

Days and Nights in the Heartland of Rebellion- In Maoist land

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April 2, 2010



*[In January 2010, leading democratic rights activist **Gautam Navlakha** accompanied Swedish writer Jan Myrdal to the jungles of Central India, and engaged in [conversations](#) with the leadership of CPI(Maoist). In the following essay, being published exclusively at Sanhati, he explores further the various facets of Maoist politics and the socioeconomic and cultural life in the Dandakaranya region. - Ed Source: [Sanhati](#)]*

When every abuse has been hurled and epithet employed against the Maoists, half-truths and untruths begin to acquire wings. They are diagnosed, dissected, and demonised; the intelligentsia are reluctant to face facts. Yet we are still compelled to demystify reality and to answer some fundamental questions: Why this war? Who are these people, the “single biggest threat” to India’s internal security? What is their politics? Why do they justify violence? How do they perceive their “people’s war”, their political goals and themselves? How do they intend to take a leap from their forest strongholds into the world outside?

This desire to humanize the demonised

and to get to know the Maoists first hand, i.e., not simply through conversations, books, and documents, but to travel and meet and to see for myself, had been building up for many years. Twice I came close to making the trip. On the first occasion, I was ditched by two young journalists who failed to show up at the rendezvous. On the second occasion, I was unable to prepare myself at short notice. I was not going to miss out on this, my third opportunity. Anyways, what follows is that I – along with Swedish writer Jan Myrdal – saw, heard, read, discussed, debated, and argued during a fortnight-long journey in January 2010 in what the CPI (Maoists) describe as a guerilla zone, where they run Jantanam Sarkar (JS) or their “people’s government”. Although “guerilla zone” is still an area of contention and control between the government and rebels, it is nevertheless an area where the Indian State has been forced to retreat and is using military force to re-establish its authority.

Introduction

Truth, it is said, is the first casualty of war. Therefore, it is not surprising that Indian government denies the very fact of prosecuting a war against the CPI(Maoist)! Instead, it is said that they are merely carrying out “police action” to restore civil authority. A police action brings the image of baton or lathi wielding cops trying to restore order in a riotous situation. Whereas 75 battalions (bns) of central para military forces especially trained in jungle warfare and assisted by more than 100 bns of state armed constabularies, the Indian Reserve bns and the SPOs, all heavily armed, have been deployed [1]. Besides, Union Minister of Home P Chidambaram categorically asserted that Indian government had a “legitimate right” to use “as much force as necessary” against the Maoists (Times of India, March 13, 2010). An extraordinary control regime is in place, which among other things, regulates entry and exit into areas held by the Maoists guerillas, somewhat akin to entering another country. Unless people carry identity cards signed by the Superintendent of Police they can neither enter nor exit from the area. As for movement of goods, this too has been curtailed; weekly markets have been shifted to local security camps, where one has to register oneself, provide list of members for whom rations is needed, and allowed rations which can last for no more than a week. In the forest, people had to walk for a few hours to reach the weekly haat (market), but now the required travel time is a full day, even two, because of the location and the encumbrances (ID cards, check-post, registration at camps, search of bags) imposed.

The war on Maoists is not because they want to overthrow the presently constituted Indian State, which the Maoists have been fighting for nearly half a century [2]. By their own admission, it will take them another 50-60 years to succeed. Also, to borrow PM’s words while referring to their military strength, the Maoists possesses “modest capabilities”. Moreover, it has nothing to do with their wanton acts of violence. Record of parliamentary parties, in varying degree of culpability, is worse. Besides, the fact that after 62 years of “transfer of power” 80% of our people survive on less than or equal on Rs. 20 per day, whereas 100 families own wealth which is equivalent to 25% of the GDP, invites us to remain skeptical of Indian rulers commitment for the life and liberties of mass of our people, the overwhelming majority of Indians.

As far as I am concerned, reason for ‘operation green hunt’ is because Maoists offer formidable resistance against implementation of hundreds of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for mining and mineral-based industries in predominately tribal India, where they enjoy considerable support [3]. Without weakening this resistance, Government of India’s mineral as well as FDI policy will remain unrealized. It is worth remembering that there is a consensus between Congress, BJP and CPI (M) to curtail political activities by “LWE” and to create an atmosphere, in the words of Prime Minister, “conducive to investment” and “rapid economic development”.

This has laid the ground for a long drawn out bloodletting, the likes of which has not been seen in the 60 years since 1947. This will be a “fight to the finish”, in which, one side is bent on destroying the ‘LWE’ and the other side determined to defend themselves. It threatens to be a prolonged attritional warfare. Having staked so much in this policy and invested in prosecuting this war, it is not surprising, that the government shows no signs of reversing or radically modifying its current policies. Indeed it is even reluctant to make public the MOUs signed by various state governments citing “commercial secrets” but unmindful of larger public concerns. In other words, Indian government has much to hide.

Democratic rights activists oppose war against our own people, under any pretext, because political aspirations ought not to be suppressed militarily. Behind every war is a long history of struggle, over-ground and peaceful. In 62 years fifteen parliaments have been voted in, and it is apparent to any discerning person, voters continue to remain impoverished, disempowered and barely able to survive. It is also our experience that, once the genre of laws under the rubric of “national security” is invoked, these not only criminalizes legitimate activities, but simultaneously legitimises unlawful acts of the authorities. This means that once the authorities proscribe an organization, and place curbs on their activities, including propagating, organizing, etc., then anyone offering any help to any member of the proscribed organization (e.g., medical help, legal assistance, or even help a member of such organization get employment or attends a meeting organized by them and addresses such meetings) ends up committing a crime. Were this ban to be lifted the very same evidence ceases to incriminate. Thus the most innocuous facts can get invested with criminal intent no sooner “national security” considerations come into play. Also, there is a strong likelihood of evidence being manufactured, facts misconstrued or twisted, to suit the State’s objective of silencing critics of its policy of curbing the so called internal sources of threat to security.

We are witness to systematic abuse by authorities wielding arbitrary powers. Apart from arrests, torture, fake encounter the authorities have become brazen enough to suppress voices of dissent by accusing them of being “Naxalite sympathizer”, as though to be a Naxalite or a Maoist is in itself criminal [4]. It took Supreme Court judges to remind the government counsels that to hold sympathies is not a crime. Recently we also saw how an attempt was made to mislead the Supreme Court by the officers of the court representing the Union and Chattisgarh Government, about a purported ambush that took place on early hours of February 9, 2010 near Gachchanpalli in Dantewada district of Chattisgarh [5]. Moreover, proclaimed absconders sought by the first class magistrate in Konta (Chattisgarh), for a crime of alleged gang rape, brazenly move around the Bastar region, and in full view of the police; the police accost, threaten and lead mobs to attack social activists, but little of it finds its way into the corporate newspapers. Independent social activists have been evicted from the areas [such as Himanshuji of the Vanvasi Chetna Ashram (VCA)] or thwart women’s team that visited Narayanpatna in Orissa or members of National Association of Peoples Movement who went to Dantewada (Chattisgarh) are thwarted from visiting areas to ensure that truth about a dirty war does not finds its way into public domain. And even Union Minister of Home shied away from attending a public hearing in Dantewada, after promising to do so in a published interview. Indeed, government forces on the ground carried out demolition of VCA ashram, arrested, beat up and implicated in criminal cases members of VCA, prevented social activists from reaching Dantewada and siding with mobs led by proclaimed offenders.

It is this repressive climate of war, which makes it incumbent, that we do not succumb to official diktat to tailor our convictions and go beyond official propaganda to understand for ourselves the Maoists, who are our own people.

Inside the Guerilla Zone

The first thing that strikes one entering a “guerilla zone” in Bastar, where the Maoists run their own government, Jantanam Sarkar (JS), is the form of greeting. Everyone, old and young, men and women, villager or party member, shake hands, raise their fist and greet you “Lal Salaam”. The second thing that strikes one is the number of women in JS as well as in every platoon or company of Peoples’ Liberation Guerilla Army (PLGA) or Jan (i.e., People’s Militia). Many a platoon had woman commander. Indeed, the platoon that came to escort us was led by a woman. They are not only in command but carry out riskiest tasks too, just as men share equally all the responsibilities with the women: collecting wood, water, lighting fire, and cooking. It was quite remarkable to see how in the platoons women and men behaved with each other. Each of them carried up to 20-25 kgs load made up of their weapon, ration and kit. Both were adept at stitching and sewing. In fact, they were rather good at not just repairing, but stitching their own kits in which they carry their clothes, books, ammunition magazines, and toiletries. Strap of my backpack broke and it was fixed by one of the young men in the platoon. It was a neat job. Indeed the kit bag they carried on their shoulders was stitched by them in which they carried two pair of clothes, toilet things, ammunition, etc. The uniform was tailored inside the “guerilla zone”, shoes and toiletries bought from the market outside. Third thing that strikes you is cleanliness. Water is boiled. For latrines they dig a hole, some distance away from the campsite, and my companion Jan Myrdal was most impressed because he said it reminded him of Swedish military design for field toilets. Fourthly, but most strikingly no sooner chores are done, be it night or day, almost all the PLGA members take out their book and read, or take out their notebook and write. Every divisional JS brings out their own magazine in Gondi/Koyam [6]. All in all, 25 magazines are printed regularly in DK. All of them are printed and distributed inside. In fact, I saw screen-printing of leaflets for the three day bandh from 25-27 January, 2010, i.e., a week before the program. By and large people don’t have problem following reportage, where they do get stuck is in analysis. So how is this problem addressed? Group discussions are the way in which this problem is tackled. An article is read out and everyone is encouraged to explain what they understand of it from it and through dialogue and discussion exercise meaning and concept/s get explained and understood. Education is prioritised and encouraged. Four textbooks have been prepared by JS for students up to fifth standard (maths, social science, politics and Hindi) and four are under preparation (history of DK, Culture, Biology and general science).

Everyone takes turn at doing the chores, from sentry duty to cooking. Since we were guests from outside, we had more leeway. But first thing they do is boil water. Once they are done with their morning ritual, it is time for PT. By 8 am, they eat their breakfast. Breakfast can vary between “poha”, “khichri”, etc., mixed with peanuts and followed by tea. Lunch and dinner consists of rice with dal and subzi. Food is simple but nutritious. Once a week they get meat. Sometimes more than once if fish is available or there is pork, which is provided by the Revolutionary Peoples Committee. (An RPC is an elected body that governs 3-5 villages. 14-15 such RPCs make up an Area RPC. And 3-5 ARPCs go on to constitute a Division.) Sometimes, as when I travelled to Abujmaad, ‘khichri’ (rice and linseeds) with peanuts is all we got. But it was simple, tasty and nutritious. Of course with every meal we were offered green chillies, which is considered a rich source of vitamin C! Milk is scarce, so milk powder is used for tea. Fruits such as bananas and papayas are plenty in JS areas. There is no fixed time for sleeping but invariably by 10 pm everyone would retire for the night. Camps are never in the same spot, it keeps shifting. A plastic sheet is spread and people cover themselves with blanket/s and sleep. For us, their guests, a shawl was spread on the plastic sheet and over our heads another plastic sheet was spread to protect against heavy morning dew. We were served tea in bed when we woke up. While the forest was used for daily rituals, over years they have honed their skills and shit-holes are dug and then covered before shifting camps.

People watch select movies. When I was there two films were shown (I am told on popular demand) “Rang de Basanti” and “Mangal Pandey”. Although, this is possible only when some relatively senior party man visits them and who also has a laptop. Laptop? How do they charge laptops? Well every company, if not platoon, has solar panels that are used to power lights, computers and so forth. TV programs and debates were downloaded from YouTube and copied and circulated and mostly available with companies. I was surprised to know that many a debate in which I featured had already been watched. Some thought that I looked healthier on screen! But of course, the all time favourite was Arundhati Roy. She spoke English, so how did you all follow her? Some of the senior comrades translated what she had to say for the benefit of others. I was asked a lot of question about her. Yes, she has quite a fan following inside the jungle too! Radio was listened to and PLGA personnel like to listen avidly to a radio program, which carries special Hindi film songs played as requested by the “faujis” (soldiers). But all time favourite is BBC news in which is heard by everyone, every morning and evening. Local radio news is followed for negative reportage with a view that reporting even negative is news. In a platoon nearly every third person had a radio. Newspaper and magazines reach them after several days. Books are mostly hardcopies downloaded from net. Yes, there are places where net can be accessed. Rest is human ingenuity. In the night solar powered lights come in handy for people to gather around and read. Or sit around the fire and chat.

What about alcohol and smoking? After all tribal people in Bastar brew their own drinks. Sulfi and Mahua are quite common. It was quite interesting that while party does not allow opening of IMFL shops in JS area they do not stop brewing of traditional drinks. But seldom does a party member drink. It is expected of party members that they neither drink nor smoke. Although they do not prohibit smoking, unlike drinking alcohol, and tendu leaves are available in plenty, they actively discourage smoking. And JS conducts propaganda campaigns. When I visited I was told that two people will publicly announce that they are quitting smoking and encourage others to follow suit. It was interesting for me to note that not one person in the camp, or the platoon which accompanied me, smoked or drank.

Getting to Know Them

For the first few days, people were shy to speak because they could not place me. Was I Indian? If so, how could I converse with Jan Myrdal in his language? Also, they were not too fluent in Hindi, were not sure whether I understood Chhattisgarhi, which they were more familiar with and knew that I did not know Gondi or Koyam. But after the first few days, curiosity got the better of them and they began to converse. When they found that I could speak and write Hindi, and that I was an Indian who had lived abroad but now lived in Delhi, they could begin to place me. It became distinctly easier when we began to sing together. They asked me question about how people lived in Delhi. Did people have work? How much did they earn? How did they live? Why did revolution not succeed in Europe when Marx and Engels lived and worked there? Is there no class struggle there? Why do Taliban and other Jihadis bomb mosques and target their own people and why not US military? How come Kashmiris do not have one party fighting for their liberation? Each question needed answers, which could not be perfunctory. I learnt and unlearned. Thirty years of the movement had made them aware of the world outside their forests. They knew that people are fighting to free themselves of oppression in Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Kashmir, Naga people, Manipur, and Assam. Despite being blocked their minds were not warped. I was again being reminded of what I discovered as a student that people who struggle are sensitive. But more importantly the difference between those who speak, like Palestinians, Lebanon’s Hizbullah, Latin Americans or South Africans, a universal language and, therefore, they could relate to other struggles, unlike those with narrower vision who could not care less about people’s struggles elsewhere or markedly different from theirs. But it struck me also that the globalizing Indian intelligentsia is, ironically, more parochial and less

cosmopolitan than the Indian forest dwellers living under Janatanam Sarkar. They who live in jungles could emote with people's struggles elsewhere in contrast to the urban-based intelligentsia who, despite having access to information, either knows not or could not be bothered less.

I came across three arguments about the spurt in struggle in Bastar in recent times, talking to adivasi peasants inside as well as in areas adjoining the guerilla zone. Firstly, that the war launched by the government was being waged on behalf of the big corporations to grab adivasi land. They, the adivasi peasants, are being warned that if they do not give their consent and take the compensation being offered, they will not only lose their land, but in addition they might never receive compensation in their hands. (Adivasi Mahasbaha, led by the CPI, is reported to be persuading people to settle for higher compensation.) I was intrigued when I heard this from several persons, so I began to inquire what was meant. What does it mean that they might not receive compensation. I was told that "agents" of the company were warning them, that if they do not accept the "offer" their money will go to others. It was then explained that incidence of fraudulent cheques that bounced or cheques issued to persons other than landowners has been a quite frequent occurrence. Second, a common refrain was that how can the monetary compensation being offered to them be a fair value for a land which has not only sustained them all this while, but their only guarantee to secure the livelihood for the coming generations. Besides, it was pointed out, that it is not just land trees such as the "sulfi", mango, tamarind and so forth, trees also fetches them earning as well as also consumed by them. Third, "vikas" (development) which the government talks of is "bunkum" (bakwas) having seen what was done in Bailadilla. For all these years, tribals have fended for themselves receiving paltry help from the government and now, when corporations want their land, government talks of "development". They want the government to let them be. One old adivasi peasant said that that if "they are so keen to bring 'development' to us what stopped or stops them, all these years to develop agriculture?"

