

CHAPTER 18

India Burning: The Maoist Revolution

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November 25, 2009. Three days ago, in a remote part of rural Jharkhand, near the villages where George Kunnath and I are currently living, a powerful explosion of homemade bombs threw up an anti-landmine vehicle of the Indian government security forces 20 feet into the air. Three Central Reserve Police Force personnel and a police driver were killed and six others injured. At the time the security forces were moving into the region for election duty, though, undoubtedly, they are here to stay for the foreseeable future. Voting begins today in the first phase of the Jharkhand Legislative Assembly polls. Elections in this part of the world's largest democracy – so-called – have come to represent little more than a contest to buy votes. The back-hand deals to muster workers, the pomp and fanfare of Bollywood glamour to woo the voters, and the bogus voting are, however, presided over by a heavily militarized landscape.

The world's largest paramilitary force is now camped in schools across central and eastern India. The government does not reveal exact figures but at least 75,000 extra troops have been deployed to Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh over the last couple of months. Together with the state police, this makes a force of about 90,000 police in Jharkhand alone. Indian Air Force helicopters whirl in the sky while the Central Reserve Police Force, Border Security Force, Central Indian Security Force, Indo-Tibetan Police, and Indian Reserve Battalion join the Jharkhand Police, throwing up a fog of dust as they thunder one after another in their anti-landmine and bulletproof vehicles through Jharkhand's forested landscapes. The task at hand is election duty but ultimately they are here because the Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, and the Indian Home Minister, P. Chidambaram, have declared it their mission to wipe out the revolution that has been simmering within India for more than 40 years.

This is the heartland of one of the world's longest guerrilla insurgencies – India's Maoist revolution. Analyzing India as semicolonial and semifuedal, these revolution-

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aries engage in protracted armed struggle along guidelines set out by China's Chairman Mao, seeking to destroy India's state institutions in order to replace them with a new communist state structure along Marxist-Leninist lines. Outnumbered at least 20 times by the security forces, as part of their more general boycott of elections and their war against the police state, it was the Maoist People's Liberation Guerrilla Army that triggered those fatal landmines three days ago.

A war is now burning within India – the Indian government, beginning the largest internal military offensive in the history of the state, labeled the Maoists "terrorists" in May 2009. More than half of India's 29 states are marked "Maoist infested," though the Maoists have their strongholds in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and parts of West Bengal, Orissa, and Bihar. In these latter states the local versions of the daily broadsheets have at least four to five stories a day on Maoist related activities, and in the last year all the major international broadsheets from the *New York Times* to the *Guardian* have printed half-page stories on India's red risings. Yet, strangely, it would not be too much of an exaggeration to suggest that there has been a conspicuous silence around India's war within.

Media reporting displays the most recent string of violence but remains disappointingly shallow in its understanding of life in the Maoist fold. This silence is a result of the difficulty of entering Maoists' lands without their permission, seldom granted for more than a few hours. But it is also the product of journalists paid by the administration to write from a particular perspective, or not to write at all (Choudhary 2009). Long-term field research in base areas of the Maoists is direly needed but glaringly absent.¹ Undoubtedly such research is extremely challenging and the few scholars and journalists who work in revolutionary contexts have to rely on historical sources and oral histories, or on very short visits. Most detailed field research is done after the conflict, when the guns are silent. There is a shortage of detailed field-level data and analysis of revolutionary movements in any part of the world, but this is especially true of the Maoist movement in India.

It is in this context that George Kunnath and I set off in September 2008 to live in the heart of a Maoist guerrilla zone in Jharkhand – an area into which the security troops dare not venture unless they are in a force of 500 or more. Cut off by steep forested hills and wide gushing rivers, we stayed in these remote regions until April 2010. Written in the midst of these circumstances, this chapter, though not focusing on our fieldwork still in progress, is inevitably influenced by and draws on questions it raises. It aims to provide a brief party history of the Maoist revolution, discuss theories of revolutionary mobilization, and ask questions of the counterinsurgency.

THE RISING FLAMES

The Naxalbari uprising of 1967 in West Bengal, from which the Indian Maoists get the name the Naxalites, is popularly heralded as the beginning of the Maoist revolution in India. However, to understand the broader political history which led to the rise of a movement focused on armed struggle and rejecting the parliamentary route, the party history of India's revolution needs to be situated within the broader history of the Communist Party in India, its emergence in the period of

British colonial rule, and its intimate relationship with the increasing strength of the Indian Congress Party (Vanaik 1986).

Formed in Tashkent after the Second Congress of the Communist International, at its first conference in Kanpur in 1925, the Communist Party of India (CPI) had fewer than 100 members. A decade later, when it collaborated with the radical elements within the Indian Congress Party and with the Congress Socialist Party, membership began to increase. Association with the Socialists, in particular, enabled the CPI to strengthen in West Bengal and in Kerala. However, confusion soon emerged within CPI about its relationship with the Indian Congress Party. While on the one hand, the CPI was increasingly supporting Gandhian collaboration with the big bourgeoisie rather than an alternative class politics, in 1942, during World War II, as a result of Comintern directions to support the Alliance, the CPI opposed the Quit India movement led by Congress against the British.

