'Even if you disagree with her views... there is no way you can read it and not feel harrowed by the war India has unleashed against its own people in Bastar' Business Standard

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The Burning Forest
India’s War in Bastar

Nandini Sundar
To Manish Kunjam – who has fought for his people with honour and retained a sense of humour through terrible times

To Ashok Desai and Nitya Ramakrishnan for striving to make the Constitution of India meaningful
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Prologue:
Dandakaranya, the Forest of Exile

do not forgive truly it is not in your power
to forgive in the name of those betrayed at dawn

Zbigniew Herbert, The Envoy of Mr Cogito

February 2006

Hungi lay counting the stars as they slowly faded into half-light, putting off the moment when she would have to start her morning chores. The goat kid had kept her up half the night by running up and down below her bed, rubbing its back against the ropes that made up the cot and nibbling at her toes. Pandri, the white rooster her father was training for a prizefight, had just started crowing but was not yet insistent. Her mother, Deve, had got up earlier to defecate while it was still dark — a time when only the dim shapes of people would be visible. But Hungi was being lazy that morning. Suddenly, 16-year-old-Masa, one of the village sentries, came running through the village, shouting loudly, ‘The Judum is coming.’ Nearing Hungi’s house, he said breathlessly, ‘They have come to Itapalli…and it’s our turn next.’ On her feet instantly, Hungi grabbed her baby brother and ran in the direction she had seen her mother going. Her father, Rama, who had been up for a while warming his hands around a small fire, went inside the house and gathered as much grain as he could in a small cloth bag, quickly untied the cattle and followed
her. In half an hour, the entire village was deserted, except for the squawking chickens and some pigs.

They came from the east, some 400 men dressed in camouflage fatigues, some with black scarves around their heads, carrying Kalashnikovs. They reached the village just as dawn was breaking. In front was the former Maoist Kiche Handa, now working with the police as a ‘Special Police Officer’. His task was to point out houses. ‘That’s the house of the headman,’ he said, ‘where the Maoist leaders always stay when they visit the village. And that’s the house of Hadma, an active sympathizer.’ The force went inside the houses and took whatever they found – rice, money, jewellery. In Hungi’s house, they kicked at the sack of beans she had so carefully collected, spilling them around the house before setting fire to it. The fire took time to catch since the houses were at a little distance from each other. But by 11 a.m., all seventy mud and thatch huts in the hamlet were burning. The forces were tired and the local commander called a halt. They moved a little way off and began to cook, feasting on the frightened chickens they had captured and the rice they had looted. By the time lunch was over, it was two in the afternoon, and time for the next village.

Jogi’s house on the western edge of the neighbouring hamlet was shielded by a grove of mango and tamarind trees. She had been out since 4.30 a.m., gathering the mahua flowers used to make the local liquor, and had just come home. Jogi’s father, Hunga, had a bad leg after he had fallen off a tree some years ago. As he did most afternoons, he was sitting outside the house making a bamboo basket. When the forces came, neither Jogi nor her father was prepared. Two of the men hit Hunga with rifle butts, and when Jogi ran to save him, she was caught and pushed inside the house. After they had finished raping her, the soldiers shot Jogi. That evening, back in camp, the force commander called a press conference. He proudly displayed a woman’s corpse dressed in an olive-green uniform. A guerrilla squad commander, he said, captured after a heavy encounter in which both sides fired several rounds.

The villagers of Koruthguda did not come back that night or even the next. From the forest, they watched the flames devour their houses. Luckily Hungi had found her mother and some others from the village in the forest. They cooked what little rice they had brought, hushing the babies in case the forces were still out there. Hungi’s father, Rama, went back to the village briefly to try to retrieve some grain, but the houses were still smouldering. When people came out of hiding on the third day, they found only the charred remains of their homes, an occasional mud wall still standing, and in some places the twisted metal mouth of a blackened vessel visible through the ashes. Even the sounds of the village were missing – the chickens gone, the pigs no longer grunting.

After two weeks of trying to live in the forest, the entire village left. Most went across the border to Khammam in Andhra Pradesh, a day’s walk away, where they had contacts among the Telugu farmers who employed them seasonally to harvest chillies. A few took shelter with relatives in villages which had not yet been burnt. Some tried to take a few head of cattle with them and some just let them go, defeated by the enormity of what had happened. The cattle became feral, appearing together in wild groups at the edge of the forest, and fleeing again. Grass began to grow out of the houses, and the tracks disappeared as the forest took over. The village died.

April 2009

Rama was the first one to return to the village. He went up to the herd of cows grazing nearby, and found his favourite brown cow, Moti. He gently touched her face and called her by her name, and Moti quietly followed him home. For both man and cow, there was real joy in this reunion. Others began to come back in ones and twos, reclaiming their cattle, cleaning the debris of burnt grain and broken pots from their homes. The men went into the forest and cut down fresh logs. Slowly, slowly, the village began to grow again.

In the neighbouring village, Itapalli, some families had been
captured by the forces, and had been living in the Salwa Judum ‘relief’ camp at Dornapal, along with people from other villages. They were ostensibly refugees from the Maoists and under police protection. When they heard that the villagers of Koruthguda and Itapalli had started trickling home, Hidma and Mahesh, who had been living in camp, sent a letter asking whether they too could come back: ‘Our lives have been miserable, without forests and fields, without the sunrise on the river, and the sound of the birds. Forgive us for staying on the other side.’

February 2016

The villages were tense again. The fields had yielded little this year because of the drought. A paramilitary camp had come up 2 kilometres from Itapalli, and the forces went out patrolling every day, raiding villages at dawn, arresting men and taking them to the camp. The women spent the days pleading with the police to release their men. Two boys had been picked up while cutting wood from the forest between Itapalli and Koruthguda. A week later, the Koruthguda villagers found out they had been killed as Maoists.

Hungi had got married the previous year and was living in a neighbouring village, but had come home to check on her parents. The family talked late into the night. Hungi’s mother, Deve, said, ‘When we came back seven years ago, we vowed we would never leave again.’ ‘But who knows,’ said her father Rama, ‘what the future will bring?’
From before the time of human life, in the heart of Gondwana, as the earth pushed and pulled itself into shape under heat and pressure, Archaean granite metamorphosed into gneiss. The plateaus thrust upwards, while water flowed from the rocks to form the landscape familiar to us today as Bastar, clasped between the rivered boundaries of the Sabari and the Godavari, which separate the states of Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra and Telangana–Andhra Pradesh.

The Indrawati cuts across the district, flowing south-west from its origins in Kalahandi in Odisha, past Jagdalpur, the former capital of Bastar state, before joining the Godavari near the Chhattisgarh–Telangana border. To the north of the Indrawati ascend the unmapped hills, the Marh, and to its south lie the districts of Bijapur and Dantewada. Each night the moon rises on the sandy banks of the river, reflecting in the water, before disappearing as the mist settles over silent, forested tracts. But the Indrawati is dying, its waters flowing backward into a former tributary, the Jaurana, a symptom of all that has turned upside down in this part of the world.

For those whose bearings depend on roads rather than rivers, two old trading routes, now national highways, run south and west through Jagdalpur, taking in wooded hill passes, before descending into the hotter, less shaded, plains. These roads connecting
Chhattisgarh to Maharashtra and Telangana form the arteries of both commerce and state control.

The plateaus are ancient, but the first geological phenomena in the region, older even than the gneiss, are the Dharwar rocks formed over 500 million years ago. These form three distinct ferrous hill ranges each running north to south: the Chargaon–Kondapakha–Hahladdi hills and Raoghat in the north and the Bailadilla hills in the south. It is from here that iron entered the soul of the nation, hardening it to all human emotion, from here that the origins of time return to haunt the present.

In these hills, there once lived a civilization. Over the centuries, people here named the gods on the mountains and the mountains for the gods: Raoghat for the horse-riding Rao who guards the entrance to the Marh, Omalwar for the Kunjam clan god, Orko Marka Datto. They etched the landscape with stark and simple names: Biere Metta or Big Mountain, renamed by outsiders as Bailadilla for its bull hump shape, Inda referring to the wide water of both river and sea, now Sanskritized as the Indrawati. The Savada became the Sabari, and the entire region came to be known as Dandakaranya, or the forest where Rama was exiled, in an attempt to fit the region into a national epic imagination, where the locals were fierce and savage, and fair-skinned Aryans brought civilization.

For the adivasis, the forest was an intimate, if also dangerous, home. They battled the tigers and the wild boars to collect colourless gum from the white dhaora tree, pressed the yellow fora fruit for oil and learnt to peel away the round red skin of the tendu fruit to eat the sweet, pulpy flesh beneath. They found that the bija tree bleeds red like a human being when hacked. Where they had to clear the forests, they left mahua and toddy trees to mark the bunds, and planted tamarind trees to shade the village. In empty forest fields, the clap of a wooden trap blowing in the wind reminded humans and animals of each other’s presence. ‘If you peer into the deep caves,’ said Dulsai, in a village north of the Indrawati, ‘you can see the marks of tigers.’

In the cities, however, these forms of life find no favour. The gods that live in the mountains are signed away to mining companies, whose infra-vision does not see the splendour of the forest, the flower tucked behind the ear, the feather in the dancing headgear, but only the minerals beneath.

The colonial-era principle of eminent domain, which gives the state the right to acquire all land, has no room for local notions of property. In Bastar, the Earth, known as Bhum, Jaga or Mati, was sovereign, giving permission to certain lineages to settle; if the Earth was unhappy, people fell sick and had to leave. The first founders gave land to others, interceding on their behalf with the Earth. Every village knew where its forest began and that of their neighbours ended; they made sure that each forest spirit got its own due. The Mother Goddesses – every village has at least one – love, fight and visit each other, just like their followers.

The central Indian forest tract out of which Bastar is hived is peopled by several Gondi-speaking groups, who refer to themselves as simply koi, koya or koitor, meaning human. The major scheduled tribe (ST) or adivasi communities of Bastar include the Halbas, agriculturists who worked as soldiers guarding small forts like Chote Dongar or Hamirgarh; Bhatras in north-east Bastar whose language is a mixture of Halbi and Oriya; Dhurwas (formerly known as Parjas) who occupy the areas surrounding the Kanger forest; and the Dorlas of the southern plains bordering Telangana/Andhra. The best known are the southern Madia, whose distinctive bison horn headgear embellished with tassels of cowrie shells has been appropriated by the government to showcase tribal diversity, and the northern Muria famous for their ghotuls where youth were initiated into work and life.

