



Marxist Concerns in the Selected Works of Neel Mukherjee

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Abstract

For years, Marxist theorists have used literature as an expression to expose class struggle. Theorist interpretation has been enhancing the world, and novelists all over the world have been able to make an exposition of radicalized people through fictitious works. Many unfulfilled revolutions have occurred in India. However, the works produced are entirely a product of history, which can be analyzed by examining the material conditions of the past society. As an Indian writer, Neel Mukherjee uses his novel to protect the working class by depicting the realities of Indian society. The themes of his novels revolve around the misinterpretation of ideological thoughts, specifically communist extremism symbolized as the Naxalite movement, at the same time pathetic peasant struggles were presented. Mukherjee defines the transformation of people into radical mentalities, as well as the causes and consequences that prompted them to attempt a subaltern revolution. Although the majority of his works refer to bourgeoisie novels, the author emphasizes the significance of hegemonic Indian society. As a Bengali-born author, he has written three novels, each being an allegory of Bengali society and inspected the pulse of the lower class at ground level. Neel Mukherjee's tension as a Marxist thinker is visible.

Keywords: Naxalbari Uprising, Communist Party, India, Neel Mukherjee, West Bengal.

Karl Marx created Marxism, which is the conflict between social classes, particularly between capitalists and workers. Marxism demonstrates that the exploitation of workers by the upper class will result in class conflict. According to Marx, the conflict would lead to a revolution in which the working class would overthrow the capitalist class and seize control of the economy. In India, Marxism is active and well, because of the Communist Party of India-Marxist, which has been trying to abolish the Indian society's class system. To understand Indian society, Indian Marxist scholars apply essential assumptions from Marxian analysis. In India, Akshay Ramanlal Desai was the scholar who contributed the most to the growth of Marxist sociology.

Literature is a medium through which writers can cope with the critical effects of capitalism and depict the aftereffects and harsh realities of capitalist society. Literature has for years advanced the field of Marxism by enabling novelists to speak to the political and



social structures of society. Some Indian political novels resemble the significance of Marxist theory, and novelists use the ideology to express class struggle and capitalist society's hegemony.

The novels by Neel Mukherjee depict a fractured Bengali society. He was able to analyse Bengali society through the political and social actions of West Bengal's history as a Bengali-born English writer. The novels illustrate the paradoxes of society that has been thrown into disarray by the capitalist's imperialistic domination. Mukherjee's books, *The Lives of Others* 2014 and *A State of Freedom* 2017, have a touch of violence that aims to repair the injustices of Bengali society's proletariat through righting the subalterns. The novel stories depict the harsh realities of the times, with the author explaining the Naxalbari Uprising and other extremist movements aimed at overthrowing capitalism. Mukherjee says:

I feel very bleak about history and the human race right now. Where did we take this wrong turning in history? Late capitalism has not been good for us. I think the whole capitalist order has a lot to answer for. The marriage of liberal democracy and capitalism is coming unstuck. It hasn't worked. Why haven't we got rid of racism in America? Why haven't we got rid of nationalism and intolerance? The only way to deal with it all is to look it in the face and try and write about it and depict it in very unblinking ways. (Neel Mukherjee *On Displacement And Desire* 76).

Mukherjee is concerned about society and places a maximum priority on the people of the lower classes, as seen by the fact that he shows it from all sides of a realistic novel. *The Lives of Others* is Mukherjee's second novel, set in Calcutta in 1967 and depicting the class tensions that can be considered the plot's core. This is a disturbing depiction of a wealthy society under threat from violent extremist attacks. *The Lives of Others* begins with a devastating murder-suicide of a peasant named Nithi Das and his family, who were oppressed by the landlord's supremacy, and a sequence that depicts the full extent of rural worker's toil. Violence is a fixture in the lives of peasants who are subjected to exploitation, poverty, and other aspects of social injustice. The story makes a strong connection between this circumstance and the Naxalite revolution's deadly response. The novel covers the narrative of a family during one of West Bengal's most contentious periods in recent history, especially the Naxalite movement and the state's repression of it.

Another novel by Mukherjee is *A State of Freedom*, which depicts the tragic lives of society's lower classes. The book explores the human desire to conquer the fundamentals, but restricted factors strike them. Another perspective is that people are more inclined to engage in extremism to obtain their basic needs. He beautifully depicts the brutality inherent in the class system, as well as the resulting violence and despair.

Mukherjee's political insight was successful in reflecting reality through his writings. The core of the works has a bourgeoisie tone inside them. That indicates the desire to speak up for those in the lower socioeconomic strata. However, the fiction provides limited space and viewpoints for lower-class characters, focusing on the Naxalite revolution primarily as a critique of middle-class bourgeoisie society.



