



**NMML
OCCASIONAL PAPER**

HISTORY AND SOCIETY

**New Series
63**

***Salwa Judum*
Another View**

Himanshu Roy

Fellow, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library



**Nehru Memorial Museum and Library
2014**

NMML Occasional Paper



© Himanshu Roy, 2014

All rights reserved. No portion of the contents may be reproduced in any form without the written permission of the author. The findings, interpretations, and conclusions expressed herein are those of the author and do not reflect the opinion of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library Society, in whole or part thereof.

Published by

Nehru Memorial Museum and Library
Teen Murti House
New Delhi-110011

e-mail : ddnehrumemorial@gmail.com

ISBN : 978-93-83650-46-0

Price Rs. 100/-; US \$ 10

Page setting & Printed by : A.D. Print Studio, 1749 B/6, Govind Puri
Extn. Kalkaji, New Delhi - 110019. E-mail : studio.adprint@gmail.com

NMML Occasional Paper



Salwa Judum Another View*

Himanshu Roy

Introduction

This paper is an analysis of tribal peasant movement popularly known as *Salwa Judum* that arose against the specific agenda of the Communist Party of India (Maoist)¹ in its full intensity in 2005 in the sub-region of Bastar (*baanstari*, a Halbi word meaning the bed of or the land of bamboos) in Chattisgarh. The movement began since January across different villages of non-Abujhmaad (the unknown hills of Madia/Koya tribe) region that initially galvanized approximately 20,000 tribals. It was spontaneous and non-political.² It was unique as the movement was against a ‘revolutionary’ party, the Maoist, and not the state or the zamindari system as most peasant movements in rural India were in the past. Its build-up was the culmination of suppressed anger of the tribals that had developed over the decades against the Party. This new movement was different.

The paper critically analyses the Maoist response against this movement, of their programmes and praxis, their expansion in Bastar and of the state’s policies towards tribes and of their impact, including that of judicial directives, and of civil society’s response towards the state and Maoist. It concludes that the tribes of Bastar need rapid development of infrastructure where they are also a part of the dialogue process. Their insular existence is neither feasible nor desirable. It has resulted in conflict, backwardness, migration and sufferings. It must change for the better.

* Lecture delivered at the Nehru Memorial Museum and the Library, New Delhi, 10 December 2013.

The lack of development in Bastar needs to be addressed academically. What exists is media reports and travelogues by writers (for example, Navlakha, 2012; Choudhary, 2012; Sundar, 2007) who are ideologically inclined towards Maoists as acknowledged in their works. In the ensuing paragraphs, the author intends to posit his work holistically, critically and contextually.

I

Contrary Interpretations

Salwa Judum, if interpreted as a Gondi metaphor, or as one word, which it is, means rallying/bonding together. But if it is broken into two words, *Salwa* and *Judum*,³ the meaning changes; it becomes purification hunt, ghost busting (*bhoot bhagana*), etc. As, for example, Jawaharlal is a name in Hindi; but usually, it is broken into two words, Jawahar and Lal and then abbreviated separately as J.L. in English.⁴ This distorts the Hindi name. In a similar way, the meaning of *Salwa Judum* was distorted deliberately to suit an ideological design.

The phenomenon of *Salwa Judum* has been interpreted differently by the civil society which can be primarily categorized into two: “...बस्तर के दो चेहरे हो गए हैं। एक चेहरा जो अनकहा है और दूसरा जिस पर एक बस्तरिया कहावत ही सही बैठती है—कावरा कोल्हार (काक-कोलाहल)⁵”

The first, the unsaid voice is the local, vernacular Chattisgarhi opinion of the civil society which is feeble and non-assertive, and which primarily blames the Maoist for its emergence. “...सलवा जुडूम स्वतः स्फूर्त हो अथवा प्रायोजित इसका प्रादुर्भाव भारतीय कम्युनिष्ट पार्टी (माओवादी) के गठन के बाद अपने आधार क्षेत्र को विस्तार देने की कोशिशों के साथ-साथ हुआ है।”⁶

The second is the English, urban, non-Chattisgarhi but vocal ideological formulation that asserts that the *Salwa Judum* is “an anti-Naxalite counter-insurgency campaign ... in which the state has descended to private vigilantism to counter it”.⁷ The first argues that



the atrocities have been committed by both the sides. “...नृशंस हत्या और बलात्कार दोनों ही पक्षों की सत्यता थी”¹⁸

