

## Chapter 2

### **The People's Will to Change to Changing the Will of the People: Reflections on the Indian Maoist Struggle**

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#### **Abstract**

*Based on a fresh look at Marx's and Engels' and some contemporary theoreticians' writings on war, on an intimate acquaintance with the history of the Indian Maoist movement, and on internal party documents, this chapter conducts a critical appraisal of the military philosophy and practices of the Indian Maoists. Armed struggle is a necessity in situations of extreme state violence where the Maoists have established themselves in defence and for the emancipation of the violated. The author shares his detailed knowledge of some of the Maoist guerrilla zones. Within this account his critical attention is drawn to the lack of judicial process whereby those accused of betrayal are summarily executed. This and other aspects of the movement's military strategy has alienated the leadership from its own base, in its strong areas and elsewhere, and has undermined developing mass organisations. 'It is people's will to change that must prevail over attempts to change the will of the people. This is the challenge posed to Maoists in India.'*

As the single biggest internal security threat, according to the Indian Government, the Communist Party of India (Maoist) is today placed at a crossroads. The Party owes its resurgence to the strategy of Protracted People's War (PPW). However, recent setbacks suffered by the Maoists also highlight the problems they face. Their success in war, but setbacks in mass mobilisation and mass struggle point towards a developing hiatus between armed struggle and mass struggle which now impacts their Protracted People's War. While mass mobilisation requires patient and painstaking work, armed conflict requires both mass struggle and territorial expansion. How prepared is the Party subjectively to confront the Indian State and to mobilise the masses in a context where reckless killing and the alienation of potential allies make it difficult to expand outside, as well as sustain itself inside, forested hill areas? I look here at the concept of Protracted People's War as it is practiced by the

CPI(Maoist) and examine the challenges that arise out of the dialectical interplay between theory and practice.

What has been called the “Marxist dialectical tradition” is the form of theoretical structuring which runs all through the evolution of Marxism, with Marx himself as its chief representative. At the heart and centre of this problematic lies the determining role of the dialectical method ... There can be no theory that is not also practice, and vice versa. The basis for Marxist methodology is praxis, practical work ... Practice is only a starting point. Dialectics is conceptual ... Concepts are no longer the phenomena, the separate aspects of, and the external relations of things; they grasp the essence, the totality and internal relations of things. (Lew 1975: 129-131)

There is a ‘vein of political prudery’ (Galle 1978: 67)<sup>1</sup> in Marxist scholarship where matters of war and its relevance for revolutionary transformation are concerned. Marxist scholars are reluctant to study wars or engage in analysis of military affairs and instead undermine Marxism by reducing class struggle to competitive electoral politics in pursuit of government power rather than seeking to replace one system of class rule with another through armed seizure of political power.

This ‘prudery’ is also linked to generalising the specific experience of the socialist movement in Western Europe, which eventually embraced class reconciliation and gave tacit support to colonialism.

Engels published more on military matters than on any other subject. Both Marx and Engels favoured some wars and opposed others. Wars which were seen as accelerating social change could play a progressive role. Armed members of the working class were held up as heroes. Engels, in particular, took Carl Von Clausewitz’s work seriously and was attracted to the idea that war ‘is not an activity of the will exerted upon inanimate matter ... but against a living and re-acting force’ (Clausewitz cited in Galle 1978: 43).

With the triumph of Bismarck’s militarism and the suppression of the Paris Commune, Marx and Engels turned their attention to preparation for war between European powers and worked to forestall the outbreak of a world war. For Engels, the prospect of a world war was deeply disturbing for he feared both the destruction it would bring about and the possibility

that 'it would set jingoism going everywhere' (Engels cited in Galle 1978: 92).

Engels was no longer unequivocal in seeing opportunities for revolutionary transformation in the impending war. Marxism's ambiguity about war draws much on these anxieties and proposals of Engels which directly addressed the challenge posed to socialists in Europe towards the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Some of Lenin's and Mao's seminal contributions make their mark here. They found insights in Clausewitz's writings that helped to conceptualise revolutionary warfare. For Clausewitz, as for other reformers in his circle in early 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany, guerrilla warfare was pre-eminently a political matter in the highest sense, having an almost revolutionary character (Galle 1978). Creative application of Clausewitz's theory to the concrete reality of Russia or China helped revolutionise Marxist thinking about war. Lenin, and later Mao, took his ideas of war as a political instrument and found them compatible with their project of revolutionary transformation.

Clausewitz's great contribution was to recognize irregulars and insurgents as a legitimate warring party. Like other reformers in Germany then, for Clausewitz guerrilla war was part of the theory of war. While war as a continuation of politics applied to all wars, the political character of war determined whether it was to be an Absolute War or a Real War.<sup>2</sup> The idea of an Absolute War aimed at disarming or destroying the enemy was read by Marx, Engels, Lenin and Mao as class war conducted with what Clausewitz defined as 'absolute enmity' (Galle 1978). In both war and politics, identifying and choosing friends and enemies, deciding on absolute versus relative enmity and therefore real war, in which war can be contained or regulated, became of critical importance. When Mao Zedong (1938) stated in his lecture 'On Protracted War' that 'politics is war without bloodshed while war is politics by bloodshed,' he was suggesting that politics is a continuum of which war is one part. Carl Schmitt points out that what Lenin learned from Clausewitz 'was not just the famous formula of war as the continuation of politics. It involved the recognition that in the age of revolution the distinction between friend and enemy is the primary distinction, decisive for war as for politics. Only revolutionary war is a true war for Lenin, because it derives from absolute enmity. Everything else is a conventional game' (2004: 35). According to Schmitt '(t)he question, however, is whether the enmity can be contained and regulated, that is, whether it represents relative or absolute enmity' (2004: 42).

Therefore, for Schmitt, the issue is ‘about the quantitative proportion of military action to be conducted by a regular army relative to other methods of class warfare that are not openly military. Mao finds an exact number: revolutionary war is nine tenths non-open, non-regular war and just one-tenth open military war’ (2004: 42). However, according to Galle, ‘wars are not just politics by other means, war is politics where its aim, methods and intensity change as it proceeds’ (1978: 75). Therefore, how one conducts warfare is of critical importance because it influences the desired political objective.