Drawing on Gramsci, Sudipta Kaviraj (1984; 1991) and Partha Chatterjee (1986) describe the arrival of Indian independence as a "passive revolution" – where transformations were led by the old dominant classes, the Indian bourgeoisie, which was socially and politically isolated from the popular masses. This analysis is directly reflected in the dilemmas facing the Indian communists, whose development in the period after Independence was marked by questions about the nature of the Congress Party. In the 1950s, Nehru's social democratic government sought Soviet assistance to develop a state economic sector with the aim of self-sufficiency, and implemented agrarian reform to supposedly eliminate the *zamindari* (landlord) system. The CPI was on the one hand approving, but on the other hand was also strengthening as an opposition force, emerging as the largest opposition party in the 1957 general election. Tensions within the party also emerged in the context of the Telengana armed struggle (1946–1951), a rebellion of the peasantry, led by the CPI, against the autocratic regime of the Nizam Nawab of Hyderabad. When the Congress government ordered the Indian army to quell the struggle, the CPI was wracked by sharply opposed views about whether to continue the struggle or to surrender to the armies of the Congress government (see Sundarayya 1972). Moreover, the border war of 1962 increased the tensions within the party – while some backed the Congress government, others took a pro-China stance. The tensions over the question of alliances with the Indian Congress eventually led to a major split in the CPI in 1964, the year of Nehru's death. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)) was formed, and while the CPI continued to support Congress, CPI(M) considered Congress to be the party of the big bourgeoisie and landlords which collaborated with foreign capital.

The revolutionary politics of the Naxalite movement has its roots in this period of splits in the CPI. For the radicals CPI(M) was in fact not radical enough. As Indira Gandhi tried to stop the rising red revolution with a green revolution by distributing new high-yielding seeds, chemical fertilizers and enhanced irrigation in Naxalbari, West Bengal, the radicals of the CPI(M) led a violent uprising in 1967 in which peasants attacked local landlords, forcibly occupied land, burned records, and canceled old debts. Around the time of Indian independence, the CPI had supported a number of violent peasant movements such as the Telengana movement in Hyderabad and the Tebhaga movement in West Bengal. However, led by Charu Mazumdar, Naxalbari became emblematic of the commitment of a faction of the Indian communists, the CPI(M), to violent struggle as a means to seize state power.

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Between 1967 and 1968, triggered by the split between the Moscow and Peking factions in the communist movement internationally, and inspired by China's Chairman Mao, the communist revolutionaries of Naxalbari broke away to form the All India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries (AICCCR), which was then disbanded in 1969 in favor of a party, the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) – CPI(ML). Meanwhile, a few communist radicals chose not to join AICCCR, retained a separate identity and called themselves Dakshindesh, after the name of their mouthpiece. These were the people who later took the name of Maoist Communist Centre (MCC). While CPI(M) took the parliamentary path, CPI(ML) and MCC became the revolutionary communist parties, analyzing India as semifeudal and semi-colonial, and adopting Mao's strategy of protracted people's war, whereby the immediate task of the party is the organization of landless laborers, poor peasants and exploited middle peasants in armed struggle against their oppressors. Although the Indian state and its labor laws created numerous structural divisions in the industrial workforce, co-opting many trade unions and preventing radical political organization of the working class (Parry 2009), the role of the urban proletarian in the revolution was not denied. Nevertheless, the revolutionaries emphasized the rural peasantry as the leading force of a first stage of a "people's democratic revolution" that would overthrow the government and the ruling classes who were responsible for their plight. The Maoist route they envisioned explicitly connected political ideology to military strategy. They sought to launch a "people's war" of the peasantry through armed warfare.

Their revolutionary campaign spread to the forested and hilly tracts of Srikakulam in Andhra Pradesh, Koraput in Orissa, and the plains of Bhojpur in Bihar and Birbhum in West Bengal. Landlords were driven out of villages, people's courts were established to redistribute land and deliver justice, and programs to encourage the mass actions of the rural poor were initiated. These actions went hand in hand with a form of class struggle that involved the tactic of "annihilation of class enemies" – the killing of landlords, rich peasants, government employees, and rival party members, as well as anyone suspected of being a police informer or agent (Banerjee 1984).

The 1970s saw massive police repression. Many leaders were killed or in jail. Charu Mazumdar died in police custody in 1972. Factionalism arose within the Maoist ranks – the CPI(ML) split into two in 1973 and there were further splits. One group, Liberation, later decided on having more open mass fronts (organized open people's movements) as well as participating in electoral politics.. Against the backdrop of Indira Gandhi's repressive regime, the Maoists tried to build their strength once more in the late 1970s. CPI(ML) Party Unity was formed in 1978 by a small group of previously imprisoned Naxalite activists who wanted to revive the old CPI(ML) and they built strongholds in the plains of Bihar in Jehanabad. Developing from the Andhra Pradesh branch of the Central Organizing Committee of the CPI(ML) led by Kondapalli Seetharamaiah, similar motives drove the formation of CPI(ML) People's War Group in Andhra Pradesh in 1980.

In the following years various factions and mergers developed in the MCC, Party Unity and People's War Group, the most significant of which came in 1998 when the Andhra People's War Group merged with Party Unity to form the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) People's War. Through the 1980s, the Maoists continued to harness support among poor peasants, offering them dignity in the face of caste and economic discrimination in their villages and the oppressive regimes of the state.

In the strongholds of the plains of central Bihar, however, they were working against the formation of a range of brutal caste-based private armies or militias of dominant groups (mainly the upper castes), going by names such as Sunlight Sena, Bhumi Sena, and Ranvir Sena. Faced by these, together with ongoing direct state repression (the MCC and the Mazdoor Kisan Sangram Samity, the mass front organization of Party Unity, were banned in 1984), the Maoist leaders found themselves expanding into the forested hilly tracts of what is now Jharkhand, looking to build bases in geographically ideal guerrilla territory.² Similarly, state repression in Andhra Pradesh meant that the People's War Group moved to neighboring areas of what is now Chhattisgarh and Orissa.