The second articulates that it is the state that created Salwa Judum, armed them and launched them against the local tribals resisting the bourgeois interests. “Arming sections of local people comprising disgruntled elements of the once dominating tribal elite, local non-tribal contractors and business persons and extreme right wing Hindutva cadres was a conscious policy decision of the government which was passed off as people’s resistance”.⁹ The first argues that “...ये विभाजन अमीरों और गरीबों के बीच नहीं बल्कि गरीब और गरीब के बीच हुआ था”¹⁰ This had enraged a large section of the tribals and who sacrificed themselves fighting against the Maoists. “...आदिवासियों के बड़े धड़े (ने) अपनी जान और आजीविका की कीमत पर इसके लिए कुर्बानियाँ भी दी हैं।”¹¹

It alleges that the Maoist deliberately mixes up the issues of one region/sub-region with the others to hide its own atrocities against the tribals. The Maoist does not state, for example, that in the south Bastar region where the Salwa Judum emerged, there was/is no tribal land acquisition by the state or by the business for either mining or for industries in the recent years. Hence, the question of tribal protest against land acquisition did not arise. In fact, the state does not exist in Abujhmaad; and in the non-Abujhmaad sub-region its existence is confined to urban/administrative centres. In the rural hinterland, its presence is negligible. Development is more in the central region of Chattisgarh; but again it is a non-tribal area. In the central Bastar region where the Tatas signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for investment in 2005, the Maoist began to organize protests and linked it to the emergence of Salwa Judum which was coincidental, and not planned, and which erupted far away from it, in south Bastar, and against the Maoist. Moreover, the three different sub-regions of Bastar are culturally and demographically different as it is a huge territory—equal/larger than some of the states of India. And Bastar, to reiterate, is not the entire Chattisgarh—only the southern part of it.

The movement was launched in 2005 and remained faceless initially. Subsequently it was led by Kalma Masa alias Mahendra Karma, a local Gond and a Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) who was earlier with the Communist Party of India (CPI) and later joined the Congress. It was also supported by the state and its political appendages. A small fraction of the movement's activists (approximately 3,000) was recruited in the auxiliary police of Chattisgarh under the 1860 Police Act to protect them from the Maoist as well as assist the movement.¹² The outside political support brought in new social dynamics. The number of rebel participants swelled over to 80,000 and more within a short span as the fear of Maoist retribution declined. Consequently, the elements among them, egged on by the local administration to fight the Maoist indulged into wanton killings and pillage, mostly in retaliation and revenge for similar acts of the Maoists. A few, particularly tribal leaders, also indulged in private caprice. The civil society—the activists, the journalists, the academics—mainly urban-centric and writing in English, focused on the critique of the state, particularly against the local BJP government in Chattisgarh. Nandini Sundar went as far as to state that "... the BJP, in particular, has a history of justifying violence by displacing it onto 'people'—whether the destruction of the Babri Masjid, the action–reaction theory of the Gujarat genocide, or now the *Salwa Judum*".¹³ Such critics have rarely developed a rigorous critique of the Maoists. They have also chosen not to support the movement of the tribals against the Maoists. In fact, it never recognized this movement, its spontaneity and independence; rather derided it, termed this movement as 'government sponsored' to counter the Maoist, to create intra-tribal conflict. In brief, it was partisan. Nandini Sundar, for example, acknowledged that she "was quite ready to put (her) research at the service of the struggling masses represented by the Naxalites".¹⁴ Gautam Navlakha similarly wrote that "there is an ideological affinity which makes me positively inclined towards popular movements, in particular to the resistance led by the Maoists ... (and) I have no reluctance in saying that for me the legitimacy of the Maoist armed struggle is not an issue".¹⁵

Thus, these two antagonistic interpretations need to be understood in their topographical, social, political and global context.



II

Social Backdrop

Structurally, Bastar has two kinds of social composition: tribes and castes. Among the tribes are Halbas, Bhatra, Parja-Dhurwas, Dorlas, Marias (Abujh, Dandami and Murias) Ghotul, Jhoria and Raja. Mundas, Saoras and Gadabas, which are mainly in Jharkhand, Odisha and Bengal have a small presence in Bastar. They are primarily agriculturalists and old residents. Among the castes are Brahmins, Kayasthas, Rohillas (traders), Maharas, Pankas and Gadbas (weavers), Kallars and Sundhis (distillers), Rauts (cowherds), Kumhars (potters), Telis (oil pressers), Kewats (sailors), Dhakads, Panaras, Marars, Ghasias (brass workers, musicians), etc.¹⁶ Some of the castes such as Mahara, Raut, Dhakad and Panka are historically alike the tribes. But the government recognizes them as castes due to their migration and professional occupation. Their language is Halbi. They had migrated from Odisha, Maharashtra, and Uttar Pradesh centuries ago. Halbi is the *lingua franca* of the different tribes. Gondi, in different dialects, is spoken by Maria, Muria, Dorla and Dhurwas. Their dialects, depending on their geographical habitats, hamper their inner and inter-tribal communication. Their language/dialects as well as social structure is greatly influenced by Telugu and Marathi.

