

Fluid Femininity: Modern Maithili Litterateur Lily Ray's Affective Subjectivity In Transregional Mobility

Abstract

Lily Ray (26 January 1933 - 3 February 2022) is an unusual landmark in the modern literary history of Mithila and sociology of vernacular literature in India. Ray's life and works provides for a reading of Maithili cultural complexity. Her worldview was enmeshed in the perpetual mobility across the linguistic and social regions in North Bihar, Bengal and Uttar Pradesh. Mostly under the ambit of family, marriage and kinship, conditioned by the institution of patriarchy prevalent in Mithila, Ray's mobility determined her literary journey. Her dramatis personae became part of the urban legend. The latter depicted her as a conventional Maithil wife with vermilion dot on her forehead, a glass of wine in her hand as a marker of progress, and her lips humming the traditional *samdaun* (a genre of women's folksong in Mithila). Such an embodiment of opposites, was deemed iconoclastic in the context of Mithila.

In this essay Ray's autobiography titled *samay ke dhangait* (Treading the Time, 2015 a) is closely read in relation with a novel titled *Patakshep* (Curtain Down, 1977). She was bestowed the prestigious Gyanpeeth award for the novel *Mrigmarichika* (Mirage), although *Patakshep* was her most popular political novel. There is an uncanny structural overlap between her biography and the novel, *samay ke dhangait* and *Patakshep*. There arises a curious case of a young, mostly self-educated writer, becoming a traditional wife, and a mother, in the journey taking her from one cultural region to another. Emergence of an affective subjectivity in the transregional mobility leads to a glimpse of fluid femininity of Ray. The most dramatic manifestation of such an affective subjectivity vis-à-vis fluid femininity, surfaces in a close reading of her biography and the novel *Patakshep*, together. In so doing, this essay unravels the gendered vernacular cosmopolitanism in which subversion of and negotiation with the dominant normative order is a sociologically promising outcome. The context of modern vernacular holds out enormous possibility to comprehend the cultural complexity of India.

Keywords: Feminity, Mobility, Maithili, Vernacular, Lily Ray, Mithila, Sociology of Literature

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An exception in the male dominated history of modern Maithili literature, Lily Ray (26 January 1933 - 3 February 2022) is important for sociology of vernacular literature in India. Her oeuvre presents a gendered comprehension of social reality that is fraught with patriarchal normative order. Moreover, her life is a testimonial of a gendered cosmopolitanism, in negotiation with roots and routes. An account of negotiation with the socially expected norms in life and works of Ray is also that of contestation. As a result, Ray's biography was saddled with myriad social roles. As an author, playing various social roles, she undertook a journey that brought about imperative subversion of the gendered order. What

was the nature and scope of cultural subversion in Ray's life and works? How does it lead to debate a situated knowledge of a gendered and embodied authorship?

This essay reads Lily Ray's novel, *Patakshep* (The Drop Scene, 2015 b), and the autobiography, *samay ke dhangait* (Treading the Time, 2015 a) together. This is a methodology of reading backward and forward, at once, in which past and present of Ray intersect. On one hand, this reading subscribes to the sociological imagination, propounded by C W Mills (2000), in which the relationship of personal troubles with public issues is vivid. Intersection of Ray's biography and history, perceived through sociological imagination, is central in this essay. On the other hand, in such a reading intertextuality¹ is not merely about the interaction of various texts. Instead, it also entails the author's journey across the context. Elsewhere, Clifford (1988) elucidated the role of travelling in the interconnectedness of culture, overcoming the binaries of roots and routes. Identity of an author, in this case of Lily Ray, is thus at the intersection of roots (vernacular nativism) and routes (intersections of vernaculars induced by the transregional mobility).

The interplay of text and context is conducive for a holistic understanding of the author's dispositions and creative output. In this essay, sociological imagination enables for such an intertextual reading, aligned with the life-journey of the author, Lily Ray. The exercise shall lead us to develop an argument on the becoming of a female litterateur in the context of the Maithili speaking society in the northern India. The becoming of an author in a patriarchal socio-cultural and family set up in Mithila was a challenge. Besides, the Maithili socio-literary scenario was not too conducive for female litterateurs in post-independent India. This was in spite of the fact that W G Archer (1949)² had established the significance of women in the folk art of Mithila and enlisted many Maithili female artists and their prolific artworks. Besides, the centrality of women in the realm of Maithili folklore has attracted many readings. A vast corpus of Maithili folklore inclusive of songs, proverbs, and tales have been in circulation across generations. The folkloric context adorned with art, songs, performances, present a vernacular terrain with anonymous authorship of the folk knowledge³. There is a palpable instance of an informal and cultural significance of women-centred, which may be deemed to be a kind of 'folkloric feminism' in the vernacular cultural context of Mithila. In such an instance women's songs creates a possibility of subversion of the normative sexual order as well as negotiation

¹End Notes

As discussed in Alfaro (1996).

