

Chapter 24 - The Spring Thunder Rolls On

A group of twenty-seven armed policemen returning in a van from a sortie into the deep jungles of Bastar were blown up in a landmine blast on September 3rd 2005 killing twenty-four of them (Rediff.com, September 4th, 2005). The blast was so powerful that the supposedly anti-landmine vehicle, which was carrying them, was thrown thirty-five feet up in the air and landed a good ninety feet away. This was a retaliatory action by the Naxalites or Indian Maoists against a combined armed and civil offensive launched a few months earlier by the Government of Chhattisgarh to finish them off in which some fifty odd cadres and some of their sympathisers had been killed in combing operations. This established, literally with a bang, the Naxalites' ability to carry on their armed struggle despite the heavy repressive and cooptive tactics being adopted against them by the state. This act was preceded by the killing of a senior Congress legislator in Andhra Pradesh on August 15th and followed by a successful daring raid on the jail in Jehanabad town in Bihar on November 3rd to free some of their comrades incarcerated there, interspersed with raids and bombings on state institutions and the police in the states of Karnataka, Orissa, Tamil Nadu and Jharkhand.

This fascinating admixture of pre and post modernism with modernism in a typically post-modern "micro-narrative" (Lyotard, 1984) of the tenacious armed struggle being waged by the Naxalites to overwhelm the state apparatus and bring about a New Democratic Revolution through the armed mobilisation of the peasant masses has significantly challenged the attempt of the Indian ruling classes to foist a counterfeit meta-narrative of socio-economic progress based on corrupt electoral politics and centralised industrial development on the Indian masses. In fact the current second phase of the Naxalite movement has gained much more support among the masses and been much more of a headache for the Indian state than the resistance put up by the mass environmental movements which have emerged in the same period since the late nineteen seventies. It all began when a grassroots activist of the CPI(M) in West Bengal, Charu Mazumdar, began pondering from 1965 onwards over the failure of the Indian communists, despite forty years of struggle since the formation of the CPI, in freeing the peasants from the feudal oppression of the landlords. Over a space of two years he wrote eight essays, which have since become famous as the "eight documents" that led to a section of the CPI(M) cadres breaking away and sparking off the Naxalbari movement in which peasants began seizing the produce and lands of the landlords in 1967 (Mazumdar, 1991). He analysed his own experiences beginning with the "Tebhaga" peasant movement in Bengal of the pre-independence days and the later struggles after independence all over India. In all of these struggles he found that the main reason for their failure was the inability of the communists to build up a cadre based revolutionary party capable of fighting the armed might of the state through a sustained armed struggle. He came down heavily on the Communist Party leaders for their "revisionist" approach of working within the bourgeois constitutional framework despite repeated illegal crackdowns by the Congress party after independence on the mass organisations of the party and also on the efforts to form governments through the fighting and winning of elections. He stressed the need for educating the peasant masses and giving them a taste of blood by following a policy of physical annihilation of class enemies and the police.

However Mazumdar and his Naxalite comrades were themselves following the by then obsolete combination of the pre-modern and the modern in the Maoist "meta-narrative" of the nineteen thirties China of setting up of base areas in the villages and then laying siege to the cities and towns by surrounding them. There was no way in which this strategy could work against a much better entrenched and powerful modern bourgeois state apparatus in

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India. Crucially this state apparatus also had a fair amount of legitimacy in the minds of the people because of being chosen by them in the elections. The government the Naxalites confronted was a leftist coalition in which the CPI(M) was a partner and had three ministers. The CPI(M) tried to reason with the rebels but when this did not work they chose the practical course of sending in the armed police and para military forces in strength to suppress the rebellion and so save its own government from falling. Thus the rebellion in the countryside was crushed within a few months in West Bengal. Nevertheless the coalition government did not survive and President's rule was imposed. The Congress government at the centre tried to use this opportunity to weed out more thoroughly what it must have considered a serious menace. A later Naxalite spurt in Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh in 1968 too was similarly obliterated. In both instances heavy armed police repression was carried out including extra-judicial killings of peasants and activists badly exposing the over estimation of the power and resilience of armed peasant militancy by Mazumdar (Banerjee, 1984).

