The Social Science Review A Multidisciplinary Journal. May-June, 2025. Vol. 3. Issue 3. 270-272

Published by: Pather Dabi Educational Trust, (Regn No: IV-1402-00064/2023), Under Govt. of West Bengal, India

The Social Science Review
A Multidisciplinary Journal
ISSN: 2584-0789
(Open-Access, Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Bi-Monthly, International e-Journal)
Homepage: www.tssreview.in

DISCLOSING THE PARTICULARS OF RAPE: ILA MITRA'S DEFIANCE AGAINST HEGEMONY

Suranjan Mondal

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Author Details:
Ph.D. Research Scholar,
Department of Political Science,
The University of Burdwan,
West Bengal, India

Corresponding Author:
Suranjan Mondal

DOI:
https://doi.org/10.70096/tssr.250303043

Abstract

In the history of Tebhaga Movement, Ila Mitra is a prominent figure. Like a true leader, she has planned and initiated an armed rebellion against the tyrannical landlords. She is arrested and gang-raped inside the police station. But as a brave warrior, she fights back to normal life. Her story does not end here. Breaking the hegemony, she narrates the minute details of her rape publicly and discloses how the state exercises violence upon its subjects to mute rebellions. Despite being a rape victim, she denies to feel ashamed and it stands in sharp contrast to the society's "structure of feeling". This article puts focus on her struggle and her radical defiance against male hegemony.

Keywords: *Rape, hegemony, violence, shame, Repressive State Apparatus, Rape Trauma Syndrome, Structure of Feeling*

Ila Mitra is known for her revolutionary spirit and unfathomable courage. She is born on 18th October 1925 in Kolkata. She begins her political career when she was a student of Bethune College. She is associated with radical left politics. She is the first Bengali woman to get an Olympic call. She has led the Tebhaga movement with arms and as a result, is gang-raped and tortured inhumanly inside the Police Station. In her testimony, we find her poignant depiction of how brutally she is raped. Her 'woman' body witnesses the vulnerability of a woman in a society that never tolerates woman autonomy. She is a leader and has fought alone against all oddities.

She is arrested on 7th January, 1950 from Rohanpur and threatened to be naked if she hides any information. She denies and is kept naked inside the prison cell. They opine that 'Pakistani injection' process is only appropriate for such a heinous woman like her. She is denied to be given any food, even water. Hot boiled eggs are put into her vagina, she loses her conscience, loses control over her resilience. An iron nail is embedded into her heal. She is gang-raped in the dark hours of the night. Susan Brownmiller's book, *Against our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* (1975), contends that all rape is an exercise in power and that the function of rape is "nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear" (Brownmiller,15).

The Tebhaga Movement became an anti-state movement and this was essentially an armed struggle by the peasants. After the partition of 1947, the socio-political condition of the newly emerged nation states of independent India and Pakistan infuriate the peasants and the lower class workers. They raise the slogan "ye azaadi jhooti hain". The newly emerged nation states of Pakistan and India with the help of blatant violence try to subdue this armed revolution. The people in power that time know it very well that if the lower castes and tribal peasants liberate themselves from the age-old shackles of oppression, this uprising would proceed further and eventually distort the prevailing power structure. They are, then, in need to use Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) in order to mute the voices of those revolutionaries. In this context, we may refer to Louis Althusser's idea of RSA as discussed in his well known 1970 essay "*Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*".

Althusser defines RSA as a tool to exercise power. It consists of the judiciary, the prison system, armed forces like the army and the police and so on. They employ physical and psychological violence in order to establish autonomy over their subjects. During the Tebhaga Movement, the armed forces of the state attempt to dominate the rebels by means of repression and coercion. The soldiers blaze twelve villages, have arrested the peasants unlawfully. More than 50 peasants have died in jail due to unimaginable and horrifying torture. Apart from it, Ila Mitra's leadership of the santhals in Nachole during the movement, her arrest and her rape inside the prison exemplify how the state uses RSA to enforce their power and hegemony. She becomes a victim of RSA. Her body becomes a platform through which the state's armed forces exhibit their power. They want to control her revolting spirit by robbing her of her honour. As Kavita Panjabi states in her article "*Otiter Jed or Times of Revolution: Ila Mitra, the Santals and Tebhaga Movement*", "Ila Mitra's body became the ground for the newly emergent nation state's confrontation with

multiple forces, communist, Santal and Hindu, all of which extended across the borders of the nation and were perceived simultaneously as an internal as well as an external threat to its "integrity"".

She narrates this "lived experience" of hers. It goes against the society's "structure of feeling". We expect a woman to be naïve and docile. For a rape victim, the expectation is even higher. A rape victim feels ashamed to speak publicly. The society alienates her for being robbed of her honour. Patriarchy puts the honour of a woman in her vagina. Rape snatches it away and leaves a woman at the most distressful situation. Ila Mitra, the brave heart of Nachole who organizes the indigenous people against the landlords is tortured repeatedly inside the police station for not disclosing the information about her fellow comrades. She is tortured as she is a woman, a hindu, a communist and above all she leads the rebellion with arms. After four days of torture at Nachole, she is brought to Nababganj.