At a meeting inside the jungle when we were speaking to some elderly people they said something that stuck with us. "We are old and have lived our life, so even if I have to offer my life to stop the government from taking away our land, I will do it because I must ensure that our children do not have to leave this land ... all of us" he said pointing to others of his generation "are going to stay put and fight, let us see how many of us will be killed by the military. Do they think they can kill all of us?" "We know how to fight". The anger was visible. I said what should I tell people outside? "Please tell them their sarkar is lying to them. Today they take away my land and forest tomorrow this will take away my life". I said what does it mean? "This forest and land is our life".

I read out what Union Minister of Home Affairs, P Chidambaram told Tehelka that "([I]n my mind I am completely convinced that no country can develop unless it uses its natural resources and human resources. Mineral wealth is wealth that must be harvested and used for the people. And why not? Do you want the tribals to remain hunters and gatherers? Are we trying to preserve them in some sort of anthropological museum? Yes, we can allow the minerals to remain in the ground for another 10,000 years, but will that bring development to these people? We can respect the fact that they worship the Niyamgirhi hill, but will that put shoes on their feet or their children in school? Will that solve the fact they are severely malnourished. And have no access to health care? The debate about mining has gone on for centuries. It is nothing new."

But we are not the ones who are starving here, they said. But, what about those outside? "They too can benefit if JS is allowed to reach them." So you do not want development, I persisted? "No we do not want these big capitalists from outside to loot us. We know what happened in Bailadilla." This was the key word and catch phrase, 'look what they did in Bailadila'. (See

Gautam Navlakha and Asish Gupta, "The Real Divide in Bastar"; EPW Vol XLIV No 30, August 15, 2009)

What about Killings?

I posed many questions to my companions. I told them that it is said that party kills people and burn their houses. That people are killed at slightest pretext for being "informers". But in unison my companions protested "we do not kill, loot or rape". We help people. Chetu said, I come from south Dantewada where Salwa Judum did not spare girls and raped them. They pick on helpless civilians. Why don't they come and fight us instead of killing villagers? Sukhlal said that his younger brother is in jail and kept in what is known as "gola" that he is forced to remain in sitting position with chains on his ankles and wrists. He was in Dandkaranya Adivasi Kisan Mazdoor Sanghtana (DAKMS) and that was his crime. Does this mean they never kill? No that is not what we said, we only kill 'enemy of the people'. But who are these enemies of the people? Is anyone who opposes the party enemy of the people? No, that is not true. For us it is not important that you consider party your enemy or oppose or criticize the party, but if you side with government forces and work with them then you are an enemy of the people. I asked okay what punishment would you like to give such people? We do not kill everyone who is considered enemy. Our party stops informers from being killed. It is only when they do not mend their ways despite repeated warnings such persons are killed.

I remembered what General Secretary of the CPI (Maoist) (GS) had said in his interview given to Jan Myrdal and me in January 2010: "... in one of the extension areas, there was an incident where in collusion with the Inspector General of Police, 33 members belonging to two villages became agents of the enemy. In this context our comrades went and handled the issue. While villagers wanted to give capital punishment to the main agent of the police, party interceded to give a chance to that person to realize his mistake." Could there be a difference in the way in which the party works in DK where it has its own JS? Or is it merely selective citing of cases where capital punishment was not awarded? Or is it my skepticism that left me wondering? I don't know. But more I think I tend to believe that JS in DK could not have survived and grown had they engaged in a killing spree.

Sukhlal told me do you see the high-tension wires?

"Yes", I said.

Do you know that when people's militia in this area blew some towers last year the party called a meeting and criticized them and told them this was wrong.

What did the party say and why did the people's militia do it, I asked?

Party told them that by doing so they were affecting the poor in the cities who suffer more than anyone else because rich have generators.

So what did the members of people's militia have to say?

They tried to justify it by saying that they thought this was a good way to entice the police to come with the repair team and then ambush them.

Did it mean that people's militia could undertake ambushes on its own reckoning?

No they would have informed PLGA.

So does party avoid ambushes? Then what about frequent talk of ambushes here and there, land mine explosions and so on? I posed this to PLGA commander Ramu.

He said that of course we do organize ambush but each is carefully planned and takes time to plan because we are weaker than the enemy. We cannot afford to strike at will and be reckless. We generally avoid engaging the “enemy” unless we are prepared. Also we believe in focusing on such attacks that can get weapons. He said that two people who were allegedly killed for joining the army, few days ago, (21st January 2010?) according to Union Home Minister P Chidambaram speaking in Raipur, that had nothing to do with us. We do not know if such incident occurred in the first place.

What does it mean?

He said that party always owned up actions carried out by them even if it went bad for us, which is why people like you criticize us. He added that they do consider this to be “positive criticism”. But they cannot do anything about incidents that are not their doing. They pointed to what happened to Himanshuji (of Vanvasi Chetna Ashram). All these years we were accused of harassing him. Now it is the State that has demolished his ashram. What we did wrong we apologise for, but how can we be blamed for killings that have nothing to do with us. We are, he said, in a period of strategic defence and when we act it is not only a military action but, as our GS told you, a political and organizational leap forward. Thus each action is planned.

What about incidents of beheading or the use of detonators on train in Jharkhand? Were they planned? That was not good for us, he said. And the party has admitted its mistake. I pointed out that each time you commit such mistake and apologise how does it help advance the movement forward? Does it not raise question about indiscipline? Look, he said, I know about DK but cannot speak about other areas.

I raised questions about the killings of CPI(M) party workers. Why was it necessary to kill them? Were they corrupt and oppressing people? Did the party go along with people’s demand for revenge, if so, did they try to restrain them by pointing out that reckless killings will harm them as well not win them friends? If urban middle classes are wrong in shedding tears over such killings how do they intend to win them over to the side of the revolution? If the soldiers of the revolution cannot maintain discipline and engage in revenge killings how does the party intend to win over the support of people? They listened but warded off answers by saying that we do not believe in mindless violence. A senior leader to whom I threw all these questions said that he couldn’t answer without reading report of the state committee. It is good that they refused to succumb to accepting criticism at face value, even from one “quite supportive” of them, without verifying facts. But what I did note is that he did not dismiss my criticism. When I told the senior leader, that if the party could not maintain discipline they ought to re-think whether their forces are politically equipped to fight a “people’s war”, he inquired if this was my opinion or one shared by others. When I said that I was sharing what many felt, he nodded.

But I still wonder at what level does it get decided when, where and how an action is to be carried out? Does the party or the squad decide it? If squad carries out an action without party’s permission what punishment is meted out? For instance who okayed Jamui massacre of 17 February, 2010 [7]? Or use of detonators in the Tata Bilaspur passenger train on November 27, 2009 [8]? And why did the party fail to restrain people from carrying out executions in Lalgargh, if they, the party, was opposed to it. Many a question I posed I was listened to but no response was forthcoming except telling me that they would certainly consider my criticism. Although I was also told that public might not know but disciplinary action is always taken. I did not get any wiser about the specific incidents I raised and what was done. But they also insisted that there

was no need to engage in Dandkaranmya versus Bihar-Jharkhand comparison and that I must not jump to conclusion. Indeed some of them appeared quite upset that I kept bringing up these incidents that had occurred in other areas. I agree I could be wrong and, in Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal, the movement, despite its different history, might be firmly anchored among people. However, many of the recent incidents, which were reprehensible, had occurred in Bihar-Jharkhand, Orissa and West Bengal. Also unlike elsewhere JS had taken roots amongst people with a history of more than two decades in DK where the party has been able to create an alternative structure, virtually uncontested, over a relatively long and more stable condition. This allowed them to establish their hegemony through consent rather than coercion and this is reflected even in the constitution of JS. It is this ideological hegemony that is their source of strength and sustainability. Of course I must enter a caveat here that ideological hegemony could as well be consensual even elsewhere because of many other factors such as reforms, party's unstinted work among the most oppressed.... But each area has a different history of struggle. While I believe that this could account for difference in the experience and practice between DK and other areas, how vast it is and whether this creates vastly dissimilar conditions are issues on which I suspend my judgment until I have visited guerilla zones in B-J.

Be that as it may. However, I was given a copy of the public apology circulated by the DK Special Zonal Committee party on April 28, 2009, addressed to the family of those killed in a landmine explosion on April 16, 2009. The poster-pamphlet says:

“We know by saying sorry your dear departed will not return nor our apology wipe out your tears. But we wish to tell you that our Party had no animosity with your dear ones. It was an accident. Government servants including police men and ordinary police personnel posted with paramilitary formations are not our enemy....You can then ask us why do we attack police and paramilitary forces? Why do we put land mines? Or why do we have to use ‘violence’? In reality the system is responsible for this....You know very well that every peaceful agitation and struggle faces lathicharge and bullets. We are neither extremists nor terrorists as is being propagated by this government of exploiting classes. We are children of workers, peasants and middle classes.....We are organizing people in the backward tribal areas against their exploitation and oppression so that they can fight for their rights.....”

It goes on to point out that in and around Singaram in south Bastar on 4 January, 2009 19 adivasis were killed four of them women. The women were gang raped first and then killed. In West Bastar's Minkapalli 6 adivasis were killed....Since 2005 at least 1000 Adivasis have been killed, hundreds of women raped, 700 villages burnt. “All this is being done to handover mineral wealth of DK forests to multinationals and foreign capitalists. It is against this violence we have been compelled to answer with ‘violence’. Had we not resisted they would have succeeded in their objective. Of course jawans in police and paramilitary forces belong to ordinary peasant and worker families or middle class families but they have become tools in the hands of exploiters and are attacking those amongst whom they grew up. Killing, looting, raping, making illegal arrests, taking bribes...this is the common practice of the police force....Many a times we have distributed pamphlets appealing to them not to attack poor and exploited people. This is the context in which we use land mines and attack police and armed forces.”

This is a far cry from the “we- said- so” attitude of the die hard critics or “this- happens- in-class- war” attitude of the die hard supporters, both of whom are cut-off from the everyday struggle while working amongst people, the need to sift chaff from grain and accept mistakes when they occur. For all my pointed questions and at times sledgehammer style, not once did they counter by being dismissive. Although they were cagey speaking about other areas they were forthcoming about what they themselves do in DK. Politics was in command here, so to say. Therefore, to distribute in thousands leaflets offering public apology was a step in the right

direction. Because they know they are accountable to the people and if they are to be taken seriously then they have to act responsibly.

Why They Are Not Scared?

I asked everyone I met if they were not scared at the huge deployment of troops with camps setup in such a way that the guerilla zone was being encircled and a virtual economic blockade (which under international humanitarian law is considered an act of war) had been imposed? One answer I came across was that 'we have to fight to establish people's power' (apni rajya satta ke liye ladna padega). But are you not scared? If we get scared "sarkar" will "try to scare us even more". Where from do they derive their confidence? I asked Sukhmati a young woman soldier when she went to survey the road flanked by two security force camps, and who was the last person to cross the road. Are you not scared to undertake the riskiest part of the task, first to reach the road and last to leave? She smiled and said "I have seen police since I was a child enter my village and threaten us. I do not fear them". But how do you fight such a formidable force? My companions told me that they do not fear the military since they have advantage of fighting in their own terrain. But SPOs queer the pitch. Except that criminal proclivities of the SPOs encourage people to seek shelter or support with the Maoists.

When I posed this to Sonu, in charge of DK, he said, when Salwa Judum was launched in 2005 for six months the same question was posed to them. We were asked what will you do now that villages are being attacked and burnt and party members and sympathizers are being hunted and killed. Some told us to pull out. Many Mukhias, traders and teachers began to believe that government will win this time and began to spread this line. Within six months tables were turned.

So what did happen?

By February 2006 the party responded. They were able to rally the people. First they did their utmost to rehabilitate those who got displaced inside the forests. Mobilised them and cautioned them that their displacement was meant to depopulate the forestland and hand it to mining corporations. Party members reminded them about the struggles led by their party against the forest department, forest contractors, police as well as their own chiefs. Also about the Bhumkal uprising against British Raj reminding them that without putting up a fight they stood no chance to secure the gains made by the people and asked them to join people's militia to resist Salwa Judum. It appears easy enough. But to protect those escaping SJ hoodlums, provide them shelter, rehabilitate them, give them hope and courage takes a lot of doing at a time when the party was being singled out for annihilation and simultaneously had to fend off a vilification campaign launched by 'neutral' activists virtually justifying SJ by claiming that party was itself to blame for causing it. Yet, it would have been next to impossible for the Maoists to counter SJ, had there not been people's support for them, to carry out this truly monumental task.

This is what the GS meant when he said in the interview that "... people are inviting us. Even new, less experienced cadres who are meagerly armed is being asked to visit these areas by the people. For example, Sonebhadra in Uttar Pradesh, the villages invited us themselves. Then again our plans to expand from Rayagada to Nayagarh in the form of Operation Ropeway under which the Nayagarh Raid was orchestrated enabled us to expand into this area in as little as 8-10 months. So, the Nayagarh raid not only had military significance but also political significance as there was strategic reasons behind the raid. Then again Operation Vikas was undertaken to expand into the Manpur (Chattisgarh) area in the plains. And people are inviting us and their confidence is on the high. If we expand in this way, we will grow definitely and expand the guerilla war. If we proceed like this and successfully stretch the war, then in the longer run the

political and economic situations are bound to change and under pressure the state will crumble. Presently, the state is willfully spending in military expenses, but as the war stretches and expand in to newer and newer areas, the more it will spend in the longer run it would lead to failure. We are waging our war with this strategic plan.”

Thus, it was not difficult for me to believe when Sonu said that SJ period saw a huge jump in recruitment to the militia and the PLGA. He also pointed out that twice earlier, in 1990-91 and 97-98, when “jan jagran campaign” was launched by the local exploiters, police and administration, the movement grew strong. I asked if this meant that they expect the same thing to happen now when they were now confronted, according to their own claim, by a force that numbered around 2.5-3 lakhs in DK? The analogy drawn by general secretary about “honey beehive” was recalled. If millions rise in revolt then even this force, few lakhs strong is no match. But will people respond to their call? The confidence displayed by senior to lay party members, the matter of fact response given by ordinary members, gives the impression that they believe that people will put up a fight, even when they concede that they have suffered losses in shape of arrests of large number of leading cadres and killing of scores of activists.

So what sustains them through thick and thin, malignant propaganda, loss of comrades? What do they do faced with setbacks and losses? What gives them confidence and courage to go on? “Love and trust of people”. This was the common refrain. This finds a way also in the pamphlets brought out by them from time-to-time. A pamphlet brought out by Dandkaranya Special Zonal Committee for the three day bandh (January 25-27th, 2010) contained an appeal to Police and Para Military forces inviting them to ponder why the government has launched “operation greenhunt”. The pamphlet after reminding them that they are fighting a war in the interest of the capitalists and foreign multinationals and that they are being asked to “to kill and get reward, or get killed and receive compensation” reminds them of their class roots and to cease using their weapons against their own class brethren and earn people’s hatred. Another pamphlet as part of their recruitment drive (from 2 December 2009 to 10 February 2010) for PLGA, carries an appeal to unemployed boys and girls of Bastar not to join government’s armed forces. The leaflet says that when one joins PLGA “you will not get any salary but food, clothes, personal needs will be fulfilled and your families would be helped by the Janatam Sarkar. What you will earn will be love and affection of the people. Whereas those who join government armed forces will get salary and right to loot, kill and rape but also earn undying hatred of the people and you will not be remembered. Instead your death will be celebrated.” Another leaflet tells the personnel of government armed forces that their war is akin to the wars waged by foreign aggressors against our people. Towards the end the leaflet reads addressed to those joining the government armed forces: “Government does not regard you as anything more than animals. Indeed no better than slaves. Sometimes you are called dogs (greyhound), sometimes snakes (cobra) and sometimes Cats (Black cats)”.