Mukherjee mentioned capitalism in his work *The Lives of Others* by categorising the members at various economic levels. *The Lives of Others* is the story of the Ghosh family, a middle-class family from Calcutta who lived at 22/6 Basanta Bose Road. The patriarch, Prafullanath, and his wife Charubala, as well as their five children and their families, live in a spacious four-storey house. The family owns a paper factory in Bengal and many paper mills. Due to poor management, union unrest, and the economic downturn that afflicted West Bengal in the 1960s and 1970s, the firm was formerly successful but is now in a state of crisis. The novel, on the other hand, tells the story of the Naxalite battle through the eyes of the family's oldest grandchild, Supratik, who has left Calcutta to join the movement in rural West Bengal. In letters to his aunt Purba, Supratik discusses his political path and the hardships and obstacles of engaging in the rural insurgency. The use of a contrapuntal structure emphasises a dialectic contrast, a confrontation, between the Ghosh family and Supratik, middle-class and university-educated youth, right from the start.

Because of the tight class system and constant conflicts and divisions, the house on Basanta Bose Road might be considered an allegory of the Bengali social setting. Its members constantly argue and conflict amongst themselves over money, prestige, and status, creating a constant instability that echoes the political climate of the 1960s and 1970s. Moreover, the house's area is arranged in a strict hierarchical order, with various forms of discrimination between family members. From the top floor, the patriarch Prafullanath and his wife Charubala rule the house. The restrictions they impose on the home's space provide some spatial pattern, but they do not ensure family peace or well-being. Indeed, the residents of the house are allotted rooms in declining order based on their age, power, and prestige concerning other family members. Adinath, the oldest son and successor to the family company, lives on the top level with his wife and children, alongside the patriarchal couple. Chhaya, the spinster sister, resides on the second level. Priyonath, the second-born, and Bholanath, the third child, live on the first floor with their families. Rooms for the servants and Purba, the widow of the youngest son, and her children are located on the ground level.

According to Marxist ideology, the bourgeoisie is a social class that formed with modern industrialization to own the means of production and whose cultural interests include the value of property and the preservation of capital to maintain their hegemony in society. Here, Mukherjee introduces the poisonous form of bourgeoisie ideology. Purba and her two children are treated as a slave by the family since she is despairing and penniless. The narrator tells that “They have to stay hidden away, all three of them, in one room on the ground floor of this big four-storey house, as if they were servants and not what they are, true family” (Mukherjee 17). Purba is avoided by the entire family since she is a widow with a working-class background. She must perform the same duties as an ordinary servant and is not permitted to eat with the rest of the family. Her children do not have access to the same educational possibilities as their more privileged cousins.

She has suffered from inequity and discrimination as a result of her family's economic ideals, which has resulted in her being seen as a second-class resident. As the narrator stated:



Not all family bonds are equal. The lie so assiduously propagated by mothers – How can you ask who is my favourite? They are all my children, I love all of them equally. Are you partial to one finger of your hand over another? – is disbelieved by everyone, yet it is quite astonishing what pervasive currency it has in the outward show of lives. Everyone is hectically denying the existence of favourites, of special affections and allegiances and alliances within a large group of siblings, or between parents and children, while, just under the surface, the empty drama of equality is torqued to its very opposite by the forces of conflicting emotions and affinities. (Mukherjee 105)

By analysing the statements made by the narrator, it's visible that comparing the examples is true. Mukherjee similarly uses the characterization of Supratik to highlight the disastrous consequences of capitalism. In the Ghosh family, a university graduate is politicised by the Communist Party of India and, with the influence of the Naxalite movement, he is influenced and reverts to extremism. West Bengal's economic crises in the 1960s and 1970s resulted in the upper-middle-class surrendering political power. The current system was challenged by uprisings in the countryside, the Food Movement, and ultimately the Naxalite movement. In politics, the establishment of a United Front government put an end to the Congress, which was the voice of Bengali businessmen. Many individuals resort to the United Front or the Naxalite movement to reform society as unemployment and dissatisfaction increase. This is what we see in the character of Mukherjee, with university students like Supratik, who become increasingly ideological and contemptuous of their parent's generation, eventually joining the revolutionaries' ranks.

Supratik's radicalised nature was well-examined. In addition to the novel, Supratik's letter to his mother explained his ignorance towards his family. Inside the house, he felt unsafe. His letter was stated as:

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

In a great way, Mukherjee showed a character from a bourgeois household who transforms into a radical in a great way. His Supratik was capable of understanding his family's hard-line capitalism, and his analysis convinced him to work for the lower classes. Even though Purba was a slave, he formed a strong attachment with Purba. He was aggressive towards his upper-class relatives. Supratik aims to break down social barriers and eventually become a communist activist and a Naxalite fighter. While studying at Presidency College, he becomes involved in politics as a member of the Students Federation, the Communist Party of India's student wing. Supratik participated in the late 1960s Food Movement and other political activities. He soon realises though, that he isn't doing enough



and that the main battle is taking place elsewhere. Supratik decides to support the downtrodden following CPI principles.