Ila Mitra's denial of this hegemonic idea makes her stand apart in the course of history. She describes the very process of her being raped by men in power and duty. It reminded us of Mahasweta Devi's 'Draupadi'[1]. The story explores themes of gendered violence, state oppression, and the defiance of marginalized individuals against patriarchal structures. Dopdi's act of refusal to cover her body after the assault becomes a powerful symbol of resistance. "What's the use of clothes? You can strip me, but how can you clothe me again?", so speaks Dopdi. At the end of the story, the Senanayak (the army officer) stands before naked Dopdi in a state of terrified paralysis usually associated with the victim. In his book *Seeing Like a State,* James C. Scott demonstrates how modern states assert power over their subjects by attempting to make them legible in the codes of the state. Devi's Senanayak may be similarly understood as the eager agent of the state's panoptical desires. Likewise those who rape Ila Mitra serve the same purpose.

In the Second Sex (1949), Simon de Beauvoir claims that men mystify a woman's body. Mystification and stereotyping makes patriarchy sustainable. She argues that women in most cases accept these stereotypes and unconsciously initiate their own subordination. Ila Mitra challenges this stereotype and depict her experience publicly. This does not approve society's "structutre of feeling". She refuses the hegemonic script of 'shame' that the wounds of sexual violence are meant to evoke.

Ila Mitra's narration opposes this prevailing structure of feeling by creating an alternative culture, an alternative thought. She expresses her strong disagreement and fights against male hegemony. In his book *Marxism and Literature*, Raymond Williams elucidates the concept of "structure of feeling". He claims people think, feel and respond in certain pre-designed structures. Our socio-cultural orientation shapes these structures. They capture the spirit of a specific period, of a specific society. This "structure of feeling" is not just about individual feeling, but also about how these feelings are formed in some specific historical and social contexts. The feeling we often associate rape with is 'shame'. A rape victim is treated as a social stigma- isolated from the main stream. In many cases, they are even convicted for being raped. They live in a state of persistent and negative emotions. By accusing the victim, others can see the victim as different from themselves. Negative reactions may thereby serve a silencing function. Our society politicizes that brutal act and responds in this pre-determined structure. But when Ila Mitra narrates her rape-experience herself, she negotiates with that "structure of feeling" carefully nurtured by our society. She does not feel ashamed to boldly declare what she has endured. While disclosing the minute detail of her pain and suffering, she tears apart our collective expectation. Her undaunted spirit allows her to fight against all societal adversities. She is called the 'Rani Ma' of Nachole and like a true queen she never surrenders before her enemies. Her fierce determination makes her a unique figure during the course of the Tebhaga Movement. The 'Rani' in her name itself is symbolic of her unquestionable leadership quality and indomitable courage.

Ila Mitra's rape leaves a far-fetched impact upon her life, upon her mind. If we discuss it with the aid of the study of human psychology, we may refer to Rape Trauma Syndrome. In his theory of Rape Trauma Syndrome (RTS), sociologist Lynda Lytle Holmstrom claims that rape survivors experience physical, emotional, cognitive and interpersonal change. RTS identifies three stages of psychological trauma a rape survivor goes through: the acute stage, the outer adjustment stage and the renormalization stage. In the first stage the victim faces dulled sensory and memory functions. Paralyzing anxiety along with pronounced internal tremor troubles the victim. Ila Mitra suffers all these patiently. She is physically shattered but not mentally. Her bodily functions are disrupted but she does not yield. She had high fever. Her body was blood-stained. Her private parts bore the sign of stamping by boots. In the second stage i.e. outer adjustment stage, as Holmstrom claims, the survivors endeavour to resume their normal lifestyle. However, they cannot fully erase out their internal turmoil. Ila Mitra, after surviving the hell-like brutality is under treatment. In the third stage, during renormalization, survivors treat rape as a normal occurrence in their life and therefore the rape no longer remains at the centre of their focus. Negative feelings vanish and they no longer feel ashamed. This stage becomes the most ravishing for Ila Mitra. She not only overcomes her trauma but also fights back to normal life. She is appointed as a professor of Bengali at City College in Kolkata. She is elected to the West Bengal Legislative Assembly for Maniktala constituency during 1962–1971 and 1972–1977. Her struggle inspire thousands of Indian women to articulate their sufferings and to break the boundaries put around.

Acknowledgment: No
Author's Contribution: *Suranjan Mondal*: Data Collection, Literature Review, Methodology, Analysis, Drafting, Referencing
Funding: No
Declaration: Not Applicable
Competing Interest: No

References

1. Althusser, Louis. (1972). ― Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses‖ in Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays. Monthly Review Press.
2. Beauvoir, Simone De. *The Second Sex*. Vintage Classic, 2015.
3. Brownmiller, Susan. *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*. Penguin, 1975.
4. Devi, Mahasweta. "Draupadi." *Breast Stories*, 1997.
5. Holmstrom, Lynda Lytle, and Ann Wolbert Burgess. *The Victim of Rape: Institutional Reactions*. Routledge, 2017.
6. Panjabi, Kavita. "Otiter Jed or Times of Revolution: Ila Mitra, the Santals and Tebhaga Movement." *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 33, 14 Aug. 2010.
7. Scott, James C. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Filed*. Yale University Press, 1998.
8. Williams, Raymond L. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford Univ. Press, 2009.

Endnote

[1] "Draupadi" by Mahasweta Devi was first published in Bengali as a short story in 1978. It later appeared in her collection of short political narratives, "Agnigarbha" (Womb of Fire) in 1981. An English translation by Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak was published in the journal "Critical Inquiry" in 1981 and later included in her collection "Breast Stories" in 1997.

Publisher's Note
The Social Science Review A Multidisciplinary Journal remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published data, map and institutional affiliations.

©The Author(s) 2025. Open Access.
This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/