This confidence and strength to carry on against the heavy odds did not happen overnight. It took thirty years of sacrifices, a tough life, and selfless work by hundreds of young men and women, to move from being handful to becoming a mass movement. To establish themselves in such a way that today the second generation comprises predominately of Adivasis when one speaks of the movement in DK. Second generation? A senior party member told me smilingly that the third generation is getting ready. I could not fathom what he meant. I asked him to explain. He said that since last year party has started a Basic Communist Training School where we take 25-30 kids in age group of 12-15 and for six months they go through intensive training. They are introduced to basic concepts of MLM (Marxism Leninism and Maoism) taught language (Hindi and English), maths, social science, different types of weapons, computer, and also get to do practical work by joining a work team of the RPC and put in couple of weeks of work before passing out. This year they plan to introduce this on other divisions too. Even otherwise Maoists

are predominately Adivasi indistinguishable in nativity, language, lifestyle from their ethnic brethren. Of course, there were party members from AP and I met them too. It is said that one acquires much of the body language and speech modulation of a dominant group over a period. This was so true. It was difficult for me to know who is who, from outside and who indigenous, as every one looked more or less the same and indeed spoke and wrote Gondi. Of course, I do not know Gondi or any other Indian language other than Hindi and can follow with some labour Bengali and Punjabi. But what was apparent is that the language being spoken mostly, and understood by everyone around was Gondi. There were few occasions when I heard people conversing in Telugu, although neither Telugu nor Hindi is an alien language in DK for a number of reasons.

The confidence, therefore, also stems from the fact that most of the cadres here are indigenous. GS told us that it is not easy to survive the tough life that is demanded of party members in DK. I recalled what Murali told me that out of the two squads which entered DK in 1980 only two members, he and Kosa Usendi remain, rest have either been killed, gave up or just could not cope with life inside the forest. GS said that many a comrade who came from outside after few months wanted to give up full time party work and quit the forest. This also meant that cadres from outside are not the main bulwark for the party it has its roots among the people.

With such widespread appeal does the party not want to function openly? Murali told me that mass organizations of the party may not be registered but they are there alright and function to the extent that these unregistered organizations spearhead struggles and enter into negotiations, when the situation warrants. GS told us that it is important to guard against getting bogged down in legalism and economism and forget that masses have to be prepared for seizure of power. In the interview, he delved on the various trends within the Naxalbari movement and how one after another various sections began to move away from the path of “area wise seizure of power” and began speaking about preparing the masses for armed insurrection and/or exposing the parliament from within, but without having either an underground structure or armed squads and without doing much of exposing. Later when I was talking to a senior member he quoted something to the effect that open work is important but not “to function legally until it’s too late to function at all”.

During discussions conversation veered towards what has been happening across the world in terms of ideological debate between those who advocate working for seizure of state power and others who instead work for inclusionary politics by remaining a social movement retaining the open fluid form. Somehow party and union are seen as closed and undemocratic to begin with. It was not denied that there are problems. GS spoke about how partial results or reforms were ignored earlier and all emphasis was placed on ultimate seizure of power and therefore, stressed on the need to combine immediate with the ultimate that had earlier been overlooked. That is why so much of the time is devoted to strengthen what they describe as “peoples economy”.

I asked them whether they allow development activities by the State. If so, do they allow it in guerilla zones? Does it not undercut their effort to establish their own rule? The answer was that where they are unable to provide help to the people themselves, they are not opposed to any activity which benefits the people, be it health, education, employment guarantee, etc. However, where they are in control they undertake reforms that benefit people. Indeed, they also said that they do not interfere with routine patrols police and paramilitary forces for instance. This will happen they say. But they do not want to engage them in combat unless they are prepared. Will there not be a difference between the response towards reforms in areas where JS runs and areas where it does not? Well, according to the GS “[I]n areas where the enemy [security force] camps are located, even in those villages, we have Revolutionary People’s Committees where work is

still going on. Hundreds of people built up ponds in complete knowledge of the security forces in the camps”.

But time and again we were told that Maoists are not against any pro-people reforms such as those being introduced in areas where their own movement is not strong or in control, and therefore, where they were unable to provide succor to the people. In such cases, they fight for implementation of these reforms. I recall reading about the invitation extended by the party in Jharkhand to the Planning Commission team to meet their state leaders to discuss rural poverty. However, where they run parallel administration and are strong they undertake their own reforms by “strengthening people’s economy by encouraging cooperative movement”. That is to undertake reforms in such a way so as to harness the collective energy of the people in improving their material conditions, rather than waiting for someone to come and bail them out. I was reminded of the what the report of the Expert Group constituted by the Planning Commission to look into “Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Area” had to say: “the purpose of the report (is) to see how the government may eliminate the causes of unrest by constitutional and legal means and restore faith of the affected population in the system of governance, established by the constitution and law”. (3.1.3) In contrast to paternalism or benevolence of the state expressed by Planning Commission, as though some favour was being bestowed on people in return for them not to take to armed resistance, the Party pursued a line to enable people, the most oppressed taking the lead, to struggle and realise their aspirations by participating in making of their own destiny. Between the two lies a seminal difference.

I was told that while they welcome reforms they are aware that this forms part of counter-insurgency operations as well, part of “repression and reforms” – first, terrorise people so that they begin to see reforms as relief and begin to believe that something is being done. This also goes by the name of “winning hearts and mind” or WHAM under which various programmes are being launched. Thus in Bijapur, Dantewada, Malkangiri, Rayagada, Chatra, Palamu, Hazaribagh and Gaya districts as part of pilot programs various program are being promoted and these go by the name of Janmabhoomi, Vana Sanrakshan Samiti, Astha Shibir, Yuva Shakti, Gaonbandi, Three Tent Programmes etc. Also it is being propagated that socialism and communism are outdated, defeated ideologies and that revolution cannot succeed. A senior party member said that it is significant that the Indian government is propagating that it is necessary to use violence to save the people from perils of communism and eradicate Maoist menace. This is a way, he said, to prepare the Indian people to get used to violence and to accept it as something necessary. This is also meant to send a message across that Indian State is very strong and it’s a matter of time only for them to rid the country of this ‘menace’. But he said ‘they are prepared’. Party, he said, read the Salwa Judum for what it was, namely, as the first phase of an all out offensive.

Sonu pointed out that the objective behind the SJ was “to drain the water to catch the fish and to create ‘strategic hamlets’” The government thought we would get finished. He said that earlier when party used the term ‘fascist’ people could not understand what was meant by it. But with SJ this became possible. Thus SJ became a good teacher, negative no doubt. It helped clear confusion. Many opponents of the party changed their views when they saw large-scale displacement accompanied by burning, looting and raping. Others realized that SJ was meant to get rid of the movement so that something that had served them well, JS, was destroyed, their organized strength whittled down, and/or their forest land could then be handed over to corporations. He was not exaggerating. Consider what an official draft version of the report had to say on this matter. Authors of Ministry of Rural Development’s “Committee on Agrarian Relations and Unfinished Tasks of Land Reforms” (2009), which has now been censored by the government editors, explain the causes behind Salwa Judum, which has a direct bearing on mining concessions:

“There was initial resistance (in 2000) to land acquisition and displacement from the tribals. The state withdrew its plans under fierce resistance. An argument put forward was ‘you don’t play foul with the Murias’, it’s a matter of life or death and Murias don’t fear death. A new approach was necessary if the rich lodes of iron ore are to be mined.

The new approach came about with the Salwa Judum, euphemistically meaning peace hunt. Ironically the Salwa Judum was led by Mahendra Karma, elected on a Congress ticket and the Leader of the Opposition and supported whole heartedly by the BJP led government. Salwa Judum was headed and peopled by Murias, some of them erstwhile cadre and local leaders of the Communist Party of India (Maoist). Behind them are the traders, contractors and miners waiting for a successful result of their strategy. The first financiers of the Salwa Judum were Tata and the Essar in the quest for ‘peace’. The first onslaught of the Salwa Judum was on Muria villagers who still owed allegiance to the Communist Party of India (Maoist). It turned out to be an open war between brothers. 640 villages as per official statistics were laid bare, burnt to the ground and emptied with the force of the gun and the blessings of the state 350,000 tribals, half the total population of Dantewada district, are displaced, their womenfolk raped, their daughters killed, and their youth maimed. Those who could not escape into the jungle were herded together into refugee camps run and managed by the Salwa Judum. Others continue to hide in the forest or have migrated to the nearby tribal tracts in Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa.

640 villages (in Dantewada district) are empty. Villages sitting on tons of iron ore are effectively de-peopled and available for the highest bidder. The latest information that is being circulated is that both Essar Steel and Tata Steel are willing to take over the empty landscape and manage the mines.”

Collateral Damage

Ramakrishna Mission runs five schools, called Vivekanand Vidya Mandirs, inside Abujmaad area of Bastar. These are located in Akabeda, Irrakbhatti, Kachchapel, Kundla and Kutul. They also ran at these places health centres and fair price shops. The schools operate, as of now, but fair price shops have been shut and the health centres now provide skeleton service. Indeed a doctor used to visit the health centre every Wednesday but since 2005 this has been discontinued. Why? Because the administration claims that these were also availed by the Maoists and the doctor was treating Naxals. I said did your seniors inform the administration that not only is it not crime to treat anyone, but that there is Supreme Court order which says that no one can be denied medical help simply because he/she is accused of being an extremist/terrorist? His wry response was that this may be true but there is a distance of several thousand kms between the Supreme Court and where we are.

In practical terms this means that there is economic blockade, which is an act of war, imposed in the war zone and thus no supplies (i.e., ration or medicines) can enter, for instance, interior region of Maad. To ensure that rations and other supplies are controlled, weekly haat earlier held in civilian areas, have been shifted to armed camps. This means that entry and exit of civilians are regulated. I was told by a member of the RKM school staff, who feared that he could get into trouble were his name mentioned, that since September 2008 they require a special pass for traveling, which is authorized and signed by the Superintendent of Police, Narayanpur. At the checkpoint, on exiting they are obliged to record their names, where they are headed and why. On entry, they have to show what supplies they are carrying, whether it is in accordance with challan, and then searched. At the camps where they buy provisions they have to record, as do the villagers, how many members there are and then rations are provided. At the camps they are also vulnerable since it is frequented by the dreaded SPOs at whose mere words any person can

be picked up, beat, thrown into jail and maybe released after paying bribe. I was told of an incident where two milk sellers were picked up at the behest of SPOs and then the officer in-charge asked them for Rs. 2000 as bribe to set them free. They had only Rs. 500 between them so as a show of magnanimity the officer of the camp took Rs. 500 and let them go with a warning that they better remain “good citizens” and not believe anything Maoists tell them. I asked the villagers how do they get their ration? Most of them said that they don’t like traveling because of the harassment as well as because the ration they are allowed is always much less than what they are entitled to buy because they are told that they were taking it for Maoists/Naxalites. On approaching the camp, they say they have to walk in a single file through a fenced corridor. For the RKM personnel too said that they have to get down from their vehicle even when their “maharaj” returns after a visit. Why don’t you complain, I asked? They said we have to be careful. If we complain we are told you are talking like a Naxalite and asked to shut up. If we persist, we are told that we know about your links with Naxalites and we are keeping an eye on you. Don’t act too smart. I said: what about the Naxalites, don’t they scare you? They said, after initial years when we faced problem from them, they have not bothered us. They have, in fact, even stopped visiting us at our request when we told them we are being accused of being Naxalites by the authorities. Don’t they ask for help? No, they said because they know that our provisions have been slashed and health centre and fair price shop closed. Party has told us that they will not interfere, so long as we do not allow armed police to camp in the schools premise.

In fact, he said that one of the charges against leveled by officials against us is: “how come RKM schools operate but not the government run schools”. I said, yes, I too am intrigued? He said have you seen what the government schools are like? Some of them are not fit to be called schools. Just see what they are like and remember the fact that most of the teachers draw salary even when they stay away from attending schools. I said do you mean to say that Maoists do not threaten them? He said look you will get me into trouble, but all I will say is that, if a person can draw salary by doing nothing, by simply using the excuse that Naxalites threaten him, and the administration finds this useful fodder for their propaganda against Naxalites, claiming they do not allow government schools to run, then what conclusions does one draw? But he added: I would not blame the teachers, he said, because some of the schools are only schools in name. I asked that it is claimed that in last four years 385 residential schools have been destroyed by Naxalites in Bastar. Does he know anything about this? He smiled before turning away, “I did not know there were that many schools in Bastar?” I was no wiser, but did not pester him anymore. But I was reminded of a story that had appeared in Indian Express (5th, December, 2009 New Delhi edition) which cited a personnel of Naga Armed Force deployed in Tamar (ST) Constituency during recent Jharkhand elections. He was quoted as saying the following: “We had heard that this area was the den of Maoists. We did not see them anywhere. But the schools where we were lodged were full of mosquitoes. There was no potable water. We used to drink water from the hand pump after boiling, but (even) this did not help.” Those who lament destruction of schools and shed tears over the plight of soldiers having to live in such sub-human conditions, should maybe spare a thought for school children who are supposed to be taught in such miserable conditions. If in addition these are used as camps for military personnel wherein lies the responsibility?

Returning from there I could also not help thinking about how in a war zone the very act of standing up to a person in authority is considered disobedience, which they do not countenance. And yet, there was so much I got to know from the guarded remarks of the RKM personnel! It is certain that RKM is under tremendous pressure. However, what I did not fathom is that why is it that those who believe in God were scared of mortals holding out threats or trying to pressure them into submission? Was their material possession, is shape of properties, make them vulnerable to government’s arm-twisting? I mean if ‘serving the people’ is their call in service of

their Gods why is it that RKM seniors, or for that matter Christian and other missionaries do not protest cutback in medicine or closure of fair price shops in warzones?

How Did It All Begin?

Every encounter and everything I read, heard or observed, only ignited my desire to know how the movement took roots here, because only then can we understand what has been achieved in 30 years. Since 2004 party has expanded beyond DK, which comprised old Bastar (comprising five districts of Chattisgarh) and Gadchiroli (Maharashtra) into Manpur and Mainpur, which are non-forest largely plain areas. For administrative reason the area where party is working has been divided into ten divisions: the Bastar area (comprising five districts of Bastar, Kanker, Bijapur, Dantewada and Jagdalpur) has been divided into 6 divisions, while Gadchiroli is divided into 2 divisions. These along with Manpur and Mainpur, form 10 divisions. In the entire DK area, it is the Koya, Dorla tribes who are predominant adivasi communities. Others comprise Halbi, Batra and the Pradhan. There are some dalit sections as well as the Mahar community of Maharashtra who also live in sizable numbers in this area. Other than this there are some non-adivasi communities like Sahu. The Koya and Dorla communities are together referred to as Gonds and therefore, the name Gondvana. The total Gond population covering parts of state of Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa number approximately 7 million. The movement is spread over approximately 60 thousand square kilometers and where the party exercises control in the 8 divisions of DK, it covers approximately a population of 4.5-5 million. A senior leader Sonu told us that throughout its history, the people of this area have fought against exploitation and for their land and livelihood. They have had a relatively democratic living in accordance with the tribal tradition than what prevailed in rest of India. They have never submitted to oppression but fought against it. In fact from 1825 to 1964 there have been 10 to 11 recorded uprising under various tribal leaders. Approximately 16 years before the party entered this area, in 1964, the people of Bastar rose against the then Congress led government, under their Raja. It was “after a lull of 15 years, we entered this area in 1980”. Two squads of PW members entered DK in 1980. That was how it began.

Murali was member of the first squad to enter DK in 1980. According to him “after the setback of Naxalbari, in 1978, Karimnagar and Adilabad peasant movement was started in Andhra Pradesh. In 1977, the Party had decided to organise ‘Go to Village Campaign’. Accordingly, in 1978, in Telangana, Coastal areas of AP, youth and students from APRSU and RYL along with Party Professionals organised political schools for 10 days to prepare for ‘Go to Village Campaign’. At the village level, a democratic revolution against feudalism was the agenda and appeals were made to the villagers through pamphlets, posters and rallies.” The task carried out was a class analysis of the area. It became evident that in Gadchiroli “there was not that much exploitation from money lenders, but it came from the forest department. Along side, there were other contradictions, but the primary one being the state versus people. In Bastar, there was land problem. Here, there was contradiction between the people as well as of forest dwellers with the forest department. There was lesser exploitation than Adilabad in Andhra Pradesh. Although tribals were divided into classes, yet contradictions here were not as sharp as in the plains of Telangana. There was a class society here, but due to the tribal traditions, unlike plains the Mukhia/Manjis exploitation did not appear sharp”. What about language barrier? In the areas where they first entered Telugu was understood and spoken, both in Bastar as well as Gadchiroli sides. However, as part of Naxalbari movement learning to speak the language of the people, for example Gondi, became a priority. It took some doing to learn the language but as Murali said if you are fired by a desire to live and work among people you do pick up languages easily.