Against this backdrop, since approximately the late 1980s, the Maoists have increased their spread over central and eastern India, in areas often represented as the dark underbelly of the tribal heartlands of the country. Some of these areas are guerrilla zones, regions where the Maoists make every attempt to prevent police and forest officials from entering. Here, the Maoists are creating what they call their own "people's rule," curtailing the operation of police and forest officers in the region, being the first point of call for the resolution of disputes, which are solved in "people's courts," and beginning their formation of Revolutionary People's Committees – elected organs of power of the people which are responsible for pro-people economic policies such as the formation of corporatives in agriculture, the building of canals, dams and wells through voluntary labor, and the opening of schools and hospitals that provide subsidized healthcare. Significantly, in 2004, while an attempted peace process in Andhra Pradesh broke down, the Maoist Communist Center and the People's War combined to form the Communist Party of India (Maoist) – CPI(Maoist) – the largest Maoist rebel group in India. Now the Maoists probably have an underground military force (the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army) of about 10,000 people, a people's militia of at least double the size, and scores of other workers and sympathizers.

THE FUEL

Who are the revolutionaries? This is one question that has dominated studies of revolutionary movements all over the world. In general, theories of revolution have produced a divide between the radical intelligentsia and the mass of poorer peasants who form the tide of the rebellion. In India, there has actually been very little detailed insight into the internal politics and sociology of the Maoist movement. The numerous books on the movement, written by activists, ex-Maoists, journalists, academics, and state officials (cf. Banerjee 1984; Chakravarti 2007; Ghosh 1974; Gupta 2004; Singh 1995; Sinha 1989), have focused on the history and politics of the movement, as opposed to exploring its social characteristics. While the media often represents the Maoist movement today as an adivasi (or tribal) rebellion, it is also well known that well-to-do (and often higher caste) intellectuals and university students led the movement's initial rise. While many of these initial recruits were killed, arrested and/or dropped out after a romantic spell with the revolutionaries, a few have survived underground for 20 or 30 years and are now leading the movement.

A divide between the ideals of the leadership and the potential of the peasantry in the analysis of the Maoist revolution was nurtured in the late 1970s³ by a small group

of historians, who have since become known as the early subaltern studies group and who were influenced by the political theorist and founder of Italy's Communist Party, Antonio Gramsci. It is now often forgotten that the foundational scholar of subaltern studies, Ranajit Guha, was disturbed by the downturn of the CPI(ML) in the state repression which followed the Naxalbari risings and was thus concerned with the relationship between revolutionary theory and mass struggle, and in particular how the peasant could be turned into a revolutionary class for a socialist future.⁴ The subaltern studies scholars came together to reread dominant narratives to recover the "small voices of history" that show traces of consciousness in apparently unstructured movements of the masses. They sought to find "elementary aspects of peasant insurgency" through which a genuine class-consciousness could emerge to make peasants into a true revolutionary class (Arnold 1984). Guha understood the task of Marxists to be the development of a critique of subaltern ideology and culture that would expose its "negative" features and educate and strengthen its "positive" ones. Underlying the work of these early subaltern scholars there was thus a fundamental division between the "elite" and the "subaltern." This was evident not only in their contrast of nationalist history versus history from below, but also in the idea that a subaltern ideology and culture existed autonomously from those of the revolutionary party and its leaders.

The divisions between the hopes of the elites of revolutionary movements and the popular revolt of the participating peasantry have more generally marked the development of analyses of revolutions. James Scott, in a seminal essay written in 1979, distinguished the "rank and file" peasants from the radical intelligentsia, arguing that while both may share a common enemy, the former may have quite divergent visions of order and justice, and as a result may threaten to appropriate the elite rebellion for their own parochial ends (Scott 1979b). This "revolution in the revolution," the contradictions and tensions in motives, aspirations and style between the peasantry and the rebel elite will have an impact on the internal politics of the movement, making their partnership an uneasy one at best. Scott was concerned with what the "revolution in the revolution" meant for the revolutionary process promoted by the radical intelligentsia. Favoring the dialectical notion of revolutionary praxis promoted by Rosa Luxemburg and Trotsky, rather than Lenin's top-down position, Scott warned that the tapping of local sentiment and values, what he elsewhere called the "moral economy of the peasant" (Scott 1979a),⁵ must be directly incorporated into the revolutionary process if the radical intelligentsia are not to become isolated and reduced to sterile debate and if the postrevolutionary order is to incorporate its base rather than impose its will.

The limited sociological analysis on the emerging Maoist movement has in general perpetuated this division between the leaders and the mobilized masses. Forty years on, some insight into the sociological characteristics, romantic ideals and internal tensions of the early Naxalite activists of the 1960s and 1970s is finally emerging from those who have been, or have interviewed former Naxalites (Banerjee 2010; Donner 2010; S. Roy 2008). About the ordinary masses in the movement, although many have provided commentary, only two scholars – Bela Bhatia (2000) and George Kunnam (2008) – have engaged in the long-term field research required to provide a sociological analysis of participation. Both avoid theoretically reducing their analyses of peasant participation to the rational economic models that have arisen in other

parts of the world.⁶ E. P. Thompson (1971) and Scott (1979a), though not necessarily always directly acknowledged, are a strong influence in anthropological analysis of rebellion, and the moral economy of the rising peasantry is a theoretical guide for analysis.⁷ Both Bhatia and Kunnath focus on those at the bottom of the caste hierarchy, the dalits (scheduled castes) in the Naxalite movement in the 1980s and early 1990s in central Bihar, and acknowledge that, while leaders propose it, an understanding of Marxist-Leninist ideology is rare among the mobilized rural peasants. They focus instead on the appeal of the practical ideologies of the Naxalites: struggle for land reform, better terms for sharecroppers, a minimum wage, and access to common property resources. Both ultimately stress a moral economy line of analysis – that the prime attraction of the Maoist movement for the dalits in Bihar is a “dalit regarding politics,” a politics which looked after dalit interests (Kunnath 2010) – such as the dignity and respect offered to these lower castes in the face of extreme caste hierarchies and caste violence.

