

THE WORLD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN
IMPERIALIST VERSUS PEOPLE'S MODEL OF DEVELOPMENT
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Cover: Upper left - Charu Mazumdar, founder of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist). Center - Adivasi protesters putting up road blockades during the 2008 Lalgarh movement. Bottom - peasants and workers protesting against the construction of the Gurupriya bridge in Malkangiri, Odisha—one of the Indian government's infrastructure projects to “secure” the territory.



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PART I

Imperialist Development

CHALLENGE OF NEO-IMPERIALISM: ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND STRATEGIC RAMIFICATIONS IN INDIA

The Republic of India was formed with much enthusiasm and fanfare after the transfer of power in 1947 by British imperialism to “friendly and reliable hands.” However, the period since “the first prime minister of Free India” declared himself “the First Servant of the Indian people, pledged to their service and betterment,”¹ unfortunately created the condition not of the “betterment” in the living condition of the people, but of prolonged agony for the basic masses. No social revolution preceded or followed the transfer of power. The big comprador bourgeoisie and the feudal class—the two main pillars of colonial rule—became the ruling classes of India. Unlike what many Indians dreamt of, this transfer of power did not bring about the end of imperialist control over India; rather, it signaled the beginning of the process of imperialist control in a new way. In fact, it implied the subordination of India’s economy and its interests to and the exploitation of her resources by foreign powers under the new signboard of freedom and independence. In the name of building an independent, self-reliant, and advanced economy, the Indian ruling classes have made it more dependent on the capital and technology of imperialist countries. In the name of development and industrialization, they have helped the comprador big bourgeoisie to develop quickly, strengthened the stranglehold of imperialism over the country’s economy, politics, and culture and have not made any essential change in the feudal relations in the countryside. In the name of non-alignment in foreign policy, they have, in fact, pursued a policy of bi-alignment with Anglo-American and Soviet powers. In the name of democracy and equal opportunities for all, they have trampled underfoot the democratic rights of the people and tried to stifle the struggles of various nationalities for autonomy and self-determination. What was a colony before 1947 became a semi-colony after the transfer of power.

The British imperialists, during the years of its subjugation of India, transformed the Indian economy into its raw-material supplying append-

¹ Jawaharlal Nehru, *Independence and After: A Collection of the more important speeches of Jawaharlal Nehru from September 1946 to May 1949*, New Delhi, The Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, GOI, August 1949, p. 7.

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age that fattened and developed the British economy at the cost of India's underdevelopment. In the years following colonial rule, the subjugation to foreign capital continued in a new form, although India became formally independent. In place of Britain, however, there entered the US—the new “big brother” in the imperialist world—which sought to transform the Indian economy in its own image to serve its own needs. In fact, as John Foster Dulles, the US Secretary of State once put it, “there are two ways of conquering a foreign nation. One is to gain control of its people by force of arms; the other is to gain control of its economy by financial means.”² The reality was that it was not just the control over the economy, but also over politics, strategy, culture, and more, and this all-embracing control—initially exercised from behind the curtain—gradually became visible before the public eye. The foundation for this new kind of relationship with US imperialism was laid during the last decades of colonial rule when Nehru developed US connections, and the blueprint for the future planning and development was prepared under the British Raj. In fact, the Bombay Plan (1944), prepared by such top representatives of the Indian big bourgeoisie as Sir P. Thakurdas, Sir J. R. D. Tata, G. D. Birla, Sir Ardeshir Dalal, and others, and the Nehru plan of the National Planning Committee (1938), set up by the Congress and the GOI plan under the charge of the same Sir Ardeshir Dalal, had the same objectives. Essentially, the blueprint of India's model of future development was prepared at a time when India was still a colony of the British Raj. It was based on the Western capitalist model, which advocated investment of foreign capital and technology—and state intervention in areas where private capital was not forthcoming—and to create the infrastructure with state backing for future investment by both domestic and foreign private capital in a big way. As Hanson stated, there was little to distinguish the Industrial Policy Resolution of April 1945, i.e., of colonial India from the Industrial Policy Resolutions of 1948 and 1956, and that of independent India.³ All these plans were silent about the need for restructuring the society—the abolition of feudal relations and the confiscation of existing imperialist capital. The “mixed-economy”

² Felix Greene, *The Enemy Notes on Imperialism and Revolution*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1970.

³ A. H. Hanson, *The Process of Planning: A Study of India's Five-Year Plans 1950–1964*, London, 1966, p. 38; see also H. Venkatasubbiah, *Enterprise and Economic Change 50 Years of FICCI*, New Delhi, 1977, p. 50.

pattern or the so-called “socialist economy” pattern with which Nehru is generally identified was actually the Western capitalist pattern, which owed its parentage to the Viceroy’s executive council rather than Nehru, and had hardly anything “socialist” about it.

The end of the Second World War saw the eclipse of Britain as the super-imperialist power under which the sun never set. In her place the US emerged as the new super-global power. Meanwhile, the Chinese Revolution succeeded under Mao Zedong in 1949. The emergence of new China meant not only the loss of a very large market; it also appeared as a beacon, particularly for the struggling peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The threat posed by Red China to the capitalist world, particularly US imperialism, became a source of great concern both to the Indian comprador big bourgeoisie and also the US. The anxiety of the Indian ruling classes was reflected in the written evidence before the Fiscal Commission of 1949–50 of the Engineering Association of India on which Indian tycoons were represented. It stated:

Industrially-advanced countries like [the] US and UK should undertake the obligation of making India industrially great. The exigencies of the situation in Southeast Asia require it and [the] comparative inability of the Western powers to be of effective help in Southeast Asia demands that India should be made strong in order that she may act as a bulwark against the rising tide of Communism in this part of the globe.⁴

This dependence on, nay, active collaboration with and subservience to foreign powers was a continuation of the old policy of collaboration with the Raj. In the mid-1940s when the transfer of power was in sight, new collaboration agreements were signed between Indian big capital and foreign capital. Manu Subedar, the representative of the middle and small sections of the Indian bourgeoisie opposed this in the Central Legislative Assembly in 1945 describing it as “an illegitimate marriage” and cautioning people about the “entry of new east India companies” into the Indian economy.⁵

⁴ GOI, “Report of the Fiscal Commission 1949–50,” III (Written Evidence), p. 80.

⁵ Manu Subedar’s speech dt. May 2, 1945, cited in Suniti Kumar Ghosh, *The Indian big Bourgeoisie, Its Genesis, Growth and Character*, 1st edition, Kolkata, August 1985, pp. 256–57.

All these developments imply that despite the gradual end of formal rule by Britain over India after August 15, 1947, control of a new type began. Unlike the pre-1947 phase when India was a colony, i.e., under the direct rule of a foreign power, India, after 1947, became a *formally* independent state. But, in reality, it was dependent on new imperialist powers economically, politically and militarily. India could not sever its links with and dependence on foreign capitalist countries. In this “semi-dependent” existence, which can be termed “semi-colonial,” the Indian domestic ruling classes enjoy political power, though within the framework of basic dependence on imperialist countries. This was the genesis of neo-imperialist control over India and had its ramifications over the Indian economy, politics, military strategy and other things. However, as all these things are very much intertwined, it is not at all easy to make a clear-cut separation between economy and politics or between military strategy and other aspects. Let us try to do the job to the best of our ability.

A) Policy of the State/Political Ramifications

One thing should be made clear: when we talk about the challenge of neo-imperialism, what we mean is the challenge it poses to the people of India, and not to the Indian ruling classes. The Indian ruling classes and their political representatives—both at the centre and the states—had and have all along been joint collaborators with imperialism and actually serve as the pillars on which imperialism depended for penetration into and extension of control over Indian life, economy, polity, culture and so many other things. Another point is that the Indian ruling classes and their political representatives like Jawaharlal Nehru nourished big-power chauvinism and in his fevered imagination, conceived of a multinational state stretching from West Asia to the Pacific region with India as its centre⁶ and hitched their wagons to the American star. They did not recognize the independent political existence of small nationalities like the Nagas, Mizos, Manipuris, Kashmiris and others and drowned their struggles in pools of blood. We are not going to discuss those questions here. What we would like to emphasize is that the Indian ruling classes, in their wild ambitions to become a superpower, followed a policy of bi-alignment either tilting

⁶ J. Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, London, 1956, p. 550.

towards the Anglo-American powers or towards the Soviet power—until the dismemberment of the Soviet Union, when they turned towards US imperialism and became its clients.

The end of the Second World War signaled the end of the British empire and made America the new “big boss” among the imperialist powers. It was the only country that, because of its geographical location, escaped the ravages of the two World Wars—in fact, not a single bomb dropped on its soil—but grabbed most of the spoils out of them. By then, situation in some parts of the world, particularly in East and Southeast Asia also changed to the detriment of the interests of the capitalist world. China won her revolution under Mao Zedong’s leadership, and revolutionary and national liberation movements were gaining momentum in other countries. India thus appeared as the most important region that could be utilized by America to serve its own interests by acting as a vast market for plunder and loot and as a “bulwark against the rising tide of communism” in this part of the world. India, no doubt, was on America’s list of top priority.

In the initial period after the transfer of power, Patel was a bit indifferent towards planning. Mountbatten, in his letters to both Nehru and Patel, urged the necessity of it. “At the end of 1949,” wrote F. Frankel, “Nehru once again revived the question... this time fortified by a recommendation from an American adviser.”⁷ Dr. Solomon Trone, an American Engineer, served as Nehru’s personal adviser from the autumn of 1949 to the summer of 1950. After serving as an industrial adviser to the governments of Japan and Chiang Kai-shek’s China, Trone came to India as the Communists swept to power in China. According to Nehru’s biographer, Michael Brecher,

he conducted an investigation into the various aspects of the Indian economy and concluded that conditions were alarmingly similar to those of China at the end of the second world war. Drastic action was required without delay, he argued, the first step being the formation of a central agency to evolve a unified national plan.... Economic development would be

⁷ F. R. Frankel, *India’s Political Economy, 1947–1977*, Delhi 1984, p. 84.

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financed partly by foreign loans, but would require sacrifices by all sections of the people.⁸

In fact, the conditions in which the Indian leaders found themselves after 1947 were particularly bleak—a stagnant market, virtual absence of infrastructure for industrial development and absence of capital goods industries. The success of the Soviet Five-Year Plans exercised a deep influence everywhere. The Communist revolution in China only added to the urgency of the situation. In 1951, Chester Bowles—twice US ambassador to India—suggested to Nehru that

one of the most crucial questions was whether Asian democracy could compete with Asian Communism unless it, too, organized its village efforts on a massive scale.... Nehru said that history had selected India as one of the democracy's testing grounds. This was a contest which he and India welcomed, a challenge which must be met head on.⁹

Wolf Ladejinsky, whom Chester Bowles brought from the US to India as one of the foremost agrarian experts, reported on the basis of his investigation in some villages of India that

the bitter complaints of the peasants reminded him of similar complaints he heard in pre-Communist China in 1946. The land inequalities in parts of India, he said, were as bad as or even worse than he had seen anywhere else in Asia.¹⁰

Thus the threat of Chinese communism was uppermost in their minds and partly to combat that threat, they joined hands. It was a decision of deep political nature and formed an integral part of the policies of both Indian and American states.

Why was China regarded as a threat by America? China was a threat by example. Her significant success in ensuring both rapid economic growth and all-round development in the living conditions of the people stood firm as an example of what could be achieved by her model of

⁸ Michael Brecher, *Nehru: A Political Biography*, London, 1959, pp. 515–16.

⁹ Chester Bowles, *Ambassador's Report*, London, 1954, pp. 199–200.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

development, which stood poles apart from the rest of the Third World. In countries like India where abject conditions prevailed, the very existence of China posed an internal danger to the existing socio-political order. Her example gave people living under poverty and suffering from malnutrition and hunger an example they could emulate if they strove to make their world a better place in which to live. For the USSR, the additional threat posed by China was that China's socialism contrasted sharply with what went on under the name of socialism in the USSR, thereby undermining the prestige of the latter. When the victory of the Chinese revolution became imminent, Chiang Kai-shek fled to Taiwan. Then, Washington, according to David Horowitz,

began its campaign by imposing the Seventh Fleet between the mainland and the defeated dictator Chiang, thereby violating its pledge not to interfere in China's civil war. Following this, the US refused recognition to the new Chinese Government, characterizing it as "illegal" barred China from international... institutions like the UN, branded her a "willful aggressor" in Korea—after first provoking her entry into the war... guided the Kuomintang (through the CIA) in conducting espionage overflights of China with U-2s.... In addition, the United States occupied the strategic Pacific bases of China's historic enemy Japan.... From these bases nuclear bombers of the Strategic Air Command were targeted on mainland objectives long before China herself became a nuclear power. A Polaris submarine fleet was built up in the China Sea and US secretary of defence McNamara announced on several occasions prior to the Chinese nuclear test that in the event of nuclear war with the Soviet Union, the US had the nuclear capacity to destroy *both* Russia and China as national societies.¹¹

In fact, China had been under frequent threat of nuclear attack by the US and towards the end of the sixties by the erstwhile USSR. In 1954 when the French forces in Vietnam were besieged in Dien Bien Phu, US

¹¹ David Horowitz, *From Yalta to Vietnam*, Penguin, 1971 reprint, pp. 414–15.

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Secretary of State Dulles, as Geoffrey Warner wrote, went to Paris and offered the French “one or more bombs to be dropped on Communist Chinese territory near the Indochina border.”¹² The interesting thing is that “India has begun to give tacit recognition to the legitimacy of a US nuclear presence in the Indian Ocean” as, so writes Selig Harrison, “Indian and American interests are complimentary.”¹³

Nehru himself had a role to play in the US strategy. As Suniti Kumar Ghosh¹⁴ observes, it became obvious by degrees; Nehru was to be projected as a counterweight to Asian Communism as represented by Mao Zedong. Referring to senator (later Secretary of State) John Foster Dulles’ speech in New York, the *New York Times* reported on October 21, 1949:

Lest efforts of the United States against Communism be understood as imperialism... (Dulles) recommended that leadership in the battle to check Communist expansion in the Far East be furnished by those in the region who have a stake in the struggle. Mr. Dulles suggested Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, India’s Prime Minister now visiting in New York, as one who could fill the role of leadership.¹⁵

An important organ of the US ruling classes, the *New York Times*, hailed Nehru’s decision in 1949 to remain a member of the Commonwealth of Nations headed by the British monarch as “a historic step, not only in the progress of the Commonwealth, but in setting a limit to Communist conquest and opening the prospect of a wider defence system than the Atlantic Pact.”¹⁶ Another mouthpiece of the US imperialists, the *New York Post*, observed in a leading article in October 1949 that India was “America’s hope in Asia.”¹⁷ Another interesting statement came from the

¹² Geoffrey Warner, “Escalation in Vietnam: The Precedents of 1954,” *International Affairs* (organ of the Royal Institute of International Affairs, London), April 1965, pp. 273–74.

¹³ Selig S. Harrison, “Troubled India and her Neighbours,” *Foreign Affairs*, January 1965, pp. 328–29.

¹⁴ Suniti Kumar Ghosh, *The Himalayan Adventure: India-China War of 1962—Causes and Consequences*, RUPE, Mumbai, December 2002, pp. 30–34.

¹⁵ Cited in L. Natarajan, *American Shadow Over India*, Bombay, 1952, p. 126.

¹⁶ *New York Times*, April 28, 1949, quoted in S. Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol. II, Delhi, 1979, p. 54.

¹⁷ Jawaharlal Nehru, *Inside America (A Voyage of Discovery)*, Delhi, n.d., p. 71.

New York Times in August 1950: “He [Nehru] is in a sense the *counter-weight* on the democratic side [sic!] to *Mao Zedong*. To have Nehru as ally in the struggle for Asiatic support is worth many divisions.”¹⁸ Thus Nehru was to be projected as the hero on the side of “Asian democracy” against Mao Zedong standing on the side of Asian Communism.

Nehru himself was not unwilling to perform the role he was expected to play. In fact, long before, in 1942, he wrote: “The next hundred years, it has been said, are going to be *the century of America*. America is undoubtedly going to play important role in the years and generations to come.”¹⁹ What part would Nehru play in relation to America who, in his opinion, was the representative of “free nations” of the world—and not the hawkers of neo-imperialism, death and starvation for the people of the world? On April 6, 1942 he told Col. Louis Johnson, then US President Roosevelt’s personal representative in India and afterwards US defence secretary, that “India wanted to hitch her wagons to the American star.”²⁰ As a matter of fact, even when India was still a colony, Nehru and his associates nourished aspirations to become a superpower—the fourth big power after America, Russia and China—a power equipped industrially and armed militarily by the US and UK that would dominate the Indian Ocean region as a zonal power to fight the Anglo-American powers’ war against national liberation struggles and Socialism.²¹ Nehru hailed US President Truman’s Point Four programme of 1949 and signed it in December 1950. Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Nehru’s sister and Indian ambassador to the US, considered it to be an effective weapon for fighting Communism.²² Among other things, this programme was basically a political programme, which, as Truman held, was a means to halt the spread of “false doctrines” (like communism).²³

The extent of the intimacy between the Indian ruling classes and US imperialism (which has a bearing on the nature of economic and political relations between the two) could be gauged from the following two illuminating facts—both disclosed by Daniel Patrick Moynihan, US ambas-

¹⁸ Cited in R. P. Dutt, *India Today and Tomorrow*, Delhi, 1955, p. 275.

¹⁹ J. Nehru, *Selected Works*, Vol. XII, p. 169.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. XII, pp. 194–95.

²¹ For details see S. K. Ghosh, *op. cit.*, pp. 33, 72.

²² Natarajan, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 60–67.

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sador to India in the early 1970s. Moynihan writes that in the face of a prospective communist victory in a state election, once in Kerala and once in West Bengal, the ruling Congress party at the centre sought financial contributions from the US government through its New Delhi embassy. It was, according to Moynihan, “given to Mrs. Gandhi herself, who was then a party official”²⁴—later the prime minister of India. The Kerala election referred to by Moynihan took place in the late 1950s, i.e., during the heyday of “non-alignment.” The other illuminating fact disclosed by Moynihan was the attempt made by the US and India to spy on the Chinese from the tops of the Himalayas. He wrote:

In 1965 we had sent a climbing expedition to the top of Nanda Devi, a mountain of 26,645 feet in the northeast, near the border with China, to put in place nuclear-powered instruments which would record Chinese rocket telemetry and atomic tests. A storm came, the instruments, including the power pack, were cached, and the party returned to base. The climbers returned in the spring to find that an avalanche had swept everything away, and the plutonium was lost in the snow pack at the headwaters of the holy Ganges. Our then-Ambassador Chester Bowles went back to Mrs. Gandhi (then Indian prime minister), and the next year a second Indo-American expedition successfully put instruments in place atop Nanda Kot, the 22,400-foot mountain adjacent to Nanda Devi... but in 1974 Mrs. Gandhi was still making speeches about the ever present danger of subversion by the CIA, whilst I was meeting with the relevant officials about our common interest in China.²⁵

The policies of the American and Indian states thus converged since the day direct colonial rule ended, and both regarded Chinese communism and communist movements as their sworn enemies. The political crisis of the ruling classes intensified during the Naxalbari movement of 1967 and after, to which China extended its moral and political support. Such an

²⁴ Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *A Dangerous Place*, New Delhi, Second Indian reprint, 1979, p. 41.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 40–41.

attitude towards China continued until 1976 when Mao Zedong died and China gradually changed its colour. Moreover, Indian ruling classes and their top political representatives like Nehru sought to become a super-power in this part of the world and wanted to have the active backing from the US and UK for its realization. America, as the new leader in the global imperialist world order, also needed India's vast market and resources for exploitation and plunder. It ushered in a process of collaboration with and subservience to America which, in turn, pushed its policy of neo-imperialist policy of plunder of India. When dealing with neo-imperialist aggression in India, we have to take all these factors into consideration.

B) Economic Ramifications

We have pointed out that after World War II the US emerged as the new global power that sought to rebuild India in its own image and for its own imperial interests. In this venture, significant roles were played by Chester Bowles, Douglas Ensminger, the Ford Foundation (FF), the MIT Center for International Studies, George Rosen, Wolf Ladejinsky, the Rockefeller Foundation (RF), etc. The Ford staff with Ensminger in charge was closely associated with the Indian Planning Commission, and their main purpose was to beat back communism and build up US global hegemony.²⁶ The Community Development Project (CDP) which formed an integral part of early Indian plans and whose ostensible purpose was to rebuild the Indian countryside, was undertaken under US inspiration and guidance. Albert Mayer, an American architect, who was close to Nehru, formulated a pilot project in 1948 covering 48 villages in the Etah district of Western UP—a project hailed by Nehru “as a model for meeting the revolutionary threats from the left-wing and communist peasant movements demanding basic social reforms in agriculture.”²⁷ The Ford and Rockefeller Foundations lent their support to this programme. The US Aid for International Development (USAID) and the FF worked together on the CDP, trained Indians for the projects and also gave financial support to set up such Indian agricultural universities and research centres

²⁶ For details, see Suniti Kumar Ghosh, *Development Planning in India Lumpen-Development and Imperialism*, RUPE, Mumbai, August 2002, pp. 23–35.

²⁷ George Rosen, *Western Economists and Eastern Societies: Agents of Change in South Asia 1950-70*, Delhi, 1985, p. 49.

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as the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI), the Delhi School of Economics, Gokhale Institute, etc.

Even for food, India had to depend for many years on the US. When, in the mid-1960s, the food crisis reached alarming proportions, the Indian ruling classes adopted a technocratic approach to the food problem and opted for the “Green Revolution” (GR), which meant the application of HYV (high-yield variety) seeds, chemical fertilizers, pesticides and a heavy water burden. India was forced to buy seeds and other inputs from the transnational corporations (TNC). This major shift in policy was not initiated by India’s planners, but dictated by US imperialism and the World Bank. As the subsequent developments showed, the GR, far from reducing inequalities and removing hunger and food shortage, only accentuated the inequalities between class and class and region and region, and furthered the interests of rich peasants and landowners. It caused soil degradation, destroyed fish wealth and created health hazards of different types through the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides—and the use of a few exotic HYV seeds led to the loss of the genetic diversity of indigenous seeds.²⁸

From the very beginning, India’s plans have been heavily dependent on loan-capital and investment capital, technology and technical “experts” from foreign countries. While welcoming foreign investment and depending on foreign loan-capital for financing India’s “development,” the planners did not forget to keep up the flow of rhetoric about achieving “self-reliance” and “self-sustaining growth.” In reality, their path to “independence” ran through the path of abject surrender to foreign capital. Needless to mention, this type of “development” planning suited the interests of the imperialists. R. K. Hazari and S. D. Mehta pointed out that “International ‘aid’ holds the key to the entire Indian development effort.... However, the importance of external assistance has necessarily meant some extra-national influence in the shaping of domestic policies.”²⁹

The following table reproduced from the sixth Five-Year Plan from 1980 to 1985 provides us the official estimates of the gross and net “aid” received to finance the plans from 1951–52 to 1978–79.

²⁸ For details, see Suniti Kumar Ghosh, *Imperialism’s Tightening Grip on Indian Agriculture*, Kolkata, 1998, passim.

²⁹ R. K. Hazari and S. D. Mehta, *Public International Development Financing in India*, Bombay, 1968, pp. 52, 56.

Gross and Net Aid by Plan Periods

	Period	Utilization of External Assistance (Rs.cr.)	Amortization & Interest Payment (Rs.cr.)	Net Aid (Rs.cr.)	Net Aid as % of Plan Expenditures	Net Aid as % of Imports
1 st Plan	51–52 to 55–56	201.7	23.8	177.9	9.1	4.9
2 nd Plan	56–57 to 60–61	1430.4	119.4	1311.0	28.1	26.9
3 rd Plan	61–62 to 65–66	2867.7	542.6	2325.1	27.2	37.5
4 th Plan	66–67 to 68–69	3229.6	982.5	2247.1	33.9	37.5
5 th Plan	69–70 to 73–74	4183.7	2445.0	1738.7	11.2	17.6
6 th Plan	74–75 to 78–79	7309.5	3770.4	3539.1	8.9 ³⁰	12.8

The table furnishes the estimates of the gross and net “aid” received as percentage of the plan expenditure during the plan periods. What is necessary to keep in mind is that the actual debt from imperialist countries and the financial institutions/agencies dominated by them is far greater than the net “aid,” for net “aid” is the actual debt minus amortization and interest payments, which together is likely to be greater than the net “aid” received.

The World Bank’s *World Debt Tables, 1991–92: External Debt of the Developing Countries* stated:

Net flows (into India) from both official and private creditors excluding non-resident Indian deposits have almost doubled

³⁰ On actual expenditure for the first four years, anticipated expenditure for 1978–79, Government of India, *Planning Commission, Sixth Five Year Plan 1980–85*, New Delhi 1981, p. 14.

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since 1985 from US \$2.5 billion in fiscal year 1991 including almost \$1.8 billion from the IMF. But net transfers have recorded decline over the same period from a peak of US \$1.7 billion in 1985 to US \$0.5 billion in fiscal 1991.³¹

This means that apart from the deposits from non-resident Indians (NRIs), which too form a part of the external debt, India incurred an external debt of \$4.6 billion in 1991 but actually received only \$0.5 billion; it paid the rest—\$3.1 billion, more than 6 times the net “aid” received to service old debts—as amortization and interest payments. According to the *World Debt Tables 1993–94*, the total external debt incurred by India in 1992 was \$8.01 billion, but \$3.32 billion and \$3.30 billion out of that went towards principal repayments and interest payments, respectively. Thus in order to pay off old debts, India takes more loans and the more she takes, the more indebted she becomes.

It is important to refer in this connection to some of the salient features of “aid.” “Aid” is not a gift, but a loan on what are supposed to be concessional terms. It is conditional. “Aid” from a foreign country has to be spent on the purchase of capital goods or other goods from it. It is generally country-tied as well as project-tied. “Aid” from an international institution/agency like the World Bank, the watch-dog of imperialist interests, is always project-tied. It is always tied to projects for which international tenders have to be invited and a tender has to be approved by the funding agency. P. Elridge wrote:

A senior Indian official, much concerned with aid negotiations estimated during an interview that a combination country-tying and project-tying can increase the cost to India anywhere up to 60 percent above what would apply if she received free foreign exchange.³²

According to a news item, datelined Geneva, February 28, 1977, the International Labour Organization stated in a report that for every dollar

³¹ Cited in “The World Bank on India’s Foreign Debt,” AIE, No. 9, July-September 1992, p. 56.

³² P. Elridge, *The Politics of Foreign Aid in India*, Delhi, 1969, Note 6, p. 260.

given to a third world country to continue buying from the West, the “donors” receive three dollars in return.”³³

There is no doubt that “aid” is responsible for this continual, severe drain of India’s economic surplus to advanced capitalist countries. At the same time, it contributes to India’s underdevelopment in other ways, too. Under “aid” agreements huge imports of machinery, components, etc., from those countries take place while the public sector enterprises that manufacture similar goods, like Bharat Heavy Electricals or Heavy Engineering Corporation, built with foreign collaborations, starve for want of orders. Their capacity for manufacturing remains greatly underutilized and workers suffer from forced idleness. Such is the price that India has to pay to procure aid from abroad.

Moreover, “aid” forges not only economic dependence and subservience but also political dependence.

During the ‘80s, changes in government policies were noticeable. With relaxation of controls over capital issues, licensing, etc., lowering of tariffs on imports and exports, increase in incentives to exporters, relaxation of foreign regulations and so on, India’s trade deficit and adverse balance of payments, chronic since the inception of planning, grew from bad to worse. The steady rise in India’s budget deficit necessitated increased dependence on external debt. The increasing balance of payments difficulties, the soaring external debt, the acute foreign exchange crisis, etc.—all of which were the inevitable outcome of India’s “development” planning for about forty years—placed the Indian government at the mercy of the IMF and the World Bank.

At the same time, the advanced capitalist countries had been hit by recession since 1978–79, leaving them anxious to export more capital goods and luxury consumption goods to Third World countries like India and to have all the existing restrictions on their exports by the Indian government removed. Their interests no doubt converged with those of big Indian industrialists. They were also critical of various government controls such as the industrial licensing system, controls over capital issues, foreign regulations, import controls and others, which now stood in the way of their operations. The irony is that these very controls had earlier enabled

³³ *Economic Times* (New Delhi), March 1, 1977.

them to become what they became and created a monopolistic market for their industries. But now these same controls had become fetters. In fact, the “socialist pattern” had already served its purpose and for them it had already outlived its utility. There was, therefore, no need for it; they had a large amount of capital within the country and much more kept in foreign banks. They wanted to bring back part of it as white money to realize their ambitions of more and more expansion. In fact, their dreams could be made as junior partners of transnationals based in imperialist countries. Thus the basis for a change of policy was laid—the policy of “liberalization”—the dismantling of controls and restrictions, both of which were essential instruments of planning.

Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization

The World Bank (WB) released a report in December 1989 entitled *India: An Industrializing Economy in Transition*, which became the basis of India’s “new industrial policy” and was announced later. Immediately upon assuming office in mid-1991, the Narasimha Rao government started introducing sweeping changes in the name of liberalizing the Indian economy—at the behests of WB and the IMF. The Rao government (Dr. Manmohan Singh was the finance minister) undertook to fulfill the “conditionalities” of the Bank and the Fund, as the government was seeking a Structural Adjustment Loan of \$500 million from the former and a Standby Loan of \$2.2 billion from the latter in order to tide over a foreign exchange crisis. It hoped to obtain more loans in the near future from imperialist countries by complying with “conditionalities.” These “conditionalities” was comprised of devaluation of the *rupee*, reducing bank lending to the government and the public sector, relaxation of import restrictions, lower tariff rates for imports, the freezing of the wages, etc.—all in the interest of imperialist capital and to the detriment of the interests of the country and the people of India. In the “Memorandum on Economic Policies for 1991/92—1992/93,” attached to this letter of intent, dated August 17, 1991, to the IMF and in his letter dated November 11, 1991 to the WB, Manmohan Singh gave undertakings on behalf of the government to introduce policy changes which affected the entire Indian economy and which opened wider the door to imperialist aggression and plunder. The Bank and the Fund would closely monitor

the performance of the government, and the budget of 1992–93 would be prepared according to their prescriptions; loans would be doled out in instalments on the satisfactory compliance with the “conditionalities” of the Bank and the Fund. The prescriptions of the two funding agencies were, in a nutshell, as follows:

First, the *rupee* must be devalued. That would mean a vast plunder of India’s resources by imperialist countries. It would make imports dearer and exports cheaper. It would also make the burden of repayment of foreign loans much heavier. The *rupee* depreciated against the major currencies of the world, for instance from Rs.7.91 per US dollar in 1982–3 to Rs.20.96 in June 1991, the eve of the Bank-Fund-dictated devaluation early in July. Submitting to the dictates of the Bank and the Fund, the government carried out a steep devaluation of the *rupee* by about 20 per cent and the value of the *rupee* was fixed at Rs.25.95 per US dollar. The downward trend of the *rupee* continued over the years.

Second, the Indian ruling classes had already removed most of the restrictions on direct investment of imperialist capital and pledged to do away with the rest. Addressing a press conference at the Tokyo Chamber of Commerce and Industry on April 10, 1992, Manmohan Singh said that they expected about \$6 billion of direct foreign investment, which was about Rs.18,000 *crore* at the then market rate. This amount, incidentally, was bigger than the total amount of foreign capital (other than loan capital) invested so far in India.

According to official US reports, annual direct foreign investment rose from about \$100 million in 1990 to \$2.4 billion by 1996, more than one-third of which were made by US companies. According to the same source, following the 1999 parliamentary elections, the Vajpayee government launched second generation reforms, including major deregulation, privatization and tariff-reducing measures. The US incidentally is India’s largest trading and investment partner.³⁴

In fact, it is foreign capitalism that the reactionary ruling classes of India have been promoting on Indian soil more aggressively than ever before. The big compradors are enthusiastically welcoming imperialist capital for a share of the loot as collaborators of imperialist capital. Needless to

³⁴ *CRS Issue Brief for Congress India-US Relations*, updated May 9, 2003, K. Alan Kroststadt, Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Division, pp. CRS12–13.

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say, to them, national interests, national sovereignty, national dignity and their own dignity do not matter at all.

The public sector enterprises, which had been built with more than one *lakh* and a half *crores* of *rupees*³⁵ by squeezing the blood out of the famished people through deficit financing, inflation and ever-increasing indirect taxation and by raising loans from the foreign creditors, were then sold out to imperialists and their Indian collaborators at throwaway prices.

Third, in obedience to the dictates of the Bank and the Fund, every backing was being given to promote cheap, subsidized exports, and restrictions on imports were mostly removed and customs duties slashed. Foreign transnationals were offered exceptionally generous terms for technology transfer to their collaborative ventures. The Bank and the Fund are keen on dismantling all measures to protect domestic industry and demand an open door for imperialist capital and other foreign goods in the name of exposing Indian industries to competition to raise their efficiency, while the imperialists themselves practise protectionism for their own countries. The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) also cited US measures to protect several of its industries against foreign competition.³⁶ Contrary to the principles of free trade, which they insist other countries must follow, imperialist countries set up regional trade blocs like the European Community, European Free Trade Association and the north American grouping of the US, Canada and Mexico.

Fourth, the Indian government had undertaken the overhaul of financial services so that foreign banks and insurance companies can flourish at the expense of the Indian banks and insurance, almost all of which belong to the public sector.

In addition, in obedience to the Bank and the Fund, the Indian government adopted an “exit policy,” i.e., the policy of closing down factories which incur losses and retrenching workers and employees, on a large scale, even from profit-making enterprises. Thousands of people lost their jobs as a result. The targets of the deadly offensive of the World Bank and the IMF are the peasants—middle, poor and landless—the workers,

³⁵ One *lakh* is equal to 100,000. 1 *crore* is equal to 100 *lakh* or 10 million. In June 2022, 1 USD was equal to about 78 *rupees*.

³⁶ For respective roles of imperialist capital and its Indian collaborators in joint ventures, see Michael Kidron, *Foreign Investments in India*, London, 1965, pp. 263–4.

the urban petit bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie who own small businesses. On the other hand, the beneficiaries were imperialist capital, Indian compradors, big landlords and political and other pimps.

The Dunkel Commandments

Another vicious offensive of imperialism against the Indian people and the peoples of other semi-colonies and neo-colonies is the GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) offensive. Arthur Dunkel, Director-General of GATT, presented a package of proposals for a new international agreement under the GATT. While seeking to bring about a compromise between the US imperialist interests and those of the European Community over subsidies to agricultural products, the Dunkel proposals go far beyond the jurisdiction of the GATT and spell ruin for the interests of India and other backward countries. To be brief, they demand that foreign companies, i.e., transnational corporations, must enjoy “national treatment” in these countries; that all restrictions on imports must go; that foreign banks and insurance companies and telecommunication giants must be allowed unrestricted entry into these countries. Another Dunkel commandment is that protection for *product* patents, not merely for *process* patents, must be given to drugs and chemicals; that the life of a patent must be extended to 20 years instead of 7 years; that a patented product must be given protection even if it is only imported and not manufactured in India. This will naturally emasculate research and development in India, bring ruin to many pharmaceutical companies, lead to monopoly by transnational corporations in crucial sectors and raise the prices of many medicines sky-high.³⁷

The most dangerous aspect of the Dunkel draft is that it will lead to the all-pervasive domination of Indian agriculture by a few transnational corporations and that would be accompanied by their legalized loot. First, no Indian or other scientist would be allowed without a license from the patent-holder to improve upon the patented seed and to develop a better one—pest-resistant and more suitable for the climate of the country. Second, the peasants will not be allowed to retain seeds from the crop harvested for sowing in the next season but must buy fresh seeds for every crop

³⁷ *Business Standard*, March 27, 1992.

from the company's agents. Third, the irony is that the seed genes of an infinite variety of plants with which nature endowed mainly Third World countries and not the countries of Western Europe and North America, have been ruthlessly plundered by the imperialists. The introduction of HYV seeds in the wake of the "Green Revolution" brought ruin to the Indian soil and this second phase of the "Green Revolution" means further penetration of Third World agriculture by the economic institutions of Western capitalism. The Indian ruling classes welcomed the Dunkel draft with much enthusiasm.

No matter who was in power at the centre, throughout the 1990s, the Indian government followed the same policy of collaborating with the new "East India Companies" to plunder the wealth of the country as ruthlessly as possible. The next phase of imperialist aggression is the formation of Special Economic Zones (SEZ).

Special Economic Zones

The introduction of the SEZs in India was a necessary and inevitable chain in the process of global control by foreign powers. Let us discuss this issue very briefly. In 2000, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government pioneered the SEZ concept—formerly known as the Economic Processing Zone (EPZ)—by way of the revision of the Export-Import Policy of 1997–2000. Under the UPA government, it was made into an act in 2005. The interesting fact is that the CPI(M), which is opposed to the SEZ in states where it is not in power, is very aggressive in introducing it in West Bengal where it is in power. This "left-front" government passed such an act in 2003, i.e., two years prior to 2005. The SEZ is actually a delineated duty-free enclave, as if it were a foreign territory where private proprietors enjoy total sovereignty. There businessmen need not pay any taxes to do business; in the next fifteen-year-period, the industrialists need not to pay any income tax for the next ten years at a stretch; for the importation of any material from abroad, no license is needed; the processing areas in the SEZ occupies 35% (later increased to 50%), while in the remaining areas, housing projects, hotels, restaurants, amusement centres, malls, etc. can be built. The SEZ would be a duty-free enclave and considered a foreign territory; but if one buys goods from an SEZ, one has to pay taxes. In the SEZ, special cities can be set up and foreign money invested.

There will be no elected local government/civic authorities. In most cases, land is acquired by the state governments on behalf of the SEZs' private developers by imposing the infamous colonial Land Acquisition Act of 1894. This Act, meant to serve the British Raj, should have been scrapped altogether along with other colonial acts after 1947. However, this same act has been reinforced in the name of "public purpose"—in the name of "development"—to hand over large chunks of land forever to the multinational corporations (MNC) and their domestic comprador accomplices. In these areas, all the units will be declared as "public utilities" (perhaps to match "public purpose") and existing labour laws such as right to strike, provident fund, etc. will not apply. These zones are also discriminatory towards women; only unmarried women will get jobs and maternity benefits do not apply. The central and state governments have been pursuing this policy in the most aggressive way in Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa, and other states. It has recently been halted in West Bengal in Nandigram, which acted as the symbol of defiance and resistance against it.

What does the SEZ mean for the people? First, setting up such zones is the greatest movement for land-grabbing in the history of modern India. It is the scheme to forcibly take away huge land mass from the hands of people and sell them to the foreign MNCs in the name of industrialization and development. Second, it plays havoc to agriculture, to our food supply and creates famine conditions and starvation on a far larger scale. Third, this large-scale eviction and displacement affects not only the owners of small plots of land, but many sharecroppers who are in some way or other tied up with the soil, would also be evicted. Along with it, is also the loss of their ways of life and culture. Fourth, the government stands to lose a staggering sum of money by way of loss of revenue. According to the then finance minister, P. Chidambaram (now central home minister after the Mumbai "terror attack"), the total would come close to Rs.1,50,000 *crore* by 2010. Fifth, under the SEZ, all the jobs are contractual.

The Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led government also aggressively pushed three more major policies, much to the liking of the imperialists, while bringing further devastation to the people of the country. First was the passing of the Contract Labour Bill, to bind the working class and allow big business even larger profits. Second, it planned to dismantle the Public

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Distribution System, handing it over entirely to private traders, the major ones being US agribusiness. Third, they planned the imposition of IMF-style conditionalities on state governments to force them to reduce their fiscal deficits by massively cutting down on social welfare expenditure and removing the subsidy on electricity charges.

C) Strategic Ramifications

We have pointed out that after the end of World War II, one of the main military objectives of the US was the encirclement of China, attested by much evidence, some of which we have mentioned in the first part of this paper. Economic subservience to US imperialism led inevitably to political and strategic ties with it. Although the first official military treaty was signed between the USSR and India in 1971 during the war with undivided Pakistan—known as the Bangladesh War—military assistance was asked for by the Indian government from America whenever China was at the centre of some dispute. During the India-China War of 1962, Nehru “sought full defensive intervention by our Air Force.... The Indians are pleading for military association,” Galbraith noted in his diary on November 19, 1962.³⁸ Another remarkable fact was the Indo-US joint spying on the Chinese from the tops of the Himalayas to which we have already referred. The period of the late 1960s and the early 1970s characterized by the Naxalite revolutionary movement was a matter of concern for both the countries and exchange of views to combat that “menace” was made both with the US and the UK, as was reported in some contemporary reports.

From the 1980s US imperialism had been trying desperately to fulfill its long-cherished dream of world domination, what it calls its “manifest destiny.” There were two developments of far-reaching consequence that whetted its appetite. First, socialist China led by Mao Zedong, which was the source of inspiration to the freedom-loving people everywhere and the fear to all imperialists, degenerated into a capitalist state. Second, the USSR or what is known as Soviet social imperialism disappeared under the weight of its own inner contradictions. Imperialism, especially US imperialism had become the dominant power in the world and the main enemy

³⁸ See IM, “GATT, the Dunkel Draft and India,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, January 25, 1992; *Business Standard*, February 24, 1992.

of the people of the world. It also became the only superpower; its war against Iraq in 1991 was not only a war against the Iraqi people, but a declaration of war against the peoples of the world and a warning to them. The draft of a secret 1994–99 plan hatched by US imperialism states that it would be the policy of the US to “see that no superpower emerged in Western Europe, Asia or the areas of the former Soviet Union.”³⁹

In another document, the US Joint Chiefs of Staff underlined the need to maintain a “headquarters element” in South-West Asia “for the foreseeable future,” and for US power to be visible “throughout Far East and South Asia.” They stated that control of lines of communication “is a prerequisite to our ability to protect global US interests and is essential for power projection, reinforcement, re-supply and access.”⁴⁰ This most aggressive and most ferocious imperialist power has been striving to act as the global policeman ready to put down any opposition against itself and its stooges. It has already done this in Iraq, threatened Libya, Korea and Iran, trampling underfoot all international norms and using the UN Security Council to support its aggression.

With the disappearance of the Soviet bloc along with social imperialism, the ruling classes of India have been obediently carrying out US plans to build close integration between US and Indian military establishments. We would only refer to some features of this military/strategic collaboration. The International Military Educational Training Programme has the following features: the upgrading of Indian military equipment with US help; the strengthening of army-to-army and navy-to-navy “cooperation” by holding joint seminars, joint exercises, etc.; combined training exercises; the military officers’ exchange programme; and the setting up of steering committees to work out the various proposals to bring about closer integration are some of the aspects of the military ties forged between US and India in the name of strategic “cooperation.”

One can also observe a greater interlinking of the State governments directly with the imperialists, best seen by their so-called *Vision Statement* mostly drawn up by imperialist agencies like McKinsey & Co. at a huge cost. In fact, it was this statement signed during a visit by US President Clinton in March 2000 that set the seal for a long-term strategic depen-

³⁹ J. K. Galbraith, *Ambassador’s Journal*, London, 1969, p. 486.

⁴⁰ *Economic Times*, March 12, 1992.

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dence on US imperialism. This took a major leap after the September 11, 2001 attack on the twin towers of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and the US crusade against so-called terrorism, of which India's ruling classes became a major appendage. It prepared the ground for the development of a US-India-Israel military axis.

Meanwhile, the spread of the Maoist movement in large parts of the country has become a source of anxiety not only to the Indian government, but also to the US imperialism. On April 13, 2006, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh described the Maoists movement as "the single greatest threat to internal security ever faced since independence" and the US put the name of CPI(Maoist) on its list of "terrorist" organizations. The US general Richard M. Myers called for a joint operation against "terror."⁴¹ According to another press report, two American officers of the US consulate in Mumbai went to Raipur to give a proposal to the Chhattisgarh government to assist in removing landmines planted by the Naxalites.⁴² These developments are serious and have sinister implications for the future.

During one of her recent visits to India, the US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, while referring to the proposed Indo-US nuclear deal, stated: "The US has a vital stake in India's rise to global power and prosperity, and relations between the two countries have been stronger or broader." Then she said: "India stands on the front lines of globalization." She added that "this is a dramatic breakthrough for both our strategic interests and our values." The experience of the Indian people over the last six decades has shown that if such relations are allowed to continue, it would have more serious and harmful implications for the country as a whole. It is high time we break these chains and try to search for an alternative—before it is too late.

⁴¹ *Economic Times*, April 12, 1991.

⁴² "India, US must jointly fight terror: Gen Myers," *The Statesman*, February 18, 2002.

BUREAUCRATIC CAPITALISM AND NATIONAL CAPITALISM: THE INDIAN EXPERIENCE⁴³

This paper is divided into two parts. The first part deals with the nature of Bureaucratic Capitalism and the second part with the nature of National Capitalism. The experience that we have in India has certain features, some of which could be common with other countries having similar historical developments, while others could be specific to the Indian reality. Before going into the Indian reality, we propose to deal, however briefly, with the Chinese experience as explained by Mao Zedong.

Bureaucratic Capitalism and National Capitalism in China

Let us begin with the definition of “comprador”—originally a Portuguese word that was later introduced into the English vocabulary, thanks to the writings and activism of Marxist thinkers, revolutionaries and social scientists of countries across the world. A note at the end of the essay “Analysis of Classes in Chinese Society” written by Mao Zedong states:

A comprador, in the original sense of the word, was the Chinese manager or the Chinese senior employee in a foreign commercial establishment. The compradors served foreign economic interests and had close connection with imperialism and foreign capital.⁴⁴

A comprador has thus come to stand for a bourgeois who serves foreign capital and has its interests closely tied up with its interests.

Comprador capitalism has often been identified with bureaucratic capitalism, particularly in relation to Third World countries. Mao Zedong spoke of the Chinese compradors as the big bourgeoisie and of the national bourgeoisie as chiefly the middle bourgeoisie of China. Compradors emerged as “go-between-*dalals*” or middlemen and brokers in countries

⁴³ This is a slightly revised version of a paper presented at the Fifth International Seminar on Bureaucratic Capitalism organized by the Universidade de Pernambuco, Campus Petrolina, Brazil in late November 2014.

⁴⁴ Mao Zedong, “Analysis of Classes in Chinese Society,” *Selected Works*, Vol. I, Foreign Languages Press, Paris, 2021, p. 7.

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that were either colonies under one imperialist power or semi-colonies under several imperialist powers. Compradors grew big by serving imperialist bourgeoisie as conditions prevailing in a colony or a semi-colony are detrimental to the growth of an independent national bourgeoisie. In his article “Analysis of Classes in Chinese Society” (1926), Mao stated that “In economically backward and semi-colonial China the landlord class and the comprador class are wholly appendages of the international bourgeoisie, depending upon imperialism for their survival and growth. These classes represent the most backward and most reactionary relations of production in China and hinder the development of her productive forces.”⁴⁵

This statement does not mean that the Chinese compradors were engaged exclusively in commerce and that they did not take part in the industrial sphere. Speaking on the all-pervasive control of bureaucrat capital in pre-liberation China, Mao wrote on December 25, 1947:

During their twenty-year rule, the four big families, Chiang [Chiang Kai-shek], Soong [T. V. Soong], Kung [H. H. Kung] and Chen [Chen Li-fu], have piled up enormous fortunes valued at ten to twenty thousand million US dollars and monopolized the economic lifelines of the whole country. This monopoly capital, combined with state power, has become state-monopoly capitalism. This monopoly capitalism, closely tied up with foreign imperialism, the domestic landlord class and the old-type rich peasants, has become *comprador*, feudal, state-monopoly capitalism... This capital is popularly known in China as bureaucrat capital. This capitalist class, known as the bureaucrat-capitalist class, is the big bourgeoisie of China.⁴⁶

What is called “comprador capitalism” has thus been defined as one whose interests, rise and growth are intertwined with imperialist capital, which serves foreign capital as its underling and which is tied up with feudal forces in the countryside. This comprador capitalism is not just trading or commercial capital, but also industrial capital. It is also tied up with state power and thus assumes the form of state capitalism. It is this combination of comprador capitalism, feudal forces and the State, subservient to and under the control of foreign capital that Mao called “bureaucratic cap-

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 1.

⁴⁶ Mao Zedong, “The Present Situation and Our Tasks,” *Selected Works*, Vol. IV, Foreign Languages Press, Paris, 2021, p. 161.

italism.” These basic features are more or less common to underdeveloped countries—former colonies or semi-colonies, in many parts of the world.

China’s early industrialization was mainly undertaken by compradors and the traditional members of the gentry, including high officials and traditional gentry-merchants. The Chinese comprador bourgeoisie combined its trading activities with its role as the builder of industries and entered such modern fields as steamship navigation, mining, milling and finally manufacturing. The task of operating the government-sponsored industrial enterprises was also entrusted to the comprador bourgeoisie because of its knowledge of handling modern business. And to run them, the compradors in turn relied on imperialist capital and foreign personnel.⁴⁷ It was this “unholy alliance”—the alliance of the imperialists, the comprador big bourgeoisie and the feudal class—that did not allow the potentialities of capitalist development to be realized and acted as a brake on the normal evolution and development of productive forces in China.

In an article entitled “Some Experiences in Our Party’s History” written in 1956, Mao also made the following generalization. He stated: “In countries under imperialist oppression there are two kinds of bourgeoisie—the national and the comprador bourgeoisie. Do these two kinds of bourgeoisie exist in your countries? Probably, yes.”⁴⁸

What is Mao’s criterion for differentiating the comprador from the national bourgeois? It is the nature of the economic relationships with imperialist capital and its ties with domestic feudal interests. Speaking about the comprador bourgeoisie, he pointed out that it is “a class which *directly* serves the capitalists of the imperialist countries and is nurtured by them, countless ties link it closely with feudal forces in the countryside.”⁴⁹ The bourgeoisie in a colony or semi-colony, whether commercial or industrial or both, is comprador if it serves imperialist capital directly and helps intensify imperialist economic and political aggression against its own country.

⁴⁷ Yen Ping Hao, *The Comprador in Nineteenth Century China; The Bridge Between East and West*, Cambridge, 1970, pp. 1–2.

⁴⁸ Mao Zedong, “Some Experiences in our Party’s History,” *Selected Works*, Vol. V, Paris, Foreign Languages Press, 2021, p. 310.

⁴⁹ Mao Zedong, “The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party,” *Selected Works*, Vol. II, Paris, 2021, p. 297.

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The role of the national bourgeoisie, on the other hand, is not complimentary to that of the imperialist bourgeoisie. Despite its likely dependence on imperialist capital in some respects, e.g., capital goods and market, their interests are not intertwined. Its aspirations for independent development are often frustrated by imperialist and comprador bourgeoisie, the prevalence of feudal interests and policies of the state, which mostly serves their interests. How did Mao define the national bourgeoisie? The national bourgeoisie is

a class with a dual character. On the one hand, it is oppressed by imperialism and fettered by feudalism and consequently is in contradiction with both of them. In this respect, it constitutes one of the revolutionary forces.... But on the other hand, it lacks the courage to oppose imperialism and feudalism thoroughly because it is economically and politically flabby and still has economic ties with imperialism and feudalism.... It follows... that at other times there is the danger of its following the comprador big bourgeoisie and acting as its accomplice in counterrevolution.⁵⁰

With this preliminary discussion on the Chinese experience, let us now pass on to the Indian situation.

Bureaucratic Capitalism in India

It is generally known that British colonial rule in India destroyed much of the indigenous industry, e.g., cotton weaving and spinning, iron, shipping, etc. It shattered the old union between agriculture and industry and converted India primarily into a raw-material-supplying appendage to and a market for the British factory industry and secondarily into a market for export of capital. India's external and internal trade came to be dominated by the imperialist British bourgeoisie. That was accompanied, on the one hand, by the decline of a section of the old independent merchants and, on the other, by the transformation/degeneration of the other section into a class of comprador merchants dependent for their growth on the foreign imperialist bourgeoisie.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 298.

Here two important features should be kept in mind. First, industrial capitalism emerged and developed in India in conditions that were basically different from those in which it had developed in the West. It arose in a dependent country colonized by a foreign power and so was unable to develop along independent lines. Colonial rule transformed the Indian economy into an appendage of the metropolitan economy of Britain.

Second, in Britain, the appearance of industrial capitalism was preceded by struggles of new social classes against feudalism since the Wars of the Roses in the late 15th century, formation of the New Monarchy, dissolution of monastic lands and the rise of the landed class of the gentry with capitalist tendencies and the subsequent defeat of feudalism. In India, on the contrary, industrial capitalism grew not by defeating feudalism but by adjusting itself to it. In India, feudal princes like those of Baroda, Mysore, Indore and Travancore set up factories themselves and encouraged and helped industrialists in various ways. In Bengal also, at the beginning of the 20th century, zamindars such as M. C. Nandi, Brojendra Kishore Roy Choudhury, Bipradas Pal Choudhuri and others invested part of their money, procured from land in indigenous enterprises.

Thus industrial capitalism did not emerge in this country in the course of the normal evolution of industry as in the countries of the West. On the contrary, it was transplanted from an advanced capitalist country to a dependent feudal country to further the interests of the former. It is also evident that no social revolution or technological development in this country had prepared the way for its emergence. In fact, the factory industry in India, with its capital goods and technology developed elsewhere, represents transplantation from outside, rather than an evolution.

Compradors in India handled different types of goods for different countries and periods according to the demands of their European masters. For instance, in the era of European merchant capital, Indian compradors in Surat, Bombay, Madras and Calcutta, procured cotton textiles, indigo, saltpeter, silk and other commodities for European East India companies from the hinterland for export to other Asian countries and also to Europe. In the era of pre-monopoly industrial capital, as a new international division of labour arose in the 19th century, the commodity composition of India's export and import trade changed. Instead of finished goods like

cotton textiles, Indian compradors supplied raw cotton, jute, food grains, etc. to European firms and sold British factory-produced goods—especially cotton textiles on the domestic market—and minted millions in lieu of their service. Opium was also a major commodity, which was exported mainly to China by British (Jardine, Matheson & Co) and Indian merchants (J. N. Tata, G. D. Birla, Cowasji Jehangir, Harduttarai Chamaria, to name only a few)—a trade which was of inestimable value to the colonial system of exploitation. In the era of finance capital, especially after the transfer of power in 1947, when imperialist monopolies are keen to export capital, the Indian compradors are serving as the channel for the import of massive amounts of foreign imperialist capital—both official loan capital and private investment capital—which dominates every sphere of the country's life, especially its industry and agriculture. Here the Indian State, the ruling classes and their political representative both at the centre and the states played a crucial role. We will come to that role as we proceed.

From Mid-19th Century to World War I

While analyzing the circumstances leading to the emergence of industrial capitalism in the West, Karl Marx pointed out that it happened along either one of the two paths. One was when master craftsmen/artisans became industrial capitalists. The other was when merchants, carrying on trade independently, became industrial capitalists. Of these two paths, the first path, according to Marx, was the truly “revolutionary path.” In India, as in China, on the other hand, neither small commodity producers nor merchants carrying on trade independently grew into industrial capitalists. On the contrary, it was the local Parsi and Gujarati *banians* (agent/middlemen/“guarantee broker” to European firms), brokers, and *shroffs* (moneylenders) of Bombay and Ahmedabad closely associated with British capital—in short, comprador merchants who invested in cotton and iron and steel industries. Some of the early Indian capitalists had been bureaucrats in the service of the colonial government or native feudal princes. They amassed millions by exporting opium and raw cotton to China as underlings to British capital, as also from contracts with the British army when it attacked Iran in 1857 and Ethiopia in 1868. J. N. Tata and his associates obtained a contract to furnish supplies required by the expeditionary forces of General Napier in Abyssinia and, as R. M. Lala stated,

the share of the profits was sufficient to launch his career in textiles.⁵¹ Thus economic ties also fostered political and military ones.

From the mid-19th century to the First World War, the Indian cotton-mill industry depended entirely on British manufacturers, from the preparation of building plans to installing and running the machines, for machinery, spare parts, technical know-how and even for the market. The comprador bourgeoisie had their mills erected, managed and supervised by British managers and technicians. The early mills were mostly spinning mills, which produced yarn—not so much for the domestic market as for the foreign markets: Britain's imperial markets in East Africa, Hong Kong and China. In fact, Indian textiles were sold abroad particularly in China under the umbrella of British power and influence.⁵² The other Indian industry set up before the First World War was iron and steel. For this, Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata depended on the feudal rulers and British support for many things. The entire working capital was provided by the Maharaja of Gwalior (feudal ruler of Gwalior). For extracting iron ores, capital goods, construction of the works, etc., the Tatas turned towards the Americans. The Julian Kennedy Sahlin and Co., an American firm of engineers, built the factory, and Wells, an American, became the first general manager of TISCO (Tata Iron and Steel Co.) that was set up at Jamshedpur.

From World War I to 1947

In the period from the First World War to 1947, Indian industrial capitalism saw the expansion of the cotton and iron and steel industries and the investment of Indian big capital in paper, sugar, cement, jute, etc., and the emergence of new groups of the Indian big bourgeoisie—the Birlas, Singhania, Goenkas, Thapars, Ruias, Walchands and others. Even though Indian big capital was forced to turn its attention to the domestic market due to World War I, its comprador ties with foreign imperialist capital were not only kept intact, but further strengthened. In fact, the first imperialist war brought to the fore the need to rely on India as an ordinance base for protective operations in the Eastern theatres of war in

⁵¹ R. M. Lala, *The Creation of Wealth*, Bombay, 1981, p. 4.

⁵² A. P. Kannangara, "Indian Millowners and Indian Nationalism before 1914," *Past and Present*, No. 40, July 1968, p. 164.

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view of the interruption of sea communications. In fact, when all supplies of machinery through sea-route from Britain were cut off, TISCO was converted into a plant for production of war material so that the British could win the war. Besides supplying 1,500 miles of rails to the colonial government for campaigns in Mesopotamia, Egypt, East Africa and other places, TISCO for the first time produced bullet-proof armoured plates, armoured vehicles made of special alloy steels, special steels for armour-piercing bullets and shells for machine-guns, rifles and machine-gun magazines, etc.⁵³ For this service rendered to the British Empire in its hour of need, TISCO was given discriminating protection by the colonial government. TISCO also served the interests of British capitalists in India at the expense of Indian interests. It sold steel to British engineering firms at low concessional rates while the indigenous engineering concerns had to purchase this industrial raw-material at much higher prices.⁵⁴ The Delhi Cloth Mills (DCM) of the Shri Ram House, another representative of the comprador big bourgeoisie, secured large orders from the government for the supply of tents for troops during the war, which fetched them a profit of millions of *rupees*.⁵⁵

The Second World War created highly favourable conditions for the select class to which Shri Ram belonged. The draconian Defence of India Rules made strikes illegal and kept wages low, while prices of goods soared. However, as regards profits, especially textile mills, these went beyond the wildest dreams of the industrialists. Shri Ram was rewarded for his loyalty in various ways besides being awarded knighthood. Walchand Hirachand, the founder of another big business group, won his first fortunes as a military and railway contractor during World War I. His Premier Automobiles Limited promoted during World War II, entered into a collaboration agreement with the US Chrysler Corporation to build motor vehicles for the defence forces. Financed by Indians, it was actually a Chrysler unit

⁵³ Frank Harris, *J. N. Tata A Chronicle of his Life*, Bombay 2nd edition, 1958, p. 214; R. M. Lala, *op. cit.*, p. 25; see Editorial in *Journal of the College of Engineering and Technology*, Vol. XIII, No. 2, December 1941, pp. 98–99.