The Indian Maoists are at present in what they describe as a defensive phase of Protracted People’s War, a stage which aims to build and organize popular consciousness in order to mobilise people to spearhead a mass struggle as the war progresses. Thus, trying to understand revolutionary warfare requires us to take the politics of war seriously in order to analyse whether and how the Protracted People’s War is fulfilling its objectives.

A caveat is necessary here. The nature of the Protracted People’s War, indeed even its causation, does not rest with the Maoists alone. The war that the Indian State carries out is also decisive. In the document ‘Doctrine for Sub Conventional Operations,’ the Indian Army (2006) speaks of sub-conventional operations as the ‘*predominant* form of warfare.’ The distinction between fighting the ‘enemy’ and ‘fighting one’s own people’ is vast. There is a blurring of distinctions between the concepts of front and rear; strategic and tactical; combatants and non-combatants. Therefore, for these operations the document points out that there is a need to change a soldier’s mind-set from fighting the ‘enemy’ in a conventional conflict, for which he is trained, to fighting his ‘own people.’

The document states that ‘... the military operations should aim firstly, at *neutralizing all hostile elements* in the conflict zone that oppose or retard the peace initiatives and secondly, at *transforming the will and attitudes of the people* ... The endeavour should be to bring about a realization that fighting the government is a ‘no win’ situation and that their anti-government stance will only delay the return of peace and normalcy. Therefore, *distancing from the terrorists is in their own interest and the only plausible course of action*. However, the manifestation of *such a realization can take from a couple of years to decades as attitudes take time to form and to change*’ (Indian Army 2006, my emphasis).<sup>3</sup>

Since the Indian army's brutal policy forms the bedrock of all counter-insurgency operations, the implication is that the military fights a prolonged war of suppression. Because transforming the will and attitudes of the people is key to understanding the objective behind military suppression, 'Absolute War' is the State's preference.

## **The Context**

Armed struggle by communist revolutionaries in India has a long history starting with what is popularly called the Telengana Uprising in 1946 which lasted until 1951. After 1951, the former Communist Party surrendered its arms and participated in elections. However, sections of the Party were discontented with this policy shift and following the Naxalbari uprising of 1967 some Party veterans broke away to form CPI(ML). Fragmentation of the Naxalbari movement began in the 1970s. Towards the 1990s those who still subscribed to armed struggle drew closer, while those opposed to it began to participate in elections. Eventually, through a merger of various parties, the CPI(Maoist) emerged in 2004.

Since 2009, a series of crackdowns and arrests made by security agencies across India have resulted in the Maoists suffering reverses, while showing how rapidly Maoists could spread across the country. In this sense, critics were wrong to claim that the Maoist strategy of Protracted People's War was leading nowhere. In the Jangalmahal region of West Bengal, the Maoists emerged as a strong popular fighting force just as they did in the Dumka area of Jharkhand, both new to mobilisation. In politico-military terms, meticulously planned looting of armories as well as jail raids to free prisoners showed that they were capable of moving an armed force of between 200 and 500 guerrilla soldiers across a large territory. This required training a team drawn from different units for several months, an operation impossible without a social base in those territories. No longer were the Maoists a rag-tag guerrilla band, but an army in the making. In all these areas, the Maoists have also been actively engaged in building public assets such as ponds and roads as well as organising work teams to develop agriculture and to provide elementary health and education services (Navlakha 2010).

Drawing on the CPI(Maoist) (2007b) document 'Strategy and Tactics of the Indian Revolution,' Chakrabarty and Kujur list the four principal characteristics of India's revolutionary war as: '(a) uneven economic and political development and the semi-colonial and semi-feudal character of Indian Society; (b) The enemy is big and powerful having

centralized state machinery and a well-equipped army; (c) The Communist Party, the guerrilla army and the agrarian revolutionary movement in India are still weak and (d) Our country is a prison house of nationalities where some nationalities are engaged in bitter struggles against the Indian state to achieve their right to self-determination' (2010: 73).

The same document points out that, given 'the vastness of the countryside, the inadequacy of the transport and communication system and the isolation of the remote countryside from the military centres, and above all, the inadequacy of the reactionary forces in comparison to the vastness of the country and the population ... can transform the vast tracts of the countryside into red resistance areas, guerrilla zones, guerrilla bases and liberated areas by making use of the favourable terrain which is abundant in some regions of the Indian countryside' (CPI(Maoist) 2007b).

The document goes on to say that 'guerrilla bases will constitute the focal points within the guerrilla zones for the development of a strong party, a strong people's liberation army and a united front while, at the same time, creating favourable conditions for the establishment of liberated areas, expanding the political power in waves and quickening the tempo of the revolution. As the new political power in the guerrilla bases goes on stabilizing, changes should be brought about in the production relations while intensifying the agrarian revolution' (CPI(Maoist) 2007b).<sup>4</sup>

While the Party does not possess 'liberated areas' it does have 'guerrilla bases' and how they consolidate their position there is thus critical to understanding the concept of area-wise seizure of power.

### **Area-wise Seizure of Power**

Here the principal driving force is to gradually exercise control in a specific geographical area so that the nucleus of a parallel administration and the foundations of a new state are laid. However, it is necessary to select suitable geographical locations which are hilly, forested and where the presence of the State is weak. These areas need not be contiguous. There could even be a vast plain area splitting one 'guerrilla zone' from another. Besides, penetration by the Indian State covers a much larger territory and it is confined to a shrinking area as imperialist globalisation seeks newer and cheaper sources of minerals and comes into

conflict with people fighting to retain control over their common resources.

If this strategy requires expansion into new areas, what should be its nature? Should party units be equated with guerrilla squads or political mobilisation balanced with guerrilla activities? The concept of 'area wise seizure of power' has some shortcomings when it is applied in India.