Among the other communities who make up the special character of Bastar are several classified as other backward classes (OBCs), such as the Dhakads, Marars (gardeners), Rauts (cowherds), Gadhwas (bell metal specialists), Kumhars (potters) Kallars and Sundis (distillers). The scheduled castes (SCs) – Maharas, Pankas and Mrigans – were the traditional weavers and musicians. There are several other OBC
and SC communities who have come in from neighbouring states like the Telgas and Mahars from Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra respectively, now settled in Bijapur district.

But political and economic power is concentrated in the hands of immigrants who have come in the last century, especially in the last five decades: traders and businessmen from Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Punjab; those working in the Bailadilla mines and the lower state bureaucracy; and Bengali refugees from the 1971 war, officially called East Pakistan Displaced Persons, settled by the government in what it saw as the empty forests of Koraput and Bastar.

When I first visited Bastar in 1990 as a PhD student researching colonialism and resistance, the newspapers occasionally reported ‘Naxalite incidents’ such as police–guerrilla encounters, along with accounts of murders and human sacrifices. But all these were ‘far away’, in places like Bijapur or Golapalli or Kistaram at the western and southern extremities of the state. In the Dhurwa belt where I lived, the Maoists were still exotic. There was little in the newspapers then about who the Naxalites were or what villagers thought about them. This kind of reporting that obliterates, even as it names, has remained constant over the decades.

From the bureaucratic redoubts of Delhi and Bhopal (Bastar was still part of undivided Madhya Pradesh), the government ruled over a vast tract in principle if not in practice, replacing the ritualism of the old kingdoms of Bastar and Kanker with an indifferent administration. The main problem I saw was exploitation by immigrant traders, mostly Thakurs from Uttar Pradesh, who ran the trade in minor forest produce and illegal tin mining. Together, the traders and local officials devised ways in which they could profit from government schemes meant for adivasi welfare. But thanks to the parliamentary Communist Party of India (CPI) which had been active in this area for a few years, the days when the forest guard or the patwari (revenue agent) would demand chickens and free labour from the villagers had gone, and land was still mostly in the hands of adivasis. Across the region, children went to village schools, regularly if the teacher came, and irregularly when the teacher absconded; government health services were few and far between, and people’s only hope – both then and now – was the wadde or local healer. On soundless summer evenings, the wadde’s long, low incantations can be heard from afar, rising suddenly to a crescendo and then falling again to an intimate mutter, as he implores the Mata, the Mother Goddess, to spare the patient she has infected.

I was young then, and divided my time between other young people and village elders, learning to speak Dhurwa and discovering the intricacies of village politics. I remember it as a time when I laughed a lot. My days were spent carrying out a household census and collecting genealogies, attending rituals, chatting to women as they husked grain or cracked tamarind pods, and watching the Panka weaver at his loom. Returning home on full moon nights, I would pause by the fields to see how brightly each stalk of grain was lit. Friday, the weekly market day, was like a mini festival when nobody did any work, coming home happy and exhausted after a morning negotiating with traders and meeting friends.

I made occasional trips further afield, for instance to a small village haat at Bade Karkeli near Kutru in Bijapur where we drank landa or rice beer and my friend Kala bought baskets of small dried fish. Near the dilapidated mansion of the former zamindar of Kutru lay the grave of a Parsi shikari, Peston Naoroji Kharas, gored by a wild buffalo in 1948. The Elwin Cooper Company of Nagpur used to organize hunting expeditions in the area. By 1998, the grave was in disrepair and the wild buffalo were no longer so plentiful in the Indrawati National Park. My field notes spoke of barricaded police stations: ‘Fortified police camp at Kutru with barbed wire all around. Police shining wary torches at night at all passing vehicles and calling out to find out who is there.’

The war had already begun, though I did not know it. What I remember more vividly is the everyday humiliation and loss, of friends
dying suddenly for want of a doctor, the tense silence of village elders before a visiting policeman. It was hard not to feel angered by the casual racism of outsiders: bus conductors kicking elderly adivasi men and shoving women off the seat to make way for some minor official, a constant litany of complaints about how adivasis did nothing but drink and did not want education or modern medicine.

I recall occasional delirious nights of dancing during fairs and weddings, and tense moments at the cockfights, but voices were rarely raised. Village disputes involved extremely complicated negotiations, such as one in which the priest made off with an entire pig rather than just the head, which was his customary due. But arguments usually ended with the male elders drinking together and laughing.

In 2005, all this suddenly changed for the villagers living in the Maoist strongholds of Dantewada or South Bastar district, when the government began its devastating counter-insurgency operations. My life, which had taken me on to new research interests elsewhere, changed too, as news of violence began to trickle in from Bastar. My first encounters with the Salwa Judum were through human rights investigations or ‘fact-findings’ in November 2005 (with a PUCL/All India Fact-finding team, henceforth All India Fact-finding team) and May 2006 (with the Independent Citizens’ Initiative, henceforth ICI). After that, over the past decade, I have made repeated visits alone or with different friends. In 2007 three of us from the ICI, Ramachandra Guha, E.A.S. Sarma and I, filed a petition on human rights violations and state-sponsored vigilantism before the Supreme Court. Litigation reduced the licence I had as a sociologist to travel freely and talk to every side. But in the beginning, when I saw what I saw, I could not sleep, and a permanent ache entered my heart.

Chronicles of Counter-insurgency

In telling the story of counter-insurgency, where do I begin – with the flame or the candle snuffer, with the dream or the death, with the living forest or the hardened iron?

I have learnt from my lawyer friends that the first page of any petition must contain a ‘timeline’, a narrative of dates and events relevant to the issue, to help the judges understand and contextualize the matter. But what are the relevant dates here that the reader should know about? Should one start with 1910, with the Bhumkal, when the adivasis of Bastar rebelled against the colonial administration, asking for their lands and forests to be left alone, whose memory is invoked in the songs and tracts produced by the Maoists? Or 1947, when independent India promised a new democracy but sold the adivasis short by keeping several old colonial laws? Some might want to start with 1967, when a small village in West Bengal, Naxalbari, became synonymous with hope, and young men and women took to armed struggle against oppression; or the 1980s, when the first Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) (CPI [ML]) People’s War squads left Telangana for Bastar; or 2004, when the CPI (Maoist) was formed by the merger of the People’s War and the Maoist Communist Centre of India (MCC), signalling a higher level of strength. One could also reel one’s historical timeline close and start with 2005, when the mineral-rich hills of Bastar suddenly became the most valuable piece of real estate in the country, and those who stood in the way of their exploitation – like the Maoists – became, in former prime minister Manmohan Singh’s words, the ‘Biggest Internal Security Threat to the Indian State’.

The Biggest Security Threat contains many smaller stories from across the country, of both individual lives and community sorrows. In writing a history of the Indian Maoists in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, appropriate space must be given to the desperate struggle of the dalits or SCs of Bihar against upper-caste landlords for wages and dignity; the corruption introduced by the faction-ridden, extortionist gangs of Jharkhand which call themselves Maoist but are propped up with police support, like the ‘Tritiya Prastuti’ or the People’s Liberation Front of India; the police-atrocity-induced Lalgarh movement in Bengal which flared briefly and ran its own health centres and schools before it was appropriated and betrayed.
by Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress (TMC); the tragic story of the Kuis of Odisha, whose entirely constitutional agitation for land rights was labelled Maoist by the state and repressed; and the virtual overground disappearance of the Maoists in Andhra Pradesh, following aborted peace talks in 2004, repression, and new economic and political opportunities.

My account is focused on Bastar or the southern part of Chhattisgarh, where, over three decades, the Maoists established what is almost a parallel state, distributing land, settling disputes, taxing contractors and entering into the minutiae of intimate relations. But my story is not about the Maoists, though they inevitably figure in it. My narrative is really about Indian democracy, when it reduces what are essentially political contests over rights, distributive justice and alternative visions of the good to law and order problems, and when it would rather fight against its poorest citizens than talk to them.

Unlike insurgency, which has many local characteristics, counter-insurgency draws on a global repertoire. The political histories of places like Malaysia, Vietnam, Guatemala, El Salvador and Colombia, or even Sri Lanka, Algeria and Kenya, the kinds of movements (nationalist, Marxist, Islamist), and the kinds of regimes in power (colonial government, authoritarian regime or democracy) may be quite different, but the software of counter-insurgency that circulates through manuals and military training colleges across the world is common. The basic aim is to exhaust and coerce civilians into abandoning support for insurgents. The similarities are especially stark when it comes to indigenous people dreaming of a Marxist revolution.

To borrow a term from the historian Ranajit Guha who wrote on the elementary forms of peasant insurgency in colonial India, one might discern certain 'elementary aspects' of counter-insurgency. The counter-insurgency may be conducted directly by the police or army; cloak itself in the guise of popular anger against rebels; or employ vigilantes, including death squads, with the state claiming it is helpless to identify and act against criminals. Most counter-insurgencies, however, officially deploy a combination of state and state-supported non-state actors against insurgents. Former insurgents turned pro-government mercenaries are organized as 'home guards', 'special police officers' or paramilitaries who work as informers and also serve as the first line of attack. Often, villagers are also armed and conscripted into 'civil patrols' or 'village defence units' to fight against insurgents.

In addition, counter-insurgencies have similar consequences for civilians. Looting and/or burning of villages is standard as are murders, rapes and widespread arrests of the civilian population. Forcing villagers into camps, often called 'model villages', under police, paramilitary or army surveillance in order to isolate the insurgents and break the support of the civilians is part of a widespread strategy variously called 'grouping', strategic hamletting or forced population removal. Both grouping and conflict more generally lead to widespread displacement. Starvation and denial of basic services are often used as weapons of control and are not merely by-products of unsettled conditions.

Finally, counter-insurgencies also rely on control over the media, and the use of special laws which give the government emergency powers to arrest, detain without bail and so on.

In Bastar, as I show below, almost all of these elements have been present; only the combination has varied over the years. This book concentrates on the early years, since they set the pattern for what came after, but also shows how violence has mutated over the decade.