The survey helped the party to decide to focus on the “main contradiction” between state versus people given the long history of oppression under the state’s forest department. Sonu told us that

initially it took some time for the people to trust the Party. One of the first thing which the party did and which won them lot of appreciation was, what Kobad Gandhi told BBC interviewer, that we told villagers to boil water which reduced infant mortality by 50%. People became receptive to listen to what party had to say.

How was trust gained? The first struggle launched in this area, was against the forest department since the primary problem was that of land and forest produce. The forest department had enormous amounts of land under its authority and also exercised control over forest products from tendu patta, tamarind to bamboo. Although, said Sonu, we were aware of the contradiction between the tribal chiefs and the people, the people hesitated to say any thing against them. “They did not know much about us and probably feared that they would face the brunt of the chief’s revenge if the party left them on their own”. Therefore in the initial years, said Sonu, they took the entire adivasi population versus the forest department as the main issue. But even then, and this is important difference between this party and other branches of CPI(ML), they distinguished themselves by taking up class issue while following what the party describes as mass line. Thus the party concentrated on mobilizing the poorest among the tribals and thus put into practice that the most oppressed not only became the first focus of their attempts to mobilize the Adivasis but also overtime were in the lead. Mass organizations, which initially started being built, were peasant organisations where women also took part, later separate women organisations were built, to take up issues for their emancipation. One of the prime issues around which the party mobilised the people was regarding labour rate for tendu leaf collection, or for cutting bamboos. In this largely underdeveloped area, the contractors used to pay extremely low rates, lower than even the rate decided by the government. Against this, 1981 onwards the party began to mobilize the Adivasis peasants.

It was in the course of this struggle that people gained confidence about the party as they observed how party members worked in the movement against the forest department and contractors. Murali said that in Gadchiroli area, where Ballarpur paper mills had the lease for the bamboo forests they use, to pay Rs. 1 for six bundle (each bundle had 20 sticks) of bamboo. He said that earlier the practice was that company’s agent would meet the Mukhia and fix the rate in a private deal with him and this is how rates would get fixed. Ordinary adivasis had no say in the matter. This lasted up to 1983 when party began an agitation which saw the rates rise to Rs. 1 for three bundle, then in 1984 Rs. 1 for two bundle; right now it is Rs. 7 for each bundle. Similarly, a bundle of tendu leaves (70 leaves in a bundle) use to fetch 3 paise, whereas it is now more than a Rupee per bundle. These struggles and successes helped the party win confidence of the people. These were in the nature of wage struggle. Today, said Murali proudly, in most parts, where Adivasis have been organized by the party, they earn higher than minimum wages.

How was it dealing with the company managers or contractors, I asked? Murali said that it took some years before the “managers” became convinced that they could not bypass the “party” or negotiate with anyone else to get a better deal for themselves. It was then that bribes began to be offered. At one such meeting one of the “agents” told them that they, party activists have ensured welfare of the tribals now why don’t they think of their own welfare. Murali said that the part cadres turned on the agents and asked them that you all work for “owners” and are not owners yourselves so why are you so loyal to your masters? “What harm will it do to you if you were to pay a fair price to adivasis? If you have money to pay us bribe surely you have money to pay fair price to tribals”. After that encounter these agents stopped trying to bribe them.

These successes laid the foundation for party’s consolidation and expansion. Sonu pointed out, when Adivasis join they do not join in trickle, entire villages more or less gets mobilized and this is where tradition of collective activity among tribals acts as an enabling factor. It was thereafter people began to share the problem they faced from their tribal chiefs (i.e., majhis and mukhias).

By 1984 a committee (i.e., Forest Liason Committee) was constituted in DK for the coordination of the movement. In 1987, a state committee was elected, but due to absence of a central level committee, it worked under the AP state committee. It was in 1989, a DK wide Adivasi peasant organisation was formed in the shape of Dandkaranya Adivasi Kisan Mazdoor Sanghata (DAKMS). Today it boasts a membership of more than 100,000 members. Under this organisation, men and women fought for land rights and particularly of the landless peasants, were consolidated under the slogan – land to the tillers. .

Issue of Land

Land problem was the most serious issue. Not only did the adivasi peasantry face the illegal and extra-legal exactions of the Forest department which affected all adivasis, internally in addition, they faced domination of their chiefs, for instance, which meant that they had to labour on land of their chiefs and only on completion of this task could they tend to their own field. Not only did the Majhis, Patels, sarpanch etc own more land failure to obey meant that they had to pay fine in form of alcohol, goat or even in some cases face being ostracized. This was as true of area which had taken to settled cultivation as those where penda (shifting cultivation) was practiced. Basically it meant that adivasis depended on a single crop, but could tend to their farms only after tending to the fields of their chiefs. Thus, by the time they came to tend theirs, monsoon would be receding making their already precarious conditions even more uncertain. This also further created relationship of bondage with their chiefs. In addition, landless or land poor Adivasis were numerous. Moreover, paucity of land, low yields forced many to work as agricultural labour. They worked either as ‘naukar’ (i.e., free labour) receiving seasonal wage or as ‘Kabadi’ or attached labour with a large landowner getting food in lieu of wages. [See in particular chapter “Background” in When the State Makes War On Its Own People; Violation of People’s Rights During the Salwa Judum, January 2006, brought out by APDR, IAPL, PUCL and PUDR. www.pudr.org]. Furthermore, ‘penda’ or shifting cultivation had been banned except in Abujmaad by the Forest Department, without commensurate improvement in settled cultivation, which also contributed to low yields, as many a cadre pointed out to me, pushing them into servitude.

Sonu said proudly that “there is almost no land less peasantry here today, however, initially there were in considerable number. Three lakh (300,000) acres of forest land were won over. So, the first struggle within the village was launched around the land movement. The tribal chiefs had a lot of land under their power. But once that was acquired along with the forest land, the standard of living in this area took an upward turn. In the initial years, there was dearth of food as well. Now people get food twice a day and they also possess land. The struggle against the forest department was thus combined with the struggle against the tribal chiefs.”

But, it is one thing to distribute land and quite another to ensure that agriculture prospers. In the entire Bastar and Gadchiroli region, only 2% of the land was irrigated. The movement took it upon itself to start building irrigation tanks at the village level. Along with this, there was a new phenomena introduced in the form of the development of a cooperative system. 3-4 families started to plough the land. Even while building houses or doing other works, cooperative teams of 11 members were constituted. It is noteworthy that the constitution of JS mentions the following: “(t)hough there is private ownership over land, it (JS) will encourage collective work through mutual labor cooperation of the peasants in leveling the land, tilling, transplantations, weed removing, harvesting, growing vegetables, raising fruits, fish, cattle raising and other such agricultural and agriculture related works. It will thus develop the cooperative movement. It will strive to increase productivity and production so as to fulfill the necessities of food grains to the people and give importance to the development of agriculture. The collective lands, collective

plantations, collective ponds, fish raising and other such things shall be in the control of this (agriculture) department.”

These mutual labour cooperatives or work teams, were built from a class perspective. “Putting the poorer peasant families along with the rich peasantry would have meant by the time they ploughed their own land, the monsoon would be passed”. The cooperative system, as it emerged, led to the development of a feeling of collectivity and unity. There was land now in hand along with this there was some irrigation available that led to marked improvement in the standard of living. Increasing agricultural production is of great importance. Especially, in order to overcome unevenness in development. Some areas were relatively more developed than others, and, in some areas party had been working for longer than in other parts. Besides, in some parts ‘penda’ (shifting cultivation) is still practiced whereas there are parts where tractor is employed for ploughing. In between, there is settled cultivation that uses shovels for ploughing, which obviously does not turn the soil deep enough and elsewhere cattle used for ploughing. (The platoon, which accompanied me to Maad, had two members who had never drunk fresh milk or tasted yoghurt because cattle was absent where they came from). As part of the policy to improve agriculture, JS had bought 106 pairs of buffalos for use in Maad. Fourteen died leaving them ninety two. Now villagers who had switched to settled cultivation were being taught how to plough and also training the animal to be harnessed for ploughing. But local RPC member Narsingh and Kumma, who showed me several collective farms, told me that they found penda cultivation to be superior to more elementary forms of settled cultivation. One advantage with penda is that not only are yields higher but, along with Kohla or Kosra grain, a number of other crops can also be grown simultaneously.

Women: Against Superstition, Patriarchy and the State

Together with land was tied the issue of women’s emancipation. Women did not get any share of landed property nor after marriage could they freely participate in ceremonies or rituals, move from one village to another, during menstruation were forced to remain outside the village, and their attendance in meetings was discouraged. Emergence of Krantikari Adivasi Mahila Sanghata meant that these demands began to be raised. It was KAMS that raised the issue of Ghotul and began a debate to end what had become a system where women serviced men. It took six years of relentless propaganda to end the license young adults had to consort with women of their choice and where tribal chiefs or rich peasants (dhani kisan) among tribals, as well as, later forest department and police personnel, exploited young tribal women. The point was that party did not go and decree anything. What they did was they backed debate and propagated their views and over a period of time brought about acceptance of reform being envisaged. So it is not as though ‘Ghotul’ has disappeared, but it has been transformed.

As a digression when we were in Maad one of the soldiers asked me, do you see that field in front dada. Yes, I said, what about it. This land was cleared by us and we build the boundary wall and then asked villagers to cultivate it as a collective farm. It is good for dhaan (paddy). But villagers were scared and they said that the land belonged to ‘Deva’ and that if they cultivate it they could fall ill. So who cultivated it then? We did, he said. Our platoon did. And now we hope that villagers will see that nothing bad has happened to us and sow paddy next time. Similarly, Niti, party representative in an Area RPC, said that very often when people fall ill they say we will go to ‘ojha’ for curing us. We do not stop them. We tell them go to ‘ojha’ but please take your tablet too. And they do, if they then believe they have become better due to ‘ojha’ that’s fine with us, so long as we can help them with medicine, because we know it is that which will cure them.

If women comprise by far the most articulate members of the movement and their numbers has grown, it is less than fifty per cent that the party itself mandates and varies between 40-45 percent. But it is a remarkable that one sees young women as commander and leading cadres of JS. Thus not all the problems encountered by women have been addressed. Not all demands raised by them met. As women cadres themselves say the difference is that they are encouraged into raising issues, to take on responsibilities. One of the issues is that JS constitution mandates the agriculture department under its Article 3(c) to “release joint patta in the name of families and in the name of wife and husband.” This met with opposition but they are pushing through. In any case anyone who travels inside JS areas cannot fail to observe the prominent role of women in the movement. All my conversations were not with the men but included women. In many ways enlightened cosmopolitanism is what one encountered in the JS area where issues of gender discrimination and patriarchy was openly expressed and challenged.

There were many issues that I wanted to probe such as question of love marriage within the same endogamous group since I had been told that party backed such couples, which went against tribal customs. I wanted to know also whether household chores were being shared between men and women. I also needed to know whether if both wife and husband were party members the husband helped with household chores if wife had to attend meetings or attend to party work. Unfortunately, I had to choose between this and travel to Abujmaad and see developments being carried out there. I chose the latter.

White Terror

By end of eighties, peasant and women’s organisations in DK were now operating at zonal level which encompassed tribal areas across states, and recruitment to people’s militia were on the rise. But state repression was also increasing. A stage had come by then when the villagers had reposed their confidence in DAKMS as their own organisation. Since tribals traditionally had the practice of participating collectively, every villager began participating in it. Sonu said “(t)he old tradition of collective participation of the Adivasi was exploited by the party in the initial years for the purpose of the revolution. Now that they themselves started understanding the advantages of organisation and the party, it raised the consciousness level of the people to the extent that they could clearly demarcate the contradiction between the people and the chiefs as well as the people and the state. So, the alignment also was very clear to them. The chiefs sided with the state, while the party and people came together.” There was a growing realization accordingly among the people, that if they needed to maintain their right over the land, then they would have to organize themselves and fight. Or else, the state and the chiefs would seize no opportunity to grab it back. “So the party, as well, gave the direction that if you organise and arm yourself then you will be able protect your right.” There was spurt in recruitment to the party as a consequence.

It was around then that the first Jan Jagaran campaign was launched by the MP state government, in 1990-91. As the tribal chiefs lost their land as well as their traditional status, the DAKMS was steadily replacing them. “So naturally, the state and chiefs colluded in organising the first white terror campaign in 1990-91 in the form of Jan Jagaran.” In 1991, repression started in Gadchiroli in Maharashtra and Bastar region in Madhya Pradesh. Dozens of party members were killed between 1991-1994. Sukhlal who was from a village in Gadchiroli, told me that his village was attacked 15 times. He was then in his early teens. It was at this time, said Sonu that the party took the decision to fight against the state. It is since then in 1991, that action against the state forces began to be taken. And the process towards forming a Guerilla zone started being developed. By now all village problems were being referred to the DAKMS. Both the traditional chieftains and the government Panchayat system were losing ground. “This was a form of power transfer in clearest terms”. Even the patwaris stopped coming to village for revenue collection.

However, the Party observed a power vacuum and realised that DAKMS could not fill this vacuum. By 1994, the decision to create people's power organs was formally taken. And it was in 1995 the All India Special Conference was held where Party ratified the decision of building power organs called "Gram Rajya Committees", a body elected by all villagers above the age of 18 and the main focus was to concentrate on development of agriculture.

As the Mukhia's traditional privileges and the government's panchayat system began receding and embryonic forms of people's power emerged a clash between the two powers was inevitable. As people's power consolidated, again, the state reacted with a second 'white terror' campaign in the name of 'Jan Jagaran' in 1997. In this campaign many local comrades were tortured, many houses were burnt and people were threatened into surrender. One comrade, for instance had been killed publicly in a public meeting, creating an atmosphere of terror. But did not the party also develop a military force at the level of squads and carry out actions? Yes they did. One Masa of village Vedire was said to be a cruel and notorious village chief he was eliminated as the people's enemy. Thus selected people were killed. This phase lasted for 6-8 months. However the attack which started on 5th June 2005, in the name of 'Salwa Judum' was qualitatively different both in extent and scope from the last two 'jan jagran' campaigns. While the two 'jan jagrans' had been largely organised at a local level, this one was the product of a coordinated planning from the local through the state, to the Centre. Both the state police and central para military forces along with the local level Salwa Judum gangs were unleashed on the people with a long-term perspective.

The development and strengthening of the people's movement since 2004, after the formation of CPI (Maoist), had made them the primary target of the State, and it is apparent this emergence of a united party enabled them to mount a formidable resistance to corporate takeover of forest land. Although there was noticeable shift in Indian government's stance towards Naxalites by 1998, when under the leadership of L K Advani the then Minister of Home Affairs of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance, Naxalites and Maoists were elevated as posing a threat to "internal security". However, by the time Congress party led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) under Manmohan Singh took over in 2004, there was further lurch towards policy of suppression. It was under Manmohan Singh led UPA government which identified the Maoist party as the "single biggest internal security threat" in the country. This, despite the fact, that in 2004-05 Maoists had been dealt a severe blow in Andhra Pradesh where they lost, according to party estimates, 1800 cadres. The anti-Maoist operations in AP had picked up in October 2004 and carried on throughout 2005. Coincidentally, Salwa Judum formally started in June 2005, but it was preceded by months of preparation. (See When the State Makes War on Its Own People; Violation of People's Rights during the Salwa Judum, January 2006, brought out by APDR, IAPL, PUCL and PUDR: www.pudr.org). Thus, SJ was a pre-meditated, coordinated and planned assault to stem any consolidation of people's power which held out the biggest challenge to implementation of MOUs signed by Chattisgarh, Orissa and Jharkahnd government. For mineral extraction and mineral based industries.