The political report of the 9<sup>th</sup> Congress of the CPI(Maoist) (2007c) was concerned that there were areas where 'grassroots Party organization is weak with insignificant party units at the village level. Some states have formed the party units at the village level but they are non-functional. In many areas *our party activity is still squad centred*. This makes the masses passive supporters and dependent on the squads for taking up struggles and in solving the issues at the village level.'

Another CPI(Maoist) document called *New Circular on Rectification* (undated but issued after the Ninth Congress of the Party in 2007) is important. Rectification campaigns are an integral part of Maoist practice where mistakes are addressed and corrected through a system of criticism. The fact that this document was released after the 2007 Party Congress emphasises its importance.

The document states:

- a) In some areas, the lands occupied from landlords in the past are lying fallow due to government repression; when the landlords try to sell these lands, the rich peasants and middle peasants are purchasing them. On such occasions, instead of bringing pressure through the agricultural labourers and poor peasants, who occupied those lands, on those who purchased the lands and stopping the sales, the squads themselves have been thrashing the rich and middle peasants who purchased the lands.
- b) In the struggle for the eradication of bad habits like liquor consumption, educating the people with a long term view is lacking; in the struggle to obstruct the manufacture of arrack, instead of rallying the people, especially the women, prominence is being given to squad actions only. Physical punishments are being imposed disregarding class basis.

c) When problems arise in man-woman relations, especially in matters relating to marriage, judgments are being given without taking into view the social problems women face.

d) In various kinds of people's 'Panchayats' instead of listening to the versions of both sides apart from gathering the needed information from others in the villages also, one sided judgments are being delivered, under the effect of sectarianism.

e) When some among the people commit mistakes, when they oppose our mass organisation, or when they are suspected to be working as informers, punishments much beyond their wrongs are being imposed. (CPI(Maoist) undated)

Note the criticism of relying on squad actions instead of mass mobilisation to deal with class issues in areas dominated by the Party. Loss or gain of territory need not be a major deterrent against PPW if subjective forces remain intact. But it does cause problems if, in their areas of control, either the subjective forces are weak or themselves become a cause for concern.

Another report from the Bihar-Jharkhand Special Area Committee on Rectification (CPI(Maoist) 2004-2005) is a candid indictment of certain practices that emerged in *some* areas:

In recent years, large scale relief and reform programmes launched by the government have created a huge battery of contractors and middle-men in the rural areas. They are the social basis of various groups of ruling class parties. Locally, they maintain links with organizers (comrades at zone and even higher levels), appease them, assure block officials and engineers that they can 'manage' the 'new government' and get hold of contracts. During polls, these are the elements who wean away people to polling stations. *That relations with such type of contractors have been maintained by party organizers is a matter of concern.* Some of our comrades use such contractors not only for various works, but also the most secret work of the Party, and they also share their joys and sorrows. Tiffs between contractors over this or that contract have become a cause for contradiction among our cadres. Among cadres ill-feeling arises as they take sides between the contractors; different contractors even take recommendation letters of



their 'protector' Party comrades to Block development officials and engineers in order to win in the competition for contracts. For example in Chatra, the so called contradiction between Yadavs and Ganjhus is not a contradiction between toiling masses of these two castes, but between contractors and middle-men of these castes.

Among the recommendations the report calls for is one that Party members do not enter into any 'obligation from contractors' unless it is 'first discussed in the concerned committee' (CPI(Maoist) 2004-2005). It calls for warning and then expelling cadres found to be violating the Party's rule against hobnobbing with contractors and middle-men unless authorised, within limits set by the higher committees.

Concurrently, another issue becomes important. In order to maintain the CPI(Maoist)'s political control over an area it has to decide how it will tackle those who hold opinions different from theirs. Let us consider executions. Maoists claim to have a Constitution for their Janatana Sarkar (People's Government) (CPI(Maoist) 2007a).<sup>5</sup> Under Article 5(a) certain guidelines are laid down for carrying out death sentences. It says that before the People's Court implements a death sentence the local people's government has to obtain permission from the higher courts. Thus summary executions and arbitrary acts were to be contained. However, both Jharkhand-Bihar and West Bengal have reported an increase in summary executions.

It is worth noting, however, that unlike the recklessness that prevailed in Jangalmahal of West Bengal, in Jharkhand there have been comparatively fewer such killings.

By their own account, in the Jangalmahal area, 52 Communist Party (Marxist) or CPM members were killed in just the first seven months of 2009 (Koteswar Rao 2009).

Furthermore, these figures do not cover the period from November 2008 to November 2011.

It is claimed by the former ruling party, the CPM, that from 2009 to 2011, two hundred and ten of their members were executed by the Maoists (CPI(Marxist) 2012). Numbers apart, what were the charges against those executed? We have only vague explanations that these victims were all cruel and corrupt, so-called 'people's enemies.' So how do we know if the killings of CPM members were actually the execution of *political opponents* or the elimination of *informers* who had committed heinous crimes? Maoists in Jangalmahal appeared to be oblivious to the need for circumspection lest blood-letting rebound on them by creating a constituency of aggrieved people. Kinship and other affiliations can become fertile

grounds for mobilising those who are hostile towards Maoists to become pawns in the hands of Government forces.

Take Niyamat Ansari's<sup>6</sup> killing on 2 March 2011. He was engaged in enforcing entitlement under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme in the state of Jharkhand. His suspicious activities were brought to the Party's attention and he was issued a notice to appear before the 'people's court.' While charges against him were serious, including one of settling people on forest land for a price, these in no way deserved a death penalty. But after a summary *trial*, he was beaten with a rifle butt and later died.

So does this example mean that the Janatana Sarkar Constitution is followed only selectively? Is a summary trial not the antithesis of a just procedure, which the Maoists claim for their People's Court? Did it not require an inquiry by the Party into its own practice given that it was a summary trial and he was beaten to death? Instead the Party waited for pressure to mount before ordering an inquiry after six months. Ansari's killing generated a campaign against the Party and became a bone of contention when united programmes were being contemplated in Jharkhand. Participants demanded an explanation for this killing before agreeing to come together to highlight some common concerns.