On adivasi mobilization in the contemporary heartland of the revolution, we in fact know very little, but there are two popular stereotypes. On the one hand, these poor forgotten tribal masses of these “backward areas” are constructed as caught between the fire of the Maoist and that of the state, sometimes supporting both, but ultimately having separate aims and aspirations. On the other hand, the revolution is portrayed as garnering great success in poor tribal areas as the natural sites of rebel consciousness, emerging from the stereotype that tribal communities will do what it takes to fight for their survival and defend their primordial attachment to their land in the face of the onslaught by outsiders. Propped up by Indian intellectuals, who no doubt come together on common platforms at times, these positions are highly influenced by the political aims of those who are writing.

The activist circles of India’s largest cities who are the proponents of the “Independent Citizens’ Initiative” or the “Citizens Initiative for Peace” are keen to be seen as impartial, “independent” civil rights actors mediating some kind of middle ground on behalf of “the people,” and thus tend to promote a division between the people, the Maoists, and the state. The most extreme forms of these arguments portray the adivasis as caught or “sandwiched” between the Maoists and the state (Independent Citizens’ Initiative 2006b; Guha 2007a), an argument that has parallels in many parts of the world.⁸ The current demands of these activists from these citizens’ initiatives are for peace talks on the conditions that the Indian government withdraw its troops and the Maoists lay down their arms to come to the negotiating table – the latter, in particular, being an especially ludicrous demand for the Maoists, who suffered major losses in Andhra Pradesh in 2004 when the government offered similar promises but only used the opportunity to further infiltrate and crush the revolution.

Others, like the writer Arundhati Roy, are also tempted by partial truths and the attraction and power of the voice of outrage which necessitates the elimination of shades of gray. She says, “as a writer, a fiction writer, I have often wondered whether the attempt to always be precise, to try and get it all factually right somehow reduces the epic scale of what is really going on. Does it eventually mask a larger truth?” (2009a:xi). From the writing of activists like Roy emerges the idea that tribals taking up arms is the only avenue to justice they have. In the current climate where the Indian state has begun bulldozing the tribal heartlands, where a point of no return has been reached, where journalists are afraid to uncover different sides to the story,

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Roy’s screams, as partial as they may be, seem necessary simply because they cry out against a brutal government offensive whose indiscriminate barbarism will only be realized by the general public many years into the future, when it is all too late.

The Maoist leadership, of course, proposes the view that the people are the party – for them, formal interviews, public letters, etc., need to be seen as part of the strategy of the war – ultimately as propaganda. However, as Roy herself says, “not many outsiders have any first-hand experience of the real nature of the Maoist movement in the forest” (2009b:32).

We can guess from the critiques of the subaltern studies literature⁹ that, in fact, the situation is likely much more complex than the stark divisions commonly posed between the party, the people, and the state. Can we generalize about those who are allegedly mobilizing at the grass roots as one uniform and homogeneous group – can we speak of, say, “dalit” or “adivasi” mobilization? Can we gloss over the internal politics of the movement? Can we indeed draw a line between the party, the people, and the state?

Drawing on my own field research between 1999 and 2001 in an adivasi area in Jharkhand, a region the Maoists were only just entering at the time, I have elsewhere raised several issues about who the revolutionaries are and the amorphous lines between the revolutionaries, the people, and the state. Reflecting on Maoist anti-alcohol campaigns (Shah, forthcoming), I questioned some early subaltern studies analysis (notably Hardiman 1987) by exploring the intergenerational and gender conflict arising in adivasi households whose youth were becoming involved in the Maoist spread. Through their engagement with the Maoists, these educated adivasi youth actually wanted to live like the rural elites and shed some of the lifestyles and values of their parents. Promoting Maoist anti-alcohol campaigns, they saw the traditional practices of communal and ritual drinking of homemade brew (where men and women openly drink together) as “backward.” The result was, on the one hand, an unfortunate reduction of the spaces of equal participation in public life for adivasi women – in this case in the consumption of homemade brews – and on the other hand, the promotion of private indulgence in expensive foreign varieties of alcohol consumed only by men behind closed dark curtains.

This writing developed my earlier analysis questioning whether the Maoists spread through the poor peasantry in their first emergence in adivasi regions. I showed that the Maoists in fact entered through rural upper caste elites and educated well-to-do adivasis, not the poorest adivasi families. Moreover, I showed that the initial spread of the Maoists was based on capturing “markets of protection” to access the informal economy of state development resources previously controlled by various state officials, rural elites, and politician groupings, hence blurring the boundary between the state and the Maoist (Shah 2006b).

Reflecting further on developments in this region, and in particular on the dilemmas of one friend mediating between the Maoists and the state who began to contemplate joining the armed squads, I have sought to add one dimension to the debate on the making of a revolutionary. In the blurring of the boundary between the Maoist, the state, and the villager that characterized the early spread of the movement, a normative uncertainty generated about who was a Maoist, a villager, or a state official – an uncertainty about one’s social relations – was crucial to the movement’s spread. In this epistemic murk, betrayal, trust, paranoia and suspicion can be overwhelming

emotions capable of driving those caught in the wheeling and dealing to consider joining the armed squads. In this situation, the driving force for the potential revolutionary is the dialectic between certainty and uncertainty in social relations and the hope that revolutionary engagement will come with more guarantees – a greater epistemic clarity of social relationships imagined to be less opaque, more predictable, and hence trustworthy (Shah 2010b).

These previous writings were, however, based on my research into the initial spread of the Maoists in an adivasi area. Over time, the operations of the Maoist movement, the characteristics of its support, and the base of the movement are likely to change. In the adivasi dominated areas of Jharkhand where George Kunnath and I recently lived, the Maoists have been present for more than 20 years. Here they are a part of the everyday landscape, moving relatively openly both during the day and at night, and preventing the entry of the armed wings of the state – the forest guards, the police, and the paramilitary forces – to the extent that they can. Seen as a free, fair and quick means to deliver justice, the Maoist courts are the first point of call for those living in the area to settle disputes – whether those be marital problems or disagreements over the ownership of land. And certainly, as I analyzed in my earlier field research (Shah 2006b), the Maoists have controlled the “markets of protection” over the informal economy in these regions – from the collection of kendu leaves for the production of the Indian cigarette, *bidi*, to the building of roads, bridges, dams, etc. The Maoists call this taxation, and the income from these levies is a crucial source of funding for the movement’s operation in India.