Starting from 5th of June and up to December 2005, the terror campaign was at its peak. Particularly two blocs of Bhairamgarh and Bijapur were selected for maximum assault and in the whole process at least 644 villages were destroyed and people displaced. As per government records, 350 thousand people were displaced. Only 56 thousand were accounted for, who had been kept in 33 "concentration camps or what they call relief camps", said Sonu. Another 35,000 tribals sought refuge in AP. However, government still fights shy to account for the rest. Sonu said "majority people are with us". A destructive campaign was undertaken when the people who have forced into the camps led a miserable life, while the villagers who dared to return to their own villages still largely live in jungles as the repression in the form of indiscriminate loots, killings and rapes continued.

So what did the party do?

Starting 2006 January a concrete planned campaign against Salwa Judum was taken up. While the party began its campaign against SJ, the state propaganda of projecting it as an independent and spontaneous movement of the people and as some kind of a democratic revolution had been thoroughly exposed. It was clearly a battle for Adivasis survival. The party called the people to join the militia for survival. And as part of that the Koya Bhoomkal Militia was formed in 2006 and inaugurated on 10th February 2006 thus linking it to the Bhoomkal uprising of 1910.

According to the party thousands of people joined the militia to fight for their life and existence against SJ. "The people, the PLGA, the party, the mass organisations and the campaigns in the national and international levels came together in the shape of a big movement for which the party is grateful to the democratic forces of the country." In their assessment, SJ was halted by May-June 2006.

According to Sonu, SJ was the product of a state, which was eager to loot the natural resources of this region. With the coming of BJP to power in 2004, by 2005 hundreds of MOUs had been signed. The Texas Power Generation Company had invested for instance 5000 crores in Chattisgarh. In Lohandiguda, Tata had acquired enormous lands and so did Jindal in Bansi. Ultimately, it was the question of existence for the adivasi community and as experience shows the Bailadilla mines that had started as early as 1970, was profiting Japan while continuously hampering adivasi life and culture. This policy to acquire natural resources is the gravest danger haunting the adivasi communities. "Manmohan Singh calls the Maoists as the biggest danger, but the real threat is being faced by the adivasis. That is why people came forward in large numbers and resisted SJ. In fact people as far as Nagaland and Mizoram protested the deployment of their kith and kin such as in Naga and Mizo battalion/s in this area".

By 2009 October, architects of SJ had to finally give public statement annulling SJ. However, the SJ was, according to the party only first phase of a war and as this terror campaign failed, "the state began mobilising its repressive resources and another wave of intensification of the assault on the people is now being seen in the form of operation green hunt". In Salwa Judum phase 18-20000 forces were deployed. Today there are more than two hundred thousand security forces who have been massed against the Maoists. The SPOs of the SJ are now known as Koya Commandos. And so Operation Green Hunt is nothing but an extension of SJ. Besides, such campaigns are not unique to DK, in Jharkhand, Bihar and Orissa too there is the Sendra /Shanti Senas.

"So from Lalgad to Surjagad" said Sonu, "this entire adivasi belt with all its wealth and natural resources, although projected as the Red Corridor, is in reality a mineral corridor. They (State) feel threatened by the rising people's power in this region, therefore, they are launching one offensive after another. Since the failure of SJ now we see the Operation Green Hunt. To conclude, white terror had started in 1990-91 after which we decided to form people's government which was followed by the 2nd white terror in 1997. And after this, we gave concrete shape to the people's power by consolidating the RPCs. Then came SJ and since then, we have progressed to area level organs of state power and through all these years, militarily we have moved from platoons to companies, and are now moving towards battalion formation."

Towards RPC

In 2001, at the 9th Party congress a conceptual development was reached in the party about base areas and building the people's army. After a thorough review, the decision was taken to build guerilla bases. In the words of Sonu: "Since 2001, the first base area construction had to be analysed in more concrete terms. This was discussed and debated thoroughly. Accordingly

within the guerilla zones, guerilla bases began to be built. Therefore, concrete shape was now finally being given to the construction of people's power in accordance with the terrain and available support of mass base. 500 to 3000 people in the villages were now being constituted into Revolutionary People's Committees (RPCs). The understanding was that without army people cannot built power. People's army and people's power were linked. This developed understanding helped us a lot in working towards both the development of the army and the development of people's power. Two or three spots were selected for guerilla bases in each division, and in this shape 10-12 spots were concentrated upon to form the guerilla bases. Maad forms the Central Guerilla Base."

Difference between Guerilla zone and guerilla base is not semantic it is, Maoists claim, of substance. Guerilla zone is a fluid area in the sense that there is contention for control and the State is not entirely absent, even if it be in shape of its police or armed force. However, there are spots in these guerilla zones which are demarcated to ensure that some work can carry on relatively uninterrupted. These are "bases" which are not easily penetrable or accessible. It is here RPC function and one can see the liberated zone in its embryonic form.

The first step was to create village level RPC which comprised up to 15 villages. The second step was to create ARPC over the selected guerilla bases in each division comprising 3-5 RPCs. Thus by December 2004, the first ARPC was built. And by February 2005, the 2nd ARPC was formed. From 2005 onwards, till 2008 all the spots were covered by ARPC. The party decision was to create minimum 3 ARPCs in each division, which is currently under process. The first divisional government was formed in 2007 March. During the initial stage of guerilla bases, the corresponding military formation was platoons. Now with the development of divisional sarkar, companies were formed at military level. To intensify this process, they have made Zonal Level Sarkar Preparatory Committee. Once this is made, the zonal level sarkar will be in place, and alongside, in terms of military development, battalions are being built. The first battalion was formed on August 10, 2009.

At the village level, for the JS, there is adult franchise. After that at higher levels, there is selection. This means, that it is elected RPCs which select members to ARPC. And the same process goes up to the Zonal level council. Considering that DK area was predominantly inhabited by adivasi people with limited experience in new governance, the first workshop for this purpose was organised in February 2008. According to Sonu it was an extremely productive endeavor as a free exchange of experience and opinion took place for both the party as well as the people. On the other side, as the higher level of people's government was being formed the call for boycott of parliamentary election was now being actively undertaken. In the 2008 November, Chattisgarh Assembly Election, as in the 2009 April, 15th Lok Sabha Election and in the 2009 October Maharashtra Assembly Election, it was the JS which took the initiative of active and collective boycott of election by the people. All the RPCs called public meetings in their villages and told the people that they have been electing their own government, how can they elect another government outside of themselves at the same time?

Along side the people's militia has also evolved with the purpose of protecting the people's government. The military strength has also been increasing and consequently the para military forces which during every election try to pressurise and threaten the masses, according to the party, have been effectively resisted by the PLGA and the militia lately. In the entire struggle area or the guerilla zone there are only been 2-5% polling. For instance, in Gogonda, there were 700 voters and 1000 para military posted during election. Despite elaborate arrangements there were only 10 votes cast, that too after 3rd repolling.

In terms of recruitment too, PLGA has been holding recruitment campaign from 2001. Difference is that after 2005, the duty of recruitment has been handed over to the RPCs. Now responsibility for the people's army rests with the people's government, JS. RPCs encourage people to join the people's army. We were told, for instance, that in 2008 December, in Gangalgar the ARPCs of the area conducted two public meetings at two different places attended by more than 10 thousand people. From the Dias itself, the ARPC president gave a call for recruitment into the PLGA. From these two public meetings 107 youth volunteered to join the PLGA and the party after screening them recruited 65 members from here.

All developments in this region of DK is now the responsibility of the people's government, i.e., the JS. The established administration is being replaced by the strengthening of the people's government. The RPCs originally had 7 departments later two more departments in the form of trade and industry and public relations have been added. In order to ensure women's participation in people's government the goal is to secure 50% share for women in governance. When asked, if this goal has been met we were told that they are still working in this area and as of now there has not been much progress possible. So what is the percentage of women in responsible posts in JS? It was said that it is around 40%. One of the problems which being encountered is that unlike party or PLGA which is full time work and involves traveling JS means a more sedentary job and families and household chores remain. Unless there is sharing of these chores women find it difficult to take on administrative responsibilities. The work load too has increased for JS. For instance they run mobile schools and mobile health care units.

What was interesting was to get to know how JS was trying to get around the problem of lack of hospitals and trained doctors. So what do they do? I was told that doctors who are there working in DK's guerilla zones conduct work shops where elementary training is provided to members of RPCs. Since malaria, cholera and elephantitis are the three most dreaded illness which afflicts people, their symptoms are taught and medicines identified by their colours. In order that, some treatment is offered to people who are unwell. What if these "barefoot" doctors mix up medicines? Well there is no hundred per cent guarantee that this does not occur. But all we can ensure is that incidence of this nature through workshops or by sending a team (a couple of them) this is brought down.

In so far as mobile schools are concerned these are in nature of camps where children attend schools for anywhere between 15 to 30 days, depending upon how tense the situation is in a particular area. Classes last for 90 minutes for each subject with four subjects taught in a day. There are between 25-30 students and three teachers. They have begun to employ certain teaching aids from globe, torchlights to CDs to teach history and science. In science they find that they encounter problem because people's beliefs about evolution, universe, sun and moon etc are different from what science teaches us. But children are taught through teaching aids or CDs the way life evolved, eclipses occur etc. Significantly, JS education tries to meet the challenge posed to them to teach, for e.g., modern science by picking on everyday things around them and maximizing use of resources which they have access to. Reminded me of work done by Kishore Bharati in MP.

How Does it Work

However, it is one thing to create a political structure but quite another to find out how it actually operates. I was told that elections to RPCs are held every three years. And those RPCs select members for ARPCs. I knew also that on an average up to 15 RPCs constitute ARPC. RPC holds a general body meeting where accounts are shared and reviewed. Similarly ARPC accounts are discussed in extended meetings of all the RPCs which come under it. In both RPC and ARPC members have right to recall any office bearer if he or she is found wanting in any respect. But I

wanted to know what an ARPC budget looked like. The area where we were, there were 14 RPCs, each RPC had roughly 160 households thus in the ARPC there were approximately 3000 + households. There were 15 members in the ARPC. Niti a woman comrade was the division committee member in charge of the Janatam Sarkar. Shivnath was the president of the ARPC and Balmati its vice president. Head of the finance department was Naresh, while Sushila was head of the PR department and member of party area committee. Each ARPC has a standing committee where the president, vice president, finance department head as well as defense department head are members. I asked to see the budget for 2009. This is what it looked like:

On the income side it showed Rs. 10 lakh and one thousand. This was made up of Rs. 3,60,000 tax on contractors, Rs. 500,000 allotted by Jantam Sarkar and Rs 250,000 collected through work days or shram daan by the area households. On the expenditure side the budget showed that they spent Rs 506,935 towards defence, Rs 140,250 for agriculture, Rs 100,000 for health, Rs 10,000 for education, Rs 60,000 for trade and Rs 5000 for public relations. Why the expenditure on defense was high and education pittance, I asked? Niti explained that since 2004 when decision was taken to shift the responsibility for PLGA and people's militia on JS the expenditure incurred for kit (three pair of uniform, oil, soap, toothpaste, washing soap, comb, gunpowder, bows and arrows, and food) was borne by the ARPC. As for low expenditure on education Shivnath said that it was only because they had not been able to find a "guruji" for the schools run by the JS. As party cadres filled in the role they did not have to spend money on paying salary or more than what was needed to run the evening schools. I asked them if I could be shown details of how the money was spent on agriculture. The expenditure comprised money spent on fishery, plants, seeds, papaya, lemon, mango and guava. Some were items purchased from the individual farmers and distributed among those who needed it. However, fishery and seeds and plants were meant for development of pisciculture (this ARPC had four ponds for fishery and 7 wells) and providing seeds to poor peasants who could not afford to buy them or those who for some reason needed help. Similarly trade was to purchase forest products for resale. The ARPC has a justice department also.

What cases generally are referred to them? Land disputes say between family members especially between brothers. Earlier practise was that elder brother got a bigger share than the younger ones. Also women got less than men. Not anymore. RPCs go by principle of equality. They also intercede on matters of superstition.

One of the most difficult cases was the case of murder of three traders from L who had gone to T to purchase goats. They had between them Rs 20,000. First the missing case was referred to in the local police station. When they failed to do anything the family of the missing traders approached the RPC. Their remains were found after three months. The justice department after investigation discovered that they were robbed and killed while the story spread claimed that wild animals probably had got them. The people accused of the crime were brought before a peoples court where 1500 people came along with 115 of victims family. The victim's family wanted to kill the accused. After much to and from they settled for 60 bullocks, 40 goats, 15 pigs, 20 chicken, 10 kandi of rice (each kandi equals 30 kgs). However, finally the matter was settled by making the accused pay Rs 80,000, bones of the dead was handed over to the family of the victims and proper burial undertaken. I asked why such leniency was shown to the accused. I was told that Rs 80,000 was a huge amount in the forest area and that even this amount was in inverse proportion to the class of peasant. Thus the rich peasant had to pay Rs 20,000, middle 15,000 and poor 10,000. Besides, they said that JS Constitution does not follow death for death, as matter of principle.

Article 5(h) says that "(t)he people's courts will work as per the principles of just judiciary process and system on the basis of class line and mass line. The judicial department will solve

the problems between the people so as to enhance their integrity. Normally it does not punish to solve them. When it tries landlords, hierarchs, heads of the ruling class parties, wicked government officers, police, paramilitary, military forces, police agents, conspirators, disrupters, deceivers, goons, thieves, anarchists and other such elements, it isolates them from the people and punishes them accordingly including confiscation of their properties. It follows methods to increase the role of people in avoiding crimes. It gives death sentence to those who indulge in counter revolutionary crimes. Before it implements death sentence the local people's government have to obtain permission from the higher courts. Except for counter revolutionary crimes, it will send those indulged in murder, attempt to murder, atrocities on women, informing the exploiting police and other such things to the labor camps. In these camps, they are made to do labor. They are taught revolutionary politics and are reformed. It will help to develop the people's judicial system by passing verdict on disputes, crimes and conspiracies. It will also keep in view the customary traditions while giving verdict."(Emphasis added)

And 5(I) says that "(I)n each and every case there must be voting among the judges and verdict must be given according to the opinion of the majority. It may be given with slight majority also. But in critical cases the verdicts must have 2/3 rd majorities. The president of the judicial departmental committee or the judge who presides the trial shall announce the verdicts. They must give the necessary explanation."

Thus contrary to critics who believe that Maoists kill at the drop of a hat capital punishment is reserved only for "counter-revolutionary crimes" and outlawed for rest. What is meant by "counter-revolutionary crimes"? From what I gathered it is a heinous crime such as enabling security forces to carry out an ambush that results in loss of lives which can invite capital punishment. It is not awarded for every informer, or even homicide. I was repeatedly told that death penalty is rare and is preceded by several warnings to the person. Even then, at least what the constitution obliges them to do, is not to carry out the sentence unless it is ratified by the higher instance, going all the way up to the state or zonal JS. This is to ensure that there is some check and balance against abuse of authority.

War as a Metaphor for Mobilisation of People

While I was familiar with the fact that Maoists consider 'people's war' as intrinsic part of their politics it was in the course of discussion that clarity over 'political' emerged. Of what they meant by this. Our conversation had veered towards some of the spectacular actions undertaken by them. I was asking them about Nayagarh in the state of Orissa. It was then the GS said that well military action was only one part of the operation. It was preceded by 8 to 9 month long political work in the area concerned. It was therefore, it was called "operation ropeway" meaning party's leap from Rayagada into areas beyond and close to state capital Bhubaneswar. For months party members entered Nayagarh and worked among the people taking some of them into confidence and establishing themselves. More than military, i.e. looting of the armoury, it is this political mobilization which was successful. Militarily, I found out, the action was considered less successful. For one, their reconaissance under-estimated number of weapons which were in the armoury, instead of 1200 weapons they expected no more than 4-500 and 30-40,000 rounds of ammunition as against more than 100,000 rounds which was actually there. As a result the force which was prepared to carryout the raid was smaller than what the armoury raid necessitated. Also the action was to have taken place in the night and the guerillas ought to have escaped unseen. Instead operation began late and was completed in the early hours of the morning by when the inhabitants of Nayagarh had gathered outside and saw in which direction they retreated. Also they could only carry 300 odd weapons and 50,000 rounds of ammunition. And yet, if the action was considered success it was because of the political mobilization achieved whereby Maoists expanded into a new area. The point is to emphasise that every

military action is seen as enabling expansion of political reach of the party. This is one aspect. There is another aspect of this.