Another example is how the Maoists responded to the killing of their cadres by the Bihar police who were informed of their whereabouts by members of the Koda tribe in the Jamui district. Here, partial mobilisation appears to have generated caste-based antagonisms in which arms were used against disadvantaged groups. In February 2010, 11 tribals, including women and children, were killed by Maoist squads, 50 others were injured and 36 houses burnt down in the Phulwaria-Kudasi (Korasi) village, creating great upheaval. This event was steeped in local political conflicts, which reflected caste tensions. Kudasi village was not Maoist controlled, although the Maoists were in the forests nearby and had the support of neighbouring villages. This was mainly because the Koda tribals there benefitted from the government's watershed programmes, and a member of their community had won the local election for chief of the Panchayat. Moreover, the Maoist cadres in this area were predominately from a different caste, the Yadavs and the Ravidasis, contributing to the hostility between them and the Kodas.

A caste-based schism between local communities and the Maoists in the Jamui district was

behind the killing on July 2, 2011 of a tribal assistant sub-inspector, Lukas Tete. He was one of four police personnel taken hostage by the Maoists and was killed while Yadav sub-inspectors, who were also taken hostage, were freed. While mobilising people to fight for justice remains an important objective for the Maoists, in the exigencies of war, local caste conflicts (here between Yadav Maoist cadres and tribal villagers or the police) appear to take precedence over a struggle which ought to rise above caste divisions.

If the Party's presence in an area is weak, support for its politics, which are meant to protect and encourage the poor to organise themselves for their own emancipation, gets stunted and divisions among the poor lead them to occupy opposing sides. This creates a fissure which can end up harming the movement, as was the case in Jamui. So why and how did they fail to win over Koda tribals in Jamui? How and why did differences with a 'social activist' get out of hand? And why were so many killings passed off as of 'informers' in Jangalmahal when the Party could not even document their crimes? If the Party can admit to some faults, it can be self-critical and correct itself.

It is true that the pent up fury of the oppressed is at times difficult to contain (Rajkumar 2010) or partially true, but this is a limited explanation when, as we saw with the Jamui massacre, the victims also belonged to the oppressed classes. What sense does it make to kill one section of the oppressed in order to satisfy another section baying for blood? Party cadres have to stand up against the very people they mobilise, lest reckless or vendetta killings ensue in the name of fighting 'the class enemy.' In this sense it is a political lapse. The presence or absence of a CPI(Maoist) unit is not a mechanical thing. The task of mobilising people for a revolutionary cause, carrying out work designed to help the 'people's economy,' ensuring participation of people in the task of improving their economy and inspiring them to join the CPI(Maoist) and becoming a guerrilla fighter etc. becomes possible as a result. What is actually happening only widens differences between an oppressed people. This also undercuts the policy of area wise seizure of power where winning the support of the oppressed people matters most if the CPI(Maoist)'s control over an area is to be consolidated.

### **The Limits of Armed Struggle**

If we look at areas where the Party was confident of expanding, its prospects now appear shaky because areas of influence have been lost and the ranks of their political cadres

depleted due to killings and arrests. Arrests of Party leaders and cadres are not only due to informers and the intelligence agencies determinedly pursuing them, but also to the erosion of their bases and declining mass struggles in some areas because of over-emphasis on war.

In an interview, the General Secretary of the CPI(Maoist) stated ‘we are confident that there is an advantage in the long run which cannot be achieved in a short period ... we want to stretch this war and transform the situation to our advantage favourable to the revolution’ (Ganapathy 2010). Another Maoist leader asserted that ‘(t)he Party and leadership will grow rapidly in times of war ... War is giving birth to new generals and commanders, which we never anticipated in normal times. While it took several years to produce a leader of calibre in relatively peaceful times, it is taking a fraction of that time in the midst of the war situation’ (Rajkumar 2010).

This proposition needs investigation, since the risk is that the slow and painful work of political education gets replaced by military concerns. So, how realistic is the proposition of war? Wars do sharpen people’s powers of comprehension, and they also help to spread the political appeal of the Maoists. However, it does not mean that political education of the cadres gets replaced by education through war. It may indeed be easier for people to comprehend developments and understand linkages between what appear to be disparate issues under circumstances of war. For instance a CPI(Maoist) leader told Jan Myrdal and myself that when they used the word ‘fascism’ in the Dandakaranya area prior to 2005, people could not grasp what it meant (Sonu 2011). However, as the State-supported private militia, Salwa Judum, began its brutal campaign, it brought home to the local people what the Maoists had been warning them about. Nevertheless, precisely because war heightens the senses, civil wars, which tend to be dirty wars, can also alienate sections of the people with their needless bloodshed, conflicting loyalties, manipulative propaganda and the machinations of State agencies.

So what are the limits to achieving political objectives through armed struggle in contemporary India? The Party states that ‘the mass organizations and mass struggle should serve the war between the people’s armed forces and the enemy forces once it has broken out, or should be oriented towards preparation for war’(CPI(Maoist) 2007b). But the Party also says that ‘armed struggle cannot achieve success unless it is coordinated with other forms of struggle ... This will amount to leaving behind the masses and going ahead with only the

advanced sections' (CPI(Maoist) 2007b). Trying to manage both ends of this requirement is a recipe for conflict.

Take the Jangalmahal area of West Bengal. At its peak, from November 2008 to June 2009, the Jangalmahal struggle encompassed 1100 villages across 1000 sq km and was organised around 150 Gram (village) Committees (GCs) in the Lalgarh and Belpahari blocks. Each GC represented several villages and comprised men and women in equal proportions. While Maoists were the dominant force, there were other political tendencies and groups present in the Peoples Committee Against Police Atrocities (PCAPA).