In these adivasi-dominated regions of Jharkhand where there has been no obvious locally based class enemy (like the large landlords of Central Bihar against whom the Maoists once led a fierce antifeudal struggle), over the years the Maoists have enjoyed some form of support from a wide range of people – from the higher caste rural elites and the trading classes to the poorest adivasi families. The reasons for this support and its characteristics have been different for different people at different times. The in-depth analysis of this will have to be the subject of a future monograph, but in light of the dichotomies between the party leadership and the mobilized masses that have generally marked the anthropology of revolution, there is one important point I wish to raise here.

In a long and protracted revolution such as that of the Maoists in India, where today’s leaders may have been underground for 20 or 30 years and where guerrilla zones are the product of more than 20 years of revolutionary engagement in a particular region, the revolutionary party is likely to be intimately embedded in the area. When one looks at the social histories of every house in the guerrilla zone, it in fact makes little sense to speak of the Maoists as separate from the people. This does not mean that everyone is a Maoist or a Maoist supporter, but that almost every family will either have or know someone who is or was involved as an armed cadre, worker, or sympathizer, or who has had a dispute solved in the Maoist courts. The Maoists are the state in the region, but in the same vein of anthropological analysis that highlights the porous boundaries between the state and the people, they are often regarded more like an extended family in the region.

People have individual social relations with particular Maoist cadres and leaders, the sum of which cannot be reduced to a simple love/hate, support/reject attitude toward the movement. Some have literally fallen in and out of love with cadres, many male

aling to consider potential revolutionaries and the s – a greater episode predictable, and the initial spread Maoist movement, likely to change. th and I recently they are a part of lay and at night, rest guards, the as a free, fair and of call for those ems or disagree my earlier field protection" over fu leaves for the dges, dams, etc. crucial source of seen no obvious ainst whom the ts have enjoyed caste rural elites his support and times. The in sh, but in light classes that have nt point I wish 1 India, where where guerrilla ment in a par ed in the area. zone, it in fact This does not t every family cadre, worker, ne Maoists are hat highlights often regarded id leaders, the titude toward s, many male and female cadres have exchanged wedding vows in the revolution army, and still others, such as villagers seeking intercaste/intertribe or interreligious unions in the villages, are married off by the revolutionaries. With significant parallels to my earlier field site where adivasi youth ran away to the brick kilns where they found a space of social freedom (Shah 2006a), in Maoist-controlled Jharkhand many adivasi youth have run away from fights and pressures at home to live with the Maoist armed squads. They escape to be with the squads for a few months, sometimes years, leave, and then come back if they want. For these young people, moving with the squads is like being in a second home. They may follow brothers, sisters or distant cousins to join the underground squads and in many instances particular Maoist leaders are treated as *dadas, mamas, or kakas*, elder brother, mother's brother, or father's brother. Leaders will over time politically educate those younger cadres in revolutionary ideology, an understanding of the likes of strategy and tactics, and to operate above the sectarian divides such as those of caste to work toward a united four-class alliance of workers, peasants, petty bourgeoisie, and national bourgeoisie. Some of these men and women may become leaders themselves. Overriding all of these developments is a very personalized familial context. So when things go wrong, such as when an armed cadre runs off to form a factional group, or when someone becomes a police informer, explanations which project ideological divides or allegations of opportunism are, in fact, also likely to be accompanied by the deepest feelings of betrayal or rejection that are the consequences of the most intimate of relations.

Undoubtedly the rhetoric of the moral economy is an important tool for people to articulate their revolutionary involvement to others and to reflect historically on their participation. However, one possible conclusion from my preliminary analysis of the situation in the forests of Jharkhand is that, in fact, the classic anthropological understandings of family and kinship, exchange and its expectations, caste and its manifestations, might be better tools with which to understand the social dynamics of the revolution – why people join, leave, and support the movement, and what simultaneously connects and divides leaders from cadres – than the classic populist political assessments of the moral economy of rebellion. Ultimately then, the success of the revolution would not just be about whether it caters to the “revolution in the revolution,” but whether those in the movement can rise beyond the social divisions of caste and class and be good brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, uncles, and aunts, managing the inevitable family, exchange, caste and community tensions, while nurturing their collective aims and visions.

A DYING FLAME?

Why the counterinsurgency; why now? India is allegedly shining.¹⁰ The economy is booming. In the fiscal year 2007/08, GDP growth rates leapt to 9.1 percent. Despite the start of a global economic downturn, India's ruling classes dream that the nation will become the third largest economy in the world – creeping close to China and the United States – by 2050 even. With the collapse of India's major trading partner, the Soviet Union, and facing major balance of payment crises, in 1991 Finance Minister Manmohan Singh (now Prime Minister) introduced his first union budget to the Lok Sabha (lower house of parliament) aimed at liberalizing the economy, encouraging

foreign direct investment in many sectors. Coca-Cola, McDonald's and the global IT sector marched in. Since then the forces of globalization have exploded in India, the middle classes supposedly swelling, international trade burgeoning and state-controlled industries and sectors privatizing. The country's economic and political elite is jostling for power in international politics. In 1998, India joined the nuclear club with tests conducted in the deserts of Rajasthan. The government is now seeking a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council.

A 10 percent growth rate is the aim. Promises have been made. Deals have been struck. More than 300 Special Economic Zones (SEZs) have been planned – areas with more liberal economic laws than those of the state governments. Prime land is to be captured for these paradises of investors, tax havens for the rich. Land banks are being created in each district for the easy identification of government land for investment. In Jharkhand alone more than a hundred Memoranda of Understanding have been signed selling off approximately 200,000 acres of land for mines, steel factories and power plants.