*A Very Statist People's Movement*

When it started in 2005, the Salwa Judum was presented in the media as a popular uprising against the Maoists, and even a decade later the government continues to insist it was a 'spontaneous, self-initiated people's movement against the Naxalites'. In practice, it was the police and politicians who mobilized the 'people'. The ruling
Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) ministers and Opposition politicians like Congress leader Mahendra Karma held public meetings and rallies (Jan Jagran Abhiyans or Public Awakening Campaigns) against the Maoists; villagers who attended these official summons were conscripted into marching on other villages.

In earlier, but similar, counter-insurgencies in India, as in Telangana and Mizoram, the police and army carried out the operations. However, at least initially, using the army against the Maoists would not have been seen as legitimate, since fighting for social and economic rights is treated differently from secession. Moreover, the popularity of ‘people’s movements’ made this a desirable label to appropriate. The experience of both Delhi 1984 and Gujarat 2002 proved useful, when the pogroms of Sikhs and Muslims were blamed on ‘mob anger’, even as they were clearly organized by members of the ruling Congress and BJP respectively. In a model public-private partnership, the governments ensured police inactivity and complicity.

From 2009 onwards, the government gave up the pretence of using non-state actors, launching ‘Operation Green Hunt’ or a nationwide action against the Maoists, using the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) comprising different agencies such as the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), the Border Security Force (BSF) and the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), along with the Chhattisgarh police. Recruiting locals into the paramilitary forces and police to ‘wean’ them off the Maoists is a critical part of this strategy.

Despite having such a large force at its command, the government is loath to let go of vigilantism. Indeed, with the coming of the Modi-led government in 2014 and the growing incidence of vigilantism against minorities and liberals, the Salwa Judum has gone mainstream across the country. For every protest against the violence of right-wing non-state actors, there is a counter protest supported by the police. Emboldened by this national atmosphere, in 2015–16 the police encouraged their urban acolytes to form groups like the Samajik Ekta Manch (Social Unity Platform), Naxal Peedeth Sangharsh Samiti (Naxal-affected Struggle Committee) and Bastar Sangharsh Samiti (Bastar Struggle Committee) to hold anti-Maoist rallies, threaten human rights activists and display public affection for the police.

The Mass Burning and Grouping of Villages

Between June 2005 and 2007, entire villages in (then undivided) Dantewada were forcibly taken to live in roadside settlements. To avoid violence, many villages came to camp on their own. The camps were officially described as ‘relief camps’, but the Judum leaders referred to them as Salwa Judum ‘base camps’, from where attacks could be launched. Villages that resisted joining the anti-Maoist rallies were burnt. Men, women and even children were killed, and many women were viciously gang-raped. The Maoists retaliated by killing Judum leaders, including headmen who had convinced their villages that it was safer to side with the government; their frightened relatives then took refuge in the government camps.

British-controlled Malaya (1948–60) is famous as the classic prototype of grouping. Some 5,70,000 Chinese were uprooted and moved into internment camps glorified as ‘New Villages’ to ‘wean them away’ from the Communist Party of Malaya. The strategy was borrowed by the Americans who created ‘strategic hamlets’ in Vietnam to isolate the peasants from the Viet Cong, and deprive the latter of supplies and information on troop movements. The process is euphemistically described as ‘protecting’ the civilian population from being ‘preyed on’ by insurgents, and has been deployed with devastating effect on civilian populations across the world.

What colonial- and emergency-era Malaya did, however, democratic India did in parallel time. Between 1949 and 1951, some 1000 Koya villages in Khammam in Hyderabad state were burnt, cattle impounded and the people forced into large military camps euphemistically called Ashokanagar, Gandhinagar, Jawaharnagar and so on, after the national leaders of those days. This was just one of
the tactics used, apart from raids, arrests, torture and sexual violence, to repress the Telangana armed struggle (1946–51), when guerrilla squads of the CPI (then undivided) assisted by village defence units fought both the razzakars—the private armed militia under the Nizam of Hyderabad—and, subsequently, the forces of the Indian Union.

However, the Indian army counts Mizoram as its most successful use of grouping when 82 per cent of the population was moved from several small, scattered villages into larger villages called grouping centres, in order to defeat the Mizo National Front, which had declared independence in 1966. Even then, participation was portrayed as ‘voluntary’:

Darzo (Mizoram) was one of the richest villages I have ever seen in this part of the world... My orders were to get the villagers to collect whatever moveable property they could, and to set their own village on fire at seven in the evening. I also had orders to burn all the paddy and other grain that could not be carried away by the villagers to the new centre so as to keep food out of reach of the insurgents... I called the Darzo Village Council President and his village elders and ordered them to sign a document saying that they had voluntarily asked to be resettled in Hnahthial PPV (Protected and Progressive Village) under the protection of the Security Forces as they were being harassed by the insurgents, and because their own village did not have communications, educational, medical and other facilities. Another document stated that they had burnt down their own village, and that no force or coercion was used by the Security Forces. They refused to sign. So I sent them out and after an hour called them in again, this time one man at a time. On my table was a loaded revolver, and in the corner stood two NCOs with loaded sten-guns. This frightened them, and one by one they signed both the documents.

In India, grouping has only been applied to ‘tribal’ populations. Apart from Telangana and Mizoram, grouping was used to subdue the Srikakulam Naxalite uprising (1957–70s) and the Naga armed struggle for sovereignty in the 1950s. In Telangana, while the entire population was resisting, it was only the adivasis who were confined to camps. But this is not surprising, since adivasi ways of life are seen as lacking value. Even before grouping became a popular counter-insurgency tactic, indigenous people were being ‘settled’ by colonial governments who saw shifting cultivation, hunting gathering and nomadic herding as a wasteful use of resources. Modern governments also justify grouping in the name of a more efficient delivery of services, which traditionally scattered habitations make difficult. This rationale fits neatly into the ‘winning hearts and minds’ approach made famous by General Gerald Templer in Malaya. The new villages where the Chinese were settled, it was argued, would be models of benevolent and efficient administration in contrast to what they were leaving behind. The Salwa Judum camps too were initially promoted as model settlements, before the endemic corruption of both the state and the Salwa Judum leaders ensured there was nothing exemplary about them.

**From Displacement to Starvation**

Scorched earth policies are so common in war that international conventions have explicitly outlawed them:

Starvation of civilians as a method of combat is prohibited. It is therefore prohibited to attack, destroy, remove or render useless, for that purpose, objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, such as food-stuffs, agricultural areas for the production of food-stuffs, crops, livestock, drinking water installations and supplies and irrigation works.

When the Judum attacked, they burnt not just the houses with everything inside, but also any stocks of stored grain they found in the forest. They even destroyed hand-pumps. Those who were
not forced into camps fled into the forests, taking shelter with the Maoists; some 1,00,000 fled into neighbouring states, particularly Andhra Pradesh. They survived on the water used to boil rice or on grain recovered from their burnt houses. In normal times, the smell and taste of burnt grain is hard to stomach, but humans will eat anything to survive. In the camps, corruption in food supplies meant that people were always hungry. As in Malaya and Mizoram, the government also imposed restrictions on the transport of rice to markets in the interior.

The battle has raged across roads, trees, schools, transformers and hand-pumps, fought each bitter inch of the way. The government clears the forest and expands the highways, and the Maoists mobilize villagers to cut the roads at night, deep incisions that slow vehicles down to a crawl. The most visible signs of the infrastructural war are the abandoned schools, their ceilings half fallen, creepers growing out of the sides of blasted walls. In the early years, the schools were occupied by troops during their combing operations, and destroyed by night on Maoist orders, to prevent permanent police bases in the villages. But even before this, as soon as the Judum started, the government ordered the schools to shut down and the teachers to move to camp. For several years, interior weekly markets also closed, and those left in the villages — even when ill and desperate for medical help — were too scared to come out for fear of being captured and killed.

In 2015–16, after a spell of relative calm, terror has resurfaced, with reports of cash, jewellery and poultry being looted from homes, bans on traders transporting rice to the interior, and villagers, especially men, scared to come to the market for fear of being arrested.

**Recruiting Local Youth as Auxiliaries**

The government initially proposed to create ‘village defence committees’, which would be armed as in Kashmir or Nagaland, much like the civil patrols of Guatemala where there was mass conscription of civilians into the ‘dirty war’. However, this didn't work out and, instead, it created a force of special police officers (SPO) out of civilians. Many of these SPOs were former Maoists or their village-level workers, called sangham members, who had been forced to ‘surrender’ at Judum rallies and join the police to identify and track their former comrades.

Here too the government borrowed from well-tested counter-insurgency models, using renegades like the Ikhwanis in Kashmir, SULFA (surrendered United Liberation Front of Asom) members in Assam, or the ‘Cats’ of Punjab. These men form a shadowy force, unaccountable because they are not officially on police rolls. Even if formally absorbed into the local police, they often continue as an indisciplined presence inside the force. Hated as a class by the local population for being collaborators and traitors, some among them become particularly infamous among civilian victims even as the state celebrates them as counter-insurgent warriors. The Kashmiri Ikhwani Ghulam Mohammad Mir aka Muma Kana, who by his own claims had assisted in the arrest of some 5000 militants, was given one of the nation’s highest honours, the Padma Shri, in 2010. In Bastar, the SPO Kartam Surya, notorious among locals for his role in arson, rape and murders, was given a gun salute by the police when he was killed by the Maoists in 2012.

In 2011, the Supreme Court declared the use of local youth as SPOs in counter-insurgency operations unconstitutional. Not only were the state’s economic policies neo-liberal, it said, but when faced with the inevitable consequences of these disastrous policies in the form of increased social unrest, its response was equally misguided — such as the reliance on revenge-filled renegades or jobless youth to fight the insurgency rather than on well-trained forces.

The state government immediately responded to this order by renaming the SPOs an ‘auxiliary armed police force’, continuing to use them in much the same fashion as before, as undisciplined storm troopers and guides. In 2013, the state police changed their name yet again, creating a 1700-strong ‘District Reserve Guard’ (DRG) of ‘former Naxalites of lower cadres, Maoist sympathisers,
and villagers displaced during the Salwa Judum'. In 2016, the police also resuscitated the idea of village defence committees.