² Archer's study was the first ever systematic attempt on Mithila art, which have been the starting point for many works afterwards.

³ Davis' *O* reading provides a feminist template to understand the role of folksongs in the society of Mithila, while Pathak's *O* is an attempt to read the folk philosophy of living and dying in Maithili speaking society.

with the patrilineal kinship logic. Through affects, emotions, ontologically rooted intellectual arguments and sensorially evocative allusions, the folkloric feminism of Mithila has been expressive of critique of social order. Be it against the preference of a male child, agonies of the new bride leaving for a patrilocal family at her in laws', melancholia of separation or even the euphoria of union, Maithili women curate a soundscape that invites men and women folk alike. Unlike the zero sum power struggle of women in the feminist discourse worldwide, women in Mithila seemed to provide an instance of redefinitions of the stereotypical social roles and reconciliations to the societal impositions.

In such a complex backdrop of the Maithili speaking women's folkloric feminism it is not surprising that the modern literary works derive a great deal of creative stimulants from folk worldview⁴. Modern Maithili litterateurs such as Harimohan Jha, Rajkamal Chaudhuri, Baba Nagarjun, and others have significantly dwelled upon the Maithili folkloric corpus of knowledge. Yet, paradoxically, there has been a relatively lesser number of female Maithili litterateurs in postcolonial Mithila. Various versions of the historical accounts of the modern literature in Maithili language speak volumes about the male dominated literary public sphere of Mithila⁵. Thus Lily Ray is an exception worth a detailed attention, as this essay attempts. Ray was a self-taught author who never dissociated from, becoming a daughter, a wife, and a mother among other things. The intersection of biographical and historical, literary and the socio-cultural materiality, characterises the life and work of Ray. It is difficult to determine where the novel stops and autobiography begins, and vice-versa. Thereby, Lily Ray holds out an intellectual challenge to the larger framework of sociology of literature⁶. The essay shall elucidate as to how Ray becomes a landmark in sociology of modern vernacular literature in India.

Intertwined Author and Social

Samay ke Dhangait, which Lilly Ray began to pen much later in 2015, upon an interaction with a young researcher. She discovered the untapped significance of

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This was an elaborate premise in Pathak's reading of a significant work by a doyen of modern Maithili literature, namely Harimohan Jha's *Khattar kaka*. See Pathak (2022).

⁵ It is rare to find the names of female literary writers in modern Mithila in a quasi-historical account such as Mishra (1998).

⁶ The framework of sociology of literature in South Asia seems to be thinly attended, in spite of the fact that one of the doyens of Indian sociology, namely G S Ghurye (1969) wrote a pretty much sociological treatise on Shakespeare. Sociologist N Jayaram wrote an equally landmark essay on V. S. Naipaul's novels to discuss the interplay of ethnicity and colonialism. Yet the sociology of literature framework cannot be independent of the significant contributions owed to historical and literary analyses. A significant headway is in Gupta (1991), Gupta et. al (2022).

the story of her life. Written in small pieces, the unfolding biography depicts Lily Ray, as a daughter, wife, mother, and a householder. She had almost stopped writing after her early marriage. She was a traditional daughter inclined to accept the decisions made by her parents and extended kinship. Without formal schooling she began to learn on her own by reading the textbooks of her brothers. In the early years she wrote with the pen name Kalpana Sharan, hiding her real identity. The reason behind adopting the pen name was that she feared the social-familial embarrassment. In a patriarchal society, even an educated Maithil family such as hers did not have space for the intellectual training for the girls. But then, neither life stopped nor literary urge. Much later as a mother Ray was persuaded by her grown up sons, and pushed by the circumstances, to resume writing! She wrote with heavy heart of a mother vexed by the uncertainty about her son. This was to become the novel *Patakshep*. It is particularly this creative coming together of the socio-cultural role sets that dissolves the binary of intellect and emotion, theory and action, thoughts and deeds, that makes Lily Ray eligible for a timeless celebration!