Meanwhile the CPI(M) managed to come back to power as part of yet another coalition government in 1969 and release some of the Naxalite leaders and activists who had been jailed during President's rule. This opportunity was seized by the mostly urban activists of the Naxalite movement, which had been transformed into the full fledged CPI(ML) party in 1969 with Mazumdar as its General Secretary, to compensate for the failure of the peasant insurrection by carrying on their programme of annihilation of class enemies in Kolkata, letting loose a murderous free for all in which they also targeted the CPI(M) cadre. Things soon got out of hand leading to the United Front Government being dismissed and President's rule being imposed by the Congress government at the centre. Thereafter criminal gangs and a totally lawless police were given a free hand by the Central government for wiping out the Naxalites and their sympathisers. This urban terrorism and its repercussions in the form of heightened state repression resulted in alienating the CPI(ML) from the urban middle classes also which had provided it with much of its cadre and tacit support. Most of the cadre was either murdered or jailed by 1971 and with the arrest in 1972 and subsequent death in suspicious circumstances in jail of Mazumdar the first phase of the Naxalite movement came to a sorry end.

The CPI(M) leaders in West Bengal learnt their lessons from the deep ideological and tactical challenge that this movement had posed to its supremacy among the peasant masses and the left leaning intelligentsia and students. They were also concerned about the danger that the threat of such armed struggle posed to their practice of participating in parliamentary democracy. So while using force against the Naxalites they also carried out wide ranging land reforms by identifying and redistributing ceiling surplus land during both its limited stints in power in 1967 and 1969-70. The Naxalites protested vociferously against this legal land reform as it successfully weaned the peasants away from them but all to no avail as even Charu Mazumdar lost twelve acres of his ceiling surplus land for redistribution in this campaign (Bandyopadhyay, 2000)! Later when it came to power again in 1978 after a landslide victory in the elections held after the lifting of the internal emergency the CPI(M) launched "Operation Barga" a programme for the registration of the rights of the "bargadars" or tenant farmers to the cultivation of the land of the landlords. The CPI(M) also introduced a participatory Panchayati Raj, which considerably increased the political power of the peasants in the rural areas. These measures created a ground swell of long lasting support for it that has ensured that it has been returned to power consecutively for a record six more terms. More importantly this created so much dynamism in the agricultural sector in West

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Bengal that the overall economic growth momentum of the state was sustained for a long time despite an initial decline in industrial growth due to the burgeoning of trade union militancy during CPI(M) rule (Banerjee, et al 2002).

However, in the rest of India there was not much of a positive impact of the Naxalite movement towards bringing about land reforms. The deeply feudal control of the landlords over the peasants continued unabated. This was especially so in the neighbouring states of Bihar and Jharkhand, which had earlier seen the Bhoodan movement being reduced to a mockery. The subsequent Sampooran Kranti Andolan in the mid 1970s, which had considerable peasant support too was also crushed. This failure on the part of the Congress governments at the centre and in the states to pay serious attention to the problems of the peasantry in most parts of the country provided a fertile ground in the states of Bihar, Jharkhand and Andhra Pradesh which had witnessed some armed mobilisations in the initial phase for a rekindling of the Naxal rebellion from 1980 onwards. In the meantime during the decade of the 1970s the movement had remained alive in the form of many splintered groups scattered over the whole country. One such group the CPI(ML) Liberation began mobilising the peasants openly in Bihar and Jharkhand and also participating successfully in electoral politics. Two other groups in Bihar and Jharkhand, the CPI(ML) Party Unity and the Maoist Communist Centre opted for renewing the armed struggle. Similarly the CPI(ML) People's War Group and some other marginal groups too began the armed struggle in Andhra Pradesh.