Throughout the novel, Mukherjee's shaping of Supratik can be seen as a touch of Marxist principle. Supratik rejects capitalist values and attempts to fit in with peasant culture. Change, as well as his fight against himself and his middle-class upbringing, are the first steps toward revolution for him. The work, like *The Lives of Others*, highlights both the capitalist class and the working class in society and also glorifies those who attempted to rectify the situation and improve the poor's plight. Using the perspective of a Marxist thinker, Mukherjee explored the challenges of Bengali society in his novel.

A State of Freedom, another work by Neel Mukherjee, similarly tackles the pathetic lower-class people. Similar to *The Lives of Others* it also has equal themes in common. The narrative is centred on people from the lower social classes and their lives of full injustice and discrimination. It also discusses the investigation of the cruelty of societal divisions. Soni is a figure who appears in Mukherjee's places, such as Supratik. The change that he has made here is the change of class, from Soni from the working class who is against the upper class. She has been radicalised by the influence of Maoist groups as a witness to harsh persecution by the capitalist class, and Mukherjee portrays her as a woman for the lower classes, while also being able to connect extremism with misinterpretation of ideology.

Mukherjee's desire for unequal society is central to the narrative. Soni, who had been through too much trauma as a child, watched her mother's suicide as a result of bad hospitalisation for the poorest strata of society. These events prompted her to join the far-right party. The author also portrayed the necessity for a balanced society among the lower classes.

The government does not give us those things, rights and respect. We have nothing except the rights to jail, jameen and jangal. They're going to take our water, land and forest away from us (Mukherjee 193).

These kinds of claims from the Maoist parties influenced Soni to change her mind and join the Maoist party to save her community from the capitalists. As a leftist writer, Mukherjee focused on demonstrating the negative effects of capitalist administration and social exploitation. In the course of conveying this, Mukherjee also discussed the negative repercussions of extreme groups, which are driven by a misreading of ideology. He mentioned in the lines:

The Party, as the Communist Party of India- Maoists had two guerrilla wings; the group Soni joined was the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army" (Mukherjee 195).

Through author was able to demonstrate the Maoist extreme group's evil intents as well as their agenda to enlist the peasants and working class in their mission. Hanya Yanagihara addressed *A State of Freedom* as:

Neel Mukherjee's breathtaking *A State of Freedom* is that rarest, most wonderful of things: a book both literarily dextrous, full of unforgettable scenes, images, language, and characters, as well as a furious, unsparing, clear-eyed study of how a society's



gross inequities of money and power demean and deform the human condition. The most astonishing and brilliant novel I have read in a long, long time. (*Astonishing And Brilliant: A State Of Freedom*, The New Novel From Neel Mukherjee).

Studies point to the Naxalite group's nihilistic existential ideology as one of the reasons for the revolution's downfall. A similar concept was expressed by Mukherjee. In *The Lives of Others* and *A State of Freedom*, Mukherjee paints a picture of a divided Bengali society in which one component appears unable to connect with the others. Taking the middle-class viewpoint, the work is more of a parable about bourgeois values and their decline than a study of subaltern reality. At the same time, Mukherjee also considered the economic growth of the lower-class people.

Rabindra Ray in his work *The Naxalites and their Ideology* criticized the movement as “terrorism and political assassinations to a nihilistic ideology, and that, in turn, to the Naxalites’ inability to gain the support of the industrial proletariat.”(Ray). Mukherjee's novel appears to accord with this conclusion with its emphasis on massacres, bombs, and the sacrifice of innocent lives. Both of Mukherjee's novels focus on class inequalities and even illustrate the march of extremism and its side consequences, as well as address the vital role of the Naxalbari movement and its influence on working-class people. The storyline depicts the relationship between the young middle class and the subaltern. The *Lives of Others* and *A State of Freedom* explain the Naxalite movement's demise, and it becomes evident from an examination of the works that the extremist group's actions and results on the common people are fatal. As a Marxist thinker, Neel Mukherjee was able to highlight the negative consequences of Bengal society in the post-colonial 1960s. Mukherjee does not hold back from emphasising the grave ramifications of the capitalist system. His emphasis in demonstrating an unbalanced society was on capitalist tension rather than the role of the working class. The passion for his motherland and his status as a Marxist thinker are clear in Mukherjee's work.

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