In terms of the literary method as well as the interface of the novel with history and polity, *Patakshep* deserves more detailed discussion. Written in Maithili, it appeared first as serialised stories in the magazine *Mithila Mihir*. First story was published on 1 July 1979 and the thirteenth and the last one on 7 October 1979. These stories were collected and edited by Ramanand Jha 'Raman' and published as a novel in 2015 (b) by the publisher, Sahityiki Prakashan, located in the village Sarisab-Pahi in the district Madhubani of Bihar. A note from the editor Ramanand Jha Raman, suggestively titled *patakshep nahi* (no drop scene), gives an interesting entry into the formation of subjectivity and the cues of intertextuality of the novel. The intertextuality arises from the interface of historical and biographic, the issues of public relevance and personal interest of the author.

Reading *Patakshep* is informed by the larger socio-historical conditions of the time, the decades of mid 1960s and 1970s in India. The armed struggle of the communist party had begun to manifest, and the most articulate variety was the Naxalbari movement⁷. Names of the revolutionary leaders such as Charu Majumdar and Kanu Sanyal had reached the nooks and corners of the peasant society. The ideas and actions of the leaders inspired mobilization and actions of the units of revolutionaries engaged in transformative struggle. On one hand the struggle was aimed at mobilizing the peasants and workers against the oppressive class, on the other it also began to show violent social implications. There was a critical testimonial in Gaur Kishore Ghosh's *Sagina Mahto*, a critique of the communist struggles in the villages of Bengal; it had already made a buzz in the 1960s. Subsequently, in 1975, Mahashweta Devi's *1084's Mother* had earned rave critical accolades for putting across a mother's perspective on the trail and tribulation of a youth in the Naxalbari struggle.

Therefore, in the beginning of the novel *Patakshep*, the publisher observes, "patakshep depicts the scenario of seventh and eighth decades of the twentieth

⁷ For a more detailed account of Naxalbari and Naxalites, see Ray (1992), D'Mello (2018).

century in which many bright youth from cultured families were brainwashed to believe in the political violence and deviated from the education” (2015 b: 1)⁸. The idea of deviant youth thus seems to be at the core of such public perceptions. It may remind a social science student of India that anti-youth perceptions began to form almost alongside the famous students’ movements, be it in Vietnam or in India in various epochs of history. The sociology of youth in the postcolonial societies suffered from the hasty moralistic judgmental perceptions. The power to be always wish to see students and youth getting prepared for the employable workforce rather than indulging in the idea of a better world or transformative politics. This is also lurking in the background of *Patakshep*, which stands out given that the husband, son and his friends, and many other kith and kin seem to join in the literary framework of the author, crisscrossing the literary and biographical.

Lily Ray’s note, however, suggests a more nuanced and complex subjectivity rather than an oversimplistic, moralistic and hastily judgmental stance. The note of the author and the novel solicits an attention to the ‘intertextuality’, i.e. her existential and ontological locations, interrelations of the texts with context and subtexts, and interface of history, biographies, and politics of the time. In this regard, the first and foremost question, before taking a plunge into the textual world created in the novel, is who’s Lily Ray and what’s her intellectual-emotional, literary-biographical situatedness? If we don’t understand this situatedness, we would not get an idea of why is the mother-author writing this tale.

Who’s Lily Ray?

Born in a family of Maithil Brahmins Lily Ray was an ideal compliant daughter. Her father Shri Bhim Nath Jha was a high ranking police officer in the British India, posted in various parts of Bihar. The children grew up in an extended kinship in which nuclear families of the parents located in different parts of Bihar were neatly joint. This meant that children would visit and grow up with and at uncles’ houses too, at Patna, Bhagalpur and Ramnagar in Bihar. Such a kinship added mobility in biography and velocity to experience of growing up. But then, neither mobility nor velocity minimised the societal constraints in which Maithil Brahman families, also known as the *Shrotriyas*, were embroiled (Jha 1974). The conservative social structure of the Maithil Brahmins was detrimental to the education of the girls.