⁵⁴ Suniti Kumar Ghosh, *The Indian Big Bourgeoisie, Its Genesis, Growth and Character*, Calcutta, January 2000, p. 199.

⁵⁵ Arun Joshi, *Lala Shri Ram: A Biography*, Bombay, 1968, pp. 106–109.

fulfilling the needs of the British Indian army.⁵⁶ One can multiply such instances.

An important reason why the Indian big bourgeoisie felt enamoured of “the British connection” was that they had a large stake in the British colonies in southeast Asia and Africa. Indian big capital not only played the role of an underling to foreign capital within India, but went out to exploit other British colonies under the umbrella of British power as a *sub-exploiter*. The total capital invested in Burma alone amounted to Rs. 2,500 million by 1941.⁵⁷ The Nattukottai Chettiars of Tamil Nadu were usurers and traders whose tentacles had spread to such Southeast Asian countries as Ceylon, Malaya, Singapore and especially Burma. Their total assets rose to Rs. 800 million in 1930 according to one estimate and Rs. 1,400 million, according to another.⁵⁸ Some of the Chettiar business groups were knighted by the British for their services to the foreign rulers. As S. B. D. de Silva puts it, “Like the remora which travels long distances by attaching itself through its dorsal slicker to the body of a shark, Indian capital went along with Britain’s overseas expansion.”⁵⁹

It is not that only foreign capital was invested in Indian-owned industries; there were a lot of foreign-owned industries in which Indian capital was also invested. The Indian capital invested in foreign-controlled companies constituted investments by such feudal lords as the Maharaja (feudal king) of Darbhanga as also big bourgeoisie and affluent petit bourgeoisie. Big business houses like the Goenkas, Birlas, Bangurs, Jalans, Bajorrias, Jatias, etc. started as brokers or *banians* (middlemen/agent for East India Company’s servants/guaranteed brokers) of European companies and came to have large financial stakes in them. Many of them served on the boards of directors, although they did not have any control over them.

Foreign and Indian big comprador capital were tied up in another way. The cement units—both Indian and British-owned—formed quasi-monopolistic organizations: the Indian Cement Manufacturers’ Association in 1926 and the Cement Marketing Company of India Ltd in

⁵⁶ S. K. Ghosh, *op. cit.*, pp. 208–209.

⁵⁷ Kasturbhai Lalbhai Papers, K-6 cited in Claude Markovits, *Indian Business and Nationalist Politics*, p. 183, fn. 5.

⁵⁸ S. K. Ghosh, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

⁵⁹ SBD de Silva, *The Political Economy of Underdevelopment*, London, 1982, p. 153.

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1930. Later, in 1936, a large number of cement companies, including those under the managing agencies of Killick Nixon and Tata Sons, were amalgamated to form the Associated Cement Companies (ACC). This cement monopoly in 1941 formed a joint syndicate with the Dalmia Jain big Marwari business group. That was followed by the formation of the Indian Sugar Syndicate, on which both Indian and British capital was represented, before the Second World War.⁶⁰ V. I. Pavlov observed: “India’s colonial capitalist sector developed an indissoluble unity with British capitalism relying on the latter’s powerful support.”⁶¹

Thus India became one of the most important supply bases for the British east of the Suez. With the entry of Japan into war, India not only provided men and material for war in West Asia, Africa and Europe, but also became a base of military operations, not only of British but also American troops. The British depended on the Indian big bourgeoisie for procurement and production of certain raw materials for the successful prosecution of the war and the Indian big bourgeoisie, true to its comprador character, provided all military and political support. In fact, while the war was the worst of times for the people, it was the best of times for the big bourgeoisie. They minted millions out of the blood and sweat of the people.

After World War II was over and the transfer of power was in sight, there was much talk about planning for future India. Leading representatives of the Indian comprador big bourgeoisie such as Sir J. R. D. Tata, G. D. Birla, Sir Purushottamdas Thakurdas, Sir Shri Ram, Kasturbhai Lalbhai and others formulated their plan popularly known as the “Bombay Plan (1944).” In fact, the success of the Soviet Five-Year Plans adopted since the end of the twenties prompted the capitalist ruling classes in some countries to attempt economic planning to stabilize and deceive the people. Did the plan declare war against feudalism and imperialism? Far from it. Neither the abolition of feudalism nor the liquidation of feudal princely states nor redistribution of land was proposed. There was no talk about restructuring existing property relationships by confiscating foreign capital. On the contrary, the plan provided for foreign loans of Rs. 700 crore

⁶⁰ A. I. Levkovsky, *Capitalism in India*, New Delhi, 1966, pp. 301–304.

⁶¹ V. I. Pavlov, V. Rastyannikov, G. Shirokov, *India: Social and Economic Development (18th to 20th centuries)*, Moscow, 1975, p. 92.

(7,000 million) to finance the Rs. 10,000 *crore* (100,000 million) plan. The plan did not demand the nationalization of the foreign capital which then dominated Indian trade, industry and banking. Professors Wadia and Merchant observed: “A national government, as our authors contemplate it, will be a government representing their capitalist interests and amenable to their wishes.”⁶²

In fact, what the Bombay Plan included is as follows: the concept of massive state intervention in the economy, a mixed private and public sector enterprise known as the “mixed economy,” the emphasis on heavy industry, the need for foreign capital and the need for deficit financing. There seems to be little difference between the basic approach of the Bombay Plan and the approach of the Government Plan formulated by the Planning and Development Committee chaired by Sir Ardeshir Dalal after the formation of the Post-War Reconstruction Committee in 1943. In the “Statement of Industrial Policy (1945)” the GoI’s (Government of India) Planning and Development Department stated that if adequate private capital was not forthcoming, basic industries should be nationalized. The idea was to prepare the infrastructure through state intervention to facilitate the entry of private capital—Indian big capital and foreign imperialist loan and private capital—in the future.⁶³ *Thus the basis of state capitalism or bureaucratic capitalism for India was laid.*

The Indian big bourgeoisie had by then reached the crossroads of history and relied on two pillars for its further growth—imperialist capital and state capitalism. State capitalism, in the words of Maurice Dobb, means “State-enforced monopoly—monopolistic restriction and monopolistic aggrandizement with the sanction and by the arm of the law.” Dobb added that the various species of state capitalism have a common element, which is “the coexistence of capitalistic ownership and operation of production with a system of generalized controls over economic operations exercised by the State, which pursues ends that are not identical with those of an individual firm.”⁶⁴ Let us now pass on to the phase that begins with the “transfer of power” in 1947.

⁶² P. A. Wadia and K. T. Merchant, *The Bombay Plan: A Criticism*, Bombay, 1945, p. 40, 45–47.

⁶³ For the full text, see *Aspects of India’s Economy* (Bombay) by RUPE, No.11, January-March 1993, pp. 42–63.

⁶⁴ Maurice Dobb, *Studies in the Development of Capitalism*, Routledge Paperback edition, London, 1972, p. 384.

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The economic ties with imperialist capital became stronger after the transfer of power in 1947. In the memorandum attached to the Indian government's Industrial Policy Resolution of April 1948, it was stated that there should be full freedom for foreign capital and enterprise in Indian industry. When Prime Minister Nehru went to the US in 1949 in quest of food, capital and technical help, he assured US capitalists that private capital would be given freedom to operate in India. The members of the Indian big capital such as G. D. Birla and Sir Homi Mody of the Tata House were no less enthusiastic in welcoming foreign monopoly capital. It is notable that the Engineering Association of India on which the tycoons were represented placed the responsibility of making India "industrially great" on the shoulders of the British and American monopolists. That was necessary because of another crucial factor, that is, the appearance of Red China. In fact, in its written evidence before the Fiscal Commission (1949-50), it stated that "industrially advanced countries like the US and UK should undertake the obligation of making India industrially great," so that "she may act as a bulwark against the rising tide of Communism in this part of the globe." It was this anti-Communist crusade that comprised another important feature of state-bureaucratic capitalism into which the Indian comprador big bourgeoisie, the Indian state and foreign imperialist capital were enmeshed.

Why did the Indian comprador big bourgeoisie choose to play the role of an underling to foreign imperialist capital when India was going to be a formally independent country? In *Capital*, Karl Marx spoke of merchant's capital and usurer's capital. In pre-capitalist countries, these forms of capital subordinate productive capital to themselves while, under capitalism, they function as agents of productive capital. In India, it was the former that was dominant. To most of the Indian industrial bourgeoisie, which developed from merchants and moneylenders, industry was an adjunct to their basic activities as traders. Even expatriate British capital, which operated through British managing agency firms and dominated India's foreign trade, industry, banking, insurance, etc., was predominantly merchant capital. Here it was commerce that ruled industry rather than industry ruling commerce.

Even when direct colonial rule came to an end, the basic weakness of India's capitalist class lay in two things: one was its failure to subordinate merchants' and usurers' capital to productive capital; the other was the virtual absence of one of the two major departments of capitalist production—the production of the means of production. As Marx pointed out, total social production is divided into two major departments: a) means of production (department: I) and b) articles of consumption (department: II). Of these two departments, the first is the more dynamic of the two. In India, the department for the production of the means of production, i.e., machinery, is almost non-existent. In fact, machine-building industry in India hardly existed and hence it always looked towards foreign capital and technical know-how. Neither the Indian big capital nor the Indian State tried to cast off that dependence; rather, they hugged the chains that bound them. In the modern world, modern technology is the monopoly of giant multinational corporations and this technological dependence on imperialist capital attended by unequal exchange leads to further surrender to their foreign masters. That is why the faster India tries to run on the clutches⁶⁵ of purchased technology, the more backward it moves in comparison with metropolitan countries.

The “transfer of power” by the British to “friendly and reliable hands” in 1947 signaled the beginning of the process of imperialist domination in a new way. In the name of building an independent and advanced economy, the Indian ruling classes have made it more dependent on the capital and technology of imperialist countries. In the name of development and industrialization, they have helped the comprador big bourgeoisie to develop quickly to better serve it in the new situation; strengthened the stranglehold of imperialism over the Indian state, country's economy, politics and culture; and have made no fundamental change in the feudal relations. In the name of non-alignment in foreign policy, they have, in fact, pursued a policy of bi-alignment with Anglo-American and Soviet powers. In the name of democracy and equal opportunities for all, they have trampled underfoot democratic rights of the people and tried to stifle the struggles of various nationalities for autonomy and self-determination. What was a colony before 1947 in fact became a semi-colony after the transfer of power.

⁶⁵ “Run on the clutches,” meaning abject dependence.

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India thus became a formally independent country. It was in such a condition that state capitalism in India made its appearance. It was a situation when the Indian comprador big bourgeoisie—basically mercantile in orientation—having feudal linkages and closely tied up with state power and major political parties both at the central and state levels, promoted imperialist capital and helped in its penetration into the economic and political lifelines of the country at a tremendous cost to the people and nature. The introduction of Five-Year Plans played a crucial role in developing bureaucratic capitalism.

There was another important development: the top political representatives of the Indian big bourgeoisie such as Jawaharlal Nehru, and Vallabhbhai Patel, the former Deputy Prime Minister, in particular, nourished big-power chauvinism and in Nehru's fevered imagination conceived of a multinational state stretching from West Asia to the Pacific region with India as its centre, and hitched their wagons to the American star. In their wild ambition to become a superpower, they followed a policy of bi-alignment either tilting towards the Anglo-American powers or towards the Soviet power—until the dismemberment of the Soviet Union, when they turned towards US imperialism and became virtually its clients. However, despite its wild ambition, India did not have the capacity to become a big power either in the past or present, a reality into which we would not enter at present. America, for its part, whetted the appetite of the Indian ruling classes by giving the false impression that it had that capacity to be a big power and brought the Indian state further under its all-round control. The "Community Development Project," the "Green Revolution," intervention by the MIT Center, etc. formed part and parcel of the American strategy to remould Indian policy in its own image.

An important aspect of bureaucratic capitalism is the dependence on imperialist capital. In fact, from the very beginning, India's plans have been heavily dependent on loan-capital and investment, technology and technical "experts" from foreign countries—in short, the abject surrender to foreign capital. Loans led to the piling up of external debts, interests multiplied and India took more loans to pay off old debts, thus making itself more indebted than ever. Another form of loan was "aid," which was responsible for the continuous, severe drain on India's surplus to advanced capitalist countries. The International Labour Organization (ILO) stated

in its report of 1977 that for every dollar given to a third-world country to continue buying from the West, the “donors” received three dollars in return.⁶⁶ The amount of drain has multiplied since then. The “aid” forges not only economic dependence and subservience but also political dependence. It helps to exercise a stranglehold on bureaucracy, government officials, leaders of political parties—ruling and others—in short, the state machinery as a whole. Policies of state control were relaxed one after the other for the entry of foreign capital and the consequent plunder of the country’s resources.

Meanwhile, the advanced capitalist countries, hit by recession since 1978–79, were anxious to export more capital goods and luxury goods to India and other Third World countries, and the withdrawal of all the existing restrictions on their exports by the Indian government. Interestingly, their interests converged with those of the Indian bureaucratic capitalists. Like the foreign imperialists, they were also critical of various government controls such as the industrial licensing system, controls over capital, import control, etc., which now stood in the way of their operations. The irony is that these very controls had earlier enabled the bureaucratic capitalists to become what they became and created a monopolistic market for their industries. But now these same controls became fetters for them. Thus they no longer had any need for them. They had a large amount of capital within the country and much more kept in foreign banks, which they wanted to bring back as white money for further expansion as junior partners of transnationals based in imperialist countries. That led to a change in policy—“liberalization, privatization and globalization”—and the dismantling of controls and restrictions, both of which were essential instruments of planning. It was this planning that made the emergence of state capitalism possible in India and it was these again which the big bureaucratic capitalists sought to do away with when these hindered their expansion.

The World Bank and the IMF, the watchdogs of imperialist interests, put forward the prescriptions for Indians. That led to the devaluation of the *rupee*, which made imports dearer and exports cheaper and the repayment of foreign loans much heavier. Secondly, the Indian ruling

⁶⁶ *Economic Times*, New Delhi, March 1, 1977.

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classes pledged to remove whatever restrictions on direct investment of imperialist capital that still remained. According to US official reports, the annual direct foreign investment rose from about \$100 million in 1990 to \$2.4 billion by 1996.⁶⁷

In fact, whether one accepts it or not, it is foreign capitalism that the Indian ruling classes and their political representatives in successive central governments have been promoting on Indian soil more aggressively than ever before. To them, national interests, national sovereignty, national dignity and their own dignity do not matter at all.

Another feature of bureaucratic capitalism in India is that public-sector enterprises, even profit-making enterprises, were sold out to foreign corporate capital and their Indian collaborators at throwaway prices. The World Bank and the IMF are keen on dismantling all measures to protect domestic national industry and demand an open door for imperialist capital and other foreign goods. That also applies to Indian banks and insurance companies, which suffer at the hands of foreign banks and insurance companies, which flourish on Indian soil because of patronage by the Indian government.

An important feature of bureaucratic capitalism in India is state intervention to transfer surplus to the private corporate sector—both Indian and foreign. Privatization has taken various forms: the disinvestment of shares of public sector firms; the sale of public enterprises with handover of management control to private firms; “public-private-partnerships” in the infrastructure sector; and the opening up of profitable sectors such as telecommunications hitherto closed to private firms. This should be discussed in some detail.

First, virtually all partial disinvestment of shares in public sector firms has been carried out consciously at prices that are “attractive” to investors. Quite naturally, these sales have attracted wide criticism, including from the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), which spoke of gross irregularities even from the first round (1991–92). The CAG put the loss at Rs. 3,442 *crore* on receipts of just Rs. 3,038 *crore*.⁶⁸ In the most recent

⁶⁷ CRS Issue Brief for Congress India-US Relations updated May 9, 2003, K. Alan Kronstadt, *Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Division*, pp. CRS 12–13.

⁶⁸ *India's Runaway "Growth" Distortion, Disarticulation and Exclusion*, Part II, Aspects of India's Economy No. 45, RUPE (Research Unit for Political Economy), Mumbai, pp. 39–40.

period, the newly formed second National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government led by Narendra Modi has initiated a mega sale of three major public sector undertakings—Oil and Natural Gas Commission (ONGC), Coal India Limited (CIL) and NHPC Ltd., which “amounts to a way of enriching the corporate sector at the expense of the exchequer.”⁶⁹

Second, virtually every sale with transfer of management to private firms has handed over assets at scandalously depressed prices. Between 2000 and 2002, the government sold and transferred nine firms to the private sector, including Balco, Hindustan Zinc, VSNL and IPCL. The CAG found that the valuation of the firms’ assets was riddled with irregularities. In several cases, it found that substantial “surplus land” was sold along with the company, thereby suggesting that real estate gains were the key motive to some of the deals (e.g., Hindustan Lever’s takeover of Modern Foods). In some cases, major assets (mines in the case of Hindustan Zinc) were arbitrarily excluded from the valuation.⁷⁰

Third, the Eleventh Five-Year Plan envisages Rs. 20 *lakh crore* (Rs. 20 trillion, or \$500 billion at Rs. 40/\$) investment in physical infrastructure (electricity, railways, roads, ports, airports, irrigation, urban and rural water supply and sanitation) during the period 2007–12. India’s savings rate surged by 11.3 percentage points between 2001–02 and 2006–07, and is projected further in 2007–08 (to reach 35.6 percent). Given this abundance/projected abundance, no problem is expected for the public sector to find finance for the projected growth in infrastructure. The government, however, constituted a committee headed by a private bank chairman to produce a list of reasons why the public sector could not carry out the necessary investments and argue that “public-private-partnerships” (PPPs) were required. With such alibis, the central government has decided to promote PPPs to fill the alleged gap in infrastructure financing. Hence foreign direct investment up to 100 percent is invited. Contracts have been awarded and projects are under way for 221 PPPs with an estimated cost of Rs. 129,575 *crore* (\$32 billion). Moreover, infrastructure PPPs would enjoy generous tax concessions.⁷¹

⁶⁹ C. P. Chandrasekhar, “An Obsession to Sell,” *Frontline*, October 18–31, 2014.

⁷⁰ V. Sridhar, “Scam accounts,” *Frontline*, 06/10/06.

⁷¹ *India’s Runaway “Growth,” op. cit.*, pp. 41–43.

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Fourth, the retreat of the State from the healthcare and education sectors led to tacit privatization. The worsening state of nutrition is due not only to the deterioration in agricultural production, but also to the government's tacit policy of privatization of health, education and transport, for this has forced the poor to spend more on these services, leaving less for food.

It is interesting to point out that bureaucratic capitalism in the neo-liberal phase condemns subsidies such as those for food and fertilizer, and the supposed subsidy on petroleum. However, it provides an array of subsidies to the private corporate sector. First, there are large transfers disguised in the form of sums owed to the State by the corporate sector, which the State makes no serious attempt to collect. Large borrowers with 11,000 individual accounts accounted for as much as Rs. 40,000 *crore* of total bad debt of banks by 2001–02. Among public sector banks, too high value defaults involving 1,741 accounts of over Rs. 5 *crore* amounted to Rs. 22,866 *crore*. The second major subsidy is tax concessions. Here the total of tax revenue foregone on corporation tax, excise duty and customs duty was estimated at a massive amount: Rs. 236,483 *crore*.⁷²

Another important feature of bureaucratic capitalism is the forging of political, military and strategic ties with imperialist countries. During the India-China border war of 1962, the Indian government “sought full defensive intervention” by America, as Galbraith noted in his diary.⁷³ The period of the late 1960s and the early 1970s characterized by the Naxalite Communist revolutionary movement led to the exchange of views to combat it among India, the US and the UK.

From the late 1980s, the US had been trying desperately to seek its long-cherished dream of world domination, what it called its “manifest destiny.” Two developments whetted its appetite. First, socialist China led by Mao Zedong, which was a source of inspiration for the freedom-loving people everywhere, had degenerated into a capitalist state. Second, the USSR, or what is known as Soviet social imperialism broke down mainly due to its internal contradictions. The US now dreamt of becoming the only superpower so that “no superpower emerged in Western Europe, Asia or

⁷² Ibid., pp. 43–44.

⁷³ J. K. Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, London, 1969, p. 486. Galbraith was the US ambassador to India from 1961 to 1963.

areas of former Soviet Union” and the US Joint Chiefs of Staff highlighted the need to maintain a “headquarters element” in South-West Asia.⁷⁴ The Indian bureaucratic capitalists and the central governments that served their interests were only too willing to carry out US plans of building close integration between Indian and American military establishments. What were the features of this military/strategic collaboration? Some features of military and strategic ties between the two countries include: the upgrading of Indian military equipment with US help; the strengthening of army-to-army and navy-to-navy “cooperation” by holding joint seminars, joint exercises, etc.; combined training exercises; the military officers’ exchange programme; the setting up of steering committees to work out various relevant proposals. An FBI office was set up in New Delhi many years ago and a jungle warfare training school was set up in Mizoram in northeastern India where American and Indian soldiers undergo joint jungle warfare training. The Indian government is taking logistical support from the US and Israel (such as unmanned airplanes/USVs) to carry on “Low-Intensity-Conflict” (LIC) to deal with the “Left-wing Extremists” (LWE), i.e., the Indian Maoists.

The *Vision Statement* that set the seal for long-term strategic dependence on US imperialism was drawn up by imperialist agencies like McKinsey & Co and which was signed during the visit by US President Clinton in March 2000. This took a major leap after the September 11, 2001 attack on the twin (World Trade Center) towers and the Pentagon and the consequent US crusade against what they termed as “terrorism,” of which the Indian ruling classes became a major appendage. It prepared the ground for a US-India-Israel military axis.

In the first decade of the 21st century, the Manmohan-Chidambaram combine⁷⁵ started what has been described as “Operation Green Hunt.” During his tenure as the central finance minister, P. Chidambaram (who was also connected with the Vedanta group and also the legal advisor to Enron), signed MOUs (Memorandums of Understanding) with a large number of foreign MNCs and domestic big compradors such as Vedanta,

⁷⁴ *Economic Times*, March 12, 1992; April 12, 1991.

⁷⁵ The Manmohan-Chidambaram combine refers to when Manmohan Singh of Congress was the Prime Minister and Chidambaram was the Home Minister. Operation Green Hunt was initiated by Chidambaram.

Starline, Jindal Steel, POSCO, Tata, Ambani, etc. to extract bauxite, iron ores and other precious mineral resources by cutting down forest reserves, displacing hundreds and thousands of *Adivasis* from their land and habitats. When the masses resisted against displacement and plunder of natural resources along with the Maoists and other forces—both with and without arms—the resisting masses were subjected to all forms of brutality perpetrated by the security forces and many other state/state-sponsored repressive agencies raised for the purpose. This “Operation Green Hunt” enters its third phase at present when the new NDA government declared its intention to directly engage the Indian army and air force to deal with the Maoist insurgency.

A Few Observations on Bureaucratic Capitalism

The close relationship between private monopoly companies and the state leads to the emergence of State monopoly capitalism. This results in high concentration of production as well as high degree of production and employment of labour. This ensures the strengthening of the monopoly grip on the state machinery and big capital makes the State subservient to it. The whole state machinery serves the interests of the ruling classes and is dictated by them. An essential element of the state machinery is the bureaucracy. Marx deduced the notion of bureaucracy from the bureaucratic relationship existing between the power-holding institutions and the social groups subordinated to them. He calls this an essential social relation, which exercises a dominating influence on the decision makers themselves. This state monopoly capitalism has thus been identified with bureaucratic capitalism.

This state capitalism strengthens private monopoly capital by assisting in the expansion of production and also development of modern industry and science. The huge economic wealth under the State directly or indirectly comes in handy for the further growth of private big comprador capitalists. The State acts positively in providing raw material (such as bauxite, iron ores, coal, etc.) to them; hands over sources of raw material through the signing of MOUs with domestic corporate and foreign imperialist capital; places orders with big capital; provides cheap electricity, mineral resources, etc. to the corporate houses—native and foreign. As the State adopts a policy of militarization by whipping up war hyste-

ria at intervals with neighbouring countries like Pakistan and China, the demand for defence goods gets a fillip and that is met by big capital. In the name of combating armed intrusion from Pakistan and also for dealing with the Maoist insurgency, the Indian state is procuring war materials from Israel and America in increasing quantities. That fattens the belly of native and foreign imperialist capital.

State monopoly capitalism is further strengthened by the control over industry, the transport system, banks, and by the selling out of shares in the private-public partnership. Privatization or disinvestment of public sector units at throwaway prices fattens the purse of imperialist capital and domestic big capital. Rules are relaxed, even changed in Parliament and state legislative assemblies in the interest of bureaucratic capital.

An important question is: Who are the beneficiaries of the surplus extracted by bureaucratic capitalism? It is mainly the domestic big capital and imperialist capital that grab such profits, directly through the backing provided by the bureaucratic state to their industries, stock market-based incomes, disinvestment of public sector units, devaluation of the *rupee*, changing laws to permit TNCs to operate with near total or total control, handing over large tracts of land for the creation of SEZs (Special Economic Zones), etc. The new trend of private-public-partnerships (PPP) explicitly shows that the major portion of surplus goes to the domestic big capital and imperialist capital and the state bureaucracy. Side by side, as no state can sustain itself without eliciting the support of the people, a small portion of the surplus is also distributed in various ways among the lower layers of society and is also set aside for the furtherance of various works of public utility.

In India, state capitalism or bureaucratic capitalism showed signs of its emergence in the last years of colonial rule. As was the case during the emergence of industrial capitalism, here also it did not have any independent growth; on the contrary, the basis of its emergence was laid by the British colonial masters themselves. Thus from the very beginning, it was dependent in character. There was nothing unusual about it. Had India adopted the path of the New Democratic Revolution the essence of which was an agrarian revolution as was taken up by China under Mao, her history would have proceeded along a different course. The state capitalism that would have emerged then would have nothing to do either with feu-

dalism or imperialism, as New Democratic India would have emerged after getting rid of these anti-people internal and external forces, and later on, it would have undergone the phase of socialist transformation as China had done. Let us now pass on to a brief account of national capitalism in India.

National Capitalism in India

One can have two sections of the bourgeoisie—comprador bourgeoisie and national bourgeoisie—in a colony or semi-colony. In a truly independent country which is neither colonized by nor dependent on imperialist countries, one can have only one section of the bourgeoisie—the national bourgeoisie. In a colony or a semi-colony, the nature of national capitalism is determined by the concrete condition that prevails in the country. Speaking of China before 1949, Mao Zedong said that the national bourgeoisie was “oppressed by imperialism and fettered by feudalism.” This was also true of India’s national bourgeoisie and is true even today. Because of the prevalence of feudal land relations in the vast countryside of India, the Indian market was narrow. Because of the stranglehold over the Indian economy—domestic and foreign trade, industry, finance, etc.—by imperialist capital and its compradors, and the inimical policies of the colonial state, national capitalism could hardly grow and survive. In fact, national capitalism had antagonistic contradictions not only with the imperialist bourgeoisie but also with the compradors.

Colonial Period:

The comprador bourgeoisie, which was one of the main pillars of colonial rule, was divided into three groups. The first combined banking and trading activities; the second acted as brokers, *baniyas* (member of a trading caste) or contractors to the British Raj and supplied provisions to the British Indian army at home and abroad; the third were gamblers, speculators and brokers of British firms.

The national bourgeoisie on the other hand, moved in totally different directions. It is possible to draw clear lines of demarcation⁷⁶ between the comprador big bourgeoisie and national middle-small bourgeoisie of India. Very briefly, we propose to refer to their salient features under eight

⁷⁶ For details, see Amit Bhattacharyya, *Swadeshi Enterprise in Bengal 1921-47*, Setu Prakashani, Kolkata, September 2007, pp. 181-195.

broad heads: social origin; ways of primary accumulation; knowledge of production process/original research; selection of sites and building plans; management/experts/directors; machinery; market; political attitude.

1. *Social Origin*: Unlike the compradors who originated from traders, bankers, middlemen, brokers, speculators and gamblers, the national capitalists emerged from the educated middle class (professors, chemists, physicians, engineers), landlords and artisans.
2. *Ways of Primary Accumulation*: Unlike the comprador big bourgeoisie who accumulated money as traders, usurers, gamblers, brokers, contractors and speculators, the national capitalists depended on small savings from middle-class professions, land, donations and even their own skills and confidence in themselves.
3. *Knowledge of the Process of Production/Original Research*: Unlike the big bourgeoisie which neither had a thorough knowledge or any knowledge whatsoever of the process of production, the national capitalists gained in such knowledge through experience as chemists, medical personnel, knowledge about engineering and direct participation in the process of production.
4. *Selection of Sites for Factories and Building Plans*: Unlike the compradors, which depended on foreign experts for the selection of sites for their factories and also for making plans for buildings, the national section relied on themselves for all these.
5. *Management/Experts/Directors*: Unlike the big bourgeoisie, which depended to a large extent on foreigners, the small and middle bourgeoisie depended on themselves.
6. *Machinery*: Unlike the compradors which depended entirely on foreigners for machinery, spare parts, capital goods, etc., the national bourgeoisie, despite dependence on foreign machinery in many sectors, also manufactured machines both for the use in their own factories as also for the market.

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7. *Market*: Unlike the big bourgeoisie which depended on the imperialists even for the market, particularly the overseas market, the small and medium entrepreneurs sold their products through *deshi* (indigenous) shops of different sizes which sprang up in large numbers during the colonial days.
8. *Political Attitude*: While the compradors were politically and strategically tied up with the colonial rulers in many different ways, the national section had a clear anti-British orientation. Many of the founder-proprietors of *swadeshi* companies (indigenous and anti-British) took part in the anti-colonial revolutionary movements and members of secret societies and were imprisoned for their political activism.

Post-Colonial Period (since 1947):

In the period after colonial rule, the policies of the Indian ruling classes were overwhelmingly in favour of imperialist capital and the big bourgeoisie. Even though this national section could develop in some sectors in the initial period, e.g., in textiles, engineering works, cycles, etc., change in government policy and the opening up of the country's economy by the gradual withdrawal of restrictions, in addition to other factors, worsened the situation. From the 1990s onwards, particularly as a result of the introduction of the LPG (liberalization, privatization, globalization) programme, small and medium-sized factories faced closure; their number in West Bengal alone ran into many thousands, which left millions of workers jobless. A massive number of small and cottage-sized units in the unorganized sectors throughout the country have died out due to lack of state support, paucity of funds, crippling competition from the big companies, etc. The setting up of shopping malls in urban centres by the corporate houses—domestic and foreign—in the sites of closed factories has been playing havoc on the small businessmen, hawkers and daily earners. That, however, requires a detailed study and analysis into which we will not enter at present.

INDIAN EXPANSIONISTS AND THEIR WILD ASPIRATIONS

The expansionist ambitions of the Indian ruling classes and their political representatives began to take shape in the 1930s and 1940s when the Indian big bourgeoisie looked towards extending their business activities to countries outside India under the umbrella of British power and influence. Likewise, their political representatives also betrayed “Great Power” syndrome in no uncertain terms in their writings and letters, even when some of them were still in prison. These expansionist ambitions of the Indian big bourgeoisie were closely tied up with the interests of the imperialist bourgeoisie and the role of the former as sub-exploiter was conditioned by their role as compradors—a role that had endeared them to and made them the most trusted lackeys of the British Raj. When the “transfer of power” was in sight, the Hindu compradors consisting of the Birlas, Thakurdases, Sarabhais among others, stood for a strong centre where they could dominate. The Muslim compradors consisting of the Ispahanis, Adamjis, Haroons, etc., demanded a separate unitary state where they could thrive, free from competition with the more powerful Marwari, Gujarati and Parsi business magnates. The Hindu compradors opted for a divided India with a strong centre, rather than an undivided India with a weak centre. The decision to partition the country along communal lines was taken mainly because of the congressional leaders’ pursuit of a monopoly of whatever power the British would concede before their departure. The “Big Power” syndrome was reflected in their uncompromising demand to set up a strong centre under their control.

In fact, the Indian big bourgeoisie had a large stake in the British colonies in Southeast Asia and East Africa. Their role was that of a sub-exploiter in other British colonies, as in India. In Myanmar, Indian businessmen controlled about two-fifths of the value of imports and about three-fifths of the value of exports. The Indian Imperial Citizenship Association, of which Gandhi was a founder, and with which Thakurdas and many other Indian business magnates were actively attached, estimated total Indian capital investment in Myanmar in 1941 at Rs. 250 *crore*. The Nattukottai Chettiyar groups of Tamil Nadu alone owned one-fourth of the cultivable land in South Myanmar in the early 1930s. The Birlas, too,

owned a starch factory there. In Malaya, the Chettiyar groups, besides other Indian groups, set up their trading and money-lending firms and made investments in rubber plantations and coal mines. In Sri Lanka, the import of trade in rice, flour, sugar and textiles was dominated from about 1908 by the Memon merchants from India. Claude Marcovits writes that “prior to the 1920s, Indian capitalist interests in Mumbai wanted to transform Kenya into an Indian sub-colony.”⁷⁷ In East Africa, a Parekh family and a Patel group had big cotton trading concerns and set up cotton mills. Of the major groups, at least Mafatlal, Sarabhai and Thakurdas had considerable interests in Uganda. Thakurdas had important interests also in Tanzania. In this way, the Indian big capital, protected by British guns, spread its tentacles to other British colonies to squeeze people of other lands and served the British Raj to serve itself.

The Indian big bourgeoisie, which prospered mainly because of its role as intermediaries to imperialist capital, wanted an India with a strong centre by their control over different national regions, by curbing the forces of genuine nationalism and suppressing various nations and nationalities of India. Before transferring power, the British imperialists also wanted to keep the unity of India intact. They seriously wanted to have a “United India” to serve their global strategy: political, economic and military. Moreover, the Indian big bourgeoisie aspired to become a zonal power in the Indian Ocean region as junior partners of the Anglo-American powers. The closing period of the Second World War enabled them to see rosy visions of its future. This class minted gold out of the sweat and tears of the people of India during the war. The defeat of Japan in Asia, the decline in the power and prestige of the old imperialist powers like France and the Netherlands, etc. whetted the appetite of the big bourgeoisie. They started dreaming of dominating not only South Asia but also the entire Indian Ocean region.

Small Nationalities Are Doomed

These predatory aspirations of the Indian big bourgeoisie were voiced by one of their top political representatives—the man who was destined to be the first prime minister of “independent” India. Jawaharlal Nehru was

⁷⁷ *Indian Business and Nationalist Politics*, Cambridge, 1985, p. 187.

one of those who, irrespective of his public statements, abhorred the right of nations to self-determination. While in jail, he wrote:

Whether India is properly to be described as a nation, or two, or more, really does not matter, for the modern idea of nationality has been almost divorced from statehood. The national state is too small a unit today and small states can have no independent existence.⁷⁸

Statements such as these are in clear contravention of UN Declaration on Fundamental Rights. He held: “the small national state is doomed. It may survive as a cultural, autonomous area but not as an independent political unit.”⁷⁹ Again, he stated:

The right of any well-constituted area to secede from the Indian federation or union has often been put forward, and the argument of the USSR advanced in support of it. That argument has little application, for conditions there are wholly different and the right has little practical value.⁸⁰

Nehru’s wild ambitions knew no bounds. He asserted that it was India’s “manifest destiny” to become the centre of a “super-national state” stretching from the Middle East to Southeast Asia and to exercise “an important influence” in the Pacific region.⁸¹ Nehru asserted:

So it seems that in the modern world it is inevitable for India to be the centre of things in Asia (In that term, I would include Australia and New Zealand too, being in the Indian Ocean region. East Africa comes into it also).... India is going to be the centre of a very big federation.⁸²

⁷⁸ J. Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, London, 1956, p. 545.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 550.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 548.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 550.

⁸² Nehru, *Selected Works*, Vol. XV, pp. 562, 566.

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Nehru was quite prompt in affirming that “India is likely to dominate politically and economically the Indian Ocean region.” In August 1945, he stated:

I stand for a south Asia federation of India, Iraq, Afghanistan and Burma.... In the world of today there are two big powers, Russia and America. In the world of tomorrow, there will be two more, India and China—there will be no fifth.⁸³

That is not the end of such tall talks and wild dreams. Nehru considered Sri Lanka to be “really part of India” and wanted her to be “an autonomous unit of the Indian federation.”⁸⁴ He also claimed that Nepal was “certainly a part of India,” though she was a nominally independent country.⁸⁵ Like Nehru, Patel was afflicted with this “Great Power” syndrome. He said: “Let India be strong and be able to assume the leadership of Asia, which is its right.”⁸⁶ On November 7, 1950, he wrote to Nehru:

the undefined state of the frontier (in the north and north-east) and the existence on our side of the population with its affinities to Tibetans or Chinese have all the elements of potential trouble between China and ourselves.... Our northern or northeastern approaches consist of Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, Darjeeling (area) and tribal areas in Assam.... The people inhabiting these portions have no established loyalty or devotion to India.

So he proposed that “political and administrative steps” should be taken “to strengthen our northern and northeastern frontiers. This would include the whole of the border, i.e., Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, Darjeeling and the tribal territory in Assam.”⁸⁷ Toeing the line of Nehru that small nationalities are bound to be doomed to pave the way for the creation of the “Indian nation” (which is but a myth), Patel advocated the establish-

⁸³ Ibid, pp. 440–442.

⁸⁴ Nehru, *Selected Works*, Vol. XIV, p. 450; Vol. XV, p. 458; Vol. X, p. 32; Vol. XI, pp. 788–89.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 2nd series, Vol. II, p. 470.

⁸⁶ P. D. Saggi, *Life & Works of Vallabhbhai Patel*, Bombay, n.d., p. 89.

⁸⁷ Durga Das, ed., *Sardar Patel's Correspondence*, Vol. X, pp. 337–8, 340.

ment of Indian domination over all these countries and regions in the north and the northeast.

Small Nationalities in the Northeast

The northeastern part of India consisting of seven small states—namely, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura—is the home of many small nationalities like the Assamese, the Nagas, the Mizos, the Khasis, the Bodos, the Khamtis, the Karbis, etc. and many other ethnic groups of people. They were ruled by independent feudal kings and tribal chiefs. This region is rich in such natural resources as oil, tea, gas, coal, etc. The British imperialists pursued a “forward policy” in these regions, suppressed the hopes and aspirations of the people living there by force and other means, and sought to integrate the northeast with the central administration. They were successful only in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya, while the peoples of Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura raised the standards of rebellion against colonial rule. In the post-1947 phase, the Nehru-led government installed by the British continued the same colonial legacy of national subjugation and what followed were the forcible mergers of these regions with the Indian state.

In March 1947, the Maharaja and the ruling council of **Manipur** drafted a constitution for independent Manipur. Turning a deaf ear to the aspirations of the Manipuri people, Vallabhbhai Patel, the then Home Minister of India, compelled king Bodhchandra Singh to sign a document for the merger of Manipur with the Indian state. The Maharaja sought to some time to discuss the matter with his council but was disallowed by Patel. The merger agreement was signed on September 21, 1949 and became effective on October 15 that year.

Regarding **Nagaland**, Nehru wrote:

It [the Naga territory] lies between two huge countries, India and China.... Inevitably, therefore, this Naga territory must form part of India and Assam... the excluded areas should be incorporated with the other areas.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Nehru, *Selected Works*, Vol. XV, p. 279.

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As part of the “forward policy,” the British annexed one part of the Naga territory and created the Naga Hills territory and the Naga Hills District. The British followed a policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of the Naga Hills District, and the land bordering Tibet and Myanmar, inhabited by the Naga people, were left unadministered. But the Indian expansionists did not allow the Naga people to take their destiny into their own hands. They wanted to annex the whole of the Naga territory. On August 7, 1951, Nehru’s principal private secretary wrote to A. Z. Phizo, the leader of the Naga National Council, that “the Indian government would not allow any attempt by any section of the people of India to claim an independent state.”⁸⁹ Such was the plea given by the Indian expansionists to justify their annexation of Nagaland even though the Nagas had never been a section of the people of India.

Assam

Assam was never historically a part of present-day India. The Assamese nationality, consisting of such groups as Ahom, Moran, Matak, Koch, Deurie, Chutia, etc., rather grew in isolation and were endowed with a racial and cultural heritage totally distinct from that of metropolitan India. Assam was annexed by the British on February 24, 1826, by virtue of the Treaty of Yandaboo, entered into with the government of Myanmar and was brought under unified Indian administration. This treaty did not have the concurrence of the Assamese people, nor was it ratified by the then rulers of Assam. The Indian expansionists took Assam over as if by natural right and thus Assam became an integral part of the Indian state in 1947. The same is true of other nationalities living in **Mizoram**, **Tripura**, Meghalaya, etc.

Jammu and Kashmir: The Indian expansionists also sought to grab **Jammu and Kashmir** (J & K). On June 14, 1947, V. K. Krishna Menon, Nehru’s trusted emissary, appealed to Viceroy Mountbatten to ensure that on the lapse of British paramountcy, Jammu and Kashmir should be allowed to be acceded to India in the interest of the “free world,” i.e., a world dominated by the imperialists and their accomplices.⁹⁰ On June 17 that year, Nehru sent a note on Kashmir to Mountbatten. After pointing

⁸⁹ S. Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol. II, Delhi 1979, p. 208.

⁹⁰ A. C. Bose, “J and K’s Accession-II,” *Statesman*, December 20, 1995.

out that the Muslims constituted 77.11 percent of the population of the state, Nehru stated that it should join India.⁹¹ In Nehru's scheme of things, there were only options before J & K: one was the accession to India, which naturally, as the facts will testify, was Nehru's heart's desire; the other was accession to Pakistan. The third alternative, i.e., the right of the Kashmiri people to remain separate and independent was never acceptable to the Nehrus. In a document adopted at a conference held in 1944, known as *Naya Kashmir*, the National Conference led by Sheikh Abdullah envisaged the future state of Jammu and Kashmir as "an independent federation... like a Switzerland of the East."⁹² In November and December 1947, Nehru declared that there should be a referendum on the issue of the merger of Kashmir with either India or Pakistan. Speaking in Indian Parliament on August 7, 1952, Nehru again declared:

We do not want to win people against their will and with the help of armed force; and, *if the people of Jammu and Kashmir State wish to part company with us, they can go their way and we go ours. We want no forced marriages, no forced unions. I hope this great Republic of India is a free, voluntary, friendly and affectionate union of the States of India.*⁹³

However noble the ideal may appear, it contained not an iota of truth, as the following would testify. Within a few days—on August 25, 1952—Nehru sent a note to Abdulla, the then prime minister of J & K, in which he stated:

Our general outlook should be such as to make people think that the association of Kashmir state with India is an accomplished and final fact and nothing is going to undo it.... I have held these views concisely and precisely for the last four years.... What has sometimes worried me is what happens in Kashmir, because I have found doubt and hesitation there, and not clarity of vision or firmness of outlook.⁹⁴

⁹¹ N. Mansergh, ed., *Transfer of Power Documents*, Vol. XI, pp. 446–48.

⁹² See Bose's article.

⁹³ Nehru, *Jawaharlal Nehru's Speeches*, p. 361.

⁹⁴ Quoted in S. Gopal, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

It was through cunning, deceit and coercion that the Indian expansionists annexed J & K to the Indian state.

Language as an Instrument of Domination

Language has been used as an instrument of domination of the Indian big bourgeoisie over different nationalities of India. In fact, to promote the growth of “Indian nationalism” and suppress “sub-nationalism,” the Indian ruling classes have tried for a long time to foist Hindi in Devanagari script as the common language of the whole of India. The mastermind behind this project was Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. In order to solidify “Hindu India,” he proposed an “All-India script” in *Young India* on July 14, 1927. He wrote:

Before the acceptance of Devanagari script becomes a universal fact in India, Hindu India has got to be converted to the idea of one script for all the languages derived from Sanskrit and Dravidian stock.... If these scripts (Bengali, Sindhi, Gurumukhi, Oriya, Malayalam, Kannarese, Tamil, Telugu and so on) could be replaced by Devanagari for all practical and national purposes, it would mean a tremendous step forward. *It will help to solidify Hindu India.*⁹⁵

It was also his desire that Hindustani should “become the language of the whole of Asia.”⁹⁶ Quite revealing indeed!

In fact, Gandhi had been voicing the aspirations of the Indian big bourgeoisie whose political representative he was. The goal of the Indian ruling classes was to have a powerful centre in a unitary Indian state in the interests of the Hindu and Parsi business magnates. The ruling classes avoided open debates on the language question, fearing that that would consolidate opposition and thwart the plan of imposing Hindi. Selig Harrison wrote:

Language provisions were pointedly omitted from the Draft Constitution of October 1947, as well as from all subsequent versions until the very last. In fact, Article 115 in the Draft

⁹⁵ Gandhi, *Collected Works*, Vol. XXXV, p. 357.

⁹⁶ Gandhi, *Collected Works*, Vol. LXXXVII, p. 216.

Constitution, which dealt with the Hindi question, generated more heat than any other. Hindi was ultimately imposed as the national language by a margin of one single vote (78 against 77).

We have already referred to the letter from Patel, the Home Minister, to Nehru about the northern and northeastern regions like Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, etc., where he suggested that administrative steps be taken to exercise control over them. In the case of **Sikkim**, India seized the opportunity of a local uprising against the ruler to send in troops and bring the State into closer dependence as a protectorate than it had under the British. Annexing Sikkim was the widely known ambition of Indira Gandhi and her father, Jawaharlal Nehru. After turning Sikkim into its protectorate and emboldened by Soviet social imperialist backing, the Indian expansionists became more unscrupulous than ever. In 1973, the Indian government openly marched into Gangtok, capital of Sikkim, to take over Sikkim's administration by force. In 1974, the Indian Parliament, in the teeth of strong opposition of the Sikkimese people and world public opinion, carried out the colonialist annexation of Sikkim by making it an "associate state" of India through an amendment to the Indian Constitution. On April 9, 1975, the Indian government, under the prime ministership of Indira Gandhi, let loose its troops and forcibly disbanded the palace guards of Sikkim's Chogyal. The very next day, Sikkim's cabinet and national assembly, manipulated by the Indian expansionists, adopted "resolutions" demanding the removal of Chogyal and the turning of Sikkim into a constituent state of India. The fig leaf of "protectorate" and of "associate state" had been completely cast aside, and Sikkim was turned in no time into a constituent state of India. *Renmin Ribao* commented: "It is indeed the height of arrogance for the Indian government to commit so outrageous an aggression in the 1970s."⁹⁷

In 1949 again, India signed a treaty with **Bhutan**, in which she took over Britain's right to guide Bhutan in foreign affairs. However, to the Indian expansionists, Nepal was more important than many others in their imperial quest for regional hegemony.

⁹⁷ *Peking Review*, no. 16, April 18, 1975.

Nepal

The US ambassador to India, Chester Bowles wrote in 1954: “So India has done on a small scale in Nepal which we have done on a far broader scale on two continents” (*Ambassador’s Report*, London 1954, p. 280). What did the Indian expansionists do to Nepal? The question is all the more important in the context of the Maoist offensive in Nepal in recent years against both US imperialism and Indian hegemony. We will be brief.

The present state of Nepal—a mountainous region of about 500 miles by 100 miles in size was established in the second half of the 18th century through the forcible annexation of nearly 60 petty tribal and ancient states under the leadership of one chief, Prithvi Narayan Shah of Gorkha. The process of state expansion continued till the early 19th century when a semi-colonial position was thrust upon the state by the British colonizers with the signing of the Sugauli treaty of 1816 and was further buttressed by a set of “unequal” treaties it was forced to sign with “free” India in subsequent years. The Indian ruling classes followed in the footsteps of their former British masters and continued with their expansionist designs. The outcome was the *Indo-Nepal Treaty of 1950*, the most objectionable provisions of which are as follows: so-called security commitments towards each other, restrictions to purchase arms by Nepal, “national treatment” to be given to the nationals of the other in one’s territory and the virtual scrapping of the political border between the two countries. Constant political manipulations exercised by the Indian rulers to put their puppets in power, armed intervention to crush rebellion in Nepal (e.g., Indian army operations to put down peasant uprisings led by Bhim Dutta Pant in 1953, etc.) clearly showed what the “Nehru doctrine” actually stood for. This political control was matched by the almost total control of the Indian ruling classes over the economy of Nepal, including industry, trade and finance. The Indian expansionists have also established control over Nepal’s vast water resources. The Koshi River Agreement (1954), Gondak River Agreement (1960) and the more recent Mahakali River Treaty (1996) clearly reveal how the Indian big bourgeoisie is plundering the massive hydro-electric potential of Nepal. Accompanied by it is social and cultural domination

through fanning Hindu jingoism or corrupting young minds through pornographic Hindi films.

The sovereignty of Nepal and other Himalayan states has actually been trampled underfoot to serve the interests of imperialism and their lackeys. In an article in the *Times of India* dated February 2, 1960, Prem Bhatia wrote that as the need arose to protect Nepal from Chinese “invasion or subversion,” “the US and India came to realize that their aims in Nepal were identical.”

Tibet and India’s Policy Towards China

The Nehrus had a keen interest in Tibet as well. As early as April 25, 1947, when India was yet to attain formal independence from the British Raj, Nehru, as a member of the viceroy’s “interim government,” informed the British secretary of state for India that the

Government of India now wish to be represented in Tibet... and should be grateful to know whether His Majesty’s Government desire to retain separate mission there in future. If they do not, it would seem feasible to arrange transition from ‘British Mission’ to ‘Indian Mission’ *without publicity and without drawing too much attention to change*, to avoid if possible any constitutional issue being raised by China.⁹⁸

At that time, a civil war had been going on in China when all the forces of progress joined hands with Mao Zedong and the Communist Party of China against the lackeys of imperialism and feudalism represented by Chiang Kai-shek and Co. Nehru started to develop a liaison with Dalai Lama’s government in Tibet, which, as the London *Times* reported on July 29, 1949, was “a gratifying indication that an important new bulwark against the spread of communism westward is being created.” Meanwhile, the Sino-Tibetan agreement guaranteeing the autonomy of Tibet within the People’s Republic of China was signed on May 27, 1951.

On November 18, 1950, one year after the birth of the People’s Republic of China, Nehru wrote:

⁹⁸ N. Mansergh, ed., *Transfer of Power Documents*, Vol. X, p. 430.

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We cannot save Tibet, as we should have liked to do, and our very attempts to save it might well bring greater trouble to it.... It may be possible, however, that we might be able to help Tibet to retain a large measure of her autonomy. That would be good for Tibet and good for India. As far as I can see this can only be done on the diplomatic level and by avoidance of making the present tension between India and China worse.⁹⁹

Why was Tibet so important for Nehru? The successful accomplishment of the Chinese revolution, the spread of communist and national revolutionary movements in the countries of southeast Asia alarmed the Indian ruling classes as it had alarmed the imperialist forces. There was the fear—mortal fear that India would go the China way. This spectre of communism was voiced in the statements made from time to time by the Indian bourgeoisie and also by the representatives of the US imperialist state. As early as 1949, the Engineering Association of India, on which Indian tycoons were represented, stated:

Industrially-advanced countries like US and UK should undertake the obligation of making India industrially great. The exigencies of the situation in Southeast Asia require it and comparative inability of the Western powers to be of effective help in Southeast Asia demands that India should be made strong in order that *she may act as a bulwark against the rising tide of Communism in this part of the globe.*¹⁰⁰

The Indian big bourgeoisie felt that India's entente with US and British imperialism was essential not only for her becoming a big power, but also to combat their mortal enemy, i.e., communism. Chester Bowles, the political representative of US imperialism, also showed his deep anxiety when he stated:

If the communists should win the struggle of Indo-China... the consequence for India would be ominous. The Commu-

⁹⁹ Durga Das, *op. cit.*, p. 346.

¹⁰⁰ GOI, *Report of the Fiscal Commission 1949–50*, Vol. III, Written evidence, p. 80.

nists would then be in a position to bring overwhelming pressure on both Thailand and Burma, whether politically or by physical occupation of those countries.... The continued presence of Chinese Communists on its northern border makes what happens in Nepal all the more important to India, and to the whole non-Communist world. If Nepal should fall before an invasion from Tibet, or from an internal Communist revolution, the Communists would be poised right on the Indian border, above the great heartland of the country and less than four hundred miles from Delhi.¹⁰¹

Bowles made it amply clear that the spread of Communism would spell the doom of the imperialist system itself. So he sought to project Nehru as the role model defending Asian democracy in opposition to Asian communism represented by Mao Zedong. The attitude of US imperialism was manifested in no uncertain terms in the *Life* magazine which stated:

Nehru is greatest Statesman and diplomat, a man with vast qualities of courage and leadership. If we can find the right formula for joining our strength with his, the future of Asia and the World will become much brighter. We owe it to ourselves and all of non-Communist Asia to put heart into Nehru for the ordeal that lies ahead.¹⁰²

The *New York Post* wrote in October 1949 that India was “America’s hope in Asia.”¹⁰³ Another organ of US imperialism, the *New York Times* was more straightforward when it stated in August 1950: “He [Nehru] is in a sense the *counter-weight* on the democratic side (sic!) to *Mao Zedong*. [My italics.] To have Pandit Nehru as ally in the struggle for Asiatic support is worth many divisions.”¹⁰⁴

Nehru was quite willing to play the role for which US imperialism cast him, as he himself told Col. Louis Johnson, the then personal rep-

¹⁰¹ “Ambassador’s Report,” *op. cit.*, pp. 247–48, 270.

¹⁰² Cited in Editorial, “What Communist China means to India” in *Engineering News of India*, Vol. I, No. 6, September 1949, p. 395.

¹⁰³ Cited in J. Nehru, *Inside America: A Voyage of Discovery*, Delhi, n.d., p. 71.

¹⁰⁴ Cited in R. P. Dutt, *India, Today & Tomorrow*, Delhi, 1955, p. 275.

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representative of US President Roosevelt back on April 6, 1942 that “India wanted to hitch her wagon to America’s star.”¹⁰⁵

The border between India and Tibet—vast, mountainous, sparsely populated, icy and desolate areas never under Indian administration—had remained undefined and un-demarcated when the direct rule of India by the British ended in 1947. In April 1947, Nehru held that the McMahon Line was the boundary in the eastern side of the India-China border and from November 1950, started to claim unilaterally that “the McMahon line is our boundary and that is our boundary—map or no map.”¹⁰⁶ Nehru simply brushed aside the unassailable fact that the *Simla Convocation of 1914*, where the McMahon Line was drawn, was never ratified by the parties concerned including the British-Indian government, and China objected to it from the beginning.

To cut a long story short, the Nehrus were engaged in a game to stir up revolt of the serf-owners in Tibet by training the Khamba tribes of Tibet in collusion with US and the CIA, with US engaged in anti-China espionage from a base set up in Kalimpong in Darjeeling. Clashes with the Chinese border guards started in August 1959 when Indian soldiers crossed the McMahon Line. Nehru made the greatest blunder of his life when he mistook Chinese restraint and Zhou Enlai’s offer for talks as a sign of China’s weakness. What followed in late 1962 is well known. The whole story was depicted in great detail based on primary sources by Neville Maxwell in his *India’s China War*. The Indian expansionists and their behind-the-scene American accomplices thus suffered one of the most stunning defeats in history. Nehru’s much-publicized “forward policy” turned out to be an abortive one.

Dismemberment of Pakistan

In 1971, backed by different imperialist powers, especially the Soviet social imperialists, and condemned by all the progressive forces of the world, the Indian expansionists attacked Pakistan and occupied the whole of East Pakistan. This war of aggression was the culmination of more than a decade-old imperialist conspiracy to force Pakistan to join India as a subordinate in an alliance directed against socialist China and world revolu-

¹⁰⁵ Nehru, *Selected Works*, Vol. XII, pp. 194–5; *TOP*, Vol. I, pp. 665–66.

¹⁰⁶ Quoted in S. Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol. II, Delhi 1979, p. 176.

tion. Indira Gandhi, the then prime minister of India declared on January 2, 1972 that India would supply all the needs of Bangladesh.¹⁰⁷ For the supply of all the needs of the “newborn state” the Indian compradors not only kept the army there but also sent a substantial number of civil and police officers. They rebuilt East Bengal’s damaged roads, railways, bridges, power houses, ports and even printed currency notes for Bangladesh. They dumped textiles, coal, cement, petroleum and other of their products in the East Bengal market at high prices and bought raw jute, hide and skin, newsprint, paper, etc. at cheap prices. Dhaka was visited not only by D. P. Dhar, Indira Gandhi’s special envoy, but also by economic, shipping, insurance and aviation delegations from India. The US monopolists, too, were represented by the World Bank chief, the notorious McNamara, and others. The “liberation” of Bangladesh had brought cruel suffering, shame, humiliation, semi-starvation and slow death to the hundreds of millions of Indian peasants, workers and other toiling people.

That the aims and interests of US imperialism and the Indian ruling classes were identical became evident with the passage of time. As the imperialist forces sought to globalize its forces to exercise their control over and plunder the underdeveloped countries of the world, they depended on the then congressional leaders at the national level and CPI(M) (Communist Party of India (Marxist)) leaders and other parties at the state levels. Besides building up defence agreements and conducting joint military exercises with the US, Russia, France and other countries, the Indian expansionists have also quietly beefed up arms ties with Israel. In fact, Israel has emerged the second largest military hardware and software supplier to India after Russia. Later, India signed a \$11.6-million contract with the Israel Military Industries to jointly manufacture 125-mm tank shells. In 2003 alone, India procured an estimated \$42.7 billion worth of armaments from Israel.¹⁰⁸ The wide array of Israeli high-tech equipment inducted into the armed forces ranges from the Barak anti-missile systems and Searcher-II and Heron UAVs to Green Pine and Aerostat radars. One major deal was, of course, the \$1.1-billion contract for three airborne Phalcon early warning radar and communication systems to fulfil the IAF’s long-standing requirement for AWACS (airborne warning and control sys-

¹⁰⁷ *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, January 3, 1972.

¹⁰⁸ *The Times of India*, February 17, 2005.