This time round the movement began among the dalit and the adivasi peasants and with a clear-cut understanding that it would be subjected to heavy repression by the state. So right from the beginning armed squads were built up and provided with sophisticated weapons. These squads were extremely mobile and mostly stayed in the dense jungles only to essay forth to carry out armed actions and then retreat into their safety and anonymity once again. Simultaneously open mass organisations were built up among the peasants, workers, students, intellectuals and artistes, which worked towards raising the level of political consciousness of the masses and solving their immediate socio-economic problems arising from social and economic oppression. These mass organisations also provided the cadre for the armed squads and the underground party. Moreover realising that the state forces could easily ring in an isolated armed movement like they had done earlier in Naxalbari and Srikakulam the movement spread its wings early on into the contiguous states and so now it has a vast area of influence extending from Tamil Nadu and Kerala in the south through Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Jharkhand to Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Bihar in the north. It is interesting to note that in West Bengal the movement has struck roots among the impoverished adivasis. The adivasi regions of Bengal have been neglected by the CPI(M) which is dominated by the Bengalis and so there is a lot of discontent there which the Naxalites have capitalised on.

The armed Tamil separatist movement in Sri Lanka and the armed Maoist movement in Nepal too provide the Naxalites with considerable moral and military support. Thus when the going gets too hot in one place then the squads move out from there to concentrate their action on some other place where things are relatively easier and so keep the movement going. Consequently even though coordinated police action in Andhra Pradesh has put a lid on Naxalite activity there this has resulted in all the cadre and armed squads migrating to neighbouring states of Maharashtra and Orissa to intensify operations there. This mobility has become so crucial to their survival and effectiveness that all the major armed factions of the Naxalites patched up their ideological differences and came together to form the CPI (Maoist) in 2004. There is also a Coordination Committee of Maoist Parties and

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Organisations of South Asia that includes the strongest of these, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), which is in effective control of most of rural Nepal and now with the sidelining of the royalty it has an open presence even in Kathmandu. It has not only survived despite all that the Indian state could do to facilitate the Nepal royalty's attempt to decimate it but has also in the end succeeded in getting very close to sharing power after the King's removal. Such is their strength that they have been able to retain their army and areas of influence as a parallel to the state till the elections to the Constituent Assembly to devise a new constitution are conducted. Consequently the spring thunder that first cracked in West Bengal in 1967 is still rolling ominously to the acute discomfort of the Indian ruling classes.

This ability to sustain an armed struggle against the state has earned it enough credibility among the poverty stricken youth mainly from among the dalits and adivasis and also from other sections of the masses to inspire them to sacrifice all for overthrowing a patently unjust politico-economic dispensation. The commitment to the overthrow of the bourgeois Indian state, though they themselves term it as being semi-feudal and semi-colonial, through the successful conduct of an armed New Democratic Revolution is so total in the movement that despite the killing of hundreds of its cadres in extra-judicial "encounters" after arrest and the jailing of thousands more of its cadres and supporters it continues to wax strong. Strong enough indeed to force the Indian state to plan a coordinated higher scale armed intervention against the movement spread across all the states in which it has an influence. Like a blinkered horse the Indian state, dominated as it is by feudal elements and colonially minded bureaucrats, unlike the CPI(M) in West Bengal, is still refusing to address in any serious way the basic socio-economic injustices that have given rise to the movement in the first place (Bidwai, 2005). But there are limits to the violence that the state can resort to. While the state has been able to deploy the regular army to suppress to some extent the armed separatist movements in the peripheral areas in the Northeast, Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab it cannot so easily do the same in the very heart of the country without affecting its combat readiness for meeting external threats, which are of a far more menacing nature. There is also the problem of the human rights violations that the army will commit on the populace in general alienating them from whichever political party decides to launch full scale military operations against the naxalites over such a large swathe of the country.