Ray duly noted in her autobiography, “Our family was perceived as modern and progressive in the Maithil society. Yet like any other family in Mithila, ours was illiberal too” (2015 a, 11). In a way, the question, as to who is Lily Ray, leads to another question, who is the *Shrotriyas*? Shrotriyas were the Maithil Brahmins located at the intersection of tradition and modernity, conventional cultural

norms and modernity in the outlook⁹. Also deemed to be the cultural and social elites, the identification of the Shrotriyas is traced to 14th century AD, with the attributes associated with birth in the Maithil Brahmin family, performance of samskara according to the Dharmashastras, and the acquired knowledge of the scriptures. The social manifestation of the Shrotriyas also include a strict adherence to the gotra and moola for forging kinship alliances. Corresponding to the adherence to the three attributes, there is a hierarchy of Maithil Brahmins, in which Shrotriyas is at the top, followed by Yogyas, Vanshas, and Punjibadhas and Jayabaras (Jha 1974). Curiously, the status of women in the hierarchy of Maithil Brahmins is ambiguous, to say the least.

Subsequently, as per the cultural convention of Mithila, with due calculation of gotra-moola a suitable match was arranged, and a young Lily was married off to a student of medical science named Harendra Narayan Ray in 1945. At the time of her marriage she was meagre twelve year old girl. She addresses her husband as *Rai Saheb* in the biography and describes him as a kind person with liberal outlook. As per the practice after wedding the newly wed bride lived with her parents and uncles, continuing with the practice. In Mithila, and likewise in the cultural region around, there is a system of *dwiragaman* after three years of marriage. This is a symbolic reaffirmation of marriage resulting into farewell to the bride. Before the farewell Lily lived in Bhagalpur at her uncle's house, and was enrolled in Mount Carmel school for middle school for three years. This was a very short span of formal schooling in which she began to take interest in English literature and discovered the joy of reading writing. Her husband, Dr Ray visited her, regularly, before *dwiragaman*. In 1948 she moved to the patrilocal family in Purnea district in Bihar upon *dwiragaman*, and became pregnant with her first child. Her husband got a job in Jamshedpur as a doctor in 1951, and along with husband Lily moved to the new location of home. At Jamshedpur, all her neighbours and friends were Bengali with whom she acquired knowledge of Bengali literature while she sang Bengali songs with her friends. This was the short period in which Lily became avid reader of literature in English, Hindi, Maithili and Bengali. The stay and cultural intermingling at Jamshedpur was only for two years, but intensive and fruitful, notes Ray. Her husband got an opportunity to study medicine abroad, and he left, while Lily returned to her parental home with her child in Bhagalpur. Her father had retired from the services and for health benefits, had to take regular visits to the Himalayan hill stations such as Darjeeling, Missouri, Shillong in the north and northeast of India. Lilly Ray was a constant companion on such months long tours and sojourns. She notes the cultural acquisitions and learning she had during these travels.

In the decade of 1950s 'an unknown female writer' started writing stories in Maithili in the then well-known literary periodical *Vaidehi*¹⁰ with a pen name i.e.

⁹ This was a curious case anthropologically discussed by Srinivas O in the instance of the bulldodger driver of Rampur, who practiced black magic at home while operated on the modern machine in his formal profession.

¹⁰ Vaidehi was one of the well-known literary periodicals in Mithila that published and encouraged modern writings in Maithili and were part of Maithili

Kalpana Sharan. This was before Lily was married that she had started writing stories based on the tales she heard from her mother and other women folk. For a long time this was difficult to identify Kalpana Sharan, who was twelve when she wrote her first story, *Rogini* (The Ailing One), followed by her stories such as *Atmhatya* (Suicide), *Aathvarsh* (Eight Years) and *Apman* (Humiliation). Some of these stories also appeared in the Hindi magazine *Maya* too. One of the famous story was *Rangeen Parda* (Colorful Curtain) that came out in 1956. The stories had a post-publication discursive life about which Ray notes with amusement, “there were a lot of guesswork about the identity of the author in Maithili literary public sphere, and then it was not too long to figure out the unknown female writer that was me, with a pseudonym of Kalpana Sharan”. But, why did an author wish to remain incognito? This was when the author was really keen to tell tales from a woman’s perspective. On this, Ray notes, “It was a feeling of embarrassment to be a woman, a writer, and that too of these tales which were too direct and blunt”. Explicitly, this implies the constraints of a female litterateur, socialised in a patriarchal normative order, and in a male dominated literary world.