When I visited Bastar I was told that the JS had begun to experiment with cooperative farming. This is a step in the direction of strengthening what is called “people’s economy”. It should be remembered that people’s war is not military actions or operations. It is essentially, and eighty per cent of it, is non-military work. Maoists consider production by organized militia or collection of forest produce by militia as part of its Tactical Counter Offensive Campaign to meet the personal expenses of the members as well as needs of war. Thus engaging in production activities is an intrinsic part of people’s war. This has to be understood or else we can assume the worst when reference is made to Peoples War and conflate it to militarization by the State.

As explained above PW also means mobilising resources and taking up welfare activities like education, providing medical facilities, distributing food grains and clothes to the people facing repression and famine affected. JS distributed seeds and extends credit to farmers and even in midst of severe repression it carried out land reform. I recall reading in ‘People’s March’ supplement of July 2007 how in Bhairamgarh block of Dantewada district in Chattisgarh, which was one of the main centres of Salwa Judum terror, 768 acres of land of adivasis and non adivasi landlords were seized and distributed by JS. These villages were: Takilode, Sathva, Dharma, Belnar, Poosal, Neerum, Pidiakot, Pollevaya, Palla, Kodanka, Parkelli, Markapal, Oorsapara and Oothia. Thus the quite confidence displayed by the party that people are with them stems from this fact that those whose lives have been transformed, thanks to the reforms carried out by the JS, will stay, get organized, and offer resistance. This is substantiated by the fact that in villages of Bastar region five years of depredation brought upon by SJ has not weakened but strengthened the Maoists movement. In this context their continuous engagement to improve “people’s economy” saw them introducing cooperative farms in DK which are a notch higher than land distribution, work teams etc. in terms of development.

Land which belonged to RPC, was cleared by villagers at the initiative of the RPC. It was cultivated by villagers sparing time to work on the land and then sharing the harvest. This cooperative farm was an experiment towards collective farming, where land is collectively owned through the RPC. Cultivated by village households and harvest is shared. This was introduced in Maad area about two years ago. The first which struck me was the sight of green chillies. About 25% of land, where vegetables were grown, was taken up by chillies. Red and green chillies are consumed in large quantity by every one. But they had also planted saunf (aniseed), onion, brinjal, gourd, lady fingers, cauliflower, banana, maize, spinach, tomatos, lauki, and kaddu.... I asked Kumma baba how much labour went into it. It took one day to clear the land for which 28 villagers came. From each household in the village nearby one member came to sow the seeds, two members each came to water every eight day. And everyday and night two persons took turn to stand watch against wild animals destroying the farm.

Narsimha, another ARPC agricultural expert showed me a field where paddy was sown. It was an acre and half land. Field was ready with harvest and in a few days he said villagers will come to harvest. This he felt would go some way in making themselves self-sufficient and reduce their dependence on haats outside. What is more in time of need he said JS has to provide food to the people. How is the produce in such farms divided? They follow class line with poor peasants getting it first and then others as one goes up. Is the vegetable grown for villagers own consumption or for the market? The plan was to sell some of the produce in haat but with haat shifting to camps this is no longer possible. So maybe even vegetable plots might switchover to grain cultivation.

Let me cite from the register of the Agricultural Department of Toke RPC in Maad for 2009:

Paddy: 87 kandi (each kandi haqs 20 pelli. Each pelli has 1.5 kgs thus each kandi has 30 kgs) or 2610 kgs from three acres on which 60 persons worked for two days.

Pulses: 10 pelli or 15 kgs from half acre. Three ploughs employed one day.

Chavri (vegetable or V grown on Medh): 30 kgs as seeds and 100 kgs for consumption grown on 70 yards.

Barbati (v): 26 kg. one plough for one day on half acre.

Mustard: 150 kgs grown on half acre. Three days work number of people not available (NA)

Ganga (oilseed): 138 kgs on three acres of land 10 persons

Sesame: 15 kgs on less than half acre two persons ploughed the land.

Pumpkin: 100 kgs Mixed with Kosra grain on three acres

Kumhra: 300 kgs again cultivated with Kosra grain on three acres

Tomato: 40 kgs

Cucumber: 200 kgs

Brinjal: 20 kgs

Maize: 870 kgs cultivated on the same land as Mustard. Entire RPC households.

Rahad Pulse: 10 kgs grown on medh

Spinach: 10 kgs

Sweetpotatos: 15 kgs

Paddy and Kosra are stored for use during summer months and for those who are poor.

Dumnar RPC (Maad) distributed 817.5 kgs of paddy to 109 people in 10 villages in 2009.

In the same RPC during monsoon additional 243 kgs of paddy was distributed. They also provided 622.5 kgs to Vedametta RPC in 2009.

How many such farms are there under JS? Unfortunately I could not get any number, but in last two years such farms are being promoted in every village and area RPC. Thus they could not be few. In Maad I was told that each RPC had at least one such cooperative farm, in some cases even more. What I came across were instances of success but surely there might be those which failed? The answer was that none of the cooperative farms have failed. But I guess its few years down the line we will know for sure whether the momentum has been maintained. Anyhow, as mark of developing food security these farms will play a very important role. It is also significant that some of the party members were discussing the deficiency in the soil in Bastar and the need for ammonia, urea and zinc to improve the soil. Obviously, they were grappling with issues even

in the midst of gathering storm of war. Or perhaps this was helping them to accelerate the pace of this development to meet the likely food shortages.

I Needed Some Answers

Talking about displacement and land grab and party's role against this inevitably led me to pose a question, surely minerals need to be exploited and mineral based industries needed for progress, so in opposing corporate land grab are they not opposing industrialization per say?

Precisely because of this, said Raju, we will soon be coming out with our own mining policy.

What will be its salient points?

Wait till it is released but one thing is for certain the low royalty of approximately Rs 10- 50 , per metric ton, depending on the quality of iron ore, is too low when the international iron ore price per m.t. had gone as high as Rs 10,000 plus. He referred to a booklet brought out in Chattisgarh which highlighted some of the anomalies of government's lopsided policy which benefits foreign and big corporations. Referring to that he said that NMDC supplies iron ore to Japan from its Bailadilla mines at Rs 400 per m.t. Whereas local manufacturers have to buy iron ore at one time for Rs 5800 p m.t. which was been brought down when the union Chattisgarh Mukti Morcha linked Engineering Workers Union impressed on the owners that instead of squeezing money from workers by lowering wages they should be lobbying with the government against discriminatory policy followed to charge them exorbitant prices for iron ore, whereas allowing captive mines at throwaway prices for multinational corporations.

According to Raju, the party was firmly against handing over mining leases to MNCs, that too for export of minerals rather than for use of domestic industries. They also believe, he said, that mining should be strictly regulated and restricted.

What about advantages of scales of production, energy saving, restoration of land after excavation....

He said that all these issues will be addressed and that out party is not against local industries.

When I asked him does it mean that mines will be leased out to private parties, if so what would be the criterion and what guarantee will they have to ensure against exploitation.

For answers, Raju smilingly insisted, I must have patience and wait.

While I will wait, what was, nevertheless, significant was the need felt by the Party to think in terms of going public with their own version of mining policy. Moreover, they seem to have deliberated on the matter. Because Raju said that while party is not opposed to industrialization they are firmly opposed to big industries. Also they believe that forest based product manufacturing such as amla, bamboo or wood etc should be given preference.

Another question which troubled me was how does the party meet all its requirements?

A document "Our Financial Policy" given to me to read had this to say:

"There are three resources in the main for fulfilling our economic needs. One is the party membership fee, levy and the contributions of the people and the second one is by confiscating

the wealth and the income sources of the enemy and the third is the taxes we collect in the guerilla zones and base areas by following progressive tax system. At present income through independent production is not an important source of income for us (emphasis added). This is possible only after the establishment of the base areas.

Our sources of income are limited but our areas of operation are expanding. The intensity of the war is increasing and area of movement is expanding. So our needs and expenditure are increasing also. It is natural for the incomes of the different regions to be unequal as there is unequal development of the movement. It is also fact that our income is not increasing par with the growing expenditure. Therefore it is quite necessary for us to strive to achieve balance between income and expenditure.

So, to achieve the above said balance, to fulfill ever increasing needs of the war, political propaganda and to uplift the life standards of the people, it is necessary to improve the economic resources and regulate the expenditure. For this a centralized financial policy and planning is quite essential for our party. That means, all the income and expenditure should be planned centrally. This centralized policy and plan should be implemented throughout the party from the higher committee to lower committee according to the committee system.

Though we work in the light of the above centralized general policy, it is difficult for the CC to fulfill all the needs of conducting revolutionary war in a vast country like India. Moreover even when seen from the angle of protracted people's war, making the areas self-sufficient is also of prime importance. While implementing the centralized financial policy we have to keep in mind the above said important factor also. Therefore by making our areas of struggle self-sufficient on the one hand and proper implementation of the centralized policy on the other we can fulfill the need of war efficiently. For this the State and Zonal committees should have to play a crucial role in planning, procurement of funds and regulation of expenditures."

This was party's policy, I wanted to know what is their revenue income? Is it Rs 1400 cr or more as the government claims? Raju laughed to say that if they had so much they would be able to do so much more. Infact if there was social peace and they were able to carry out their various programs they may be able to reach that revenue figure. Most of the money is collected in form of 'royalty' on tendu patta, bamboo, tamarind, other forest produce. Revenue accruing from looting of bank or confiscation of wealth are far less. Yes they do tax some of the companies or contractors which operate in what they describe as 'guerilla zone'. Officials call this extortion they call it tax. It really is of no consequence, except that their sources are indigenous and not external, which even government is forced to concede. In this sense it is in the time honoured tradition of patriotic revolutionaries.

It is also worth recalling that thirty years of party's intervention has brought about a see change in wage rates as evident from significant hike in price of picking/cutting tendu leaf, bamboo, tamarind etc. Thus the levy charged by the party from adivasis is not exhorbitant or a burden. There is some anecdotal reference made also to how much revenue was generated from fish cultivation. In south Dantewada it was said that a RPC earned Rs 5 lakh in income from fish cultivation! This could mean that other RPCs too must be earning income, less or more? In the ARPC I was in their fish income was less than Rs 1 lakh. It would appear, however, that independent generation of income was unevenly distributed across DK but there was certainly some generation. It could also depend on access to market. Because of war situation and restriction on entry and exit it is likely that many of the goods which otherwise could have been sold in Haats and generated income were being consumed inside. This must impact RPC and ARPC income.

Significantly, I was told that JS is contemplating setting up a paper plant to meet its need since purchasing and transporting paper has become a problem. Bamboo is in abundance in the area and so is water. They can do without bleach or at least keep its use to bare minimum and only hurdle is power generation. If they are able to ensure generation of power or generate power through micro hydel project, which are not too difficult to install and technology or rather technical expertise readily available inside they might be able to overcome even this problem. The ingenuity, enterprise and ambition of the JS is quite remarkable.

A Hurried and Much Too Short a Meeting

As I was returning from Maad I met Comrade Lenj in charge of CNM in DK along with Chandru a leading member of Chetna Natya Manch. I had read Comrade Lenj's interview in Peoples March years ago. There is a range of activities in which they are engaged. He told me, time was short and he had to reach long way from where we were before disk falls. So I asked him what the changes are since your interview appeared in Peoples March (August – September 2006). He told me that their membership has since grown to 10,000 plus members. One of the major tasks they were engaged in currently was to write a history of 30 years of cultural work in DK. Their work involves literature, plastic art, music and dance. Their members have composed 204 songs in last two years. "Jhankar" carries stories written by their own members. They use the form of street theatre to stage plays. I asked them about themes of their songs? It is propaganda, such as satire or parody (they had used popular Hindi song from Bunty and Babli and used it as a parody of Mahendra Karma although they said that they use film tunes selectively and that too only for parody), philosophy to teach dialectical materialism, political campaign against Salwa Judum etc. They use traditional instruments as well as others and even trying to use KiKirh which they said was like an early version of violin. They produce their own music cassettes and have a mobile editing unit. But he said that much of what he said in the interview still remained valid. Following extracts are relevant:

“ We impart training to all members of CNM. Children from the age of 10 years to elders are members of CNM. We invite them to special camps according to their activities and enthusiasm. We are trying to teach marching songs, songs with simple words to increase scientific thinking and dances to children. We are concentrating more on young men and women. We are facing severe police repression in giving training. Especially it is a big problem to give training in places like Gadchiroli (Maharashtra).

We go to the villages and mobilize the CNM members. We fix a schedule of 4, 5 days or two days according to... agriculture works, wage earning or collection of forest produce works. We participate in production work along with them and give them training. We don't teach them many songs, dances, steps or instruments at one go. We teach one song or a dance or an instrument one at a time. We give training by keeping in view their talents, interests and learning capacity. This is giving good results. Some times we are teaching them to write songs also as part of training. For example we held a five day training camp in South Bastar in 2002. We concentrated on encouraging them to write. The people here are experts in singing songs extempore.....

The instruments of DK are very ancient. There are 18 kinds of them. Only a few are in use now. We are using these instruments and also some modern ones. The importance of instruments cannot be underestimated. We did not put any restrictions that only the local instruments should be used. We are using a combination of various instruments. Music should not dominate the song and its lyrics. So we are using modern and local instruments according to the needs of the performance and in a way that it is enhanced. The main ones are the "Dappi" (a percussion instrument) and the "Melam" (wind instrument).....

Jhankar (CNM periodical) was started in July – August 1994.....Comrades write in Gondi, Hindi, Marathi, Bengali and Telugu in this magazine, this is another special feature of Jhankar. They can write in whatever language they feel they can express (themselves). There are adivasis, non adivasis, Bengalis, Telugus, Marathis and Oriya i.e. people belonging to various areas and nationalities in the DK movement now. So Jhankar is a multi lingual magazine. We are trying to make writers not only out of people but out of cadres also....They express excellently all their problems, sufferings, happiness and feelings in those songs....CNM members are also learning to read and write now. We are correcting and publishing their writings and developing them. There are some shortcomings in this effort too. We are not able to concentrate fully on what the new writers are writing and on improving them....”

But there was one thing I was also keen to ask him. This was to do with the discussion within the party on Gondi script. We were told that right now they were using devnagri script, same as used for Hindi, to write Gondi. However, they were now veering round to the view that Gondi must have its own separate script. Why, asked Jan Myrdal. He said that even his own mother tongue Swedish uses roman alphabets but has added three alphabets which enable sounds specific to Swedish to be used. Advantage with this is that by retaining a common alphabet there is scope for cross-cultural interaction and learning. If there had been a separate script for Swedish this separateness could have fed isolation. I concurred with him. But we were told that this may be true but only partially. There are many sounds absent, such as “gh” or “sh”. Thus if people have a script of their own in which their own special sounds and intonations can be expressed, they will find it easier to identify with it because the representation i.e. alphabets, are easier pick up and faster to learn. Will not this enable people to communicate across cultural boundaries? The point is not whether they are right or wrong; it is more that the projected image of a militarized and violent Maoist does not match the reality of members engaged in a variety of cultural, economic, political and social subject matter of concern.

What Do I Believe?

What is my overall impression? How do I read the Maoist movement in DK?

I am convinced that this war will be unlike any other war which Indian government has waged in the last 63 years. That this is one war which will test the resilience of the Indian state as it has never been done before. Precisely because it is a war in which people are fighting in their own territory to save their land, forest, water, minerals, from being grabbed and they are convinced that they have an alternate vision, not just for themselves, the adivasis, but for Indian people as a whole. It is a different ballgame altogether when a people feel that destiny beckons them to emancipate themselves in order that they can inspire fellow country men and women to rally around them and follow their example.

However, no movement in India has so much to its credit and yet so little written about it or so much abuse hurled at them. Far less than this gets talked about and celebrated. Those of us, who believe in ‘liberty with equality’, must rejoice at the remarkable strides Maoists have taken and in showing us how far the spirit of “serve the people” can take us. They are not saints, certainly not sinners, but as mortals they have shown what an unflinching commitment to bring about social transformation actually means. Critics can find faults, magnify them, over-read them, rulers can try to “eliminate”, “cripple” and “choke”, to use the words employed by the PM, to wipe them out, but it is not possible to deny that they are rooted among people, they survive because of this, and they are expanding politically because poor and deprived believe in them. Its not only Maoists reaching out to people but people are reaching out to them and inviting them to enter new areas, to assist them in their everyday struggles. Therefore, I believe that whether they are dealt a setback or lose their base or bases here or there, this movement is not going to be

obliterated. I think that if they are pushed from one area they will sprout elsewhere. This is the significance of their claim that they are thinking in terms of 50-60 years and not just here and now. They are here to stay. This represents a significant shift.