*The Tyranny of the Law*

The law has always been more efficient as a companion and aide to counter-insurgency rather than as a check on its excesses. In September 2005, the government announced a ban on the CPI (Maoist) and all its front organizations, and in December 2005, the Chhattisgarh state assembly passed the Chhattisgarh Special Public Security Act (CSPSA) (based on an earlier ordinance). Among other things, this made it illegal for any person to ‘assist or participate in any manner in the unlawful activities of such organizations or through any medium or means’. Any villager attending a Maoist meeting or contributing to a village pond whose construction was organized by a guerrilla squad might technically be violating the law. However, the police do not need the CSPSA when it comes to ordinary adivasis, liberally invoking charges of murder and attempt to murder. The clauses related to the Arms Act, dacoity and waging war against the state (Sections 120–121 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, CrPC) are also used, even when people are found with nothing more than axes or bows and arrows.

Policing strategies to deal with adivasis and Naxalites appear to have changed little over four decades. As Amrita Rangasamy wrote in the 1970s:

The Central Reserve Police were brought to Srikakulam to hunt down a small band of Naxalites and their followers. They now hold the entire tribal community suspect. Police bewilderment is evident in the transporting of scores of tribals to prisons all over Andhra Pradesh and ‘sieving operations’ are perhaps carried out in jail in the hope that the ‘Naxalites’ would surface... By tradition, the Indian tribal has never received justice. But in Srikakulam denial of justice has been made a canon of official policy.  

Prison statistics in Chhattisgarh are shocking, and have only got worse over the years. In 2013, the Chhattisgarh jails were running at a capacity of 261 per cent, or 15,840 prisoners as against a capacity of 6070 prisoners, the highest levels of overcrowding in the country. Of this, Kanker had an occupancy rate of 428 per cent, Dantewada of 371 per cent and Jagdalpur jail of 260 per cent. Most of the prisoners are undertrials, who are eventually acquitted because there is and can be no evidence against them. But in the meantime, they have spent several years in jail. Rather than rethinking its policy of mass arrests, the Chhattisgarh government sanctioned Rs 21.66 crore in its 2016 budget for additional barracks to address the problem of overcrowding.

*Shackling the Messenger*

In times of counter-insurgency or war, the media’s tendency to follow the state’s narrative is well known – whether through the visual and aural imaging of war and casualties, or the front-page coverage given to the administration’s view versus the space given to dissenters.

In Chhattisgarh, the local media has been intimidated when it has not been actively co-opted by the state. At the height of the Judum, few in villages or towns barely 50 or 100 kilometres away knew what was happening since all they read in the press was a litany of violent Maoist attacks.

The national media has been largely indifferent, with coverage of the armed conflict in the last 10 years ranging from silence on state atrocities to uncritical praise for the state in its battle against the Naxalites. From 2005 to 2007 there was a virtual media blackout. Between 2008 and 2011 there was some exposure of human rights abuses, followed by comparative silence till 2015–16, when the revival of vigilantism and attacks on human rights activists, lawyers, journalists and others made it impossible to ignore. Much of the coverage has focused on middle-class interlocutors, but a decade of war in Bastar means there is much more reporting even on ordinary
Nandini Sundar

adivasis now than there was at the start of the Salwa Judum. The major difference is that villagers are now willing to talk about what they have suffered compared to the terrified silence with which they endured the Salwa Judum.

In general, the national media is sanguine about the effects on civilians when it comes to national security. In the 1960s, when almost the entire population of the north-eastern state of Mizoram was being forcibly displaced into army-controlled camps, the Indian Express accepted, with apparent approval, that ‘Operation Security will involve a measure of force’. In Kashmir, despite the discovery of unmarked mass graves, thousands of disappearances and some estimated 70,000 to 90,000 deaths since 1989 when the Kashmir movement began, these are scarcely issues for national debate.

The Ebbs and Flows of Counter-insurgency

As the seasons have passed, the war has both receded and redoubled in intensity, naming and renaming itself – Salwa Judum, Operation Green Hunt, localized operations like Operation Maad, Kilam and Podku, or Mission 2016. The conflict has expanded to new areas, spreading north and east into the Dhurwa and Koya villages of the Kanger National Park, and to Kanker, Antagarh and Bhanupratappur in the far north. Encounters, ambushes, mass arrests and civilian killings are reported from across the district. Combing operations now go on even during the monsoons, with no thought to the deep vulnerability of people during this season when food stocks are traditionally low.

Uniformed guerrillas march through the night, crossing pebbled streams by foot, wary of snakebites and brambles, trying to keep themselves and their janatha sarkar alive. Uniformed paramilitaries march through the heat of the day, many praying for a transfer out of the place. Occasionally, the Maoists launch a devastating attack, like the 76 CRPF men ambushed in Tadmetla in April 2010; and sometimes the security forces notch up deaths, as in the 17 villagers shot in Sarkeguda one night in 2012. The silent forest has learnt to listen for the sound of death.

The security forces have come to stay. Like an occupation army, they have spread their tentacles, setting up camps every 5 to 8 kilometres, tearing down the forest, ringing large areas with concertina wire, their lumbering green armoured vehicles flattening the forest roads as helicopters and unmanned drones fly overhead. Villagers say the camps come up overnight, sometimes on land they have been cultivating for decades. Six-lane highways are being built through forest villages. Right now there are perhaps five or six vehicles that might pass in an entire day – some couples on a scooter, interstate trucks, the very occasional car belonging to some official, and on market days crowded jeep-taxis and buses carrying people and produce. On village roads one might go for miles without seeing a single person, leave alone a motor vehicle. The population density in Dantewada, according to the 2011 census, is 59 persons per square kilometre, while in Bijapur it is 39. But the planning is clearly for a future where ore-laden trucks will make their way out in a continuous stream.

While most villagers have returned from the Judum camps or Andhra Pradesh where they fled between 2005 and 2007, some who left then will never return, because even desperate flight produces new roots. Some have settled in the Salwa Judum camps where their children have become part of the police, and some have struck roots, albeit tenuous, in Telangana/Andhra Pradesh – their children study in Telugu, and they have new identity cards and, in some cases, new religions.

Even for those who have returned, staying in their villages is contingent: frequent combing operations by security forces, torture and mass arrests as well as the lack of work drive youth to leave, at least for a season, and often for much longer. Under the pressure of paramilitary camps and police payments to informers, the Maoists are also turning on villagers, killing ‘informers’ and beating people for collaborating with the police. In conversations, people report ‘calm’
or 'disturbed' as if they were reporting the weather on a weekly or monthly basis. And whenever there is a major 'encounter' between the security forces and Maoists, a silence descends on all the villages around, as villagers collectively hold their breath, waiting for state retaliation.

In the areas which have not been directly affected by the Judum or subsequent operations, other kinds of divisions have surfaced. Each tribe has its own association, like the Halba Samaj or Koya Samaj, which lays down rules regarding marriage and food. There are fights between Christian converts who refuse to pay their share of contributions for village fairs, saying they no longer follow the gods in whose name these fairs are held, and those following the traditional path who argue that these are collective village events and not just religious festivals. The Hindu chauvinist Vishwa Hindu Parishad is now in on the act, infusing a wider Hindu–Christian antagonism into a very local conflict.

Future historians will note the passing of a civilization that understood the forest, and the rise of a society of middlemen, contractors, paramilitary forces, and of divisions induced by religion and political parties.

Iron in the Soul

In April 2015, I was sitting in a tea shop in Nagarnar, 16 kilometres to the east of Jagdalpur (the headquarters of Bastar district), where the state-owned National Minerals Development Corporation (NMDC) is building a steel plant. As in Kirandul and Bacheli in the Baitadilla hills, the first public sector mining townships in the region, the roads within the Nagarnar steel plant were wide and well paved. However, the road to the village outside was earthen and bumpy; it ended in a chowk, with the usual shops selling tea, soft drinks and cold samosas, a bus stand and a panchayat bhawan. The conversation in the tea shop was about the ongoing land acquisition. The shop owner said, pushing stalks of sugarcane through a press, that the government was now acquiring land for Rs 28–30 lakh an acre, when in 2001, they had forced people to sign away their land for Rs 11,000 an acre. Most land had been acquired then. The villagers had been lathi-charged and arrested when they protested. A balding man, Shankar, chimed in, saying he had got Rs 73,000 for his 5 acres. This was too little to buy alternative land; the family now survives on the class IV or manual job one son had obtained in NMDC. Since then, politicians and traders from Jagdalpur had bought up the land, in their own names if purchasing from non-Adavasis like the Sundis, or in the name of a trusted adivasi servant
(benami), since the law prohibits adivasi land from being sold to non-advasis. A tall, thin man with a sharp moustache, who worked at the Punjab National Bank, insisted that it was the market at work; the locals kept silent, and almost tangentially, as if it was part of someone else’s story, or in separate conversations with me, described what they had lost.

On the other side of Jagdalpur, in Lohandiguda, where a Tata steel plant was to have come up following an agreement in 2005, the villagers have been living in uncertainty and tension for eleven years. In 2007, the state carried out rapes and arrests to cow the villagers, organized by the CPI, into parting with their land to the Tatas. The company was silent on this, but ran sports programmes in schools, and operated a clinic as part of its corporate social responsibility (CSR). Villagers continued to cultivate their own land, but officials refused to give them loans or fertilizers since the land had been officially ‘acquired’. The only people who were really happy were the dalals who have a finger in the manipulation of land acquisition and sales. In August 2016, the company formally wound up its project, ostensibly because of delays in land acquisition, and the consequent loss of a captive iron ore mine, but also because of the glut in steel production worldwide.

The Wealth Beneath the Earth

In May 2015, Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Dantewada and announced investments of Rs 24,000 crore, for an ‘ultra mega’ steel plant at Dilmilli to the south of Jagdalpur, a 10 million metric tonne processing plant at Bacheli-Kirandul near the existing NMDC iron ore mines in Bailadilla, a railway line to bring iron ore from the planned Raoghat mines in the north to Jagdalpur, and a slurry pipe and pellet plant in Nagarnar. If the government had its way, Jagdalpur would be surrounded by steel plants and the entire region criss-crossed by pipelines, roads and railway lines carrying iron ore and other minerals. Where there are no mines, there will be dams and reservoirs to supply power to industry: the Polavaram dam in Andhra Pradesh, if it comes through, will submerge much of Konta block, while the Bodhghat hydroelectric project – once shelved but now revived – will flood villages in Dantewada. Between the mines, the dams and the defence establishments like the defence base at Mardum and the Jungle Warfare College in Kanker, the dense biodiversity of the region will be a thing of the past.