Both, the tribes and the castes, have migrated from the regions and sub-regions into Bastar; and their migration and settlements have partially altered their culture, nature and functioning as per the new social and topographical context. A case study is of the Telugu-speaking Dorla tribe which had settled in Telangana near south Bastar in the 1940s. Due to an epidemic, its population dwindled and it migrated to other places and in its place, the Gondi-speaking Koya tribe moved in from north Bastar. The Koyas are adventurous and are now with the Maoist while the Dorlas, more educated, have settled down in life and are with Salwa Judum.¹⁷

It is interesting to note that the names of the tribes and of their sub-divisions reflect the topography of their habitats, the Abujh Madia, Bison Horn Madia, Dandami Madia reflect their habitats with each

having its own separate dialect despite being a Madia and a Gondi. And each one's dialect cannot be understood by the other. Gondi is not a language but a dialect.

Each caste/tribe or its sub-division is endogamous. Marriage and social intercourse are within the castes/tribes and within sub-divisions. Marriages are regulated by their customary laws. Inheritance, however, is now transmitted as per the civil laws, the division of the property is also regulated by it which has become patriarchal with the passage of time. Earlier, it was determined by the customary laws which were more egalitarian, if not matriarchal. The development in Bastar, after the killing of its ex-monarch in 1966, took a new turn. The old, symbiotic relationship of the monarch and the tribals which had provided political leadership to the tribals declined and so did trust. But it had not perpetuated its feudal replica among the tribals in the hinterland who were ironically, by and large, free from it. The insulated, forest-dependent subsistence economy provided them the autonomy. The government failed to substitute this vacuum. And in its place, it was partially replaced by the Maoist since the 1990s. In the meantime, different tribes/castes developed differently. A few of them became more literate and accepted modern life; the others remained slow in their social mobility and intercourse.

Bastar as part of Madhya Pradesh had a peripheral and largely insulated existence, far from development, despite being part of a capitalist framework. The impact of the Nehruvian-Elvin tribal policy—to let the tribals remain insulated lest they join the capitalist development voluntarily, was applied to Bastar as well, as the North-East. There was slow penetration of the state, limited capital investment despite the areas being exposed to electoral politics. The entry of the Naxal in 1980 from Andhra Pradesh began to change the political contours of Bastar. Their resistance to petty exploitation of the tribals by the local contractors, shopkeepers and petty proprietors, or the misconduct of the state personnel facilitated their expansion. The impact of the Naxals on the tribals was that they created awareness among a section of the tribals and simultaneously galvanized them in a few pockets. As the Naxals spread, they armed themselves and became more militant, resisting state intervention in the region. It simultaneously initiated



technological, educational, cultural and structural changes in their agriculture, social relations, health care, irrigation, and animal husbandry. They brought in radical land reforms and tried to restructure the tribal social relations. The party organization began to regulate their functioning. This turned out to be cataclysmic for the Naxals from within and without that triggered not only substantive coercive intervention of the state but also led to local tribals opposing them.

Carved out of a part of Madhya Pradesh in 2000, Chattisgarh has three regions: north, central and south. The north, dominated by the Baiga tribe, and the south by the Gond, are hilly, rural and backward regions while the central plain region is dominated by the non-tribal population. This region is also the most urbanized and industrialized among the three with cities like Bhillai and Raipur. The south, the contemporary Bastar division, has two sub-regions: Abujhmaad and the rest, merging with the wider region of Dandakaranaya (the forest of Dandak), comprising parts of Odisha, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra with influence of their sub-regional Telugu and Marathi cultures and histories. This region with approximately 70 per cent of Gond population has a history of rebellion. Abujhmaad is the most backward sub-region and is completely dominated by the guerrilla base of the Maoist. It is a no-conflict zone. Non-Abujhmaad sub-regions are the conflict zones where the guerrillas are in conflict, against the state or against the non-conforming tribals, for creating an area of influence and dominance. In the 1970s the local administration had withdrawn itself from the Abujhmaad and from all the development works to let the tribals live their lives.¹⁸ It was such an isolated area that the cadres of the People's War entered in mid-1980 in search of a hideout closer to Telangana. In 2004, Abujhmaad saved these cadres from Andhra police's greyhounds, and still shelters them.