So, one should not belittle their achievement. All the more because while scholars and activists talk about alternative development models and paradigms, here are Maoists who have been practicing it for last thirty years among millions of Indians. And not only are they developing agriculture, introducing social and economic reforms, debating social mores but are engaged in working out their own take on industrialization, mining.....Yes it is small step when you consider the vast canvas of India. But is there any other political formation which has come anywhere close to what they have achieved against this many odds?

Ironically, whatever document one was given to read or conversation we had was invariably punctuated with their admission of many a shortcoming or mistake or weakness. While I consider them honest admission I believe these are highly exaggerated. One of the things which stuck me was that unlike elsewhere where people tend to over blow their achievement here party was being modest about them. Constantly talking about the problems they face or what needed to be done. For instance when I asked why is it that there is so little written material in shape of travelogue, reportage, party documentation etc on DK movement? There are few books available in Hindi, even these are translated from Telugu or Punjabi, and there is booklet brought out by the party on the development work in DK which is available in English and Hindi. But these are few and far in between. P Shankar's book "yeh jungle hamara hai" (This Forest Belongs to Us) needs updating since it was written in 1997 in Telugu and later translated into Hindi. Somehow the answer was that they never got round to doing this. Why? Did they not know that their detractors have used this knowledge deficit to malign them?

Yes, they did especially when in the initial period of Salwa Judum they were blamed for bringing "white terror" upon themselves. They were accused of having stopped adivasis from plucking tendu leaf. Whereas "the truth was that we were opposed to government announced price of less than Rs 50 for a bundle of 50 leaves when private contractors were offering nearly double the rates. That was the period when we realized that some intellectuals were leveling charges against us by believing whatever was told them in the Salwa Judum camps." But why did they not publicize their achievement? Here they were practicing alternate 'development' enriching adivasi society be it in terms of economic activities, health, education, development of their language (developing a new script) and preserving tribal culture.....Why did they not encourage more write ups on their experience and work in DK? I could not find satisfactory answer; I was met with shy smiles.

My own take is that for years DK was seen as an adjunct to the movement in AP. By the time it took roots and organs of people's power began to consolidate nearly two decades had passed. It was around the turn of this millennium that serious efforts were made to invite writers to come, visit and write. This picked up with the formation of CPI (Maoists) with significant presence in several states and setback experienced in AP.

The remarkable thing is that party in DK is strongly located among the poor adivasis and women. The advantage of entering an area which had been overlooked by the Indian State for decades, where political parties were marked by their absence, proved to provide the Maoists with a tremendous advantage. This they seized and as a result the progress made, the utilization of resources and how far it went – against Indian State's record where 12 paise for every rupee allocated reaches the people, here nearly every penny serves the people – the frugality of life of party members in DK as well as the PLGA, the backbone of the movement, makes evident a fact that collective work and commitment to serve the people can make even limited resources go

very far. I did not probe whether they debated while utilizing resources the choice between equity and efficiency or how did they resolve it, but it was evident to naked eyes that emphasis was on reaching out to as many as possible with minimum of wastage. The way in which every scrap of paper was saved and used was an everyday reminder. Every scrap was used for scribbling a message, instruction or requirement. Life remains tough and Spartan. The problems the party faces are mounting: on the one hand offensive as well as encirclement by the State and on the other loss of human and material resources.

However, the point is that while they face problems they also exaggerate their weaknesses. If one reads, for instance, the party document on rectification being carried out by them it reveals that most examples they cite are probably drawn from outside DK and most likely AP. Let me illustrate:

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 organisations, or when they are suspected to be working as informers, punishments much beyond their wrongs are being imposed.....”

Now squads have given way to platoons, companies and now they are talking of battalions. In Bastar where land was distributed the ousted landlords have not been able to either sell or take possession of their lands expropriated from them and distributed to poor adivasis by JS. This is opposite to what happened in AP. In AP land which was distributed lay fallow and attempts were made to sell them off which was thwarted through squad action. Indeed during the peak of SJ these lands may have remained fallow, but by now Adivasi peasants have begun to return to cultivate the lands, and size of the land which remains fallow has shrunk. Also in Bastar, JS extends credit and seeds to poor peasants and loans to purchase pair of bullocks provided to poor peasants to encourage them to take to ploughing their fields rather than using shovels to plough the land. Besides, in DK's JS areas there are no arrack shops and only traditional liquor is brewed. Therefore, mobilizing women against arrack shops, so effective in early phase of the movement in AP, is not needed here. Indeed incidence of drunkenness is far less. Punishment meted out is not in excess of mistake committed. In fact people are proud that ordinary crimes have reduced. Finally, an adivasi comrade said that in AP, unlike here in DK, party members had become little lazy. I said really. He said here in DK we do all the work ourselves; even carry our supplies and even when we fetch it from the haat everyone has to chip in to carry it. In AP

people would use their mobile and place order and provisions would arrive either in tractor or jeep. He said they exposed themselves to informers and infiltration.

Could these mistakes cited in the document on Rectification allude to what went wrong in AP, a way to remind the cadres to be aware of such mistakes and to avoid them? That is what I think. Indeed such is the influence and trust in the party in DK that despite the best efforts of CPI local leaders, who have begun to bad mouth Maoists and warning people that they will be arrested or harassed if they do not cease supporting Maoists in Lohandiguda, CPI's Adivasi Mahasabha has not managed to entice many peasants to sell their land to Tatas at higher rate of compensation. This is quite a change from CPI's attitude until recently where A B Bardhan, general secretary of CPI spoke of 'operation greenhunt' as a policy to 'exterminate communists' and "all those who hold the red flag high".(See The Tribune, 5 October, 2009)

It can also be observed in the way in which Maoists are looked upon as the only force on the ground fighting for Adivasis in Bastar, and this cuts across party affiliations. It does not mean that there is hundred per cent identification with everything Maoists preach or practise. Only that in the eyes of the people they are legitimate and a force they can trust. This has to be seen in its perspective. Imagine an area where corrupt and oppressive forest department was driven away, struggle for decent wages was fought, land reforms were brought about, where the Party continues to anchor itself among the poor and the most deprived especially the women, and struggles with them to ensure that people's dignity and honour is not compromised, their culture prospers, where they stand by the most oppressed...it is then one realizes why Maoists are looked upon as their own by most Adivasis. It is quite remarkable that the virulent tone of urban intellectuals is shared by that section of Adivasis, which earlier wielded power over their own ethnic brethren and who have gotten marginalized in the course of 30 years of Maoist movement. This does not qualify to claim that Adivasis are caught between State and Maoists, particularly, when Maoists are themselves Adivasis! Indeed charge of "outsiders" appears ridiculous when one remembers that aliens are the security forces, bureaucrats, police officers, corporate honchos...

One question which kept on coming up was how does the Maoist movement plan to move from here, their forest stronghold, into the world outside?

We were told in the interview given to us by the GS that this "is definitely a challenge before us but we are confident that there is an advantage in the long run which cannot be achieved in a short period. But unlike what the enemy wants, to finish this in a short period, we want to stretch this war and transform the situation to our advantage favorable to the revolution." From what was said I gathered that they expect to expand rapidly in the course of this war, which they argue has been thrust upon them. As it happened during the two 'jan jagrans' and the SJ, they believe that if they are able to protect their core, no matter how many reverses they may encounter, they will be in a position to sprout elsewhere. How realistic is this assessment? It is one thing to say, which they do in Strategy and Tactics of Indian Revolution that "(w)hatever the forms assumed by the revolutionary wars in various countries, the content remains the same i.e. the seizure of power by armed forces", but quite another to first reach there.

Let me explain. I consider the argument about violence and non-violence to be unreal and esoteric mumb-jumbo. I defend the right of people to offer armed resistance because it is legitimate to fight oppression any which way. Also I think that unless people are armed there is no other way one can neutralize the great advantage the ruling classes enjoy over means of violence, which is primarily employed against the masses. It is worth remembering that there are, according to International Action Network on Small Arms, an estimated 40 mn private weapons in India. (8) It does not require rocket science to believe that these tens of millions of weapons

are mostly in the possession of those who wield power and are privileged? This reality, and an India, which for all its verbosity about non-violence, is one of the most heavily armed state both in terms of accumulation of destructive power of its arsenal as well as size of its military force, which gets force multiplied by draconian laws, and thus enables the ruling classes to practice 'slow genocide'. Harsh words, but not necessarily misplaced if one considers that 45% of children below 6 years suffer from malnutrition, malnourishment and stunted growth, or that by playing around with calorie intake, from 2400 to 1500-1800, one can statistically reduce the number of people living below poverty line and thus reduce Food Security entitlement for hundreds of millions of Indians! This exposes our own people to a slow death. (9) To then argue that violence has no role to play or that it has no emancipatory value is, therefore, quite wrong. It is as good telling people to wait patiently for the fruit to fall into their lap. This may be touching display of fortitude and of religious faith, but for the fact those at the receiving end may be getting desperate after 63 years of practising it. Recall that, even the State, which fights the Maoists, does not deny that Maoists represent the "poorest among the poor". Could it be that class operates even here when one considers the fact that middle class youth rebels of 1960s vintage who recanted are eulogied but the oppressed who join the Maoists today are pilloried.

Point is, so long as State monopolises means of violence they will remain enabled to subject people to life of indignity and enslavement. Freedoms and liberties are prerogatives of middle classes to enjoy. Working people are exposed to repressive freedom; no sooner they appear to have succeeded in mobilizing people and begin to question the inequalities and inadequacies in the system they become target of State's oppressive ways.

I also find little reason to dismiss the need to offer armed resistance, when the state first proscribes a political party, declaring their ideology as criminal disallows them from working to mobilize people and propagate their politics and instead deploys a huge force to militarily suppress them. Also going by the fact that in 1971 three divisions of the army with 45,000 soldiers were deployed against them under what was called "Operation Steeplechase", when they posed no threat to the state, only shows that any movement for emancipation of Indian people from oppression and exploitation will be met by coercive power of the State. In this sense if Maoists had not honed their fighting skill they would have been liquidated long before and few would have noticed, let alone mourned, their demise. I wonder if it is properly acknowledged that it is the presence of Maoists which provides reformers and many a dissident with leverage to pitch their demand for change/modification in government policies.

Having said this, however, I am not convinced that military action must be the only way to advance the cause of social transformation in every other part of India. Apart from the fact that militarily, they are weak; their numbers at 10,000 PLGA and 50,000 people's militia exhibits modest capability. This also means that they have to be mindful of their politics. It is not guns which fight but people who wield guns which fight. India is a vast country and diverse in multiple ways, including socio-economic development. The conditions which prevail in large parts of India, such as the 34 districts where Maoists are relatively strong, do not match conditions in some other more populous parts. These differences have to be taken into account.

When Marx said, revolution "peaceful if possible, armed if necessary" even he must not have realized that perhaps it is not either or scenario but a combination of the two might be needed, as the initial success reached by Maoists in Nepal exhibit. So what takes precedence and when, what will the equation be between peaceful and armed are determined by circumstances. Responsibility even then does not rest with Maoists alone, it rests primarily with the State, which after proscribing them has been hunting, arresting or annihilating them.

But in order to take a leap from the forest strongholds to the plains outside military victories will be inadequate because the question will be to sustain this politically. Methods which work in one area need not apply, let alone, work in them. Thus I remain confused, if not unconvinced, over the path chosen by them. I also believe that as they draw closer to other realities which prevail elsewhere in India their practice will be different and influence their theory too. Except that it is premature to argue either way when they themselves admit that they have a long way to go. They were insightful about the cul de sac reached by other left movements, which have been reduced, more or less, to working within the system, unable to offer an alternative vision and make much advance. Their assessment of their own movement is that although they are weak they are perceived by people as the one movement holding out hope. Since this is linked to their brand of politics and because they believe theirs is a long-term perspective, they believe that their success or failure will be determined in the future, not here and now.

So it was abundantly clear that Maoists will not resile from their goal of social transformation in which they have invested for over half a century. Before anyone begins to preach that Maoists ought to work to transform the state and society peacefully, advocates of this proposition must explain whether the Indian political elite will permit Maoists to work openly even when they are perceived as threatening the status-quo? Also that advocacy of peaceful way is not a ruse to decimate them as it happened in AP 2004-05? The fact that they have not only survived but consolidated and expanded against the most onerous conditions, and their rhetoric matches their practice, it sets them apart from most left formations in India. For this reason, more than any other left formation, they are placed under microscope. Just as success begets admirer, partial-success begets critics. It is true that today's critics can become tomorrow's admirers.

Nevertheless, to reach there they will have to work out how they will negotiate their way out of the diversity and plurality of India. Battles may be won militarily but revolutionary wars finally are won on the political front. Without democracy it cannot be done in 21st century India. Democracy is not a tactical question, even when one critiques formal democracy as being unacceptable, real democracy is and must be the central concern of all revolutions. But what will be the nature of this "new" democracy remains to be seen because, real challenge lies ahead for the Maoists. The RPCs are embryonic forms of a system, in which people directly participate in making of their own lives. This is a step forward. But DK has certain specificities of having been left out of State's reckoning for centuries. Whereas elsewhere they will have to keep in mind that more than hundred years of struggle has won Indian working class, rural as well as urban, a variety of freedoms. Much of these freedoms have been legislated, exist on paper, or/and are today under attack. Yet, if Maoists have to win over the working people in areas where they have no or little presence at present, they will have to take this into account. So how will they go about doing it? How does one attract or win over a middle class, which is used to public dissent and debate and has an opinion on and about everything? When the GS spoke of the need for the party to work with lakhs and crores of people, was he hinting towards this reality?

Be that as it may. Political plurality has become as much, if not more, a hallmark of India as cultural diversity. Thus will they be able to accept and respect the fact that they may become a leading force but not necessarily the only force? But more than ever before people want more than rhetoric to believe that not only is change possible but that it will result in real democracy. They want an alternative democratic model, which only Maoists are today in a position to demonstrate because they alone hold base areas i.e. something distinct and outside the pale of the system. Nevertheless, while projecting their own system as superior or better they can not afford reckless killings, of the Jamui kind, followed by apology, which are unconvincing. Beheading, for example, trade union leader Thomas Munda of Kulta Iron Works in Koraput district, affiliated to CITU for defying a bandh call by Maoists, can hardly endear them to those people who are not with them, yet who need to be won over. I know being a mass movement mistakes

will occur and crimes will get committed. However, the decisive fact, for me, is whether they are willing to learn and how fast they are at learning from their mistakes. Not because violence makes me squeamish. But, heinous crimes committed by revolutionaries besmirches entire resistance, belittles the self-less labour of thousands of ordinary Maoist cadres, and silences those who look to Maoists to set higher ethical standards, because revolution is a struggle to create a superior democratic state and society.

Revolution may not be “an express train pulling into a station” sedately, as Lenin once wrote. But nor can it mean regression. The GS told us in the interview that “in general people and Maoist revolutionaries do not want violence or armed confrontation with anybody. In unavoidable condition only they take-up arms and resist their enemies, and they are waging liberation war by learning from the history. So, we see this as a war of self-defense.” Yes, I heartily concur with him. Far too much is at stake. It is axiomatic for all guerilla and anti-guerilla wars that tactical error/s can cause strategic defeat. For this reason, one cannot accept reckless violence which targets civilians or non-combatants when we know that, despite the opposition of large number of Indians, the war imposed by the Indian state against the Maoists will not cease any time soon. But precisely because revolutionaries fight for life, therefore, they must harness violence and use it with discipline. Indeed it is unfortunate that the appeal issued by ten non-funded civil liberties groups has remained unheeded. (10) Having aroused so much hope and shown through their courage and selflessness, the way forward, they cannot afford to drown it at the altar of indiscipline or shortcut. Thus, unless the party practices democracy, addresses uneven political development, and bridges difference between their practice and precept as well as conduct in DK and other areas, the remarkable transformation they have brought about through their blood and sweat, which raises much hopes of people, can get dashed. This would be immensely tragic for them and for the people of India.