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tems). Not only that—Indian army commandos, an elite force, could be used to help friendly governments. They can be used to rescue hostages, in anti-terrorist operations and to help friendly governments. This could be done in the name of national interests, as in the case of an operation in the Maldives.¹⁰⁹ In these ways, the imperialists and their accomplices in India and other countries are making frantic preparations to save themselves from the people's wrath. However, history has shown more often than once that it is not the weapons, but the people who are motive forces of change.

¹⁰⁹ *The Statesman*, October 25, 2004.

IMPERIALISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL DISASTER: “GREEN REVOLUTION” IN OPERATION IN INDIA

For the last few decades, the people of India have been confronted with such a deep socio-economic crisis that was probably unprecedented in our history. The regular rise in the prices of essential commodities; increase in public transport fares; irregular fee hikes in educational institutions; privatization of education; increasing unemployment of alarming proportions; retrenchment; selling out of public industrial undertaking, even profit-making units, one after another at throw-away prices to domestic big capitalists and foreign companies; introduction of the system of contractual workers; employment of teachers at schools and colleges on a contractual basis; cultivation of land on contract; handing over of agricultural land to the foreign speculators in the name of “industrialization”; displacement of hundreds and thousands of *Adivasi* people from their land and habitats; incidences of suicides for various reasons; and deaths from malnutrition in large numbers—all these are as clear as the light of the day. In the name of “development” and “modernization,” hawkers have been ousted from their areas; slums have been cleared without any rehabilitation worth its name; thousands of people have been evicted from their land and homes and compelled to resign to their own fate in the name of dam making. The Indian ruling classes and all central and state governments have been pursuing this policy in the name of “development.” To them, “development” means flyovers, promotion of the IT sector, wooing more and more foreign capital and technology; at the same time it also means the long, unending procession of the dead.

Needless to say, conditions such as these did not develop all of a sudden. Ever since 1947, all central and state governments adopted this policy which cannot, by any account, be called pro-people. The hard reality is that with the backing of the domestic ruling classes, imperialist powers enjoyed an unlimited and unhindered entry into our country and a license to plunder its resources according to their own sweet will. The fact is that all the central governments—from the Nehru-led to the Manmohan-led—died to welcome foreign capital. They knew it full well that it

would establish firm imperialist control over our country and jeopardize our sovereignty. In the present paper, we propose to deal with one aspect of US penetration into India—the “Green Revolution” and try to assess the impact it had made on Indian society, economy and environment.

Background

Indian agriculture, like other aspects of the Indian economy, came to be controlled by imperialism ever since the British ruling classes colonized India. The British ruling classes transformed the Indian countryside into a raw-material-supplying appendage to metropolitan Britain. What was true of the colonial period is generally not less true of the period after the transfer of power to “friendly hands” in 1947. The fundamental features of imperialist exploitation in post-colonial India remained more or less the same as in the colonial times. The basic differences were that henceforth India was not a colony but a semi-feudal and semi-colonial country, and that the leader among the imperialist powers has changed. In the post-1947 phase, it was the US rather than Britain, which took the lead in globalizing the world in her own interest. Its primary object was to cast India’s agricultural strategy into a mould that would serve the interests of US transnational corporations. The aim was to decide for India what to produce and how to produce and to make Indian agriculture an appendage of imperialist capital. The American imperialists gave it a catchy name—the “Green Revolution.” It started its first phase from 1966 to 1967 and entered into its second phase from 1994. Why was it introduced, the politics behind it, how “green” was it and the nature of its impact on agriculture, economy, society and environment—all these questions are basic questions and make for interesting reading.

John Foster Dulles, the US Secretary of State in the 1950s, remarked: “There are two ways of conquering a foreign nation. One is to gain control of its people by force of arms: the other is to gain control of its economy by financial means.” When there is a direct military attack on any country, when the sovereignty of a country is threatened, then it is clearly visible; the media is active and it is difficult to conceal. On the other hand, economic invasion is silent, not clearly visible; it takes the appearance of providing assistance to the debtor country; its impact becomes visible only after it has already done much damage to the victim. After World War 2,

the American imperialists concentrated more on the latter option than on the former. After the Chinese revolution, they realized that in order to prevent the further breakdown of the capitalist world order, India should not be allowed to go the China way; on the contrary, she should be used as a bulwark against the spread of communism in this part of the globe.

It is pertinent to point out that it was not the Nehru government but foreign agencies that played the major role in transforming Indian agricultural scene. The Ford Foundation (FF), the Rockefeller Foundation, Chester Bowles (twice US ambassador to India), Douglas Ensminger (the Ford Foundation chief), the World Bank—all played their part in transforming Indian economy into a vast market for the giant US agrochemical corporations.

Here the major role was played by the Ford Foundation. Douglas Ensminger, its chief and a rural sociologist, suggested to the Indian Prime Minister Nehru that a group of foreign experts be set up with some Indians to make recommendations about Indian agriculture. He was introduced to the top political bosses of India by Chester Bowles. This team of experts was headed by Sherman Johnson, the US expert on agriculture, and it produced in 1959 the Ford Foundation's "Report on India's Food crisis and steps to meet it." This report prepared the ground for the introduction of the "Green Revolution" in India and for the penetration into and control of Indian agriculture by US and other transnational corporations. The agricultural strategy that the FF prepared did not involve any structural change in the property structure; the structure would remain unchanged. Rather, it would involve the application of "improved seeds, chemical fertilizers and pesticides—in irrigated areas of the country"—in about 25 districts of the Punjab (which then included Haryana), and parts of UP, MP and Bihar. At that time, there was a glut in the western markets, particularly of fertilizers, pesticides, etc.; and the agrochemical corporations of the US were seeking expanded markets for those goods in the third world countries like India.

The policy was to ensure imports of chemical fertilizers from the metropolitan countries, as well as imports of capital goods and technology for building chemical fertilizer plants in India. These were to be set up by transnational corporations, either by themselves or in collaboration with their Indian collaborators. This programme, known as the Intensive

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Agricultural Development Programme (IADP), also called the “package programme,” got generous financial assistance from the FE.

Like the US imperialists, the World Bank also decried institutional changes and stressed the role of imperialist capital in raising agricultural production in underdeveloped countries. Since India was not in a position to procure capital, the World Bank argued, she should look towards foreign agencies. It recommended the use of new technology—a technology which would of course be foreign, not indigenous—the concentration of modern inputs, especially hybrid seeds (bred at the research centres set up by imperialist agencies), fertilizers, pesticides, power and farm machinery in irrigated areas. The World Bank also demanded a lot from India in return. The Indian government should relax controls on industrial licensing, institute an import liberalization programme and devalue the *rupee*. The most revealing portion of the World Bank report—submitted by Bernard R. Bell on behalf of the Bank: that the World Bank package of economic reforms was presented as a *condition* of substantial flows of aid.

The strategy of the US imperialists, the World Bank and their associates was to tighten the grip of imperialist capital on Indian agriculture. In fact, India had before her two strategies. One was to carry out radical land reforms, unleash the creativity of the peasants and apply science to improve upon the indigenous seeds and traditional methods and practices as contemporary China under Mao’s leadership had been doing. The other strategy was to import the western model that had developed in conditions fundamentally different from ours. It sought to reject all that was positive in our farming system. The new western technology had nothing in common with the social, economic, ecological and other conditions prevailing in our country. This technology had been loudly advertised as an instrument of combating hunger; in reality, however, it tended to ensure fabulous profits for the transnational corporations (TNCs) based in imperialist countries. It would intensify India’s dependence on imperialist countries and spell disaster for the country and the people.

The “Green Revolution”

Pat Roy Mooney writes that the Rockefeller, Ford, and Kellogg foundations played an active role in exporting the “Green Revolution” to India and other underdeveloped countries. The pivot of this revolution

was the HYV (high-yield variety) seed. These foundations provided money to set up seed research institutions in many countries, such as Mexico, Philippines, Peru, Colombia and in Hyderabad, India. The Indian centre was named *International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics*. The work of these research centres was coordinated by IBPRG (*International Crops Research Institute for Plant Genetic Resources*), which is based in Rome. Connected with this centre was Robert McNamara, the then president of the World Bank, who earned notoriety because of his war crimes in Vietnam and was greeted with a mammoth anti-McNamara demonstration by the youth and students of Kolkata when he landed in Kolkata airport in 1968.

In these research centres, controlled by the US imperialists, hybrid seeds of wheat, rice, maize, potato, etc. were bred by crossing seed genes of plants with which nature endowed several underdeveloped countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. These countries are gene-rich countries—the original homes of an infinite variety of plants—while the industrialized countries of the North are gene-poor countries and depending on the third world countries for genetic material. Many of the seed genes have been plundered by the imperialists and stored in gene banks and laboratories under their control. The reality is that any agency that could successfully achieve private control over a variety of these genetic resources, in fact, possessed infinite political and economic power.

In order to understand the purpose behind the “Green Revolution,” one should know its intimate connection with agrochemical transnationals. Imperialist agencies say that these seeds are high-yield varieties (HYV). The point is that the seeds they sell to the peasants are not so much high-yield as high-responsive seeds. They respond only to large amounts of chemical fertilizers, pesticides and adequate water. In the absence of required inputs, there may be extensive crop failures.

The fact is that most of the transnationals that breed HYV seeds and dominate the seed business also dominate fertilizer and pesticide industries, besides oil, pharmaceuticals or other chemicals. Of those companies, we can mention Cargill, Monsanto, Pioneer Hi-bred International from the US, Royal Dutch Shell from the UK and the Netherlands, Novartis A.G. (a conglomerate of Ciba-Geigy and Sandoz), etc. Their seeds require increasing amounts of their chemical products, which cause ecological

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degradation of the soil and other harm. In fact, the political and economic conditions in India in the mid-1960s helped the new US offensive. Due to drought, crops failed in several parts of India and millions of people were starving. US imperialism used food as a weapon to force its policies on it. While countless Indians were starving, food shipments were deliberately held up to force the Indian government to capitulate to the demands of the oil companies. The US government insisted on India's adoption of "Green Revolution" strategy as one condition of resumed economic aid.

The Indian ruling classes also found merit in this "Green Revolution." It would help mitigate the immediate food crisis to some extent without bringing about any radical change in agrarian relations. The big landowners sought to thrive with subsidized inputs like fertilizers, liberal credit, etc., just as the big bourgeoisie hoped to grow in collaboration with imperialist capital and by swindling state funds. The "Green Revolution" was thus forced on India in 1966–67 and the then agricultural minister was C. Subramanian, on whose thinking the Ford Foundation enjoyed the maximum influence.

The regions covered by the "Green Revolution" were Punjab, Haryana and Western UP. And the "new agricultural strategy" was based not on all the peasants, but only on the richest among them. In fact, the top 10 to 15%—the landlords and rich peasants—were offered a package of subsidized inputs—exotic HYV seeds, fertilizers and pesticides—and cheap credit and subsidies to install tube-wells and pumps and buy farm machinery.

Impact

What was the impact of the "Green Revolution" on the peasantry? It worsened the condition of the landless, poor and lower-middle peasants. This imperialist strategy has accentuated the inequalities between class and class, between region and region. As pointed out earlier, it is the landlords and rich peasants who have mainly reaped the benefits of this "revolution" to the detriment of the interests of the poor and landless peasants. The rural elite made large investments in land with generous assistance of the State and has surplus stocks of cereals to sell. In contrast, the condition of the poor and landless peasants has worsened. They are the net buyers of food at ever-increasing prices; they are also deprived of access to coopera-

tive credit societies and banks for loans because of their inability to furnish collaterals. They have to seek loans from the moneylenders at high rates of interest. Many poor and lower-middle peasants have been dispossessed of their lands. S. S. Gill noted in an article: “Many small and marginal holdings (in Punjab) have become unenviable.... Between 1970–71 and 1980–81 a large number of such holdings have disappeared.”¹¹⁰

How “green” has India been during the “Green Revolution” period? Initially, for some years after the application of the new strategy, there was an almost spectacular rise in the production of cereals, especially wheat. However, the growth soon came to a halt and began to decline until 1985, according to a survey based on official data.¹¹¹ The downward trend continued even after that. In fact, self-sufficiency in food—so much trumpeted by the state propaganda machinery—proved to be a myth. The “Green Revolution” had an adverse effect on the growth rate of pulses, the main protein of the poor in India. Fish—a food of the people—which, in the past had been available in abundant quantity not only in the ponds and rivers but also in the rice-fields during the monsoon months—is killed by the pesticides.

One of the greatest losses to India and mankind caused by the “Green Revolution” was the loss of genetic diversity. The “Green Revolution” has caused narrow genetic uniformity, eliminating the rich genetic diversity. It has only spread a few HYVs, e.g., IR8, Padma, Jaya, Pankaj, etc. In Bengal, many varieties of rice were grown, some of them of the scented type. Nowadays, these have almost disappeared, yielding place to much inferior exotic varieties—inferior as regards to nutritional quality, taste, etc.

Agro-climatic conditions differ from region to region. Even in the same region the soil conditions are not the same everywhere. The rice variety that suits one area may not suit another. Until recently, peasants, with their intimate knowledge of the soil conditions of their fields and careful selection of seeds, planted the varieties of rice most suitable to their fields. This diversity has been necessary for their survival. No one wheat or rice variety can provide adequate protection against monsoon failures, pests, rusts or blights. With the introduction of a few exotic HYVs, a genetic uniformity is imposed and this can well cause the destruction of that crop.

¹¹⁰ *Economic & Political Weekly*, October 15, 1988.

¹¹¹ M. V. Nadkarni, “Crisis of increasing costs in agriculture,” *EPW*, September 24, 1988.

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In fact, the Central Rice Research Institute (CRRI) warned: “The narrow genetic base (as a result of the adoption of exotic HYVs) has created alarming uniformity, causing vulnerability to diseases and pests.”

It is worth pointing out that the pesticides kill not only harmful pests but also worms and insects that are good for the soil, thereby causing ecological disaster. The fertility of the soil is gradually eroded due to the application of heavy doses of chemicals. The indigenous method of replenishing the fertility of the soil relied on the use of available organic fertilizers at almost no cost or rotation of crops. This age-old and time-tested method has been discarded. Dr. Radha Gobinda Maity has dealt in detail with the indiscriminate use of chemicals in agriculture.¹¹² We have argued that exotic HYV seeds do not respond without the application of heavy doses of chemicals. This has resulted in the deterioration of soil conditions in many areas.

Harm is caused not only to the environment but also to health. B. D. Nag Chaudhury, a reputed scientist, said:

Excessive use of nitrogen fertilizers... can lead to leaching of these excess fertilizers into water bodies. These can be transformed by micro-organisms into nitrites and carcinogens... which can find their way back to men and animals through the food chain.... Similarly, pesticides, besides killing unwanted pests, insects and birds or small animals, can enter the human system.¹¹³

Hazardous chemicals like the DDT, which have been banned by the imperialists in their own countries, are dumped in India and other third world countries.

According to a report of the Centre for Science & Environment, the World Bank estimates that water pollution in India caused by hazardous chemicals results in the highest toll and economic costs of Rs. 20,000 crore. The report states that pesticides have contaminated everything from

¹¹² See his article in Kalyan Rudra ed., *Paschimbanger Krishinoti Krishaker Bhabishyat—Agrarian Policy of the WB government and the future of the Peasantry*, Kolkata 2003.

¹¹³ B. D. Nag Chaudhury, “Introduction to Environmental Management,” New Delhi, 1983, cited in M. V. Nadkarni, “Crisis of increasing costs in Agriculture,” *Economic and Political Weekly* (EPW), September 3-4, 1988, p. A-116.

milk, human blood, eggs, goat meat and processed *ghee* to fruits, vegetables, drinking water and food grains.¹¹⁴

People are learning from their bitter experience how ruinous, how environmentally destructive the “Green Revolution” strategy is. Not so long ago, reports of many cases of arsenic poisoning appeared in the press. Water in the 8 districts of West Bengal is contaminated with arsenic. One WHO official, based in New Delhi, stated that 15 million people of Bangladesh and 30 million of West Bengal, including Kolkata, are exposed to the risk of arsenic poisoning. In fact, it is the “Green Revolution” that has given rise to this situation. We stated earlier that the application of exotic HYV seeds is backed by exotic chemical fertilizers and pesticides, but also by the supply of adequate water. Hence, to procure water, numerous tube-wells were dug up in those areas. The over-extraction of underground water led to the drop in the water table level, bringing up the embedded arsenic. The governments of West Bengal and Bangladesh were warned against this impending scourge beforehand by the scientists, but they kept it a secret. Willard Chappel, an expert on the environment at the University of Colorado, described it as “the biggest mass poisoning case in the world.”

The second phase of the “Green Revolution” started in the mid-1990s with India’s signing of the treaty under the GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) in 1994. The main features of this phase were the control of the world seed industry, acquisition of “intellectual property rights,” and granting of product patents, along with process patents.

Recently, state governments in Karnataka, WB, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Punjab, etc. sought to amend land ceiling acts and raise the legal ceiling of land holdings. It is the policy of the ruling classes to encourage TNCs and Indian companies to set up food-processing units; help TNCs to acquire large plots of land for this purpose; and develop horticulture and floriculture for export of their products. One part of this policy is to hand over peasant land to capitalists for conversion into plantations or for other purposes, as in some parts of north Bengal. The CPI(M)-led WB-government’s recent policy formulated at the dictates of the McKinsey & Co—the American consultancy firm—to convert rice lands into lands for the production of fruits, etc. falls in line with this imperialist

¹¹⁴ *Economic Times*, January 6, 1997.

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strategy. The foreign firms who are most interested in making investments are Rallis, Pepsi, Cargill, HLL, etc.¹¹⁵

There were many cases of suicides by peasants in the “Green Revolution” belt of Punjab, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and other areas. It has been reported that suicides were caused by constant crop failures (in Andhra, crop failure took place for the sixth consecutive year) and the resultant indebtedness has been on the rise at an alarming rate. By 2000, the total debt of Punjab farmers stood at Rs. 5700 crore.¹¹⁶

A few local organizations in AP made a detailed enquiry into the reasons why farmers commit suicide; their study was entitled “Gathering Agrarian Crisis—Farmers’ Suicides in Warangal district, AP,” (1998). The study concludes that tiny holdings, fast depletion of groundwater, adoption of unviable crop technology, lack of access to institutional credit, failure of market mechanism and deteriorating return-cost position contributed to falling farm incomes. The accumulated debts were added to catastrophic crop conditions in 1997–98.

So far we have tried to analyze, however briefly, some of the features of imperialism, primarily US imperialism, and what it has already done to the Indian producers, environment, soil, indigenous seeds, people’s health and other things. We have been learning from our bitter experiences the nature of the disaster that it has already been done and will continue to do to us in future. They could do these things only because they had a number of domestic collaborators under their command.

The bitter truth is that this planet earth is now faced with a grave crisis—the crisis of human civilization: whether human beings will be able to live as human beings and whether there will be all-round development of mankind as envisioned by people all over the world down the centuries, or whether human beings will cease to exist as a result of brutal competition and insatiable hunger for more and more profits. Human beings as a species could survive in this world, unlike many other species, because of his *instinct for cooperation*. Nature’s law does not call for divisions within the species. There may be variations of many kinds; there may also be one species preying on another. But never do we see animals preying on their

¹¹⁵ See McKinsey Agro-business projects in WB, D. O. No.1329/CIS/2002 dt. May 13, 2002, submitted by the principal secretary to the government of West Bengal.

¹¹⁶ Sukhpal Singh, “Crisis in Punjab Agriculture,” *EPW*, June 3–9, 2000.

own kind in this manner. In fact, the higher the development of the species, the more marked is the degree of social organization and cooperation.

War, [as Felix Greene remarked in his book, *The Enemy: Notes on Imperialism and Revolution*,] as distinct from individual struggle for food or for a sexual partner or for leadership of the pack, is unknown in the animal world, and was unknown to man until the most recent moments of his history. In the organized slaughter of his own species, the human animal is unique.¹¹⁷

The whole history of human civilization, particularly the two World Wars and the wars of destruction through the use of weapons of mass destruction and chemical weapons as evident in the not so recent and recent years in Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine have shown how dehumanized the so-called civilized societies have become. It is the capitalist system and its most brutal and beastly form of imperialism that stands at the root of all. What the people of the world genuinely need is *a social order that will make us human again*. The need of the hour is to get rid of this system that thrives on the lust for profits and only then will human beings become human again.

Reading list:

1. Suniti Kumar Ghosh: *Imperialism's tightening grip over Indian agriculture*.
2. F. R. Frankel: *The Green Revolution in India*.
3. Pat Roy Mooney: *Seeds of the Earth*.
4. Fred Magdoff, J. B. Foster and F. H. Buttel, eds., *Hungry for Profit: the Agribusiness Threat to Farmers, Food and the Environment*.

¹¹⁷ Felix Greene, *The Enemy: Notes on Imperialism and Revolution*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1970, pp. 270–271.

CAPITALISM, GLOBAL ECOLOGICAL DISASTER AND MARX'S CONCEPT OF "METABOLIC RIFT"

On August 9th, 2019, *The Telegraph*, Calcutta came out with a UN report, prepared by more than 100 experts from 52 countries, under the caption "Climate change threat to food supply," part of which read as follows:

The world's land and water resources are being exploited at "unprecedented rates," a UN report warns, which, combined with climate change, is putting dire pressure on the ability of humanity to feed itself. The report... found that the window to address the threat is closing rapidly. A half-billion people already live in places turning into desert, and soil is being lost between 10 and 100 times faster than it is forming.

In another recent State of Global Air 2019 report, prepared by the non-profit Health Effects Institute, it is suggested that India is set to replace China as the country worst affected by air pollution, stating that air pollution has triggered about 1.2 million deaths in India and China each in 2017.¹¹⁸ Very recently, the Amazon rain-forest zone in Brazil, which produces 20 percent of our planet's oxygen and contains the largest tropical rain forest in the world, has been burning for many days—about 60 percent of its 2.1 million square mile area. The fires, according to Haley Brink, a CNN meteorologist, are "definitely human-induced," and it tallies with the declaration by the elected President Bolsonaro during his pre-election campaign that Brazil's protected areas were an obstacle to economic growth and would be opened up to commercial exploitation.¹¹⁹

Such warnings about the grim future of the planet are being voiced from different quarters from time to time over the decades caused basically by the destructive consequences inherent in the structural logic of capitalism. These glaring consequences are visible in the economy, politics, life and culture, not only of the advanced capitalist countries, but even more

¹¹⁸ "India set for worst air pollution crown," *The Telegraph*, April 4, 2019.

¹¹⁹ *The Telegraph*, Kolkata, July 29, 2019.

in those countries that stand on the periphery and are the worst victims of exploitation and plunder by imperialist capital. However, there is one outcome that has been turning out to be ultimately disastrous for humankind as a whole. This is the threat capitalism poses at an ever-growing pace to the natural environment, to the ecology of this planet as the habitat of the human species, as the recent UN report would testify.

The Threat to Mankind

After the United States detonated two atomic bombs over the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6 and 9, 1945, the opening of the US Cold War against the USSR and the quick development of nuclear weapons by the Soviet Union to counter nuclear blackmail by the US, there was widespread apprehension that a nuclear war could wipe out the whole human endeavour on this earth. There was speculation about radioactive poisoning and nuclear winter over the entire globe. Peaceful coexistence guaranteed by “mutual armed deterrence” followed, but the threat of a nuclear war remained. Even as the US persisted with its Nuclear Missile Defence or Falcon programmes, proliferation of nuclear weapons continued, bringing even some minor powers into this game.

Meanwhile, a new threat to the human habitat on this earth has emerged. This covers a variety of ecological processes and trends, which have resulted in a major environmental crisis of our time. With every passing decade, it is deepening and gathering momentum.

This crisis is global in character. The major elements of it are well known. Rapid depletion of natural resources and general pollution of earth's resources in land, water and air; the greenhouse effect stemming from the massive combustion of fossil fuels, combined with the accelerating destruction of carbon-dioxide-absorbing tropical forests; acidification resulting in acid rain, which destroys lakes and forests and other forms of vegetation; desertification, so that there is worldwide destruction of wilderness, denuding and decimation of forests; the weakening of the ozone layer in the upper atmosphere that protects human beings and other forms of life from deadly ultra-violet rays emanating from the sun, with an epidemic rise in skin cancer in parts of the world; the erosion and destruction of top soils and expansion of deserts; pollution of rivers and lakes, depletion of groundwater and poisoning of land and surface water through dumping

of industrial waste and excessive use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides (associated, among others, with the so-called “Green Revolution” in countries like India), excessive use of electricity, global warming, etc.

Health Status of the Earth

The health status of the Earth is precarious and a large number of well-researched studies are regularly documenting and reporting on it. The Washington-based Worldwatch Institute, for example, has been, year after year, reporting about the disappearing forest cover, ravaged grasslands, declining per capita food production, polluted air and water and a hundred other symptoms of environmental degradation that is taking place. Due to the thinning, at an alarming rate, of the protective ozone field in heavily populated latitudes of the northern hemisphere, an additional 200,000 skin cancer fatalities in the US alone in the next forty years and a million more lives worldwide will result. It is said that a minimum of 140 plants and animal species are condemned to extinction each day by the destruction of their tropical rain forest due to deforestation. Very recently, as Jair Bolsonaro took over as the new far-Right President of Brazil in January 2019, all former environmental protection rules were turned upside down and Brazil’s part of the Amazon has lost more than 1,330 miles of forest cover in the name of “development.”¹²⁰

A team of scientists, writing in *Science* magazine in 2008, stated: “The rates, scale, kinds and combination of changes occurring now are fundamentally different from those at any other time in history; we are changing the earth more rapidly than we are understanding it.”¹²¹

A more serious outcome of the way we are “changing the earth” is the ecological crisis we are confronting. In fact, with somewhere between a third and a half of the land surface of the Earth is now transformed by human action. Deforestation has already decimated ecosystems in Canada, Brazil, Malaysia, worldwide. Across continents, tropical rain forests, called the “green lungs” of human beings, are being decimated at the rate of 55,000 square miles a year. Along with it, as the situation stands now, thousands upon thousands of species of birds, turtles, bats and an untold number of plant species have already disappeared from the Earth.

¹²⁰ See *The Telegraph*, Kolkata, July 29, 2019.

¹²¹ Cited in Randhir Singh, *Contemporary Ecological Crisis: A Marxist View*, Aakar, 2009, p. 30.

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Massive damage to ecology is caused also by mining and smelting. Mining by private corporate capital has ruined whole mountains, valleys and rivers from Arizona to Chile, from Brazil to New Guinea. Extraction of oil has decimated land and water from Alaska to the North Sea. Petrochemical biocides are ruining soil from the US to Uzbekistan. And over the next four decades, climate change is expected to drive a quarter of land animals and plants into extinction.

The scarcity of water has already proved to be a pressing problem. The crisis of potable water is becoming a grim reality. Four cities of India—Chennai, Hyderabad, Bangalore and New Delhi—have recently been reported in the media to have nearly exhausted their underground water supply. “Tearfund,” a British-based development agency, released a report captioned “Running on Empty” in 2007–08, in which it stated that two out of three people in the world would face water shortage by 2025 and that people would increasingly confront a new phenomenon—“water refugees.” Millions of people all over the world will be forced to leave their homes in search of clean water. In fact, in the late 1990s, scientist Carl Sagan warned of a future of nations going to war over water.

Awareness of the Crisis and Conventional Response

Awareness of the environmental crisis has grown rapidly during the last five decades or more. In 1972, the Club of Rome, an informal body of corporate leaders, researchers and government officials, published its document captioned “The Limits of Growth” and projected the issue as the very survival of the planet. Growing concern over the crisis has produced volumes upon volumes of data on the extent of damage caused to the global environment. The issues highlighted included ozone layer depletion, global warming, the “greenhouse effect,” tropical deforestation, etc.

To minimize the level of damage, some steps have also been suggested. People have been advised to use natural and recyclable materials, save energy as far as possible, minimize waste, to shift from fossil fuel (coal and petroleum) to new sources of energy derived from the sun and the wind; to lessen the use of automobiles and introduce bicycles as the main mode of transport. There are suggestions to link traditional knowledge with modern science and technology. As a result, a whole new academic discipline, “Ecological Economics” has come up. The Tokyo Declaration

of 1987 adopted some principles, e.g., changing the quality of growth, integrating environment and economics in decision-making, etc.

Such advice and principles have flowed in an endless stream from concerned environmentalists, scholarly reports, commissions, conferences and summits over the past four decades. However, all these remained just pious intentions. More and more environment-related agreements and commissions are coming up with more and more funds, such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to be handled by the World Bank. However, very little happens on the ground. This is because the environment is visibly a big affair in the affluent West; lots of money has been spent by the UN bodies, donor agencies, by international NGOs and even by governments of the Third World countries. But the results have mostly been of symbolic value.

In fact, while the warnings in this regard are daily becoming louder and clearer, it is equally true that no substantive positive and effective action has materialized so far. The Agenda 21 of the Rio Earth Summit of 1992 (UN Conference on Environment & Development) remains essentially un-implemented. The Johannesburg Summit of 2002 was a journey backward. Carl Sagan asked. "Who speaks for the human species? Who speaks for the Earth?"

There is an increasing awareness that it is the unsustainable system of economic development in the "affluent countries of the North" that is primarily responsible for the environmental crisis. The rampant consumerism of the capitalist countries over the decades has only deepened the crisis. The realization is growing that the North's system of production and consumption cannot be maintained even in the North, let alone exported to the underdeveloped South. It has been argued that any meaningful reversal of the current trends can take place only when the rich countries shed a part of their wealth to help develop the standard of living in the poor countries and shift to a more sustainable mode of development. However, there is an almost total reluctance to do so in the rich countries. Promises are made in meetings, but never kept in practice. In fact, these promises are not meant to be kept, but to be broken.

Instead, policies of globalisation and economic liberalisation which, as we all know, stand for unhindered entry into colonies and semi-colonies for plunder by imperialist capital are forced upon these poor countries.

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These foreign exploiters plunder their forests, fisheries and other natural resources by displacing the *Adivasis* and peasants from their natural habitats, even by flouting environmental standards set down by those exploited countries.

Sometimes the cause of the current environmental crisis is traced to population growth in the underdeveloped countries. Adopting the neo-Malthusian framework of “carrying capacity,” it is argued that population is outgrowing limited natural resources, and the long-term solution to it lies in putting a limit on population growth.

As opposed to this, Barry Commoner, a scientist, argues that environmental quality is largely governed not by population growth, but by the nature of the technologies of food production. The fact to keep in mind here is that the existing mode of production in its mad pursuit of profit, does not care what damage its way of utilization of natural resources, its technologies of production inflict upon the environment. By focusing more specifically on the “South” (an innocent new word used to avoid such expressions like “underdeveloped countries” which appear to be loaded to the representatives of corporate capital), such notions only serve to obscure the environment-destroying implications of the capitalist system of production in the “North” (meaning developed capitalist countries).

As in several other areas of social action, there has been an impressive growth in voluntary environmental activism all over the world in the last few decades. They are backed by the UN, the international financial institutions like the World Bank and even MNCs. The countries of the Third World also have their related NGOs, many with government support and foreign funding. What is their impact? Even at its best, the projects of these NGOs have remained largely localized without any genuine national impact. At the worst, environmentalism has become a pastime, a leisure-time activity.

The gravity of the ecological crisis has evoked, along with a denunciation of consumerism, declaration on behalf of “an environmental revolution,” “a complete restructuring of the global economic system,” etc. Governments, policy-makers, corporate planners, have been called upon to “restructure global economy.” They say that the present growth trends cannot be sustained for long and so we must turn to a pattern of growth or development that is sustainable.

Since then, the expression “sustainable development” became the key word in the international environmental lobby as well as national policies on the environment since the early 1990s. The Brundtland Report of 1989 introduced this expression into the political environment discourse, and since then, it has been used by everyone from the World Bank to Greenpeace. The concept has caught on, although its meaning remains vague. It can mean different things to different people, like any other post-structuralist expression.

In its meaningful sense, sustainable development assumes not only that development is essential to the elimination of poverty and provision for a decent living for all human beings. It also means that it has to be a development that meets human needs without destroying the natural systems.

The fact is that the growing ecological consciousness of the world still fails to recognize that the pattern of development it sees as the danger to the future of the planet called the Earth, has a name. And the name is “capitalism.” It is a system of production whose structural imperatives necessarily degrade the environment. In fact, it is sheer nonsense to talk about “sustainable development” unless it means a break with these imperatives tied up with capitalism.

What is really missing in the conventional response to the current ecological crisis is a realistic analysis of the present system of economic development, i.e., capitalism, which destroys the environment. It is so powerful that it keeps itself invisible and has virtually disappeared from today’s economic and political discourses, as is evident from the total absence of such expressions as “capitalism,” “imperialism,” “exploitation,” “plunder,” etc. It is here that Karl Marx makes his relevance felt even two centuries after his departure from this planet.

The Ecological Thinking of Karl Marx

In 1961, George Lichtheim in his book, *Marxism: An Historical and Critical Study*, wrote: “For the early Marx the only nature relevant to the understanding of history is human nature.... Marx wisely left nature (other than human nature) alone.” Although he was not a Marxist himself, Lichtheim’s view expressed here did not differ from the general outlook of Western Marxism at the time he was writing.

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However, as the study of Marx's writings on ecology went deeper since then, that general notion underwent a transformation. John Bellamy Foster says that it was no longer a question of whether Marx addressed nature and did so throughout his life, but whether he can be said to have developed an understanding of the nature-society dialectic that constitutes a crucial starting point for understanding the ecological crisis of capitalist society.

A lot of evidence has demonstrated that Marx had profound insights into the environmental problem. Yet, while this is now widely acknowledged, numerous commentators still insist that these insights were relatively marginal in relation to his work, and that he did not leave behind a significant ecological legacy that carried forward into later socialist thought—or that had any relation to the subsequent development of ecology. In an article written in 2001 by Maarten de Kadt and Salvatore Engel-Di Mauro captioned “Marx’s Ecology or Ecological Marxism: Failed Promises,”¹²² a number of authors held that Marx could not have contributed anything of fundamental relevance to the development of ecological thought, since he wrote in the 19th century before the nuclear age, and because he never used the word “ecology” in his writings.

J. B. Foster, in his book, *Marx’s Ecology* and also in many other essays, has put forward a view that is basically different from that of other commentators. Foster argues that one needs to recognize that Marx and Engels, along with other early socialist thinkers like Proudhon and William Morris, had the advantage of living at a time when the transition from feudalism to capitalism was still taking place or had occurred in recent memory. Hence, the questions they raised about capitalist society and even about the relation between society and nature were often more fundamental than what characterizes social and ecological thought today.

It is true that technology has changed, introducing massive new threats to the biosphere, undreamt of in earlier times. However, paradoxically, capitalism’s antagonistic relation to the environment, which lies at the core of the present crisis faced by our planet, was in some ways more apparent to the early 19th and 20th century socialists than it is to the majority of the green thinkers of today. This shows that it is not technology that

¹²² *Capitalism, Nature and Socialism*, June 2001.

is the primary issue, but rather the nature of capitalism as a specific mode of production. In fact, socialists have contributed in fundamental ways, at all stages, in the development of modern ecological critique and linked the global ecological crisis with the capitalist-imperialist system itself.

“Metabolism” in Justus von Liebig and Karl Marx

The profound nature of Marx’s ecological insights can be ascertained through a study of the Liebig-Marx connection.

In 1862, the great German chemist Justus von Liebig released the 7th edition of his pioneering scientific work, *Organic Chemistry and Its Application to Agriculture and Physiology* (known as *Agricultural Chemistry*). In its new Introduction, Liebig declared the intensive or “high farming” methods of British agriculture to be “robbery system,” opposed to rational agriculture. They necessitated the transportation of food and fibre over long distances from the country to the city—with no provision for the recirculation of social nutrients, such as nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium, which ended up contributing to urban waste and pollution in the form of human and animal wastes. In this way, whole countries were robbed of the nutrients of their soil. For Liebig, this was a part of a larger British imperial policy of robbing the soil resources, including bones of other countries.

He was the first to declare:

Great Britain... deprives all countries of the conditions of their fertility. It has raked up the battlefields of Leipzig (Battle of Leipzig, October 1813), Waterloo (Battle of Waterloo, 1815) and the Crimea (Battle of Crimea, 1853–56); it has consumed the bones of many generations accumulated in the catacombs of Sicily (cemeteries made by ancient Romans); and now annually destroys the food for a future generation of three millions and a half of people. Like a vampire it hangs on the breast of Europe, and even the world, sucking its lifeblood without any real necessity or permanent gain for itself.

Liebig argued that the population in Britain was able to maintain healthy bones and greater physical proportions by robbing the rest of Europe of their soil nutrients, including skeletal remains, which would

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otherwise have gone into nurturing their own soils, allowing their population to reach the same physical stature as the English.

Liebig astounded the scholarly world by pointing out that England was able to maintain its industrialized capitalist agriculture by importing *guano* (bird droppings) from Peru as well as bones from Europe. In fact, imports of guano increased from 1,700 tons in 1841 to 222,000 tons in 1847. By the early 1860s, North America was importing more guano or beds or mines of manure than all of Europe put together. In fact, as Liebig wrote: “British and American ships have searched through all the seas and there is no small island, no coast, which has escaped their enquiries after guano.”

J. B. Foster holds that all these point to “the law of restitution” as the main principle of a rational agriculture. The minerals taken from the earth had to be returned to the earth.

This critique of the British high farming by Liebig earned him the wrath of the British agricultural establishment. This edition of the book was not immediately translated into English, and when it was after many years, the whole new introduction was destroyed. For this reason, the English-speaking world was left in ignorance about the depth and significance of Liebig’s critique of capitalist agriculture.

Nevertheless, the importance of Liebig’s views did not escape the attention of one major figure who had been residing in London at that time, mainly because he himself was of German origin. His name was Karl Marx. At that time he was busy completing the first volume of *Capital* and was deeply affected by Liebig’s critique. He noted in *Capital*, Vol. I, “to have developed from the point of view of natural science the negative, i.e., the destructive side of modern agriculture is one of Liebig’s immortal merits.”

Marx’s two main discussions of modern agriculture end as an analysis of the “destructive side of modern agriculture.” In these passages, Marx highlights a number of crucial features:

First, capitalism has created an “irreparable rift” in the “metabolic interaction” between human beings and the earth.

Second, this demanded the “systematic restoration” of that necessary metabolic relation as “a regulative law of social production.”

Third, nevertheless, the growth under capitalism of large-scale agriculture and long-distance trade only intensifies and extends the metabolic rift.

Fourth, the wastage of soil nutrients is mirrored in the pollution and waste in the towns—"In London," he wrote, "they can find no better use for excretion of four and a half million human beings than to contaminate the Thames with it at heavy expense."

Fifth, large-scale industry and large-scale mechanized agriculture work together in this destructive process, with "industry" and commerce supplying agriculture with the means of exhausting the soil.

Sixth, all of this is an expression of the antagonistic relation between town and country under capitalism.

Seventh, a rational agriculture, which needs either small independent farmers producing on their own, or the action of the associated producers, is impossible under modern capitalist conditions.

Eighth, existing conditions demand a rational regulation of a metabolic relation between human beings and the earth, pointing beyond capitalist society to socialism and communism.

In fact, Marx's concept of the "metabolic rift" was the core element of this economic critique. The human labour process itself was defined by Marx in *Capital* as "the universal condition for the metabolic interaction between man and nature, the ever-lasting nature-imposed conditions of human existence." Then what does this "metabolic rift" imply? This meant nothing less than the undermining of the "ever-lasting nature-imposed condition of human existence."

Then there is the question of the sustainability of the earth—the extent to which it is passed on to future generations in a condition equal or better than the present. As Marx wrote:

From the standpoint of a higher economic form of society, private ownership of the earth by single individuals will appear quite as absurd as private ownership of one man by another. Even an entire society, a nation, or all simultaneously existing societies taken together, are not owners of the earth. They are

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simply its possessors, its beneficiaries and have to bequeath it in an improved state to succeeding generations.¹²³

For Marx, the issue of sustainability went beyond what capitalist society could address. Capitalism constantly intensifies and enlarges the metabolic rift between human beings and the earth. In the new socialist society, as Marx states, it would be necessary for the associated producers to “govern the human metabolism with nature in a rational way.” This requirement raises fundamental and unending challenges for the post-revolutionary society.

In analyzing the metabolic rift, Marx and Engels did not confine their focus within the soil-nutrient cycle or the town-country relation. On the contrary, they addressed many other issues such as deforestation, desertification, climate change, the elimination of the deer from the forests, pollution, industrial waste, toxic contamination, recycling, the exhaustion of coal mines, disease, overpopulation, etc.

It is notable that the concepts of the alienation of labour were particularly pronounced in Marx’s early writings. J. B. Foster has made a detailed investigation into Marx’s writings on different relevant aspects and this helped in the development of the understanding of Marx’s ecological thinking.

Marx did his Ph.D. on the philosophy of Epicurus, acclaimed as the greatest of the materialist thinkers of the ancient world, whom he regarded as “the greatest figure of the Greek Enlightenment.” For Marx, Epicurus articulated the philosophy of human freedom. In Epicurus could be found a materialist conception of nature that rejected all teleology (this doctrine is the explanation of phenomenon in terms of the purpose they serve rather than of the cause by which they arise) and all religious conceptions of natural and social existence. In studying Epicurus’s natural philosophy, Marx was addressing a view that had had a powerful influence on the development of European science and modern naturalist-materialist philosophies.

In the Epicurean materialist worldview, knowledge of the world started with the senses: sense perceptions. The two primary theses of Epicurus’s natural philosophy make up what is known today as the principles of conservation. One is: “Nothing comes from Nothing” and the other is:

¹²³ Marx, *Capital*, Vol. III, Part VI, Chapter 46.

“Nothing being destroyed is reduced to Nothing.” Marx’s study of ancient and early modern materialism brought him inside the struggle over the scientific understanding of the natural world. It was done in a way that influenced all of his thoughts and was deeply ecological in its significance. This was because it focused on evolution and emergence and made nature, not God, the starting point. Darwin, as we all know, presented an account of the evolution of species that was dependent on no supernatural forces, but simply on nature’s own workings.

Marx and Engels greeted Darwin’s theory immediately as “the death of teleology.” Marx described it as “the basis in natural history for our view.” Not only did they study intensely, they were also drawn into the debates concerning human evolution that followed immediately on Darwin’s work as a result of the discovery of the first prehistoric human remains (Neanderthal) in France in 1856. Suddenly it became clear that human species or the “hominid species” had existed in all probability for millions of years, and not simply a few thousand, as was the belief until then.

Many major works, mostly by Darwinians, emerged in just a few years to address the new reality, such as those by Thomas Huxley, John Lubbock and H. L. Morgan, to name only a few.

Morgan’s significant work, *Ancient Society* (1881), based on the study of the blood relationship among the Red Indian tribes, played a significant part in the making of Engels’ study *Family, Private Property and the Origin of State*. Out of Marx’s and Engels’s study came a thesis on the role of labour in human evolution. In this conception, human beings were distinguished from animals in that they more effectively utilized tools, which became extensions of their bodies. Marx stated in his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* that tools and through them the wider realm of nature became the “inorganic body of man.” “Thus,” as Marx pointed out, “nature becomes one of the organs of his (man’s) activity, which he annexes to his own bodily organs, adding stature to himself.”

In a small booklet captioned “Part played by Labour in the transition from Ape to Man,” Engels developed this argument further. In that path-breaking work, he argued that when the ancestors of human beings descended from the trees, erect posture developed first (prior to the development of the human brain) by freeing the hands for tool making. “Thus the hand is not only the organ of labour, it is also the product of labour.”

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As a result, early humans were able to alter their relation to their local environment and radically improved their adaptability. Those who were the most creative in making and using tools were most likely to survive. That implies that the evolutionary process exerted selective pressures towards the enlargement of the brain and the development of the language. And this language is necessary for the social processes of labour and tool making, leading eventually to the rise of modern humans. In Engels's opinion, the human brain, like the hand, evolved through a complex, interactive set of relations, which are now referred to by evolutionary biologists as "gene-culture co-evolution."

It is pertinent here to refer to the observation made by Stephen Jay Gould in his book *An Urchin in the Storm*. He states that all scientific explanations of the evolution of the human brain have thus far been theories of gene-culture co-evolution, and "the best 19th century case for gene-culture co-evolution was made by Frederick Engels."

All this points to the fact that Marx and Engels had a profound grasp of ecological and evolutionary problems; they were able to make important contributions to our understanding of the interaction between society and nature.

Engels's *Dialectics of Nature* is known to incorporate numerous insights on ecological issues. However, it is frequently held that Marxism, after Marx and Engels, missed out on the development of ecological thought. Such a position is very far from reality.

Kautsky, following Liebig and Marx, in his *The Agrarian Question*, addressed the problem of the soil nutrient cycle and even referred to the dangers of intensive application of pesticides—all in 1899. Rosa Luxemburg addressed ecological problems in her letters, discussing the disappearance of songbirds through the destruction of their habitat. Lenin promoted both conservation and ecology in the Soviet Union after revolution. He demonstrated an awareness of the degradation of soil fertility and the breaking of the soil nutrient cycle under capitalist agriculture.

In the 1920s, the Soviet Union developed the most developed ecological science in the world. Vernadsky had introduced the concept of biosphere in a dialectical framework of analysis that reaches the most advanced ecology of modern times. Vavilov used the historical materialist

method to identify the centres of the origin of agriculture and the banks of germplasm throughout the world.

Yet this initial ecological thinking largely died out. In the 1930s, Stalinism literally purged the more ecological elements within the Soviet leadership and scientific community, as it was felt that within those circles some of the critics of Soviet policy were found.

However, it was in Britain that an unbroken continuity in the development of socialist nature-science discussions and ecological thought is to be found within the British Marxist thinking. One can mention the names of Caudwell, Haldane, Levy, Joseph Needham, J. D. Bernal and Farrington, among others. Caudwell died at the age of 29 behind a machine gun on a hill in Spain fighting on behalf of the International Brigade for the Republic against Franco's fascism in the Spanish Civil War. He left behind an indelible intellectual legacy in his writings, such as *Heredity and Development*.

Marx and the Metabolic Rift

While working on *Capital* in the early 1860s, Marx was deeply affected by Liebig's analysis. In 1866, he wrote to Engels that in developing his critique of capitalist ground rent, he was indebted to the new agricultural chemistry in Germany represented particularly by Liebig. In fact, Marx was to develop, under Liebig's influence in the late 1850s and 1860s, a systematic critique of capitalist "exploitation" of the soil.

Marx highlighted how large-scale industry and large-scale agriculture combined to impoverish the soil and the worker. In his treatment of "The Genesis of Capitalist Ground Rent" in *Capital* Vol. 3, as also in his treatment of "Large scale Industry and Agriculture" in *Capital*, Vol. I, the central theoretical construct is that of a "rift" in the "metabolic interaction between man and the earth," through the removal from the soil of its constituent elements, requiring its "systematic restoration." This contradiction is associated with the simultaneous growth of large-scale industry and large-scale agriculture under capitalism, with the former providing the latter with the means of the intensive exploitation of the soil.

Following Liebig, Marx held that long-distance trade in food and clothing made the problem of the alienation of the constituent elements of the soil that much more of an "irreparable rift." Marx stated in *Capital*

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that “the blind desire for profit” had “exhausted the soil” of England, which could be seen daily in the conditions that “forced the manufacturing of English fields with guano” imported from Peru.

Marx’s central argument was that capitalist large-scale agriculture prevents any truly rational application of the new science of soil management. Despite all its scientific and technological development in the area of agriculture, capitalism was unable to maintain conditions necessary for the recycling of the constituent elements of the soil.

The key to Marx’s entire theoretical approach in this area is the concept of socio-economic metabolism, which was rooted in his understanding of the labour process. Marx applied the concept of metabolism to describe the human relation to nature through labour in the following way:

Labour is, first of all, a process between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature. He confronts the materials of nature as a force of nature. He sets in motion the natural forces which belong to his own body, his arms, legs, head and hands, in order to appropriate the materials of nature in a form adapted to his own needs. Through this movement he acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way he simultaneously changes his own nature.... It [the labour process] is the universal condition for the metabolic interaction between man and nature, the ever-lasting nature-imposed condition of human existence.¹²⁴

In his *Economic Manuscripts of 1861–63*, Marx wrote that the actual activity of labour was never independent of nature’s own wealth-creating potential, “since material wealth, the world of use-values, exclusively consists of natural materials modified by labour.”

In his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx explained:

Man *lives* from nature, i.e., nature is his body, and he must maintain a continuing dialogue with it if he is not to die. To say that man’s physical and mental life is linked to nature sim-

¹²⁴ Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, Part III, Chapter 7.

ply means that nature is linked to itself, for man is a part of nature.¹²⁵

When Marx attributes the fundamental reason for the “metabolic rift” to the capitalist mode of production, he at the same time naturally enters into the vision of a future society of “associated producers”:

Freedom, in this sphere [the realm of natural necessity], [he wrote in *Capital*,] can consist only in this, that socialized man, the associated producers, govern the human metabolism with nature in a rational way, bringing it under its own collective control rather than being dominated by it as a blind power: accompanying it with the least expenditure of energy and in conditions most worthy and appropriate for their human nature.¹²⁶

The really challenging question is how such a human metabolism with nature is regulated on the side of society, and not damaged beyond repair by the capitalist insatiable lust for profit. For Marx, the answer to this question was the human labour and its development within historical social formations—towards entirely new societies in which man, as part and product of nature, interacts with nature in a rational way and in which human values triumph over the greed for profits. These new and advanced social formations are socialism and advanced communism.

Marx and Sustainability

An essential aspect of the concept of metabolism is the notion that it constitutes the basis on which life is sustained and growth and reproduction possible. When Marx asserted that large-scale capitalist agriculture created such a metabolic rift between human beings and soil, what he meant is that the basic conditions of sustainability have been violated. Marx wrote: “Capitalist production turns towards the land only after its influence had exhausted it and after it has devastated its natural qualities.” Moreover, this could be seen as related not only to the soil but to the sharp antagonism between town and country—one of the “three major differ-

¹²⁵ Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*.

¹²⁶ Marx, *Capital*, Vol. III, Part VII, Chapter 48.

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ences” that, as he held, emerged since the birth of class society. For Marx, like Liebig, the failure to recycle nutrients to the soil had its counterpart in the pollution of the cities and the irrationality of the modern sewage systems.

In *Capital*, Marx, observed (as mentioned above): “In London... they can find no better use for excretion of four and a half million human beings than to contaminate the Thames with it at heavy expense.”¹²⁷ For Marx, the “excrement produced by man’s natural metabolism,” along with the waste of industrial production and consumption, needed to be recycled back into production, as a part of a complete metabolic cycle.¹²⁸

The antagonistic division between town and country and the metabolic rift associated with it was also evident at a more global level. The people of the colonies, subjugated by different capitalist powers, were witness to the rapacious plunder of their land, resources and soil to make room for the industrialization of the colonizing powers. Marx wrote: “For a century and a half, England has indirectly exported the soil of Ireland, without even allowing its cultivators the means for replacing the constituents of the exhausted soil.”¹²⁹

Marx’s view of capitalist agriculture and of the need to recycle the nutrients of the soil, including the organic waste of the city, thus led him to a wider concept of ecological sustainability. In Marx’s opinion, this notion, though of very limited practical relevance to the capitalist society, was of immense significance for a future society of associated producers.

In fact, in emphasizing the need to maintain the earth for the future generations, Marx grasped the essence of the contemporary notion of sustainable development. This concept, as J. B. Foster argues, was defined most aptly by the Brundtland Commission as “development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.”¹³⁰

Marx held the view that the “conscious and rational treatment of the land as permanent communal property” was “the inalienable condition for

¹²⁷ Marx, *Capital*, Vol. III, Part I, Chapter 5.

¹²⁸ John Bellamy Foster, *Marx’s Ecology—Materialism in Nature*, New York, Monthly Review Press, 2000, p. 163.

¹²⁹ Marx, *Capital*, Vol. II, Chapter 25.

¹³⁰ World Commission on Environment and Development, “Our Common Future,” 1987.

the existence and reproduction of the chain of human generations.” This concept became more significant near the end of Marx’s life. He gradually became convinced in course of investigation into the revolutionary potential of the Russian commune—the *Mir*—and argued that it would be possible to develop an agricultural system “organized on a vast scale and managed by cooperative labour through the introduction of modern agronomic methods.”¹³¹ It seems that at the end of his life, Marx became more or less convinced that revolution would take place not in the capitalist West, but in Russia, and that impelled him to concentrate on agricultural underdevelopment and the ecological requirements of a more rational agricultural system.

It is notable that Marx and Engels did not restrict their discussions of environmental degradation to the robbing of the soil; they acknowledged other aspects of the problem too, including the depletion of coal reserves, the destruction of forests and so on. Marx referred to the “devastating” effects of “deforestation” and saw this as a long-term result of an exploitative relation to nature—a relation which was not confined to capitalism.

In 1884, William Morris, a creative artist, revolutionary socialist intellectual and environmental thinker of the late 19th century, wrote an article entitled “Why Not?” in the socialist journal *Justice*. He was deeply concerned with the fact that most people, including many socialists of his time, in rebelling against the evils of capitalism, tended to picture the future in terms that were not that far removed from many of the worst, most environmentally and humanly destructive aspects of capitalism itself. He assailed the “growth of horrible brick encampments” that tend to “depopulate the country and small towns for the advantage of the great commercial and manufacturing centres,” the “terror and the grinding toil” in which most people were oppressed, the filling of the Yorkshire and Lancashire rivers with “filth and dye” and the stifling and poisoning of the one-third of the people of England with smoke. In rejecting all this, Morris asked, was it not possible to create a more decent, more beautiful, more fulfilling, more healthy, less hell-like way of living, in which all had a part

¹³¹ John Bellamy Foster, “The Crisis Of The Earth: Marx’s Theory of Ecological Sustainability as a Nature-Imposed Necessity for Human Production,” *Organization & Environment*, Vol. 10, No. 3, 1997, pp. 278–95.

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in the “share of earth the Common Mother” and the cruel world of “profit-grinding” was at last brought to an end? Why Not?”¹³²

Karl Kautsky’s great work, *The Agrarian Question* (1899) contained a section on “The Exploitation of the countryside by the town.” There he argued that the net external flow of value from countryside to town “corresponds to a constantly mounting loss of nutrients in the form of corn, meat, milk and forth which the former has to sell to pay taxes, debt-interest and rent.” Writing at a time when the fertilizer industry was developed further than in Marx’s time, Kautsky held that it resulted from the metabolic rift. “Supplementary fertilizers... allow the reduction in soil fertility... but the necessity of using them in larger and larger amounts simply adds a further burden to agriculture.”¹³³

Lenin and the Soviet Policy

In Lenin’s works too, some of the same concerns were evident. In *The Agrarian Question and the “Critics of Marx”* (1901), he observed that

The possibility of substituting artificial for natural manures and the fact that this is already being done (partly) do not in the least refute the irrationality of wasting natural fertilizers and thereby polluting the rivers and air in suburban and factory districts.¹³⁴

In his writings and pronouncements, Lenin insisted that human labour could never substitute for the forces of nature and that a “rational exploitation” of the environment, or the scientific management of natural resources was essential. As the main leader of the newly created Soviet Union, Lenin argued for the “preservation of the monuments of nature” and appointed the well-known environmentalist, Anatolii Vasil’evich Lunacharskii as head of the People’s Commissariat of Education (Enlightenment), which was put in charge of conservation matters for the Soviet Union. In 1919, Lenin established, in the southern Urals, the first manure preserve in the USSR and the first reserve established anywhere by a gov-

¹³² William Morris, “Why Not?” *Justice*, April 12, 1884, p. 2.

¹³³ K. Kautsky, *The Agrarian Question*, Vol. I, Zwan Publications, London, 1988, p. 215.

¹³⁴ V. I. Lenin, “The Agrarian Question and the ‘Critics of Marx,’” in *Works*, Vol. 5, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, pp. 155–156.

ernment exclusively aimed at the scientific study of nature. Under Lenin's protection, the Soviet conservation movement made notable progress, particularly during the New Economic Policy period (1921–1928).

During the same period, Nikolai Bukharin developed the most systematic approach to ecological issues in a chapter on “The Equilibrium between Society and Nature” in his “Historical Materialism” (1920). In his opinion, technology is the chief mediating force in the metabolic relationship between nature and society. Other early Soviet thinkers connected to Bukharin such as Komrov, Uranovsky and others demonstrated a similar concern for ecological issues.

However, with the early departure of Lenin and the triumph of Stalinism in the late 1920s, conservationists were attacked for being “bourgeois” and there was a departure from ecological studies.

It is important to point out in this connection that the “metabolic rift” is caused primarily when large-scale industrialization, dependence on heavy industry and technology and excessive mechanization takes precedence over other concerns. The USSR during Stalin's time adopted the policy of dependence on heavy industry and modern technology at the expense of light industry and agriculture, thereby affecting ecological balance. This was criticized by the scientific community and more ecological elements within the Soviet leadership. The result was that in the 1930s, Stalinist leadership literally purged the ecologists and thus the early ecological thought largely died out in the Soviet Union.

Ecological Thinking in Socialist China

I must admit that this is the most problematic section for discussion. Despite my best efforts, I have not been able to find any book or document or journal or article written in English that can shed light on the ecological thinking in socialist China during the period when Mao Zedong was alive. Neither during the period of socialist transformation of agriculture, industry and commerce nor during the Great Leap Forward and the stage of the People's Commune, nor during the stage of the Cultural Revolution and after, could the present writer come across any English document on this issue. The absence or non-availability of any article on this issue, when documents on other important issues are readily available, appears to imply that the question of ecological degradation in socialist China was

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neither an important issue, nor an issue at all. That is, it did not appear at all.

It suggests that China during the period we are dealing with adopted a development strategy that was not only pro-people, but also eco-friendly. Without being able to go into details, we can make some observations. The Maoist strategy of development was opposed to the Soviet strategy of development. Instead of the one-sided development of heavy industry, Mao proposed the simultaneous development of heavy industry, light industry and agriculture, with emphasis on light industry and agriculture on which most of the people of China depended. For Stalin and the Bolsheviks and for Mao, the critical problem for a Communist Party is to secure rapid development of the forces of production. Only then could the people be fed, clothed and housed. But the Soviets understood it in a restricted way. They forgot the basic Marxist notion that productive forces comprised of two things—working hands and machinery; of these two, the former was more important than the latter. But the Bolsheviks equated forces of production with industrial technology *per se*, and this capitalist industry of the West was viewed as providing the paradigm for their development. This perspective leads to the adoption of policies designed to transfer resources from agriculture to heavy industry. The assumption is that agrarian production would subsequently get modernized. Thus, to the Soviets, mechanization must precede cooperation. It is here that Mao took issue.