If the late nineteenth century belonged to the forest department, where forests were reserved to meet the shipbuilding and railway needs of the British, and the twentieth century belonged to the public engineers who built dams, the twenty-first century is undoubtedly – at least so far – the century for public–private partnerships in mining. The 2000–8 global commodity boom or, in the longer term, commodity supercycle, driven by demand from the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), led to a major rise in prices for primary commodities and a greater financialization of these commodities, as well as the development of new mining technologies. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, iron production worldwide went up by 10 per cent. New areas were opened up for mining, with state intervention in these areas taking on the form of a roll-out of rural infrastructure—roads, power, telecom towers, etc. This global phenomenon is visible in Chhattisgarh. During 1982–90, 96 per cent of the acquisition was for projects involving water resources, dropping to 49.9 per cent between 1991 and 2007. In contrast, acquisition for industry, mines, defence and roads (34.72 per cent of all acquisition) went up dramatically in the latter period, while acquisition for health and education stayed at zero. Between 1991 and 2007, 3703.75 acres of land were acquired for defence in Bastar alone.

Bastar’s mineral wealth includes 10 per cent of the country’s iron ore reserves, apart from bauxite, platinum, corundum, dolomite, limestone, etc.; minerals contribute greatly to the state’s revenues. Much of this is headed into private hands. From Kalinganagar and
Kashipur in Odisha to Noamundi in Jharkhand and Raigarh in north Chhattisgarh, landscapes are being transformed where sponge iron plants belch dense black smoke, coal mines destroy swathes of green forest, and mining for iron ore or bauxite displaces small helpless villages, turns their waters red with sludge and sucks up the springs.

Formal mining coexists with informal private extraction. I have passed rivers in Antagarh in the north where gold panning occurs, and in Tongpal in the south I have seen traders take out illegally smelted tin in bags strapped to the sides of their motorbikes, headed over the border to Odisha and Andhra Pradesh. All the police stations en route, said the traders, take a cut, giving me exact figures of how much they paid. Every night, according to a Dantewada journalist, 14-15 trucks with 16-40 tonnes of iron ore, illegally pilfered from the NMDC mines, are sent off from Bacheli and Kirandul to sponge iron plants in the state.

The emptying of villages by the Judum meant a great deal of unchecked smaller-scale prospecting and felling. In 2008, in a government guest house in Chintur on the Andhra Pradesh side of the border, waiting to cross over to Chhattisgarh, I met a Telugu businessman who had just acquired 3 hectares of land for a granite quarry in a village, all of whose inhabitants had been moved to camp. Three hectares, he figured, would get him a profit of Rs 10-20 crore. Under the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA), 1996, the villagers must be consulted before any lease for the mining of minor minerals is given in their village. But since there was no one left to ask, the administration simply usurped this right. The businessman said he sniffed opportunity at times of conflict when competition was low: his company had acquired some 100 hectares in different villages in small lots and under different names to circumvent the laws requiring federal clearance for diversion of forest land.
From Mining to Militarism

Mining and militarism have a deeply intimate history. In 2003, when India liberalized its mining policy, the de facto Maoist control over the region was seen as constituting a major obstacle to rapid industrialization and land acquisition. Industry associations like the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) explicitly supported the government's offensive against the Maoists and called for the involvement of the private sector in this effort:

The growing Maoist insurgency over large swathes of the mineral-rich countryside could soon hurt some industrial investment plans. Just when India needs to ramp up its industrial machine to lock in growth and when foreign companies are joining the party - Naxalites are clashing with mining and steel companies essential to India's long-term success.?

Human rights activists argue that it is not a coincidence that Salwa Judum began just when the state government had signed a memorandum of understanding for a steel plant with the Tatas in June 2005. Around the same time, Essar was acquiring land for another steel plant in Dhurli and Bhansi villages, and both the Tatas and Essar were given captive iron ore mines on the Bailadilla hills. 'Public hearings' were held in Lohandiguda, Dhurli and Bhansi, in order to fulfil the official requirement under PESA of eliciting villagers' consent:

The villagers under the leadership of Dantewada Adivasi Mahasabha and Sangharsh Samiti Dhurli, said that on 9th September the police forced them to sign No objection letters. Two constables were posted in each house. No outsider was allowed at the meeting place. People were not allowed to leave their homes or to talk to each other. According to villagers, at 9 a.m. they were forced into vehicles, and taken to the meeting location. Supporters of the opposition leader (Mahendra Karma) also helped the police in this process. The villagers related that they were taken into a room in twos, and pistols were placed at their temples to make them sign where told. They were told to not step out of the village afterwards.?

Those villagers who refused to sign were arrested, and Section 144 (prohibitory orders on assembly) was imposed on the area.

In North Bastar, 22 paramilitary camps fortify the prospective Raoghat mines. Villagers near the mine told us that some 10 years ago, when the project was being proposed, the police took away all their bows and arrows, leaving them vulnerable to attacks by wild animals. Since then they have arrested several village leaders protesting against the mines and railway line. Even the prosaic words of the Rapid Environmental Impact Assessment report on the Raoghat mines reveal how incalculable the loss to both people and nature would be if the mines and the railway line linking Dalli Rajhara to Jagdalpur came up. The country would lose:

26 plant species that are included in the red list of rare and endangered species of vascular plants of India; high average growing stock and ultimately, the presence of 22 mammalian species of which 15 are in either Endangered or Vulnerable list of IUCN appendices or WPA schedules; large number of insects including a few rare ones (identification in progress), 28 species of Butterflies and 102 species of bird from 38 families.?

The site proposed for the mining waste dumps, the report warned, would destroy the drainage of the entire valley; and indeed the entire culture of the people would likely become extinct.

A Concert of Interests

Important as mining and resource extraction are, they are not the whole story. Land acquisition has been taking place across the
country, and while the police often work as corporate agents, firing on villagers protesting against land acquisition,\(^3\) they have not resorted to Salwa Judum-style grouping elsewhere. Instead, what we see is the coming together of several interests – the security establishment in Delhi, local politicians, the police, the mining industry, the Hindu chauvinist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and unemployed youth. The Indian state may have let its sovereignty slide in the abandoned adivasi homelands of India, untouched for years by basic services like education or health. Elsewhere in Uttar Pradesh or Bihar, the police coexist with and are often subservient to the armed power of local big men. However, Maoist control over vast areas is untenable for the state. A casual glance at the topography through which the Salwa Judum moved and the burned villages it left in its wake will show that there is no one-to-one correlation between the villages attacked and the mining areas. Instead, major Maoist strongholds were targeted for the first attacks, and others that fell en route were burnt almost randomly.

The RSS has always seen the left as its primary enemy. A report by an RSS think tank talks of the history of conflict between the Maoists and Sangh organizations such as the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, Vidya Bharati and ideologically similar groups like the Gayatri Parivar, and proudly confirms the RSS hand in Salwa Judum:

\[\text{The participation of Gayatri Parivar, Sangha Parivar and the Divya Seva Sangh [sic] situated in Gumargunda village of Dantewada is incredible... This movement [Salwa Judum] started fifteen years ago through the peaceful People Awakening Programme. The overall objective of the movement is to form a village security committee. This movement stays completely away from any publicity or propaganda. This is their main strength.}^{11}\]

For Congress politician Mahendra Karma, the alleged leader of the Judum, the campaign was a chance to make a name and money for himself and his followers. In 2005, several people also told me that Karma got involved in the Judum so as to save himself from CBI prosecution in the \textit{malik makbuja} scam, in which timber had been illegally felled on a large scale. For at least a century before mining became the main attraction, Bastar’s forest wealth has been a source of huge profit for both the state and private traders.

Before 1947, felling teak or fruit-bearing trees on private land was prohibited except when shade or falling leaves upset standing crops. After Independence, peasants were given the right (\textit{malik makbuja}) to cut trees on their own land, after taking government permission. Contractors used this to persuade peasants with little understanding of market prices to sell them teak trees – which cost lakhs – at ridiculously low rates. The contractors also removed timber from government forests, which was then passed off as coming from private lands. Several hundred truckloads of timber were thus taken away. In response, the government enacted the MP Protection of Scheduled Tribes (Interest in Trees) Act, 1956, under which the sale of trees from adivasi lands has to be sanctioned and supervised by the Collector, to ensure the adivasis are not cheated.

However, the administration proved an unreliable protector, colluding with timber merchants to subvert the law. Agents, usually immigrants, contacted villagers, tempted them to sell trees and offered to pursue the complex paperwork involved in return for a commission. But their profits went beyond any reasonable commission, helped by the widespread illiteracy in the area. In 1997, while researching the \textit{malik makbuja} scam, I interviewed a man called Mundru in Kukanar. The agent kept Mundru’s bank passbook and merrily withdrew whatever he wanted from the account. Of the Rs 2,72,000 deposited in his account for sale of trees, Mundru got merely Rs 16,000. Timber merchants bought not just trees but, where they could, the land itself, in order to fell trees. Rich adivasi politicians from both the Congress and BJP, like Mahendra Karma and Rajaram
Manish Kunjam, who was then a CPI MLA, raised questions about the scam in the legislative assembly and the Bastar Collector complained against his own superior, the Commissioner, for collusion in the malik makbua scam. However, between 1993 and 1996, the Madhya Pradesh government did nothing. An environmentalist in Karnataka, S.R. Hiremath of the Samaj Parivartana Samudaya, and Ratneswar Nath of Ekta Parishad, an NGO in Kanker, then took the matter to the Supreme Court. In 1997, the court banned all felling in Bastar. It also set up an independent enquiry by the Lokayukt, a government watchdog body. Charges were filed against several people, but nothing came of it.