III

State

The region beyond the south of Dhamtari up to Andhra Pradesh–Odisha–Jharkhand borders constitutes Bastar with approximately 40,000 sq. km. of territory. It has 69 per cent tribal population of

diverse types but predominantly of Gond with their different dialects. Ninety-eight per cent of them are rural, dependent on primitive agriculture and forest for their livelihood. It was at the periphery of development till the formation of Chattisgarh in 2000. The state deliberately kept this region insulated, particularly south Bastar (the Abujhmaad region) as a 'tribal park'. There has been no complete census of the villages in Abujhmaad. As a result, the number of villages, their population, local topography, habitats, application of governmental schemes are unknown to the administration. But private appropriation of the forest resources continued recklessly. Development of modern agriculture is negligible as is access to markets to sell the produce. The acreage of cultivable land is meagre. The production of vegetables, milk and fruits is also negligible.

Even in other parts of Bastar, development was negligible. The only pocket where development was visible was at Bailadila with a public sector undertaking. The tragedy was that despite this underdevelopment, the tribals did not enjoy the benefits of Schedule VI and V. There was no codification and application of their tribal customary rights neither did they have any political administrative autonomous councils to govern themselves in their local affairs. Even the tribals' rights under the Forest Rights Act 2006 were denied.¹⁹ The Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act 1996 (PESA, 1996) was not honestly applied in this region. The alienation of land or the failure to restore the land back to the tribals continued unabated. The provision of consultation was circumvented. The Forest Conservation Act (1980) was repeatedly flouted and the Forest Action Committee became all powerful. They were thus neither granted their traditional rights nor were they provided with the benefits of technological developments in agriculture, industries, infrastructure, health and education. They remained mired in hunger and disease, the development of infrastructure particularly of road construction after 2000 along with the expansion of public distribution system, notwithstanding. The average life and body mass of the tribals remain 50 years and 50 kgs, respectively.

Of course, these laws were not a complete failure. Appellate authorities, Green Tribunals, Green Benches have been created in recent



years as mechanisms to check the flouting of the laws—which have partly restored the sanctity of these laws. Public Interest Litigation (PIL) has been another tool to protect the interests of the tribals or tribal-specific laws and programmes have been created for tribal development. But these measures only had a gradual, and partial impact on tribal development. By and large, they remained backward.

The critique of the state in general by the Left, thus, is partially justified. But their time-frame does not travel back to the Nehruvian policy of insulating the tribes which was substantively responsible for their backwardness. It did not provide them the legal benefit of Schedule VI or V. The debate is rather focussed on the present state government in Chattisgarh (2003–present) which is actually not responsible for the past policies of the state post-1947.

The retreat of the state from Bastar, even from routine administration since the late 1960s till 2000, was intended to preserve the pristine culture of the tribal society. It was intended to filter, if not completely stop, the impact of the outside forces on it to enable the Scheduled Tribes to preserve their habitat and social structure which was democratic and humane, and preserve their habitations. The government overlooked the fact that the market through its own autonomous functioning will gradually penetrate the tribal society which it did and left its destructive and exploitative imprint on it.²⁰ The state also failed to realize that there was a power void which had to be filled inevitably filled. The withdrawal of the state was filled in by the Naxals which turned the tribes, at least a section of them, against the state. The Naxals simultaneously changed the inner structure of the tribal society with land reforms and with the replacement of the panchayat by the revolutionary people's committees.

IV

Maoist

In June last week—first week of July 1980, two squads of the CPI (M–L) Kranti, later on renamed as People's War, comprising of seven members each, entered Bastar from Andhra to survey the 'rear areas' for the Party for safe hideouts. Since then, in the next three and half

decades the Party has not only renamed itself, CPI (Maoist), but has also expanded in number and in new areas, has witnessed the formation of a new state, Chattisgarh, has quelled the inner rebellions of the tribals, and has resisted the counter insurgency measures of the state. Moreover, it has developed a 'base area', Abujhmaad, and has formed People's Liberation Guerrilla Army which has spread out in entire Dandakaranaya comprising parts of Odisha, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra and Chattisgarh, totalling 100,000 sq. km. Today, one-third of the Party cadre is armed. Forty per cent of them are women. Five per cent of the arms is purchased, 15 per cent is looted and 80 per cent is manufactured by the Party. Three thousand and five hundred cadres are in military uniforms. Four lakh rupees are spent on each company in a year and Rs 450 are spent in a month on each armed cadre for their basic necessities. The annual budget of the Party is approximately 12 crores (approx. 3 years ago).²¹