In fact, modern technique and heavy machinery constituted one ingredient of the productive forces, but was never the principal element. Mao made a scathing criticism of Stalin's book, *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR* and held that in Stalin's book, there is no mention, from the beginning to the end, of superstructure; it is not at all concerned with human beings. Its main subject matter is matter, not human beings. Mao wrote in 1955 that in agriculture, cooperation must precede the use of big machinery. This marks far more than a tactical reversal of Bolshevik priorities. According to Mao, if, in order to finance heavy industry, agrarian production is drained of its resources, then industry itself would finally suffer. It would undermine further funding from agricultural surpluses and also deprive itself of the market through which it aims to eventually generate its own capital. This is, as Mao observed while criticizing Soviet

economy, a case of “draining the pond to catch the fish.” If, on the other hand, resources are put into agriculture and light industry that serves it, the result would be a rise in the living standard which would ultimately be able to sustain funds and markets for heavy industry.

Another aspect of the Maoist model of development was “walking on two legs.” It sought also the simultaneous development of national industries and local industries, relied on both modern and traditional technologies, on both capital-intensive and labour-intensive industries. It also sought to reduce the differences between town and country, unlike the capitalist model which makes the town develop at the cost of the villages. During the Great Leap Forward and the People’s Commune, people were taught to realize that the development of China lies not in moving from the village to the city, but in coming to the village from the city. In this way a perfect metabolic balance between man and nature was maintained and “rift” avoided.

The death of Mao in 1976 was followed by restoration of capitalism in China under Deng Xiaoping’s leadership along with, among other things, its ecological effects. The first article on “Ecological Marxism and Ecological Socialism” in China that came out in 1986 was written by Wang Jin. In a recent article captioned “Ecological Marxism in China,” Zhihe Wang admitted that “the ecological crisis facing China” was a reality.¹³⁵

Let us now get back to Marx and Engels. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels included in their programme the abolition of private property in land, gradual abolition of the distinction between town and country by a more equitable distribution of population over the country (which Mao attempted in China) and also “the bringing into the cultivation of waste lands and the improvement of the soil generally in accordance with a common plan.”¹³⁶

Marx realized the need for sustainable development, i.e., a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. The most important aspect here is that Marx’s concept of sustainable development was an integral part of his conception of a future communist society. Marx realized that transcending the ecological contradictions of capitalist agriculture was

¹³⁵ See his article in *Analytical Monthly Review*, Vol. 9, No. 11, February 2012.

¹³⁶ K. Marx, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Foreign Languages Press, Paris, 2020, pp. 55-56.

an absolute necessity for communist society. He wrote: “A conscious and rational treatment of the land as permanent communal property was the inalienable condition for the existence and reproduction of the chain of human generations.” In this sense, ecological sustainability could be viewed as a nature-imposed necessity for human production. And its implications, as understood by Marx, were truly worldwide in scope.

It goes without saying that the capitalist system, the loot and plunder of the countries of the world and the robbing and denuding of our planet of its vast natural resources by imperialist capital over the centuries has brought about this “metabolic rift” between man and nature, culminating in the present ecological disaster of a global character. The need of the hour is to get rid of the root—the capitalist-imperialist system—and create a new society fit for human living, a society where human values will triumph over the lust for profits.

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2. John Bellamy Foster, *The Vulnerable Planet* New York, Monthly Review Press, 1994.
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PART II

People's Resistance

DISPLACEMENT IN THE NAME OF “DEVELOPMENT”: POSCO IN OPERATION IN ODISHA—DISASTROUS CON- SEQUENCES ON LAND AND PEOPLE

India has two halves. One half is formed by a minority of Indians—mostly urban, elite, “enlightened people” of the 21st century, beneficiaries of the New Economic Policy, amassing millions out of the booties from stock markets, business contracts and connections with powers-that-be. The other half consists of the majority of Indians—impoverished, malnourished, non-literate, downtrodden, oppressed and exploited masses of toiling people working in the fields, jungles and factories, and also literate middle-class people. In fact, the Scheduled Tribes of Odisha comprise 62 communities such as Kondhs, Gonds, Santals, Mundas, Oraons, Bhumij, Bhattadas, Saoras Parajas, etc.¹³⁷ Many of these communities are traditionally dependent on shifting cultivation or *penda kheti* as the *Adivasis* of Bastar in Chhattisgarh state call it. Nearly half of the state's area (44.7%) is under Schedule V of the Indian Constitution, with a total population of 88.7 *lakhs* (according to 1991 census) out of which 58% are *Adivasis* and 20% are scheduled castes. The areas under Schedule V in Odisha are as follows: Mayurbhanj, Sundergarh, Koraput, Rayagarh, Nabarangpur and Malkangiri districts in whole; Kuchinda tehsil of Sambalpur district; Keojarh, Telkoi, Champua, Barbil tehsils of Keojarh district; R. Udaygiri tehsil, Gumma and Rayagarh block of Parlakhemundi sub-division; and Suruda tehsil in Parkhemundi sub-division in Ganjam district, Thuamul Rampur and Lanjigarh blocks of Kalahandi district and Nilagiri block of Balasore district.¹³⁸

The *Adivasis* constitute nearly 22.2% of the total population of the state and they are the hardest hit because of a central policy that allows entry to foreign MNCs into the heartland of the country by disdainfully violating all constitutional and environmental norms. The intervention of

¹³⁷ Kundal Kumar with P. R. Choudhury, Soumen Sarangi, Pradeep Mishra and Sricharan Behera, *Status of Adivasis/Indigenous Peoples Land Series-2 Orissa*, Delhi, Aakar Books, 2011, p. 15.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

the Pohang Iron and Steel Company (POSCO) is a case in point. In this paper, I propose to deal with the entry of the POSCO into the Jagatsinghpur—an area very rich in biodiversity, the role of the Indian State, the central government and Odisha state government, and the consequences this aggressive intrusion is likely to have on the land, environment and the people. I will also very briefly refer to the struggles of the people in that region against forcible eviction by the state machinery.

Jagatsinghpur: Place and Landscape

The district of Jagatsinghpur is gifted with an abundant supply of water made possible by the existence of the great Mahanadi and its innumerable tributaries, streams and rivulets; this huge stream moves on during the monsoon and shakes hands with another great river Brahmani, thus forming a massive estuarine complex and one of India's most extensive and fertile deltaic regions. As the monsoon passes over and the swollen rivers recede, what is left behind are excellent spawning grounds for a variety of aquatic fauna. The constant replenishing of alluvial soil and nutrients makes the region amongst the most fertile food-growing zones of India. Birds and turtles travel from afar to the seacoast year after year. Mangroves hang on stubbornly and work with sand dunes to shelter inland regions from the rage of frequent cyclones. Thus lush paddies, grazing pastures, *paan kethis* (betel vines), fruit and vegetable orchards, fishing and sedate aquaculture fields help support a variety of livelihoods in many villages in the low-lying inland areas.

Thousands of years of manual and mental human labour had helped transform swamp lands and dense coastal forests into the fertile food-growing region that it is today. Along with the food-producing economy, indigenous folk culture also developed—their habitats, language, common economy, culture and a common way of life—all of which contributed to their sustenance. The villages of Dthinkia, Gobindapur, Nua-gaon, Noliasahi, Polanga, Bayanalakanda, Bhuyanpal and Jatadhar—all directed affected by the POSCO steel-power-port project, rely heavily on the landforms and biodiversity of the area to support their agricultural and fishing activities. This rich biodiversity and the people's way of life, nay, the

very existence of the people, is today seriously threatened with imminent destruction.¹³⁹

Role of the Odisha Government in Facilitating Entry of POSCO into India

The proposal of the South Korean translational corporation Pohang Iron and Steel Company (POSCO) in Odisha (previously called Orissa until it was renamed by Parliament on November 9, 2010) a massive steel-power-port-township project, backed by one of the largest iron ore mining efforts in India, is regarded by far as the largest single foreign direct investment in the world in recent times. With its initial capital outlay of Rs. 51,000 *crores*, this is also India's single largest foreign direct investment ever. In its haste to secure the project for Odisha, in the face of competition from other states to win over the investor, the Odisha government rushed to conclude a MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) with the POSCO on June 22nd, 2005,¹⁴⁰ soon after the company had expressed its interest to invest in India.

Nothing could be sweeter for this foreign MNC than what this MOU guarantees. Actually the Odisha state effectively protects POSCO from all business risk. In fact, in the absence of a sovereign counter-guarantee,¹⁴¹ the MOU is a clear demonstration of the subordination of the interests of Odisha and of the country to serve POSCO's international growth and expansion plans, and of its massive profit-making venture. It is one of the innumerable examples of unequal exchange with the credi-

¹³⁹ For details about the early history and landscape, see *Tearing Through the Water Landscape Evaluating the Environmental and Social Consequences of POSCO Project in Odisha, India* by Leo F. Saldanha and S. Bhargavi Rao, Environment Support Group, Bangalore, India, 2011, pp. 5–8.

¹⁴⁰ For a copy of the MOU, see the following official website of the Odisha Government: <http://www.orissa.gov.in/posco/POSCO-Mou.htm>.

¹⁴¹ This policy was commonly employed in the early days of liberalization of the Indian economy to attract foreign direct investment. It was extended to foreign direct investors wary of investing in India, and the guarantee essentially covered all political and business risk. In the event a project failed, the Indian State absorbed all the costs and the investor virtually walked away without any liabilities. Such a policy was criticized for allowing inherently unviable investments to appear as sound investments, resulted in a major drain on the exchequer and was eventually withdrawn based on a directive from the Reserve Bank of India.

tor dictating terms to the debtor. Some clauses in Section 6 of the MOU amply demonstrate this:

(xiii) The Government of Odisha will assist the Company in obtaining all clearances, including forest and environmental clearance and approval of the State Pollution Control Board, and the Ministry of Environment and Forest, Government of India under Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 and Environmental (Protection) Act, 1986 for opening up the iron ore mines, laying roads, constructing township, etc.

(xiv) The Government of Odisha agrees to provide all possible assistance to the Company for acquiring mineral concession for limestone and dolomite within the ambit of MMDR and the MC Rules.¹⁴²

(xv) [The] government of Odisha will make best efforts and provide all possible assistance to POSCO for expeditious clearance of applications relating to mining lease and related matters such as forest clearance, environment, etc. to enable POSCO to start its mining operations in time to synchronize with the commissioning of its steel plant.¹⁴³

One wonders whether there is any need at all for any state to bend over backwards in securing the interest and investment from a foreign direct investor. For POSCO, this MOU has been particularly useful in paving the way forward for the project, especially in view of the fact that the Odisha Government assured its active involvement in the processing and securing of a host of statutory clearances. A clear indication of this is in how the location of the steel plant was selected. Upon signing the MoU, POSCO requisitioned 4,004 acres of land in a coastal location for the steel, power and captive port components of its integrated project. Land acquisition is normally the most contentious aspect of industrialization, especially in view of the fact that it entails a loss of precious fertile land.

¹⁴² Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 and Mineral Concession Rules, 1960 respectively.

¹⁴³ See relevant website of the Odisha Government cited above.

The company, however, did not have to worry much. The selected area comprised 8 villages of three Gram Panchayats (GP),¹⁴⁴ i.e., Dinkia and Govindapur villages under Dinkia GP, Noliensahi, Bhuyanpal, Polanga and Bayanalakanda under Gadakujang GP, and Nuagaon and Jatadhar villages under Nuagaon GP, of coastal Jagatsinghpur district of Odisha.

The justification of the Odisha Government for so locating the site in Jagatsinghpur district for the project was based on the claim that there would be a very low displacement of human settlements. The government claimed that 3,566.32 acres of the 4,004 acres requested by POSCO was “government land” (2,958.79 acres forest land and 607.53 acres non-forest “government land”) and only 437.68 acres, i.e., 10% (approximately) consisted of private land.¹⁴⁵

What has seldom been reported or been kept hidden from public gaze is that in addition to this massive demand of land, over 6,100 acres of the thickly forested land in Kandadhar Hills in the Sundergarh district of Odisha has been identified for a captive iron ore mine for the project. The MOU granted the company an unprecedented deal here as well: POSCO could extract 600 million tons of iron ore of high quality over a 30-year-lease period, 60% of which could be exported without processing.¹⁴⁶

All these clearances were based on Rapid Environmental and Social Impact Assessments (REIA), so called because it considered impacts based on studies conducted during only one season, which, in any case, were found to be highly deficient in analysis. The assessments were made in total disregard of the fundamental rights of forest-dependent communities under the Forest Rights Act, even claiming that such rights did not exist in the villages affected by the project. There was hardly any consideration to the vital fact that this region was a highly sensitive ecological zone, as the beaches here are nesting grounds of both the endangered Olive Ridley turtles and the Horseshoe crabs¹⁴⁷—both protected under the Wildlife Protection Act. Superimposed upon this is the consideration that industrial-

¹⁴⁴ Gram Panchayat is the Village Council, the basics unit of directly elected local government and is the third tier of governance per the Panchayat Raj Act, 1992.

¹⁴⁵ Kujang Tehsildar and U. N. Behera, Principal Secretary, Government of India, as cited in “Tearing Through the Water Landscape”... *op. cit.*

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

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ization of the region would severely pollute the zone around the Paradeep Port, which is only a dozen kilometres away.

The massive impact of the POSCO project on environment and society was downplayed deliberately by the POSCO, the Odisha government and the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) and they processed clearances for only small components of the overall integrated project. Thus, only 4 MTPA (Million Tons Per Annum) steel plants were processed for environmental clearance and not the 12 MTPA production that would be in place in just 6 years. The power plant impacts were considered for only 400 MW installed capacity and not the entire 1100 MW that would eventually be needed. The captive port was shown as a “minor port,” thus escaping stringent review demanded for major ports—which, incidentally, is what was proposed by POSCO. Then there was no consideration at all about the impact of a variety of ancillary transport infrastructure, such as the train line from the mines to the port and of the water supply linkage. Overlooked also was the severe impact that the mining and township components of the project would cause, both involving extensive land acquisition and accompanying displacement of people on a large scale. The whole operation was done in a conspiratorial manner based on deception and falsehood that included rapid assessments by governmental authorities containing wrong and misleading, fraudulent data. The whole story gives the impression of a conspiracy being hatched by bureaucrats, people’s elected representatives and the Indian State to grab land by displacing a large number of our own people in the interest of a foreign MNC.

There are various estimates about the extent of displacement of people the project would cause. Almost all the estimates, barring the governmental one, put the number at well over 20,000; however, this figure takes into account only the impact of the steel plant. The Odisha government claims that the number of evicted persons would be as low as 471 families, i.e., approximately 2,500 people. According to one account, seven villages and 22,000 people will be displaced from 4000 acres of land. In addition to the displaced farmers, thousands of fisherfolk and villagers in the port area will lose their livelihood. The villages have a lot of sandy forest land where they grow cashew nuts and other cash crops. All seven villages are multi-crop, including profitable betel-vine. Irrigation is provided with “sweet water” drawn from wells, which will naturally be polluted by steel

plant.¹⁴⁸ If drinking water is thus contaminated, how would the people get pure drinking water?

As for the indirectly displaced communities, especially of those dependent on fisheries, we suffer from lack of any reliable estimate. If we are able to take into consideration the actual social displacement and damage done to environment caused by the project's mining, pipeline, road/rail networks and township development and comprehensively and honestly assess the impact as a whole, only then shall we be able to perceive the social and environmental impact of the POSCO project fully. There is so much of a disinformation campaign by the governments and the aggressive foreign company and sections of the media, active denial of access to public domain information and deliberate, and often brutal, disregard for various social, scientific legal, economic and community concerns. Such things form the basis for pushing this mega project through various stages of clearance.

The only saving grace in this rather abysmal situation is the resolute opposition and resistance struggle to the project for seven years from those who are the victims of it. They are fighting under the leadership of the POSCO Pratirodh Sangram Samiti (POSCO Resistance Movement Committee or PPSS). Women, children, men and youth in affected villages have repeatedly been the victims of police violence of the most brutal kind. It is to their struggle that we now turn.

People's Resistance to POSCO Project

June 22nd, 2012 marks the seventh year of the people's struggle against the POSCO project in Odisha. It was on this day in 2005 that the Odisha government and the South Korean Steel Company signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). According to a newspaper report,

¹⁴⁸ Report by Dave Pugh captioned "Fact-finding Report on Forced Displacement in India." The author is a US citizen, social activist and member of the ILPS (International League for People's Struggles) who undertook field investigation in several states of India on forced displacement caused by the onrush of industrial corporations. He visited five states of central and eastern India between July 25 and August 13, 2008. While he was on his field trip in Odisha along with some local guides/social activists, he, along with others, was detained by the Odisha police and interrogated. Both domestic and international pressure ultimately forced the Odisha police to set him free. His local guides were kept in prison on the cooked-up charge of being "Maoist sympathizers" for years together. Dave Pugh's article is available on the net (See website on displacement in India).

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the government has by now acquired over 2000 acres of land for the plant and POSCO has set up a small office at the site; however, the project itself has been unable to take off, stalled by people's protests against the displacement from land and livelihoods that it would cause.¹⁴⁹ This resistance movement has proceeded along a zigzag course and adopted struggles of different types. In this paper, we will refer to some of them.

The state of Odisha has always remained prone to natural disasters because of its geographical proximity to the Bay of Bengal. In the year 1999, the district of Jagatsinghpur was visited by a cyclonic storm that took a huge toll. The youth of the locality set up a committee called "Naba Nirman Samiti." This people's body started propaganda among villagers living under three *panchayats* (village councils) against the POSCO project through such cultural mediums as drama and songs. Some political parties like the BJD, BJP and Congress jointly formed the "POSCO Kshoti-grosta Ekata Mancha" (POSCO Affected Unity Forum). In July 2005 Abhay Sahoo, a member of the state committee of the CPI went there to organize people against this project and it was under his leadership that the "POSCO Protirodh Sangram Committee" (Anti-POSCO Resistance Committee) was formed. This is the committee that has been spearheading the resistance struggle since then. The forms of struggle for existence and justice were various.

On October 19, 2005, the "Naba Nirman Samiti" and "Rastriya Juva Sangathhatan" organized a huge rally and started their anti-POSCO march, reaching the office of POSCO at Bhubaneswar on October 29. On November 25, 2005, notification for government acquisition of land was issued by the *tahsildar* of Kujang and it was hung up at the Revenue Inspector's Office of Nuagaon. It was declared that the Orissa Industrial Development Corporation (OIDCO) would take over uncultivated land, grazing land, cremation ground, etc. for POSCO. Both these people's struggle committees started their sit-in demonstration (*dharna*) against this notification from December 27, 2005. On January 2, 2006, the police shot dead 12 *Adivasis* at Kalinganagar when they resisted land acquisition by government for the Tata Steel plant. From February 15, 2006, the agitators started an indefinite hunger strike demanding stoppage of POSCO

¹⁴⁹ Freny Manecksha, "Against all odds, a struggle continues. Today marks seven years of protest against the POSCO project," *The Hindu*, June 22, 2012.

work. By then, the movement was picking up. On February 21, 2006, villagers at Balituth prevented Damodar Rauth, former minister in charge of the department of Panchayati Raj and now the sitting MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) from Erasama constituency from entering their villages. That MLA tried to enter along with the revenue minister to declare a compensation package. On February 22, village women locked up the Revenue Inspector's Office. Meanwhile, many legal suits were initiated against the government's attempt at land acquisition not only on the grounds of tribal lands being taken over (which goes against the Fifth Schedule) but also concerning the environmental disaster that such attempts would cause. There was a public hearing on Environmental Clearance on April 15, 2007 at a place called Kujang located 20 km away from affected villages. As expected, no villagers from the affected villages took part in it.¹⁵⁰ There were other forms of struggle as well. The resistance committee prevented POSCO from establishing offices in the villages and set up people's "check gates" at the entrances to the villages to check the identification of outsiders and prevent the foreign MNC from starting to survey and demarcate the land.

Blocked in its land acquisition attempts, POSCO hired outside goons to destabilize the situation and provide a pretext to police and para-military forces. According to Abhoy Sahoo, these goons had set off bombs on at least 10 occasions. On November 29, 2007, POSCO goons attacked a *dharna*, injuring hundreds of people and setting fire to a tent erected by the anti-POSCO activists. On June 20, 2008, while people from Govindapur village joined a demonstration of several thousand people at the projected the POSCO port site, sixty goons entered the village and occupied a two-story school. When the people returned that night, those "anti-socials" threw handmade bombs on them, killing one villager and seriously injuring two others.¹⁵¹ It is one of the many instances when a foreign agency hired hoodlums to crush and kill Indian people on Indian soil. This is a flagrant interference in the sovereignty of the country and

¹⁵⁰ Manshi Asher, *Striking while the Iron is hot*, National Centre for Advocacy Studies, June 2007; Achyut Das & Vidya Das, *Chronicle of struggle and other writings*, Agragamee Publications, 2006; Manoranjan Mohanti, "Iron in the Seoul," *The Statesman*, December 18 & 19, 2007; See also *Posco Protirodher Dinlipi*, Manthan Prakashan Prakashan, Kolkata, January 2008, pp. 9–16.

¹⁵¹ Dave Pugh's report, *op. cit.*

totally unconstitutional. Needless to state, such attacks by POSCO could be made possible only with the connivance of the Odisha state and central governments.

When such steps failed to stem the tide of resistance, the State opted to pick up activists and incarcerate them for as long a period as possible. On November 25, 2011, Abhoy Sahoo was arrested and sent to prison after his application for bail was rejected. As many as ten cases were slapped against Sahoo which included clashing with police during construction of a coastal road.¹⁵² Various organizations and individuals issued a statement condemning repression against Anti-POSCO Protesters. The text is as follows:

The undersigned condemn the growing brutality of the state repression being unleashed against the peaceful, democratic protesters of the POSCO project area, who are only fighting for their legal and fundamental rights. This repression has reached a peak with the arrest yesterday (Friday) of POSCO Pratirodh Sangram Samiti leader Abhay Sahoo. The government's constant announcements of its intention to start construction in the area lead us to apprehend that there will be more violence and brutality against the movement.

This comes after the people of Dhinkia and Govindapur heroically resisted police attacks for more than two months in the heat of summer, drawing the attention of the entire country to the threat to their thriving economy and fragile ecosystem. It also comes in the wake of a grossly illegal clearance to the project from the Environment Ministry, in direct violation of the Forest Rights Acts and EIA notification, despite two of the Ministry's own enquiry committees finding that grant of clearance would be a crime. Moreover, the Centre itself now claims that projects of this kind will be subject, under its proposed new law, to the consent of 80% of the local community—which has been ignored in this case. Meanwhile, dozens of false cases have been filed against the protesters, and

¹⁵² See Update from POSCO Pratirodh Sangram Samiti (December 3, 2011): www.sanhati.com/articles/3634.

it is worth noting that Abhya Sahoo has received bail from the courts in more than 40 cases so far; but every time he is released, new cases are foisted on him. Finally, court cases are pending against the illegal clearance to the project in the High Court and in the national Green Tribunal. Despite all this, the Orissa government is continuing its criminal offensive, and the centre as usual is doing nothing to stop it or to uphold the law.

We condemn this repression, and call for the immediate release of Abhay Sahoo, the dropping of the false cases against him and other members of the movement, and the immediate withdrawal of this illegal, unjust and economically destructive project.¹⁵³

What has been taking place in the Jagatsinghpur area of Odisha is a struggle between two halves. On one side, there are the foreign company—the Pohang Steel Company, the government of Odisha and the central government with its police force, bureaucracy and muscle power bent upon grabbing land by trampling underfoot all democratic and constitutional norms. On the other side, there are the hapless villagers who stand to disappear as a result of the aggressive pro-capital designs of the Indian state and are naturally fighting their battle for life. If they lose, they will be lost forever. They have received support from members of the civil society, the urban educated, middle-class people from other states of the country as also some political parties. So far, it has been a peaceful movement, despite various acts of violence perpetrated by the Indian state machinery and the POSCO-funded goons, leading to deaths and injuries to many people. Actually, no matter whether they are conscious of it or not, they are fighting not just for their own sake, but also in the interest of the future. Their defeat would also spell doom for the environment, flora and fauna which this mother earth has created over millions of years.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

NANDIGRAM STRUGGLE—THE SYMBOL OF DEFIANCE AND RESISTANCE¹⁵⁴

This paper is about the struggle of the people of Nandigram against land acquisition and displacements from their hearths and homes. It is the story of the historic struggle waged by the heroic people of Nandigram against SEZs and chemical hubs that the Indian ruling classes seek to create in as many areas as possible throughout the country at the dictates of foreign imperialism. It also exposes the violent character of the dominant ruling party in West Bengal and “Left-front” government led by Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee. In the face of violent attacks by the armed hired goons and the police forces, the people of Nandigram carried on their resistance struggle under the banner of the Bhumi Uchhed Protirodh Committee (Committee Against Displacement from Land—henceforth BUPC).

Nandigram, located in the East Medinipur district of West Bengal (WB), and its adjoining areas have had a long history of struggle against British imperialism. During the Quit India Movement of 1942, when India was a British colony, the people set up their own government there and literally kept it liberated for 17 months.¹⁵⁵ The present struggle in Nandigram is also an anti-imperialist struggle, although it takes place in a different historical context. At first glance, it is directed against the CPI(Marxist) *harmads* (the word derives its name from the name of the Portuguese pirates and it comes from the word “armada” or navy; presently, it stands for the armed CPI(M) cadres/goons who kill, torture, maim, humiliate and rape people) and the WB police forces. In reality, however, the struggle of the Nandigram people is directed against the general policy of land acquisition, the formation of SEZ (Special Economic Zones) and chemical hubs initiated by the central and state government at the dictates of their

¹⁵⁴ This article was originally published in *Bharatiya Samajik Chintan* (a quarterly journal of the Indian Academy of Social Sciences), Vol. VI, No. 3, (New Series) October–December 2007, pp. 183–195).

¹⁵⁵ The *Tamralipta Jatiya Sarkar* formed during the “Quit India” movement of 1942 by Satish Samanta, Sushil Dhara and others in the Midnapur district, had a 21-month stay from December 17, 1942 to September 1, 1944. See Banga Bhusan Bhakta, *Swadhinata Sangrame Nandigra*, Anandam, Gopalpur, Medinipur, January 26, 1989, pp. 168, 243.

foreign masters. By so doing, the people of Nandigram have become quite unknowingly an integral part of an anti-imperialist struggle and also of an historic year which, incidentally, is the 150th year of the Revolt of 1857 or the First National War of Indian Independence.

The Beginning

Lakshman Seth, the sitting MP (member of Parliament) of the CPI(M) from Tamluk, declared on December 28, 2006 as chairperson of the Haldia Development Authority that about 14,500 acres of land would be acquired from the sons of the soil¹⁵⁶ for the creation of a “mega chemical hub” for the Salim industrial group of Indonesia. It would occupy 10,000 acres, for a ship-building dock by the comprador Ruia group on 2,500 acres and for the deposit of silt after dredging in the Haldia dock area on 2,000 acres. The formal notice was put out on January 2, 2007. Twenty-nine *mouzas* (portions of land)—as a whole or parts of them—would, according to that notice, be acquired from Nandigram Block 1 and Khejuri Block 2. On January 3, 2007, when the news spread that a meeting was being held in the *panchayat* office on the issue of land-acquisition, many villagers gathered and shouted slogans denouncing the government order, Lakshman Seth and the *panchayat pradhan*. Sensing trouble, the CPI(M) *pradhan* sought police help. The police came and started firing on the villagers, which left four people wounded. The peasants were not ready to submit meekly. They quickly retaliated by attacking the police forces, dragging some of them from the police van when the van, in a hurry to leave the area, hit a light post and caught fire. The policemen were beaten up and thrown into the nearby pond, and they were allowed to beat a retreat only after tendering an apology to the angry crowd. The villagers, anticipating trouble, started putting up barricades on the roads by felling trees, digging roads and placing massive stones on the roads to prevent the entry of police jeeps. Interestingly, these were the same methods adopted by the people during the days of the Tamralipta Jatiya Sarkar (National Government of Tamralipta) of the 1940s.¹⁵⁷ The CPI(M) activists and local leaders panicked. Those who were spearheading the movement against forcible

¹⁵⁶ The term “sons of the soil” is commonly used in South and Southeast Asia and refers to the indigenous population of a particular area.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, *passim*.

acquisition of land had been CPI(M) activists or ardent supporters until that other day. In the face of the people's wrath, Lakshman Seth sensed danger. He sent musclemen from Haldia to attack the villagers at night.

The police did not prevent the armed hooligans from attacking the villagers even though they had prior information. The BUPC—formed on January 5, 2007 at a meeting convened by Siddikulla Chowdhury of the Jamiat-e Ulema-I Hind¹⁵⁸—had also made appeals to the police to take necessary steps. The climax was reached on January 6, when the CPI(M) gunmen attacked villagers from different places—the other side of the Tal-pati khal, i.e., Khejuri. Three members of the BUPC namely, Bharat Mondal—an agricultural labourer, Biswajit Maiti, a 12-year-old school student, and Sheikh Selim, a tailor, were killed. Sankar Samanta, whose house was used as a bunker for launching the attack and who was directly involved in it, was lynched by the angry crowd. His granary, betel-leaf field and the two-storied house were burnt down by the people. From then till March 13, Nandigram was in the hands of the people.

Genocide of March 14

What took place on March 14 in West Bengal, ruled over by a “left-front” government, was a genocide that would put to shame many previous acts of genocide in West Bengal. It was, in a sense, a military operation of which the principal script writer was the chief minister. Mr. Biman Bose, the state party secretary, approved of the plan to dispatch police,

¹⁵⁸ The BUPC was formed on January 5, 2007 at a meeting held in Etimkhana (Muslim orphanage) in Tarachand Bar close to the Nandigram market with 15 members. It was attended, among others, by Siddikulla Chowdhury, Santosh Rana, Pranab Banerjee, Subhendu Adhikari, Chhoton Das, Sumit Sinha, Nanda Patra, Abdus Samad, Abu Sufian and Saktiman Ghosh. It was formed by uniting three previous committees, namely, Krishak Uchhed Birodhi O Jonoswastho Raksha Committee (Committee Against Eviction of Peasants and to Save People's Interest)—formed by SUCI along with INC; Krishi Jomi Raksha Committee (Committee to Save Farmland) formed by the TMC; and Gana Unnayan O Jana Odhikar Sangram Samiti (Association for People's Development and Struggle for People's Rights)—formed by Jamiat-e Ulema-I Hind and the PCC CPI(M-L). It was resolved at the meeting that henceforth, while working under the common banner of the BUPC, no party would hoist their own political flag within Nandigram except when a party organizes a meeting or stages a march on its own. On January 6, at a mammoth public rally at Bhuta More, Garchakraberia attended by about 30,000 people, of whom 40% were women, the news of the formation of the BUPC was announced. (Interview with Sumit Sinha, CPI(M-L) PCC activist working in that area on 02-02-07 at Etimkhana; *People's Resistance of Nandigram A Report* by Manthan Samoyiki, Kolkata, December 12, 2007, pp. 4–9.

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and Binoy Konar, a central committee member of the CPI(M) threatened to let loose hell on the people of Nandigram. After a state-wide, two-month-long campaign for industrialization, the CPI(M) organized a big mass meeting in Kolkata on March 1 under the banner of Kishan Sabha, the party's peasant wing. P. R. Ray, then home secretary of the WB government, ordered the administration to reoccupy Nandigram villages on March 14, 2007. *The Telegraph* in its March 17 issue produced a list of lethal weapons that the Eastern Frontier Rifles (EFR) and the Indian Reserve Battalion (IRB) took with them for use against the people.¹⁵⁹ The force behaved as mercenaries, or like aggressor troops of foreign invaders with clear instruction to kill all, rape all and burn all. Behind them entered the hired goons in police uniforms but wearing sandals.

The people and the BUPC leadership had totally underestimated the ferocity of their enemy. In the first row stood women and children, thinking that that would deter the forces from attacking such an unarmed crowd. But their hopes were belied. On March 14, the EFR, IRB *jawans* and the WB police started firing indiscriminately without any warning. Women, boys and girls standing in the front row were shot down first. Women were chased, beaten with sticks and then raped by the policemen and the CPI(M) cadres. Truckloads of bodies—both dead and wounded—were taken out in trucks to an undisclosed destination. Some of the elderly women had their breasts torn by sharp weapons. One mother burst into tears when she related how her baby was pressed onto the oven. Two of the main culprits identified by many villagers were Ashok Guria and Naba Samanta. It was reported in the newspapers that Lakshman Seth had hired 300 *harmads* at a cost of Rs. 2 *lakhs* each for the whole operation, of whom ten had been caught by the CBI team, but since no charge-sheet was framed against them in due time, they were released.¹⁶⁰

Many of those wounded were admitted into the Tamruk hospital and the SSKM hospital in Kolkata. Even in the hospitals, the version of the victims, such as the names of the perpetrators of violence, nature of the

¹⁵⁹ *The Telegraph*, March 17, 2007.

¹⁶⁰ For the list of these criminals along with the list of the arms and other articles seized by the CBI from them at Janani brick-kiln, see *A Living Testimony of Nandigram Genocide and Mass Rape Health Spectra*, Journal of Medical Service Centre, Vol. 17, Special Nandigram issue, Kolkata, June 2007, p. 28.

injury, bullet wounds, statements of the victims of rape and other methods of torture and humiliation—were not recorded properly. As a continuous stay in the hospitals for 21 days and more would strengthen the cases of the victims against the police and the CPI(M) in the eyes of the law, the Tamluk hospital authorities in East Medinipur tampered with patient record books and handed over “discharge certificates” to at least 10 such victims with back dates.¹⁶¹ These enemies of the people went to such an extent that doctors were directed by the party leaders against all medical ethics to leave the patients unattended for days together, not to treat them properly and even discharge the patients when they needed months of medical care and rest to heal their wounds.

One conscientious doctor in the Tamluk hospital who treated the patients with care with whatever facilities available were at hand, was even ordered to leave by the CPI(M) president of the *jila parishad* (district committee). In protest, all the patients started a hunger strike, demanding the reinstatement of the physician. The team of doctors that had been visiting Nandigram at regular intervals to treat them and stand by their side, reported stories with details of torture and cold-blooded murder as provided by the victims and survivor-witnesses that would have shocked the even the strongest of hearts. Dr. Sarmistha Roy, who worked with the medical teams, said that women in particular had been shot in the genitals. A cadre pressed a rod into a woman's vagina. Her uterus ruptured. Another woman, Kabita Das (35) was pinned between two sticks and gang-raped. Her husband tried to rescue her, but forced to watch on with anguish and total helplessness, since the cadres threatened to dash their six-month-old baby to the ground and stamp it underfoot. It was widely reported that the police had opened fire near a bridge on March 14, virtually helping the CPI(M) goons shepherd 17 girls into a deserted house owned by Sankar Samanta, a CPI(M) leader who had met his doom earlier at the hands of the people.¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ *Dainik Statesman* 11-4-07; Statements of Dr. Subrata Sarkar and Dr. Debapriyo Mullick dt. 28-5-07 in *Nandigram Ganahatya Janashunani Protibedan* (Report of the People's Commission on the Nandigram Genocide), All India Citizens' Initiative, Kolkata December 2007, pp. 20–21.

¹⁶² Sunanda Sanyal, “The pus focus of a deep festering abyss,” *The Statesman*, May 31, 2007.

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How many people were killed, how many received bullet injuries, how many women were raped and sexually abused, how many boys and girls below 14 years were tortured? Although there are many reports of fact-finding committees, none of them can claim to be complete. The official figure puts the number of people who fell to the cadre-police bullets at 14, when actually, as reports poured in from the ground, it should be several times more than that. The Medical Service Centre—a voluntary organization—made a survey of different villages and hospitals where they treated victims. According to their findings, the total number of persons who received bullet injuries was 68, although the police claimed to have fired only 18 rounds.¹⁶³ The number of seriously injured patients at the East Medinipur District Hospital, Tamluk excluding those transferred to the SSKM (PG) hospital was 50.¹⁶⁴ The number of patients at Nandigram BPHC, excluding those transferred to Tamluk District Hospital and PG, Kolkata stood at 117.¹⁶⁵ The number of only those injured boys and girls between the ages of 4 months (Sourav Giri of Kalicharanpur injured by blunt weapon) to 13 years who were brought for treatment to the mobile medical camps was 81.¹⁶⁶ The number of women raped or sexually abused on March 14–15, 2007 and those who reported to the mobile camps stood at 16. No doubt, social prejudice and sense of guilt prevented many women from coming forward and to reveal being insulted.¹⁶⁷

Doctors related numerous cases of ophthalmic ailments such as red eyes, poor vision, constant pain in the eyes and even loss of vision—cases which could not normally have been caused by teargas shells. In all probability, para-military troops used anti-riot smoke grenades and 51-mm tear-smoke bombs, which must have contained such poisonous chemical components to cause even loss of vision, not to speak of other serious ailments. One can multiply such instances.

¹⁶³ “A Living Testimony,” *op. cit.*, pp. 6–7.

¹⁶⁴ For the names, see *ibid.*, pp. 9–10.

¹⁶⁵ For details, see *ibid.*, pp. 10–12.

¹⁶⁶ For details, see *ibid.*, pp. 23–24.

¹⁶⁷ For details, see *ibid.*, p. 25.

People Snatch Lost Areas from the CPI(M)

Within 48 hours of the bloodbath of March 14, the indomitable people of Nandigram wrested control of all these areas from the CPI(M). According to a conservative estimate, as many as twenty thousand villagers braving all odds stormed into Sonachura village on March 16 and recaptured the area. Policemen begged for their lives. Men and women with sticks and iron-rods chased the CPI(M) goons from the villages.

After the genocide, batches of people from different walks of life—students, intellectuals, artists, civil rights activists, members of different political organizations and physicians made regular visits to Nandigram on fact-finding missions and to extend their solidarity to the struggle of the Nandigram people. The opposition, led by the TMC (Trinamul Congress), called for a state-wide *bandh* on March 16, which was spontaneous and total. Intellectuals, teachers, youth and students, artists, theatre personalities, poets, singers and many other people organized demonstrations and demanded the resignation and even the hanging of “Butcher Buddha.” Many well-known theatre artists and intellectuals, such as Bibhas Chakraborty, Bratya Basu, Kaushik Sen and Manoj Mitra, resigned from the Natya Academy. Poet Sankha Ghosh resigned from the Bangla Academy. Nabarun Bhattacharya returned the Rabindra prize to the WB government and declared that he would donate the money to the Nandigram relief fund. Kabir Suman, through his public speeches, TV programmes and songs assailed the WB government and its chief minister. An Artists’ and Intellectuals’ forum was also been formed. The TASAM—forum of teachers and scientists—organized processions and many individual teachers, doctors contributed in their own ways to this struggle against the SEZs and the land acquisition programme. Students of Jadavpur University, Presidency College and many other institutions under the banner of such forums as Chhatra Chhatri Sanhati Manch, Forum for Arts Students or Independent Consolidation organized demonstrations on their respective campuses and took to the streets shouting slogans against the government-led barbarity in Nandigram and even formed street barricades along with teachers.

Despite intimidation of different types, the heroic people of Nandigram did not bend their heads. For several months till November, they

resisted armed attacks under the banner of the BUPC and did not yield an inch of ground. The people underwent traumatic experiences throughout this period. Every day and night, bullets rained on them from the Khejuri side. For months, despite having spent sleepless nights, they maintained their vigilance on the border on a war footing with the determination that they would, on no account, part with their land.

The Mastermind Behind Terror Talked About “Peace”

After the March 14 genocide, the CPI(M) leadership started talking about the establishment of “peace” in Nandigram. The chief minister also grudgingly talked about it. The CPI(M) party and the WB government that it controls, which have never shown any genuine inclination towards peace, also started talking about peace. On March 28, two weeks after the Nandigram genocide, when there was much hue and cry over it, Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee accepted “responsibility” for it at a public meeting. Had there been a genuine sense of remorse on his part, he would have resigned from the post of the chief minister on the very next day. In fact, not only was there no sense of remorse on the part of the State and the central leaders of the Party, what is worse is that there was still a defiance and the usual arrogant note by him as also others party leaders like Binoy Konar and Biman Bose. *Mainstream* in its editorial to the May 5, 2007 number noted: “As for the Chief Minister, his acceptance of responsibility is more in the nature of guilt before the party leadership for his inability to ensure the CPI(M)’s sway over the region rather than genuine sorrow over the tragic developments.”¹⁶⁸

Who is Responsible for the Misery of the People?

The CPI(M) leadership, the WB government and the central government have denounced the BUPC and the Maoists as the forces responsible for the “disorder” and the absence of administration in Nandigram. We have shown that it was neither the BUPC nor the Maoists who are responsible for the situation. In reality, it was the powers-that-be who went on a land-grab spree who are to be blamed. It has been alleged that Nandigram had been transformed into a “liberated zone.” In a leaflet dated November 26, 2007, published by such democratic organizations as Sanhati Udyog

¹⁶⁸ *Mainstream*, May 5, 2007.

(Solidarity Effort), Nandigram Ganahatya Birodhi Prochar Mancha (Propaganda Platform Against Nandigram Genocide), and SEZ-Birodhi Prochar Mancha (Anti-SEZ Propaganda Platform), some pertinent questions have been raised.

What does a “liberated zone” mean? Did the BUPR set up a parallel administration? Did they mint their coins? Did they collect taxes? Did schools, colleges, post offices remain closed? During the last 11 months, thousands of men and media persons entered into and came back from Nandigram. Did they have to take any permission from the BUPC? On the other hand, what was the condition of Khejuri—the CPI(M) stronghold? Did common people and media persons have free access to that area? Policemen were there in many places of Nandigram—all of which were withdrawn to facilitate the actions of the *harmads* at a later period. Was there no police camp inside Khejuri, although the fact remains that bullets were rained from that part at all times of the day and night? Then which part constituted the “liberated zone?”¹⁶⁹

It has regularly been propagated that the CPI(M) people had to take shelter in the relief camps for the last 11 months, and it was those people who, apparently, returned to their homes after November 10, 2007. However much the police may try to paper over the matter of involvement of the two CPI(M) musclemen, Tapan and Sukur in the Nandigram massacre, the fact remains that they could not be tracked by the CBI (Central Bureau of Investigation) over the last five years even though they were refused bail by the apex court. They were arrested by the state police only after the Trinamul Congressmen gheraoed the vehicle carrying the nameplate of the state government, in which the duo were travelling. With the highly politicized police and government administration, many such things will not be unearthed.

How many CPI(M) people actually became “homeless?” The CPI(M) put the figure at one time at 1,500, and at other times at 5,000. Were it the homeless who returned by raining bullets from AK-47s or

¹⁶⁹ Leaflet dt. 26-11-07 issued by Sanhati Uddyog.

the SLRs? By destroying houses of their neighbours with fire? By raping women? By burning to death a pregnant mother and her child inside her house and setting it on fire? Why did the local party bosses refuse media entry into the relief camps in Khejuri? Why did neither the top CPI(M) leaders nor the chief minister visit those places? The real reason is that those camps were the camps of the CPI(M) *harmads* who were hired from outside. Once five persons died in a bomb explosion in those “relief camps,” but the bodies lay unclaimed for 4–5 days, before being whisked away to unknown destinations. There is no veil of mystery surrounding it. They were outsiders, and their identity could not be disclosed.

How did the people live during this brief period of about eleven months? In a leaflet issued by the *Matangini Mahila Samiti* in late November 2007, it was stated that schools remained open, the banks functioned as usual and the BDO office remained open. The only thing was that policemen and the CPI(M) *harmads*, for obvious reasons, were not allowed entry into Nandigram.

The people of Nandigram not only fought against these henchmen; they took part in various new social experiments.

New Social Experiments in Nandigram

The resistance struggle against displacement in Nandigram had brought about a social awakening the likes of which had seldom been seen in the long history of West Bengal. There, people of all walks of life—Muslims and Hindus—joined hands, the sound of the *azaan* mingled in perfect tune with the blowing of the conch; there was a definite feeling that something was shaking people from within. A section of the students also had their own and, in a sense, novel way of responding to this popular upsurge.

From April 2007, students—both boys and girls—of Jadavpur University, Presidency College, Scottish Church College, Bangabasi College, JNU (Jawaharlal Nehru University) and the University of Hyderabad organized “to-the-village-campaigns” to Nandigram to understand the ground reality, the nature of people’s struggles, what impelled them to take such measures, etc. They went from door to door, contacted the leadership of the BUPC, talked to the villagers and made propaganda against the SEZ, chemical hubs and the state policy of land acquisition through mass

meetings, songs, dramas, and stayed either in the houses of the villagers or in the village clubs. They thus could have a first-hand experience of village life. It became clear to them through this contact that the village people were conscious of the fact that the loss of cultivable land and the selling out of the country to foreign companies were doing much harm to the country and the people, and that the CPI(M) Party whom they themselves voted into power had become stooges of foreign capitalists. “We would not part with our land”—was their slogan.

The next phase in their campaign started at the end of June when many of them decided to stay there permanently as activists. Women were the main victims of the genocide of March 14. When on March 15/16, 2007, Sonachura and Gokulnagar were captured by the CPI(M) goons, there were large-scale rapes of women and young girls.¹⁷⁰ The victims came forward to organize themselves. A convention was held on July 15, 2007, which led to the formation of the *Matangini Mahila Samiti*. (MMS)¹⁷¹ It drew its name from the name of Matangini Hazra, who led a procession during the 1942 Quit India Movement against British rule and was shot dead. It raised its voice against the SEZ, patriarchy, and stood in favour of the establishment of democracy and equal rights of women. Their three slogans were: Democracy, Independence and Equal Rights. The organizers of the MMS who I had interviewed told me that whenever the CPI(M) started firing from Khejuri, they organized large processions, and whenever there were large processions, the firing stopped. The CPI(M) was afraid of mass gatherings.

Whether we can call it people's power or not, this much is true that for the last 10–11 months, policemen were not allowed to enter. But the people did administrative work spontaneously. What were their achievements during this brief period?

1. The MMS set up People's Courts to deal with disputes such as the beatings of wives by the husbands or cases of theft, etc.

¹⁷⁰ Leaflet captioned *Amra Matangini—amra “ora”r dal Amader shesh kora jaya na—Amrai agami bhobiswat* (We are Matangini—We belong to the “other” party. We cannot be extinguished. We are immortal—We stand for the Future) issued by the MMS. Undated, probable date being November 21, 2007 (the day I received it).

¹⁷¹ Matangini Mahila Samiti *Karmasuchi O Gothontantra* (Programme and Constitution). October 2007. See Preface.

All these family and other disputes were settled in the people's court. What was the need of the police, they wondered? They would only take money and set the miscreants free. Theft and robbery are the outcome of poverty. In Nandigram, all people, including the thieves and robbers, stood united against the enemy. The fact is that, in the MMS-controlled areas, thefts and robberies actually stopped altogether.

2. The image that we have of the Indian village women is that associated with the pond, courtyard and the kitchen. This was turned upside down. In the new situation, the women stood up. This was more evident in the areas dominated by the Muslims. Women said: "The *shariat* that directs us to remain behind the veil, also directs us to face the enemy with knives in hands whenever attacked." This is like taking lessons from the past to justify the armed resistance of the present.
3. Although this movement identified the CPI(M) *harmads* as the main enemy, it also enabled them to raise questions about the present model of development.
4. Women also initiated social struggles such as those against patriarchy, even against the husbands who were members of the BUPC. The husbands did not want their wives to move outside freely; so the MMS gave the women courage to struggle against such patriarchal restrictions. The MMS boasted that in areas where policemen were present, there were crimes, but in areas where policemen were not allowed to enter, there was no incidence of crime. The women could even move outside in the dead of night freely without any fear of being molested or mistreated. Free air reigned in areas of people's struggle.
5. Another success of the MMS was the destruction of the liquor shops, which they correctly identified as the object that ruined their husbands and family life. The MMS felt that the fight against the CPI(M) was integrally connected with the fight against liquor shops.¹⁷²

¹⁷² Interview with Deblina Chakraborti, Secretary, MMS, dt. November 19, 2007.

What was the extent of MMS success? In the editorial of the first number of their mouthpiece entitled *Matangini*, it was stated:

The people's everyday fight for land intermingles with the sound of the bullets and bombs. All the video shops are closed. The presence of roadside Romeos passing remarks towards girls is no longer to be seen. It is as if everyone is celebrating the struggle to defend their motherland. Women have got the taste of real freedom; men have accepted the right of women to organize meetings and processions. Whenever the head of the family objected, women in body went to that house to talk and convince. There was no threat to their security even if they went out at 2 at night.¹⁷³

(What have been already related under this section I have called "new social experiments." When I call these experiments "new," what I mean is that these are new in Nandigram. Experiments such as these as also many others are being attempted in other parts of India where revolutionary and democratic social movements have been going on for a long time).

Media Entry Barred

The CPI(M) Party is a party based on deceit, falsehood and blatant lies. At a time when it was taking part in the "all-party meeting," it has been at the same time instigating its hired goons to carry on ceaseless attacks from Khejuri. Binoy Konar, who had earned much notoriety for his foul comments and for instigating his cadres to show buttocks to Medha Patkar—the environmentalist crusader, whenever she came in sight, was threatening to let loose hell from all the sides on the people of Nandigram. Brinda Karat, who earned a CPI(M) Rajya Sabha ticket from West Bengal where she is an "outsider," threatened to apply "Dum Dum *daoai*" (medicine) to the dissenters.¹⁷⁴ And Lakshman Seth, at a meeting of his party cadres in early November, called on his hired goons to "kill or get killed." It

¹⁷³ *Matangini* (mouthpiece of MMS), No.1, January 2008, Kolkata.

¹⁷⁴ Brinda Karat, MP of CPI(M), said this at an open meeting organized by the Ganatantrik Mahila Samiti, the women's wing of the CPI(M), held in Dum Dum Central Jail Maidan on 04-11-07 just on the eve of the second mayhem. It shows that she also was in the know of what was going to take place. *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, November 5, 2007.

The World Turned Upside Down

is reported that the goons were raised as a private army and given military training with sophisticated weapons such as Insas rifles, AK-47 and SLRs. The belief that has been gaining ground is that they were trained by some army men or ex-army men. The whole operation started slowly on October 28, gained momentum on November 5 and continued till November 12, when Sonachura and Gokulnagar fell. Throughout this period, all entry points were sealed by men under CPI(M) and CITU (workers union of the CPIM). They were clearly on an “encirclement and suppression” campaign with the sole motto: “kill, maim, burn and destroy.” The *Dainik Statesman* of November 11, 2007 noted that all mobile towers in a radius of about 36 km² sq. from Bhangabera to Tekhali were jammed so that the news of what had been going on could not go outside.¹⁷⁵ It clearly shows the complicity of the administration in the whole operation. Thousands of villagers were taken as hostages and later used as human shields to capture fresh areas with armed lumpens operating from behind.

The police force was neutralized; in reality, they were kept positively active to see to it that the whole operation went on unhindered. The WB state government, with the active connivance of the central government, abdicated to make room for the party-led butchers, rapists and hooligans in that savage and brutal mission of recapturing Nandigram. That the State backed the whole operation is also evident from the discovery of a packet full of bullets near Amgachhia Mirerbazar, which had the marks of the ordnance factory—.303 X 8 mm remod cartridge priced Rs. 438. Insas rifles had the date of manufacture recorded as June 22, 2007—this news was also been published in the newspapers.¹⁷⁶

On November 8, 2007, a team of intellectuals, social activists, civil rights activists, representatives of some political organizations, teachers and others sought to enter Nandigram. The group had representatives from the Association for the Protection of Democratic Rights, Bandi Mukti Committee (Committee for the Release of Prisoners), Teachers and Scientists Against Mal-development, the National Alliance for People’s Movement and others. When they reached Kapashberia More, they were surrounded by a group of men and women flaunting CITU and the Ganatantrik Mahila Samiti (the CPI(M) women’s wing) banners. They attacked the cars,

¹⁷⁵ *Dainik Statesman*, November 11, 2007.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

fists were aimed at the those who were seated inside, and the driver in particular was beaten black and blue. The windows of many cars were smashed with heavy stones and filthy and abusive language of all conceivable types were hurled at them. The police forces that led the convoy remained mute spectators to what was happening before them. Experiences such as this were one of many similar experiences faced by other groups who tried to enter Nandigram.

The Second Genocide: Cases of CPI(M)-led Brutality—Murder and Mass-Rape

The Bengali daily *Dainik Statesman* in its November 12, 2007 issue gave a ghastly description of savagery perpetrated by CPI(M) *harmads*. It relates the plight of Sibani Mondal, a resident of Gokulnagar village, who was one of the hundreds of victims kidnapped by CPI(M) armed goons. The following is a free translation:

She was literally trembling with fear while relating the experience of November 10. She was one of those who joined the procession led by the Bhumi Ucched Protirodh Committee (BUPC) at 12 noon from Sonachura. When the procession almost reached the Moheshpur market area, they were greeted with hundreds of bullets. Many people standing in the front row, dropped down on the ground. Sibani along with some others fled towards the field and, in their hurry, got into a pond. She saw the armed goons forcing people to come out of their houses in Moheshpur and to stand in a row. There were six rickshaw-vans on which the dead bodies lying on the streets were placed and taken towards Tekhali. Sibani along with about 600 others were taken to Amratola primary school in a procession with both hands placed on their heads.

When they reached the school, the hands and legs of the boys were bound with ropes with bamboo placed through the hole and the ends of the bamboo placed on benches, so that heads lay below and legs on the upper side. They were beaten as brutally as possible. Even an octogenarian was not spared. He

was ordered to do *othh bosh* (sit-ups) without any break. As he could not comply, he was hit hard on the head with a big bamboo stick. His head was broken and he lay down dead.

There were about 100 women in that group. Some *goondas* (goons) with their faces covered with cloth came to us to identify those who were young. They picked up about 12 girls from them as the meat-seller picks up chicken from the basket and then vanished into darkness. Soon afterwards, wails and cries of women were heard. This is only one of the many instances of murder, torture and mass rape perpetrated by the CPI(M) cadres.¹⁷⁷

The *Dainik Statesman* of November 18, 2007 related other instances of rape. Akhreza Bibi of Satengabari was raped by one Anup Karan at Bacchu, the local CPI(M) leader of Satengabari. Anup Karan led an armed group of 40 motorcyclists who went on a rampage and destroyed nearly 300 houses in Satengabari.¹⁷⁸ In her statement submitted to the WB Women's Commission dated May 20, 2008, Akhreza Bibi complained that one of her daughters, Ansura Khatun, was raped before her eyes by Kalu and Ahsan, and another daughter, Mansura Khatun, was raped by Abdul Rob and Barik.¹⁷⁹ Needless to say, the rapists were local CPI(M) cadres. Sk. Sufian, President of the BUPC complained that in Sonachura, Kanchannagar, Garchakraberia and Gokulnagar the CPI(M) goons did whatever they liked. Women were tortured and molested under the leadership of Naba Samanta and Utpal Bhuiyan. The *Dainik Statesman* in its November 25, 2007 issue reports that one Gouri Das, a housewife of Satengabari village, worked as a maid in Mumbai. She came back to her village on a leave. She complained to the media on November 24 that she joined the procession towards Moheshpur on November 10, 2007. In the face of bullet-rains from the CPI(M) *harmads*, she also became wounded and was eventually caught by them. Along with about 400 others, she was taken

¹⁷⁷ Sukumar Mitra, "Khejurir atanka stabdho kore diyechhe Sibani-ke" (The horror at Khejuri has made Sibani speechless), *Dainik statesman*. November 12, 2007.

¹⁷⁸ *Dainik Statesman*, November 18, 2007.

¹⁷⁹ See statement of Akhreza Bibi dated May 20, 2008 submitted to WB Women's Commission. It was received on behalf of the Commission by Malini Bhattacharya.

to Sherkhan Chowk in Khejuri. Some people picked her up and subjected her to all conceivable forms of molestation, humiliation and torture.¹⁸⁰

Men Behind the Mayhem

It appears from the reactions, statements and the body languages of the chief minister and the CPI(M) leaders of the centre and the State that many people were either directly involved or in the know of things. Biman Bose, the left-front chairman, Binoy Konar, and Shyamal Chakraborty played their respective parts in the operation. Over and above there stood “Brand Buddha”—the blue-eyed boy of the Tatas, Salims and the American industrialists. Those who were actively involved in the actual operation and whose names frequently reached us from the statements of the local people are Naba Samanta, Joydev Paik, Badal Garu, Himangshu Das, Himangshu Roy, Anup Mandal, lakshman Mandal and Badal Das.

The CPI(M) raised this private army like the Ranvir Sena of Bihar from different areas such as Gorbeta, Keshpur, Magrahat, Barrackpur, Dum Dum, the coal belts of Ranigunj-Asansol as also Bihar and Jharkhand. Among them were Tapan Ghosh and Sukur Ali, who were wanted by the CBI in the Chhoto Angaria genocide of 2001, but who could not be arrested by the CBI, as the CPI(M) and the WB government gave them necessary protection. Incidentally, Tapan was the district committee member and Sukur was the zonal secretary of the CPI(M) at Garbeta in West Medinipur. After their arrest, they were garlanded by Mr. Dipak Sarkar, the district party secretary and Mr. Sishanta Ghosh, the minister when they went to jail to give them a hero's welcome.¹⁸¹

On the night of November 10, 2007 at Egra School More, when six cars were moving in a suspicious manner, they were stopped by the local people. It was found that four injured BUPC members were being taken to an undisclosed destination. The injured persons were reported to be Yadav Pal, Kalpana Das, Bipin Gayen and Gautam Pradhan. They were being taken by top CPI(M) leaders like Tapan Ghosh, Sukur Ali (both wanted by the CBI) and some other CPI(M) leaders. All of them were handed over to the police. The CPI(M) leaders Dipak Sarkar and Shyamal Chakraborty

¹⁸⁰ *Dainik Statesman*, November 25, 2007.

¹⁸¹ Suman Batabyal, “Tapan-Sukur doler sampad” (Tapan and Sukur are the assets of the party), *Dainik Statesman*, November 15, 2007.

described it as “media propaganda” and stated that Tapan and Sukur were coming back from a holiday trip to Digha.¹⁸² Holiday trip, indeed!!