In 1978 after a long hiatus the author with her real name began to write and publish, which included her novel in two volumes *Marichika* (Mirage) that was bestowed with Sahitya Akademy award in 1982. *Patakshep* was published before the first volume of *Marichika* (1981). In the preface of *Patakshep* Lily Ray notes that her sons prodded her to resume writing and in the middle of loneliness and pathos (about the illness of her son Lallu, aka Rabindra Ray), ‘kalam chalay laagal’ (pen started to move) (p. 17). Everyone would retire after the day’s activities, “my sleep would disappear and I would sit up in the bed and write on the notebook placed on my knees; no matter what, I would write thus; and that’s how the first volume of *Marichika* commenced” (Ibid.: 17).

Looking at the chronology it appears that Lily Ray wrote stories in 1979 that serially appeared in *Mithila Mihir* before she began to write *Marichika*. A critique named Jeevkant commented after reading the stories in *Mithila Mihir*, as noted by the editor of the novel Raman, ‘patakshep is not a tearjerking melodrama; it is the first ever novel written in the background of the naxalite movement; and the stories show that a female litterateur does not only engage with women’s issue, but also can elucidate other issues and squeeze them like lemon” (ibid.: 7)¹¹.

In addition to this, Lily Ray’s preface provides for a painstakingly brief information about her biographic location mostly tethered to the biography of her son, Lallu who had along with two other friends from his college (St.

literary public sphere. For more details, see Jha (2017), and also for a critical sketch of these literary entities in relation with the life of a renowned modern literary figure in Maithili and Hindi Nagarjun, see Viyogi ().

¹¹ Jeevkant’s comment in the issue of *Mithila Mihir* on 5 August 1979 is quoted by the editor of the novel, Raman, in a long footnote.

Stephen's college, University of Delhi) joined the movement in and around Purnea district. In the biographic snapshots of mother and son, the author and the characters of Patakshep, we witness a happily consumed wife of a husband, Harendra Narayan Ray from the district Katihar, a trained doctor of medicine employed with a fertiliser company based in Kanpur. She narrates the experience of getting to know that her son was inclined to an ideology of political transformation. Even though Lallu was doing well in the pre-medical at Hindu college, he began to feel disinterested and decided to drop out. Subsequently, he opted to study English literature at St. Stephen's college. His letters home used to articulate concern about social injustice and inequality, and aspiration to do something for the downtrodden folks. The parents discovered Lallu's leanings towards the left ideology and politics and they tried to counsel the young man about the imperative of fighting against injustice while staying in a regular employment after education. Lallu was in MA at St. Stephen's when he wrote a letter informing that he was joining naxal movement instead of writing exam. The shaken mother, Lilly Ray heard from everyone, 'whoever joins naxal movement, does not return, either dies or serves prison' (ibid.: 13)! But, to a mixed respite of the mother, Lallu returns with ailment, a psychological disorder¹². The son, Lallu Ray subsequently studied sociology, and pursued doctoral research at the Oxford on the ideological question of the Naxalite, which was published as a book in 1980s. Rabindra Ray recounts a fragment of his experience, saying,

"My own concern with the Naxalites dates back to my first graduate year in Delhi in 1969. I began to work with a student organization, the Student-Youth Federation, that was pro-Naxalite. Together with some other students from this group I left Delhi in 1970 to preach Revolution in the north Bihar countryside and remained there for a couple of years under the direction of the North-Bengal North-Bihar Border Region Committee of the CPI (ML). I returned to my parents' home with the disintegration of the Naxalite organisations..." (Ray 1980: 7).

This is too truncated an account to understand much about the author Lilly Ray except a synoptic idea about her personal, maternal, biographic subjectivities experiences, and herself as a witness of her son's ordeal during his participation in the movement. This is broadly the time period of late 1960s and early 1970s alluded to in the preface. It is not farfetched to conjecture the location of Lilly Ray's subjectivity and subject formation in the backdrop of the rise of Naxal movement in India. The naxalite insurgency of 1967 led by the leaders such as Charu Majumdar, Kanu Sanyal and Jangle Santhal is perpetually in the background of the novel Patakshep too. From the villages of Bengal to Siliguri, and from the villages of Mithila to Purnea, the sweep of the movement was strong enough to invite many educated youths to join with a hope to redeem socio-political justice that was central at the commencement of the tryst with destiny in Nehruvian India.

¹² On several occasions Lallu is said to have manifested deep fear psychosis.