The Lokayukt report specifically names Mahendra Karma, who was then MP for Bastar, for defrauding five residents of Kasoli village whose land he bought. In the registered sale deed, while the land itself cost merely Rs 22,050, the 25 teak trees, two bija trees and seven mahua trees standing on it were valued at Rs 1,61,000. The total was thus Rs 1.83 lakh. Karma claimed to the Lokayukt that he had paid the full amount, but the sellers said they got only Rs 1.5 lakh. Karma then resold the trees — and it turned out that there were actually 79 trees on that piece of land and not merely 34 trees as mentioned in the sale deed — and got Rs 17.5 lakh for it. In short, Karma made a profit of Rs 16.5 lakh within six months, while the actual landowners got practically nothing. As the Lokayukt report dispassionately notes, all this was possible because of collusion at all levels of officialdom:

These officers (forest and revenue officials responsible for supervising sales) granted permission freely in favour of other influential persons also like Mahendra Karma (the then Member of Parliament), Rajaram Todem (presently Dy. Leader of Opposition in M.P. Legislative Assembly) and other influential merchant families like Suranas, Awasthis, Brij Mohan Gupta and many others who have entered in this trade of purchasing land with standing trees and selling the timber. It is observed on the basis of scrutiny of records that their cases were decided with utmost promptness whereas cases of other ordinary persons were decided in a routine manner.12

Once the Judum started, however, all this was quickly forgotten.

The Police Stake in a Continuing War

The presence of the Naxalites has been hugely beneficial for the police, as Shivraj Patil, who was Union home minister at the time, admitted to the ICI in 2006. Police stations compete to be declared ‘Naxal affected’ since this brings with it the promise of ‘security-related expenditure’, free central government (taxpayer) money without any metric of accountability. The police also want the promotions, which come with a high kill rate of insurgents, never mind if these are ‘genuine encounters’ or extrajudicial killings.

On the other hand, every time there is a major encounter or ambush in which the police or CRPF get killed, it becomes an occasion for the security forces to demand more money. The press dutifully reports violations of standard operating procedure, the need for better equipment and better coordination between states and the Centre.

In the police narrative, they never have enough personnel to fight the Maoists. They claim that the administration initially relied on Salwa Judum vigilantes because decades of neglect had resulted in low people–police ratios in Chhattisgarh, and this was a prelude to establishing full control by the police. However, the police–population figures in Chhattisgarh have for long been higher than in many other states with a Maoist presence.13 It is true that the police–area ratio in Chhattisgarh is among the lowest in India — 31.8 police personnel per square kilometre (2009) up from 17.59 (2005–6) — but again, this is higher than in some neighbouring states.14 What the security
establishment ignores is that Scheduled Areas were meant to be sparsely policed and lightly administered as a matter of policy.

The lack of police has been overcompensated by the presence of armed personnel sent by the Centre. In 2016, 116 battalions of CAPF were posted to 10 states across central India, with more forces in the pipeline. Of the 93 battalions deployed the previous year, over half (48 battalions) were in Bastar alone, with four battalions earmarked just for the Raoghat mines. By 2016, there will be an estimated 0.1 million 'boots on the ground' in Bastar for a population of about 3.09 million (2011 census). Coupled with unmanned aerial vehicles to spot Maoist movements, helicopters to drop security forces, bulletproof mine vehicles and a whole host of other equipment, in the 11 years between 2004 and 2015, central India has become a bristling war theatre. The air force has started practising strafing, though their official position is that this is only for self-defence. But nothing is ever enough for the security establishment.

Middle-class Dreams

Life in this region is marked by a duality. Larger-than-life statues of dancing Gond women – their naked black bodies adorned with bronze-paint jewellery – mark the roundabouts of Jagdalpur, gratifying settler fantasies, even as the presence of real adivasis diminishes in the city. Wide roads with yellow dividers now cut through small towns like Sukma and Bijapur, formerly just a jumble of small shops, petrol pumps and an occasional roadside eatery. Bijapur now boasts a district library, a swimming pool and glass-fronted government buildings. The country is full of youth looking for jobs; if adivasis must be sacrificed to make way for industry, so be it.

Most of the middle class actively supports the idea of mining (even if it comes with severe police repression), claiming that this is the route by which adivasis will be 'civilized' and 'mainstreamed'. In 1938, Wilfred Grigson, the administrator of Bastar state and author of the authoritative The Maria Gonds of Bastar, wrote:

As the Maratha Amil sixty-seven years before, so now the Victorian Englishman: develop trade and civilisation would follow. The isolation of centuries was to end, Bastar was to be opened to the world by land and water, and its 'savages' to exchange their freedom for the 'allurements and comforts of civilisation', trade and traders, clothes, tobacco, a better system of criminal and judicial procedure, vaccination and copper coin... A land free from rules and regulations and a race that had no use for copper coin did not square with that passion for uniformity that characterised the Victorian rulers of India and still marks the framers of constitutions for the India of today.
indigenous than the adivasis, whom they despise as backward and incapable of fully utilizing the advantages of the area. The desperate poverty of the adivasis is turned against them, to justify displacing them for more productive uses of land. From 1947 till the turn of the century, approximately one in every four adivasis nationally had been displaced for dams, industries, mines and similar projects.

It is this immigrant constituency that is especially vocal in demanding a railway line, mining and industrialization, which they think will get them jobs. In 2009, when the CPI organized a public hearing in Lohandiguda on the proposed steel plant to counter the fraudulent public hearing organized by the government, these non-adivasi youth barricaded the road to try to prevent them, with tacit support from the administration. Compared to these assertive ‘insiders’, everyone who comes in the way of their exploitation of resources – Maoists, human rights activists, metropolitan journalists – is an outsider.

The immigrants retain close connections to other parts of India, speak the same languages and share the same aspirations as the metropolitan urban middle classes – who, since liberalization began in 1991, have been fed on a story of accumulation with growth and learnt to love private capital as the saviour of their times. Even when the weight of ‘scams’ or instances of collusion in utilizing natural resources between corporates and government became apparent in the last days of the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) regime, public anger was directed not at the model of growth predicated on the use of adivasi resources but at the money being made by politicians. This is the constituency that broadly supports the government’s counter-insurgency efforts, even if the way the Salwa Judum initially played out, with the unchecked power it gave adivasi SPOs, was not to their liking.

In comparison to immigrant youth, local adivasi and ‘Bastariya’ youth are much more conflicted about the effects of mining and industrialization. They know that projects like the Bailadilla mines have brought them nothing but displacement and ruined their environment, but at the same time, they see no alternative model of employment. While education and literacy have been hugely neglected in adivasi areas, there is a growing population of youth who have been schooled up to class 12 or college, and who, in part because of the alienating nature of their education, do not wish to return to farming. Lacking the kind of family contacts that non-adivasi youth have, their main hope lies in the formal government sector in which a certain number of jobs are reserved by law for the SCs and STs. But given the downsizing and contractualization of government employment, these jobs are almost impossible to get. In 2015, 75,000 persons applied for 30 peon positions in Chhattisgarh’s Directorate of Economics and Statistics.20

In 2005, when the government started the Salwa Judum, adivasi youth had few choices. Many were attracted by the Maoists, who had been a familiar presence since childhood, and their argument that people should support them in order to defend their lands had a deep resonance. This was strengthened by the brutal Salwa Judum attacks on their villages, which forced many to join the Maoists in pure self-defence. But many – especially the SCs and OBCs who
saw the Maoists as a predominantly adivasi party — were attracted by the prospect of government jobs as SPOs.

**Dehumanizing Adivasis**

Decades of upper-caste racism have so naturalized the association between adivasis and animals that they are often described as subhuman, as in the Bastar tourism website which ran for a few years from 2005, before middle-class adivasis finally succeeded in having it scrapped. Describing Maria drinking habits, the government proclaimed: 'when drinking water from a stream they do not take up water in their hands but put their mouth down to it like cattle.' It added pruriently, 'The tribals of this area is famous for their “ghotul” where the prospective couples do the “dating” and have free sex also [sic].'

The Maoists have become the national vermin, competing with the national animal and the national song, and ‘infesting’ a whole red corridor of their very own. While the Maoists and the villagers they represent occupy the lower end of the animal scale, the sort that humans like to crush and exterminate, the security forces are exhorted to bring out the animal in themselves, the fiercer the better. The police and paramilitary units specially trained in anti-Naxalite operations are called Greyhounds in Andhra Pradesh, Jaguars in Jharkhand and Cobras (Commando Battalion for Resolution Action, a unit of the CRPF) in Chhattisgarh. The forces also employ dogs to discover explosives and sense ambushes, importing Belgian Mallinois for the task. On one trip, the police unleashed a dog to check our car. This one happened to be a particularly enthusiastic puppy which licked our faces, but doubtless, this was not the effect they intended. The use of dogs also has a symbolic value in reducing the enemy to hunted prey.

Even when talking of welfare and not war, the prose of dehumanization is evident: if food rations or other services are denied to villages, it does not matter, because it is only Naxalites who ‘infest’ these areas. Conversely, if villagers are to be given services, it is only because they are ‘Naxal-hit’ and need to be ‘weaned away’ from the Naxalites, not because they have entitlements as citizens. At a meeting in June 2015 organized by the Surya Foundation, a pro-BJP think tank, a ‘security expert’ from a reputed government security think tank, waved a list of solutions. One of them included stopping all rice-carrying trucks from entering Abujhmarh, considered the headquarters of the Maoists, so that the Maoists could not stop the trucks and offload supplies for themselves. When I pointed out there were villagers living in the Marh, he declared, ‘There are ways to get rice to them, such as going house to house and distributing rice.’ But then the Maoists can simply ask each household to set aside some rice for them,’ I said. He replied, ‘The villagers will then refuse and this demand will help to alienate them from the Maoists.' I gave up at this point. How does one begin to explain the complicated overlap between adivasis and Maoists to those blinded by hubris?

To summarize, the repertoire of counter-insurgency may be common to different parts of the world, but in Chhattisgarh it is inflected with a particular character that draws on the nature of Indian democracy: the location of adivasis as the poorest and most ‘backward’ section of the Indian population requiring to be weaned away from their forest-dependent lifestyles into urban mainstream society; the constellation of classes, especially the growing middle classes, which want economic growth at all costs; and the attractions of government employment in the police or paramilitary forces, especially given the lack of other jobs. Counter-insurgency, especially in order to clear the way for mining and industrialization, is justified as a massive employment exercise, and displacement of the poor is sanitized and celebrated as growth and development.