Eviction of Thousands from Their Hearths and Homes

The WB government and also the CPI(M) leaders had maintained all along that the whole operation had to be done only to get their men back to their homes in Nandigram from Khejuri. The question is: how many people got “evicted” from Nandigram as a result of their misdeeds? Interestingly, the claims made in the *Ganashakti*—the Bengali organ of the CPI(M)—vary quite a lot. From 500, it increased to 2,500, then to 5,000 and then suddenly dropped to 1,500. They themselves were at a loss for what to say. What they claimed is a blatant lie. The number could hardly exceed a few hundred. The BUPC made it clear time and again that aside from 35 rapists and murderers who were involved in the March 14 massacre, all others were welcome to Nandigram. The MMS leaflet dated November 21, 2007 stated that except Naba Samanta, Badal Garui, Robin Giri, Anup Mondal and others directly involved in the genocide, all others were recalled. Those who returned were not tortured; some of those who acted as informers were warned. What is to be pointed out here is that some 10 to 15 families of Khejuri were compelled to stay in Nandigram during this period also because of CPI(M) attacks.¹⁸³

How many people were evicted from Nandigram? According to a report published in *Dainik Statesman*, Bhawani Prasad Das, the BUPC leader gave the number of homeless people at around 10,000. Many villages were ravaged to the ground and the property looted by the CPI(M) hoodlums. In the representation of the BUPC to the BDO, the number of people rendered homeless and staying in the relief camps in Nandigram Block 1 stood at 1,140. The National Human Rights Commission puts the figure at around 1,500. The total number of homeless people, as given in the BUPC account, was 9,245, spread over 37 villages. Of these people, the figure for women stood at 3,042; that for men at 4,298 and that for children at 1905.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² *Dainik Statesman*, November 11/12, 2007.

¹⁸³ MMS leaflet dt. November 21, 2007.

¹⁸⁴ *Dainik Statesman*, November 21, 2007.

CPI(M) Cadres Impose Fines on the BUPC Members

When murder, arson, loot, plunder and gang-rape failed to quench the thirst of the CPI(M) *harmads*, they started to impose fines on the BUPC members, failing which, they were forced to leave their villages. The fines ranged from Rs. 2,000 to Rs. 200,000. The cases of Sheikh Mosu, Prajapati Jana, Lakshman Maiti, Sriram Chandra Mandal, Manas Maiti and Bhoja Maiti have already come to light and more and more such cases are pouring in.¹⁸⁵ It is also reported that paddies belonging to the BUPC members are being looted by CPI(M) *harmads*. *Bartaman*, the Bengali newspaper, reported that the paddy of Tapas Khatua of Gangra village (then nursing his wound in the hospital) was looted by a group of 15/20 goons.¹⁸⁶

Hounded and Arrested on the Pretext of being Maoists

The Association for the Protection of Democratic Rights (APDR), in a press statement, stated¹⁸⁷ that three persons who were forced to leave Nandigram and took shelter in the home of their relative named Gurupada Munian were arrested on November 13 on the charge of being Maoists under sections 120, 120B, 121A, 122, 123, 124A, and 124B—which implies “waging war against the state.” They were Radheshyam Giri, Gouhari Mandal and Prakash Munian. They were mercilessly tortured and produced in the court after 48 hours on November 15, 2007.

Buddhadev and CPI(M) Talk Foul

For quite some time, Buddhadev Bhattacharjee and top CPI(M) central and state leaders have been saying: “The chemical hub has been withdrawn, so there is no justification for the ongoing agitation and the need for the BUPC in Nandigram.” The question that the people of Nandigram have raised is: how could one place faith in persons like Buddhadev, Biman, Lakshman & Co., who have proved to be pathological liars? They have already proved by their actions and deeds that they are acting not on

¹⁸⁵ *The Statesman*, November 16, 2007.

¹⁸⁶ *Bartaman*, November 21, 2007.

¹⁸⁷ *Press Statement* dt. November 19, 2007 of APDR; see also Dave Pugh's pamphlet, “One Year Later: Nandigram and the Struggle against Forced Displacement in India,” March 2008.

behalf of the people, but on their enemies. As chief minister, Buddhadev first made a public statement that no notice had been served to the Nandigram people for land acquisition. When the notice dated January 2, 2007 was confirmed by the local administration and the resistance of the people burst out spontaneously, he asked people to tear up the notice. He knew full well that to cancel one notice, one has to issue another notice superseding the earlier one. That was never done. Instead, he sent his policemen and party-men to attack the people. Even after such a public outcry that followed the genocide of March 14, he simply did nothing to punish anybody. He only said that if the Nandigram people did not want to have a chemical hub, then there would be no chemical hub. The message is made perfectly clear. The land acquisition programme has not been stopped; it is still in place and that “consent” could be extracted from the people by sheer intimidation and coercion. This is the real face of Buddhadev & Co.—to bring the MNCs at all costs. In reality, that precisely is the reason why Buddhadev and the CPI(M) Party are still in power. If one takes into account the frequent visits to India and WB by leading US politicians, US government advisors, US security officials, and most recently by Henry Kissinger, one cannot but be certain that all these have sinister implications.

Maoist Presence in Nandigram

Let us now talk about the Maoist presence in Nandigram. Some relevant points can be raised in this connection:

1. In the Budget Speech for the year 2007–08 given by Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, chief minister and minister-in-charge, Home Department, Government of West Bengal in respect of Demand No. 27, the so-called “informal notice” put up by the Haldia Development Authority was mentioned and then it was stated that “there was massive public resistance in the region and a number of political organizations and parties came together to form the Bhumi Uchhed Pratirodh Committee, Nandigram which caused several violent incidents on and from 3rd January 2007.” There was, however, no mention of the presence of the Maoists there.

2. It is pertinent to refer in this connection to the speech of the Prime Minister on April 13, 2006 at a conclave of the chief ministers and representatives of 13 Maoist-hit states. He said: "It would not be an exaggeration to state that the problem of Naxalism is the single biggest internal security challenge ever faced by our country."¹⁸⁸ In order to combat this threat, he ironically advocated the policy of "walking on two legs." The irony lies in the fact that Dr. M. M. Singh, without actually naming Mao Zedong, had referred to the policy advocated by Mao Zedong long ago in order to deal with the Indian Maoists. Mao formulated this policy in a totally different context, particularly at the time of socialist reconstruction. He advocated the simultaneous development of large enterprises and medium and small enterprises, of national and local industries, reliance on both modern and traditional technologies, on capital-intensive and labour-intensive industries, etc. The Prime Minister, however, used it to achieve a different result. He stated: "Our strategy has to be to walk on two legs—to have an effective police response while focusing on reducing the sense of deprivation and association." While Dr. Singh thus quite clearly advocated state terrorism against the Maoists, he also, by admitted in saying so that the roots of Maoist insurgency lay in social deprivation and exploitation.
3. Whether there was Maoist presence in Nandigram is not that important. The more important question is: why should they not be present there too? If the CPI(M), TMC, Congress and others could function and preach their policy in Nandigram, why should the Maoists also not be there talking about their objectives among the people? Bibhas Chakraborty, a noted playwright, stated recently that if people of Nandigram take up arms out of their ideological conviction in support of some political party, then what was the harm in it?¹⁸⁹ In fact, if people realize through their own experience that of all the existing

¹⁸⁸ *TOI*, April 14, 2006.

¹⁸⁹ *Dainik Statesman*, November 8, 2007.

paths, Maoism is the only path that can lead to their liberation, then what is the harm in it? Yes, it is harmful to the present government and others closely linked with it; but democratic people can see it from another viewpoint. If the present state fails to provide basic requirements to the people; if it fails to prevent death from hunger and malnutrition from occurring in all parts of the country regularly year after year; if *lakhs* of people commit suicide every year for being unable to pay off their debts; if the state fails to remove the feeling of deprivation from their minds—then it means that the state has already outlived its utility. In that case, one can legitimately ask whether it still has the moral right to exist.

4. Despite the fact that propaganda about the Maoist presence in Nandigram has been given currency very recently in different circles, the Maoists were, quite surprisingly, totally silent about it. Some people say that had there really been the presence of the Maoists, the number of casualties on the side of the people would definitely have been less. Some argued that there could have been some Maoist organizers in Nandigram, but no guerilla squads, as there was no retreat area; and it would have been suicidal for them to send some 100 armed men from outside, as had been reported in the press. It is only on November 15, 2007 that they came out with a press statement entitled *Fight out Fascist CPI(M) goons from Nandigram! Destroy SEZ Programme*, signed by “Somen” on behalf of the WB State Committee of the CPI(Maoist). Parts of that statement read as follows: “We have stood by the Nandigram people as a Communist duty and stand by and organize people’s movements in all forms.... Nandigram is still alive and will rise very soon as a glowing sun....”¹⁹⁰ Such a statement appears to have some bearing on this issue. What one feels is that without the presence of the Maoists in Nandigram, the resistance movement could not have continued for such a long time.

¹⁹⁰ *Press Statement of the WB State Committee of the CPI(Maoist)* captioned “Fight out Fascist CPI(M) goons from Nandigram! Destroy SEZ Programme,” dt. November 15, 2007.

The Message the CPI(M) Wanted to Convey

The CPI(M) has, over the last few years, emerged as the most trusted agent of the foreign agencies and has been engaged more faithfully than probably any other party to act as a pawn in the process of selling out the land of India at the dictates of foreign capital—particularly US imperialist capital and the Indian comprador big bourgeoisie. They would brook no criticism; they would brook no resistance. As members of a parliamentary party, the CPI(M) legislators have taken oaths to abide by the Indian Constitution, but, surprisingly enough, as MLAs, MPs and as the chief minister, they have been trampling underfoot all democratic norms and branding all dissident voices either as “Maoists” or “terrorists,” and have been doing acts which are totally impermissible in the eyes of the same constitution. Since December 2000, they have arrested about 3,500 persons on the charge of their alleged links with the Maoists, the Kamtapuris, SIMI, “Greater Coochbehar” activists and others. The number has mounted with cases being registered against 4,000 people of Nandigram and hundreds in Singur and others connected with food movements in WB districts. The more the crisis of the rulers, the more violent and brutal their attacks on the people become. In fact, through the brutal suppression of the just struggle of the people of Nandigram, the chief minister of West Bengal and the CPI(M) leadership have sent a clear and unmistakable message to the people: Either you surrender to our dictates, give your “consent” to the land acquisition policy, toe the line of “industrialization” that we advocate—or face our armed might and become doomed. There is no scope for democratic space for anyone here. We would never accept your talks about democracy or right to livelihood, freedom of speech or life. We understand just only one language—the language of the gun, rape and violence.

In reality, this is tantamount to inciting civil war. In this way, the CPI(M) leadership and Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee are forcing people to take up arms, as that is the only language that the ruling classes and their political representatives understand. However, by doing so, the CPI(M)-led “left-front” government has, in fact, already placed itself in a difficult, irreconcilable situation. It cannot maintain its rule without the use of brute force; but once it uses force in the way they did in Singur, Nandigram and other places, it is only by discarding the present “democratic” fabric of

the Indian political and social system. This is an insoluble contradiction. One may agree to identify it as “social fascism” or not. But the outcome is not much different. Thus under CPI(M)-rule, democracy is doomed. Ironically, this is a prospect which the Indian ruling classes, whose political representatives the CPI(M) are, can never afford to accept. That would signify the doom of the present system itself.

Defeated, But Not Dead

The people of Nandigram waged one of the most heroic struggles in the history of West Bengal for a long time. They have been shot down twice—once on March 14 and then during November 5–12. They rose up very quickly after the first defeat. And the news that has regularly been coming to light is that they cannot be cowed, browbeaten, or forced into servitude. They are a freedom-loving people, and such people cannot be sold into slavery to foreign masters.

“I will die but not part with my land,” said 70-year-old Mr. Bhagbat Giri of Gokulnagar. The old man, visibly shaken and trembling after witnessing the violence unleashed by CPI(M) cadres, is still determined not to give in. A woman who was allegedly gang-raped on March 14, a 70-year-old woman who cannot forget how she knelt in the canal and begged gun-toting goons to let her live on the same date, an elderly couple who have been forsaken by their only son and whose house was burnt down in the November 6 carnage in Takapara—they are firm in their resolve that they would rather die than give in to the dictates of the ruling party. “We will fight to the death for our land like Matangini,” shouted the old woman who everyone calls Narmada Mashī, as those who stood around her in the Nandigram relief camp stared in surprise at the venom in her voice.¹⁹¹

On November 29, 2007, one Rashbehai Khanra planted the black flag in Nandigram, the banner of defiance, along with his wife Anubha Khanra—on the very day they returned from the hospital after nursing

¹⁹¹ *The Statesmen*, November 28, 2007.

their bullet wounds.¹⁹² The people of Nandigram are bound to rise up again from this defeat. And the symptoms are very clear and unmistakable. They are defeated, but not dead!!

The struggle of the people of Nandigram is essentially a struggle against land acquisition and displacement—a state policy formulated by the powers-that-be at the dictates of their foreign masters. It has proved that the CPI(M) Party has already become the most trusted agents of US imperialism, despite their futile attempts to pretend as anti-imperialists.

Some Observations

Let us now make certain observations on the Nandigram struggle.

1. The struggle of the people of Nandigram is essentially a struggle against land acquisition and displacement, against SEZs and chemical hubs—a state policy formulated by the powers-that-be at the dictates of their US masters. Therefore, it is anti-imperialist in character. Despite historical difference, it is to some extent comparable to the period of the 1940s when the independent *Tamralipta Jatiyo Sarkar* was set up and the whole area stood liberated. The Nandigram movement was, however, not aimed at creating any such liberated zone.
2. Undoubtedly, Singur was, in one sense, the starting point, as it bore the brunt of state repression earlier and at one point of time appeared to be a lost case. (Despite Ratan Tata's much noisy departure, the future of Singur is still uncertain.) Nandigram, no doubt, learnt from the experience of apparent defeat at Singur and adopted both unarmed and armed methods of struggle, fought under the banner of BUPC and developed the struggle to a much higher stage, at least at the initial stage.
3. What is also noticeable is the deep bonding between the Hindus and Muslims in the interest of a common struggle. This unity has been demonstrated by how the enemy attacks were resisted amidst the mingled sounds of the blowing of conch shells and the call of the *muezzin*. Whenever the people were attacked

¹⁹² *Dainik Statesman*, November 30, 2007.

by the goons or whenever the police forces were in sight, the sounds of the conch shell and that of the *muezzin* from the top of the mosques alerted the people that the enemy forces were advancing.

4. The Nandigram struggle witnessed another development. After a long time, the urban people—intellectuals, teachers, students, workers, artists, scientists, human rights and other activists and many others—joined hands with the rural people. It was something not seen for many years.
5. The struggle was not only anti-imperialist; it had also important social implications. The formation of the MMS—a women’s organization—was something new. Their fight against patriarchy, against liquor shops, for the assertion of their right to form committees of their own, to go out at all times of the day and night, formation of people’s committees to settle disputes, even family disputes—all these were unique experiments in Nandigram.
6. The Nandigram struggle is also a struggle which clearly showed that the struggling people looked towards the past history for the sake of their present struggle. As the people of the area fought against the British Raj during the 1940s by adopting such methods as cutting down roads, felling trees on the streets to raise barricades to the entry of the state forces, the people during the present fight also adopted the same methods. The Muslim women looked towards their religion to seek ideological justification for their present armed movement. They said: “The shariat that directs us to remain behind the veil also directs us to face the enemy with knives in hand.”
7. The CPI(M), which still prefers to have the label “Marxist” attached to its organization, has proved to be a trusted, if not the most trusted, agent of foreign capital.
8. Nandigram has truly become the symbol of defiance and resistance. The WB government had to declare, though not in writing as yet, that there would be no chemical hub in Nandigram.

That has become an inspiration for people fighting in other areas against eviction from land and habitats. In fact, Nandigram has become the household name of a fighting people and the message spread far and wide.

9. Later, some activists and also academicians made some comparisons between the Nandigram struggle and the Naxalbari struggle of the late 1960s. This attempt is welcome and one can write a few words on it. The battle being waged in Nandigram is a battle against the Special Economic Zone (SEZ). It is a battle against imperialism, notably US imperialism. The Naxalbari struggle was primarily a struggle for the capture of political power; it signified the beginning of an agrarian revolution under the influence of Mao Zedong Thought. And an agrarian revolution in the context of a semi-feudal and semi-colonial country like India has necessarily to be an anti-imperialist struggle as well. Naxalbari was the product of a long conscious theoretical and practical effort initiated by Charu Mazumdar and his comrades. That agrarian struggle struck deep roots in the Indian soil and nothing remained the same after Naxalbari. The *Eight Documents* that he wrote provided the ideological basis of that struggle. Nandigram, on the other hand, began as a spontaneous effort on the part of the people against forcible acquisition of their land by the State and it drew sustenance from the Tebhaga and the anti-British national liberation struggles. Land is the issue in both the cases. However, in Naxalbari, the political issue—the issue of the capture of political power—was more pronounced. In Nandigram, on the other hand, the immediate issue was livelihood. The Buddhadev-led WB government with the connivance of the Manmohan Singh-led central government, has tried to take away land from the sons and daughters of the soil in the interests of foreign imperialism, and the peasants have opposed it and adopted all available means to prevent the takeover. Naxalbari acted as the source of inspiration to the democratic and revolutionary people all over the country, and Nandigram was no exception. Nandigram has

united people from all walks of life, irrespective of religion, gender, class and creed, and acted as a source of inspiration to people in other states to carry forward the anti-SEZ movement. Naxalbari led to the creation of a revolutionary Communist party in India—the CPI(M-L). Of course, the Nandigram struggle was not aimed at the creation of such a party as it is there already. The Naxalbari movement was qualitatively more important than Nandigram. While the first was more all-encompassing, the second was, in a sense, partial, but formed as part of the broader movement.

THE HISTORIC MOVEMENT IN LALGARH 2008–2011

“Kichhui porenā pate, Tai banduk nile hate, Shalboner doshyi chhele, Eto sahos̄h kothay pele?” (“Prolonged agony of hunger, Lit up your raging anger. Brave youth of Shalbon! How did you get the courage to lift the gun?”) These were some of the lines of a song sung by the people's singer and composer, Kabir Suman, while celebrating the historic Lalgarh movement in the Jangal Mahal area of Eastern India. It is hunger and state repression that impelled young sons and daughters of the soil to take up the gun in the vast Sal forest zone—so sings the singer.

The region known as Jangal Mahal roughly covers three districts of West Bengal viz, West Medinipur, Bankura and Purulia, although it extends to the neighbouring Jharkhand state. This region is inhabited to a large extent by the *Adivasi* people, having surnames such as Murmu, Kisku, Baske, Singh, Mahato, Pratihār, Tudu, Soren, Hembrom and others. According to the census of 2001, out of a total population of 8 *crores* plus in West Bengal, the *Adivasi* people number around 44 *lakhs*, i.e., 5.5%. This region, like many other *Adivasi* regions, is one of the most backward regions of our country with hardly any facility for drinking water, electricity, roads, medical treatment or education. Apart from the main road that links one district with another, there is hardly any road worth its name. Most of the roads are *kutchā* roads, and during the monsoon, these get muddy and many villages remain submerged and completely isolated from the outside world. People depend on wells for drinking water and many of the tube-wells that were set up by the government remain non-functional.

The medical facilities are meagre; primary health centres remain on paper only; one would have to take the patient for miles together to get to the main road and then take a bus to Jhargram or Medinipur hospitals. There are primary schools in many places, but the rate of student attendance at the higher level has come down to a significant extent over the decades, as census reports of 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991 and 2001 would testify. The *Adivasi* children are the worst victims of malnutrition. According to a report of the National Sample Survey-2 (1998–99), of nearly 50% of children suffering from malnutrition, *Adivasi* children are the worst hit. As many as 95% of the *Adivasi* children suffer from anemia. Malnutrition

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comes from lack of food, proper food, in short, from hunger—and this hunger is the result of utter neglect by the successive governments both at the centre and also in the state. Add to this the decades, nay, centuries of neglect, humiliation and repression suffered by these “wretched of the earth” at the hands of the elite classes, government officials, political bosses and the police forces.

Such a region only a few years back became the site of an historic struggle the likes of which was not seen anywhere else in our country for a long time. In one sense, it heralded the resurgence of the Naxalite/Maoist movement in West Bengal in a far more advanced form since the movement as a whole suffered the first major setback with the arrest and death of Charu Mazumdar in the Lalbazar police lockup in July 1972.

Lalgarh Movement

The place called Lalgarh is situated near Jhargram on the northwestern side of the West Medinipur district of West Bengal and not very far from the Salboni area in the same district. There around 5,000 acres of land have been acquired for the Salboni project, of which 4,500 acres have been handed over by the government and 500 acres have been purchased directly by Jindal Steel India from the landowners. According to newspaper reports, a large portion of this land was vested with the government for distribution among landless tribal people as part of the much publicized land reform programme and also included forested tracts. Moreover, although the land was originally acquired for a “usual” steel plant, in September 2007, Jindal Steel got SEZ status for the project, with active backing from the state government, which, on a regular basis, dispensed with the requirements for following most regulations for building and running the plant—including such crucial requirements as doing an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). A government that has in reality sold itself out to big capital—both domestic and foreign—is not at all bothered about the setting up of an SEZ having a polluting steel plant in the middle of a forested area, brutally displacing tribals from their land and endangering their means of survival. It is, thus, quite understandable that there could be major grievances among the tribals against this, although the mainstream media, as one of the spokespersons of the state policy, constantly portrayed a very rosy picture of the entire project.

The Beginning

The circumstances leading to the Lalgarh rising were as follows: On November 2, 2008, the WB Chief Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya and the Central Iron and Steel Minister Ram Vilas Paswan went to Salboni to inaugurate the Special Economic Zone complex of the Jindal Steel industrial house along with a huge police convoy. On their way back, there was a landmine explosion when the convoy of the Central Iron and Steel Minister, Ram Vilas Paswan, passed, and as a result, a police car was hit and some policemen were injured. Some time before the explosion, the convoy of the chief minister had passed by. Usually, the police harassed, tortured, detained and humiliated anyone they could find in the area after every Maoist attack, as had been corroborated by a number of fact-finding teams comprising civil rights activists and others. This time, in order to conceal their own failure in providing security to their political bosses and to save their skins from their seniors, the police went on a rampage in the tribal villages. The police and the CRPF unleashed a reign of terror in 35 villages, encompassing the entire tribal belt of Lalgarh.

Around 4 AM on November 5th, 2008, a huge police force entered Chhotopelia village of Lalgarh and let loose a reign of terror. They attacked and beat up the *Adivasi* women like mercenary goons. Chhitamoni Murmu was asleep in her hut when she suddenly woke to see that someone was trying to forcibly take her husband. When she resisted, she was molested and hit on the left eye with the rifle butt and she ultimately lost her eyesight. Fourteen other women also sustained injuries on the body, leg, and hand. Some among them are Panmoni Murmu, Domani Murmu and Gangamoni Murmu. Kshamananda Mahato, an old retired schoolteacher of the village. Surya Mahato of Gormal, Salboni were picked up and detained. On November 3rd, they picked up three school students, namely Eben Murmu, Goutam Patra and Buddhadev Patra when they were returning from the Kantapahari market after listening to a *baul* song programme. Three other persons—Bhagabat Hansda, Sunil Hansda and Sunil Mandi—were also arrested on 5th. The policemen went to arrest one Dipak Protihar. His pregnant wife, Lakshmi Protihar, was forcibly dragged and thrown on the road and beaten up. The whole operation was led by Sandip Sinha Roy, the

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police IC of Lalgarh police station. The police hurled abusive language and picked them up on the charge of being Maoists linked to the mine blast.

Resistance Starts

The way the people of Lalgarh reacted was somewhat similar to that adopted by the people of Nadigram. What began as rumblings of protest took the shape of a spontaneous mass uprising the next day. On November 7th, when the ruling CPI(Marxist) was “observing” the anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution throughout West Bengal, ten thousand Santhal men and women, armed with traditional weapons, obstructed the roads leading to Lalgarh, cutting it off from Medinipur and Bankura. Roads were dug up and tree trunks were placed on the road to obstruct the entry of police vehicles, in the same way as it had been done in Nandigram.

The police jeep and the CPI(M) motorcycle gangs have long been the symbols of oppression and terror for villagers throughout West Bengal, so this digging up of roads, besides actually preventing the entry of these agents of oppression, have become a symbol of defiance and liberation. Towards the night of November 7th, the people also disconnected telephone and electricity lines, virtually converting a vast area into a liberated zone. The apex social organization of the Santhals, the “Bharat Jakat Majhi Madwa Juan Gaonta” took up the leadership of the struggle, although the leader of the organization admitted that the organization had no control over the movement; rather, the organization was under the control of the movement.

Smaller organizations of the tribals, such as the “Kherwal Junit Gaonta,” that had been playing active roles in the struggle, openly called for armed resistance, stating that there was no way other than this for the survival of the *Adivasis*.

The people immediately cut off the roads in large areas, fell down trees to block the roads in order to prevent the entry of police jeeps and the CPI(M) *harmads* and organized huge demonstrations and processions. They demonstrated in front of the Lalgarh police station, were reported to have attacked a bus and then took on the police forces. They had already cut off the electricity lines and other means of communication. Soon the movement spread to new areas. Lalgarh was cut off from Medinipur, Bankura and Jhargram. The roads to the Jhitka forest and Nokat were cut

off. On November 6th, the *Adivasis* armed with their traditional weapons like bows and arrows numbering about 12,000 gheraoed the Lalgarh police station and damaged the cars stationed within the police station compound. They declared through the public address system that unless the police explained why they had spilled the blood of the *Adivasi* people, the situation would deteriorate further. The pent up anger among them was so intense that even the women bayed for police blood. In the name of arresting the Maoists, the police forces let loose a continued reign of terror, beat up the people, humiliated them, and picked up innocent people. The movement spread to other *Adivasi* districts—from West Medinipur to Bankura, Purulia, Hooghly and Birbhum.¹⁹³

Phases of the Movement

We are dealing with a movement that went on for three years from early November 2008 to late November 2011 when the Mallejula Koteswar Rao was reportedly betrayed to the enemy and brutally killed in a fake encounter in Kishenji. This historic movement underwent different phases, each having its own characteristics, from the day of the so-called mine attack on the police convoy of the West Bengal chief minister against the inauguration of the Salboni SEZ project (an act reportedly done out of overenthusiasm by local cadres, but not approved by the Maoist central leadership in charge of West Bengal), to the holding of Lok Sabha elections, the entry of joint paramilitary forces, people's bold resistance, Maoist counterattacks, state repression, the formation of people's militia¹⁹⁴ and other developments, features were many and novel. However, as it is still not easy to identify each phase within a specific time span, we would prefer to trace the movement and mention its features as it went on.

Formation of the People's Committee Against Police Atrocity (PCAPA)

Like the people of Nandigram, the people of Lalgarh formed their own mass forum to give some organizational shape to their movement. In Nandigram, it was the BUPC or the Committee to Resist Displacement

¹⁹³ For details, see report in *Dainik Statesman* (henceforth DS), November 3-9, 2008; *Bartaman*, November 8, 2008.

¹⁹⁴ "Chhatradhar's outfit gets an armed wing," *Hindusthan Times* (henceforth HT), October 28, 2009.

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from Land. In Lalgarh, it was “Pulishi Santrash Birodhi Janasadharaner Committee” or PSBJC, i.e., People’s Committee Against Police Atrocity (henceforth PCAPA). As Chhatradhar Mahato, one of the main spokespersons of the PSBJC told me, this committee was formed on November 8th, 2008 at Dalilpur Chowk in Lalgarh with representatives from 95 villages. It was formed because it was not possible for the existing social organization led by the elders, *Bharat Jakat Majhi Marwa* to stand up to the new challenges of the time. As one daily reported, villagers accused it of “betraying the tribal cause.”¹⁹⁵ Later, as the movement spread, the number of villages that came under its influence rose to more than 200. One of the first decisions of the committee was to prepare their charter of demands. The 13-point charter of demands was as follows:

1. The police superintendent (Mr. Rajesh Kumar Singh of West Medinipur) must apologize publicly with his hands holding his ears for what his forces did to the people. He will declare publicly that henceforth, he will stop arresting people, particularly women.
2. Those policemen who on November 5th (2008) at 4:30 in the morning physically assaulted the women in Chhotopelia village, must do *naake-kshot*, i.e., lie down on the road with their noses touching the surface and crawl by rubbing their noses on the road from Dalilpur Chowk to Chhotopelia village.
3. Each of the women of Chhotopelia village who have been physically injured on the eyes, hands and legs due to police brutality must be given compensation amounting to Rs. 2 *lakh*.
4. All the persons arrested so far in connection with the Salboni explosion must be released.
5. The persons who had been arrested during 1998–2008 in West Medinipur on the suspicion of having Maoist links and implicated in false cases should have their names removed from the charge sheets and be allowed to not attend the courts and police stations.

¹⁹⁵ *The Telegraph*, November 15, 2008.

6. Police must stop the indiscriminate arrest of people of the locality.
7. Immediate withdrawal of all paramilitary camps from the areas such as those of Dharampur, Kalaimuri and Ramgarh police stations.
8. The government should immediately withdraw the statement that the blueprint of the Salboni explosion was prepared by Sasadhar Mahato in Bansher village.
9. Police must stop giving false accusations and attacks on clubs and *gaontas* (i.e., organizations) set up by the people.
10. Police must stop patrolling villages from 5 in the evening until 6 in the morning.
11. Police must stop setting up police camps in school buildings, hospitals and *panchayat* offices and close down those that have already been set up.
12. The CPI(M) must stop attacking the blockaders of roads at Humgarh. The vehicles that were damaged due to such attacks on November 15th at a place on National Highway No. 60 between Moyrakata and Rasakundu—30 bicycles and 2 motorcycles—must be compensated for and a sum of Rs. 12,000 cash and a bank passbook be returned. Arrangements should be made for the medical treatment of Mohan Tudu and a compensation of Rs. 2 *lakh* given to him.
13. In case of attacks by CPI(M) *harmads* on the *Adivasis* and innocent people, the administration will be held responsible and adequate compensation be given by the administration itself.

This charter of demands was published in the form of a leaflet by Sidhu Soren on behalf of the PSBJC and was reprinted from Kolkata.

This charter of demands is an interesting study. No doubt, they are overwhelmingly directed against police repression. Demands are for the withdrawal of charges, release of political prisoners and the withdrawal of the newly set up police outposts in schools, hospitals or *panchayat* buildings. There are judgements of the Calcutta High Court against the conver-

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sion of schoolrooms into police camps. Patrolling after dusk, indiscriminate arrests, picking up people according to the sweet will of the police and subjecting them to all forms of humiliation are instances of state terror. The role of the CPI(M) and their hired *harmads* who were hand in glove with the state machinery was also mentioned.

However, probably the most interesting demands are the first two, according to which certain punishments were to be meted out to the perpetrators of state violence. The peasants did not say that they would like the oppressive police officers and their forces to be physically assaulted as the policemen themselves had done and are in the habit of always doing. In fact, the demand for a public apology with hands grabbing the ears is no physical assault at all. The demand for crawling with noses rubbing the road may cause a bit of physical damage; but this is nothing in comparison to what the policemen themselves had done to these poor people. In one of the leaflets captioned “Pulish o Proshashonke Samajikbhabe Boycott korun” (“Initiate a social boycott against the police and administration”) dated January 1, 2009, the PSBJC asked:

We are not demanding a death sentence for that police officer under whose command the police forces perpetrated beast-like brutality on the people. What we are demanding is their public apology. The police forces that could rape Behula Mahato in Belpahari, could force Sulochana Kalindi to undress in order to determine her sex, the police forces that force school girls to untie their inner garments in the name of search operations, those who could kick the eight-month pregnant woman of Kantapahari named Lakshmi Prothiar to the ground, those policemen who could not think twice before hitting Chhitamoni Murmu on her left eye that led to the loss of her eyesight—why can't this police force hold their own ears or do *nake kshot* [rubbing their nose on the ground]? Did those beasts in human figures feel ashamed when they committed all these crimes?

In fact, however innocent these demands might seem, acceptance of these demands would mean the public humiliation of the state machinery, dethronement from power and their submission to the will of the people.

It is, therefore, highly unlikely that they would accept this punishment at the hands of those whom they had been oppressing for ages. That is why the police were prepared to accept all the other demands but these. But those two demands were “totally impossible to accept,” as senior police officials said. For the *Adivasis*, however, these demands were crucial.

In the Jangal Mahal area, the police forces have been facing a *social boycott*. This call was given by the PSBJC because of police reluctance to make a public apology for their torture. All grocery owners, cobblers, hair cutters stopped service to the police. The police found it difficult to get daily necessities. At the same time, the Maoist threat kept them indoors within their camps and police stations. Posters were put up in different places in support of the police boycott. Even the water supply was stopped. As reported in the press, one grocer gave back all the money to the police without supplying any articles. Such developments clearly show how powerful the mass movement became.¹⁹⁶

In order to build up confidence against the notorious motor-cycle borne gangsters which the CPI(M) was assembling, students affiliated to the PSBJC also held motorcycle rallies. All local CPI(M) leaders were shifted to police camps for their safety. The secretary of the Belpahari local committee, Hariram Singh, the secretary of the Shilda local committee and Anil Mahato, secretary of the Banspahari local committee of the CPI(M) were forced to stay in the local police camps to save their skins from public wrath.

New Demands

In course of time, certain new demands were placed in the name of the “*Adivasi*-Mulbasi People's Committee” of Purulia on January 25th, 2009. These new demands dealt with people's livelihood; self-government; employment opportunity; a new development model and the rejection of the state-sponsored model; promotion of the Santhali language and culture; and health, education and agriculture. We are reproducing some relevant portions of the text after rendering them into English. The demands are as follows:

¹⁹⁶ DS, February 4, 2009.

1. Oppression of all types on the *Adivasi-moolbasi* people must stop. The police must stop arresting and torturing all members of opposition parties, dissident persons and ordinary villagers on cooked-up charges by branding them as “Maoists” at the instigation of the ruling CPI(M) leaders. Police must stop all illegal acts such as arrests without warrants, intrusion into houses without warrants, arrests without furnishing memos of arrest, third-degree torture in police lockups, beating of village people, damaging crops in the field, looting of money and property while raiding houses, rape and torture of women, intimidation or threat, *badli* (substitute) arrests, i.e., father in the absence of son, obstructions to free movement of people on the roads and molestation of women in the name of checking, taking pictures without consent, forcing villagers to go to the police stations, alluring and pressuring villagers to show jungle paths, i.e., using them as human shields in dangerous zones, forcing and bribing the villagers to act as police informers, etc. All these should be stopped.
2. There should be the general and widespread improvement of the district. All poor villagers should be given cultivable land. Small irrigation network should be developed in the villages. Old dams and canals should be renovated and turned into working condition. Cold storage should be set up in every block for the preservation of fruits. There should be improvement of the infrastructure of the village markets. Peasants should be given seeds, fertilizers, pesticides and bank loans at cheap prices. The government must ensure just prices of agricultural crops.
3. As Purulia is a backward area, its rent cannot be fixed at the same rate as those of developed districts, such as Bardhaman, Howrah, Hooghly, etc. As there was no improvement in agriculture in Purulia, all rents should be waived.
4. The forest zones of the Ajodhya Hills area should be protected. Forest resources cannot be destroyed in connivance with the forest department. Indiscriminate production of charcoal and felling of trees should be stopped. As the Japanese hydro-elec-

tric project has done much harm to the vast forest zones, a programme for widespread reforestation should be undertaken as compensation. At the time of social reforestation, stress should be placed on the planting of many indigenous precious trees and fruit trees rather than on foreign breeds such as Sonajhuri, Eucalyptus, etc. The just prices of inflammable trees, Sal leaves, Kendu leaves, etc. should be ensured.

5. Industries that destroy the national forest life such as Japanese hydro-electric project, sponge-iron industry, etc. should not be taken up. There should be agriculture-based industries and industries that serve the people's needs. There should also be the revival of bidi and lac industries which had a rich heritage. There should be the development of rural technical and hand-craft industries.
6. Workers doing their jobs should be paid a minimum daily wage of Rs. 125. Their wages should be paid on time and there should not be any harassment in this regard.
7. The "100-day work" programme should be properly and wholly implemented. All types of government and party-corruption relating to such projects as the 100-day work, BPL (Below Poverty Line)-card, Old-Age Pension, Indira Ahasan, etc. must be stopped.
8. Electricity and potable water should be provided to all villages in the district. Health centres should be set up and improvements made, ensuring the supply of free medicine to the poor and introducing medical van service to distant villages.
9. Improvements should immediately be made to the education situation, which is already in a very bad shape in the district. The number of schools at the primary and secondary levels should be increased. All vacant teaching and non-teaching posts should be immediately filled in the schools. All corruption relating to midday meals should be stopped. The Manbhum University should immediately be opened.

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10. Start introducing the Santhali language in every government work. There should be the introduction of complete education from the primary to the higher stage in the Santhali language. Steps should be taken for the preservation and culture of the Kurumali Mundari language.
11. Steps should be taken to promote the rich folk-culture of the district. The day of the important Sabar festival should be declared a government holiday. The Satari/Sarna religion of the *Adivasis* should be recognised.
12. The CPI(M)-led government's policy of promoting drinking among the simple, innocent *Adivasi moolbasi* people should be discontinued. All liquor shops within 1 km of school and college complexes should have their licenses cancelled. The practice of illegal liquor business with the connivance of the police administration and the CPI(M) leaders should be completely stopped.
13. There should be the establishment of self-rule in Jangal Mahal and with that end in view, an autonomous body named "Jangal Mahal Autonomous Body" be constituted, embracing Purulia, Bankura and West Medinipur. There should be a special economic package for the three districts. Those police officials and bureaucrats—outsiders who harbour an attitude of hatred towards the *Adivasi-moolbasi* people in the three districts should be removed and in all branches, *Adivasis* and sons and daughters of the soil should be given proper employment opportunity.

These demands had important implications. Many of them are against state repression perpetrated by both the ruling party and the state machinery. There is also a blueprint for an alternative model of development, which is pro-people. The promotion of agriculture, agro-industries, handicraft industries, revival of dying industries, opposition to destruction of natural resources are anti-globalization and hence anti-imperialist in nature. The fixation of minimum wages for the workers is a basic demand which is often flouted by the government and CITU leaders. Demands for electricity, potable water, health centres, schools are such demands the simple raising of which demonstrate the situation the basic masses of our

country have been reduced to over the last 62 years since independence. It is a commentary on the so-called “development” model introduced by the Indian ruling classes and their political representatives, who had sold out our country's resources by hoodwinking people and also by drowning their resistance in pools of blood. Another notable feature is the demand for the introduction of the Santhali language and the Alchiki script, which has almost become extinct. In fact, as reported in the press, as a result of globalization and the domination of one language over another, thousands of indigenous languages had already gone into oblivion and many more are awaiting the same fate in different countries of the world. These things take place before our very eyes, but many of us are quite ignorant about it. The new model of development should bring within its scope this element and give it due importance. In fact, in areas where people's struggles are being waged in whatever form, local languages show signs of resurgence, local writers, artists, singers come up and leave signs of their creativity. It is in this way that even extinct languages can develop. This is the experience of the tribal people in the struggling region of Dandakaranya as well. The opposition against liquor sales is, of course, a social demand; use of liquor creates animosity within families and leads to domestic violence. The demand for the formation of an autonomous body for the three *Adivasi*-populated districts is a natural demand arising out of a deep sense of socio-economic deprivation and exploitation.

New Social experiments: Formation of Village Committees

The *Adivasis* of India are one of the most oppressed and downtrodden sections of the people in the country. Governments came and went, but the condition of the tribal people did not change; on the contrary, it went from bad to worse. The *panchayati* system proved to be a tool in the hands of the ruling classes and ruling parties. Thus the tribal people had to fight not only against the police repression, an anti-people government and the ruling CPI(M), they, at the same time, felt that unless they took up the management of their own government themselves, there would possibly be no end to their present plight. What they attempted has important implications.

In the thick of their struggle, the people of Lalgarh organized a public meeting at Ramgarh on January 1, 2009, and there they took the historic

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decision to form *gram* committees (village committees) in as many villages as possible.¹⁹⁷ As Chhatradhar Mahato told me, each of these committees would have 10 members, of which 5 would be men and 5 women. One area committee would be formed with representation from 10 villages and the number of members would be 20. Above this, there would be a central committee comprising 35 members, of which 12 would be women and 23 men. Initially, the central committee was confined within Lalgarh, but later it spread to other blocks as well. The total number of villages where village committees were formed was then more than 1,000 and the movement spread steadily despite severe state terror let loose by joint forces and the CPI(M) goons.

The task of the village committee is to implement the village development programme, to resolve problems of different types—both within and outside the family. If it failed to resolve some issue, then it would have to be referred to the area committee, and, failing that, to the central committee. On being asked whether the committee had by now to confront any dispute on rural issues, both Sukhlal Soren and Chhatradhar Mahato referred to one incident. One peasant near Kantapahari was not allowed to cultivate and use a shallow tube-well due to resistance from the whole village; the village committee intervened and decided that water would have to be supplied on cash payment. There was another case relating to the theft of cattle—a very common occurrence in the villages. It was settled through discussion.

Women's Struggle

The movement of the tribal people also helped to free women from various social shackles. Previously, the *Majhi Marwa*—traditional tribal body—adopted a conservative attitude towards the free movement of women and wanted to restrict them within the four walls of their homes. Their present struggle freed them from such social bondage. The active participation of village women in the struggles, sometimes even surpassing their menfolk in numbers, hit hard at patriarchy and social subordina-

¹⁹⁷ For the list of 187 villages (the number increased as the movement spread), the names of which I have been able to get, see booklet by Amit Bhattacharyya, *Singur to Lalgarh via Nandigram Rising Flames of People's Anger against Displacement, Destitution and the State Terror*. Published by K. N. Pandit on behalf of Visthapan Birodhi Jan Vikash Aandolan, Ranchi, April 2009, pp. 45-47.

tion. There were many other problems. One of them, of course, related to the consumption of liquor by the menfolk. It had all along been creating family problems everywhere. In order to resolve various issues relating to women—social subordination, women's liberation, etc.—a women's committee of the PSBJC was formed on Women's Day on March 8, 2009 at a public meeting at a place called Narcha under Jhargram. It was attended by about 5,000 persons. The Women's Committee was to act as the women's branch of the PSBJC and would not only resist police repression and attacks by CPI(M)-sponsored *harmads*, but also fight against domestic oppression. Srabani Soren of village Boropelia, Lalgarth, who became the convenor of the Women's Committee, declared in her speech that women had become the main victims of state-terror and Party-terror; they had also been subjected to beatings by their drunkard husbands and many other forms of repression and social inequality. The committee, according to Srabani Soren, would fight against all these.¹⁹⁸ This committee has much in common with the "Matangini Mahila Samiti" formed in Nandigram during the peak period of people's resistance there.

Maoists in Lalgarth and Their Role in the Struggle

Ever since Dr. Manmohan Singh, the Indian prime minister described, in April 2006, the Maoist insurgency as the "single greatest threat to the internal security of the country since independence"—a threat that, according to him, had to be rooted out like a "virus"—the central and state governments sharpened their weapons to do everything they could to deal with that threat. The state of West Bengal was no exception. It and the ruling CPI(M) cadres pursued a policy of brutal persecution of the Maoists and Maoist sympathizers like the witch-hunts in medieval Europe. Not only the Maoists, but all dissident voices were branded as "Maoists," attacked and maimed in all possible ways by trampling underfoot all democratic and constitutional norms.

From the 1980s and 1990s when the MCC and CPI(M-L) People's War (PW) started political work among the *Adivasis* in the West Medinipur district, the tribal people had to face attacks from the state and the party cadres. Since 1998, when the CPI(M-L) PW started working in

¹⁹⁸ DS, March 9, 2009.

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this area as a leaflet published by Sidhu Soren described, there had been a steady rise in the intensity of persecution of the tribal and other innocent people. Behula Kalindi of Laljol, Belpahari was raped by the police, girl students of schools were forced to strip in the name of routine checking and an old woman was beaten up with a bamboo stick; these are some of the instances of state-sponsored brutality that the people had to face. There were also other methods of sadistic torture. Details were published in different leaflets and field-investigation reports by many democratic and civil rights organizations from time to time. It was in the jungles of Jhitka that the body of Asim Das of Kanchan, a Maoist activist, was found on March 3rd, 2003. According to civil rights activists, he was arrested, tortured and killed in a fake encounter. This was the second incidence of a fake encounter killing of Maoist activists in WB, according to their findings.

In fact, there is nothing unusual about radical political forces being active among the *Adivasis*. Five days after the mine explosion, the Maoists, in one of their press statements, acknowledged that they were responsible for it and that there would be more such blasts—and that such anti-people projects as SEZ would not be allowed in Salboni.¹⁹⁹ However, the presence and participation of the Maoists or similar political forces in no way delegitimizes the seemingly spontaneous and democratic expression of people's anger. This was made amply clear by what Arati Murmu, a woman who had gone to block the Lalgarh police station and who had been assaulted by the police, had to say:

Whenever there is a Maoist attack the police raid our villages and torture our women and children. For how long will we suffer such suffering at the hands of the police? All of us are Maoists, let the police arrest us. We have come out.

Since the announcement of the dates for the Lok Sabha elections, the WB government and the Election Commission started talking about the need to send police and central forces to ensure the smooth holding of the elections in Lalgarh. In fact, for several months, the government was left totally in the dark about what had been going on inside Jangal Mahal, because of the PSBJC's police boycott call and prevention of police

¹⁹⁹ *Ananda Bazar Patrika* (henceforth ABP), November 8, 2008; *Sanbad Pratidin*, November 8, 2008.

entry into the area. There was good reason to believe that in the name of the smooth holding of elections, the police and their CPI(M) political bosses would actually try to capture the area, set up police and paramilitary camps in as many areas as possible and facilitate the entry of the armed *harmads* in the Nandigram style by drowning resistance movements in pools of blood. However, despite tall talks, the WB government was quite aware of the risks involved in taking such administrative steps that might result in an *Adivasi* rebellion, the serious implications of which they could hardly wish away. The *Adivasi* leaders also made it amply clear that any political party could enter the area for an election campaign and go out unharmed, but they would not be allowed to be accompanied by police forces. And if the police sought to enter the area by applying force against the people's committee's dictum, the people would be forced to resist with whatever arms they could lay their hands on; for this the administration alone would be held responsible.

The government decided to test the strength of the *Adivasi* movement by sending central paramilitary forces on March 21st, 2009. But they were stopped at Peliachawk in Lalgarh by the tribals. As one leading English daily reported, the Maoist-backed villagers waylaid them, snatched their rifles and held them hostage for five hours. Large groups of women blocked and barricaded police reinforcements sent to rescue the Indian Reserve Battalion (IRB) *jawans*. The PSBJC leaders compelled the IRB assistant commandant to give a written "undertaking" that "police had done wrong by torturing tribal women at Chhotopelia on November 5, 2008 and killing three PCPA workers at Khasjungle on February 2." Thus after five hours, the IRB *jawans* were set free.²⁰⁰ When the central forces were thus prevented from entering Lalgarh, the DGP made trips by helicopter to make aerial surveys from above to locate the activities of the Maoist armed squads, which, according to them, had already been firmly entrenched in the Lalgarh area.

Meanwhile, two members of the PSBJC—Monoranjan Singh and Bishnu Singh—who had disappeared from Phulkusma where they went to buy goats on March 23rd, were found killed and their decomposed bodies were found in Majhgheria in Bankura not far from Belpahari in West

²⁰⁰ *Times of India*, (henceforth TOI), March 22, 2009.

Medinipur. Chhatradhar Mahato put the blame for their murder on the Salwa Judum type resistance committee formed by the CPI(M) and the police. In protest, the PSBJC organized a public meeting at Simulpal—a hilly area on the Jharkhand-Bengal border and gave a call to oust the CPI(M) and the police from the Jangal Mahal area.²⁰¹ They also reiterated their decision to continue the boycott of the police forces. Meanwhile, the PSBJC lost another of its members, Indrajit Sahis of Maitipara, Dheta who disappeared after attending the Simulpal meeting held on March 29th and whose bruised body was recovered on April 1st. According to the People's Committee, he too was the victim of attack by the Salwa Judum-type resistance committee.

That the Lalgarh movement had steeled the resolve of the tribal people and spread to other areas is evident from other incidents where police forces who tried to enter villages on the claim of arresting Maoists were prevented from doing so. Alleging that Maoist squads had camped in the Ajudhya Hills, the police forces of the Baghmundi, Balarampur and Arsha police stations started long-range patrolling with the CRPF on the night of March 26th. At the early hours of the morning when the state and central forces, allegedly on a tip-off that some Maoist squad members had taken shelter there, were about to enter Chhat Rajera village, the villagers surrounded them and preventing them from entering the area. When a boy was beaten up by the police, the situation went out of control. The whole force was encircled and at the front row were women. They made it clear that before entering the villages, the police would have to give prior information and that they would not be allowed to torture and beat up people in the name of search operations. New rescue police teams arrived. The state machinery had to beat a retreat in the face of the united resistance and courage of the villagers.²⁰² The Lalgarh movement has started to bear fruit.

Lok Sabha Elections and Struggles Ahead

The situation that the people of Lalgarh were confronted with was totally unprecedented. Some time after the election process was finalized, the WB government, taking the cue from the Election Commissioner

²⁰¹ *SP*, March 30, 2009.

²⁰² *ABP*, March 28, 2009.

declared that police and central forces would enter Lalgarh to facilitate the election process, and that the Maoists had already encamped there and were bent on disturbing the entire process with their call for poll boycott. On the issue of the Lok Sabha elections, Chhatradhar Mahato said that the people of Lalgarh had been keeping very well *sans* the presence of the police forces and would remain so during elections. Their committee was not against elections; in fact, the people of Jangal Mahal would definitely participate in the election process to oust the “left-front” candidates from power. But that could be done without the presence of the state forces. If the police and central forces were allowed to enter, they would also have armed CPI(M) *harmads* closely following behind in police uniforms (as they had in Nadigram earlier), and both the state forces and the CPI(M) goons would then try to let loose a reign of fascist terror to ensure the victory of “left-front” candidates. On the question of protection for polling officials, Chhatradhar Mahato said at a press conference held at Kolkata on April 5th, 2009 at the Press Club that although there was no need for protection for the polling officials as no harm would be done to them by anyone, the people themselves would take responsibility for their free entry and free exit along with ballot boxes. In case state and paramilitary forces entered the area against the will of the people, then the people would definitely resist with their traditional weapons like bows and arrows and the committee would have no option other than giving a call for the boycott of elections. But the home secretary, government of West Bengal was quite adamant to use his muscle power and bluntly declared that forces would definitely enter Lalgarh “at all costs.” He alleged that the Maoists were using the People’s Committee (PCAPA) as a front. “Both the Maoists and the committee are against the police entering the area. Chhatradhar Mahato’s outfit (the committee) is operating as [a] front, backed by Maoists.”²⁰³ The pertinent question is: if the People’s Committee is a front organization of the CPI(Maoist) as the home secretary asserted, then how would he explain the diametrically different position taken on the issue of elections by the Maoists on the one hand, and the People’s Committee on the other?

While the state government had been preparing itself for the brutal state action ahead, the people of Lalgarh were also making preparations for

²⁰³ *The Telegraph*, April 5, 2009.

resistance against it in their own way. The committee set up check posts at two points of entry into Lalgarh—Barapelia and Ramgarh. Sensing that policemen and their CPI(M) *harmads*-accomplices-informers could also enter in plain dresses, they decided to search all vehicles entering the area to prevent the entry of unwanted persons along with arms and ammunition.²⁰⁴ For so long, the people had been familiar with the police check-posts; now struggling people devised a new weapon—the people's check-posts. Thus the Lalgarh movement added another weapon to their arsenal for fighting police atrocities. It is not important to consider here whether such an effort would be long lasting or not. In all likelihood, at least at the initial stage, the barricade would crumble at the first armed push, with much bloodshed. What is important is the idea of creating such a barricade, the thought that this was the point of entry into people's area—the symbol of people's power, however weak it might appear to be. And this method would certainly be adopted along with others in other areas of struggle. The Lalgarh struggle has provided many lessons to those eager to learn.

New Model of Development by the People's Committee

The model of development the Indian ruling classes and their political representatives adopted since they came to power in 1947 was the policy of dependence on foreign capital and technology, which led to the selling out of our country's economy, water, land and vast natural resources to foreign imperialist capital and domestic comprador big capital. It was the Naxalbari movement and the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) led by Charu Mazumdar that first raised the demand for radical land reforms, opposition to and confiscation of imperialist capital and, at the same time, formulated the blueprint for an alternative model of development, which was attempted at a rudimentary level in the Naxalbari region. At a later period, the Maoists put into practice an alternative development programme in Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and Dandakaranya regions covering some mineral-rich states. The main elements of it are self-reliance, equitable distribution of resources and property among the people, distribution of land to the tiller, all-round development in the countryside based on

²⁰⁴ DS, April 5, 2009.

people's initiative and voluntary labour, and the weeding out of foreign influence and control over our economy, society, culture and politics.

Health Centres

It is well known that the WB state government did not do anything to introduce genuine developmental work in the Jangal Mahal area, not to speak of uplifting the living conditions of the people. What the so-called "left-front" government had failed, nay, preferred not to do, was sincerely attempted by the PCAPA. The long-neglected health services started work at the committee's initiative. The health centre in Kantapahari had been set up two years previously by the government, but remained unutilised—a sad commentary on the apathy of the powers-that-be to the plight of the people. The People's Committee took control over it and started new free health centres in Belpahari and Chakadoba with an ambulance van and a team of doctors from Kolkata. Nearly 1,500 patients visited the centres every day. Such centres partially met the long-standing needs of the people and were called "People's hospitals." A centre started functioning with one physician and six health workers. Dr. Shanti Mullick, a physician who visited a centre from Kolkata, said:

Most of the patients have been suffering from malnutrition. One has to see in order to believe it. The health services here are very bad. Although the infrastructure is there, there are no doctors, no medicines due to the apathy of the administration. I welcome the initiative of the committee.

Among those who attended was a woman named Shantabala Nag who had one of her bones in her right hand broken and had not been able to undergo any previous treatment. Others like Panmani Murmu, Jiban Kisku of Dalilpur and Churamani Murmu of Narcha, came for ailments related to malnutrition. They said that what the government failed to do was done by the committee of the people.²⁰⁵

According to a report of the PCAPA Dharampur Area Committee No.6, Binpur Block No. 1, under PS Lalgah, during 2009–10, health centres were set up in Bholagara, Karamshol and Barkala, which remained

²⁰⁵ *DS*, March 21, 2009.

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open for six days a week, each of which treated 70 to 100 patients on an average every day. The number of physicians attached to each centre was 4 to 5, each of whom was given a token honorarium of Rs. 500 every month. Incidentally, such developmental work at the elementary level, employment of voluntary labour for the people by the people, and many other things were accomplished by the people of Dandakaranya under the leadership of Maoist Communist revolutionaries many years before. That again proves that means and methods invented by the people in course of their struggle either for the creation of a new society, for the betterment of their living conditions, or against state repression are adopted and implemented by other people in other areas as well.

Agriculture and Land Distribution

Any person visiting Jangal Mahal would be able to realize that the much-trumpeted land reform programme of the previous LF (left-front) government did not have any presence there. In areas where trees had been cut to introduce land reforms, nothing had been done and vast tracts turned into wastelands. Although the WB government, through an act of 2004, vowed to distribute those lands among landless *Adivasis*, nothing was done. On the contrary, the CPI(M)-led LF government decided to hand over thousands of acres of those lands to set up an SEZ to the Jindal Steel corporate house. Faced with such government apathy and deprivation, it was quite natural for the people of Jangal Mahal to organize under the banner of the PCAPA to initiate a genuine land reform programme.

The Committee initiated a programme to ensure full rights of the *Adivasis* over forest land to the landless with adequate facilities for irrigation, while opposing the government policy of wooing multinational seed companies through the promotion of organic fertilizers prepared with either forest ash or cow dung.

Another important step is land distribution. The village committee decided to ensure one *bigha*²⁰⁶ of land for the landless, 15 *kathas*²⁰⁷ for peasants with less land, and no land for those having five *bighas* or more. In June 2009, before the deployment of the joint forces in Operation Lalgah, a team comprising students affiliated to the Democratic

²⁰⁶ 1 *bigha* is approximately 17,452 square feet.

²⁰⁷ 1 *katha* is approximately 720 square feet.

Students Union (DSU) of the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, visited Bansheria village and were witness to a land distribution meeting.²⁰⁸ However, one problem was that land was not in an arable condition due to the senseless plantation of eucalyptus trees by the state government as part of its “social forestry” project promoted by the World Bank. The plantation of eucalyptus trees was aimed at drying up the land to facilitate future extraction of mineral resources from the region. It is an anti-people conspiracy deliberately hatched by corporate foreign and domestic capital with the backing of central and state governments. In order to replenish the soil, the people decided to grow fruits and vegetables there for at least two seasons would need before the land became fit, hopefully, once again, for paddy cultivation. At the same time, it was decided that the land of the “new landlords” such as those of the CPI(M) leaders—Anuj Pandey, Bimal Pandey or Dalim Pandey—the rural bosses-rogues-cum-money-lenders, who had amassed millions by expropriating the wealth and land of the poor peasants, as also by swindling money from government projects, would be confiscated and distributed among the real owners.

Irrigation

In the dry Jangal Mahal belt, where rainfall is scanty, special irrigation was the need of the hour. The government built a huge canal connecting Mayurbhanj in Jharkhand state and Midnapore town in West Bengal to supply water to the fields when the rainy season was over. However, because of faulty construction, the canal remained dry throughout the year and the pipes that opened to the field remained completely choked.

To surmount this problem of water scarcity, the PCAPA began building small check dams and lock gates that would help store water during the monsoon and preserve water that flows down through natural streams. Such a check dam was in the process of construction when the DSU team visited the area. Later, old dams were repaired and new dams were built in such areas as Bholagara, Mohanpur, Teljharia, Purnapani, Podiha, Bhaudi, etc. Some old ponds were repaired and made fit for public use such as in Ajnaguli mouja, Jhatirara, Kankaradara mouja and Dumurkota mouja—all under Binpur during 2009–10. Moreover, as part of the devel-

²⁰⁸ For details, see *State Repression and People's Resistance Experiences from the Lalgarh Movement: A Fact-finding Report by DSU*, New Delhi, August 2009, pp. 47–55.

opment project, shallow tube-wells were constructed in Koganala, Lolita Pal mouja, Kushgora mouja, Gadaria mouja, Chhoto Brindapur mouja and other places. For potable water, a number of tube-wells were constructed in Chhoto Salboni mouja, Jirapasha mouja and Jirakuli mouja. Along with these, existing tube-wells left by the government in an unused state, were repaired by the committee in such villages as Baghghara, Karganala, Bamal, Bholagari, Domuhani, Damujona, Dingla, Narendrapur, Brindabanpur, Purnapani, Rautara, Kankradara, and Karamshol. In other villages, some new wells were built and some old wells were repaired and made fit for use.