The process of arming the Party in Bastar had begun in 1981 when there were 35 armed cadres from five *dalams*. Today, in each company there are 75 members and in each platoon there are twenty-five. The base area is Abujhmaad, a block with 480 villages and 120 panchayats in Narayanpur district spread over an area of 4,000 sq. km. It is here that the comrades return to the safety of their *sanghams*, forests and hills when the state hunts for them; and in 2004 it rescued them from total elimination in Andhra. In the same year, they formed CPI (Maoist) after merging with the MCC. Majority of their Party cadres are of Koya tribe and are women. In the process of their expansion since then (2004) and for their own safety, they have killed more than 200 informers and 1,200 class enemies.²²

The Maoist continues to represent the ideological and programmatic praxis of the past which the Naxals since 1967 have been applying in their policies. One of them, for example, is the land to the tillers which still remains in vogue since the beginning of the communist movement in India. It is also a part of a New Democratic revolution which the Maoist in Bastar actuated after 1980. The contradiction for them was between the 'rich tribal land owners and the masses' which was resolved through the distribution of private lands, its produce and animals to the landless tribal peasantry. As the guerrilla zone expanded, so did the re-distribution programme. By 2005, resentment against



the Party reached explosive levels. The tribals whose lands were seized were seething with anger. It was Salwa Judum against the Maoist. The tribals had protested earlier as well, in 1987, 1991 and again in 1996. But these rebellions were quelled as the number of the protesters was small and the killings of their key leaders subdued their movement temporarily. But the 2005 movement was unprecedented and catapulted Bastar and the Maoist to the national limelight and brought in large scale counter insurgency measures by the state—from military to paramilitary forces—against the Maoist.

The Peoples' War, and now the Maoists, are partially different from the Naxals in their practising ideas. The struggle to create a base and a guerrilla zone has partly succeeded and the intention now is to expand through the entire Dandakaranaya zone with its People's Liberation Army and the Janatana Sarkar, the people's government. The idea is to create a system, even in embryonic form, in which people directly participate in the making of their own lives.²³ The Revolutionary Peoples' Committees, the cadres of the Guerrilla Army are all engaged in multi-tasking, from agricultural production to education, and to engage the local masses to decide their own destiny. The Party has learnt a lesson from the past when it failed to create such organs, base areas and Janatana Sarkars. Besides these, the Party has never quit the path of armed struggle as the different functions of the CPI (M-L) did. The factions which adopted/returned to the forms of political-parliamentary struggle never returned to the revolutionary armed struggle and sunk forever in the cesspool of bourgeois politics.

The Party, however, has failed to revise its land reforms programmes particularly in Bastar where the average landholding in the tribal peasant family is 2.5 acre approximately with negligible irrigation and technological inputs. Till a decade back, the tribals used to practise jhum cultivation with meagre output. There was no zamindari system either. Yet the Maoist carried the hangover from Telangana and enacted land distribution in Bastar including the division of agricultural produce and of animals like pigs, hens, etc. It still believes that there is a tribal elite with large land ownership and social dominance who needs to be overthrown. In the process, it antagonized a large population of tribal society who eked out their living miserably. It failed to analyse that in

the absence of modern technology in agricultural cultivation and in other allied activities and the large dependence of masses on forest produce and on government's Public Distribution System, the entire tribal population is deprived of material comfort. What acquired importance was the relative deprivation of a section of masses, which became the alibi for the application of a preconceived programmatic agenda. The consequence of it was disastrous for the tribal population. It was they who ultimately lost out in the battle between the Maoist and the state.

V

Salwa Judum

This tribal peasant movement against the Maoist began around January 2005 in south Bastar and exploded after June. In the next one year it spread to several villages, one after another. It aimed to reverse the unviable land reforms, the distribution of grains and cattle, the intrusion of the Party in the functioning of the village panchayat and the coercive behaviour of the cadres towards the dissenting voices in the villages. The tribal peasants were furious to see that their meagre landholdings/grains/cattle, insufficient for their own living, were being distributed among their fellow villagers who were conceived to be relatively more deprived by the Revolutionary Peoples' Committees. If they protested against this arbitrary re-distribution they were ostracized, beaten or killed. Their protest was not to protect their class privileges. In fact, there is no class distinction, untouchability, or gender discrimination as there is no feudal or bourgeois property relations and privileges, neither do its members possess any private *latifundia*. These tribals are substantively dependent on the forest for their survival. In this primitive subsistence economy surplus extraction was non-existent. Yet, the Maoist created a class, exploitative and reactionary in nature, personified it in Mahendra Karma who had become rank and file an outsider, and thrust upon him the traditional village leadership. Essentially a very tiny cultural section in villages bore the brunt of the Maoist 'revolution'. The revolution, thus, distributed the deprivation and created a new irreconcilable contradiction in the tribal society. The discontent was subsequently used by different governmental agencies, political parties and leaders