Afterword

I woke up with the moon shining bright on my face. Through the fifteen day journey every night we saw the moon grow in size. From new moon to full moon, a fortnight was now coming to an end. Tonight would be full moon. It was 3.30 a.m and I could not sleep. I sat up. It was the day we were to return. I felt heavy in my heart. I heard Jan stir next to me. He asked me “is something wrong?” I said, I can’t sleep. I feel kind of low thinking whether I will get to see them ever again. Will these young women and men be around? The party members we got to know and with whom we shared so much of ourselves, we talked, argued and discussed, so frankly, will they be around? He said yes, its been quite remarkable meeting all of them, and I for one have been treated as grandfather, which is something so strange for someone like me who comes from Sweden, you know. But listen, he said, you can still return, whereas I am not only getting old but I don’t think I will be allowed to return. We sat talking in whispers. But the feeling did not disappear. So just when it was time to bid goodbye at the “border” Niti came to me and said “bhai, mujhe bahut bura lag raha hai ki aap log ja rahe ho” (Brother, I feel bad that you all are leaving today). I said that is our feeling too. She said “hum yahi baat kar rahe the ki John sir se kabhi milna nahi hoga. Lekin aap vapas aayoge na?” (We were discussing that we might not meet John Sir ever again, but you will come again, no?) I told her she could count on me that I will never give up trying to somehow make my way back there to see them. I meant every word. What a sad day it would be for all of us if these men and women were to die at the hands of a force which neither knows nor appreciates the motivation behind these young people. What the party means to them, why they took up arms, what they have achieved, why they fight and what their dreams are. And why we must not let them down and protest destruction of lives of these people, our very own.

[Acknowledgment: *There are a number of people who read my draft and shared their views. Bernard and Sumanto gave detailed comments, and others briefly such as Sharmila. Many never got back because they liked it, or so I believe. I also owe to my colleagues in PUDR and to friends in Perspective a lot for letting me share my impressions and whose probing questions helped in organizing my thoughts. To Neha and Saral my children and Ingrid, my ex-wife, I owe a lot for believing in me and the courage they gave me to go through it without feeling burdened. To all of them my heartfelt gratitude. But Sahba was with me throughout, despite our sharp political differences; the days before, while I was away when she did not know how I was, and when I returned waking her up middle of the night because suddenly something occurred to me, or I was missing all the comrades I got to know, or just could not sleep.... Needless to add, I alone am responsible for being “quite supportive” of the Maoists and for what I have written, as honestly and as truthfully as I could.]*

Notes:

1. Security forces possess light mortars, machine guns, rocket launchers, INSAS rifles, FN 35 and Glock pistols, Hecker and Koch MP 5 machine guns and Carl Gustav Reconnaissance Recoilless rifles... Besides, they have air force providing helicopters for ferrying troops in and out of the combat zone, aerial surveillance.... Maoists claim they possess INSAS rifles, AK 47s, self-loading rifles and cache of explosives. The Hindustan Times 10th October, 2009.
2. The war against Naxals and Maoists has a long history of bloodletting. For instance police sources themselves admit that between March 1970 and August 1971 in Kolkata and its suburbs 1,783 CPI(ML) supporters were killed. On single day on August 21, 1971 in Baranagar, near Kolkata 1000 young people may have been slaughtered in a single locality. Escape routes were blocked and police guarded every lane. By 1973, more than 32,000 CPI (ML) leaders, activists and supporters were jailed. In West Bengal alone there were 17,787 prisoners of which 12,016 were young and 1399 below 18 years. Such was the phobia that 20 incidents of firing on unarmed Naxalites inside jails took place between 1970-72. The killing of 8 prisoners and injuries to 60 of them in Midnapore Central jail on 17th December 1970 and the 21st February, 1971 killing in Berhampore jail where 10 inmates died and 62 were injured, were some of the worst. (Taken from Low Intensity Conflict, CPI (Maoist) for internal circulation, year and place of publication not known)
3. “It is very clear that the anti-Naxal operations are being carried out in those districts (East Singhbhum, West Singhbhum, Khunti, Gumla, Bokaro, Giridih, Chatra, Latehar, Ramgarh and Hazaribagh) where the villagers are opposing the proposed projects for steel plants, mining industries, Power projects, Dams and sponge iron factories.... Therefore, we have every reason to believe that the so-called operation green hunt or anti-Naxal operation is to get the Adivasis and other local settlers lands clear for the Corporate Houses rather than cleansing the Maoists from the areas. It seems that the state is essentially battling for the corporate houses in the name of the Maoists and instead of creating peace the government is creating insecurity in the state.” From open letter sent by Jharkhand Indigenous People’s Front dated 19/03/2010 (Ref: gov/025/2010) to the Union Home Minister P Chaidambaram.
4. To be referred to in a chargesheet against Kobad Gandhi, filed by Special Cell of Delhi Police in FIR No 58/09 Dated 20.09.2009, on 18.02.2010 in the court of Ms Kaveri Baweja, Tis Hazari, Delhi is not the nicest experience of life. Yet, the reference is neither un-flattering nor inaccurate. It is the intent they attach to it, or rather what the officials perceive to be wrong, unlawful.... that’s the issue. It is not my intent, it is the intent officials attribute which makes evident the obnoxious nature of UAPA. The charge-sheet says “Mr Gautam Naulakha (can’t the MHA ensure that people’s names are not mis-spelt given the many years of surveillance) of PUDR is

quite supportive to their outfit CPI (Maoist) and he (Kobad Gandhi) met him many times in Delhi and Mumbai prior to his arrest in the present case. He also met him in Tihar Jail, Delhi". (pp 15) [Emphasis added]. The exact implication of "quiet supportive" and "met him many times" arises only because it is considered 'unlawful'. In other words once you proscribe a political party, and prevent its ideology from being propagated or promoted, as well as declare as unlawful and terrorist the organization and its members, then you criminalize what is normal and legitimate. If the law says that meeting, holding a meeting even between three persons belonging to a proscribed organization is 'unlawful', then they are justified in taking away a person's freedom. Membership of a proscribed organization is a crime (us 10 and 20 Of UAPA). Thus hob-nobbing with members of proscribed organization is unlawful too. These provisions are accompanied by procedures and rules which enhances the power of police and prosecutor at the expense of the accused. And simultaneously relaxes the exacting standards for collecting, collating and use of evidence.

5. Let me cite two instances: On February 8th the Supreme Court ordered that in Writ Petition (Criminal) No 103 of 2009, 12 disappeared Adivasis including Shambho Sodi be produced before it on February 15th, 2010. The case related to victims and witnesses to a massacre at Gompad village on 1st October, 2009. Since the 2nd of January 2010 Shabho Sodi had gone missing. When on order of the apex court she was brought to Delhi by the Chattisgarh police for treatment no one was allowed to meet her not even her lawyer. By the time the court ordered that her lawyer be allowed to meet her without the police being present she had once again gone missing. In response to this on 29th January, 2010 the court ordered that she, along with other 11 adivasis, be brought back to Delhi by 15th February, 2010. However, on February 9th the apex court was informed that in pursuance of its order on the evening of February 8th a team of 300 police guided by Hari Ram a SPO left on foot for Gachchanpalli to fetch seven of the twelve adivasis.. The police team reached at 5 a.m. of 9th February the village of Gurkha, on way to Gachchanpalli, where they first met with a landmine explosion in which SPO Hari Ram lost both his legs and another police personnel got injured. Thereupon the police team came under firing of the Maoists. The fax produced before the apex court also said that Gachhanpalli was a Naxal hotbed. Since neither media nor social activists are being permitted to enter the 'war zone' there was no independent confirmation of the story. However, a fact finding team by Coordination of Democratic Rights Organisation (which among others comprised APCLC, HRF, PDF, PUDR, CPCL, NPMHR etc) found that DGP of Chattisgarh who claimed that two SPOs were killed on 9th of February was being less than truthful. The team visited Gompad village on 13th February, 2010 and villagers stated that no such incident had taken place. Instead on 10th February SPOs and a police party attacked the village of Ganchampalli, near Gompad, and picked up 10 of the villagers and took them to the Dornapal Base Camp. Village head Pudiam Lakshmaiah told the team that Kadithi Muthaiah(35), Kadithi Venkaiah(25), Kunjam Veeraiah(35), Kunjam Chilakaiah(32), Parisi Venkaiah(25), Parisi Veeraiah(20), Vanjam Dharma(34), Madivi Edima(32), Povasi Edima(30) and Sodi Podiya(45) were forcibly taken by the SPO and police and they had not heard anything since then. Thus it is evident that Chattisgarh authorities in connivance with Union Home Ministry and its various agencies will go to any length to thwart efforts to bring out the truth.

This is not all. On 6th January, 2010 a team of social activists were accosted by members of Maa Danteshawri Swabhimanch and prevented from participating in a padyatra called by Himanshuji of Vanvasi Chetna Ashram in Dantewada. The same members of this organization had attacked VCA and also abused and hurled eggs and stones at social activists. All of this was dutifully broadcast by a malleable media as a manifestation of adivasi anger against the supposed pro-Maoist proclivity of the social activists. The fact that 6th January attack on social activists was led by Soyam Mukka an absconder in a case of gang rape of adivasi girl in March 2008 (case No 84/09 of 2009) by the Judicial Magistrate First Class in Konta and that all this took

place in full view of Chattisgarh police, one which claimed that they were unable to trace any of the eight alleged rapists, makes the role of the state government, police administration and union home ministry suspect. What is also obvious that institutions of State and its agencies and the corporate media would much rather patronize alleged rapists and killers and looters than allow truth to become public.

It is this deliberate attempt to silence all voices and not allow any independent views to filter out of the war zone and on the other hand patronage given to alleged rapists, killers and looters that makes this 'dirty war', nay "police action", so life threatening as far as constitutional democracy is concerned.

6. South Bastar Division: Pituri (rebellion); West Bastar Division: Midangur (fire place); Darbha Division: Moyil Gudrum (Thunder); north and South Divisions of Gadichiroli: Poddhu(Sun); Maad and North Bastar Joint Division: Bhoomkal (Earth quake); East Bastar Division: Bhoomkal Sandesh (message of rebellion) apart from Janatana Sarkar brings out a Magazine called Janatana Raj (People's State) party brings out its own called 'Viyukka', its military command 'Padiyora Pollo', Chetna Natya Manch 'Jhankar' etc. groups practicing singing was also a common sight.

7. Jamui massacre involved the killing of 12 people all of the tribals, including women and children, and wounding of 50 others on 17 February in Phulwaria-Korasi village of Jamui district of Bihar allegedly by the CPI (Maoist). The massacre is reported to be in retaliation for killing of eight Maoist cadres on 1 February, who were allegedly taken into custody and then killed by the police.

8. On November 20, 2009 eight bogies of the Tata-Bilaspur passenger train were derailed, near Manoharpur railway station in West Singhbhum district of Jharkhand, by the armed cadres of CPI (Maoist), in which two persons, including a two year old, died and 51 were injured. The derailment, allegedly using detonators, was caused in the course of a two day bandh on November 19-20th when, according to local Maoist leaders, they were demanding that one of their arrested leaders be produced in the Court. According to Samarji, secretary Bihar-Jharkhand –Orissa regional committee of the CPI(Maoist), said that the "mistake" occurred because of "overzealous new recruits"

9. There are now an estimated 75 million firearms in South Asia, 63 million of which are in civilian hands. India and Pakistan overwhelmingly account for most of the weapons (40 million and 20 million respectively) where there is local production as well, while civilians in Nepal and Sri Lanka own an additional 3 million weapons (?). Civilians are the largest category of gun owners in the region, accounting for far more weapons than the military, police and insurgents. See International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) www.iansa.org/regions/scasia/scasia.htm

10. A must read is Utsa Patnaik's discussion piece "A Critical Look At Some Propositions on Consumption and Poverty"; Economic and Political Weeskly, Vol 45, No. 6, February 6, 2010. Also consider what national vice-president of People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) Dr Binayak Sen had to say at the sixth I G Khan Memorial Lecture on 'Violence and Justice in Our Times' at Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) on Saturday (13th March 2010). He said that the action against Maoists is only accentuating the problem of malnutrition in tribal areas. According to him malnutrition should be the most pressing concern of the government." A person with a body mass index of less than 18.5 is malnourished. According to National Nutrition Monitoring Bureau, 33 per cent of adult Indians have a BMI of less than 18.5. If you disaggregate this, over 50 per cent Scheduled Tribes have a BMI of 18.5 or are undernourished.

“The WHO says that any community of which over 40 per cent population has a BMI of 18.5 per cent is in a state of famine. By that standard, many communities in India are living in a state of famine. Orissa, whose 40 per cent population is undernourished, too, fits the bill.”

Military campaign against Maoists and displacement of tribals, he underlined, would only make things worse. “The government is displacing a large number of people from the very resource base that they are surviving on. Use of words like collateral damage by the government is dangerous as the Maoists don’t carry a label on their head.”

11. The statement reads: “Since the transfer of power in 1947, there has not been a single year when the Indian government has not fought against our people, starting with suppression of Telengana uprising (1946-51) followed by war against Jammu and Kashmir, Naga people, against people of Manipur, Assam, etc. Fact findings by Civil Liberties – Democratic Rights groups, including PUDR, have brought out the fact that such wars/armed conflicts are intrinsically ‘dirty war’ where casualties occur in form of encounters, custodial killings, enforced disappearances, mortar shelling, search and cordon operations, arbitrary detentions, torture, and rape.

The new war, we fear, in its scale and spread of the war against the Naxalites/Maoists will cover predominately nine states. The fact that the war zone covers primarily tribal areas of ‘heartland’ India, which is mineral rich and where the specter of land grab, displacement from forests, privatization of water resources and attack on people’s sources of livelihood looms large, makes this war particularly gruesome. We are convinced that this war is nothing short of an attempt at weakening the formidable resistance offered by our people against Government of India’s neo-liberal policy. The resistance comprises struggles not only led by Maoists/Naxalites (from CPI(ML) New Democracy to CPI(ML) Liberation), other organisations like PSBJC of West Bengal, CMAS of Narayanpatna, workers’ movement in Gorakhpur, dalit landless agricultural workers led by All India Kisan Mazdoor Sabha in rural districts around Allahabad (UP), the NBA and other constituents of NAPM led struggles, Kalinganagar struggle spearheaded by CPI amongst several other. Contribution of this plurality of struggles, different in nature and even intent, is what has sustained the resistance.

We the undersigned are convinced that singling out Naxalites/Maoists is precisely because they have offered the most stubborn resistance against neo-liberal policies of the Indian government, and which has acted as a fillip for the overall resistance being offered by other groups and parties. The collective resistance has thwarted so far Indian and foreign corporations from implementing more than hundred MOUs in Chattisgarh, Orissa, Jharkhand etc. This war, we believe, is precisely to enable corporations to enforce the secret MOUs which they have signed with the various state governments. We support all forms of resistance against this savage war for corporate development unleashed by the state against our own people.

However, we urge all warring parties to declare their unequivocal adherence to Geneva Convention and other international laws in order to ensure that civilians/non-combatants are not harmed.

We believe, that ethics of war, as enshrined in Article 3, common to the four Geneva Convention of 1949, enjoins on the parties, even to an internal conflict, to respect some basic principles of humanitarian behavior during war/armed conflict, and it is binding not just on governments but also on the insurgents/rebels/revolutionaries. Moreover, additional Protocol II of 1977 of Geneva Convention supplements Article 3 with few specific provisions where wars take place within a country.

We wish to point out that issues of legality, reciprocity or applicability of the ethical principles underlying Geneva Conventions and Protocol II cannot be made an excuse to deny that these principles, which govern war/armed conflict, can be complied with and implemented, by all warring sides in so far as their own combat personnel are concerned.”

Issued by Kranti (APCLC), Negriechon (NPMHR) and Asish Gupta (PUDR) on behalf of:
APCLC, APDR (West Bengal), Bandi Mukti Morcha, COHR, CPDR (Mumbai), MASS,
NPMHR, PCHR (Haryana), PDF (Karnataka) and PUDR (Delhi).