For the purpose of irrigation, canal dredging commenced in Barapelia and Kalaimuri. The cost for installing each tube-well is around Rs. 12,000—canal dredging in the two areas would come to around Rs. 8 *lakh*. The PSBJC has appealed to the people for donations to meet the expenses and the response was tremendous. Although the people were poor and many of them could not make both ends meet, they came out with whatever amount they could, since they realized that this money was essential for their own development, and not for fattening the purse of the people's enemies. Apart from monetary contributions, the people also gave voluntary labour, i.e., unpaid labour for the cause of local development. Local people said that the scarcity of potable water was grave; however, the setting up of tube-wells has improved the situation considerably. "We need more tube-wells and we have informed the committee about the requirement," they said. "What the government had failed to do was done by the people's committee and thereby removed our problem."²⁰⁹

Construction of Roads

In the Jangal Mahal region, there are no roads worth a name—only paths. During the monsoon, paths were muddy and waterlogged at intervals and virtually impossible to walk on. The shifting of patients, pregnant women or dead bodies was very difficult. The villagers of Adharmari complained that transportation facility was pathetic and during the rainy season, the village got totally cut off from the outside world. The same is true for many other villages as well. The PCAPA took up this task and constructed roads with red-stone chips, which are locally available at an

²⁰⁹ DS, April 5, 2009.

affordable cost. The construction was done through voluntary labour, as in the Dandakaranya region. It is an example of participatory development where human resources are mobilized for developmental work for the people.

During the Yanan phase (1937–45) of the Chinese Revolution, this principle of Mao Zedong was applied in many regions, which helped to unleash the creativity of the masses. In villages such as Korengapara, Shaldanga, Bahardabga, Papuria, Darigera, etc. the villagers themselves took part. According to the PCAPA report of the Radhanagar Area Committee No. 1, Jhargram during 2009–10, roads connecting Joynagar and Chhendaboni; Kuldiha and Kuldiha canal; Matihana and its end; Bindukata and its end; Lohamajya and Sarala mouja; Dakshinshol and Dhobadihi; Kanyaduba and Bindukata; Jorakhali and Shalukgeria; Chhotodhabani and Khorikashuli; Chhenraboni Siva temple and Tentulbhanga—all brick-roads/moram roads were made and drains connecting Kharikashuli and Dakshimshol and Keundi and Bheundi were installed.

Such developments were unlike the government projects in the earlier period when the villagers helplessly witnessed from a distance their development funds being siphoned off by the corrupt CPI(M) members and corrupt government officials. According to Chhatradhar Mahato, unlike the state which builds one km of road by spending Rs. 15,000, the Committee could build 20 km of road by spending only Rs. 47,000.

On May 17, 2009, the day after the results of the Lok Sabha elections were announced, the Congress formed a ministry at the centre with its allies, which included the TMC.

The WB “left-front” government refused to give permission to hold a demonstration in Kolkata to be organized jointly by CAVOW (Committee Against Violence on Women) and the women’s wing of the People’s Committee with traditional weapons on June 5, on the grounds that it would be political in nature. It even threatened the local convenor of CAVOW with arrest if they did not listen. The organizers were thus forced to shift the venue to West Medinipur. Traditional weapons are a part of their culture and the WB government, in their actions, actually rejected that very right. Superimposed upon it was the fact that when a cultural team went to Chakulia in Jharkhand on the WB-Jharkhand border to make propaganda among the *Adivasis* there so that they could join the

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rally on June 5, many of them were arrested by the Jharkhand police and a number of women were molested and one reportedly raped inside the Chakulia police station. When the Committee went to enter Jharkhand, a huge force was mobilized on the Jharkhand side and they were greeted with tear-gas shells. Chhatradhar Mahato declared that the road from WB to Jharkhand would be blocked to cut off supply lines if the arrested were not released. That resulted in the spread of the movement to new areas as well. The administration retaliated with the promulgation of Section 144 of the CrPC²¹⁰ within 2 km of the Lalgarh police station.

Meanwhile, the CPI(M) retaliated to recover lost ground with 200 armed goons from Keshpur and Garbeta. On June 11, they fired at PCAPA members. On June 12, the goons shot and injured four members of the PCAPA namely, Syed Afsar Ali, Jainal Abedin, Sheikh Kamruddin and Safiur Rahman at Sijua.²¹¹ The people retaliated quickly. One CPI(M) leader of a branch of Dharampur was killed.

Turning Things Upside Down

On June 14, 2009, a PCAPA procession started from Lalgarh covered 11 km and took control of 48 villages, including CPI(M) party offices in Dharampur—a CPI(M) citadel used for launching armed attacks on the people. This was preceded by intense firing between the CPI(M) goons and the Maoist squads for five days in areas such as Dharampur, Jirapara, Hodhodi and Bhaudi. An unspecified number of CPI(M) goons died in the exchange of fire. Many people left their homes from the battlefield and the Maoists, according to press reports, seized the weapons left behind by

²¹⁰ Section 144 of the CrPC: “This colonial-era law... empowers... any... executive magistrate empowered by the state government, to issue orders to prevent and address urgent cases of apprehended danger or nuisance. The written order by the officer may be directed against an individual or individuals residing in a particular area, or to the public at large. In urgent cases, the magistrate can pass the order without giving prior notice to the individual targeted in the order. This usually means restrictions on movement, carrying arms, and unlawful assembly. It is generally understood that an assembly of three or more people is prohibited under Section 144.... When aimed at restricting a single individual, the order is passed if the magistrate believes it is likely to prevent obstruction, annoyance or injury to any lawfully employed person, or a danger to human life, health or safety, or a disturbance of the public tranquility, or a riot, etc.... Orders passed under Section 144 remain in force for two months, unless the state government considers it necessary to extend it.” *The Indian Express*, April 27, 2022.

²¹¹ *TOI*, June 22, 2009. See also Amit Bhattacharyya, “Is Lalgarh showing the way?” in *Economic & Political Weekly* (henceforth EPW), January 9–15, 2010, Vol. XIV, No. 2.

their enemies. Then they attacked Sijua, a CPI(M) stronghold that would allow them easy access to Jindal Steel's proposed steel plant site at Salboni. So decisive was the power shift in Dharampur that CPI(M)'s Lalgarh zonal committee secretary Anuj Pandey, a resident of the village, had to flee out of sheer panic.

Around midnight on June 15, 320 policemen left their camps in Dharampur, Ramgarh, Belatikuti and Koima. Now thousands of villagers from Lalgarh, where the police had been unable to enter since November 2008, swept into areas known as CPI(M) strongholds. They burnt down the police camps at Ramgarh and Kaima; one CPI(M) party office after another was burnt down by the masses, thereby revealing the pent up hatred of the people towards the CPI(M) leaders. One of the most hated of the despicable lot was Anuj Pandey. The time he came to West Medinipur from Jharkhand, he was a person of ordinary means. But gradually, through party connections, this fellow is said to have amassed millions out of the toil and sweat of the people and constructed a palatial building in an area where people were deprived of the basic necessities of life. He was protected by three bodyguards 24 hours a day, and there was also a police camp in front of his house. It was he who exercised total control over everything in the area, viz., distribution of *pattas* (land deeds) among the poor in the Dharampur area, clearance of 100 days' work,²¹² BPL cards (Below Poverty Line ration cards), application for the construction of deep tube-wells—all these and many more were controlled from the Dharampur party office. Votes were looted year after year by intimidation and terror. To suppress the opposition, armed *harmads* were sent from Dharampur by this fellow to Khejuri and Gorbeta. Whenever money was sanctioned by government for development work in the area, Anuj Pandey pocketed and bought arms and ammunition. In the name of giving employment, he robbed the poor of millions of *rupees*. The money that came through "Indira Yojana" was pocketed by him. Many of those unfortunate ones who stood against or criticized him were killed by his hired goons. He had the last word there. Now what happened to that palatial building?

It was broken down by the people. An English daily wrote:

²¹² Passed in 2005, the MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act), purportedly guarantees 100 days of paid work for adults in rural areas who volunteer to do unskilled manual labor.

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The hammer rose and fell, the energy of the man behind it rising steadily as the blows gradually brought down chunks of concrete from the roof. On the first floor, three men were tearing down the fancy grills of the iron railing adorning the balcony. A huge crowd gathered below in an area now under Section 144 lustily cheering each blow that fell on the white two-story house, quite out of place in this land of deprivation under Lalgah police station. By sundown, the hammers had chopped off the first floor, leaving behind a skeleton of what was a “posh” house in the morning.²¹³

Every punch of the hammer was greeted with the sound of the conch-shells made by the standing women.²¹⁴ It was like a festival of the masses, for what was being demolished was the symbol of power, the symbol of oppression and domination. The *Adivasi* women remarked that for them it was a social festival like that of Dussera when the effigy of Ravana—the villain of the Ramayana epic was burnt down. The women on that day talked about the inhuman treatment meted out to the people by that fellow and stated that their act of destruction was a spontaneous outburst emanating from their veins. And in a climax to it all, the Maoist leader Bikash, with an AK-47 slung over his shoulder, addressed the press openly and proclaimed their leadership in this movement.²¹⁵ For a political party, which claims itself to be a revolutionary party dedicated to the cause of revolution and service to the people, such a claim is unfair. Whatever the role the Maoists might have played here, there is no doubt that this was a people’s movement where the masses played a very significant role. Later on, the Maoist Polit Bureau leader, Kishenji and the person in charge of the Eastern Bureau, in a press conference, also acknowledged the people’s role in unequivocal terms.

The destruction of the house was followed by the destruction of the CPI(M) party office and the house of another leader, Dalim Pandey, the secretary of the Dharampur local committee of the CPI(M). That act

²¹³ *HT*, June 16, 2009.

²¹⁴ *SP*, June 16, 2009.

²¹⁵ *ABP*, June 16, 2009.

was equally celebrated by women with the sound of the conch-shells.²¹⁶ What was the reaction of Bimal Pandey, cousin brother of Anuj Pandey whose palace was struck down? Bimal Pandey said: "I have seen oppression and injustice being done before my very eyes. But I did not have the courage to speak out against. Lalgarh became liberated on Monday. Why should I feel sorry?"²¹⁷ That this destruction of symbols of power brought about liberation is the feeling of other residents of Dharampur as well. They claim that Dharampur under the CPI(M) rule was in captivity. In one case, before one party office was attacked, photographs of anti-colonial revolutionary nationalists—Bhagat Singh, Subhas Chandra Bose and Khudiram Bose—were carefully taken out and placed under a tree, and then property kept inside the party office was burnt down. And to cap it all, there was no looting at all. Refuting the charges put forward from some quarters that the PCAPA had only created anarchy and done much harm to the common people, Chhobirani Mahato of Dharampur told a newspaper correspondent:

Although party office buildings and residences of party leaders have been broken, the members of the People's Committee did not do any harm to the common people. Nothing has been looted from the houses. All rooms in the village remain the same as before.²¹⁸

Events took place in quick succession, as if people suppressed for ages were in a great hurry to settle scores with their enemies. They torched police stations and demolished party strongholds. The deliberate show of strength came within hours of the administration pulling their forces out of police camps in Belatikri, Dharampur, Ramgarh and Koima. The first wave of attacks hit the Koima camp around 11AM. PCAPA had called a meeting in the Mohulbani forest nearby, after which, according to a press report, armed supporters and Maoists ransacked the camp and set furniture and buildings on fire. The committee members had encircled the Koima camp over the previous few days, leaving the policemen posted

²¹⁶ *SP*, June 16, 2009.

²¹⁷ *Ekdin*, June 17, 2009.

²¹⁸ *Ekdin*, June 23, 2009.

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there without any food or water. Policemen had to secretly leave the camp during the night. Others fanned out across a 25-km² area over the next few hours, with the attacks targeting administrative and party strongholds. Next to fall was the Ramgarh police camp. After that the Dharampur party office was targeted.²¹⁹ The next day, the Lalgarh party office was targeted. Thousands of men and women carrying axes and *tongies* (a traditional weapon) joined in celebration as the office, along with the papers and furniture, were set on fire. Although section 144 was declared, thousands of people rejected it and met in a huge gathering near the police station. Representatives of the BUPC (Resistance Committee Against Eviction from Land) from Nandigram and also those of *Adivasi* Vikash Parishad from north Bengal joined that gathering.²²⁰

The events at Dharampur and other areas reminds one of the days of earlier peasant rebellions when the rebels attacked the houses of the landlords, *kacharies* and granaries, destroyed property, killed them if they could, burnt down land deeds and distributed food among poor, which rightfully belonged to them. In the Jangal Mahal too, the rebels of Lalgarh attacked the “new landlords,” i.e., the CPI(M) leaders, their houses and the party offices—all of which were symbols of power and exploitation and the cause of their indignity and humiliation. By so doing they not only destroyed the power of the oppressors, they also asserted their own power and authority. To use William Hinton’s words, it was like “turning things upside down.”

Kishenji once described the Lalgarh uprising as the “second Naxalbari.” However, from the historical point of view, it was far more advanced than the 1967 uprising. It witnessed an amalgamation of mass movement and armed struggle with a strong mass base. It is pertinent to refer to the following newspaper report captioned, “Welcome to India’s newest secret state.” The correspondent, Snigdhendu Bhattacharya writes:

Here across a 1,000 km² area bordering Orissa in West Medinipur district, the Maoists over the last 8 months have quietly unleashed new weapons in their battle against the Indian state: drinking water, irrigation, roads and health centres...

²¹⁹ *TOI*, June 16, 2009.

²²⁰ *Bartaman*, June 17, 2009.

carefully shielded from the public eye, the HT found India's second "liberated zone," a Maoist-run state within a state where development for more than 2 *lakh* people is unfolding at a pace not seen in 30 years of Left rule. Apart from taking over the organs of the state and most notably the executive and the judiciary, the Maoists here have built at least 50 km of gravel paths, dug tube-wells and tanks, rebuilt irrigation canals and are running health centres, with the help of local villagers.²²¹

Entry of the Joint Forces: "Operation Lalgarh"

This phase started on June 18, 2009 with the entry of joint forces. The chief minister of WB went to meet P. Chidambaran, the central home minister to seek central help to suppress this people's rising.²²² One of the front partners, the CPI—its leader Nandagopal Bhattacharya—even asked Biman Bose, the "left-front" chairman, to consider thinking about sending the army to Lalgarh.²²³

The decision to send in central forces was taken by the central home minister in no time. What has surprised many is the magnitude of central involvement in what it described as "Operation Lalgarh." Besides the state police forces such as the police and the RAF, New Delhi introduced companies of CRPF (Central Reserve Police Force), EFR (Eastern Frontier Rifles), BSF (Border Security Force), the notorious CoBRA (Commando Battalion for Resolute Action), Straco (an elite military force created especially to combat Maoist "insurgents") and Vayusena (Air Force), with Kalaikunda air force base located nearby and with the "Greyhounds" combat forces (police special forces specializing in "counter-insurgency") as standby. Such a huge mobilization of forces was, with the possible exceptions in Jammu and Kashmir and Chhattisgarh, quite unprecedented in the history of our country. It was nothing but what many people regarded as the declaration of war against the people of Jangal Mahal.

²²¹ See Snigdhendru Bhattacharya's report, "Welcome to India's newest secret state," in *HT*, June 10, 2009. See also his book, *Lalgarh and the Legend of Kishanji Tales from India's Maoist Movement* Noida, India, Harper Collins Publishers India, 2016.

²²² *ABP*, June 12, 2009.

²²³ *Aaj Bikash*, June 16, 2009.

That war against the people began with much fanfare by Buddhadev Bhattacharya, the “Marxist” chief minister of West Bengal, under media glare on June 18. The aim was to “liberate” areas under 18 police stations which had come under the control of the PCAPA.²²⁴ The whole operation, thanks to the media coverage, gave the unmistakable impression that an invading army, armed to the teeth, had descended from heaven to take on the Maoists. The media covered front page news of the expedition and nobody bothered to question the validity or the possible impact that it was likely to have on the people of Jangal Mahal. Some dailies carried front page captions such as “Buddha orders crackdown, Maoists sound war cry” or “Action at last,” or “Greyhounds on standby. Cobras crawl in, save venom for final bite.” It was as if a holy war was being conducted by the central and state governments against the Maoist infidels. Not a single media initially raised a voice against the war. One Vayusena helicopter was introduced to drop leaflets in Santhali and Bengali languages making appeals to the people to refrain from mixing with the Maoist “terrorists.” That reminds one of the way in which the Naga Battalion was introduced into Chhattisgarh²²⁵ to suppress the Maoist movement. Actually, it was a psychological war on the part of the state to isolate the Maoists from the people or the “fish from water.” That attempt, however, as the state home department had to admit reluctantly, did not succeed.

Operation Lalgarh and the Resistance by the People and the Maoists

The military operation against the people of Lalgarh, despite this massive show of strength, was not at all a smooth affair. By covering about 70 km, it took two days and a half for the forces to reach the Lalgarh police station. On the way, they met with people’s resistance at different points. Roads were dug, trees were cut down, heavy stones were placed on the main roads at several points to prevent the advance of the paramilitary forces. People shot arrows from different sides, women and children tried to obstruct the progress as far as possible. The police used teargas shells and started beating people mercilessly, women falling on the ground and still

²²⁴ *Ganashakti*, June 19, 2009.

²²⁵ In 2014, Home Minister Rajnath Singh sent over 2,000 para-military men from Nagaland’s Indian Reserve Battalions to fight Maoists in Bastar.

being beaten. Landmines exploded, causing damage to a bridge and a culvert, which stalled the advance. The battle that everyone expected from the beginning of the operation erupted just as the sun was setting on 19th—the second day. The Maoists fighters fired at central forces in Kuldiha—one of the areas cleared by police the previous day. At Pingboni, some constables rushed forward with *lathis*, only to scatter as arrows were shot at them. Suddenly, a deafening silence ripped through. One of the policemen had apparently tripped a booby trap—an IED rigged to a tree. That was the signal for the Maoists to open fire. Completely taken by surprise, policemen scrambled for cover.²²⁶ The blast hit the Domkal sub-divisional police officer's car in Pirakata, critically injuring four policemen. A culvert was blown up at Nimtala and around 9 AM, heavy gunfire was heard near Lalgargh police station. Rattled by the attack, many constables reportedly refused to carry out any further operations without central forces accompanying them.²²⁷

What surprised the police was that all the attacks occurred in areas that security forces had swept through only the previous day. There were huge gaps at the rear that the Maoists stealthily moved in to exploit and ambushed the forces from behind. In many places boulders were placed, human barricades were created and broken, then created again. Ultimately, forty-five tense hours after the operation started, security forces entered Lalgargh town and reached the police station, which was kept virtually locked from inside by the policemen. The security forces breathed a sigh of relief and celebrated in a manner that Jaffna had at last fallen to them.

Atrocities by the Security Forces/“Harmads”

The first obstruction raised by the people was on way to Malida with trees cut down and placed on the road and human shields comprising both men and women with traditional weapons and women in the front. Police announced through the hand-mike to disperse within two minutes. People replied with the slogans: “We would not allow police forces that back CPI(M) *harmads* to advance.” Within a few seconds, police action started; tear gas was fired, and they rushed towards the crowd with batons and rifles. One group chased the demonstrators to their village and spared

²²⁶ *TOI*, June 21, 2009.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

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not even women, children, teenagers, old men and women. Many of them were bleeding profusely due to beating. The state armed force broke into houses and literally dragged people from inside to beat them up in a savage manner.²²⁸ A fourteen-year-old boy fled from tear-gas attacks and asked his grandmother to save him from police beating. By then, the police had already started beating up the granny. As she writhed in pain, the boy rushed into the room. Buddhadev's sentry, according to a reporter, was still been beating the old granny. When a photographer, Ashutosh Patra of *Sanbad Pratidin* went to take the photo, he was beaten by the police. Four or five policemen entered the room and within two minutes, came out dragging the boy by the hair; he was naked with blood scars all over his body. He was taken prisoner. Scenes such as these were enacted in many houses in villages such as Pirakuli, Dhanguri, etc.²²⁹

When on June 22, some intellectuals from Kolkata went to Malida, gory details of humiliation and torture of a sadistic nature came to light. The correspondent of a Bengali daily gave a vivid description; here is a free translation into English:

All of a sudden, a woman came and got hold of Saonli Mitra's feet, similar to the way a sinking man catches a straw to remain alive. She could not control her tears. "Didi (sister), save us. They will not let us go. Police entered our house and have only just kept us alive. Everything else they looted." She broke into tears as she spoke.

The police broke into her house, beat her black and blue. As she writhed in pain, one armed police hit her back with the pointed part of the gun. Her mother-in-law pleaded with them to spare her.

But who will listen to whom? They stripped me. I was totally helpless. Before I could realize what was being done to me, the rifle butt was pressed into my vagina. They held my two hands tight. They were throwing all types of abusive languages and continued beating me with sticks. They did these things as the call for the boycott of police was written on our house.

²²⁸ *Bartaman*, June 19, 2009.

²²⁹ *SP*, June 19, 2009.

The same was the picture in the villages of Goaltore, Belpahari and Sarenga where the team visited. Even a seven-year-old child was not spared by the police force of Buddhadev Bhattacharya. The child was beaten in front of his mother and one of his legs was broken.²³⁰ That is not all. In some villages, human excreta were thrown into the wells from which drinking water was drawn to deprive them of any source of drinking water at all.

CPI(M) "Harmads" in Police Uniform Operate in the Nandigram Style

The PCAPA accused the CPI(M) *harmads* of entering Lalgarh in police uniform in collusion with the state police forces and identifying the houses of members of the People's Committee to the police so that they could target them with ease. These agents masquerading as policemen trailed behind the security forces and started attacking committee members to regain control over the area so that they could again establish their fascist rule over the people.²³¹ The 40 odd houses in Kuldiha village were attacked by the police on the charge of giving food and shelter to the Maoists. The victims of police atrocity from many villages such as Kuldiha, Pyachapara, Jamboni, Mahatapur, Nimtola, Malida, Pukur-iashol, Amchor, Salboni, Saboli, Pirrakuli, Dhorashol, Boro Pukur-iashol, Korma, Belashol, Pirakata, Boro Kolshibhanga, Sorberia, Dhangouri and Jorka came to Pirakata primary school for shelter and food. The tales are the same. Strip the women, humiliate them in every conceivable manner and make them break down, so that they are never able to hold their heads high again. When Usharani Singh, Gitabani Mahato, Alo Mahato and other women related tales of their humiliation and molestation, they categorically referred to the presence of CPI(M) goons in new khaki dress with shoes different from that of the police force—similar to that in Nandigram. Many of them were forced to strip in front of these beasts in human figures.²³²

²³⁰ *Ekdin*, June 22, 2009.

²³¹ *DS*, June 22, 2009.

²³² *Ibid*.

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Human Rights Commission and Amnesty International Accuse the Governments

Meanwhile, the National Human Rights Commission and Amnesty International strongly criticized the central and WB state governments for torturing *Adivasi* people and warned that unless it stopped, stern action would be taken against the government.²³³

Police Force People to Look for IEDs

The government, which had many a time accused the Maoists of forcing people to act as human shields, according to newspaper reports, did the same thing. In fact, state armed force—terrified of IED explosions—caught hold of local youths and forced them to poke around for hidden mines and explosives. A newspaper carried such pictures near Dhangori village.²³⁴

Relief Camps for People

As a result of police atrocities, thousands of people were forced to flee their villages and take shelter in the relief camps being set up in Pirakata and Goaltore by the TMC. Bikash Mohit and Chanchal Mohit described with tearful eyes how people were tortured by the security forces and the police. Poison was dropped into their well, because the police said that the Maoists came to take water from the well. All the villagers were picked up on the mere suspicion of being Maoists.²³⁵

Tales of Brutality Perpetrated by the Police, Troops and CPI(M) “Harmads” Wearing Half-Pants

The joint military operation was nothing but a state-sponsored war declared against the people of Jangal Mahal. Since they failed to isolate the Maoists from the people, they committed barbarity even of the most sadistic kind to humiliate, terrorize, maim and starve the poor people of the land so that they could never raise their heads and fight for dignity again. In the name of taming the Maoists and to enforce the “rule of law” both the central and state governments and their hired agents broke laws with impunity and let loose hell on the people. “Operation Lalgarh” cre-

²³³ *SP*, June 23, 2009.

²³⁴ *TOI*, June 23, 2009.

²³⁵ *Bikeler Protidin*, June 23, 2009.

ated such a psychological trauma in the minds of the people that it would have serious implications for the future. Biren Mal, a resident of Pirakhuli village, told a reporter: "The last time I saw such fear and terror was during the British rule. This was such a peaceful place. We led simple lives. Look what they have turned us into. We are being treated like hunted animals."²³⁶

We would cite just another instance. This war against the people forced one pregnant woman to flee her home, take shelter in a relief camp organized by the PCAPA and give birth to a baby. The story, full of pain and resolve to stand up to injustice, is as follows: Parvati Kisku gave birth to her second baby on June 25 at a relief camp set up by the PCAPA in Narcha, which was located 1 km short of Kantapahari. Her husband was not by her side during the birth, neither was a doctor or a midwife present. It was left to some women staying in the camp to help her through labour. So short of facilities were they that they had to use a piece of broken glass to cut the umbilical cord. As the security forces marched by on the morning of the 29th on their way to Kantapahari, Parvati was spotted sitting in the courtyard of the Narcha primary school with her son on her lap, both of them visibly weak. At first she would not say anything, but, quizzed a few times, she said: "We have severe shortage of food here," and turned her attention to her son who had already developed rashes on his body. Her mother-in-law refused to disclose her son's name or his whereabouts. She even declined to name their native village.

"We are staying here for the last eight days. We are living in a painful condition. But we cannot go back to our village as police will torture us again," said Mrs. Jaba Kisku. The reporter rang up the top boss in charge of the operation and some others. An ambulance was sent; but the Parvati refused to take any help from the government, i.e., from those who themselves were responsible for her plight. Parvati was taken inside by other women. They said: "She will not go to Lalgargh. Her son is fine. Please do not bother us."

²³⁶ *TOI*, June 26, 2009. For more details, see Amit Bhattacharyya, "Singur to Lalgargh via Nandigram... Update 2..." Ranchi, April, 2009, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-19.

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When asked if they would allow a doctor to come and examine the child, they were hesitant. The BDO, Binpur I Mr. Sourabh Barik asked to speak to Parvati over the phone, but she refused. Instead another woman spoke to the BDO and declined any help for the ailing mother and her child.²³⁷ As the baby was born at night, she was given the name *Ratri* or night.²³⁸ Parvati lives in Chhotopelia village—the cradle of the present movement where the Lalgah police let loose a reign of terror on November 5, 2008.

Parvati later told another reporter: “In our village, hundreds of children are born at home without any medical supervision. The government has never bothered about us. Now they are putting up a show of sympathy. We won’t take their help.” The reporter commented:

The aversion to anything to do with the government is understandable when the elderly woman in charge of the daily needs of the camp between Kantapahari and Lalgah says how an expectant Jashomoni Mandi was kicked in the tummy by policemen raiding their village last November.... Jashomoni, 22, gave birth to a son last night.²³⁹

The Involvement of US intelligence and the Indian Army in Lalgah

The media carried a front-page news item which shows that US intelligence agencies and the Indian space research centre, the ISRO and also the Indian army were involved in this war declared against the people of Lalgah. The report is captioned “Chemical dyes and foreign technology used to locate Mao,” and written by Rajarshee Dattagupta. This is a free translation.

Goaltore: A literally “high tech” war has started in Lalgah. The names of both the US intelligence satellite and the Indian space research centre, ISRO have been tagged with this war preparation for regaining the areas held by the Maoists. On the other hand, in order to trace the Maoist guerrillas who

²³⁷ *The Statesman*, June 30, 2009.

²³⁸ *DS*, June 30, 2009.

²³⁹ *The Telegraph*, July 1, 2009.

have kept themselves mixed with the villagers, the administration has taken the help of the most modern technology. At the beginning of the second round of the "Operation Lalgah," the air force has dropped special chemical dyes over Murarka village adjoining the Burishol forest where 1,500 Maoist guerrillas are supposed to be holed up. In case that dye falls on the bodies of the guerrillas, that colour will last for one year. It means that after they are driven out from that area by the forces, they would take shelter in another village; it would thus be easy to identify them. As a result, the Maoists, on the one hand, would not be able to get themselves mixed up with the villagers; on the other hand, the police forces would not be accused of arresting innocent people while going for the Maoists. The first part in this "high tech" war was successful on Friday (i.e., June 26). There will be a fresh expedition on Saturday.²⁴⁰

Farewell to Teaching and Admission as Troops Set Up Their Camps in School and College Buildings

With central and state police forces engaged in this totally unjust war against the people, occupying about 14 school buildings, 20,000 students have been affected as the schools have been shut down and nobody knows for how long. Of these, five schools are situated in Midnapore Kotwali police station area while the rest are in Lalgah, Jhargram, Salboni and Goaltore areas. The occupation of schools by occupation forces has resulted in strong resentment among students, their guardians and teachers. The students of Mohandas Vidyapith in Medinipur even staged a demonstration. A group of students and their guardians also demonstrated outside the district inspector of schools' office, demanding that the police camps be shifted to other places, but to no avail. Leaders of the Medinipur Suraksha Committee staged a *dharma* outside the office of the district magistrate on June 26 over the same issue. Students of Class V to IX of these schools could not appear for the unit tests that were scheduled

²⁴⁰ Rajarshree Dasgupta, "Chemical Dyes & Foreign Technology to identify Mao," *SP*, June 27, 2009.

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to begin on June 26. In all, they were expected to undergo five such unit tests before the annual examination and three before the *pujas* (annual social/religious festival of the Hindus), which had been prepared that year. Besides, the academic session in the same state had also been advanced by two months from 2010, thereby incurring a loss of time for preparation.

However, the problems of the students of Gargaria Subhas High School and Bejdanga High School in Sarenga, Bankura, bordering Lalgarh, seemed to be more acute, particularly for those who stayed in school hostels. They were asked by the school authorities to vacate the hostels to make room for police accommodation. But some of them who hailed from Lalgarh were in dire straits, as they did not know where to go. Most of them had fled home fearing police atrocities and were now finding it difficult to return.²⁴¹

In Satpati village Lalgarh, the local school was turned into a “prohibited zone.” Even teachers were not allowed to enter. “We will allow only four,” said a plainclothes police officer. The teachers protested. Seeing the media, police let them in, but only to collect their salaries.²⁴² According to one report, every school and college in Goaltore and even a health centre in Kewakole were requisitioned for security forces.²⁴³

In the early 2000s, in order to combat CPI(M-L) People’s War activity in the Belpahari area, the WB police set up camps of *jawans* in school buildings meant for scheduled tribe students. When Paritosh Mahato, the headmaster of the Odolchua High School, protested, he was booked on the charge of having PW links.²⁴⁴ There is an old Supreme Court (SC) ruling whereby the highest court barred the setting up of security camps in educational institutions and hospitals. The conversion of the school into camps for *jawans* in Medinipur town and also in the Jangal Mahal area was a clear case of violation of the SC order. There were many cases of protest demonstrations and processions involving students, teachers and guardians.

²⁴¹ *The Statesman*, June 28, 2009.

²⁴² *TOI*, June 26, 2009.

²⁴³ *The Telegraph*, June 25, 2009.

²⁴⁴ See Amit Bhattacharyya, *Singur to Lalgarh... Update 2*, *ibid.*, pp. 47–50.

Lalgarh Effect

In response to the Lalgarh movement, a number of mass forums emerged in solidarity with it in Kolkata and elsewhere such as Lalgarh Mancha (Lalgarh Platform), Lalgarh Aandolan Sanhati Mancha (Platform in Solidarity with the Lalgarh Movement), etc. They demanded immediate withdrawal of troops from different areas including educational institutions in Lalgarh and start discussion with the PCAPA. Sujato Bhadro, the rights activist, said on behalf of the Lalgarh Mancha that the imposition of Section 144 was illegal and activists should be allowed entry into the area to ascertain incidents of human rights violations. The organizers also demanded the release of Gour Chakraborty, the erstwhile spokesperson of the CPI(Maoist).²⁴⁵ Speaking on behalf of Sanhati Udyog (Solidarity Initiative), Sukhendu Bhattacharya said that if the Lalgarh movement resembled something violent in nature, it was solely due to the long period of neglect and patronage of crime.²⁴⁶ Vara Vara Rao, revolutionary poet from Andhra Pradesh, remarked that Lalgarh had turned into a second Naxalbari movement. “The developments in Lalgarh are a subject of household talk in Andhra Pradesh. The struggle is a source of inspiration for the poor and deprived people throughout the country.”²⁴⁷

Formation of People's Militia

In the face of state repression and attacks by the CPI(M)-sponsored “*harmads*,” the people formed the “Sidhu-Kanu Gana Militia” (People's Militia) on October 27, 2009, drawing its name from the two *Adivasi* rebel leaders who fought against the British colonial rulers in the mid-19th century. “We have no links with the Maoists. But we have 20 guns—all snatched from CPI(M) goons,” said the PCAPA general secretary, Sidhu Soren.²⁴⁸ Compared to Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand or Bihar, where people's militia were active, in WB it took a very short period to get going. It ushered in a qualitatively new stage in the history of their struggle.

²⁴⁵ *The Statesman*, July 15, 2009.

²⁴⁶ *DS*, July 15, 2009.

²⁴⁷ *HT*, July 30, 2009.

²⁴⁸ *HT*, October 28, 2009.

War Against Jangal Mahal Was a War to Serve Foreign and Domestic Corporate Capital

The massive mobilization of armed forces, paramilitary forces, police forces and air forces totalling around 1 *lakh* personnel, along with US-Israel military assistance of various types only highlighted the magnitude of the war. They identified the Maoists as the “greatest threat to the internal security of the country since independence,” i.e., the security of the Indian ruling classes. The entire forested region in central and eastern India were divided into seven Operating Areas, which the State wanted to “clear,” within the next five years of all resistance, including that by the Maoists and other Naxalite organizations. A massive amount of money to the tune of Rs. 7,300 *crore* had already been earmarked for meeting the cost of this war. Needless to state, this war against the people is being waged in the interests of foreign capital and domestic big comprador capital. Hundreds of MOUs have been signed between imperialists and domestic big comprador capital and the central and state governments. That will further intensify the process of displacement of the *Adivasis* from the forest areas, plunder of our vast natural resources and bring more misery and ruin in the lives of the impoverished people of our country. Lalgarh, nay, the Jangal Mahal region, is a region that, as the central home minister Mr. P. Chidambaram declared, would be treated as a laboratory to undertake experiments in dealing with this “greatest internal threat” and then to utilize that experience to crush resistance in such states as Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Orissa.

Review of the Lalgarh Movement by the Maoist State Committee

The WB State Committee of the CPI(Maoist) at its meeting held during September 18–30, 2009 made a draft review²⁴⁹ of the Lalgarh movement after the completion of eleven months of struggle. It had two parts—positive aspects and negative aspects. The draft review mentions

²⁴⁹ Resolutions adopted at the meeting of the WB State Committee of the CPI(Maoist) “Review of the Lalgarh Movement and future course of action,” For all Party members. It is a four-page draft review. Complete review was, as stated, to be placed after the receipt of reviews from all affiliated forums.

twelve positive aspects and ten negative aspects. Let us refer to those in turn.

Positive Aspects:

First, this movement did not emerge on the basis of any partial demand; on the contrary, it was a political uprising based on political demands that influenced the whole state and the country.

Second, this movement is a continuation of the Naxalbari movement and has set an example throughout the country. Judging by the yardstick of people's political consciousness, the Lalgarh movement is an advance upon Singur and Nandigram movements.

Third, the strength of the Party before November (2008) was considerably low. This uprising completely changed the situation. The strength of our Party and armed forces increased. The influence of the Party, its acceptability, people's trust on the Party greatly increased.

Fourth, on the eve of the parliamentary elections, "people responded widely to our call for election boycott and the boycott was almost total. As a result, the mass base of the Party was created and brought the Lalgarh movement to the limelight." Moreover, throughout this period, "women played a glorious role—confronting the police, encirclement of police camps, in the meetings of people's court," etc. In addition, students played a bold role in opposing the conversion of schools into police camps and drew the support of many people to their cause.

Fifth, during the movement, the ruling CPI(M) party created some reactionary forums to malign this movement. However, they were beaten back through the conscious and spirited participation of the people.

Sixth, while the movement was on, one section of the traditional leadership within the movement tried to destroy the movement by colluding with the State from within, sometimes by supporting it and sometimes by opposing it. Adopting the method of unity and struggle, the Party exposed them and isolated them. During the movement, when the different reactionary sections of the opportunist leadership of the Jharkhand Party tried to grab and derail the movement, the Party exposed their political bankruptcy by struggling against them and created the conditions for the progressive workers and leaders within them to join their movement.

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Seventh, this movement proceeded through different forms of struggle. *Bundh* (total shutdown), road blockade, *gherao* (encirclement), boycott were some of the mass forms adopted. It was possible to keep the spirit and morale of the people intact by proceeding through a long zigzag course.

Eighth, despite the fact that at the beginning of the joint military operation, one section of the people was afraid, in the later period active resistance was built up. In recent history, this people's uprising in the state displayed continuity and survived, expanded and strengthened itself for one year, and that was made possible primarily due to their selflessness and iron will. For this reason, the struggling leadership could lead the movement in the battlefield against state terror.

Ninth, it was possible to expose the social fascist nature of the CPI(M) by countering their attacks with firm resolve and destroying their citadel. Not only that, it was also possible for the Party to expose the real nature of other constituent parties of the so-called left front and also Congress and the TMC, and more particularly the connivance between the centre and the state after the beginning of the joint operation. "Before and during the joint operation, we worked according to a plan, gained success and seized weapons from the *harmads* and strengthened our arsenal."

Tenth, they tried to counter the propaganda war waged by both the centre and the state to the best of our ability and could adopt a correct approach to place our politics before the people.

Eleventh, as the result of these positive developments, the review asserted, "they could defeat the three-month-old joint operation" and started preparing themselves to counter the enemy in the future.

Twelfth, the Party asserted that the basis of this mass uprising was the long preparation spanning one decade.

Negative Aspects

The review identified ten shortcomings in their movement.

First, the Party's work outside Jangal Mahal was not that strong; they could not utilize whatever was available to arouse the masses in support of the Jangal Mahal movement. This limitation was evident both before and also during the joint operation. The Party noted that such things happened during the Nandigram movement too. They admitted the Party's inability to overcome that limitation this time as well.

Second, after the beginning of the joint military offensive, links with the party units outside Jangal Mahal were cut off, for which it was not possible to guide them. The courier mechanism between Jangal Mahal and outside was not built up earlier. So the Party was faced with much difficulty before it could restore it after some time.

Third, although discussions were made to strengthen the Party in Jangal Mahal, it was not given due importance. The result was that although many new activists came forward, not much progress was made to bring in new party members and strengthen the Party.

Fourth, from the beginning of the movement, the people showed much bravery in raising the banner of resistance with traditional weapons. However, at the initial stage, as the Party admitted, they lagged behind in the formation of a people's militia. In fact, within one month of the review meeting of Western Bengal State Committee, the people's militia was formed on October 27.

Fifth, the fact that army and also lower-rank leading activists were comparatively new, they suffered from an absence of competent planning and efficient leadership. That explains why members of special committees were confined within select areas. The Party admitted that it failed to develop collective leadership at the lower level.

Sixth, it is true that the protracted mass movement brought a large number of new faces forward; however, the Maoists admit, they lagged much behind in the task of distinguishing organizational and military work and in increasing competence in both.

Seventh, the Party also identified a lack of enough firearms and explosives as another major limitation. There was no paucity of manpower; there was paucity of gun power. One can say that this played a major role in the setback of the Lalgarh movement in 2011 as well.

Eighth, the Party admitted its weakness in the urban areas. However, the mass uprising in the countryside brought about great possibilities in expanding the movement. However lack of leaders stood in the way. Its impact was negative.

Ninth, the Maoists admitted that although there was great possibility of developing organized resistance in adjoining Bankura by sending competent organizers, it did not materialize because of lack of correct planning.

Tenth, during the joint military offensive, several ML groups launched political attacks against the Party, but the Maoists could not give befitting counter-replies to them despite the presence of senior leaders.

Reaction of the Intellectuals

The intellectual response to the Lalgarh struggle was different from what was seen during the Singur and Nandigram struggles. Those who came forward in the early stage later retracted and kept mum. Meanwhile, the tide was blowing for a “change”; the isolation of the CPI(M) was reflected in the elections, and one section among intellectuals found it more attractive to keep closer to the prospective winner—the Trinamool Congress—in the approaching elections to receive bouquets and cushy jobs.

According to a section of the intelligentsia, the people of Janagal Mahal were continuing their movement quite well until the Maoists entered the scene from outside and derailed the movement. In their view, it is the violent activities of the Maoists that brought joint forces into the scene. The result was that the people were sandwiched between state terror and gun-toting Maoist attacks or “non-state” actors. The most bitter attack, however, came from two Delhi-based historians—Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar. They wrote:

Maoists have done incalculable harm to the movement. Their activities and intentions are shrouded in mystery, their secret terror operations express total indifference to human lives, their arms deals lead them... into shady financial transactions with rich and corrupt power brokers.... They come into an already strong and open mass movement, they engage in a killing spree discrediting the movement, and then they leave after giving the state authorities a splendid excuse for crushing it.²⁵⁰

The reality, of course, is that the Maoists did not fall from the sky; the CPI(ML) People’s War and the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) had been active in the region from the 1990s and fought over day-to-

²⁵⁰ See article by Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar in *EPW*, June 27–July 10, 2009.

day issues by the people's side, and suffered persecution, indignity, abuse and incarceration for years together. Their social roots lay in the soil of Jangal Mahal, however disturbing and unacceptable it might sound to these learned historians and sections of "learned personalities." Thus the statement that the Maoists were external to the movement, that they had entered the scene all of a sudden and took control of it, does not have any factual basis at all.

As to the "sandwich" theory, the advocates of this theory actually portrayed the masses as "ignorant" people devoid of any independent thinking or initiative of their own—like unthinking, unfeeling robots that could only follow, but could not lead.²⁵¹

In his reply to the question on the advocacy of violence, Mallejula Koteswar Rao in Kishenji replied:

Maoists did not indulge in violence, nor will they do. We stand for peace. Let the intellectuals think more about it. Come to the village and talk to the people. Stay in the village for one month, assess the ground reality and suggest how to fight and what to do. We will definitely put that into practice. Tell how we should confront the "sunrise" in Nandigram. Tell us. Tell us how to confront Anuj Pandey and his body guards firing bullets at us with their AK47s? Tell us how to resist the assailants who butchered Indrajit while he was returning home? Tell us how to deal with those murderers who killed the leadership of the People's Committee Against Police Atrocities of Belpahari? Tell us how to deal with the Bengal model Salwa Judum that started from December. You will have to point out how we should resist state terror. Who are indulging in terror? Not we. Nor are we for it. Millions of incidents of CPI(M)-sponsored terror are recorded in history—it is not the Maoists who committed these. In reality, the problem is related to ideological outlook. Let them come to Keshpur, Garbeta and other places, stay there, assess the situation and suggest means.²⁵²

²⁵¹ For details, see Amit Bhattacharyya's article in *EPW*, *ibid*.

²⁵² Interview with Kishanji published in *Biplabi Gana Protirodh*, Year 1, No. 3, June 2009.

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In fact, the Lalgarh struggle posed a serious problem for a section of civil rights activists and urban intellectuals. When the masses were attacked and tortured, the city-bred intellectuals stood by their side, as in Singur and Nandigram. But the Lalgarh story was entirely different. There the urban literati were confronted with the emergence of a resisting warrior masses and, in their presence, were at a loss as to what position to take.

The reality is that the mass uprising in Jangal Mahal was not a spontaneous movement; rather, it was a politically conscious movement. Without the active role of the Maoists, the movement would not have taken such a shape and spread to new areas. That constituted its main strength. The urban literati should not grudge it, because who is to lead and guide the movement, what form that movement would take is to be decided by the sons and daughters of the soil themselves, and not by those who keep a safe distance from it.

Letters from the People's Committee to Civil Rights Bodies and Intellectuals

The PCAPA issued at least six open letters and a number of additional letters to the APDR (Association for the Protection of Democratic Rights), Lalgarh Mancha and Intellectuals, who supported the people's movement during the period from March to September 2010 (with no response). They vividly describe the brutal nature of state repression initiated by the joint forces sent by the central and police forces of the WB state governments and the CPI(M) *harmads* and are important primary sources on that tumultuous phase in the history of people's struggle in West Bengal. They describe the real nature of the "Operation Green Hunt," closely associated with innumerable tales of state terror, the destruction of the life and livelihood of the people, occupation of markets, roads, schools, government buildings by joint forces, arrests, cold-blooded murders and disappearances of so many people, death of babies in the womb due to brutality perpetrated by forces of the state and many others. Health centres set up by the PCAPA were attacked and even doctors arrested on trumped-up charges. People of Patri and Kashibhanga villages were prevented in taking part in developmental work by joint forces that kept the villages in a state of perpetual encirclement. Women going to the forests to collect leaves were attacked and molested. Houses were frequently raided

and property—gold rings, cash, etc.—were looted by joint forces. Schools were taken over by forces and used as bases for the suppression of people's movement.

The people of Jangal Mahal did not let such repression go unchallenged. As women formed an important part of resistance, they were made special targets of attack. They were killed by bullets; they were subjected to indignities and rape by the *harmads* and police forces. In July 2010, the *harmads* and state police forces attacked Sonamukhi village, raped at will and beat to death 75-year-old Sarbala Mahato in the adjoining Birihanri village. On July 20, 2010, 50,000 women joined a mammoth demonstration and entered Jhargram town demanding punishment for the rapists. That led to the formation of their own organization—Nari Ijyat Banchao Committee (Committee for the Protection of the Dignity of Women) of Jangal Mahal with Jyotsna Mahato as convenor of the Preparatory Committee. This committee came out with its own organ, *Ijyat (Dignity)* in October 2011.²⁵³

The PCAPA appealed to the civil rights bodies to raise their voice against state terror and stand by the side of the people.²⁵⁴ It evoked no response.

Maoists' Propaganda War

One of the major features of the movement was the propaganda war made by the Maoists on a regular basis either in the name of the WB State Committee of the CPI(ML) or by Koteswar Rao, the central Maoist leader in charge of the Eastern Bureau, bearing such names as Kishenji, Surya, etc. A large number of open letters circulated among the media were issued on every occasion they thought fit, be that on the sabotage of Jnaneswari Express on May 28, 2010 that led to the death of 150 passengers; or open letter to Mamata Banerjee, then central Railway Minister; or to intellectuals like Saonli Mitra, Aparna Sen, Kaushik Sen and others on their proposal for ceasefire; or to Swami Agnivesh; or numerous press releases on BT brinjal seed (a HYV seed harmful to the soil), opposing the

²⁵³ For details, see *Ijyat*, Year 1, No. 1, October 2011.

²⁵⁴ *Pulishi Santrash-birodhi Janasadharaner Committee Chithhi Sankalan* (Collection of letters from PCAPA) published by Debolina Chakraborti on behalf of Matangini Mahila Samiti, Kolkata, December 2010.

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appointment of Sri Narayanam as WB governor and many others. In all these cases, Kishenji played the key role. He talked to the media over the phone for long hours; he came out in the open and released Atindra Lal Roy, the abducted police officer of Sankrail police station, and brought with him an *Adivasi* woman and described her plight to them. No doubt, risks were involved, particularly when his location could be easily located by sophisticated technology.

Kishenji was reportedly arrested and brutally tortured and succumbed to wounds on November 24, 2011 when the TMC government was in power in West Bengal. He was reportedly betrayed by some of his close associates. He was the person who gave leadership in the resurgence of the Maoist movement in West Bengal.

Like many other revolutionaries, Kishenji wrote many poems, one of which was entitled “Blood-offerings from my martyred comrade” written under the penname “Ashidhara.”²⁵⁵ Parts of it are as follows:

Tumults in my mind
Eyes full of tear
Heart frozen in grief
Too heavy to bear
My torch still ablaze
Defying the rains
Jasmines turn blue
Venom spreads in veins.
Friends, hold back tears
It's the final battle
What command to give
I don't know at all.
Revolution calls
Tough times ahead
No time to mourn
Wail for the dead.

²⁵⁵ “*Ashidhara-r Kabita Sankalan*” (Collected Poems of “Ashidhara,” i.e., Kishanji), Kolkata, *Notun Sakal* (New Dawn), Radical Publication, November 2012. This portion was translated for me by a friend.

Brief Review of the Lalgarh Movement by the Maoists

Since the death of Kishenji, the CPI(Maoist) central leadership has come out with a preliminary review of the movement and pointed out a few mistakes. The most striking of the admissions is the leadership's "lack of clarity on Mamata's class character" that led to the misconception that the movement would benefit from the release of political prisoners once Mamata Banerjee, the TMC chief, came to power. The review also blamed the WB Maoist leaders for "falling into the trap of peace talks." The Party also confessed that some of their killings were not right. "We overreacted to the CPI(M) atrocities and repeated their mistakes like killing people without issuing public declaration and by secretly dumping the bodies," the review stated. The document asserted that the Mamata Banerjee government conspired with the UPA II government to kill Kishenji and used the peace talks for that purpose.²⁵⁶

The death of Kishenji signalled a major setback in the movement in Jangal Mahal and, as it appears, it will take a long time to recover.

²⁵⁶ See Snigdhendru Bhattacharya's report in *HT*, July 25, 2015. For varied opinion about Kishanji immediately after his death, see *Kishenji Ekti Hotya, Bohu Postmortem O Kichhu Kathha* (Kishenji A Murder Lots of Postmortem and Some Observation), published by Debolina Chakraborti on behalf of Matangini Mahila Samiti, Kolkata Book Fair, 2012.

PART III
Repression

RIGHT TO READ BOOKS AND EXPRESS ONE'S VIEWS IS A FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT: A BRIEF HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

The right to read books of one's own choice and express one's views comes within the purview of fundamental rights. In history, the stage of expression of one's opinion appeared a long time ago, and written history appeared much later than that; human beings expressed their opinion much earlier than they put their thoughts in writing. However, from some historical stage long gone by, restrictions of two types have been imposed on the freedom of expression. One is imposed by the State, while the other is imposed by society. For the present, we would confine ourselves within state-imposed restrictions.

In bygone days, such a social condition prevailed that everyone could express their personal opinion freely, without any interference. The expression of opinions, exchange of views and such things were part and parcel of daily life and regarded as absolutely natural. One cannot think of such a condition unless there is social equality. Such a situation can exist only in a society where there is no deprivation, no exploitation and authoritarianism of any kind. One can possibly think of such a situation only in a classless society. As the expression of one's opinion is something natural, so the question of rights is not expected to appear in that society. When rights are present as a normal and natural thing, the question of the emergence of the sense of enjoyment of rights can never arise. Such a sense can arise only in a situation when restrictions are imposed on the expression of independent views. Some people are able to enjoy freedom of expression, while others are deprived of it. It is this sense of deprivation that gives rise to the desire for rights. Human beings do not feel any sense of deprivation when everything is being enjoyed as something natural. It arises in a situation when some people are not allowed to enjoy those rights, while some others exercise a monopoly over freedom and enjoyment of rights. That implies that such a sense of enjoyment of rights can come only in a situation where inequality prevails and the society is stratified. It can arise only in a class society where the oppression of one class by another has become an established fact, i.e., where the state-system has emerged.

The time of its arrival varies from one country to another. In the Indian sub-continent, it appears to fall in the late Rig Vedic period (1500–1000 BC approx.) or early Later Vedic period/Yajur Vedic period (1000–500 BC approx.), when the Aryans started their eastward migration from the Land of the Seven Rivers along the foothills of the Himalayas.

Burning of Carvak and his Writings in Ancient India

There are ample instances in the pages of history about how new social, intellectual and political forces were marginalized in one way or another. In ancient India, Brahmanism was the ideology of the ruling classes and hence the dominant ideology, when new Protestant philosophical schools of thought/sects numbering 62 or 363 (according to Buddhist or Jain sources) such as Buddhism, Jainism or Ajivikas made their appearance in the 6th century BC. One of the most important of these schools of thought was the Lokayata (folk philosophy, materialism, atheism, etc.) school. This philosophy probably made its appearance earlier than Jainism and Buddhism and even before the Upanisadas. Makkhali Gosala is regarded as the founder of this school. However, the greatest proponent of the Lokayata school was Carvak. Debiprasad Chattopadhyay, the philosopher, relates the story of the epic, *Mahabharata* after the war was over. All the Brahmin pundits were waiting to greet the Pandava King Yudhisthir. Among them there was Carvak. Carvak came forward and charged the king with the crime of committing the murder of his relatives. The Brahmins became very angry and burnt Carvak to death. They made a bonfire of his writings also, denouncing him as a “hedonist,” “seditious” and “heretic.” Whatever small things we know about Carvak’s philosophy, we know from the writings of his adversaries, i.e., that which they mentioned by way of refuting Carvak’s thoughts. This burning of Carvak along with his writings is the worst example of brutal suppression of the greatest dissenting voice of the time so that his philosophy would disappear from public memory forever. In the later days, many other dissenting voices made their appearance and were suppressed by the dominant Brahmanical ideology as “*pashanda*,” “heretic” and their views as “seditious” in nature.

Burning of Books and the Elimination of Dissident Scholars in Ancient China

What happened in ancient India also happened in ancient China, though probably on a larger scale. We know from the “Records of the Historian” written by Sima Qian, the ancient Chinese historian, that the slave system prevailed during the rule of Zhou dynasty (Western Zhou dynasty/12th century BC to 8th century BC and the Eastern Zhou dynasty/8th century BC to 3rd century BC). In that society the most important philosophy was that of Confucius, which served as the ideological basis of slavery. Among many other schools of thought were Taoism and Legalist Thought. The Legalist school represented the interests of the emerging feudal forces of the time. In 221 BC, emperor Qin Shi Huangdi established the first feudal empire in China. Legalist Thought advocated the introduction of the same law throughout the country and represented the feudal Qin dynasty. During Qin rule (221 BC to 206 BC) at the initiative of Prime Minister Li Si, many books of the Confucius school of thought, such as *Classic of Poetry*, *Classic Book of History*, *Confucian Analects*, etc. were burned. However, despite such actions, the imperial archives retained copies of most of the ancient texts, including the Confucian classics. Li Si also accused sections of the intelligentsia of singing false praise in favour of the emperor and raising dissent through libel and gave orders to kill 460 such scholars.

Forbidden Books in Pre-Revolutionary France

A large number of books were banned during the French Revolution of 1789. Books written by Voltaire, Diderot, Rousseau and Montesquieu were banned. Such books were very popular. However, they were not the most popular of the lot. Books that were bestsellers and most popular were books also banned by the Bourbon regime, written and sold under the cloak. These formed a libertine literature that assailed the orthodox values of the Old Regime. Salacious, blasphemous, treasonous, these illegal bestsellers formed an integral part of the culture of dissent in the Old Regime. They intersected with gossip, rumours, jokes, songs, graffiti, posters, etc., all of which coalesced in a political folklore that powerfully portrayed and attacked an illegitimate regime.

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Robert Darlton in his book entitled *Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France*, discussed three of the most influential bestsellers: *Thérèse philosophe*, an anti-clerical blend of sex and metaphysics; *L'An 2440, rêve s'il en fut jamais* (*Memoirs of the Year 2500*), an attack on the Old Regime in the form of a utopian fantasy set in a far distant future Paris; and *Anecdotes sur Mme. la comtesse du Barry*, a scathing work of political slander with the king as its target. These texts were generally anonymous or bore fictitious names. The police department of Paris described those books as “bad books.” But how could they identify “bad books?” The police kept a few lists. The king’s council issued individual condemnations. Bishops fulminated from the pulpits. And the public hangman lacerated and burnt forbidden books in great ceremony at the foot of the staircase before the Parliament of Paris.

One could not even judge a book by its title. Some title pages flaunt their forbidden character by gross language—*Le Cul d’Iris* (Iris’ Ass) or by provocative false addresses such as “printed at Philadelphia” or “at the sign of liberty,” or “at a hundred leagues from Bastille” or “with approbation and privilege from the king” or anything with a flagrantly false address: “printed at the expense of the Vatican.” The Paris police department asked the publishers’ guild to search for and make a list of these “bad books.” There were many books whose language and essence they could not understand. However, they could find that these “bad books” were actually “philosophical books” (*livres philosophiques*) which smelled of treason and blasphemy. It served as a signal in their commercial code to designate books that could land them in Bastille. These are the books that had to be handled with care.

In medieval Europe, feudalism ruled, and the Catholic Church held sway. Any criticism leveled against it was treated as blasphemy and the outcome was death. In those times, any form of dissent against it was heresy and was banned by the State. Those heretics were decapitated or burnt to death.

Forbidden Texts in India Under Colonial Rule

From the late 19th century, the British colonial rulers started enacting one black law after another curbing freedom of political speech and activities. The Dramatic Performance Control Act of 1876; the Sedition

Bill of 1897; the Sedition Meetings Act of 1907; the Newspapers (Incitement to Offences) Act and the Indian Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1908; the Indian Press Act of 1910; the Defence of India Act of 1915; the notorious Rowlatt Act of 1918; and the Indian Press (Emergency Powers Act) of 1931 followed, one after the other. A large number of books—swadeshi, patriotic songs, poems, articles were banned. The authors whose books were banned included Mukundadas, Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar, Girishchandra, Saiyad Abu Muhammad Ismail Siraji, Sarat Chandra, Nazrul, Manabendranath Roy, Satyendranath Mazumdar, Soumen Thakur, Bijaylal Chattopadhyay and others. Books which, though not formally banned, were under State surveillance included *Anandamath* of Bankim Chandra, *Nildarpan* of Dinabandhu Mitra, *Palashir Yuddha* of Nabinchandra, *Bhabani Mandir* of Arabinda, *Russiar Chithhi* of Rabindranath, *Mewar Patan* of Dwijendralal and many others. There is a complete list of proscribed books in the India Office Library in London. After the hanging of Kshudiram Das, the youngest revolutionary, a *swadeshi dhuti* (dress made of cotton) was manufactured in the *swadeshi* cotton mills with a message printed on it “ekbar biday de ma, ghure aasi” (“Adieu, my mother, let me be born again in your womb”). The British imposed a ban on such *dhuti* in an order dated March 12th, 1910.