for their own purposes. One important agenda was to liquidate or sustain the Maoist. For, its liquidation would have benefitted the rebels as that would have provided them opportunities to seize back their lands. Small business would also benefit as they would no longer be forced to pay 'tax' to the Maoist in its zone. Contrarily, sustaining the Maoist benefits the government agencies, parties, and leaders in receiving the largesse to checkmate the Maoist threat. The Maoist, on the other hand, had succeeded in neutralizing the movement through terror and partial rectification of its organizational functioning. Consequently, by the end of 2006, the movement had withered away. In the meantime, thanks to the rebels, the police were able to enter the villages with which they were not even familiar and catapulted the counter insurgency measures which was, till then, negligible and ineffective in Chattisgarh.

Tribal anger against the Maoist began to build up after 1987 when the Party initiated land reforms amidst a population living on subsistence economy premised on the combination of primitive agriculture, jhum cultivation and forest resources. The Party was able to suppress the rebellions as it was localized and uncoordinated. Besides, the region was a distant periphery of Madhya Pradesh. By 2005, the impact of the land reforms had widened to vast areas and was affecting a very large population. Apart from it, in the new state of Chattisgarh, the power-centre was not very far away from the scene of rebellion, and with BJP at the helm of the government, state action against the Maoist was inevitable. The rebellion, for which the Party was not ready, provided the perfect alibi for the government to eliminate the Maoist. The Maoist recovered fast from the rebellion and the counter insurgency measures which it had not visualized to emerge at such a scale. What may damage the Maoist in the coming years is the raging conflict with the state, intra- and inter-tribal conflict and inner rebellions which have already led to large-scale migration out of Bastar and which may escalate further, emptying out the native tribal population of Bastar.

It is, however, also interesting to note that the migration after the Salwa Judum conflict has created a new space for the other tribes to move to the empty villages of Bastar from outside. This may create new inner tribal conflict or it may become a new cadre of the Maoist

as the land reforms provided the best of committed cadres of the Koya tribe. It was far different from the days before 1987 when the primary contradiction was between the state and the tribals. In the next two decades, as the Party unfolded the application of its preconceived programmes new contradictions developed between the Party and the tribals, among the tribals and between the Party and the state machinery, which was earlier dormant in Madhya Pradesh. The state which in the past had negligible intelligence information to counter the Maoist seized this opportunity to strike back and used subversive methods to neutralize them. The members of the Salwa Judum, the victims of the Maoist's brutality and deprivation, paid them back when the opportunity came and it happened after June 2005 when the state and the political parties began to actively support them for their own interests. The expanding support base of Salwa Judum across the villages in south Bastar and the active backing of the state provided them the courage to take revenge. It was the reflection of their sufferings, suppressed for years under the brutal dominance of the Maoist.

The public face of this movement, Kalma Masa alias Mahendra Karma had joined the movement months after June 2005, months after it had begun. His participation and mobilization had rapidly expanded the support base of Salwa Judum and provided them the courage to retaliate. Till then, by and large, the movement was defensive and peaceful. The massive vote for Congress in Bastar in the Legislative Assembly election in December 2013, after the killing of Mahendra Karma by the Maoist, reflects the sympathy and popular support for him among the tribals.

VI

Critique

It has been alleged that Salwa Judum was 'an armed civilian vigilante group' whose activities were actively promoted by 'the state of Chattisgarh ... exacerbating the ongoing struggle' between the 'armed Maoist/Naxalite insurgency offensives launched by the government of Chattisgarh ... leading to further widespread violation of human rights'.²⁴ This was the charge levelled against Salwa Judum and government of Chattisgarh by Nandini Sundar, Ramchandra Guha

and E.A.S. Sarma in a PIL placed before the Supreme Court in 2007. The Supreme Court in its order delivered in 2011 prohibited the state of Chattisgarh from using Special Police Officers (SPOs) against the Maoists/Naxalite and their appointments ‘to perform any of the duties of regular police officers, other than those specified in Section 23(1) (h) and Section 23(1)(i) of Chattisgarh Police Act, 2007 to be unconstitutional’.²⁵ It also directed the state of Chattisgarh to prevent the operation of any group including but not limited to Salwa Judum and Koya commandos that in any manner or form seek to take law into private hands, act unconstitutionally or otherwise violate the human rights of any person’.²⁶