However, this cycle of violence and counter violence has meant that the people in the areas of influence of the Naxalites have been caught in the crossfire between them and the state forces. The exigencies of a civil war like situation have led to both sides targeting those people whom they feel to be informers and sympathisers of the enemy. The scope for democratic mass action has as a result been severely curtailed and at present all the open mass organisations of the Naxalites are officially banned with their leading activists in jail. Moreover, to keep alive the false Maoist meta-narrative of the character of the Indian state being semi-feudal and semi-colonial in the face of the considerably stronger but equally false meta-narrative of modern market centred development the Naxalites have had to oppose modern development and the further penetration of the market in the areas of their influence and maintain them in a backward condition. All this has effectively put a brake on the spread of the Naxalite struggle beyond the really remote rural areas of the country and also led to disaffection among the masses and activists in these areas in some cases with a tiredness having set in due to the endless wait for the elusive revolution (Bhatia, 2005).

For instance in south Bastar which has now become the separate district of Dantewada there emerged some spontaneous protest among the adivasis against the Naxalites and the people got organised under the banner of an organisation named "Salwa Judum",

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meaning quite ominously purification hunt in the Gondi language, to oppose the way in which Naxalite activities had led to an increase in the isolation and backwardness of their areas (Zaidi, 2005). The state immediately pitched in, adopted this movement, armed the adivasis, dressed its policemen in plain clothes and made them its activists. In next to no time a low intensity conflict in the jungles of Bastar has been converted into a full scale civil war with the state having evacuated the villages in the interior to the roadsides under the pretext of providing the adivasis with protection but really to leave the field open for armed comb and kill operations against the Naxalites and deprive them of local sustenance. The state has even brought in Naga adivasi armed police trained in counter insurgency from the northeast to add to the miseries of the local people but this has not deterred the Naxalites as they have so perfected their guerrilla strategies that they still continue to operate albeit with higher losses. In a daring attack on a explosives dump of the NMDC in Kirandul the Naxalites killed eight personnel of the CISF and wounded nine others on February 10th 2006. They also looted a huge cache of weapons, ammunition and explosives (TOI, 2006).

Nevertheless, despite the boast that they have now spread their organisation to one hundred and forty districts across twelve states, the Naxalites' actual influence over the politics and consciousness of the vast masses of people in India is marginal. In fact their sole "liberated zone" in the southern part of Dantewara district is now under siege by paramilitary forces. The Naxalites had cleared this area of government servants completely and established their own "Janathana Sarkar" or people's government. But now a training school in jungle warfare has been established for the policemen and gradually this liberated zone is being recaptured by the Indian state. The state forces have evacuated most of the villages from inside the jungles into relief camps along the roadside to deprive the Naxalites of their people and sustenance. The Naxalites in desperation have begun attacking the soft targets of the adivasis in these camps who have been forced by the state to join the Salwa Judum and are wantonly killing them (Deshpande, 2006). Thus at present there seems to be little possibility of the ideological and military dominance of the Naxalites rising to the level where they can engineer a desertion by the regular armed forces of the Indian state to their side, which is a necessary pre-condition for bringing about a successful revolution. The net result is that the poor adivasis, the major residents of these areas, are slated to go on suffering as neither the Indian revolution nor total supremacy of the Indian state in the areas of Naxalite influence are anywhere in sight.

Ironically the second phase of the Naxalite uprising began just at the time when the Communist Party of China (CPC) from which it took its inspiration was itself jettisoning the meta-narrative of Maoism. The CPC was instead embarking on a "revisionist" journey towards the adoption of the globally dominant meta-narrative of market and private enterprise based centralised industrial development through the adoption of Deng Xiaoping's policy of four modernisations (Marti, 2002). Indeed the meta-narrative of Marxism of which Maoism was a Chinese variant lost the battle for the domination of the world to the capitalist meta-narrative of the market in the early years after the Russian Revolution of 1917 itself. Immediately after the revolution the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik) led by Lenin still had to contend with the white counter revolutionary challenge sponsored by the western capitalist nations and so perforce had to implement a "military communism" of hard rationing supervised by a bureaucratic state apparatus so as to be able to produce the weapons and armour necessary to win the civil war and maintain the supply chain to the cities and towns (Trotsky, 1972). The Bolsheviks had eagerly hoped that the Communists who had some mass following in Germany would sooner or later bring about a proletarian revolution in that

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industrially more advanced country and so provide material and moral support thereafter to the precariously poised Russian revolution.