Forbidden Texts in Independent India

Did the situation change at all after India became formally independent? Not at all. On the contrary, suppression of the freedom of speech and action and oppression of the people has increased. The Constitution of independent India formulated and made effective during 1949–50 consists of 395 Articles, 250 of which are either copied verbatim or included with slight modifications from the Government of India Act of 1935—an act which was condemned at that time as a “charter of our bondage” by the future first prime minister of independent India. Can an independent country frame a constitution with any one Article that bears the birthmark of slavery and bondage? The IPC, CrPC, Sedition Act, Police Act, Land Acquisition Act and many more are all black acts of the colonial days. In the Indian Constitution, there is a long list of “Fundamental Rights” that the citizens of the country are supposed to enjoy. However, the irony is that each of these black and draconian acts only goes to negate what he or she

gets from the constitution. The Defence of India Rules, Defence of India Act, Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA), Public Security Act, TADA, POTA, UAPA²⁵⁷—each of these draconian acts were enacted to gag freedom of speech and action. Each of these laws was followed by bylaws, which actually negated the “fundamental rights” as enshrined in the Indian Constitution. These laws were actually “lawless laws,” which should not have any place in a democracy. In the early 1950s, CPI periodicals and newspapers such as “Janayuddha” and “Swadhinata” were banned. A large number of dissident activists were incarcerated. During the 1962 war with China, many political activists were put behind bars for being “pro-Chinese.” Books and atlases demarcating the boundary between India and China supporting China’s claim were taken out from the National Library of Calcutta and burned. Neville Maxwell’s book *India’s China War* was declared illegal in India when the issue was raised in the Indian Parliament. Mao Zedong’s writings, Bertrand Russell’s book *Unarmed Victory* and other books of a similar nature were burnt by people infected with chauvinism and jingoism in Kolkata and elsewhere.

In 1967, “a peal of spring thunder crashed over” Naxalbari, heralding the dawn of revolutionary politics and radical culture. Along with all-round State repression and brutality, there descended attacks on freedom of expression, publication of books and freedom to read books of one’s own choice. On April 27, 1970, police raided the office of *Deshabrati*, the organ of the WB State Committee of the CPI(ML) and then of *Liberation*, the central organ, and seized furniture, press matters, types and arrested press workers. All the publications of *Deshabrati*—booklets such as “Marxist Philosophy,” “Marxist Theory and Social Revolution,” “Chinese Path and the Communist Party of India,” “Real Face of Parliamentary Democracy,” “Boycott of Elections in the form of Questions and Answers,” “Report of the Terai Peasant Movement,” “Srikakulam,” “China’s Chairman is Our Chairman, China’s Path is Our Path,” “On New Democracy” by Mao Zedong and many more were made illegal. Mao’s “Red Book” published

²⁵⁷ All “Anti-Terrorism” laws: TADA – Terrorism and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (1987), POTA – Prevention of Terrorism Act (2002), UAPA – Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (1967, updated 2004).

from Beijing was also banned. A large number of magazines and booklets published in different areas were also banned.

Readers can get an idea of the nature of the proscribed literature from the seizure list of police cases. Let us take up the Entally Conspiracy Case—an anti-State sedition case framed by a police officer named Ranajit (Runu) Guha Neogi who earned much notoriety for his sadistic torture inflicted in the Lalbazar central police lockup, particularly on Naxalite women activists. Materials included in that seizure list were as follows:

1. *Deshabrati*, dated July 27, July 31, 1972;
2. Sixteen leaflets;
3. *Liberation*, January–March 1971, Vol. 4, No. 3;
4. Lots of unidentified periodicals;
5. Book entitled *Two International Documents*;
6. Book entitled *National Democratic Front for National Democratic Tasks*;
7. Presidency College Magazine, Aswin 1376 (1968–69);
8. Book captioned *Collected Writings of Our Respected Leader Comrade Charu Mazumdar*, 562 copies;
9. *Liberation*, July 1971, 20 copies;
10. “Poob Aakaash Lal” (“The East is Red”), November 1971, 8 copies;
11. “Chinese Literature,” Nos. 8 & 9, 1969;
12. Ho Chi Minh’s *Prison Diary*;
13. *Hindi Lok Yudh*, April 22, 1972;
14. *Peking Review*, February 5, 1972;
15. Inner-Party document on “On Pakistan and the line of Deshabrati-Liberation”;
16. Booklet captioned “Naxalbarir Siksha” (“Teachings of Naxalbari”).

Later during 2001–02, Prof. Kaushik Ganguly, Parashar Bhattacharya, Sudip Chongdar, Mithu Roy and others were arrested and tortured in the lockup and Abhijit Sinha was forced to commit suicide. In their case a seizure list was given by the police which included some issues of *People's March*, *Aneek*, a Bengali periodical, George Thomson's well-known book, *From Marx to Mao Zedong* and a leaflet captioned "Clinton, go back."

That phase was followed by people's movements in Nandigram and Lalgarh, and police repression also became intense. During that phase, apart from common people—activist or not—printers and publishers were also attacked. Bapi Goswami of Sreeparna Press near Barasat and the proprietor of Calcutta Grafix at Ultadanga were taken into custody. Swapan Dasgupta, the editor of *Bangla People's March*, was arrested under the draconian UAPA, tortured and left to die virtually without medical treatment in prison. Members of some such democratic, civil and human rights bodies as Sanhati Mancha, Lalgarh Aandolan Sanhati Mancha, Matangini Mahila Samiti, APDR (Association for Protection of Democratic Rights), BMC (Bandi Mukti Committee, a human rights body based in West Bengal that fights for the release of political prisoners) and others were intimidated and branded as "Maoists" by the WB State agencies, so that they would desist from raising their voice against state repression and incarceration of the *Adivasis* and others fighting for their rights, dignity and justice. The question is: why does the State impose restrictions on dissenting voices, organizations and magazines? Can the State achieve its goal by so doing?

Why Does the State Impose a Ban? Does It Bear Fruit?

The government which professes democracy cannot curb freedom of expression, of publication of books by individuals and organizations. Still it does. Why does it do so? They take this recourse when they are afflicted with deep-rooted socio-economic crises, and when people's voice against state repression gets louder and louder and the rulers find it hard to combat them ideologically. It is the State that is armed with weapons, forces and black laws which they use according to their own sweet will against their adversaries, even though they are sons and daughters of the same soil. They believe that since they are armed to the teeth, they will be able to crush people's resistance as they wish. The ruling classes all over the world

think that by putting a ban on books, they will be able to put an end to their reading; by stopping the publication of a book, they will be able to stop the dissemination of the ideas it professes; and by banning an organization, they will be able to send it to oblivion. Does what they believe will happen actually happen?

First, in some situation, it can happen, but that too for a brief period. Actually the eagerness to know what is forbidden increases, not diminishes, among the people, particularly among the young generation. Banned books are then printed secretly, circulated among people and they go on changing hands. Clandestine literature makes its way, spread through networks, keeping the ruling classes in the dark and placing them in a state of perpetual anxiety.

In China, clandestine literature was printed and circulated secretly among people during the stage of the Revolution of 1911 under Sun Yat-sen, not to speak of those published later during the stage of communist revolution. The British rulers could not stop the circulation of “seditious” (read patriotic) songs and poems by enacting black laws. The result was just the opposite. Nor could the colonial rulers wipe out revolutionary ideology by sending Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev, Rajguru, Batukeswar Datta and Surya Sen to the gallows.

In his speech against banning and the anti-State sedition act before the Sedition Committee on November 1st, 1907, the leading lawyer, Rashbihari Ghosh stated that the rulers had forgotten that “they cannot coerce thought, they cannot make men loyal by legislative enactment.” To make discontent illegal does not pay as then “discontent was driven beneath the surface.” Rabindranath Tagore stood against the Sedition Law and wrote his critique of it in *Kantharodh* (Gagging freedom of speech) in 1898. He wrote:

I am not a rebel, nor am I a hero, probably not foolish also.... I do not know where exactly I stand. I know not what steps that I may take would invite the rulers' wrath... one fine morning I see that the chains that rusted for being unused for long are being polished to bind us with new laws... as we have become dangerous. [He went on to state:] Suddenly, I have woken up to realize that the weak did not have any rights at all. We

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woke up to the reality that what we thought all human beings would get naturally is being enjoyed by us due to the mercy towards the weak from the strong.

When *Deshabrati*, the organ of the CPI(ML) was banned, it began to be printed secretly. Production was not stopped. Printing became decentralized. Instead of being printed in a central press at Keshab Sen Street in central Calcutta, it was printed in different localities, such as in Beliaghata, Behala, etc. by respected area committees under stressful conditions. Copies were circulated secretly, and the same copy changed hands until the copy became soiled due to wear and tear. Niranjana Bose and his team were in charge of the central team looking after printing and publication. Much later, the WB State Committee of the CPI(ML) People's War started its Bengali organ *Biplabi Yug* under the leadership of the same Niranjana Bose. Initially, it was published openly. Later, after the Party was banned, the organ also went underground and regularly changed its cover page to deceive the police.

So many reading materials throughout the world were banned for being "seditious," and still the message of change and revolution spread far and wide. Thus ideas cannot be killed by banning any literature or an organization. This is simply because there is a deep social and political demand for such literature among the people, as these writings address certain issues that are burning issues and affect the vital lifelines of the people. Robert Darnton starts his book with the following words: "When the public hangman lacerated and burned forbidden books in the courtyard of the Palais de Justice in Paris, he paid tribute to the power of the printed word." Undoubtedly he did pay. Similarly, when "seditious" literature is made illegal by governments in India and other countries, they, quite unknowingly, pay tribute to the strength of the ideology of the dissidents. What one may add is: this new ideology is so powerful as to make the State too scared to confront it openly.

Second, as we know, the CPI(Maoist) was banned on an all-India level with a "terror" tag attached to it on June 22, 2009 and, henceforth, it came under the purview of the draconian Unlawful Activities Prevention (Amended) Act of 2008. That ban has been extended along with the act itself, as the notorious Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) has been

in force in Manipur for the last 35 years. But by banning the CPI(Maoist), both the central and state governments have unknowingly admitted the fact that the Maoists are a formidable political force to deal with.

Third, by banning them, they again quite unknowingly have admitted something that can never acknowledge in public. That is, they have admitted their own failure to combat the Maoists ideologically and politically. The Naxalite/Maoist movement is the longest surviving revolutionary movement in the history of our country, having a history of nearly five decades since 1967. They have raised certain fundamental questions on socio-economic conditions, poverty, hunger, malnutrition, disastrous effects of the Western model of development on our society and economy, the plunder of the country's vast resources by the foreign MNCs and domestic big capital and advocated the need for introducing a truly self-reliant, pro-people development model in our country. Many of these issues have been raised by social scientists, writers, political activists, intellectuals, retired and in-service bureaucrats over time. However, the powers-that-be at the centre and the states have never cared to seriously address these fundamental issues, never cared to fulfill their own fundamental obligations to the people. So by treating it solely as a "law and order problem," it has only betrayed its utter inability to combat them on the political and socio-economic planes. In fact, by banning the Maoist Party, they have, in reality, admitted their own defeat in the face of their formidable enemy.

Fourth, while opposing the ban on the Maoist Party, K. G. Kannabiran, the late civil rights lawyer-crusader wrote a letter to Dr. Manmohan Singh, then Indian prime minister, stating: "Maoist intervention or for that matter any political intervention on account of the failure of successive governments to perform their fundamental obligations could not be considered an act of terrorism and justify invocation of draconian laws." In fact, democracy and ban never go together. It is quite unfortunate that the powers at the centre and the states have utterly failed to appreciate the significance of this lesson.

Howard Fast in his ever memorable novel, *Spartacus*, which transcended historical epochs, wrote that the name Spartacus, the legendary slave leader who fought against mighty Rome, was uttered among the slaves sometimes in whispers and sometimes at the top of the voice. In the same way, the names of Thomas Munzer, Lenin, Mao Zedong, Charu

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Mazumdar, and so many other rebel leaders were uttered in many lands. No degree of intimidation, coercion, threat to life or incarceration could stop people's voices.

A couple of years back, Mamata Banerjee-led WB government amended Section 24 of the West Bengal Correctional Services Act of 1992 (introduced by the previous left-front government), which gave the status of political prisoner to all those charged with the commission of political offences. This was done at a time when the whole issue of political prisoner status was kept pending in the Supreme Court. In the amendment, they withdrew the status of political prisoner from all those who were members of any "banned organization." So members of organizations banned by the State will not get that status. Here we will not dwell either on the vindictive attitude of the TMC-led government towards those whom they consider to be their sworn enemies, or with the election pledges regarding the release of all political prisoners—a pledge they have conveniently broken; we will rather deal with the members of "banned" organizations. The State has banned the Maoist Party as also various radical mass organizations and some Muslim organizations for being supposedly involved in "seditious" activities. The question is: seditious activities are offences of a clear political nature and thus anybody charged with committing such political offences is the first to be declared as a political prisoner. By depriving its own citizens, charged with "seditious" activity of this status, the present Western Bengal government has actually made itself a laughingstock. They ban an organization on the charge of the commission of the most serious political offences (sedition). It is tantamount to accepting the serious political nature of the "offences" legally. But then they refuse to give the status to those political "offenders" on the grounds of being members of banned organizations. How foolish and funny their illogic is!

The progressive, democratic and conscientious people in our country have always fought for the establishment of the fundamental rights of freedom to read, to publish, to express one's opinion, to act and to disseminate one's ideas by brushing aside intimidation and veiled threats from the various state agencies, fundamentalist elements and vested interests from time to time. There is no doubt that they will continue to do so

by braving all odds and strengthen this battle for democratic space and the restoration of all those fundamental rights of the people without the enjoyment of which this land will not remain fit for human living.

READING PRISON TEXTS: COLONIAL AND POST-COLONIAL INDIA

On September 1, 2014, national dailies carried the news of a Supreme Court order in response to a PIL (Public Interest Litigation)²⁵⁸ on prisoners across the country. Those among the under-trial prisoners who had already passed a period in jail that was half the maximum sentence that he or she would have gotten if sentenced, would be released.²⁵⁹ The Supreme Court gave the unbelievable number of under-trials and convicts in that order. The total number across the country was 3.81 *lakhs*, of which 2.54 *lakhs* were under-trial prisoners and 1.27 *lakhs* were serving sentences as convicts, including life imprisonment and also those on the death row. The figure excludes those who were released on bail, the number of which we do not have any clear idea. Of these, thousands were incarcerated for their political dissent, with 31,000 *Adivasis* and others such as *Dalits*, peasants, educated middle class, etc.—all of whom could be categorized as political prisoners, even though the state might not officially treat them as such. These facts are important as this paper presented deals with prison, political prisoners and their interactions with ordinary prisoners as well as the State.

This paper is based on prison memoirs written mostly by political prisoners having an intellectual background covering both the colonial and post-colonial periods. The texts that have been selected for the present study are *Nirbashiter Atmakatha (Autobiography of an Exile)* by Upendranath Bandyopadhyay,²⁶⁰ *Shrikhal Jhankar (Rattling of the Chains)* by Bina Das,²⁶¹ *Jenana Fatak (Female Ward)* by Rani Chanda.²⁶² These are texts based on their experience in colonial prisons spread over parts of

²⁵⁸ Public Interest Litigation is a legal instrument in India introduced in the 1980s, which allows for litigation to serve public interest. Prior to the PIL, poor defendants were not guaranteed free legal aid or speedy trial.

²⁵⁹ *Times of India*, September 1, 2014.

²⁶⁰ Upendranath Bandyopadhyay, *Nirbashiter Atmakatha (Autobiography of the Banished)*, Ninth impression, Kolkata, National Publishers, August 1976.

²⁶¹ Bina Das, *Shrikhal Jhankar O Onyanyo*, Jayasree Prakashan, Kolkata, Poush 1402 BS (1995).

²⁶² Rani Chanda, *Jenana Fatak (Female Ward)*, Ananda Publishers Pvt. Ltd, June 1997.

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undivided Bengal and the Andamans. For the post-colonial period, I have chosen *My Years in an Indian Prison* by Mary Tyler,²⁶³ *Karagare Athharo Bachhor* (Eighteen Years in Prison) by Azizul Haque,²⁶⁴ *Jail-er Bhitor Jail* (*Prison within Prison*) by Meenakshi Sen,²⁶⁵ *Captive Imagination* by Varavara Rao²⁶⁶ and *Colours of the Cage* by Arun Ferreira.²⁶⁷ The post-colonial texts cover prisons in Hazaribagh in Bihar, Kolkata in West Bengal, Secunderabad in Andhra Pradesh and Nagpur in Maharashtra. The sub-themes that will be discussed in this paper are as follows:

1. Prison;
2. Prisoners: Ordinary and Political;
3. Torture in Police Custody;
4. Relations Between Political Prisoners and Ordinary Prisoners;
5. How do they make an unbearable life bearable inside prison?
6. Creativity thrives under pressure;
7. Struggle Inside Prison: Political and Ordinary Prisoners; and
8. Prison and Prisoners: Colonial Period and Post-Colonial Period.

Prison

When one enters a prison as a prisoner, one has to bow one's head down. He enters through a small iron gate, although there are also large gates which are meant only for officials. This bowing down is significant. The prison will make you feel that as you have become a prisoner, you are henceforth unfree and that you will have to keep your head down as long

²⁶³ Mary Tyler, *My Years in an Indian Prison*, London, Victor Gollancz Ltd., March 1977.

²⁶⁴ Azizul Haque, *Karagare Athharo Bachhor*, Kolkata, Dey's Publishing, August 2006.

²⁶⁵ Meenakshi Sen, *Jail-er Bhitor Jail* (Prison Inside Prison), Pagalbari Parbo (This volume deals with life sketches of non-criminal lunatic (NCL) woman prisoners), People's Book Society, Kolkata, January 2003; Hajati Number Meyadi Number Parbo (This volume is about under-trial and convict woman prisoners), Pratikshon Publications Pvt. Ltd., January 1994.

²⁶⁶ Varavara Rao, *Captive Imagination: Letters from Prison*, Penguin Viking, Penguin Books India, 2010.

²⁶⁷ Arun Ferreira, *Colours of the Cage: A Prison Memoir*, Rupa, Nagpur, 2014; A Bengali translation has been published by Setu Prakashani, Kolkata in January 2015 entitled *Barnamoy Pinjar Karabrittant*.

as you remain in jail. Varavara Rao describes the small gate as “the mouth of a python” that devours you. It is this python that drains out all your spirit and kills you with every passing day. Upendranath Bandyopadhyay wrote:

Prachirta chhilo amader chokshushul. Seta jeno ahoraho chitkar koriya bolito “Tomra koyedi, tomra koyedi. Amar hate jokhon poriyachho tokhon ar tomader nistar nai.” [We detested the wall. It appeared to go on shouting at us: “You are prisoners, you are prisoners. Once you are within my grasp there is no way of slipping out of it.”]²⁶⁸

It does not matter whether the jail has been renamed as a “correctional home.” Its intrinsic nature remains unchanged through the ages.

In prison, the prisoner is kept either in a ward (also called “file”) or in a cell. The ward is for ordinary prisoners while the cell is generally for those who are considered by the authorities to be dangerous, those charged with sedition or those sentenced to death. Those who are condemned to death are put up in *fanshi* cells (i.e., condemned cells from which the prisoners are taken to be hanged). In some prisons, such as those in Andhra Pradesh or Maharashtra, wards are called barracks. Wards are big, of rectangular size, and can accommodate a large number of prisoners, while cells, smaller in size (9 feet by 6 feet or a bit more) accommodate either three or one prisoner. In colonial days, revolutionaries were kept in solitary confinement in a cell, and in post-colonial days, communist revolutionaries, Naxalite/Maoist prisoners or those allegedly connected with certain Muslim “terrorist” organizations are kept in the solitary cells. The first night, the new inmate is kept in a ward called “aamdani” (i.e., newcomer). The next morning he or she is taken to the case table where the jailor or superintendent comes every morning, the legal sections under which the prisoner is booked—i.e., case histories are recorded on a card—and then sent either to a ward or a cell according to the nature of the offence.

The gates of the ward and the cell are opened every morning at 6 AM after the *gunti* (head-counting of prisoners), locked up at 12 noon, unlocked at 3 PM and locked up again at 6 PM for the night. So a prisoner

²⁶⁸ Upendranath Bandyopadhyay, *Nirbashiter Atmakatha (Autobiography of the Banished)*, Ninth impression, Kolkata, National Publishers, August 1976.

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is locked up for 15 hours every day. Cells in different jails are not of the same size—some big, some small. The cells in Presidency Jail in Kolkata called 44 degrees²⁶⁹ are of about 9 feet by 6 feet in size, in which the present writer spent a couple of years in the early 1970s—a picture of which one can see in Aurobindo Ghosh's *Tales of Prison Life* and Barindra Kumar Ghosh's *The Tale of My Exile Twelve Years in the Andamans*. The cells in the Cellular Jail in Port Blair, Andamans, are, though rectangular, far bigger in size. The shape of the cell in Hazaribagh Jail which Mary Tyler, the British prisoner, drew in her book is also rectangular. I had the opportunity to visit a former prison in the city of Recife in Brazil, which is also of the same shape. Everywhere, the cell, or the place for solitary confinement, was the place for those who are considered to be most dangerous in the eyes of the State. Arun Ferreira states in his account that in the cell you are all alone and this prolonged absence of human beings is the thing that affects the prisoner most. This loneliness is dangerous and enough to bring mental and physical breakdown, even to the strongest mind.

Prisoners: Ordinary and Political

In prison you have under-trials and convicts. At times, there could also be detainees—people under preventive detention without any specific charges levelled against them. There were also classified prisoners who enjoy special amenities. Most of the prisoners in prisons are poor people—people who are victims of social oppression, tagged in false cases, *Adivasis*, *Dalits*—victims of high-caste oppression, victims of group rivalry, women who are raped and humiliated by those who roam about freely while the victims are kept in “safe custody,” and many others. Meenakshi Sen, a Naxalite prisoner in the 1970s lodged in Presidency Jail, relates many stories of such ordinary women, their plight and also their fight for survival. Putul, who stole two sarees from a house in which she worked, was arrested and her case went on for years. Rina worked in a house where she resisted the sexual advances of the house owner; that person, unable to satisfy his lust, handed her over to the police by bringing a false charge of theft against her.

²⁶⁹ There are 44 cells in Presidency jail (now called “correctional home”) in two lines: 1-22 cells and 23-44 cells). Some of these cells are also known as “condemned cells,” meant for those who to be sent to the gallows. These were meant mainly for Naxalite/Maoist prisoners who believed in Charu Mazumdar's line of jail revolt and jail breaks.

Since then she has been in Presidency Jail, Kolkata for years. Arun Ferreira relates the story of political prisoners, of one *Adivasi* couple in Nagpur prison, accused of having Maoist connections, both of whom were tagged in more than forty cases. After five years Ganpat Kudmethhe and his wife Suttaka Noitam realized that they had been arrested and charged twice in the same case. Pijush Guha, who is a co-accused and now on bail in the Binayak Sen-Narayan Sanyal case in Raipur, Chhattisgarh, told the audience in a recently held book release event in Kolkata, that in Chhattisgarh, a person was booked in as many as 125 cases.

The sections under which the political prisoners are booked are those that come under sedition act such as 121A, 120B, 122, etc. which detain a person on the charge of “conspiring against the State” for overthrowing it by armed means. These charges were levelled against such revolutionaries as Bhagat Singh, Surya Sen, Ullaskar Datta, Lala Hardayal and hundreds of others by the British-Indian government, and also against Telangana peasants and the Naxalites/Maoists during the post-colonial period. Upen-dranath Bandyopadhyay related his experience of the Muraripukur Conspiracy Case and his days in Alipur Jail and in Cellular Jail; to keep the political prisoners in detention for as many years as possible, ordinary laws were not enough, so black laws such as the AFSPA, MISA, TADA, POT, UAPA were enacted. Getting bail under these draconian acts, particularly the UAPA, is next to impossible, as the plight of the political prisoners in the Bhima-Koregaon case and the very recent death of the 84-year-old Stan Swami in captivity would amply testify.

The treatment is different with leaders and members of mainstream parliamentary parties. During the colonial days and after, they enjoyed the status of classified prisoners or division prisoners, which entitled them to many privileges and amenities that made them stand apart in a separate category from the rest. Other prisoners jokingly call them VIP prisoners.

Torture in Police Custody

Torture in police custody is a common occurrence nowadays, as it was in the colonial days. Bina Das, the young lady who shot at the Bengal Governor at the convocation of the University of Calcutta in 1932, heard about perpetration of cruelty by police, such as subjecting the detained to battery charging, forcing the detained to lie on the ice slab, inserting pins

into the nails, etc. being meted out to many. Upendranath Bandyopadhyaya related his experience in Cellular Jail in the Andamans where brutal torture was added to hard and inhuman physical labour. Arun Ferreira, who spent four and a half years in Nagpur Jail from 2007 to 2012, provided us with gory details of police torture in custody, being subjected himself to a narco-analysis test²⁷⁰ twice, besides other sadistic methods of torture. We will not repeat such instances.

Relations Between Political Prisoners and Ordinary Prisoners

The relations between political and ordinary prisoners appear to be generally cordial as we go through the texts. Political prisoners are held with respect by others. In the 1970s, when the prisons were full beyond capacity, Naxalite prisoners were called “comrades” by others both in the police lockup and also in jail. This was particularly noticeable in the female wards where inmates were fewer and women political activists were far fewer in number than those in male wards.

Rani Chanda, who stayed in Suri Jail in the early 1940s for quite some time, stayed in the same ward with other prisoners and freely mixed with them. Meenakshi Sen created pieces on ordinary women with such passion that can move readers to tears. One such character is Shobha, who was deserted by her husband when she became pregnant and sent to jail on a false charge. She gave birth to a baby who died in prison a few days after birth. Shobha was charged with the murder of her own baby by the *matines* (convict women in charge of wards/cells) and sent to the degree cell (for solitary confinement) which was a nightmare for prisoners. Shobha appealed to the political prisoners for help, which led to a boycott of lockup (refusing to enter the cell) until Shobha was released from degree cell and shifted to her original place. It was a protest movement in which both political and ordinary prisoners joined hands.

In post-colonial India, particularly in the 1970s, conditions inside prison were more difficult for them. Jails were then filled with thousands of Naxalite prisoners. They waged struggles against injustice, fought against attacks by the jail warders and trusted convicts: there were revolts in prison and attempts at jail breaks leading to jail killings. It was a situation which

²⁷⁰ Narco-analysis tests are “tests” in which psychotropic drugs are administered to put prisoners into a mental stupor that can be exploited by an interrogator.

was entirely new and the relations with ordinary prisoners were not that easy or smooth.

In the prisons of West Bengal, there were within Naxalite political activists three different broad lines on the policy towards ordinary prisoners. First, that there need not be any interaction with ordinary prisoners; the political prisoners should have separate wards with separate *chouka* (kitchen) detached from the main *chouka*. Second, political prisoners should stay in the general ward along with ordinary prisoners and should not have a separate *chouka*; they should try to indoctrinate them (convicts and under-trials) in the revolutionary doctrines so that they could also take part in struggles inside prison and take that lesson outside after being released. They were against legal struggles such as making applications for bail, etc. Their line was only that of jail revolt and jail break. The third line, like the second one, was in favour of staying in the general ward along with other prisoners without any separate *chouka*. But on the issue of indoctrination and reliance, there was a major difference. According to this line, ordinary convicts are part of the prison administration and the jail officials depend on them for maintenance of law and order inside. The early release of the convicts depended on their good conduct, which enabled them to get remission from the jail authority. Mary Tyler related that each convict in Hazaribagh Jail got a remission of six months if he killed one Naxalite prisoner. If they disobeyed, then their imprisonment would be prolonged without remission. The under-trial ordinary prisoners, if they disobeyed, would be penalized by various means and could also be tagged in new cases if they were seen interacting with the Naxalites. Thus many of them are forced to act as informers, and there should be vigilance about them. What should be done about them? According to the third line, good relations should be maintained, and the general political line could be propagated without divulging organizational matters. The object was to neutralize them in times of crisis so that they did not act as pawns in the hands of administration. Unlike the second line, it was not one of politicizing them, but neutralizing them by commanding their respect through interaction.

How Do the Political Prisoners Make Life Bearable Inside Prison?

Is the life in prison unbearable? When a detained person is transferred from police custody to jail custody after undergoing physical and mental torture and humiliation under inhuman conditions, one feels a bit relieved. However, in prison the political prisoner finds himself in a condition which, with its solitary confinement, other restrictions, and bad food, with hardly any amenities needed for basic living—which is equally oppressive, although different in nature. Such living conditions are even worse for women, and the reader gets this impression from the writings of Bina Das, Rani Chanda and Mary Tyler, particularly the latter.

To Arun Ferreira and also to many others, life in prison is extremely monotonous; the best way to overcome this monotony is “by being engaged in work.” Political discussions are natural among them. What else? In the Maharashtra prisons, non-vegetarian food is not allowed, so the prisoners found out ways to get meat inside jail. They trapped sparrows and big rats for food. At times, locusts invaded the prison and they collected them, dried them and ate them as non-vegetarian food. Reading books and engaging in discussions on themes of a varied nature are an important part of prison life. Most of the prisoners are not only poor; they are also illiterate. They come to the political prisoners for writing letters to their relatives, petitions to jailor, to court on various occasions, and in this way an intimacy develops between political and ordinary prisoners. Arun Ferreira related that on the Rakhi Bandhan Day (the practice of tying threads/*rakhi* by the sister around the wrist of the brother—which goes back to the anti-British *swadeshi* days), he would receive two *rakhis*, one from Lata and another from Dharmendra’s sister.²⁷¹ On the occasion of Eid and Diwali, they prepared cards from the pictures of flowers and leaves printed on old magazines. Ordinary prisoners also come to them to learn English and mathematics.

Bina Das, who was in Hijli Jail for a period of time under British rule, wrote in her memoirs about how they engaged in reading, games, singing,

²⁷¹ Lata and Dharmendra’s sister were ordinary prisoners whose *rakhis*/threads were tied around the wrist of Arun Ferreira, a Naxalite prisoner. *Rakhi* is tied by the sister around the wrist of her brother as a token of affection—a practice that goes back to the *swadeshi* anti-colonial days just after the partition of Bengal in 1905.

staging dramas, initiating debates, competition, etc. “On the whole, we had transformed Hijli into a mini ‘Santiniketan’ (abode of Rabindranath Tagore), with so many festivals—Varshamangal, Rabindra Jayanti or Bijaya Sammilani.” Upendranath Bandyopadhyaya also talked about the singing of “Swadeshi songs” inside prison by teenagers like Sachin Sen. In the evenings after the lockup, they met in an *adda* where songs by Hemchandra, Ullashkar, Debabrata and others were sung.

In 1970, Mary Tyler, a young English school teacher, was arrested and held for five years without trial in the Hazaribagh Jail. (In June 1975, the charges were suddenly dropped, and she was deported back to England.) She was arrested under sedition charges and branded as a Naxalite. In jail she was kept under solitary confinement, in a cell separated by a wall from another where Kalpana, another political prisoner, stayed. How did she pass her sleepless nights all alone? She wrote:

Late at night, tired of shouting to Kalpana, I would stand in silence by the bars and contemplate the moon rising clear and serene above the *peepul* trees beyond the jail’s outer wall; I watched a white owl perched motionless on the roof of the men’s dormitory next door, frogs that leaped around the gutters and the tall *margosa* tree, home of a thousand sleeping birds, that stood in the yard outside my cell, and I felt that, in a strange world filled with a language I did not understand and situations beyond my comprehension, Nature at least was something familiar and tangible; I was grateful that imprisonment had not entirely cut me off from her.²⁷²

Life in prison has to be made bearable; because once the prisoner succumbs to that situation, he or she cannot get out of it. It is a compulsion that keeps her/him alive. Political prisoners in different periods did it in their own ways by fighting against all adversity.

Creativity Thrives Under Pressure: Prison Literature

How do the political prisoners overcome suffering? The weight of suffering grows lighter if you speak out. Meenakshi Sen, a Naxalite activist

²⁷² Mary Tyler, *My Years in an Indian Prison*, London, Victor Gollancz Ltd., March 1977.

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of the 1970s, wrote a number of pieces with much passion and warmth about ordinary women prisoners such as Mira, Shobha, Madina and many others, who suffered so much in the society outside; she exposed the cruelty embedded in our social and political structure with her penetrating analysis, which moves us to tears. Varavara Rao, a well-known Telugu poet, an ideologue of Maoist politics and a founder-member of the Virasam (Revolutionary Writers' Association, in and out of prison throughout his life and now on medical bail in the Bhima-Koregaon Case) also took up the pen to speak out. Poetry, which is a synonym for suffering, should also be synonymous with the struggle to end suffering. He wrote:

To share with people,
To condemn the oppressor,
To lighten my solitude
To relieve your solitude
To know myself
And to know ourselves...
I seize a pen—in this culture
That blind imprisoned culture,
I do not write
Because I have the freedom to write
I write because
I have nothing to lose but my chains.
Words rise and swell in my heart
Like blood
For a world that is just and free.
These handcuffs,
My tools, I write
I write to escape death,
To exorcise the demon
That haunts me.
Isn't it the same for us all?²⁷³

In the Secunderabad Conspiracy Case of the 1970s, there were six political prisoners, including Varavara Rao and Cherabandu Raju, who

²⁷³ Varavara Rao, *Captive Imagination: Letters from Prison*, Penguin Viking, Penguin Books India, 2010.

were members of the Virasam—the first of its kind in India, directly inspired by the Naxalbari and Srikakulam *Adivasi* struggles. They felt that their songs and slogans should be indelibly stamped with the Virasam mark.

It was with this in mind that Cherabandu Raju wrote his “Pallavi.” He felt that the song had the power to transform slogans into poetry. Even our handcuffs had the taste of poetry. One handcuff is put on one wrist and the other hangs loose if no one is chained to you. Holding one handcuff and beating time with it on the other we would even forget that we were handcuffed.²⁷⁴

Struggle Inside Prison: Political and Ordinary Prisoners

Whenever there are political prisoners, there are struggles inside prisons. Political prisoners fight over various issues such as food, medical treatment, for their rights, jail reforms, against indignity and humiliation, tagging in false cases, arrests at jail gates in new cases immediately after release. Mary Tyler talks about the struggle to get a copy of the jail manual when she was in Hazaribagh Jail. At times, there are higher struggles, such as jailbreaks. Azizul Haque related the story of a jailbreak in Presidency Jail, Kolkata, on February 24, 1976 during Emergency in which 44 political prisoners escaped, two of whom died in police firing just outside the jail gate. That break was followed by stringent repressive measures in all West Bengal prisons, including 24-hour lockups—a massive hunger strike by a large number of political prisoners followed. There are cases both in the colonial and post-colonial periods when political and ordinary prisoners joined hands on common issues and organized indefinite hunger strikes.

Prison and Prisoners: Colonial and Post-Colonial Periods

Conditions inside prison have not changed much since the colonial times. The abysmal living conditions; the worst food for general prisoners; almost daily and hourly maltreatment and humiliation of prisoners by the jail authority; prolonged agony of the prisoners due to years of incarceration

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

tion; tagging in false and new cases; separation from home for long periods and the trauma and other sufferings that follow—are very regular features today as they were in the yesteryears. Poor people suffer in the same way as before. So there is continuity in the two periods. As the socio-economic and political crisis deepens, newer black laws are enacted to intimidate and keep dissident voices under control, and brutality and new methods of torture and repression are being perpetrated. Today, under the Modi-led BJP central rule, not only the Maoist prisoners, but all dissenting voices are gagged and invariably tagged under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) whose main object is to keep them in prison for decades together where getting bail is next to impossible.

Sometime back, jail got a new name: “correctional home.” Does this change in name mean anything new in actual life? No. Actual life does not remain the same, but gets worse, with no hope for prisoners to get release. In the earlier days, life imprisonment meant that the prisoner would be in prison for at least 14 years, after which he would be released. The idea was that by then, he must have atoned for his misdeeds and corrected himself, and that gave him a chance to start life anew—even though jail, then, was not called a “correctional home.” However, it is called so now. And quite surprisingly, the Supreme Court gave the verdict that life imprisonment from now on is to be taken in a literal sense, i.e., imprisonment for life. The prisoner has to remain in jail for the last years of his life, even if he corrects himself in the “correctional home.” This goes against the fundamental right to freedom and to life.

Let me conclude with what Nelson Mandela wrote in his prison memoir, *Long Walk to Freedom*: “It is said that no one truly knows a nation until one has been inside its jails. A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens, but its lowest ones.”

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PART IV

People's Development

THE WORLD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN: BASIC CHANGES BROUGHT ABOUT IN PARTS OF CENTRAL INDIA BY THE MAOIST MOVEMENT (1980 TO THE 1990s)

This paper is about the impact of the Maoist movement on the economy and society in parts of the Gadchiroli area of Maharashtra. This region is part of a far bigger zone called Dandakaranya.

Dandakaranya is a vast region located in central India, with slices taken from five different states of India. It embraces parts of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Odisha. It is very rich in forest and mineral resources and spread over one *lakh* and ten thousand square kilometers embracing 11 districts. It comprises such areas as Adilabad, Khammam, East Godavari and Vishakhapatnam of Andhra Pradesh; Gadchiroli, Chnadrapura and Bhandara of Maharashtra; Bastar and Rajnandgaon of Chhattisgarh; Balaghat of Madhya Pradesh and Koraput and Malkangiri of Odisha. The area has a population of around two *crores*. People of several tribes such as the Gond, Madia, Govari, Kondu, Kondareddy, Nayakapu, Dorla, Muria (Koya) and Odiya tribes of Ooruja, Gudijursa, Butar, Durva, etc. live in Dandakaranya (henceforth DK).

This region is one of the richest in terms of being the reservoir of forest, water and mineral wealth. The Jagdalpur market in Bastar alone is considered to be Asia's largest trading centre for forest produce, with a yearly trade of over Rs. 1,000 *crore* in tamarind, Mahua flowers and seeds, sal seeds, gum, etc. Godavari, Indravati and Pranhita are the three major rivers, along with a number of medium-sized rivers crisscrossing the region. There are extensive deposits of minerals such as iron ore, bauxite, dolomite, granite, marble, limestone, corundum, mica, manganese, etc.

From the early days of British colonial rule down to the present-day, the British imperialists, native princes and the Indian comprador big bourgeoisie plundered the wealth of the region, made and broke promises and subjected the sons and daughters of the soil to deprivation and exploitation. The people of the land fought many battles against them, such as the Palakot revolt of 1825 in north Bastar against the joint Maratha-British rule; the Meiriya revolt of 1852-62 against the same enemies; the revolts

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against the colonial Forest Acts against the British from 1910 to 1914 and then again in the 1960s against the local *raja* (ruler); and made immense sacrifices.

The *Adivasi* people of the DK region have been victims of exploitation of three types. First, the ruling classes have retained the age-old socio-economic structure and the backwardness of people and the region. Second, the local people have been subjected to ruthless exploitation by the landlords, traders, usurers and government officials. Third, the exploitation by the MNC-comprador bureaucrat capitalist combines who have displaced thousands, polluted rivers, cut down their forests and reduced the *Adivasis* to an existence that beggars description. The lack of education, cultural backwardness and superstition have forced them to live in bestial conditions. They suffered from perennial hunger, malnutrition and went without clothing. With no health centres and medicine, the extent of early death among them was remarkably high. Over and above this, the patriarchal social structure subjected women to all conceivable forms of exploitation, indignity and humiliation. Neither any central nor any state government had ever taken any steps to bring about improvement in their living conditions and the region. The Maoist movement commenced against this background in late 1980 when a number of CPI(ML) People's War activists—split up into groups—entered Gadchiroli and Bastar from Andhra Pradesh to spread the message of revolution. On November 2, 1980, Peddi Sankar, a coal mine worker and squad member, was shot down by the Maharashtra police. The Maoists hailed him as the first martyr of the Dandakaranya struggle.²⁷⁵

When I opted to write on this theme, I did not realize that it could be so difficult to get a grip on it. It was not difficult because there is not much information about the semi-feudal system in India, nor because there is paucity of information about the new social experiments that had been taking place in different parts of the country under the guidance of the Maoist leadership. There is no dearth of information either about the semi-feudal economy of India or about the alternative developmental work being carried on at the initiative of the people. A number of studies have already been done on different regions, and many more are being con-

²⁷⁵ Sudhakar, "A Saga of twenty-five years of Glorious struggle An Epic of People's Radical Transformation" in *People's March*, Vol. 7, No.1, January 2006.

ducted nowadays by scholars and academicians, generally in areas that are not those in struggle or even if so, in areas where the struggle is not intense and hence accessible. At the same time, we have gotten many reports from the struggling areas about the nature of developmental works that have been going on over the years, specifically in parts of central India known as the Dandakaranya region.

The main problem is getting information about the nature of land relations and the nature of revolutionary changes in the same area. The information that we get about changes does not specifically identify the areas. The names of villages or blocks are mentioned as A, B, or C. This is done clearly to thwart pinpointed attacks by state forces. These are reported in various party journals or journals published by non-party organizations, many of which are clandestine publications, without the names of the printer, publisher or place of publication. There are also studies or investigation reports of different areas on classes analysis, the nature of exploitation in the countryside, changes brought about by the revolutionary movement in those areas, etc., conducted by party activists for a long period, spanning two months or more. These were conducted in North Bastar, South Bastar, Gadchiroli and some other areas some years ago. Many of these reports were written in Telugu, Hindi, Chhattisgarhi Hindi, Marathi or other languages. Some of these were translated into English and reached our hands. The present paper is based on those reports.

There was a view prevalent among some of those political workers who entered DK that since there were classes in DK, there was no need of agrarian revolution and that the New Democratic Revolution (NDR) would not be applicable there. Since there was no feudal system, it was said that the NDR would not suit and would need a new name. Others held that even though there was no feudal system, there was the state, which was the representative of the comprador bourgeoisie and feudal classes, and that they would have to fight those enemies. They said that, "it would be a NDR."²⁷⁶

Thus the discussion of whether there were classes in DK or not went on from 1983 and was resolved when the Forest Committee was formed

²⁷⁶ Report entitled "Various classes in Bastar—Our attitude" in *Viyukka*, September 2000.

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in 1987.²⁷⁷ In 1988, the Forest Committee resolved that there were classes in DK and exploitation was in the primitive stage. It said that though the feudal system was not as clear and definite as in other areas, exploitation was in the primitive stage and that they would have to deal with the various classes as per the understanding of NDR. In this paper, we propose to deal with Gadchiroli of Maharashtra, which falls within DK, and the revolutionary changes brought about during the last two decades.

Gadchiroli district came into existence in Maharashtra in 1982 with the merging of three *taluks*—the others being Sirincha and Etapalli. Its population then was 700,000, of which 45 percent were *Adivasis*. The district covers an area of 15,435 km², eighty percent of which is filled with dense forests—primarily Chandrapur forests. The Maoist activists entered the area in late 1980. These forests are the home of a large number of *Adivasis*, especially *Gonds*.²⁷⁸ Most of the forest people own small plots of land which are not very fertile. They live in poverty and backwardness, dependent partly on single crop, rain-fed agriculture and partly on the forests for their livelihood. The forests are rich in timber and bamboo and also provide *tendu* leaves, *mohua* flower and gum, among other valuable forest produce. All these have become sources of tremendous revenue for the forest department and the government that owns the forests. These forests are being exploited by the government for the benefit of the big paper mills owned by the comprador big bourgeoisie and big contractors. The net revenue of the forest department from timber and bamboo produce in 1981 was Rs. 110 million. The contractors and forest officials mint millions out of legal and illegal sale of teak, bamboo, etc.²⁷⁹

In contrast, the local villagers have now been induced to become cheap labour for the forest department. They are harassed and exploited in innumerable ways by the contractors and forest department employees. These people were once rulers of the jungles, but have now become wage slaves, while the departmental officials and the contractors have become the kings of the forests. The *Adivasis* have lost many of their rights over the

²⁷⁷ The Forest Committee is the creation of the Maoist movement to protect natural resources from destruction and to resist entry and plunder by corporate capital.

²⁷⁸ *Gonds* are an aboriginal group of about 2 million people in Central and South Central India.

²⁷⁹ See report entitled “Chandrapur Forests—A Stir” in *Voice of the Vanguard*, Organ of the Central Committee, Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) (People’s War), Vol. 1: September 7, 1983, pp. 9–11.

forests. Whether it is grazing cattle, or collecting deadwood as timber, or even *mohua* flower to make their traditional drink, they find themselves at the mercy of the forest guards and the police. Paying them fines and bribes is commonplace.

What types of change were brought about in the Gadchiroli area is evident from a report²⁸⁰ prepared in 2001 at the initiative of the Maoist Party. The field investigator, Bhupathi visited sixty villages in Gadchiroli. In every state of development the rebels fought against their enemies—forest officers, landlords, security forces, etc.—by mobilizing people on a large scale. In this way their area of operations expanded to the furthest corners of one of the most backward regions of our country. Armed squads played an important role in all stages, backed by various democratic organizations of the *Adivasis*, women or those dealing with culture.

In the preface to the report, the author stated:

The revolutionary movement brought about many changes in various sectors in the division in the past two decades... changes occurred in land relations, traditional bonded labour, economic and other forms of exploitation, loan facilities, production relations, rising of a petit-bourgeois section, in the living conditions of the people... man-woman relations, education, medicine, customary celebrations and many such things. To put it in one word, the seeds for a fundamental change in the economic, political aspects have been sown. Our revolutionary movement is one [of the] main reason[s] for this change.²⁸¹

Right from the beginning, the Maharashtra government dealt with the Maoist movement in a way that had nothing novel about it. On the one hand, it adopted a policy of repression by spending millions of *rupees*; on the other, it initiated “developmental” works of different types, such as carrying out economic reforms. The other step was to develop a communication network by making roads connecting large parts of the interior,

²⁸⁰ Bhupati, “Revolutionary Changes in Gadchiroli in Two Decades.” It is a report in a raw state that I could gather. It is in the manuscript form, naturally having no printer's or publisher's name.

²⁸¹ Bhupati's Report, p. 9.

significantly, in those areas where radical struggles had already become a headache for them. The aim was not just to send police/para-military convoys, but also to establish a market link and exploit the remote villages in the forest area permanently. Electricity was provided to all districts. Most of the amount, as the report states, “is spent in our areas of operation.” These reform programmes are aimed at misleading the people about such radical activities. Such changes have affected society in a big way, such as in the emergence of a section of students, employees, businessmen, contractors, etc.—the beneficiaries of such state-sponsored reforms; along with this, there is also an increase in the number of a semi-proletariat section in the villages. Let us now analyze the nature of changes brought about by the Maoists.

Changes in Land Relations

Needless to state, change in the land relations was closely tied up with the expansion of the squads. A poor farmer named Usandi of Gadder stated: “If not for our Party how could we get these lands? How could we secure the crops? We had to live with Kakku-Kuku-Pollejava Irku gugiri.” (*Kakku* means tender bamboo, *kuku* is mushroom, *pollejava* is rice porridge, *irku* is *ippa* flower, *gugiri* is *gudalu*.) Such was his bitter experience. This was the experience not only of one villager, but of *Adivasis* in sixty villages. In fact, the decade of the 1980s was a turning point in their lives, as the revolutionary movement had the upper hand. This was followed by a period of brutal repression when the peasantry struggled hard to retain their hard-earned rights and privileges.

Until 1980, state governments gave “*pattas*” (land rights) over tribal land. While some farmers obtained it, most of the farmers did not. By 1980, the issuing of *pattas* was stopped. As a result, by 1980, 150,000 acres of land in the Etapalli taluk in Gadchiroli alone were outside the purview of the *patta* system. Normally, every peasant is eager to have land rights; it gives them the feeling that they are now independent and free from exploitation by forest officials. Local political leaders of different varying importance extracted money from the peasants to provide them with *pattas*; but they pocketed the money and deceived them. The urge for *pattas* was uppermost in the peasant’s mind.

There is thus no surprise in the fact that the Maoist squads mobilized the farmers with the slogan “land to the tiller”—which perfectly conformed to the main objective of the New Democratic Revolution. Thus the people fought heroically against the forest department for rights to agricultural lands not just in Gadchiroli, but throughout Dandakaranya. Between 1981 and 1984, in Ahiri taluka alone, 18 villages of Jammalagutta range, 10 to 12 villages of Pranhita range, and nearly 10 villages of Diselipeta range together brought 20,000 acres of previously uncultivated land under agriculture. The news spread far and wide. The result was that many families migrated to these places from far-away places such as Kamalapur, Chalwada, Ummanur, Rayagatta, Marneli and other villages. It was their land, their world, where the rule of the oppressive governments and forest officials were beyond imagination. They started to settle down and till the land. “It was widely propagated that there was no atrocity of the forest department and lands could be tilled.”²⁸² The decade of the 1980s thus saw the migration of a number of landless, poor and middle-class farmers to those areas of struggle. This migration was so heavy that the Maoist Party at one stage had to put a ban on the felling of trees in the forests “due to many reasons.”²⁸³ They were unable to control migration until 1995; this problem continued to haunt Gadchiroli squads in the future as well.

The lands over which possession or ownership rights were established through struggle were called *jabaran* land as opposed to *patta* land. And a time came when *jabaran* lands became greater in quantity than *patta* lands. There was another related issue: until the mid-1980s, the Maoist leadership also mobilized the Gadchiroli farmers on the problem of land *pattas*. However, later they said that the state government had become irrelevant and organized the peasantry directly to have the crops. This signaled the beginning and assertion of a new political power—new democratic power—in place of the old. Thus along with changes in objective reality, ideas also underwent a transformation. So by 1990, no party had the option of mobilizing the peasantry with the demand for *pattas*.

Most of the farmers in the areas of struggle in the Gadchiroli division tilled the forest lands. Those of Ahiri accumulated more new lands. They brought in new land in two ways. One was through cutting trees in

²⁸² Ibid., p. 10.

²⁸³ Ibid., p. 12.

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a totally new area—in some distant places—to start tilling it. The second way was to procure the necessary land adjacent to their lands whenever necessary.

There is no doubt that basic changes took place in land relations, as the following facts would testify. These are details of the 497 families in the 15 villages.²⁸⁴

Number of families with <i>patta</i> land		398
	Land they hold	1748.25 acres
Number of families that had forest land		251
	Land they hold	924.75 acres
Number of families dependent only on new <i>Jabaran</i> lands		99
	<i>Jabaran</i> land they hold	424 acres

According to the findings of the field-investigator, poor people gained new lands as a result of the revolutionary movement.

Bonded Labour System and Other Forms of Socio-Economic Exploitation

In these areas, economic and other forms of exploitation by village heads continued until the end of the 1980s. However, there was a difference in the nature of exploitation between those that occurred before 1980 and those during the decade that followed. As the movement gained momentum, changes took place in this field as well. However, the rural peasantry could not break the traditional shackles the same way they broke those of the officials of the forest and revenue departments and the police. The backward, exploited peasantry continued to respect the traditions, superstitious customs and unscientific beliefs associated with *Adivasi* culture. That proves that the superstructure does not change automatically along with changes in base; some conscious efforts are needed to bring that about.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 12.

At a place called Ahiri, there was a kingdom that continued to exercise control over the people from colonial times. Even after 1947, this “family” rules in the traditional style. They were blood-seekers in the past; they remained so in the post-colonial period as well. This family used to celebrate *dasara* festival²⁸⁵ in a “grand” way. The farmers were terrorized at the time of *dasara* by goons sent by the Ahiri family. Let us see what seventy-year-old Gadder farmer, Pandu Thimma, said about it.

Kandar Inam Saheb Godsun from Ahiri used to bring the word of *dasara*. The Patel, Bhumiya and the villagers used to gather near the *gotul* [traditional place of meeting] and discuss. One and a half kilos of *ippa* oil was collected from every village. One goat, one big hen, 20 kgs of rice, two women and two men (*leyyor*) for dancing were gathered from each *patti* (one *patti*=60 villages). Patel, Bhuniya and some males from the village went to Ahiri on a cart. This took ten days' time. The Patel bowed to the king and submitted one *rupee* to him. The salary of the Patel was Rs. 10. The people were taxed if they miss even a single aspect. We could not avoid giving them.²⁸⁶

On receiving the information, the peasants went in large numbers to Ahiri to do labour of all sorts. They also took part in a lot of bonded labour meant for the “goddesses of the village” in the following ways: 1) *Ippa* flower collected on the first day had to be submitted to them; 2) After the initial showers their lands had to be tilled; 3) The ordinary farmers had to bear all the punishments meted out on the pretext of violating the norms; 4) “Arogato” was the main traditional form of exploitation of labour. It was a method by which anyone could call the villagers to work in their fields in lieu of one meal a day. The landlord would have lots of agricultural and domestic work for the peasants to do.

However, after the entry of the armed squads and the consolidation of the revolutionary movement, such things came to a stop. People from

²⁸⁵ The *dasara* festival is a Hindi festival celebrating the defeat of a ten-headed demon king.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

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Ahiri, Etapalli and Bhumragarh areas have stopped participating in the *dasara* festival in response to the boycott call by the Maoists.

The Maoist squads took up propaganda against the traditional/other forms of exploitation from the beginning. The strength of the revolutionary movement was based mainly on the support of two tribes, namely Koya (Rajagonda) and Gotte (Madia). The Rajagondas are relatively more conscious socially. The squads gained support in the tribal world by taking up this burning issue of exploitation. In fact, until 1990, the Rajagondas were the main constituents of the guerrilla forces.

Meanwhile, various people's democratic organizations emerged, which highlighted several immediate and long-term issues. By 1990, fifteen thousand peasants formed part of the Dandakaranya *Adivasi* Ryutu Coolie Sangham (DARCS)/DK Agricultural Workers Organization, half of which were in the Krantikari *Asivasi* Mahila Sangham (KAMS)/*Adivasi* Women's Organization. There were at that time 61 party cells, 64 militia teams (Gram Raksha Dalam), all of which helped in the propaganda work in a big way. Thus the exploitation by the tribal heads ended because of the radical movement. Moreover, primary changes in the production relations, land relations, increase of production and social changes helped a lot. The government officials did not dare to enter the villages.

Such changes, needless to state, were not easy; there were many ups and downs. In the Gadchiroli division, various forms of feudal or traditional exploitation had been eliminated, but the tribal head still continued to have a say in superstructural issues of the village. True, village heads did not dare to bring back old forms of exploitation; however, mass organizations under the influence of the revolutionary movement were sometimes not in a position to intervene in the "cultural affairs of the village." The government was still dependent on *patels* to get information about the village and these *patels* were considered "police patels."

Changes in Rural Loan Facilities, Money-Lending and Bank Loans

In the past, the *Adivasis* had been subjected to various forms of exploitation. It is well known that the non-tribals considered the tribal areas as a "golden duck." Many traders went to the tribal hamlets, sold ordinary food material and cosmetic material and pocketed a huge profit.

There are instances when the *Adivasis* surrendered their prized possessions and also land to the outsiders. The story is the same with “Diku” of Chhotonagpur, “Payika” of Bastar, “Koskir” of Maad (Aboojmaad or unknown hills), “Komati,” “Gandia” of Gadchiroli, etc. These outsiders exploited people in many ways.

The farmers suffer for lack of food during the months of July and August. Crops are not ripe by then; the paddy is for seeds, not for consumption. So they have to borrow from money-lenders for their maintenance. In 1984, the peasants of Moyinben peta related the nature of exploitation by the *shahukar* (moneyed man) named Sala Kanakayya of the village Ele to the guerrilla squad. “Kanakayya *shahukar* gave us 80 kg of *jowar* and took that much of *gingelly*. This was the peak of exploitation. During that period, while one kilo of *jowar* cost Rs. 2, one kilo of *gingelly* cost more than Rs. 10.” This made the peasants very angry. The *shahukars* acted as private rural bankers to the peasants, another advantage for them. The farmers stored money with the *shahukars* as we do in the banks, and withdraw it whenever necessary. The *shahukar*, in his turn, used it for his own business. Such forms of exploitation were in vogue before the expansion of the revolutionary movement.

The spread of the revolutionary movement put a brake on this exploitation. The Maoists who entered this area were newcomers; they had to grapple with many new things. They could appreciate the situation from the experiences of struggles in Srikakulam, Adilabad in Andhra Pradesh. They called for “famine raids” during 1989–90; in response, people attacked the house of Eke Kanakayya with vengeance. Many *shahukars* became panicky and shifted to the towns in the face of people's wrath.

What to do with the businessmen? The decision was arrived at after much discussion. Business was important. If the necessities of the people were not fulfilled, then the Party and the guerrilla army would also face problems. But the Maoists took some preventive measures to curb their greed for unlimited profits. They made it clear that improper measurements would not be allowed, that products had to be sold at a proper and justified rate, they should not be of poor quality and should not make a profit of more than ten percent on the material they brought from the town to sell. Later, prices were fixed by the Party. The task was then entrusted to the DAKMS (Dandakaranya tribal peasants and workers' organization).

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Let us now turn to what the Mirkal peasants say about how the tribal “landlords” used to run the “pechula” interest business.

Normally, if the loan, in terms of money and paddy is given to farmers of the same village, no interest is charged. This is the custom.... But if the loan is given to persons of a neighbouring village, they (“landlords”) used to take 37 kilos for every 150 kilos of paddy as loan.

Such a practice of taking loans for meeting expenses connected with marriage or death, besides other reasons, decreased substantially as a result of the revolutionary movement. The eradication of loans was caused by the formation of “paddy cooperative societies” at the initiative of the Maoist Party. Here three factors were important: First, improvement in the living condition of the people; second, paddy cooperative societies; third, the role played by the revolutionary committees.

Before the spread of the revolutionary movement, the *Adivasi* peasants acquired government loans only nominally. However, with the consolidation and spread of the movement, the government sought to allure the people with “loan melas” (loan fairs) to wean the villagers away from the movement. In 1897, ten policemen died in the first ambush in Adilabad district. That was followed by the pumping in of more and more loans of various types. Besides loan fairs, the government also allotted money in the cultural fields such as the construction of a modern *gotul* (common meeting place) house with a TV in place of the old. Thereby they were trying to keep the villagers away from the revolutionary movement. At the same time, the government started giving loans for collective marriages at marriage-fairs set up specifically for this purpose. They gave incentive funds for both inter-tribal marriages and also those between tribal and non-tribals. However, these loans generally went to the rich peasants, and people coming from higher classes and having high connections.

Another pertinent point here is that as people joined the revolutionary movement in large numbers, those areas were transformed into areas of intense class struggle. Hence the government adopted the policy of surrender to the government. Add to this is the fact that these government loans were available not only in cash, but in kind, too, such as in rice and other things. It is clear that this loan in kind was aimed at countering the

Maoists' paddy cooperative societies. In response, the CPI(ML) People's War leadership adopted the policy of convincing the people of the need to boycott the government-sponsored loan-fairs.