Jharkhand, literally meaning the forest land, houses some of the largest mineral deposits in India and produces 48% of the country's coal, 40% of the country's iron – some of the best in the world with a 60% ferrous content – 45% of the mica, 48% of the bauxite, 90% of the apatite and 100% of the kyanite. Big corporations, multinationals, and mining companies are trying to establish themselves in India's mineral-rich zones. In 2005, for example, the world's premier steelmaker and third richest man, the Indian-born but Europe based Laxmi Mittal, declared that he was making his first investment in India by setting up a 12 million ton steel plant (at a cost of US\$9 billion) somewhere in Jharkhand. But there are scores of other investing companies: Jindals, Essar, Rio Tinto, Tata, Vedanta, and Posco, to name but a few.

But there is a problem. Poor people, mainly adivasis, live on these lands. In the shadows of the narrative of the Indian miracle there lies their story. More than 60 years of independence have only seen increasing inequality for them. In Jadugoda, in Jharkhand, the source of the uranium for India's bombs, cattle are dying prematurely of cancer and children are being born deformed near the only uranium mine in the country. Well over 60 percent of Jharkhand's 27 million people live below the poverty line, 78 percent of the population are rural, 60 percent have no road access and 85 percent are without electricity (Government of Jharkhand 2003).

However successful the economic policies of liberalization have been for some classes, they have clearly further marginalized millions of the poorer sections of India's societies.¹¹ The protective laws of tribal areas, such as the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act, are of little comfort now – a 1996 amendment redefined "public purpose" to allow the transfer of land for any industrial purpose or for mining and other subsidiary purposes to be decided by the state government.¹² For the rural poor in states like Jharkhand, economic liberalization holds no guarantees. The resource curse of mineral-rich zones, whereby economic investment is increasingly concentrated in secured enclaves that provide little or no benefit to wider society, is not just limited to the likes of Angola, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria and Sierra Leone (see Ferguson 2006). Jharkhand, too, promises to reflect sub-Saharan Africa.

Nevertheless, most of India's mineral resources remain locked. They are locked because they are in adivasi lands and because these regions are now the reign of the Maoist insurgency. The forested hills of the adivasi heartlands are ideal territory for

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guerrilla warfare and to build guerrilla bases in which the Maoists can run their own government and expand the war to seize the Indian state. As the Mittals signed the Memoranda of Understanding with the Jharkhand government, the Maoists transported 20,000 copies of audio CDs recorded in Mumbai to Jharkhand with the lyrics, "Mittal is the plunderer of Jharkhand, we will force them to flee from the state. Tata and Mittal are drinking the tears of poor people, we will force them to flee from Jharkhand." Activists across the state have put up a fight against the acquisition of land for these corporate ventures, Mittal is now considering moving his steel plant elsewhere.

Protests are rising more generally across India. In January 2006, at Kalinganagar, immediately south of Jharkhand in Orissa's Jajpur district, police firing killed 13 tribals who were protesting the takeover of tribal land for the construction of a Tata Group steel plant complex at a proposed SEZ site. In Singur, in West Bengal, rallies and demonstrations rose against the acquisition of land by Tata Motors for a small car factory. A few months later, in March 2007, in nearby Nandigram, in West Bengal, dozens of people were killed as they marched against attempts to establish an SEZ to be run by an Indonesian business group in their locality. Such movements have the full support of the Maoists, whose chief, Muppala Laxman Rao, or "Ganapathy," says, "We call upon the people to turn every SEZ into a battlefield and assure them that we will render all support to the people's movements against SEZs."¹³

The government is anxious. It has its target growth rate. Gentlemanly agreements have been forged. Chidambaram, the brains behind the offensive against the Maoists, was a corporate lawyer representing several mining corporations before his present avatar as Indian Home Minister. Moreover, until the day he became Finance Minister in 2004, he was a nonexecutive director of Vedanta – a British mining company owned by the billionaire Anil Aggarwal, who is planning to establish operations in the Niymangiri hills in Orissa to extract its bauxite from open-pit mines. Three years ago, the Prime Minister described the Maoists as the biggest single internal security threat the country had ever faced. And six months ago, he declared in Parliament that "if left-wing extremism continues to flourish in parts which have natural resources of minerals, the climate for investment would certainly be affected."

The insurgency has been burning in India for more than 40 years and undoubtedly there have been bouts of intense state repression in various periods and states, but none on the scale currently being deployed by the central government in the adivasi heartlands of India. The government now claims that 231 out of India's 626 districts are affected and that there are more than 40,000 Maoist cadres – though these figures shift on a monthly basis and between different reports, and are regarded as an unprecedented number for an insurgency. A propaganda war against the Maoists seems to be at play. Labeling them "terrorist" has influenced middle-class perceptions, created a climate of fear propped up by the media, and, in the name of security, justified the expansion of police and paramilitary budgets on an exponential scale. Special forces, with names like the Jharkhand Jaguar and the Cobra, have been trained to fight guerrilla-style in jungle warfare schools in Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh. Paramilitary forces have been shifted out of Kashmir and the northeast to join the troops in central and eastern India. In Chhattisgarh, as part of a "purification hunt" called the Salwa Judum, villagers were even armed as Special Police Officers by the police and instructed to kill their neighbors (Independent Citizens' Initiative 2006b; Sundar 2006; People's Union of Civil Liberties 2006). Centralized intelligence gathering has

increased. The army has not yet been called in, but its hovering presence is pervasive and palpable: armed Indian Air Force helicopters are now whirring in Jharkhand's blue skies, with permission to open fire in "self-defense."