However, these hopes were dashed as the ill planned and ill timed Spartacist uprising of the German Communist Party was ruthlessly crushed in 1919 (Waldman, 1958). The situation in Germany in 1918 was somewhat similar to the one that had prevailed in Russia prior to the revolution there. The Kaiser's rule had been ended and the Social Democratic Party (SPD) had instituted bourgeois democratic rule in the form of the Weimar Republic. A group of militant communists led by Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg had earlier separated from the SPD over its policy of supporting the German war against Russia and had formed the Spartacus League naming themselves after the slave Spartacus who had mobilised the slaves in rebellion against the Roman Empire in the first century BCE. They later renamed it as the German Communist Party (KPD) in 1919 after joining the Comintern, the international communist forum, following the Russian revolution. A majority section of the KPD wanted to seize state power through an armed uprising in the same way as the Bolsheviks had done in Russia. Liebknecht and Luxemburg argued against this, as did Lenin saying that the German SPD was much more organised than the Russian Mensheviks had been and the German state was not in a state of collapse like the Russian state and so it would be difficult to get the armed forces to mutiny and come out in support of the revolution as they had done in Russia. These warnings were not heeded and the German revolution was launched by the KPD in 1919 only to be brutally suppressed ending in the execution of all its leaders and workers including Liebknecht and Luxemburg. Thus the German masses were left without any seasoned radical communist leadership during the crisis years that followed after World War I ended and Germany was burdened with paying exorbitant war reparations that crippled its economy. Consequently this premature uprising meant that instead of a Communist revolution taking place in the state of collapse that ensued in the late nineteen twenties in Germany the Nazis under Hitler came to power and put paid to the hopes of a more broad-based communist capture of state power in the advanced capitalist countries leaving the Russian communists to fend for themselves.

So by the time the Russian Communists overcame the counter-revolution by 1920 through their own devices, the nascent industrial sector in the largely agrarian and feudal economy of Russia was close to dissolution. The biggest problem therefore was how to revive industrial production in particular and the economy in general and "catch up" with the western industrialised capitalist nations. This is when the Bolsheviks decided to put socialist ideas on hold and instead adopt capitalist management techniques in the factories to revive production and also allow market forces to play so that the vast middle peasantry of kulaks could be included in the process of rebuilding the economy through the continued exploitation of the landless serfs who were converted into badly paid wage labourers. The anarchists who were in control of a large number of the workers' soviets and trade unions argued that the responsibility for the organisation of production in factories should be that of the freely elected workers' soviets and trade unions and this policy should be followed in the rural areas also (Kollontai, 1977). They argued that the workers had borne much hardship during the fight to overcome the counter-revolution and they should now reap the benefits instead of being subjected to more deprivation. Instead, they pointed out, bourgeois elements, which had no sympathy with the revolution had infiltrated the factory management, the bureaucracy and even the party during the earlier phase of military communism and were sabotaging the revolution. Dissatisfied by their living and working conditions the workers

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and peasants began to go on strikes in February 1921 demanding a more open democratic dispensation.