Simultaneously, the Lalgarh Solidarity Forum grew in urban areas of West Bengal among students, intellectuals and other sections; and the appeal of the Maoist Party grew accordingly. But so did new challenges. Very early in 2008 Maoists were confronted with a Party which also traced its roots to the Naxalbari uprising of 1960s. CPI(Maoist) (2009) accused Santosh Rana, who led CPI(ML), of pushing ahead with demands for an autonomous council for Jangalmahal within the state of West Bengal, and accused him of promoting tribal identity politics, thereby playing into the hands of the Left Front Government. They also accused Rana and his group of covertly extending support to vigilante groups promoted by the ruling CPM. When Santosh Rana said he was willing to accept an independent inquiry into the charge of covert support for vigilantes, the Maoist Party showed little interest. The Maoists do not oppose identity politics. According to the 'Strategy and Tactics of the India Revolution' document, CPI(Maoist) (2007b) claims to organise Adivasis under the slogans 'rights over the forest belong to people and Adivasis,' 'political autonomy to the Adivasi territories,' 'transform the territory as exploitation-free territory i.e. 'red land,' 'don't be divided, be united,' 'unite the real friends against the real enemies,' 'rights over all the resources including water, forest etc.,' 'the right to protect their own culture and development,' and to mobilise them against economic, political, social and cultural oppression. However, the Maoists are right to stress that divisions among the tribals should neither be lost sight of nor should tribal identity be essentialised and class divisions and struggle underplayed. These revolutionary movements are not just wedded to forests rights, to opposing land grabs by corporations and consequent displacement of people and loss of livelihood. They go further by focusing on class struggle and political power. The Party was clear that the struggle in Jangalmahal was one of the people in general, initiated by the tribals and not a tribal identity struggle per se. Tribal and dalit populations together in the Lalgarh

and Belpahari blocks is 55% and 58% . This means that more than 40% of the people did not think of themselves as tribals or dalits and these people had to be mobilised as well.

Nevertheless, the accusatory tone of the exchange above mirrored real acrimony at the grassroots level. The situation turned bitter with increased killing of police informers and people's enemies.

A senior Party leader justified these killings by claiming that these are not normal conditions but conditions of war where rules are different. He also said that '(i)n order to tire out informers, the people are adopting a number of methods. On the other side, the state is also trying everything in its power to whet their greed. Thus the number of informers being killed is also mounting. *Had there been some proper system in Jangal Mahal today, the number of informers getting killed would have been far less. In different parts of Dandakaranya, informers are being detained in people's prisons'* (Rajkumar 2009, my emphasis). It is true that in conditions of war, over-ground activities become difficult to carry out. In addition, the difference between combatants and non-combatants becomes decisive and informers or couriers are counted as combatants. However, the Maoists failed to grasp that such killings would carry repercussions, questions would be raised and their recklessness would cause rifts with friends.

The absence of jails was not as important as the fact that Maoist domination of Jangalmahal was weak. As a result, killing more informers was related to a diktat issued to CPM members in Jangalmahal to quit the Party or face social boycott. Perhaps the CPM local units and their members worked as informers and many were cruel and corrupt, but the diktat enabled the CPM, then the ruling party in the province, and government forces to find a way of infiltrating PCAPA. A combination of these factors may have contributed to the surge in informer killings. Furthermore, without politically isolating the CPM or the Trinamool Congress with a popular political campaign, increased killings actually eroded the Maoists' appeal and fractured the urban solidarity movement. Ethical rules of war on the revolutionaries' part are essential to promote their politics and rally real and potential friends or allies.<sup>7</sup>

Another mistake was declaring that they had built and controlled the movement in Jangalmahal. This ran counter to working secretly or in clandestine ways because the Maoist Party is criminalised on the ground. This claim to ownership proved to be a political miscalculation and subverted PCAPA's emergence as a mass movement representing diverse

political forces, even while the Maoists remained the dominant force (Bose 2009). This also undermined the open leadership of PCAPA and pushed the CPI(Maoist) to the forefront, thereby exposing them. The emergence of PCAPA was an achievement. Their work in the fields of health, education, small irrigation projects, the help provided to small and marginal farmers, the participation of women etc. was remarkable, despite the efforts made by the state administration and military forces to thwart these activities by physically closing health centres and schools or simply stopping doctors and teachers from entering these areas. All this held out the promise of providing the Maoists with a mass organisation for popular action and for getting around the proscription against open political work.

The urge to take credit and claim leadership of the movement widened the rift and made Maoist control of the PCAPA a divisive issue. This also contributed to the propaganda of the CPM-led Left Front government in West Bengal and the UPA government at the Centre, about PCAPA being a Maoist Front. While the authorities would have demonised PCAPA for being a Maoist front anyway, the Party made it easier to do so. This helped pave the way for a joint forces operation by the government when, knowing full well that such an offensive was imminent, after elections for the 15<sup>th</sup> Parliament in India (May 2009) were over, the Party ought to have ensured that the united mass front remained intact. This failure contributed to the erosion of their appeal within and outside Jangalmahal. By the time the 2011 state assembly elections drew close, conditions on the ground had altered.

PCAPA members faced a choice to participate in elections, support the Trinamool Congress or boycott the polls. Whereas in the May 2009 parliamentary elections, the voting share was less than 10%, in the 2011 May assembly elections, it reached 60%. What does this imply? That there was no poll boycott campaign in the 2011 polls from the Maoists, unlike in the 2009 Parliamentary elections? Or, that in the 2011 polls the Maoists encouraged people to vote for the Trinamool Congress? Or, that the difference in voting turnout in 2011 reflected a loss of ground since 2009?