The judgement outlined two obvious points: First, it never banned the ‘armed civilian vigilante group’, the Salwa Judum, as it was not an organization or a post like the SPOs. It was a voluntary movement of tribal peasants against the Maoist’s specific agenda. A few members were appointed by the state as SPOs for anti-naxal counter-insurgency measures while a few members had also violated human rights. The government was directed to prevent this illegal act of such members which is applicable on any citizen any time indulging in such act. Secondly, the appointment of the SPOs per se was not banned. What was banned was their appointment to act against the Maoist like the regular police officers. The court had found the appointed SPOs and their training unfit for their jobs. The appointment to perform duties enumerated in Section 21(1) (h) and 23(1) (i) of CPA 2007 was valid. But more than it, the criticism of the Court for the lack of development in Bastar/Chattisgarh after independence, was more pungent. The state deliberately kept the region insulated from development to preserve the tribals’ culture and identity. But ironically, clauses of Schedule V were never applied to put their habitat under state control as it was applied in Schedule VI in the North-East. Even after the formation of the new state, Chattisgarh, Schedule V is not applicable. But the modern capitalist development is taking place rapidly.

It may be noted here that the Maoists are the manifestation of the problems that exist in liberal democracies. The observations of the Court in the functioning of the governments, both of the federal and provincial, and in the making of the policies that have benefitted more

to the business rather than to the ordinary citizens were rightly stated: “The problem rests in the amoral political economy that the state endorses, and the resultant revolutionary politics that it necessarily spawns ... (it has) intimate linkages to socio-economic circumstances, endemic in equalities, and a corrupt social and state order that preys on such inequalities”.²⁷

As there is a contravention in the Constitutional principles and in the functioning of the state in liberal democracy, similarly, there is a dichotomy in the programmes and engagement of the Maoist and in the theory and writing of Marx. Marx, for example, never espoused the distribution of land to the peasants or asked for the application of the protectionist system in the national or international trade or demanded rights for the minorities. He was, in fact, opposed to such programmes and remained consistent till the last. His focus was more on the universal, systemic change rather than on the segmentary/sectarian rights. His revolutionary politics, similarly, was also premised on the use of legislative–electoral forum whenever such a system was in existence rather than the boycott of it.²⁸

The failure of the Left in India to actuate revolutionary transformation has been due to the success of the bourgeoisie to outsmart them in mobilizing the masses, in accommodating their universal principles and programmes and in their partial application. The Left has not been able to transcend them in praxis. It has, at best, surpassed them in rhetoric. It remains the conscience keeper of the bourgeoisie to remind them to apply their own constitutional principles in the functioning of their own system and governments which it joined since the 1952 elections.

VII

Conclusion

Bastar has a history of tribal rebellions against unjust policies and acts of state and kings. Salwa Judum, the tribal peasant movement, was the first rebellion against the acts of the Communist Party on such a large scale. The earlier tribal rebellions against the Party were brutally

suppressed.²⁹ Attempts were made to suppress this movement as well. But the enormous size of the participants and the intensity of their anger broke through the dominance of the Party in the villages and spread fast—particularly after the movement received support of the state, of mainstream political parties and leaders. With this support, however, criminal elements and vested interests attempted to hijack it to settle scores. The movement thus petered out after 2006. It was similar to the movement of the Ranveer Kisan Samiti (renamed by the Lalu Prasad Yadav regime in Bihar as Ranveer Sena) of marginal farmers, against the CPI (M–L) Liberation movement in north and central Bihar, that began in 1995 and petered out in 2005 after the arrival of the Nitish Kumar regime. Such peasant movements often wither away because of greed, caprice, and criminality—particularly those that are isolated, spontaneous and have little organizational structure. Also lack of long-term planning, alternative programmes and ideology curtail their life span. They either peter out or are brutally suppressed.

The uniqueness of these two specific movements mentioned above was that they had arisen against the Naxal/Maoist which aims to mobilize the labour and marginalized peasantry for revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeois society. In both the above cases, the average landholdings of the peasantry was less than 3 acres per family which was struggling to eke out a living in unviable economic situation under capitalism, subsisting on primitive agriculture. Both were spontaneous movements, that arose locally with no formal organizations. It was the rejection of a ‘revolutionary’ Party which has been struggling against an exploitative structure. It was an alternative movement against a Party which had become anachronistic in its programme and functioning.

Among the three protagonists discussed here—the state, the Maoist, and the tribals—the tribals suffered the most. In the conflict of the organized powers, the state and the Maoist, the fighting cadres were the poor tribals who destroyed each other without being class enemies. The state, which was earlier the enemy of the tribals, became their friend. The Maoist, who was earlier also their friend, became their enemy. In this conflict, the Maoist was partially affected, the state partially gained but the tribals lost their idyllic world forever. And if



history is to be the guide, the Maoist will lose the battle against the state in the coming years. The post-1950 history of the Communist movement indicates this trend.