**Retelling This Story**

Inevitably, the commentary on the conflict, like the conflict itself, is polarized on distinct lines. Police officers and security experts have
generated a large amount of what one might call 'Naxology'. This is similar to colonial Indology, which came about as a form of knowledge that would help the British to control the population better. There are some relatively more sympathetic semi-official analyses focusing on the 'root causes', such as a Planning Commission report written in 2008, which highlight the discrimination and poverty in so-called Naxalite areas. But thanks to a decade of concerted counter-insurgency propaganda, such narratives are slowly disappearing from public discourse. Police officials frequently claim that military action rather than dialogue is justified because the Maoists have lost any ideological basis they may once have had. However, their own tactics are based on the premise that civilians will obey whoever exercises greater force, that is, that control is simply a function of power, and ideology has no purchase.

In hard-nosed quantitative social science, there is equally little room for ideology. Some analysts like to plot the overlap between forest cover, mining, adivasi populations and insurgency as if one automatically leads to the other. While there are indeed strong correspondences, they are not explanatory in and of themselves. Jhabua and Dantewada districts have very similar percentages of forest cover, poverty and adivasi populations, but where Dantewada has been the epicentre of Maoist insurgency, in large part because of its proximity to Andhra Pradesh, Jhabua has been the site of experimentation for a number of Gandhian 'people's movements'.

To understand the Maoists in Bastar, or indeed anywhere, one must look at Maoist ideology and organizational structures, individual lives of sacrifice, and historically learnt repertoires of resistance and solidarity among the local population. Even within Dantewada, there is a wide variation in villages, with some considered Maoist strongholds and others relatively neutral.

In the currency of journalism and human rights, analysis depends on your political position. For the right-wing commentator, gullible adivasis are brainwashed by manipulative Naxalites. For liberals, adivasis are 'caught' (sandwiched) between the Maoists and the state.

For a radical, whose battle is often as much with the liberals as with the state, the liberals are 'sandwich theorists', naive at best and state apologists at worst, who commit the ultimate sin of 'equating state violence and Maoist violence'.

These would-be revolutionaries see only resistance wherever they look, assimilating the figure of the adivasi Maoist into the glorious fight against corporate displacement, regardless of the multiple reasons why people join the Maoists. Of course, resistance and courage exist, in remarkable measure, especially for a people as exploited and under siege as the adivasis of central India. However, the urban radicals are unable to cope with the moral complexity of multiple affiliations and desires, the differences across regions and over time as people's allegiances change, and the desperate yearning for peace. People want both the Maoists and the state, but for different reasons: the former provide freedom from a hated bureaucracy and the latter holds out the promise of welfare on a scale that no one else can provide. Even as villagers hate the government for what it is doing to them, they want justice from this very government. And even as the Maoists curse the Constitution, they invoke its principles when criticizing the extrajudicial killings or the arrest of their leaders. India's constitutional democracy, because of and in spite of all its failures, is a predicament and promise that no citizen can escape from.

Counter-insurgency and Democracy Today

A small cottage industry of quantitative political science literature is devoted to assessing whether democracy makes any difference to the conduct of counter-insurgency. Some argue that democracies are less likely to produce internal insurgencies; that public reaction to the deaths of soldiers as well as to human rights violations increase the costs to the state; and that democratic states are more likely to take a 'balanced' or 'moderate' approach, avoiding indiscriminate killing and combining counter-insurgency with welfarism and co-optation of elites. Other scholars contest this claim, arguing
that there is no empirical evidence, when comparing regime types, that democracies handle counter-insurgencies any differently from colonial or authoritarian regimes.23

That India has an electoral democracy, a free press, statutory institutions like the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), an independent judiciary and a flourishing human rights movement should surely mean something. But what they mean may not be what we expect. In fact, I argue, it is these that provide the cracks through which Indian democracy falls – both through their institutional weakness and the official legitimation they provide.

Electoral democracy seems to be of limited use in stemming massive human rights violations due to counter-insurgency. Evidence includes: the collusion of the two main political parties in conducting the Salwa Judum and the acquiescence of all the major political parties to similar operations in their own states; the use of electoral victories to justify pogroms or avoid culpability; and the role of mining companies in funding elections. If the media contributes to a freely functioning democracy, its very freedom undermines that democracy when it fails to report on certain things or slant the story. The courts or statutory institutions like the NHRC may choose to check the government, but when they don’t, their power to conceal human rights abuses is far greater in a democracy than in a military regime.

What has changed is that counter-insurgency now has to compete with international cyber-activism, though of course, both the traditional and new media can also be an effective extension of state propaganda. There are other institutional features that introduce some checks. India’s federalism is often seen by the police as a problem for cross-border operations, but it also means that the victims of Salwa Judum had the option to flee to Andhra Pradesh, where for all the hardships they faced, life was a little more secure. And because popular followings cannot be totally suppressed, events like funerals or memorial meetings can become spaces for the enactment of alternative allegiances. When Mallojula Koteswara Rao, popularly known as Kishenji, was killed by the security forces in West Bengal in November 2011, thousands of people gathered at his funeral, including members of the legislative assembly: “Since morning people started pouring in from places as far as Nizamabad, Adilabad and Visakapatnam. A serpentine queue could be seen at Kishenji’s house at Brahmana Veedhi (street), where his body was kept.”24

If the Maoists are the spectre haunting the state today, they have also influenced its imagination in more positive ways – at least enough to enable other groups like the Campaign for Survival and Dignity or the National Alliance of People’s Movements (NAPM) to press for legislation like the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, popularly called the Forest Rights Act (FRA), giving security of tenure to forest dwellers, or the Land Acquisition Act, 2013, which introduced clauses on social impact assessment and consent. That these acts passed by the UPA regime are being undermined by the Modi government, which came to power in 2014, is another matter.

Above all, democracy gives those who dissent a basic advantage: the ideals of the very Constitution and rule of law in whose name they are declared illegal. Ultimately, then, the story of Bastar will go down in history not just as a moment when democracy failed and fell by the wayside, trampling the lives of its citizens, but also a moment when it was rescued by its people – men like Podiyam Panda who managed to keep their sanity and humour in the most difficult conditions, or women who bravely testified to rape by the security forces, despite unbearable intimidation. When the state falters, it is citizens who intervene to prop up the state idea, demanding accountability and the rule of law, if only as a sign of hope that flourishes despite the anomic and despair. These are signs that stand for wonders in the parched landscape of civil war, the signposts to a democracy that is always in process, never achieved, but never abandoned.
In my narrative, I walk through dense and fragrant forests, and I can hear the koel calling. Schools teach in Gondi, Dhurwa, Hindi and English – with options to learn Spanish, Arabic or Chinese. They have well-equipped chemistry labs and large playing fields. School projects include making and editing Gondi films, recording traditional songs and cataloguing the plants that grow in their forest. Immigrant children also learn the local languages in school, and take pride in adivasi culture instead of looking down on it. Once they grow up, some of them, like Hidme and Hadma, Masa and Deve, become novelists, lawyers, politicians and scientists, using their knowledge of the forest to create life-saving drugs. But they always come home for the village mandai, to worship their hill gods. My story dances with abandon to the sound of the Madia dhol under a full moon night, where my friends and I raise a toast of mahua to hope and the future.

Notes

1. Burnt Rice

1. The former princely states of Bastar and Kanker were combined to form Bastar district after Independence. In 1998–99, Bastar district was trifurcated into North Bastar–Kanker, Bastar and South Bastar–Dantewada districts, and subsequently into seven smaller fragments: Bastar, Kondagaon, Kanker, Narayanpur, Dantewada, Bijapur and Sukma. The latter two were carved out of Dantewada district in 2007 and 2012 respectively. The state of Chhattisgarh was separated from Madhya Pradesh in 2000.


5. During the Second Boer War (1899–1902), more Boer women, children and blacks died than male Boer combatants after being regrouped in
British 'concentration camps'; in Vietnam, over 8.5 million people had been settled in 7205 strategic hamlets by 1963; in Algeria during 1954–61, 1.9 to 2.3 million civilians were grouped by the French; and in Kenya over a million people were resettled in 854 villages to crush the Mau Mau revolt. Nandini Sundar, ‘Interning insurgent populations’, Economic and Political Weekly 46, No. 6 (2011), pp. 47–57.


9. Through most of the book, I refer to the region as Andhra Pradesh rather than Telangana, because that is more accurate for most of the period described here. Moreover, while Khammam has been transferred to Telangana, seven mandals which will be affected by the proposed Polavaram project have been retained with Andhra Pradesh. These are primarily the areas to which the Chhattisgarh villagers fled. See the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, No. 6 of 2014. In the maps, Andhra Pradesh has been used when the maps show events before 2014, and Telangana when showing the boundaries as of 2016.


11. Victoria Sanford, Buried Secrets: Truth and Human Rights in Guatemala (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003). Sanford writes of army units encircling villages at dawn; of minors conscripted by the army into joining ‘civil patrols’ who were sent to hunt survivors from their own villages in the mountains, burn food and steal livestock; of ‘communities of resistance’ protected by armed guerrillas who themselves had no food; and ‘community surrenders’ to come and live in army-controlled ‘work resettlement camps’ which they could not leave without permission.

12. Ram Narayan Kumar and Amrik Singh, Reduced to Ashes: The Insurgency and Human Rights in Punjab (Kathmandu: South Asia Forum for Human Rights, 2003); Nanda Talukdar Foundation (NTF) and Human Rights Law Network (HRLN), Secret Killings of Assam (Guwahati and New Delhi: NTF & HRLN, 2009).


15. Amrita Rangasamy, ‘And then there were none: A report from Srikakulam’, Economic and Political Weekly 8, No. 46 (17 November 1973), pp. 2041–2.


17. Rashmi Drolia, ‘Chhattisgarh budget: Raman announces 4 new battalions in Bastar to fight rebels’.


2. Iron in the Soul


4. Government of India, Report of the High Level Committee on Socio-economic, Health and Educational Status of Tribal Communities of India
(henceforth Xaxa Committee Report) (New Delhi: Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2014), Table 8.12, p. 272.


6. Supriya Sharma, ‘Iron ore mines going for Rs 1 lakh in Chhattisgarh?’ Times of India, 2 August 2010. In 2013, 18 mining leases were sanctioned in Chhattisgarh of which 12 were located in Bastar alone; and of the 21 prospecting licences given in the state, over 95 per cent were to private companies. Letter dated 7 November 2013 from the Chhattisgarh Bachao Andolan, a consortium of groups in the state struggling over rights to natural resources, to the Ministry of Tribal Affairs protesting termination of the M.B. Shah Commission of Enquiry.