The charge against the Maoists for having supported TC, while campaigning fitfully against the jailed leader of PCAPA, Chatrathar Mahato, brings out an old problem. What should be the approach to elections during PPW? If they tweak their own election boycott policy for tactical gains, what would be better: to support one ruling class alliance against another or encourage members of the mass movement to stand? In the Andhra Pradesh elections of

2004, the Maoist Party was accused of campaigning to ‘Smash Telugu Desam Party and the Bhartiya Janta Party,’ which ended up assisting the Congress Party to sweep the state assembly elections. In West Bengal the main slogan was to ‘Defeat the CPM.’ Remarkably, neither in Andhra Pradesh in 2004 nor in West Bengal in 2011 were talks held about the Maoists backing Congress or the Trinamool Congress. Their own calculations pushed them to support one ruling class party over another. Considering the decimation of the rank and file of Maoists in Andhra Pradesh from 2004 to 2005 at the hands of the same Congress Party that they supported during the elections, they ought not to have ignored the likelihood of a repeat of the same situation in West Bengal. Indeed in Jangalmahal the arrest and killing of Maoist cadres could be traced to their easy identification by Trinamool Congress members. Both situations forced the Maoists to take a fresh look at their election policy. In West Bengal they could have encouraged PCAPA to put up candidates or backed some local party candidates as a way of enhancing their own political appeal as well as ensuring that the Trinamool Congress did not get to replace the CPM or to consolidate themselves in Jangalmahal.

Armed struggle on its own cannot suffice. Blood-letting may have actually undermined war efforts in that sections of the people were alienated. Guerrillas minus the people’s support is an oxymoron.

### **Other Forms of Struggle**

So does this mean that Maoists are averse to other forms of struggle? A senior Party leader (Rajkumar 2010) reminded us that when the Maoist Party mobilised people against feudal landlords in the North Telengana area of Andhra Pradesh in the 1970s and conducted social boycott campaigns against the landlords, military forces were deployed against the Party. According to him, when the Party carried out a peaceful anti-liquor campaign, the police sold arrack and encouraged people to consume alcohol in order to ‘foil the anti-liquor agitation of the revolutionaries’ (Rajkumar 2010). He recalled that, ‘when in the urban areas the colliery workers of Singareni organised themselves under the Singareni Workers Federation in 1981, the union was unofficially banned within three years. An undeclared ban was imposed on the students and youth organizations, women’s organizations, workers organizations, cultural organizations and every form of peaceful, democratic space available protest was brutally suppressed’ (Rajkumar 2010). He added that ‘it is not the forms of struggle and forms of organization adopted by the Party that led to the imposition of bans but the very ban (whether



declared or undeclared) on every type of open, legal activity including peaceful public meetings that compelled the revolutionaries to adopt non-peaceful and armed forms of struggle and underground forms of organization' (Rajkumar 2010).

Thus, they may not be averse to other forms of struggle but the ban on their overt political activities restricts their capacity to do so. However, when they succeeded in launching a mass front, and thus overcame the difficulties resulting from banning their Party, their inability to capitalise on this, to 'leap forward,' shifted focus onto the fault-lines in their movement. In order to progress from their forest strongholds to the plains, military victories may be necessary but they remain insufficient because the question remains how do they sustain the movement politically? How can they ensure mass mobilisation and mass struggle if they cannot do it under their own steam? One realises then that the movement either requires the helping hand of radical political formations operating openly and legally, or must expand through political mobilisation under the cover of a broad-based front.

In an interview that the General Secretary of the CPI(Maoist) (Ganapathy 2010) gave in January 2010, he observed the importance of 'partial' victories or reforms. This is evident in areas where the Maoists are present and they encourage people to fight for various entitlements and welfare projects. For people to fight for their rights, mobilisation and organisation is needed. This entails looking again at the popular forces working over-ground, and working with, not against each other. Trying to establish the Party's hegemony with the help of guns undermines revolutionary politics.

What Maoists faced in Jangalmahal was a situation where their political strategy was contested by members of the popular forces. To carry out an acrimonious armed struggle with these forces was problematic. As they drew closer to relatively developed areas, the Maoists found that the freedoms people fought for and won came into conflict with the needs of war. In other words they failed; not only to win over but to neutralise the innate hostility some of these groups entertain for Maoists.

The limitations Maoists face in some areas means that the movement could end up playing a *catalytic role*; one of enabling reform of the existing Indian state. If their practice causes division or subverts the process of unifying 'popular forces', then they may survive for years inside the jungle strongholds but will only play a marginal role outside them. A banned party

cannot openly mobilise and organise people, for sure. War also requires the movement to defend itself against relentless attacks. The witch-hunt to which it is exposed, the executions carried out by government forces and the large number of arrests affect their ability to carry out the political education of new recruits. But Maoists exacerbate these issues by antagonising those who work with people over-ground. There was an opportunity in Jangalmahal, where they stood a chance of expanding territorially through an armed takeover of certain areas, but a greater one was to do so politically under the cover of a mass organisation and urban solidarity front. They obviously failed.

## **Conclusion**

Violence can play an emancipatory role when the oppressed are able to defend themselves, when they can save people from being trampled on by a ruthless military force which persistently sides with the rich, powerful and privileged. A call to arms for a political cause does not have to be considered 'evil' because violence is value neutral. It is how violence is harnessed, its purposes, that is relevant. Just because fascists use violence, we need not assume that there is no difference between what they and anyone else does. To claim that all violence is one and the same, grossly misrepresents social reality.

To argue that a death caused by fascists or Maoists is the same just because a person dies is fraught with contradiction. It provides no space for motive, intent, or ideological perspective, and reduces the issue to one of metaphysics. It also blurs the distinction between just and unjust wars, between a war of aggression and a war against oppression. Those who argue that all wars are the same should also accept that all deaths are the same because someone is killed. By this logic rioters killed by security forces are no different from custodial killings carried out by security forces. The fatal lynching of a rapist gangster by slum dwellers would then be the same as a caste panchayat (council) murdering lovers across caste or clan boundaries. This defeats logic and common sense.

The living care about why deaths take place, the motivation and intent behind them. Otherwise the difference between terrorisation of civilians by extreme right wing groups (for whom a community/ethnic group becomes the enemy) and the violence of left wing radicals seeking to end through armed hostilities the material conditions perpetuating the oppression of a people would be inconsequential. So we must ask how the Maoists deploy violence for

revolutionary transformation and where they go wrong.