Acknowledgments

Rajeev Ranjan Prasad, the vernacular writer, journalist and theatre personality from Bachel, Dantewada, south Bastar has been my key interlocutor in the understanding of Bastar and Salwa Judum.

D.M. Mitra, Joint Director, National Crime Record Bureau, Delhi and Giridhari Nayak, DGP (Jail) Chattisgarh have been the other facilitators in my understanding of state and Salwa Judum.

I would also like to acknowledge Professor A.C. Sinha, National Fellow, ICSSR and affiliate Fellow, NMML for sharing his knowledge of the tribal world with me, and the editorial team at NMML for helping me with the final draft of the paper.

Notes and References

¹ The People's War (PW) and the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) merged in 2004 to form the Communist Party of India (Maoist). Earlier, the CPI(M-L) Party Unity had merged with the PW in 1998. In Bastar, the PW operated alone since June–July 1980. The original name of the PW was CPI(M-L) Kranti named after its journal/bulletin *Kranti*. The appendage Group with the People's War (PWG) was named by the media.

² Rajeev Ranjan Prasad, *Aamcho Bastar*, Yash Publications, Delhi, 2012, p. 329.

³ *Salwa* means water sprinkled on a patient to purify him/her from his/her illness. The illness in tribal society is considered as bad omen, that the god is angry with the person and the body and the soul of the person has been taken over by the ghost. *Judum* means hunting. Put together, it colloquially becomes purification hunt.

⁴ The practice was initiated by Jawaharlal himself in 1930s for the convenience of foreign correspondents in India who had felt uncomfortable in writing his name. Subsequently, it became an accepted norm for English media.

⁵ Prasad, *Aamcho Bastar*, *op. cit.*, pp. 7–8.

⁶ *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 328–329.

⁷ Nandini Sundar, *Subaltern and the Sovereigns*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2007, p. VII.

⁸ Prasad, *Aamcho Bastar*, *op. cit.*, p. 329.

⁹ Gautam Navlakha, *Days and Nights in the Heartland of Rebellion*, Penguin, New Delhi, 2012, p. 21.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 329.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Nandini Sundar and Others vs. State of Chattisgarh, Supreme Court of India, para I, 2011.

¹³ Nandini Sundar, *op. cit.*, p. 288; see also, Gautam Navlakha, *op. cit.*, pp. 11–12; Shubhranshu Choudhary, *Let's Call Him Vasu*, Penguin, New Delhi, 2012, p. 154.

¹⁴ Sundar, *ibid.*, p. xvi.

¹⁵ Navlakha, *op. cit.*, pp. xv–199.

¹⁶ Sundar, *op. cit.*, pp. 13–15; Prasad, *Aamcho Bastar, op. cit.*, pp. 341–342.

¹⁷ See Choudhary, *op. cit.*, pp. 109, 202.

¹⁸ Prasad, *Bastar Ke Jannayak*, Yash Publications, Delhi, 2013, p. 18.

¹⁹ N.C. Saxena, MOEF/MOTA Committee on Forest Rights Act, Implementation of Forest Rights in Chattisgarh: Report of Field Visit, 24–27 May 2010.

²⁰ For example, before 1981, 100 bundles each of 100 leaves of *tendu* used to fetch Re. 1. After 1981, when the Maoist began to organize the resistance of the tribals against the contractors, 16 bundles each of 50 leaves comprising 800 leaves of *tendu* fetched Re. 1. By mid-1990s, it fetched Rs. 80. Today, a bundle of 50 leaves fetches Re. 1. See Navlakha, *op. cit.*, p. 41; Choudhary, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

²¹ See Choudhary, *op. cit.*, pp. 104, 193, 207, 214, 218. The source of the Party's fund is the tax on the contractors/companies/business, levies on the residence, and the revenue generated from the sale of the resources under the command of the Party.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 81.

²³ Navlakha, *op. cit.*, pp. 213, 219.

²⁴ Subhranshu Choudhary admits that 'It is true that the villagers harboured a great deal of anger against the Naxals and the initial anti-Naxal meetings held in June had been spontaneous'. See Choudhary, *op. cit.*, p. 156. Nandini Sundar, however, calls this spontaneous tribal movement as fictitious. See Sundar, *op. cit.*, p. VII; see also, Nandini Sundar and Others vs. State of Chattisgarh, *op. cit.*, para 23.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, para 76.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, para 75 (V).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, para 5–6.

²⁸ For a detailed critique, see Himanshu Roy, *Rationale of Communist Parties in Contemporary India: A Rejoinder, Discussant*, July 2013, pp. 26–30.

²⁹ See Giridhari Nayak, *Neo-Naxal Challenge*, Pentagon Security International, 2011, p. 66.