10. For instance, in police firings at Maikanch village in Rayagada district, Odisha, three people were killed protesting against land acquisition for bauxite mining (2001); at Tatkara in Ranchi district, Jharkhand, nine were killed protesting against the Koel Karo dam (2001); at the Khuga dam site in Churachandpur district, Manipur, three were killed (2005); at Kalinganagar in Odisha, 12 were killed protesting against a Tata Steel plant (2006); at Nandigram in West Bengal in 2007, 15 were killed protesting against land acquisition for a special economic zone.


13. In 2009, the police–population ratio was 194.4 (sanctioned) and 138.16 (actual) policemen per 1,00,000 persons, going up to 268.92 (sanctioned) and 184.5 (actual) in 2013. The All-India average in 2013 was 181.47 (sanctioned) and 136.42 (actual). Answer to Rajya Sabha Starred Question No. 405 for 06 August 2014.


18. Special correspondent, ‘Rs. 50 crore a year to develop Naxal-hit and backward areas’, The Hindu, 8 August 2010.

19. I am grateful to Farah Naqvi for relaying this conversation.


22. Abhishek Bhalla, ‘Meet the dogs that have instilled fear among Maoists in the red zone’, Mail Today, 15 April 2016


3. ‘Because I Want Peace’

1. While both the Maoists and other commentators treat Naxalbari 1967 as the spark for the Maoist movement in India, the Telangana armed struggle, and the Tebhaga and Warli peasant movements are important precursors. The ‘right wing’ of the party advocated stopping the Telangana movement on the grounds that the armed squads were not equipped to confront the Indian army and that they would lose the support of the rich peasantry if they fought against India. While initially the party resolved to cease armed struggle only if the peasants could keep the land they had occupied, if cases against all prisoners connected with the struggle were closed and the ban on the party lifted, eventually, in the face of Congress intransigence, pressures to fight elections and internal differences, the resistance was withdrawn unconditionally in 1951. The people surrendered their arms.

In 1964, the CPI split on Sino-Soviet lines into the CPI and CPI(M). Broadly speaking, those who had advocated continuing the Telangana armed struggle went over to the CPI(M), and later, in 1968, the Maoists in the CPI(M) split to form the Andhra Pradesh Co-ordination Committee for Communist Revolutionaries, taking a substantial number of the cadre with them. Within the Andhra Maoists, some of them supported the Charu Majumdar group of Bengal Maoists, and the All India Co-ordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries which had been formed after the Naxalbari uprising in 1967 and which subsequently became the Communist Party of India (Marxist–Leninist), CPI(ML), in 1969. In particular, the group which led the Srikkakulam struggle sided with Charu Majumdar, while Chandra Pulla Reddy, T. Nagi Reddy and D. Venkateswara Rao advocated a more protracted struggle, believing that the situation was not yet ripe for armed revolution everywhere and mass struggles were needed to address people’s immediate needs. This group was active in Khammam and Warangal districts.

In the meantime, of course, the CPI(ML) had been working in other states, following a programme of annihilations of individual landlords, attacks on police, as well as mobilization of urban youth. After Charu Majumdar’s death in 1972, the movement splintered, but parts of it came together again as the CPI (ML) Central Organising Committee in 1974. There were other groups like the Dakshin Desh which had never been part of the CPI (ML), but which later became the Maoist Communist Centre, working in Bihar and various other permutations and combinations of ideological groupings, which worked in different states. For readings, see Sumanta Banerjee, *In the Wake of Naxalbari* (Calcutta: Subarnarekha, 1980); CPI (Maoist), *30 Years of Naxalbari* (2000); Shanta Sinha, *Maoists in Andhra Pradesh* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 1989); P. Sundarayya, *Telangana People's Struggle*, N. Venugopal, *Understanding Maoists* (Kolkata: Setu Prakashani, 2013).


5. The police list eight squads in Bastar: Konta Sukma and Bailadilla dalams (1984), Mased and National Park dalams (1983), Abujhmarh dalam (1988), Bhamragarh dalam, Keskapal dalam and Etappali dalam. Of the 15–30 men in each squad, the leaders and half the members were from Andhra. A.N. Singh, ‘Naxalpanthi Gathividhiyan Sambandhi Teep’, cyclostyled document prepared by I.G. Singh, Bilalai Zone, Bilalai, 1992; see also 1990 police note on the Jan Jagran Abhiyan.

Glossary

aonla
adivasi
anganwadi
anudeshika
baap
baheda
bandh
beedi

beeja pandum
benami

bhajans
bhawan
bhum
bhumkal
bhum pandum
bhoj
bier metta
bija
chakka jam

Phyllanthus emblica
Scheduled Tribe
pre-primary childcare centre
teaching assistant
father
Terminalia bellirica
strike
local cigarette (tobacco wrapped in tendu leaf)

seed-sowing festival
usually refers to illegal transactions or property held in another's name
Hindu devotional songs
building
earth
war to defend the earth; 1910 rebellion
seed-sowing festival
feast/food
big mountain
Pterocarpus marsupium
road blockade

char
chhind
chhindras
chowk
dada log
dalal
dalam
devi gudi
desi
dhaora
dhol
gaita
garh
gaddi pandum
ghotul
gopniya
haat
inami
inda
Ikhwani
jaga
jan adalat
Jan Jagran Abhiyan
jan militia
jan sunwai
janathana sarkar
jatra
jawans
jhola
Judum
karum/kurmi pandum
new millets festival

Buchanania lanzan
Phoenix sylvestris (date palm)
fermented sap of date palm
crossroad/market centre
elder brothers (colloquial term for Maoists)
middleman
armed squad
mother goddess shrine
native/local
Anogeissus latifolia
double-headed drum
priest
fort (headquarters of small chieftainships)
ancestor spirit festival
youth dormitory
secret
weekly market
rewarded
wide waters (river/sea)
Kashmiri pro-government militia, consisting of surrendered militants
earth deity
people's court
Public Awakening Campaign
people's militia
people's hearing
people's government
sacrifices/festivals
soldiers (paramilitary men)
cloth bag
long collective hunt (traditionally),
counter-insurgency operation (since 2005)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>khapra</td>
<td>baked-brick roof tiles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>khas aadmi</td>
<td>close followers/friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>khichdi</td>
<td>rice and lentils cooked together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>koi/koitor/koya</td>
<td>human/person (Gondi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>korta pandum</td>
<td>new rice festival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kothar</td>
<td>field shelter to guard crops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ladi</td>
<td>open shelter with thatched roof in fields or threshing grounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lal Salaam</td>
<td>red salute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>landa</td>
<td>rice beer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lathi</td>
<td>stick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lungi</td>
<td>cotton wrap-around worn by men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mai-baap</td>
<td>mother–father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>majhi</td>
<td>headman of pargana (cluster of villages)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>malik makbuja</td>
<td>owner’s right to cut trees on his/her own land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mahua</td>
<td>Madhuca indica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mandai</td>
<td>pargana festival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mantri mahoday</td>
<td>honourable minister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>marh</td>
<td>hill range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>marka pandum</td>
<td>new mango festival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mata</td>
<td>mother goddess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mati</td>
<td>earth (deity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mitanin</td>
<td>village-level health worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>moong</td>
<td>green gram</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>murdabad</td>
<td>death to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nala</td>
<td>rivulet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>panchayat</td>
<td>village self-governance unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pandum</td>
<td>festival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>para</td>
<td>hamlet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pargana</td>
<td>cluster of several villages (traditional administrative division)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>patcl</td>
<td>village headman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>patta</td>
<td>land title document</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>patwari</td>
<td>revenue officer in charge of land records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pecdith</td>
<td>victims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>peredhi</td>
<td>earth priest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>perma</td>
<td>permanent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pucca</td>
<td>priest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pujari</td>
<td>minister in charge of an area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prabhari mantri</td>
<td>private militia under the Nizam of Hyderabad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>razakar</td>
<td>affinal relatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>saga</td>
<td>soldier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sainik</td>
<td>Shorea robusta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sal</td>
<td>pacification/purification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>salwa</td>
<td>purification hunt (counter-insurgency operation since 2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salwa Judum</td>
<td>committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>samiti</td>
<td>fried snack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>samosa</td>
<td>village-level organization set up by Maoists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sangham</td>
<td>struggle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sangharsh</td>
<td>government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sarkar</td>
<td>elected head of a village panchayat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sarpanch</td>
<td>all-community platform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sarv samaj</td>
<td>contract schoolteacher</td>
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<tr>
<td>shikshakarmi</td>
<td>refugee camp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shivir</td>
<td>shaman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>siraha</td>
<td>Caryota urens (fishtail palm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sulph</td>
<td>revenue administrative unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tehsiil</td>
<td>Diospyros melanoxylon, leaf used for local cigarettes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tendu</td>
<td>sesame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tilli</td>
<td>police station</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thana</td>
<td>person in charge of a police station</td>
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Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>tora</th>
<th>fruit of <em>Madhuca indica</em></th>
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<tr>
<td>wadde</td>
<td>herbal healer</td>
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<td>vikas</td>
<td>development</td>
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<tr>
<td>vetta</td>
<td>short hunts around seed-sowing time</td>
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<tr>
<td>zindabad</td>
<td>long live</td>
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</table>

Acknowledgements

Of all the books I have written or edited, this has been the hardest one to do, in part because I have so much invested in the situation. Acknowledging people is even harder because there is no way to measure comradeship, concern, affection, selflessness and the inspiration provided by those around me.

I am deeply grateful to Manish Kunjam, Podiyam Panda, Rama Sodi, Kartam Joga, and others in the Communist Party of India, all of whom I cannot name, with whom I have had many long discussions. In particular, I admire Manish Kunjam for his insights, his ability to laugh even in the midst of conflict, and his courage. I thank Podiyam Panda for those winter dawn conversations, for never losing heart despite his own dire situation, and instead advising me to take things 'one step at a time'.

In Bastar, many people have helped in a variety of ways; I cannot name them for their own safety. My old friends from the 1990s, when I first lived in the region as a researcher, have always been there for me. The Maoists have never taken me on a guided tour of 'their' areas, as they have done with other journalists and writers. I was told it was because I asked too many difficult questions. However, I am grateful to village friends of long standing for sharing their experience of the Maoists with me, and to former Maoists who very kindly recounted