In the cities, civil liberties and indigenous rights activists are under threat of being labeled Maoist, especially if their cries are against the big industries threatening to exploit the country's mineral resources. In the rural areas, whether Maoist, sympathizer, or neither, poor people are being arrested, tortured and jailed, and usually for more than a year before being brought to trial. The famous pediatrician and human rights activist Binayak Sen, detained in 2007 for allegedly having links with the Maoists, was released on bail after two years in jail but only in the aftermath of an international storm of protest against his arrest (see People's Union for Democratic Rights 2008). In the areas of Jharkhand that we know best, however, more than 10 percent of prisoners are there because the government thinks they are Maoist or have Maoist links but, unlike in the case of Sen, there is very limited support to fight their cases. The Maoists try to aid their families in the endless legal tangles but even lawyers are too scared to visit the prisoners in jail. Physical torture is routine to the extent that an old factory occupied by the paramilitary forces as a camp in our area of field research is now locally referred to as a "torture room." New methods of torture in the form of narco-analysis (subduing the brain by injecting the body with chemicals popularly known as "truth drugs") are being introduced (Sebastian 2008). Even worse, and despite the sustained protests of civil liberties groups across India who have come together as the Coordination of Democratic Rights Organisations,¹⁴ sometimes these villagers die in the hands of the police and are then presented as killed in an encounter – India's infamous "encounter killings" (Editorial 2007).

Certain sections of the liberal urban intelligentsia, as well as the accounts that newspapers are increasingly under pressure to produce, accuse the Maoists of participating in a killing spree, having very casual attitudes toward the taking of life, and instigating mindless violence like the blowing up of schools (Independent Citizens' Initiative 2006a). Today many intellectuals are commenting on the issue in India. Yet it is deeply surprising that even the most respectable of these intellectuals choose to speculate on the ground realities from the comfort of their homes, offices, and cities, without spending any substantial time and energy visiting and investigating in the areas that they speak about. See for instance an *Economic and Political Weekly* article by Sarkar and Sarkar on the Movement in Lalgarh, a place they have never visited but whose ground situation they speculate on from a lone interview with a Kolkata based social activist and filmmaker leading a Forum in Solidarity with Lalgarh. After launching a brutal attack on what they call "Maoist infiltration" in Lalgarh (as well as criticizing government operations), and alleging that the activities and intentions of the Maoists are shrouded in mystery and that they run secret terror operations which express total indifference to human lives, Sarkar and Sarkar (2009) attempt to preempt their critics, saying that they cross-checked this interview, the basis of their article, with other Kolkata activists who visited Lalgarh. The Lalgarh scene may be different, but the Jharkhand case shows that such activists find it difficult to surmount the logistical difficulties and fear of living for any substantive period in these "red zones" (even a month is rare), away from the protective environment of an activist ashram or shelter. These restrictions mean that the city based activists tend to spend no more than a few days in the field, are usually met by similar groups of people, and generally get fed

a standard set of narratives (conflicting as they can be) on the grassroots situation, from which they pull the predictable range of analyses I have outlined earlier.

It is true that the Maoists have at times strayed from their ideology and tactics, and there have been a few occasions in their more than 20-year history in adivasi areas when ordinary villagers have mistakenly been caught in Maoist violence. However, while acknowledging that such events are not excusable, in these cases the Maoists have at least made public apologies for their mistakes. Ultimately, their violence is far from spontaneous and random. Police officials are targeted when they are engaged in an offensive against the Maoists (Shah 2010a); in the areas of our field research, the families of those who are in the police have never been attacked while they are on duty or when they return home for vacation. Although in principle against the death penalty, the Maoists kill police informers and other "class enemies" in defense when their own survival is at stake (Ganapathy 2007). Schools are bombed at night when they are empty because, across the Maoist areas of struggle, they have been occupied by the forces as paramilitary camps – and in Jharkhand, this is despite a High Court order in 2008 to evacuate them. The violent acts of the Maoists are thus most often specific and targeted – a means to achieve a socialist state that will uproot the rising socioeconomic inequality in India. Armed struggle is the only avenue left, as they see it, to bring about the radical political transformation needed within India.

Meanwhile, in remote rural areas of eastern India, the violence of the state is experienced as random and unexplainable. The police and paramilitary forces act with impunity. The application of criminal laws, public security acts and antiterror legislation in these "terrorist areas" means that suspected Maoists are arrested on little or no evidence, causing severe infringements of civil rights (Editorial 2008). Security first and development later is the new mantra. And all of this despite the 2008 report submitted by an expert group appointed by the Planning Commission which sought to recognize the Maoist movement as a political movement, demanding that in its day-to-day manifestation it had to be seen as a fight for social justice, equality, protection, security, and local development (Government of India 2008).

The Maoists are blocking access to exploitation of India's mineral resources. Desperate needs have called for desperate measures. The identification of "terrorist" and "terrorized areas" enables the state to mark a "state of exception" in those regions. Under these conditions, in the name of protection from insurgency and terrorism, the state is able to suspend normal legal procedure (Agamben 1998; Hansen and Stepputat 2005; Kelly and Shah 2006). Will it be surprising, then, if in the long run swathes of India's mineral-rich lands on which adivasi land rights were previously protected become devoid of inhabitants and their claims? Remember Walter Benjamin's (1969:256) insightful comment that documents of civilization are at the same time documents of barbarism.

Whether the Maoists ever succeed in an ultimate seizure of state power or not, they represent a rare alternative vision of a way of life and a future amidst the Indian institutes of technology, the Indian institutes of management, and the call centers that are seducing the middle classes all over the nation. To this extent both the theoretical ideology of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism and the arguments of the moral economy of Maoist reach among the poor masses are important symbols with which India's revolution within can put an alternative vision of the future to the children of the more powerful sections of Indian society who are today shaping India's fortunes.