Lenin and the Bolsheviks would have none of this, however, as it constituted a challenge to the authority of the Bolshevik party and the tight control over the government, that it had developed in the course of the civil war. They advanced the need for maintaining party unity as an excuse for clamping down on the burgeoning open debates and the formation of factions representing alternative viewpoints so as to maintain their monopoly of power. Thus arguing speciously that the proletariat in Russia was not advanced enough to be able to control the economy and government on its own and so needed the party to guide it, Lenin came down hard on the anarchist opposition (Lenin, 1973). Punitive action was begun against the striking workers in Petrograd and Moscow. As things came to a head the naval unit stationed at the port of Kronstadt near Petrograd, which happened to be aligned with the anarchists came out in support of the workers' demands. This unit had earlier played a crucial role in the victory of the Bolsheviks in the revolution of 1917 as the professionally trained core of the final military assault on the seat of bourgeois power, the Winter Palace in Petrograd and so commanded immense respect among the working masses (Trotsky, 1980). The situation worsened as workers and peasants all over the country joined the workers in Petrograd and Moscow in demonstrations protesting against the bureaucratic and military control of the economy and polity. The Bolshevik government resorted to police and military repression to suppress this opposition. The sailors of Kronstadt mutinied against the Bolshevik government demanding an end to centralised party control of the economy and greater freedom of decision for the workers and peasants. So the Red Army in full force under the command of Trotsky was sent in to deal with them on March 7th 1921. After putting up a brave fight for ten days those anarchist sailors were massacred to the last man (Berkman, 1953). It was given out by the Bolsheviks that these sailors were counter-revolutionary agents bent on sabotaging the proletarian revolution.

Thus the decade of the nineteen twenties proved to be the crucial juncture in human history at which the direction of its future in favour of centralised industrial development along with the accompanying militarism was finally sealed. Earlier in the eighteenth century when capitalist industrial development had established itself then its foremost ideologue, the classical political economist Adam Smith had come up with the theory that if all persons, rich and poor, worked for their individual gain then by an "invisible hand" an economy would develop that would be for the good of all and there was no need for any government intervention (Smith, 2003). This concept was later extended by the neo-classical economists to the functioning of the market and it was averred that such an invisible hand mechanism would automatically adjust the pulls and pushes of demand and supply to reach an equilibrium that would be beneficial to all (Daal, 1993). In reality, however, the invisible hand worked negatively because the rich in greedily pursuing their own gain deprived the poor from doing so. There have never been free markets and consumers making free choices in them. From the beginning the rich capitalists of the industrialising countries forced their governments first to sequester their own markets against external competition and also to subsidise much of the expenditure in setting up the transport and financial infrastructure that is the bedrock on which capitalist development takes place. Simultaneously the capitalists used the governments to prevent labour from organising and demanding a greater share of the output. And all the while the natural resources, people and the markets of the colonies of these industrialising nations were forcefully exploited.

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Thus an era ensued in which there was a free for all among the European nations and their independent settler states like the United States of America, for the spoils of the rest of the world in which for the first time " in human history the principle of gain (was) elevated to the organising principle of economic life " (Polanyi, 1968, p 43). The governments of these countries actively promoted this kind of monopolistic industrial development through provision of vast subsidies from state funds to develop the necessary infrastructure (Gorelick, 1998). As had been predicted by Marx this led to both internal problems of a collapse of demand within these imperialist economies as well as the collapse of the international system of trade and increasing inter-imperialist rivalry ending in war. The snapping of the world capitalist system at its weakest link in Russia in 1917 followed this. The success of the Russian revolution and the tenacity of the Soviet Union acted as a slap in the face of this orgy of the capitalists and prompted greater intervention by the governments of the imperialist countries to rein in the indiscriminate profit mongering of its capitalists and take on greater responsibility for the welfare and employment of the labouring classes and so prop up sagging demand (Bagchi, 2005).