In war, as in politics, choosing strategic friends and allies, as well as fighting the main enemy is decisive. Carl Schmitt points out that '(w)ar finds its meaning in enmity. Because it is a continuation of politics, politics too always involves an element of enmity, at least potentially; and if peace contains within itself the possibility of war – something that by the standards of experience has unfortunately proved to be true – peace too contains a moment of potential enmity' (2004: 41-42). But can the enmity can be contained and regulated, that is, does it represent 'relative' or 'absolute' enmity. While war is a continuation of politics by other means, Mao (1938) pointed out that 'war is politics with bloodshed,' meaning that the practice of warfare is part of the political. To treat as an enemy an ideological or political opponent, while enhancing the importance of a tactical ally in the shape of a ruling class, is a dilution of revolutionary politics, which is based on absolute enmity.

But this warfare must combine mass struggle with armed struggle. One without the other makes PPW hollow. In Jangalmahal the needs of war were used to justify indiscriminate killing of 'informers'. Controlling the mass front PCAPA and then publicly declaring it, weakened them just when united mass struggle was most needed.

When a military offensive is imminent, dividing the enemy is tactically useful. But keeping your allies, real as well as potential, with you is even more important. PCAPA was a coalition of class friends and allies. There were others who had joined the struggle earlier but had parted ways. Many were political opponents but remained part of a broad coalition of pro-revolutionary bent. Pushing them out and solving political battles through annihilation was senseless.

Bernard D'Mello (2011)<sup>8</sup> reminds us that '(w)hat makes the implementation of a mass line even more difficult is Article 59 of the Constitution of the Party that directs the Party fraction in the mass organization to dictate terms thereby encouraging 'commandism' which can lead to 'isolationism,' i.e. the Party ultimately failing to gain the support of the non-Party leaders of its mass organizations.'

Against the background of division within the oppressed classes, who are often at odds over

common resources, the Party, working to impose its own domination over the mass movement, undermines mass struggles. This throws up contradictions which if not addressed could gravely harm the revolutionary movement. While accepting the legitimacy of armed struggle, we ought to be clear that this does not mean *carte blanche* for killings. We do distinguish between the different manners of death. We mourn the death of our heroes, but will not mourn for tyrants. We mourn when civilians get killed but not when murderous gangs are wiped out. We are outraged by gruesome killings but not appalled by killing combatants in an exchange of fire. These differences are grounded in political ethics. Thus, to be firm in conviction is not to condone cruel and callous behaviour, which undermines revolutionary politics.

Moreover, comparing the Russian and Chinese revolutions, Isaac Deutscher perceptively pointed out that '(i)n Russia the civil war was waged after the revolution, whereas in China it had been fought before the revolution. The question of whether communists enter the civil war as a ruling party or as a party of opposition is of the greatest consequence for their subsequent relationship with all classes of society' (1964: 31). He goes on to say:

The establishment of the single party system in China was not the painful and dramatic crisis it had been in Russia, for the Chinese had never had the taste of any genuine multiparty system. No Social Democratic reformism had struck roots in Chinese soil. Maoism has never had to contend with opponents as influential as those that had defied Bolshevism: there were no Chinese Mensheviks or Social Revolutionaries ... Maoism was never in the throes of a deep conflict with its own past, such as troubled the Bolsheviks' mind when it was being forced into the monolithic mould. (1964: 30-32)

In India, the PPW takes place in a context where both 'politics without bloodshed' as well as 'politics with bloodshed' are present, side by side and overlapping. Political plurality in India also has a different history and contestation within the Indian Left with its multiple communist formations, parliamentary and extra-parliamentary parties, a six decades-long multiparty system, a large middle class, funded or non-funded activists and, above all, a multi-national and multi-ethnic lived culture. The fact that Maoists have been able to negotiate this complex terrain and have retained the support of the most oppressed classes, lends legitimacy to their movement. But, social and political divisions can easily be stoked and exploited by the ruling class(es). When this is combined with moments of elation such as

when a corrupt party is removed from power in elections, or when the government bows to pressure to pass a law or modify draconian law or a judgment questions the notion of 'guilt by association,' rejects a charge of sedition, or upholds people's right to land, a concerted popular campaign can succeed. Saner voices in the judiciary and among political leaders do triumph at times and create the impression that it is possible to get things done within the confines of the prevailing system. This impression enables the Indian state to ride roughshod over dissent and popular discontent, and, to emerge intact. All the more reason then to pay careful attention to distinguishing between friends and enemies when waging mass struggle.

Fault lines in the Maoist movement prevent it from winning over other sections of the working class, oppressed people and sections of urban wage earners, without which their movement cannot grow stronger. The presence of Maoists and their proficiency in armed warfare does act as a check and counter to the 'savage war for development' that is going on in India. The fear of people joining the Maoist ranks when state repression increases persuades the State to take *reformers* seriously. Maoist armed struggle is also a check on the proclivity of Left parties to indulge in reformism, legalism and electoralism.

Class war demands that the revolutionaries, through their own practice, mark out their differences from the reactionary classes. The niceties of ethical warfare or the Geneva Convention and Protocol are not just an attempt to undermine class war, if not to tie it down with too many principles, while the ruling classes carry out 'dirty wars'. The politics of revolutionary warfare are designed to win over large numbers of people, supported by armed cadres for the seizure of power. Winning popular recognition for their armed struggle as legitimate belligerents pushes the political to the forefront and focuses resistance on the 'savage war for development' being waged by the State. If some practices of PPW impede or undermine the movement's legitimacy, a fresh look at the strategy and tactics of revolutionary warfare in India is called for. The people's will to change must prevail over any attempt to change the will of the people. This is the challenge posed to Maoists in India.