However, as I have suggested, in India's adivasi heartlands the Maoist strength emerges not just from their theoretical ideology nor their appeal to the moral economy of the peasants, but from the fact that they are intimately intertwined in the social landscape of the region like an extended family. In this context, support for the movement can take on various practical and ideological shades – feeding guerrillas in your houses, participating in rallies and demonstrations, providing information and infrastructure, becoming a member of the armed squads. But in all these instances of revolutionary participation, the ties of kinship and friendship that have formed – and the inevitable familial relationships that are marked by tensions of respect and deference, hierarchy and equality, exchange and utility – as much as ideology, explain the reach of the Maoist movement in the region. Attention to the ground dynamics of the revolutionary situation in remote parts of adivasi India thus reveals an intimate and complex social landscape in which the Maoist movement is completely embedded.

Treating the Maoists as a security or even a developmental issue, as most analysts and researchers have done to date, thus totally misses the power and capacity of the reach of the revolution. The movement has immersed itself in the local populations in a way that the Indian government never has (Shah 2010c). In this context, the current strategy of employing outside security forces that generally have no sympathy at all for the local populations, regarding them as wild and savage, will only serve to strengthen many of the social bonds between people living in the midst of the revolution. So despite the militarized gloom that is drowning poor rural areas of central and eastern India, the current strategy of the Indian state suggests that, in some form, the Maoist flame will continue burning within India.

NOTES

- 1 Exceptions include the work of Bela Bhatia (2000) and George Kunzath (2008). In 2007 I organized a workshop in Lancashire with Judith Pettigrew to bring together those scholars in the world who had some experience of everyday life in a Maoist revolutionary context in India and Nepal to explore the comparative experiences that might emerge. For most of the participants, however, an analysis of Maoist spread turned out to be an incidental part, as opposed to a focus, of their research (see Shah and Pettigrew 2010).
- 2 Jharkhand separated from Bihar in November 2000, after a long fight for independence (see Shah 2010c).
- 3 More generally, sustained questioning about the revolutionary potential of peasants, the circumstances under which they become revolutionary, and the role that they play in revolutions emerged in India from the 1960s (Ludden 2002). Perhaps it is no coincidence that this was a time when the role of the peasant (as opposed to the proletarian) in Marxist-Leninist revolution was being widely debated within communist movements. Some of the most interesting studies emerged from those who were directly interested in revolutionary strategy (see for instance Alavi 1965; 1973; Gough and Sharma 1973).
- 4 Guha was actively involved in Maoist student organizations (Chaturvedi 2000:10).
- 5 Scott's first book, set against the backdrop of the studies of the causes of peasant revolution by Barrington Moore (1966) and Eric Wolf (1969) which primarily focused on a structural analysis of rural uprisings as a function of class coalitions and conflicts, was essentially a study of the subjective processes responsible for peasant revolt – the moral economy of peasants which tells us what makes them angry (Scott 1979a:4). Focusing on Southeast Asia (Burma and Vietnam, in particular), Scott explored the subsistence ethic of the precapitalist

Maoist strength in the moral economy intertwined in the support for the Maoist guerrillas in information and these instances of reformed – and respect and deference, explain the dynamics of the Maoist movement intimate and deeply embedded.

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agrarian order experienced as a pattern of moral rights or expectations, whereby the concerns were not maximum returns or profits for particular villagers but a series of social arrangements to assure a minimum income to all inhabitants and which acted as a form of social insurance system for the poor. In this context Scott analyzed the impact of two major transformations during the colonial period which served to violate this moral economy of the subsistence ethic – the imposition of Western capitalism and the related development of the modern state under which the transformation of land and labor into commodities for sale had the most profound impact. Peasants resisted and, where they could, rebelled.

- 6 Samuel Popkin (1979), writing on Vietnam, for instance, sought to show that peasants strived not only to protect their minimal subsistence requirements, but also to raise their standard of living by means of short-term and long-term investments. Hence, participation in revolution was not part of some anachronistic return to a golden age that never existed, it was not driven out of moral indignation, but it was rather a calculated effort to improve one's future position.
- 7 The idea of the moral economy Scott drew on was presented by E. P. Thompson in a classic 1971 article in *Past and Present* on the eighteenth-century "food riots" in England. Thompson took issue with the common view that these riots were "spasmodic" events, where hungry crowds took to the streets because they could do no better, and which denigrated popular protest as actions of "mobs," a label denying common people historical agency. Instead, Thompson argued that the riots constituted a pattern of social protest deriving from a consensus as to the moral economy of the commonwealth in times of dearth – men and women believed they were defending traditional rights or customs and that they were supported by the wider consensus of the community, and on occasion endorsed by some measure of license afforded by the authorities.
- 8 Anthropology's most notable debate on villagers caught "between two armies" has perhaps emanated from the arguments of Stoll (1993) in Guatemala.
- 9 There is a large literature, some of the best of which is Ludden 2001; O'Hanlon 1988; Ortner 1995.
- 10 "India Shining" was the political slogan popularized by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the 2004 Indian general elections. It stood for the economic optimism of the year before and the success of the information technology industry in India.
- 11 More generally, the middle classes, even by the most optimistic of estimates, constitute only 24% of the population (Guha 2007b:700); three-quarters of India's people live in rural areas and most of these in conditions of extreme poverty.
- 12 These protective laws date back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when, following a series of tribal rebellions protesting against exploitative and alienating forms of colonial rent collection and the severe limitation of tribal rights over their forests by the colonial government, the British finally felt compelled to introduce some more humanitarian measures to protect the tribal inhabitants.
- 13 Interview with Ganapathy, General Secretary, CPI(Maoist). Formerly at <http://resistanceindia.blogspot.com/2007/05/interview-with-Ganapathy-General.html> (accessed Aug. 13, 2008).
- 14 See the Coordination of Democratic Rights Organisations press release at www.pudr.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=187&Itemid=60 (accessed Jan. 20, 2010).

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