Lenin had in the months of August and September 1917 just before the revolution written extensively on the probable post revolutionary political and economic dispensation (Lenin, 1951). He had approvingly concurred with the views of Marx and Engels that the bourgeois state apparatus would have to be "smashed" and in its place a new state apparatus manned by the workers would have to be put in place that would suppress the bourgeois elements and work for the further emancipation of the workers and other oppressed masses by putting in place a system of production and distribution organised by the toilers themselves. However, in practice these noble ideas were shelved and a highly centralised bureaucratic state was put in place staffed by many of the old bourgeois elements. Once the counter-revolution had been contained the urge to "catch up with the west" in industrial development led to the adoption of the New Economic Policy from 1921 onwards involving the forced extraction of huge surpluses from the toiling masses and the free play of market forces to ramp up industrial and agricultural production. Simultaneously the management of the economy and the government was given over to a bureaucracy staffed more and more by bourgeois elements. Though state control was re-imposed again in 1929 there was always a mixture of planning and market, the latter both open and black and so considerable material and ideological corruption and confusion in the actual economy and society that came into existence in the Soviet Union (Mandel, 1952).

No doubt the Soviet Union was an improvement over what prevailed in Tsarist Russia before and was different and better in many respects from the western capitalist nations but essentially it too was subservient to the dominant post enlightenment meta-narrative of centralised industrialisation. The main problem in such centralised industrialisation based economic systems is that of the reconciliation of the contradiction between centralised production and decentralised consumption. Though theoretically this problem of synchronisation of supply and demand can be solved precisely through the construction of mathematical models of market economies, or planned economies or a mixture of both in reality this synchronisation does not take place due to a myriad unpredictable factors which are even less predictable in large mostly planned economies as compared to large mostly market economies because of the lesser flow of information in the former. Consequently the crises resulting from the mismatch of supply and demand which plague the capitalist system began to appear in even more virulent form in the socialist economies.

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Moreover at the peak of the capitalist economic crisis in the late nineteen twenties John Logie Baird invented the television (Booksoe, 1986). This set the ball rolling for carrying advertising into people's homes and bombing them with audio-visual content urging them to spend not only their present income but also their future earnings for buying goods and services. Capitalism has since ridden a continuously rising wave of consumerism to expand existing markets and open new ones by titillating the baser instincts of humans all over the world and so continued to fuel economic growth without the recurrence of similar massive demand slumps. The medium as was noted earlier has become the message.

At about the same time Gramsci while incarcerated in prison by the Italian fascists began pondering over the conundrum that the oppressed masses in Germany, Italy and Spain refused to become acolytes of Marxism despite the objective conditions arising from the economic collapse being favourable for such a development and instead preferred to plump either for fascism or a capitalism rejuvenated by state sponsored demand boosting measures (Gramsci, 1971). He came to the conclusion that the bourgeoisie exert control over the masses not only overtly through the organs of the state but also covertly through their ideological "hegemony" over "civil society" constituted independently of the state by communitarian, cultural and religious associations. Gramsci stressed the important role of "organic" intellectuals coming up from the oppressed classes who would dispel this mesmerising hegemony of the ruling classes by formulating a liberating ideology of their own that could stand up to the dominant ideology of the latter. However, the scope for this kind of a liberating ideology emerging has been significantly decreased through the influence of television. Television has ensured that it is the sports and film stars selling everything from soap to sanitary napkins and the evangelical preachers of all religious denominations selling divine salvation who have become the gurus of the masses and not the austere radicals, whether communists, anarchists or libertarians, who are making a pitch for a fight against the machinations of neo-colonial capital. These messages, which have been beamed worldwide through satellites, first ensured the tearing down of the iron and bamboo curtains and the collapse of "actually existing socialism". Today the ever widening reach of television is ensuring that the masses remain engaged in song and dance instead of taking up cudgels against the ruling classes worldwide to end their misery.

