliness. The behaviour of the representatives of the state authority police officers illustrates that the suppression of the dissenting movement was not only to maintain “peace and order” , but chiefly to maintain the superior pedestal of the former. Since the dissenting movement threatened the supremacy of the state authority, the latter chose to suppress it with iron hands.

### **Victimisation of People: Collateral Damage**

The power play between the dissenting movement and the state machinery involving violence resulted in the death and victimisation of many people who were not involved in either side. While some lost their lives due to casualties from bombings and attacks, others lost their source of livelihood. On the other hand, the rampant random attacks by the police force on the family members of the Naxal youths or the encounter of several young boys based on suspicion led to open an era of terror for the civilians. Any historical account of the movement narrates police oppression of the young boys. Abhijeet Das recounts the brutal police repression in his memoir on the movement, “[B]y October 1970, the repression of the state machinery had reached the peak, and many youths had been arrested. Youths between the age of fifteen to twenty-five were hauled away on sheer suspicion. Many of the innocents were arrested while many wanted by the police had hidden comfortably behind the disguises” (Das, 2015: 147). This statement proves that in suppressing the movement, the police force lost the distinction between dissenters and non-dissenters. With the higher authority’s permission to suppress the movement by any means, they got free-hand in randomly arresting any individual based on suspicion. Thus, a reign of terror had spread through Bengal. Parallely, the case of Archana Guha proves the police force’s brutality on the Naxal youths’ family members. *Naxal Sahityo* in Bengali Literature provides innumerable depictions of the custodial tortures and encounters of young boys who were not involved with the movement and the attack on the families of the Naxal members by the state authority. However, the texts dealing with the Naxalbari movement in Indian English Literature, such as *The Lowland* (2013), *Inquilaab: A Play in Three Acts* (1971), fail to provide narratives of police atrocities where the state machinery randomly attacked the citizens. The texts limit themselves to exploring the custodial tortures by the police force on the Naxal youths. The portrayal of victimisation of civilians is always presented as an outcome of the activities of Naxal

members. Thus, a single-sided approach is recognised in the texts on the movement in Indian English Literature. Though they explore victimisation as a result of Naxal activities, they fail to represent the miscalculations of the state authority and their atrocities towards the citizens.

*The Lives of Others* narrates the death of Madan, the oldest house servant of the Ghosh family, as a case of endless collateral damage due to the conflict between two contradictory powerful forces. Madan committed suicide after the humiliation he encountered in police custody due to the false charges brought by Supratik. He had been associated with the Ghosh family since the early days of Prafullanath and Charubala, the eldest members of the family. Entering the Ghosh family as a teenage boy, he had seen the birth of the second and third-generation family members and had himself matured into an adult and developed into old age. Thus, Madan had become an unofficial member of the family: “Madan bringing her children gifts every time he came back from his annual visits home, Madan lying down to protect one of the children from her [Charubala] wrath...” (Mukherjee, 2014: 487). At the disappearance of Supratik, Madan was also worried about him. It is reflected by his nocturnal conversation with Supratik, where he advised the latter to think about his mother and other family members before thinking about the larger society. The conversation had led to a tussle of words between the two in which Supratik silenced Madan, taking advantage of his social position (Mukherjee, 2014: 386-387).

Supratik had accused the servant of being a thief while stealing jewellery from his own house for the movement. The police realised the truth soon after arresting Madan, but they chose not to reveal anything until they had collected all the evidence they required against Supratik. During the first phase of interrogation, the police officer revealed the truth to Supratik, “Why did you let your cook, Madan, take the blame when it was you who had stolen your aunt’s jewellery? (Mukherjee, 2014: 475). The conversation proves that the police had kept Madan in custody only to buy time in finding evidence against Supratik. Therefore, this episode reveals how Madan degenerated into a puppet, for both Supratik, representing the movement, and the state authority in their power game. By means of this representation, the text moves away from the other texts on the Naxalbari movement, mentioned above, since it shows the repression by the state machinery of citizens who were not involved with the movement.

After the arrest of Supratik, Madan is released from police custody. However, once released from custody, Madan is uncertain about his life: “To Madan, the home has always meant Basanta Bose Road [the house of Ghosh], not his village, Amlapali in Orissa” (Mukherjee, 2014: 492). But after the police arrest, neither could he go to his owner’s place nor return to his village. The shame of

being arrested without committing any crime was such that his mind failed to figure things out, and soon he was at the level-crossing of trains: “The tracks look enormous ... he is perfectly weightless now like air” (Mukherjee, 2014: 495). The suicide of Madan thus symbolises the collateral damage as a result of the fight between two strong powers.

Supratik claimed to fight for the rights of the proletariat through the movement, yet he did not hesitate to subject the member of the proletariat closest to him to the dangers of police atrocities. On the other hand, the state machinery that claimed to preserve citizens’ peace and safety did not care for the old man either readily using him as a means of arresting the Naxal member. Thus, none of the forces was concerned about the people victimised as a consequence of their battle. Both were equally oblivious of the collateral damage and were only concerned about attaining their goals of establishing a new order through dissent or preserving their power by maintaining the old order. What emerges as an interesting point is that the proletariat becomes the scapegoat in the battle between the two forces. It is indeed ironic that the tussle between the members of the dissenting movement, that claimed to be for the benefit of the have-nots, and the state authority, that claimed to preserve the safety of its citizens, became the cause of the death of Madan, a proletarian citizen.

## **Conclusion**

The article confirms the aporia resulting from the indulgence with subjective violence. The text reflects how the involvement in violence from the two contradictory forces resulted in the victimisation of people who had no participation either in the movement or in the state machinery. Through Neel Mukherjee’s *The Lives of Others*, the article shows that subjective violence within the tenets might have helped the movement to attain immediate popularity among the peasants and youths from colleges and universities. However, it was futile in bringing any long-term change in the social structure. Far from achieving its goal, this article shows how the use of the doctrine of annihilation created a disassociation between subjective violence and objective violence. It also unmasked the repressive measures executed by the state authority that chose to suppress the movement quickly. Through the text, this article has also explored the collateral damage due to the conflict generated between the two forces. Thus, the article shows how the novel is singular in its approach towards the movement by projecting the repressive measures encountered by the Naxals at the hands of state machineries while also showing the abandonment of people not involved in either the movement or the state machinery. Thus, though the text adheres to certain historical narratives of the movement, as mentioned in the article, it also gives a more nuanced approach on the movement by closely looking into the lives of various individuals. Moreover, in the article, there has been a sustained endeavour to

connect the movement's historical narratives, through the lens of violence, with that of the text. Thus, the article has engaged in interaction between the role of violence in the Naxalbari movement and how the novel approaches the historical narratives in a nuanced manner.

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