Developments in Market and Commercial Activities

Tribal agriculture dependent on nature is not meant for the market, but for domestic consumption. The report showed that there was a considerable increase in the purchasing power of the *Adivasis* during 1980–2000, leading to an increase in purchases from the market. Needless to say, this was accompanied by the expansion of the market. For this, the revolutionary played a major role. What were the main factors behind the expansion of the market? The increase in wages is the most obvious factor. In fact, the increase was about 20 times. Along with it, there was a 24 times increase in the price of *tendu* leaf. The radical mass organizations fought against the exploiters and government officials, demanding a proper rate for their labour. As a result, the Thapars—one of the representatives of the big capitalists—who until 1983 paid 0.25 *paise* for one bamboo stick agreed to pay Rs. 7.10 in 2000–01.

The income of the farmers increased, but they did not have ownership rights over forests. They have started to realize that this ownership right was tied up with the success of the New Democratic Revolution.²⁸⁷

Changes in the Relations Between Landlords, Landless Farmers and Agricultural Labourers

Tribal society, as we find it today, is not a pre-class society. From groups of people depending on food-gathering, they long ago turned to food production by clearing the jungle for agriculture. This shift to agriculture also marked the first step to the emergence of the peasantry in the *Adivasis*. It has become a class society. However, it is difficult to identify it as a feudal society, or these classes with those classes “absolutely.” At the same time, as Bhupati argued in his report, tribal characteristics do not dominate this society. “We can say this is a semi-tribal society or semi-feudal society having tribal characters.” In fact, it is a society in transition,

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

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assuming feudal characteristics in the process, though still retaining some of its tribal character.²⁸⁸

Similarly, it is difficult to compare the local landlords with the landlords with which we are familiar. They are local landlords with tribal traits. Since the agricultural labourers also have tribal characters, they do consider the landlords to be feudal *doras*. Here the tribal bond probably prevails in their mind.

What type of relationship is there between the tribal landlords and the landless farmer-agricultural labourers? Mainly exploitative. However, considerable changes took place over the decades. As there were no big anti-feudal struggles against the landlords and as their land was not seized, they remained economically very powerful and exploited the people. For example, they took advantage of the *arogato* method still prevalent among the *Adivasis*—where anyone could call the villagers to work in their fields in exchange for one meal a day—and made the people work for them.

The advent of Maoists changed this reality. Many farmers now obtained new lands. The poor peasants got additional lands (“jabaran” land included). The bad old days gradually became things of the past. Now they had to work on their own lands. Thus the *arogato* system gradually disappeared, thereby destroying the traditional form of exploitation by the tribal landlords.

The section that obtained new lands became stronger. Similarly, the poor peasantry also cut down trees and gained additional land. In addition to land, their income also increased from other sources; they could now buy cattle and tractors. Once upon a time, when they had no land or had a bit of it, they worked as *oryul*, i.e., labourers in the houses of the landlords. They stayed in the houses of the landlords’ families from June to January or January to May. There they were given food and clothing along with three *quintals* (1 *quintal* is 100 kg) of paddy per annum as salary/wages. They were forced to work as beasts throughout the day in the house as well as in the field. Moreover, they also had to submit their earnings procured from work done outside, such as bamboo work and tendu leaf plucking, to the landlords. Such labourers also got lands in the wake of the revolutionary movement and no longer needed to work for wages. The increase in wages

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

in bamboo work and in *tendu* leaf picking caused them to take part in this kind of work. In this way, another important instrument of feudal exploitation became a thing of the past.

How did the Maoist movement affect village life? In the pre-1980 phase, landlord families normally enjoyed the posts of social status by heredity. The police *patel* post that happened to be representative of the exploitative government was in the hands of these families. Other traditional posts such as *patel*, *bhumyal*, *shendyal* (tribal head) also were in their hands. They controlled village life, having absolute say in all matters. In the bad old days, it was unimaginable for the farmers and agricultural labourers to stay independent of this network. The *permal*-priests who looked after cultural affairs were also under the control of this network. In case of problems between tribal heads or problems related to more than one village, they met in a large gathering to pronounce judgements. Sometimes the Ahiri king also attended.

Such a socio-political network, quite strong before 1980, was weakened in the later period. The radical mass organizations came to the fore and started to take control over *panchayet* matters, and also in the contradictions between tribal heads and the people. Members of the mass organizations and also CPI(ML) (People's War) squads met *Adivasi* families and listened to their problems. This was the situation in 1990. Those who were accustomed to seeing people bowing their heads before them now themselves bowed their heads before the people when they attended meetings called by people's mass organizations. With the exploiting classes stepping aside from the leadership of the village level, broad sections of the people—poor, middle and rich peasants came to take the centre stage. Local men and women gained a new experience as armed guerrillas, the majority of whom came from the basic masses. It was somewhat like what William Hinton, in his study of the Long Bow village in revolutionary China during the Yanan days, had described as “fanshen” or turning things upside down. This signaled the beginning of new organs of people's power.

Rise of Petit-Bourgeois Class at the Village Level

During the period under review, a considerable section of students, intellectuals, employees and those in various professions came into existence. There was the presence of women among them as well.

Improvements in the Livings Conditions of the People

As a result of this changing reality, the living conditions of the people also improved. This is attested by the following facts of great importance.

Food: Before, people filled their stomachs with rice soup and boiled horsegram in the morning. In the evening they had to be satisfied with limited rice. Now, they are able to eat rice in the morning and have a full meal in the evenings.

Oil: Before, people used less oil, which was taken from *vippa* seeds. In the new situation, this domestic industry, along with that of *gara* oil, made an exit. The majority of the peasants now use oil bought from the market. Similarly, in the earlier days, oil pressed out of *pusu* seeds was prepared for nourishing the hair; now, Parachute coconut oil has become popular.

Tea: Before, common people did not have that luxury to take tea; only rich families could have it. Now the majority of people drink tea every day.

Soap: Normally, people, mainly women, are fond of cosmetics. Young men and women decorate themselves and participate in dances. Such makeup is a normal feature now. The noticeable change is that the use of soap, powder and snow (cold cream) has increased. Every shop displays cosmetics, alongside tea powder, sugar, salt, chili powder, turmeric, tobacco and oil.

Vegetables: The use of vegetables increased. There is the addition of some new vegetables as favourites among the people like cauliflower and radish, introduced in the late 1980s. Brinjals, tomato, beans, bottle gourd, *gongura* and such other traditional vegetables continue to be used. These are also marketed.

Fish-breeding: Before, there was a scarcity of water for irrigating the land. Now most of the families are growing fish in ponds. Fish is marketed as well.

Clothes: Before, people did hardly have any clothing worth its name. Women had *dopa* (white cloth) and men had *panche* (*dhoti*), Marriage was nothing but a torture and half-nakedness for women. Such a situation changed in many areas. Women are now using blouses and sarees. Unmarried women are slowly getting used to wearing nighties and maxis.

However, the report relates, a woman party member with two children had to remove her blouse (upper garment), which reveals the continued influence of patriarchal customs even in guerrilla bases. It is a different case with men. Unlike women, there is a lot of change in their dress and they look like those in the plains area. At a later period, however, the custom of doing away with the blouse for women was discarded and the practice of covering the upper body prevailed.

House: Before, people lived in grass houses. They had to renovate the roof every year and faced difficulty in getting free grass, as deforestation took its toll. So the poor people had to borrow money from the government or private individuals. The rich peasants covered their houses with brick. Now the situation changed. With the increase in income, everyone now has brick-houses. Improvements are seen in the houses. More steel-made articles/utensils are evident. Every member of the family has a plate and utensil with which to eat.

Economic Changes

Let us now summarize the economic changes in the life of the people in the area under review. Some of these changes are related to economic foundation and some to the superstructure. These are as follows:

1. Twenty percent of the absolute landless peasants gained new land;
2. In addition to the old land, 80 percent of the poor people obtained new land;
3. More than 50 percent of the people got new land;
4. Fundamental changes occurred in land relations;
5. Traditional exploitation became things of the past;
6. Brutal exploitation by the *shahukars* came to an end;
7. There was an increase in wages, employment and income;
8. Government reforms intensified and influenced the peasants in a negative way;

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9. The role and intervention of banks in peasant's life became enhanced;
10. One section of farmers became assured that if irrigation was arranged and the fields well established, they would obtain more yields;
11. Before, the farmers sowed much in a small patch of land and now they have extended it to cover 45 percent of the total area. This naturally increased the total yield;
12. Use of tractors increased (the tractor can till 2 acres in 3 hours, the rent being Rs. 900);
13. New vegetables were introduced and marketed;
14. *Adivasi* traditional landlords began attaining capitalist character;
15. A new, nascent petit-bourgeois class appeared;
16. The purchasing power of the people increased;
17. The standard of living of the people improved. At present, each family obtains 8.25 *quintals* of paddy sufficient for nine and a half months;
18. A change in food was noticeable. The majority of peasants were able to eat rice two times a day along with soup in between;
19. Oil consumption and the use of cosmetics increased;
20. Fish and vegetables now formed part of the diet;
21. Consumption of clothes increased;
22. Bicycle, radio, tape recorder, TV, motor cycle, steel utensils, and other such consumer durables revealed an increase in consumer culture;
23. The domination of tribal heads in village affairs was weakened.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

Changes in Man-Woman Relations

One of the most remarkable changes that took place was in the realm of man-woman relationships. The struggles of hundreds of women organized under the banner of the Krantikari Mahila Sangh (KAMS/Revolutionary Tribal Women's Organization) and their heroic sacrifices contributed to this change. The local officers of the forest department considered the work of men to be skilled or semi-skilled and that of women as unskilled—and paid them accordingly. The paper mills and other such establishments also did the same. The CPI(ML) People War activists opposed this practice and took up the struggle for equal wages and equality of men and women. The struggles conducted by women and the role played by the revolutionary movement established the rights of women for equal wages from the late 1980s. The suffering by women at work places thus came to a close.

Women fought so bravely in the struggles that men started demanding that women be incorporated into the organizations and accompany men to the rallies held in the town. That signified a tremendous positive change in the ideas of men.

Gotul dance is part of *Adivasi* tradition. Here both girls and boys dance, make merry and choose their life partners. Young men used to tease young girls, and it had social acceptance. Initially, whenever Maoist squads went to a village, the village arranged a dance in their honour. During the dance, the village heads encouraged squad members to catch hold of the girls. Women compulsorily attended such cultural programmes. The youth and outsiders took advantage of this and misbehaved with women. The majority of the young women did not like it. The squad members made a special effort to stop such practices. By degrees, the situation changed for the better. Gradually, the Sangh members won respect. Men and village heads stopped behaving in that way, which enhanced self-confidence among women. They realized through their own experience that they could rely on guerrilla squads in case of trouble of this type from the village youth, lumpen elements, government employees, papermill *babus*, *shahukars* and the village heads.

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As a result of these, some changes were noticeable in social life:

1. Men stopped misbehaving with women to a large extent;
2. The slogan “Equal wages for equal work” was implemented. Women no longer felt inferior that they could not earn more wages;
3. Women joined political as well as guerrilla activities;
4. Men started to learn to respect women’s opinions;
5. The squads also raised the consciousness to some extent that women had a right over children and property;
6. Patriarchy was combated and there was the assertion of women’s rights in domestic affairs. In fact, as the present report and other reports indicated, women were so encouraged to take part in such activities that even the squad members sometimes failed to keep pace with their mounting aspirations.²⁹⁰

Changes in the Marriage System

Attempts to bring about changes in the system of marriage are far more difficult than the fight against economic and sexual exploitation. Here the change in the realm of superstructure is slow and gradual.

In the tribal society, marriage among cousins is a normal feature. The revolutionary government in China banned marriages between seven generations. The DK people were not educated about the ill-effects of such marriages from the point of view of medical science. The squads were not educated either. To them, such marriages were considered natural. In such marriages, the opinion of the parents was decisive. Those who violated the decisions were tortured. Unwilling grooms were forced to marry. However, in the years after 1980, such things started to change. Parents did not dare to apply force. Earlier, women who left their husbands were called “kerde”—a derogatory term and were harassed. They were the victims of an unjust society; but now they are no longer so.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 35–36.

Another issue associated with the marriage system is the system of *babapare* (*kanyashulkam*, i.e., bride-price²⁹¹). The amount can rise as high as thousands of *rupees*. Those who cannot afford to pay “babapare” are called *lamade* and have to work in the wife's family for six years to make the payment by manual labour. *Lamade* is practiced strongly in the *Adivasi* areas. It is, however, not seen among the Rajgonds. There one can witness a democratic way of selection and women can start living with the man of her choice without any formal tie-ups. This is called *lon hodiya* or “entering the house.”

The Maoist activists made widespread propaganda on the *babapare* issue and formulated certain norms. Thus the amount was decreased to hundreds of *rupees*. However, in areas where the revolutionary forces were weak, the tribal heads carried on the old system. It is pertinent to relate here one interesting episode.²⁹² One woman of Kondamito came to the house of a man of Koyamdud based on mutual choice. But the woman's family wanted “babapare” from the man's family, so they attacked the man's house and forcibly took Rs. 22,500. The DK women's organization tried to stop it but failed. Finally, the People's War leadership intervened and handed over the issue to the range committee. They made them return Rs. 14,000 in front of the people who had gathered from six villages. The *babapare* cases are seldom nowadays.

Changes that could thus be identified are as follows: 1. Parents no longer marry their children by force; 2. *Babapare* normally does not incur high amounts; 3. Women exercise their choice during marriage. If they are forced against their will, they bring it to the notice of the mass organization and get justice. This has naturally had a marked impact on the women. 4. Before, the victims of marriage were neglected. Suicide rate was fairly high among women. In the wake of the revolutionary movement, it has substantially been reduced.

²⁹¹ Bride price was the feature of feudal China too. In China, the family of the groom would pay the price—calculated notionally—to the family of the girl as the price for raising their daughter. That price was known as the “bride-price.” It implied that the daughter was thus being sold out to her husband's family. In the Indian Hindu society, there prevailed a custom—still in vogue in conservative families—whereby it is the family of the girl rather than that of the boy that gives the money. The idea behind the *babapare* system bears some resemblance to the Chinese feudal custom.

²⁹² Bhupati's Report, pp. 35–36.

Health Care

The Maoists take particular pride in the fact that their guerrillas have been providing honest medical services to the people since 1980–81 in areas where government medical centres are almost non-existent. There are cases where they saved the lives of people through their medical intervention. The people thereby place more confidence in the guerrillas than the government medical officers. They also took up education about matters relating to health. They set up medical units in different areas of struggling zones. They also have mobile medical units.

Some Observations

So far we have related, however briefly, the semi-feudal nature of the Indian economy with regional variations, the economy in the *Adivasi* area of the Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra in the Dandakaranya revolutionary zone with characteristics of its own, and how that world got transformed for the better as a result of the Maoist movement. We have also touched upon some of the changes that have been taking place in the realm of superstructure, role of women and other issues. It has been a very brief survey based primarily on rare investigation reports prepared by those who play a role in this ongoing process in the face of mounting adversity. India needs more and more William Hinton's and more and more "fanshens" to analyze and relate the changes that have been silently taking place in the Indian countryside, but are concealed from public gaze and knowledge.

PART V

Emergence of New Human Beings

CHARU MAZUMDAR: A BRIEF LIFE-SKETCH OF A GREAT REVOLUTIONARY LEADER, HIS POLITICAL WRITINGS AND THEIR IMPACT ON POLITICAL AND CULTURAL SPHERES²⁹³

Political India had been in a ferment for quite some time before “a peal of spring thunder” crashed on Naxalbari and acted as a catalyst. Naxalbari exposed the falsehood of parliamentary politics and established the politics of armed struggle. Guided by Mao Zedong Thought, Charu Mazumdar (CM) provided leadership to the cadres and peasants of Naxalbari. It was he who gave the clarion call for revolt against reactionary politics and revisionism, and most of the activists responded to the call. After Telangana,²⁹⁴ there was a break in the continuity of revolutionary struggle. After Naxalbari, there were setbacks, but no break. If there was a setback in one area, the struggle flared up in another.

The total number of essays written by Charu Mazumdar and published so far, are, to the best of my knowledge, seventy-three. The list includes the “Eight Documents,” written during the pre-Naxalbari phase and considered to be the theoretical basis of the Naxalbari struggle. The rest—sixty-five essays—were published in *Deshabrati*, the organ of the West Bengal State Committee of the CPI(ML) and in *Liberation*, the central organ of the CPI(ML), and also in the form of small booklets from time to time. *Deshabrati*, the very first organ and a Bengali weekly started appearing from July 6, 1967, and the first issue of *Liberation* came out on November 11, 1967. There are also several letters—personal or otherwise—written in the pre-Naxalbari and post-Naxalbari phases till his death in a Lalbazar police lockup in July 1972. As the “Eight Documents” were written before Naxalbari, these were not included in either *Deshabrati* or *Liberation*, except the eighth document which was published in *Liberation*, Vol. III, No.1 (November 1969).

²⁹³ (This article was published in *Purbasha Ekhon* Saradiya & Dipawali, Issue August—October 2021, published in Norway and India.)

²⁹⁴ The Telangana Uprising from 1946 to 1951 led to the setting up of dual governance in almost the entire state of Telangana. It was brutally repressed by the Nehru government after which the CPI called for the laying down of arms.

From then on until April 27, 1970, when the “Deshabrati Prakashani” publication office and press, which printed and published *Liberation* and its sister journals as well as a large number of books and pamphlets, were raided and ransacked by police, both the organs came out on a regular basis as legal organs. After the raid both the organs were forced to go underground and their publication became irregular owing to difficulties of its underground existence. Until then the number of Charu Mazumdar’s articles—legally published—stood at thirty-three. The rest—thirty-two articles—were published from underground.

In this article, we propose to make an assessment of Charu Mazumdar in two parts. The first part will deal with Charu Mazumdar as an individual; the second part will concentrate on the characteristics of his writings and their impact on contemporary politics and culture.

Charu Mazumdar: The Individual

Charu Mazumdar was the son of Bireswar Mazumdar and Uma-shankari Devi. His ancestral home was at Mahanandapara in the Siliguri town of North Bengal. His father passed the Law Exam but did not opt for the legal profession as he felt it promoted falsehood. He preferred to join Congress politics. Total indifference to property was a trait that the boy inherited from his father. As a student, Charu Mazumdar was meritorious and at the same time very much exceptional in character. At the time of examinations, he never completed the answer-scripts; he attempted only the minimum required. He knew that the answers he attempted were all correct. Snehalata Mukhopadhyaya, his elder cousin sister, gave an example of his distinct traits in his memoir entitled *Rupkathar Deshe (In the Land of the Fairy Tales)*.

Charu Mazumdar stood first at the school test on the eve of the school-leaving Matriculation Examination in the year 1936. His teachers dreamed that this student of theirs would score highly in the approaching Matriculation Examination. However, when they came to know that the boy along with two other students had gone to see a *jatra* (village drama), the headmaster got annoyed. Charu said:

Sir, my preparation in all the papers is complete; so I have given all my books and notes to a poor boy in need... I do not hanker for scholarship, so I cannot fulfill your expectations; however, I can give you my word that I shall definitely pass in the first division... had I not done this much, my father and you would be disheartened, that is why I had prepared this much... I do not like this type of education, Sir. Such education is meaningless; there is no use learning more (*passim*).

Snehalata wrote: “Never before could any student have the courage to argue with his teacher in support of the fruitlessness of the British system of education.” That exceptional young lad had the courage to go against the tide. Her memoirs are replete with instances of this type.

Charu was well versed in varied subjects. The side bag that hung from his shoulder was full of books, irrespective of the ideology these promoted. The authors varied from Marx, Lenin, Romain Rolland, Tolstoy, Sholokov, Turgenev, Dostoevsky, Rabindranath Tagore, Bankim Chandra, and others. He was fond of songs and music, particularly Hindusthani classical music (*passim*).

Katha-o-Kalam was a drama club in Siliguri town with which he was associated. He was very much fond of Tagore’s poem “Mrityunjoy” (“Victory over Death”)—a poem which played a key role in calling upon his comrades to make self-sacrifice for the sake of revolution. The other creation from Tagore, which too propelled him to move forward alone, was a song captioned “Jodi tor daak shune keu na ashe tobe ekla chalo re” (“When nobody responds to your call, be prepared to go alone”). These two noble creations of Tagore, besides many others, which go back to the days of the anti-colonial struggles, made a permanent imprint on the young mind.

In 1938, he enrolled himself as an ISC (Intermediate Science) student in Edwards College in Pabna (now in Bangladesh) and used to teach senior BSC (Bachelor of Science) students. There, meritorious students passed difficult subjects under Charu Mazumdar’s guidance. However, he

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himself showed no interest in applying his intelligence and merit to get to the top position. He did not sit for the ISC final examination, left the college and returned to Jalpaiguri in north Bengal. There he joined the Congress and dedicated himself to the task of organization in the peasant front. At that time, he came in contact with Satyen Mazumdar, the militant revolutionary deported by the British to the Andamans. He inspired young Charu Mazumdar to take up the revolutionary path.

“Although Satyen Mazumdar was the inspirer, he was not his mentor,” Snehalata reminds us. He concentrated on the peasant front and took the initiative in organizing militant peasant movements against the feudal system created by the British Raj. Charu Mazumdar joined the Communist Party of India in the late 1930s and became a full-timer. During the anti-feudal *tebhaga* peasant movement of 1945–46, Charu Mazumdar gave leadership in the Jalpaiguri, Boda, Pachagarh and other areas. Later, he worked among the Rajbangshi peasant community and tea garden workers. He had the natural ability to freely mix with the common people and become one of them. In the years following the Naxalbari uprising, the call that he gave to the youth and students to go the villages in order to integrate with the poor and landless peasantry to become declassed had its roots much earlier when he began putting that Maoist principle in practice himself from the late 1930s.

So many stories were in circulation about his activities.

Whenever he went out of our sight, he turned into a living legend. I heard about so many strange tales about him. Someone saw him sleeping on a tree branch. Some saw him coming along the paddy field at night with a white cloth cover in the guise of a widow to meet his mother at home, take food prepared by her, sleep there for the night and leave in the early morning (*passim*).

Charu Mazumdar was an extremely honest, sensitive person with a humane quality. What marked him was his strong personality. One really significant trait in his appearance was his two bright, penetrating eyes. When he talked, he talked logically and removed any hesitation that might have been there in the listener’s mind. He was much admired by the peasants, among whom he worked at length, and by the workers, youth and

students. His comrades attest that the sheer presence of such a man in hiding, hounded by the State, with a high price on his head by every state, made an impact on others.

Asim Chattopadhyay, one of the leading members of the CPI(ML), had many reservations about how to implement the Mazumdar line in the Debra-Gopiballavpur region. After having discussion with CM, all his questions were resolved. Koushik Banerjee mentioned an amusing comment made by a worker member after a meeting with CM. He was so much impressed with the Mazumdar's convincing ability that he made the amusing statement: "If a cow attends a meeting addressed by Charu Mazumdar, then after getting out on the street, it will gore down not any common man, but the CRP (Central Reserve Police)."²⁹⁵ Koushik also related the story of another meeting with Charu Mazumdar, which he attended:

We could get a glimpse of how to conduct investigation... and in the task of inspiring comrades, he was unequalled. After having discussions, comrades arrived at this conclusion: the task is difficult, but it can be accomplished. That meeting was attended by a student coming from the poor peasant background, named Mrityunjoy Naskar. He suffered by the untimely departure of his mother with three little brothers and sisters, father and aunt left behind. Mrityunjoy vacillated between getting some job to look after the family or leave home for revolutionary work. After attending the meeting with CM, his first reaction was: "No more vacillation! Let us enter the Sundarban region!"

Khokon Mazumdar, one of the organizers of the Naxalbari peasant movement, spoke highly about Charu Mazumdar's organizing ability. He told Koushik Banerjee: "We have been interacting with village people for years together, but in the meeting they simply nod and speak hardly anything; but once Charuda comes to the meeting, they simply break out into laughter. They go on talking loudly." In his book, *Spring Thunder Over*

²⁹⁵ *Ebong Jalark*, Charu Mazumdar, No. 2, p. 250.

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India, Khokon Mazumdar appraised the role of Charu Mazumdar in the following words:

To put it briefly, comrade Charu Mazumdar was such a leader in the Indian communist movement on whom the remark about Rosa Luxemburg made by Lenin perfectly fits in—“Sometimes the eagles fly at a level lower than the hens, but the hens can never fly to such a height as the eagles can reach.” Despite committing many mistakes, Charu Mazumdar resembled the eagle, while revisionists of our country are like a bunch of hens loitering for food in the garbage-bin.²⁹⁶

Charu Mazumdar was endowed with another significant trait. His mental horizon was wide open; he could move around a wide canvas. His thinking was never confined within narrow limits. Immediately after Naxalbari, many people came to meet him in his ancestral home at Siliguri to know about the movement. One of them was Utpal Dutt, one of the leading theatre personalities. The product was the enactment of the historic theatre—*Teer*, or *The Arrow*, which was the first of its kind about the Naxalbari agrarian struggle.

Let us turn to another experience. Biren Sarkar and some other activists went to CM’s house. On that very day, in some cinema hall in the town, the much acclaimed film “Ten Commandments” was being shown. CM told them to go and see the film first; after that he would talk to them. The youth group was surprised. Mazumdar told them that in order to become a communist, one should have a thorough knowledge about art and literature. This experience was an eye-opener for them.²⁹⁷

Charu Mazumdar had his own understanding about songs, tunes, etc., which impressed many singers and artists. In his account, Koushik Banerjee related a conversation between CM and Ajit Pande, the noted singer who composed and sang many iconic songs. The question-answer session was as follows:

Ajit Pande: Comrade, one cultural group in Kolkata has linked the slogan “Bombard the Headquarters, Bombard the

²⁹⁶ Khokon Mazumdar, *Spring Thunder Over India*, p. 11.

²⁹⁷ *Ebong Jalark Charu Mazumdar*, No. 6, p. 94.

Headquarters of the revisionists” with a Western tune. How would you respond?

CM: We cannot say that we will not adopt Western tunes. However, we will have to take more and more of indigenous tunes. We will have to take more from our folk songs, classical music and so on. But when you compose a war song or a marching song, you cannot use *kirtan* tunes; there you take Western. But we will have to take more from indigenous roots. You can definitely take from *rag sangeet* (rag songs). Have you listened to “Mot ja tu jogi” by Pandit Onkarnath Thakur? There is a call in it. We can take material from such songs.²⁹⁸

What is important here is the expanse of his mental horizon. In his book “Charu Mazumdar er kotha” (*About Charu Mazumdar*), Souren Bose, another leading member, pointed out that CM listened to Bore Gulam Ali’s songs. CM’s youngest daughter said that his father was very fond of Baba Amir Khan. Ajit Pande talked about love among the communists. CM’s stance was that love was an integral part of human life; however, what one has to be careful about is that individual love should not go against collective interest.

Let us now pass on to another feature. Comrades who were entrusted with specific tasks were given complete freedom in their own spheres. He did not wish to interfere in their day-to-day work. For example, “Deshabrati Prakashani”—the publication department—was under the charge of Niranjana Bose, a veteran of the “Quit India” movement of 1942, since its inception. He set up his own team for printing and publication. From the publication of the first number of *Deshabrati* on July 6, 1967, to April 27, 1970 when the police party raided and sealed the house, this Bengali weekly came out on every Thursday without any break. The price was 20 *paise*. Once some comrades told CM that Niranjana Babu refused to hand over copies of the paper unless fully paid. After listening to this complaint, CM replied that what Niranjana Babu did was justified. “How would he be able to publish regularly on the due date unless the comrades meet the cost

²⁹⁸ Ebong Jalark, Charu Mazumdar No.6, pp. 251–52.

on the spot? We are not in a position to centrally provide any money to Niranjnababu to meet the cost of publication. He does it solely because of his goodwill in the market and that is how the weekly comes out on time without fail,” CM replied. “He enjoys total independence in his field. I cannot interfere in his work.” The present writer got this information from Niranjnababu himself who was known as “Comrade Kaku” (uncle).

Characteristic Features in Charu Mazumdar’s Writings

1) Exceptional ability to argue logically in plain, simple language comprehensible to all.

One could understand what he said. CM’s method of writing was to start from a particular point and proceed step by step logically to take the readers to a natural conclusion. The reasoning was logical, analytical, sharp and easy to understand.

The present writer had heard from Suniti Kumar Ghosh, another leading member and editor of *Liberation* how CM gave the Political and Organizational Report of the CPI(ML) at the First Party Congress. “It was placed in English; halting, because it was rendered into other regional languages along with the speech.” That bold, logical and passionate speech was still alive in his memory. CM concluded that speech by stating, “Comrades, let us march onward. The seventies will surely be the decade of liberation.”

Let us mention an example to explain CM’s logical, analytical power. Around March 1970, attacks were directed by the youth and students against the educational system. “Under this bourgeois educational system, the more you read, the more foolish you become,” decorated the walls inside the campuses. It signaled the beginning of the tirade against M. K. Gandhi, the “father of the nation” and the “apostle of non-violence” and his ideology—book-burning and desecration of statues and portraits of Gandhi and other national leaders and intellectuals. Slogans such as “All reactionaries are paper tigers,” “Down with this rotten Yankee culture” were written on the walls.

Charu Mazumdar defended such iconoclastic activities waged by the youth and students in the following words:

But this struggle waged by the students and youths is no isolated struggle that is complete in itself. Unlike the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China, this struggle is not aimed at demolishing the entire cultural superstructure nor can it be carried forward to that stage. This struggle is taking place because the armed agrarian revolution has emerged as a fact of life in this state of West Bengal. The base is crumbling under the blows of the peasants' armed revolutionary struggle; as a result, the superstructure too and shall be pounded by blows; this attack on the superstructure in its turn accentuates that process. It is the call of this agrarian revolution which made the students and youths restive and they are directing their attacks against the images of those persons who have ever tried to put out the flames of armed revolution of the peasant masses by preaching the message of peace and reforms. That is why this struggle of the students and youths is part of the armed peasant struggle.²⁹⁹

2) *Revolutionary passion*

In his writings, Charu Mazumdar combined sharp logic with revolutionary zeal. That zeal sprang right from his heart, which inspired the youths and students to action. Revolution demands self-sacrifice. This was taken as a natural truth by them. In fact, the whole history of the Maoist revolutionary struggle in India is replete with innumerable instances of death-defying courage and self-sacrifice by the intrepid warriors—both outside and inside the four walls of prison—in all parts of the country.

There was, along with it, another side as well. This revolutionary passion carried both the leadership and the rank and file away in a tidal wave. The fact that one needs to preserve revolutionary forces and avoid making unnecessary sacrifices was a basic truth that was forgotten by the top leadership.

The first manifestation of this revolutionary passion was evident in his article captioned “Historic 16th April.” It was written in response to Mao’s statement dated April 16th, 1968 in support of the anti-imperialist

²⁹⁹ “Forge closer Unity with Peasants’ Armed Struggle,” *Liberation*, Vol. III, No. 3, August 1970.

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armed resistance struggle of the Afro-American people of the United States of America. Here, we reproduce some portions of the article:

The day has now come when the dream that the oppressed and exploited people have dreamt for ages is going to become a reality. Chairman Mao is the great helmsman and the only liberator of mankind.... It is he who is giving the leadership.

We will certainly live to see the radiant sunlight of a free and liberated India. The sun that rises on the eastern horizon will light up the western horizon also. The world will be liberated from all indignities and waste, from the menace of destruction and death. We have reached that great era. Our tasks are heavy but we will certainly be able to carry out these heavy tasks, because Chairman Mao—the source of boundless strength—is still living. It is he, the red sun in our heart, who will fill our minds with warmth and we will be able to smash this old, rotten and corrupt system.

The people of the whole world are looking forward to us, because ours is a country of 500 million people. What tremendous power will be generated and miracles can be performed once India, the land of 500 million people rise up! Let us march forward by relying on the masses. Victory will certainly be ours!³⁰⁰

Charu Mazumdar used to say: “One who does not dream of revolution, cannot make others dream, can never be a true revolutionary.” Many people of India dreamt dreams of revolution. However, to implant that dream into the minds of thousands of people is something that had never been done before. It was the creator of Naxalbari who transmitted that dream into the hearts of millions of the Indian people.

³⁰⁰ Charu Mazumdar, “Historic 16th April,” *Deshabrati*, May 2, 1968.

3. *Charu Mazumdar's writings transformed into slogans*

Portions of his articles and letters were transformed into slogans during those stormy days. Slogans were painted with tar with stencilled Mao busts on the street walls throughout the city of Kolkata and in the suburban towns. Inside the prisons, generally in the evening after the lockup in cells or wards, Naxalite prisoners raised slogans, sang songs and made speeches in memory of their fallen comrades (“Shaheed Swarane”). Here are some examples:

1. Under this bourgeois system of education, the more you read, the more foolish you become;
2. Leave your schools and colleges and join the revolutionary struggle without delay;
3. Today is not the day of repentance, it is time to flare up like fire;
4. The path of agrarian revolution is the only path of Indian liberation;
5. Make the Seventies the decade of liberation;
6. “China’s Chairman is our Chairman, China’s path is our path”;
7. Naxalbari *Lal selam* (Red salute to Naxalbari);
8. Long Live Chairman Mao (Chairman Mao *jug jug jio*);
9. Srikakulam is the Yanan of India.

Slogans were taken also from the Red Book. A few examples: “Dare to fight, dare to win,” “Where there is oppression, there is resistance,” “Political power grows out of the barrel of the gun,” “A single spark can start a prairie fire.”

Slogans sprang from the battlefield, too. During the struggle in Srikakulam, Panchadi Krishnamurthy, a leading member, was murdered in cold blood in May 1969 by the police. Just before his death, Panchadi shouted at his butchers: “You cannot stop the tide of revolution by killing us” (“Aamader hotya kore biplober gotirodh kora Jayna”). This statement became a rallying cry for the revolutionaries and spread far and wide.

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Many years ago, Saroj Datta, a leading member and revolutionary intellectual, wrote: “You are pained to see poems being turned into slogans; on my part, I am pained to see slogans not being transformed into poems.” During those stormy days, a number of songs and poems were composed about Charu Mazumdar. A few examples:

“Moder haal dhorechhen Chairman, danre Charu Mazumdar, Biplaba tarani boithha bai ho” (“With the Chairman at the helm and Charu Mazumdar on the oars, let us steer our boat of revolution to the new shore”).

The second song was written in the Santhali language that became very popular among the tribals in the Bitbhum-Midnapur region of West Bengal:

“Sidhu Kanu Chand Bhairab hul dekin naj matale, Mao Zedong Charu Mazumdar Hul dekin rufa ruerke” (“The revolution that Sidhu, Kanu, Chand and Bhairab could not accomplish, will be led to victory by Mao Zedong and Charu Mazumdar”).

Let us conclude with that poem, which made a permanent mark on young Charu Mazumdar’s mind by instilling the spirit of self-sacrifice. He transmitted that spirit through his baptism in Maoism to his innumerable comrades who fought to destroy the present man-eating system to create a new India with undying revolutionary optimism and a spirit of self-sacrifice. The title of the poem is “Mrityunjoy” (“Victory Over Death”). The author is Rabindranath Tagore.

From far I'd thought that your reign,
Invincible and ruthless, has the world quivering in pain
The terror you create breaks out
In flames in every unfortunate breast
Your right hand weapon snatches thunderbolts
From the cloud-laden sky
I came trembling to your presence
With my heart full of fear
The waves of your frown spelt danger
That would strike down instantly
My rib-cage shuddered
And hand on heart I asked

“Is there more to come,
The ultimate bolt of lightning?”
And instantly I was struck down.
Was that all? Nothing more?
I broke through from my fear.
With your hand still uplifted
I gauged I was greater than you.
When you came down with your stroke
You were on my turf.
You were reduced in size.
And I broke with all my diffidence.
As large as you may be
You cannot be larger than Death.
Before I leave, my last words will be
“I am greater than death.”³⁰¹

³⁰¹ This English version of Tagore’s Bengali original is taken from Abhijit Das, *Footprints of Foot Soldiers Experiences and Recollections of the Naxalite Movement in Eastern India 1960s and 70s*, Setu Prakashani, Kolkata, Delhi, January 2015, pp. 91–92.

ANURADHA GHANDY: A BRIEF LIFE SKETCH OF A GREAT REVOLUTIONARY WITH A HURRICANE SMILE³⁰²

Anuradha Ghandy was born Anuradha Shanbag in Mumbai in the State of Maharashtra on March 28, 1954 to a Gujarati mother and Kannadiga father. She was born into a political family, with her parents and maternal aunts all being members of the Communist Party of India (CPI). Anu, as she was fondly called by everyone, was thus brought up in a democratic atmosphere that made a deep impression on her mind. Her father was a well-known lawyer in the Bombay High Court and her mother worked as a social activist at a Women's Resource Centre in Mumbai. She had one young brother who later became a stage artist and script writer in Mumbai. She was born and brought up in an intellectual and political climate that helped to give her a progressive direction in life. In such a creative atmosphere, Anuradha excelled as a student in school, college and university.

Anuradha Ghandy started her political life at Elphinstone College, Mumbai, in 1972. By then, vast areas in rural Maharashtra were witness to one of the worst famines in recent history. Anuradha was very much alive to her social surroundings and, quite naturally, deeply affected by the misery and sufferings that it caused to the poor people in the countryside. She went to the affected regions along with a group of college mates to get a firsthand experience of the plight of the poor. Despite the severity and the beastly face of the famine, the wretched and dying people did not lose hope and displayed indomitable courage to stay alive; that was a spectacle beyond her imagination. She learnt the most important lesson in her life—the lesson that poor and illiterate peasants were the real heroes and that there should be a path to turn a bad situation into good. She began her quest for answers. When she got the answer, there was no turning back. A revolutionary that was to make a lasting impression on the Communist revolutionary movement in India was born.

The decade of the 1960s was a decade of revolutionary movements and national liberation wars. The glorious and historic struggle of the

³⁰² This article was originally published in *Towards a New Dawn*.

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people of Vietnam and other countries of Indo-China against US aggression made a deep impression everywhere. The tempestuous progress of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (GPCR) under Mao Zedong in the People's Republic of China inspired billions of youth and students throughout the world to storm the gates of heaven to create a brave new world free from exploitation and oppression. Such external factors made an indelible mark on Anuradha and many others of her time. Those events coincided with the historic Naxalbari struggle in West Bengal—"a peal of spring thunder" that started a prairie fire and turned everything upside down. Thousands of youth and students left their schools and colleges and went to the countryside to integrate themselves with the peasants, to become declassed to create a beautiful world where human values would triumph over the lust for profits. Already shaken by the plight of the famine-stricken people, Anuradha was humbled by the supreme sacrifices of the first generation of Naxalite revolutionaries, many of whom, fighting for a great cause, were tortured and killed by state forces in the prime of their youth.

As a college student, Anuradha began taking part in social work among the poor. She came in touch with a student organization called PROYOM (Progressive Youth Movement), which was inspired by the ongoing Naxalite movement. She became one of its active members and later one of its leaders. She worked in the slum areas, which helped her witness the horrors of untouchability and the *Dalit* movement. Marxism had entered her mental horizon by then and she sought to understand the basis of the oppressive and exploitative caste system and all other social ills in the light of Marxist teachings.

She did her Master of Arts and later Master of Philosophy in Sociology. Meanwhile, she also taught, first in Wilson College and then in Jhunjhunwalla College. Despite her extremely busy schedule, she never missed a single lecture. Her passion and diligence made her a very popular and effective teacher, a favourite among the students. Her thorough and conscientious approach was much loved by her students and respected by her colleagues. In November 1977, she married a fellow comrade, Kobad Ghandy, at a small function involving only the family members on both sides.

During the post-Emergency period (1975–77), Anuradha emerged as one of the leading figures of the civil rights movement. From the early 1970s to 1977, thousands of Naxalites throughout the country were shot down in cold blood, tortured, maimed and imprisoned. The number of Naxalite political prisoners in West Bengal alone in March 1973 was 17,748.³⁰³ If the number during the pre-Emergency period was nearly 18,000 in West Bengal alone, then the total number of political prisoners in the country could not be less than 150,000. It was from 1972 when the Naxalite movement suffered a major setback, that civil rights bodies were formed, and they raised the demand for the end of state repression and release of political prisoners. The Association for the Protection of Democratic Rights (APDR) in West Bengal was set up in 1972 and the Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee (APCLC) in 1973 in Andhra Pradesh. Anuradha Ghandy was one of the initiators of the Committee for the Protection of Democratic Rights (CPDR) in Maharashtra. She played a prominent role in the Civil Liberties Conference held in New Delhi in 1977, demanding the release of political prisoners. That conference was attended by such leading figures as V. M. Tarkunde, Govinda Mukhoty, Subba Rao, Sudesh Vaid and others. Her magnetic personality and persuasive capacity made many well-known intellectuals and prominent citizens come forward to endorse statements and campaigns condemning draconian laws and violations of democratic rights. She was one of the leading figures in the civil rights movements in the country until she left for Nagpur from Mumbai in 1982.

Her shift from Mumbai to Nagpur was in response to the clarion call of the revolutionary movement in the Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra. The impelling need was to spread the message of revolution from Mumbai to Vidarbha. Nagpur was totally unknown to her. She got a job teaching Sociology to post-graduate students at Nagpur University. For political work in Vidarbha, she opted for work in trade unions as also among the *Dalit* community.

In the work in trade unions, she focused on the construction workers and led a number of militant struggles. The most notable of them was the protracted strike at the Khaparkheda thermal power plant located at a

³⁰³ See Statement made by Subrata Mukherjee, Police Minister, Government of West Bengal, *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, March 17, 1973.

place 30 km from Nagpur, which was being constructed by about 5,000 workers. The police resorted to firing and imposed a curfew in the region. She also organized the household labourers (*molkarins*) of Nagpur, workers in the Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC) companies at Hingna (Nagpur), railway workers, *beedi* (indigenous tobacco leaf) workers in Bhandara, power loom workers at Kamptee—15 km from Nagpur and other workers in the unorganized sector. Later she shifted to Chandrapur to help organize coalmine and constructions workers there. She also developed links for joint activities with other progressive union leaders of the region, from Nagpur, Chandrapur, Amravati, Jalalpur, Yeotmal and other centres. In course of these struggles, she was arrested several times and incarcerated in Nagpur Jail.

Unlike the traditional Marxists, Anuradha totally identified with the *Dalits* and moved her residence to Indora, one of the largest slums of Maharashtra. Although this was a stronghold of most of the *Dalit* leaders, her incisive knowledge of B. R. Ambedkar and other sociological writings on the caste question seen in the light of Marxism drew large sections of the youth to the Naxalite movement. The cultural troupes and their performances, in particular, had enormous impact. She grew to become the open face of the Maoists in the *Dalit* movement and one of the major speakers at most *Dalit* functions in Vidarbha. Her painstaking work among the *Dalit* community, organizing and rousing them against caste oppression, for liberation from the present man-eating system was an ideal example for any Marxist.

Anuradha wrote profusely on the *Dalit* and caste question in both English and Marathi, presenting a class viewpoint of the issue countering not only the numerous post-modernist trends on this count but the wrong Marxist interpretations of the *Dalit* and caste questions as well. Among her major articles on the *Dalit* and caste question, one can mention “Caste Question in India,” “The Caste Question Returns,” “Movements against Caste in Maharashtra,” “When Maharashtra Burned for Four Days,” “Dalit Fury Scorches Maharashtra: Gruesome Massacre of Dalits” and “Mahars as Landholders.” The most elaborate article was a 25-page piece in Marathi that came out in “Satyashodhak Marxvad” explaining the Marxist standpoint on the *Dalit* question linking *Dalit* liberation with the task of the New Democratic Revolution in the country. Many years later, it was based

on this original draft of Anuradha's that the erstwhile CPI(ML) People's War prepared the first-ever caste policy paper within the revolutionary Marxist movement in India. That draft categorically emphasized that in India the democratization of society was inconceivable without smashing the elitist caste system and fighting all forms of caste oppressions, most particularly, its crudest form—untouchability. In fact, many of the views expressed by her then in the mid-1990s have become the essence of the understanding of the ongoing Maoist movement in India.

Besides these two fields of work in Nagpur, there were many other events in which she played a pioneering role. Of these, we will mention two. The first was the Kamlapur Conference of 1984. By then, armed squads of the erstwhile CPI(ML) People's War had crossed over from the state of Andhra Pradesh (now Telangana) to Maharashtra and the oppressed masses of the region were looking for an alternative. The Kamlapur Conference was organized at that opportune moment to draw the oppressed poor into the revolutionary fold. A massive campaign, led by Anuradha, was carried out all over Vidarbha and armed squads did a huge mobilization within the forests. Despite the conference being ruthlessly crushed by the police, hundreds and thousands of people began proceeding towards Kamlapur—a tiny hamlet deep in the forests. Kamlapur, a nondescript village, soon became the bugle of revolution, of the right to rebel against injustice and exploitation, reverberating through the region for months together.

The second one was the proposed cultural programme of legendary balladeer Gadar in 1992 in Nagpur, which ignited the expectations of the masses from cross-sections of society. That, too, could not escape the attention of the ruling classes, and the police ruthlessly prevented the programme from taking place. But Anuradha was not one to give it up. She approached the best lawyer in town to move the court for permission to organize the programme. On that day, the court handed over the order to let the programme happen. But the police were scared of the people bearing witness to such a programme and assembled beforehand at every corner of the venue where it was supposed to be held. People still recollect the diminutive Anuradha climbing onto to a motorcycle to address the large crowd that had gathered on the streets outside the college hall that had been sealed by the police, despite a High Court order allowing it to

take place. The big gathering that defied the police presence included a large number of journalists, professors, writers, lawyers and senior faculty members of Nagpur University. The police had plans to prevent Gadar from reaching the venue. But they failed. Gadar appeared in disguise, to the consternation of the police. The frustrated police baton-charged everyone as they saw Gadar amidst the applauding people.

The programme could not take place. But this remained headline news for nearly two months. The message of revolution had already gone deep into the masses all over Vidarbha. It was none other than Anuradha who saw to it that the programme became planted in the revolutionary consciousness of the masses of Vidarbha through her dynamic and imaginative leadership.

Anuradha Ghandy worked in the Vidarbha region for fifteen years. She made an enormous impact in carrying revolutionary politics from Gadchiroli to the entire region. Along with others, she built a revolutionary working class movement and also a powerful revolutionary movement among the *Dalits*. She also played a pioneering role in building up the revolutionary student movement and in attracting a vast cross-section of intellectuals, including senior professors, journalists, eminent playwrights and top lawyers of the region. On the martyrdom of the revolutionary poet, Cherabanduraju, she had his poems translated into Marathi and this Marathi translation had a huge impact and sold extensively throughout Maharashtra. She also played a role in the formation of the All India League of Revolutionary Culture (AILRC) in 1983. In 1985, as one of the main speakers at the Sindhri Conference of the AILRC, she was remembered by the activists of Bihar and Jharkhand, who were attracted by the impact of that conference and the cultural performances. Many activists and friends in the region remember her fondly from those days.

Varavara Rao, in his reminiscences on Anuradha Ghandy, captioned “Remembering Anuradha Ghandy The New Woman” recalled Anuradha’s role in the Sindhri Conference.

Anuradha’s expertise was revealed when she resolved the language question. A hot debate took place on the issue of link language throughout the night. I would remember the Sindhri Conference debate on the question of language for-

ever. At that time KVR (K. V. Ramana Reddy) and the representatives from Tamil Nadu and Kerala were on the side of English. Chalsani, Dani and the representatives from Bihar and Punjab and I stood for Hindi. When Anuradha realized that the debate was turning into a big confusion, she intervened by saying, “You are all debating like the proverbial horse being tied at the back of the cart.” She explained the executive by saying: “All Indian languages are national languages; first of all, all mother languages should be allowed to develop as official national languages in their own home states in the Universities, Secretariats and Higher Courts of law; then all these official national languages would recognize a language as a link language and for intercommunication.” Her words remained as the final judgement for then and till now in the manifesto of the AILRC. Since then I have been reflecting the same ideas in all my essays on the issue of language or on Telangana. Such was the deep impact of her Sindhri speech on me that day.³⁰⁴

The impact of her revolutionary activism was felt most strongly in her taking revolutionary politics to the *Dalit* community and in arousing revolutionary consciousness among them. She lived and worked among the *Dalits* day and night, strove to become declassed and underwent the process of both learning from them and also teaching them. She also helped build up the women’s organizations in Nagpur and Chandrapur.

From the Vidarbha region, Anuradha shifted her base to Bastar in response to the call for revolution from the Dandakaranya region. The Maoist movement in its advanced stage needed the services of such comrades as Anuradha and she, without flinching, joyfully responded to the call. It took her deep inside the jungles of Bastar and she, despite being diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, spent three years in the second half of the 1990s among the *Adivasis* of Bastar and the People’s Liberation Guerilla Army (PLGA). It is said that she went out of her way to gather many a

³⁰⁴ Varavara Rao, “Remembering Anuradha! Remembering a Beautiful Life,” published on behalf of comrade Anuradha Memorial Committee by H. S. Shiva Prakash, Professor, School of Arts & Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, August 5, 2008, pp. 43.

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Ph.D studies on the Gond tribals for the revolutionary movement of Dandakaranya. Her friends always recalled her saying that those three years had been one of the most fruitful in her life, where she learnt about the lives and struggles of the Gond *Adivasis* in Bastar. She keenly observed and studied their lives, the painstaking way in which the movement was built up, focusing particularly on the lives of the women, their organizations, the KAMS (Krantikari Adivasi Mahila Sangathan/Revolutionary Women's Organization of the Tribal People) and the women warriors in the detachments, which, according to Arundhati Roy, is "probably one of India's best-kept secrets." It is important to remember that all these were happening amidst heavy state repression at a time when the armed contingents of the mercenary paramilitary forces were tracking, through Drones or UAVs, every inch of the Bastar forests.

Anuradha spent most of her time in the Byramgarh area, which had been in the limelight for facing the brunt of the "Salwa Judum" attacks. Although, during her stay there, she contracted malaria several times, it was never the dangerous *falciparum*³⁰⁵ type; besides, she was in the tender care of the local tribal people who showed great concern for her. Her tenacity to stay in such adverse conditions astounded even the local tribals. In fact, it was an undying revolutionary optimism and firm conviction in a better future that gave her mental strength. Ideas, Mao said, could become a material force. That became true for Anuradha, as also for many others in the movement.

During those days, Anuradha spent much time in teaching classes, mainly for the growing leadership among the tribal women. She taught classes on women's health-related issues, oppression of women and the New Democratic Revolution, imparting general knowledge, the elementary aspects of Marxism, etc. She helped draft handbills and wrote numerous articles for the local revolutionary movement.

Towards the last part of her stay, she was responsible for the West Bastar area covering what is known as the National Park region—another region affected by the onslaught of the "Salwa Judum." During the famine in 1997, she was there in Bastar, which witnessed the death of hundreds of people from starvation. The Maoists resorted to the seizure of grains from

³⁰⁵ Malaria caused by the *P. falciparum* species is the most likely to progress to severe disease.

the hoarders and distributed them among the masses, thus preventing a major calamity. Like an upright person and true revolutionary, she never made a show of her own sufferings, always bearing pain, whether physical or mental, with dignity, without complaining or letting others know.

From Bastar she returned to Maharashtra and contributed immensely to the revolutionary movement there. She was also deeply involved in developing a perspective of the role of a revolutionary women's movement. Her writings on the question of women include "Philosophical Trends in the Feminist Movement," "The Revolutionary Women's Movement in India," "8 March and the Women's Movement in India," "International Women's Day: Past and Present," "Fascism, Fundamentalism and Patriarchy," "Changes in Rape Law: How far will they help?," "Cultural Expression of the *Adivasi* Women in the Revolutionary Movement," "In conversation with Janaki," "Working Class Women: Making the Invisible Visible," "Women Bidi Workers and the Co-operative movement: A Study of the Struggle in the Bhandara District Bidi Workers' Co-operative," etc.

The life of Anuradha was one of a mass leader who developed into a revolutionary organizer. In her life span of fifty four years, she played many roles. She was associated with the formation of Vidyarthi Pragati Sangathana (VPS/Progressive Students' Organization), Committee for the Protection of Democratic Rights (CPDR), All-India League for Revolutionary Culture (AILRC), Stree Chetna, Akhil Maharashtra Kamgar Union (AMKU) and many other mass organizations based mainly in Maharashtra.

She was a prolific writer. She was closely associated with the revolutionary students' magazine, *Kalam*—a magazine published in both English and Marathi. She was the architect behind the revolutionary Hindi magazine, *Jan Sangram* that was printed from Nagpur. She contributed regular articles under various pseudonyms such as Avanti, Janaki, etc. to the revolutionary magazines, *Voice of the Vanguard*, *People's March* and others.

Anuradha Ghandy wrote many theoretical and ideological pieces, both in English and Marathi, which addressed particularly the *Dalit* and the women's questions. She conducted many a polemic with those who took a post-modernist view on these questions. Perhaps the most significant contribution of her has been in understanding the caste question from a Marxist point of view. She based her arguments on an analysis of

the economic basis of caste and how it manifests itself in both the base and the superstructure. She was one of those pioneers who linked the caste system to the existing relations of production. With deep insights into Indian history, she showed how the Indian feudal system was basically caste-linked and the ideology of Indian feudalism was Brahmanism. She further explained how the *Dalit* question and untouchability act as one of the main pillars of the caste system. Moreover, as a theoretician-cum-activist, she explained how the destruction of the caste system was intrinsic to any anti-feudal New Democratic Revolution and the creation of a truly democratic society.

The other issue that evoked much debate is the understanding of the gender question. She pointed out that by arguing for an autonomous women's movement, the socialist feminists were in fact weakening the broader movement against capitalism, imperialism, feudalism and patriarchy. By placing patriarchy as the "main" enemy of women, the radical and cultural feminists were actually de-linking patriarchy from the systems of capitalism and feudalism which produced it. By equally emphasizing "production" and "reproduction" as the reasons for gender oppression, feminists were bringing "reproduction" into the economic base and negating the significant role of women in production. The most significant part in her argument is that the strategy of bourgeois feminism is not to unite women with the working class and peasantry and fight the system unitedly, but rather to form small women's groups advocating lifestyle changes within the system.

Anuradha sought to show through her work and writings that it was, in fact, by taking part in the revolutionary movement that women strove to throw off the shackles of patriarchy and hit hard at its roots. She was developing theoretical formulations on how "Women need revolution and the Revolution needs women!" And like her counterparts in other countries, she too admitted that patriarchy existed within the revolutionary movement—the point was how to stay within it and fight against it—not leave the movement and grumble about it. She concluded her piece, *Philosophical Trends in the Feminist Movement* by stating

The Revolutionary women's movement, under the theoretical guidance of Marxism, as it has been developed through expe-

rience by Lenin and Mao, has been successful in organizing women of the most oppressed castes and communities, the rural poor peasants and landless labourers. The movement has taken heed of the issues raised by the international women's movement and considers the fight against patriarchy an integral part of the New Democratic Revolution. By studying the above trends critically, taking the positive points and integrating them with its theory and practice can it realize its goal of liberating the vast masses of Indian women while successfully completing the democratic revolution and moving ahead towards socialism.³⁰⁶

How did Anuradha breathe her last? She had just returned from Jharkhand in early April 2008 after teaching classes amongst the tribals on the question of oppression of women. Little did she suspect that the high fever that gripped her whole body, already affected by systemic sclerosis, was the deadly falciparum malaria that would kill. She probably picked it up in the jungles. In the eyes of democratic Indian State, she was a dreaded "Maoist terrorist," liable to be arrested or, more likely, shot down in a fake "encounter," like so many other comrades of hers. When she contracted a high fever and went to a hospital in Mumbai to have her blood tested, she left a false name and a false phone number with the doctor who treated her. So the doctor could not get through to her to tell her that she had contracted the potentially fatal malaria falciparum. Her organs began to fail, one by one. By the time she was admitted to hospital on April 11, it was too late. She died on April 12, 2008. At the time of her death, she was a member of the central committee of the CPI(Maoist).

How was Anuradha Ghandy as a human being? Anuradha was an exemplary Communist. Pretence, falsehood, intrigue, ego, all these traits were alien to her. Her disdain for such traits grew in strength in the course of her participation in revolutionary struggle. Her honesty and simplicity attracted all those who came in contact with her. She was gifted with a natural ability to connect and integrate with any environment, with cross-sections of people, be it tribals, *Dalits*, construction workers, or the

³⁰⁶ Anuradha Ghandy, "The Women's Movement in India in the Light of the Philosophical Trends," *Scripting the Changes*, Delhi, Daanish Books, p. 209.

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sophisticated academia or intellectuals, with her happy smile and child-like innocence and simplicity. If revolution was the struggle for a society with the finest sensibilities of humanity, then Anuradha Ghandy was the embodiment of that struggle. A person of high principles, standing up for what she believed in. Anuradha had the modesty to be a willing learner. At the same time, she was willing to acknowledge the positive in others, even with those she differed. While being creative and not stereotyped in her thinking, she was always firm on the proletarian line and the Marxist ideology. Her life was an inspiration to all women activists, where she could go well beyond the patriarchal limitations of this society and blossom into a revolutionary communist.

One can cite a few lines from a letter that Mao, in February 1937, wrote to his teacher Xi Teli who joined the Communist Party of China in 1927 when the revolution failed and later participated in the Long March, at the age of 57. It shows Mao's vision of what a Communist should be like.

You were my teacher twenty years ago; you are still my teacher; you will continue to be my teacher in future. When the revolution failed and many members left the party, even defecting to the enemy, you joined [the Party] in the autumn of 1927 and adopted an extremely active attitude. From then until now you have shown through a long period of bitter struggle greater positiveness, less fear of difficulty, and more humility in learning new things than many younger members of the party.... You know a great deal but always feel a deficiency in your knowledge, whereas many "half-buckets of water" [people of superficial knowledge] make a lot of noise. What you think is what you say or what you do, whereas other people hide filthy things in a corner of their minds. You enjoy being with the masses all the time, whereas some others enjoy being without the masses.... For you, it is "revolution first," "work first" and "other people first," whereas for some others it is "limelight first," "rest first," and "oneself first." You always pick up the most difficult things to do, never avoiding respon-

sibilities, whereas some others choose easy work to do, always shunning responsibilities.³⁰⁷

Anuradha Ghandy represented the best traits of Communist revolutionary—traits that Mao so beautifully explains in his own simple but profound way. Anuradha lived for the people; she died for the people.

In her death have,
...men become men,
Women become women,
Fighting day and night
For people and for Life.

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