The Russian anarchists, Mikhail Bakunin being the foremost among them, had from the time of Marx continually joined issue with the Marxists over their stress on the leadership of a centralised proletarian party in bringing about a revolution, the need for the continuation of the state after the revolution and the primacy of industrial development as opposed to communitarian agriculture (AAFAQ, 2006 & Shanin, 1985). As long as a centralised state exists they argued there could never be true democracy and freedom for the masses. A capture of state power by the vanguard party in the absence of a large mass of socially and politically conscious people who could force the vanguard to act in their interest would inevitably lead to a concentration of power in the hands of the former with the possibility of a return to authoritarianism and then capitalism. This is what has happened first in the Soviet Union and then also in China though in the latter case the CPC had a much wider mass base initially than the Bolsheviks. Thus the battle for a decentralised, environmentally sustainable and humanly just form of development was finally lost by the anarchists in that crucial decade of the nineteen twenties propelling the human race onto a destructive path whose serious consequences are becoming clearer with every passing day.

At present the colonisation of the minds of the masses all over the world resulting from the television propelled cultural imperialism of the West (Said, 1993) has pushed the

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meta-narrative of capitalist industrial development and its triplets of consumerism and militarism onto the centre stage of the post-modern world and with the dawn of the twenty-first century the repositories of various kinds of post modernist "difference" like the Naxalites and the anarcho-environmentalists are doomed to acting out peripheral micro-narratives. Nothing can be more evocative of this than the phenomenal box-office success of the Hindi film *Lagaan* released in 2001. The persistent problem of the extortionate levying of *lagaan* or land tax from peasants during British colonial rule in India, even in times of severe economic stress arising from crop failure, is the cause of dispute between the British and the peasants in a fictitious location in central India in this film. However, whereas in reality such conflicts gave rise to a myriad bloody mutinies during British rule, in the film, absurdly, the peasants are shown to score a bloodless victory and secure a moratorium on the payment of *lagaan* by winning a thrilling cricket match against the British. The film was later nominated to the short list of five for the presentation of the Oscar in the best foreign film category. This sparked off a nationalistic hysteria in the Indian media at the enticing prospect of actually winning the Oscar, which only cooled down when the voters of the American Motion Picture Academy chose a Bosnian film instead, thinking probably that it was more expedient to make up for the much more recent bloody deeds of their own imperialist forces in erstwhile Yugoslavia than that of the British a century earlier in India.

It is not very difficult to imagine that given this level of readiness among the masses to suspend their disbelief, the chances of the Naxalites bringing about an agrarian revolution in India are remote indeed. Mao had said that power flows from the barrel of a gun but in today's milieu it flows more readily from the picture tube of a television set! The spring thunder, therefore, holds little promise of an emancipatory drenching for those it is ostensibly fighting for. Instead through their terrorist armed actions the Naxalites have succeeded in reducing the space for democratic mass action not only for their own mass organisations but also as we have seen for anarcho-environmentalist ones, which too are regarded by the police to be hand in glove with the Naxalites and so are subjected to extra-legal harassment. The Chhattisgarh government has legislated a new draconian Act to limit the civil liberties of those found to be supporting the Naxalites, which can easily be misused by the police.

The American anarchist Thoreau once wrote - "If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away" (Thoreau, 2000). This was a plaintive cry against the homogenising effects of modern industrialisation, which had begun to make themselves felt in the nineteenth century itself. As we have seen things have now become considerably more problematical for maintaining economic, social and cultural diversity in the post-modern era. The possibility of launching a concerted challenge to this all round hegemony of capitalist industrial development has diminished considerably. That is why the widespread limitation of the space for democratic dissent that the peripheral violence of the Naxalites is causing is a matter of concern. It brings down the number of drummers beating a different beat from that of the votaries of centralised industrial development. Of even greater concern is the fact that the Naxalite cadres are mostly from among the marginalised dalits and adivasis and these organic intellectuals who could have made a significant contribution to the fight for a better world are all dying an untimely death in the wild goose chase after the Indian revolution (Balagopal, 2006). Lesser and lesser are the numbers of people that are opting out from the destructive march that is being orchestrated by the followers of the meta-narrative of modern industrial development. Thoreau is as lonely as ever.

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