At the literary-historical scale, the left inclined progressive writers association had already established the importance of the relationship of the literary authors with societal struggles. In Maithili kavi Nagarjun was writing critical poetry and novels to articulate socio-political concerns in the 1960s and 1970s. The people's struggle had found expressions in many literary works. And alongside, there were attempts to build up a critical and sensitive literary accounts of the movements at grassroot level. A famous work, 'Sagina Mahato' in Bangla by Gaur Kishore Ghosh, a journalist with Anandabazar Patrika had depicted the societal agony in the face of the Naxalite movement in Bengal in 1969. And to top it all, Mahashweta Debi's famous novel 1084's Mother had splashed the socio-political understanding of Naxalism through the eyes of a grieving mother named Sujata who tries to reason with the killing of her son, Brati who took to Naxalism during during his education.

In such a charged backdrop Lilly Ray is a mother-author who deals with the pathos of her son with his friends joining naxalism. Unlike other known literary figures from Mithila and Bengal, Lily Ray seems to be inclined to a style of narration that collapses the distinction of *samvedna* (sympathy) and *vedna* (pathos)¹³. It is that distinct scale of empathy of the author where the personal

¹³ One can build it up in the light of the comment in the footnote 3 and a reading of the novel.

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grief and public woes invariably joins as accomplices in the narration. In another words, the self of the author seems to be indistinguishable from the soul of the narration. The editor Raman puts it more eloquently when he deems this style as 'kathopkathan shaily', literally meaning a conversational style in which dialogue is more significant than monologue. Even a character's soliloquy in the novel is thus, either silent and subdued or articulated in relation with the other dialogic partners. The language, following this kathopkathan, is that of the characters rather than of the author. It amply seems that the author, Lilly Ray, lets the characters and characters only, speak! The author is writing as though she had heard each fragment of the novel from her characters' mouth. And if any literary aesthetics in the prose, it is entirely contextual. The expressions seems to be pure mirror reflection of the expressions heard in the folk contexts. In Raman's observation, it is 'bimbatmak bhasha' which provides more credibility to the narrated prose. For example, a sentence such as 'dhanak sisak sang lokak uttejana seho badhay laagal' (as the bud of paddy grew so did the enthusiasm of the folk).

If one gets into the details of the novel, this is furthermore vindicated that there is a unique genre of mother-author's narrative writing, that could be celebrated while celebrating Lily Ray today.

Patakshep: Not a summary

The novel announces the arrival of Anil, Dilip and Sujit in Kishanganj, then a small town nearly sixty kilometres away from the district towns of Purnea and Katihar. An old party cadre named Shivnarayan comes to receive and usher them into the local world of political activism. Yet another local cadre named Manoj provided the training in the basics of the activities, prescription and proscription for the party cadre. All three boys seem to belong to well to do families in metro cities. Anil, a Punjabi Christian from the then Bombay, Sujit a Bengali Kayasth from Banaras, and Dilip from Brahmin family in Calcutta. They studied together in Delhi and none of them had any idea about rural life. Through the three characters we get to know local cadres, party organisation and meetings, tactics and contestation about ideology and practice, inter alia. All three were expected to immerse themselves in the village society and look like one of the locals else the risk of getting caught by the police. Unlike Dilip and Sujit, it seemed Anil was not able to catch up with the folkways of rural society. Hence, he was made to stick to the cities and work as a cleaner-assistant on a truck that ferried local produce to the city of Calcutta. Other two had to do everything villagers did, from tying dhoti emulating the villagers to till the field with a spade. Dilip hit his own foot with the spade while trying to till the ground. Following the advice of the locals, he urinated on the wound hoping it would heal. But it got worse, and it

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only exacerbated since there was no doctor available in the perimeter of *das kos* (ten miles). Getting him to a doctor was itself an ordeal. It only pre-empted the trial and tribulation that these three characters would undergo in the remaining twelve parts of the novel.

“I returned to my parents’ home with the disintegration of the Naxalite organisations and, after a while, to Delhi. There I associated with a small Trotskyist nucleus attempting to build up organisations of factory workers and the adjoining industrial districts of Ghaziabad and Faridabad. Still within a Marxist revolutionary perspective, I argued then that the Naxalite failure lay in its disregard of the revolutionary potential of the industrial proletariat, and in its Stalinist authoritarian organisation. It was in the course of my association with this group that I deepened my understanding of Marxist theory and began to criticise it. It was then that I first began to attempt an evaluation of the Naxalite revolt...” (Rabindra Ray, p. 7-8).