### **Acknowledgements**

My interest in the subject of revolutionary warfare was triggered by conversations with Jan Myrdal. These began when, together with him, I met senior leaders of the CPI(Maoist) in January 2010. During our meeting, I raised the issue of the CPI(Maoist) accepting the public appeal of the Indian civil liberties movement to adhere to the Geneva Convention and its

Protocol II. Reference to this meeting can be found in Jan Myrdal's (2012) book *Red Star over India: As the Wretched of the Earth are Rising*. Our conversation carried on thereafter and Jan Myrdal drew my attention to the history of the Geneva Convention. Thanks to him I was able to access some of the material available in English on the question of partisans/irregulars and how they became de-criminalised as belligerents, on the difference between 'absolute' and 'real' war and on the evolution of the Geneva Convention. I also became familiar with how Prussia violated every tenet of the Geneva Convention during the war against the Paris Commune, how the Versailles' regime massacred more than 70,000 Parisians while the Paris Commune killed 70. And yet the latter who are vilified not the former, just as in our own times bigger war mongers and war criminals, such as the US-led NATO, escape prosecution for crimes against humanity while leaders of smaller African and Balkan states are brought to justice. What follows, however, is mine alone. I am also obligated to Bernard D'Mello for drawing my attention to several issues of Socialist Register that critiqued Maoism.

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## Notes

1 I have also benefitted immensely from the clarity and lucidity with which the phenomenon of war is discussed by Carl Schmitt (2004). Schmitt is a controversial scholar with ties to the Nazi party. This fact, combined with his belief in majoritarianism and dictatorship, makes him a problematic figure. However, the value of his scholarship cannot be denied when one reads his work on politics and the significance of partisans. That said he has to be read critically. People are not an undifferentiated mass. Thus all so-called 'People's Wars' need to be examined. For instance the Taliban, as partisans, may appear to be freedom fighters. But that is not all that can be said about them. They represent a world view which is problematic to say the least. If war is politics, the specificities of each war – in particular revolutionary warfare – cannot be innocent of political ethics. This is closer to a Clausewitzian understanding which advocates understanding the specificities of each war. That is to say that each war has to be understood against the social context within which it takes place, rather than collapsing all sub-conventional wars into a single category.

2 Real War 'is a wonderful trinity, composed of the original violence of its elements, the play of probabilities and chance that make it a free activity of the soul, and its subordinate nature as a political instrument, in which respect it belongs to the province of Reason' (Clausewitz cited in Galle 1978: 49-50). Lenin (1916) in 'The Military Programme of the Proletarian Revolution' also reminds us that 'national wars under imperialism' as well as 'civil wars, which in every class society are natural, and under certain conditions inevitable' cannot be denied. Lenin also offered a thesis advancing the socialist cause by using the opportunity offered by the 'capitalist war.' Much of contemporary social life continues to be and will be dictated, influenced or caused by war(s), whether it takes the shape of Afghan Resistance against US-NATO invasion, a civil war to overthrow a military dictatorship or to overthrow oppressive class rule, a popular resistance against national tyranny such as the Palestinian struggle against Israel etc. or class wars such as the PPW of CPI(Maoist).

3 See also Navlakha (2007).

4 The same document also says 'Guerrilla bases are transitory in nature and it is not a separate phase in itself. If we want to wage guerilla war powerfully, if we want to change the Guerrilla zones into Liberated Areas, then the question of establishment of guerrilla bases will have a special importance. These guerrilla bases will constitute the focal points within the guerrilla zones for the development of a strong party, a strong people's liberation army and a united front while, at the same time, creating favourable conditions for the establishment of liberated areas, expanding the political power in waves and quickening the tempo of the revolution. As the new political power in the guerrilla bases goes on stabilizing, changes should be brought about in the production relations while intensifying the agrarian revolution. Land should be distributed on the basis of land to the tiller and cooperative movement among the people should be promoted for the development of agriculture. The embryonic form of the new democratic state should be consolidated. Therefore it should be understood that formation of the guerrilla base means a significant advance in the process of building base area. This will create a strong impact on the people in the areas around the guerrilla base and will inspire them to participate in the people's war more extensively' (CPI(Maoist) 2007a).

## Notes

5 See especially the second part of the document 'Structure of Government' with particular reference to the People's Judicial Department.

6 In response to criticism by civil liberties groups in India, the Bihar - Jharkhand – North Chhattisgarh -- UP Territorial Regional Committee issued an apology on September 1st 2011. But they insisted that there were charges against Niyamat Ansari for grabbing land benefitting a section of the villagers. A press release issued on September 3, by Koyal Shankh Zonal Committee of the CPI(Maoist), says that 'he (Niyamat Ansari) was killed, not because of his role as an Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) activist, but because he along with his associate, one Bhukhan Singh, was found guilty of capturing forest land in Jerua village for agricultural purpose for which he was subjected to beating.' The situation is murky as there are competing arguments and a certain section of the villagers wanted the forests to remain intact since minor forest produce forms an integral part of forest dwellers lives. It is nevertheless clear that the punishment exceeded the crime.

7 Carl Schmitt, while recognizing the significance of the Geneva Convention as an attempt to regulate war(s), does not specifically take up the issue of the ethics of war, let alone revolutionary ethics. His focus was on the emergence and significance of the 'Partisan' and 'People's Wars.' Although the Geneva Convention itself represents, for all its shortcomings of non-compliance, an attempt at regulating conduct of war. And in so doing it accords legitimacy to the Partisan/People's War. However, Schmitt does not go beyond this to examine the political ethics embedded in revolutionary war. For instance notions of collateral damage or civilian casualties during war are central to regulating wars as much as providing some protection for combatants when they are injured or taken prisoner. This is certainly a post-second world war phenomena, especially during the Indochina wars. Indeed, these concerns occupy a significant part of reportage from battlefields and analysis of military matters.

8 This is the longer version of a chapter included in this volume originally presented at the workshop where the papers produced here were discussed. Article 59 of the CPI(Maoist) (2007a) Party Constitution says 'The Party fractions shall be formed in the executive committees of mass organizations. Party fractions will guide the executive committees of the mass organizations adopting suitable method in accordance with the correct concrete situation. Fractions will function secretly. The opinions of a Party committee/member guiding the fraction shall be considered as a final opinion. If fraction committee members have any difference of opinion, they will send their opinions in writing to the concerned party committee/higher committee. The concerned Party committees shall guide fraction committees of different mass organizations at their own level.' The article's ambiguity has led many cadres to interpret it as a justification for commandism.