

The Heart of our Darkness.

Waking up to Naxalism. The killing of 74 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) soldiers on the wee hours of April 6, 2010 at Chintalnar near Dantewara in the Bastar area of Chattisgarh state seems to have finally woken up the Indian establishment to the fact that while they have been obsessing with economic growth and India's place in the world, the country's hinterland is witnessing an awakening of another kind. A raging insurgency, with its epicenter in the *Adivasi*¹ homelands of central India, is threatening to engulf at least a quarter of India's 590 districts. It would not be very far off the mark to state that over 200 million people now live in areas where insurgents of some kind or the other are in armed conflict with the Indian State. It's not by coincidence that in much of this area, there is a sizable tribal population. Much of the insurgency can now be attributed to Naxalism, probably making it the last communist ideology inspired insurgency in the world. But now the geographical scale dwarfs every such conflict the world has known save the Chinese civil war that finally ended with Mao Zedong's victory. China has moved on a long way since then, and almost certainly China's present Chairman no longer inspires the Naxalites, as the first Chairman did.²

But the Indian *Adivasi* regions have been troubled much before the advent of Naxalism or Maoism, as some prefer it. The Naxalite leadership, which is mostly non-*Adivasi*, has however managed to superimpose its ideological

¹ Although terms such as *atavika* (Sanskrit for *forest dwellers*), *vanvasi* or *girijan* (*hill people*) are also used for the tribes of India, *Adivasi* carries the specific meaning of being the original and autochthonous inhabitants of a given region, and was specifically coined for that purpose in the 1930s. Over a period of time, unlike the terms "aborigines" or "tribes", the word "*adivasi*" has also developed a connotation of past autonomy, which was disrupted during the colonial period in India and has not been restored. Opposition to usage of the term is varied, and it has been argued that the "original inhabitant" contention is based on dubious claims and that the *adivasi* - non-*adivasi* divide that is created is artificial. It should also be noted that in Northeast India, the term *Adivasi* applies only to the Tea tribes imported from Central India during colonial times, while all tribal groups refer collectively to themselves by using the English word "tribes". Thus, generally speaking the term *Adivasi* is used to refer to the tribal communities in Hindu dominant areas.

² From the Naxalite groups who held that China was the center of the world revolution, a substantial number now have gone over to the position that the CPC has betrayed world revolution. The CPC's authoritative documents produced in the sixth plenum of the CC, the eleventh and twelfth congresses, have become for them the bedrock of revisionism and betrayal of Mao Zedong thought. The blind and dogmatic adherence to Mao Zedong thought as the essence of Marxism-Leninism of the epoch- a position that the CPC itself does not maintain now-is the key to the ideological disarray these groups have reached. **The Marxist**; Volume: 3, No. 1; January- March 1985.

orientation on the long prevalent disaffection of the tribal people. While the Maoists have managed to exploit the tribal unrest over their exploitation and the destruction of their traditional homelands, it would be wrong of the Indian State to tar the *Adivasi* unrest as naxalism.

When the troubles in first erupted in the predominantly tribal village of Naxalbari³ and began spreading to other areas in West Bengal, a popular slogan then was "China's Chairman is our Chairman". It may not have fired the minds of the rural masses, but it caught on in the university campuses all over the country. Many students of Delhi's elite St. Stephens College even went underground to fight for the revolution.⁴ But they soon, like their compatriots from Kolkata's elite Presidency College, discovered that revolution was not a dinner party⁵, or even a seminar.

If the Stephanians soon came back after discovering that they did not have it in them to stay the hard course nor an appetite for spilling blood, others and more often than not far less privileged, showed that they had in them "right stuff" and the reason for taking recourse to armed action and the violent overthrow of the state. The Naxalbari uprising in West Bengal in 1967 inspired several young Communists in the remote hilly and forested district

³ During the mid 1960s Charu Mazumdar and Kanu Sanyal organized an ultra leftist faction in CPI (M) in northern Bengal. In 1967, a militant peasant uprising took place in Naxalbari, led by the Mazumdar-Sanyal group. This group would later become known as the Naxalites. The same year, Mazumdar and Sanyal broke away and formed the All India Co-ordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries (AICCCR), which in turn founded the Communist Party of India (Marxist –Leninist) in 1969, with Mazumdar as its General Secretary.

Naxalbari is the name of a village and a region in northern part of the state of West Bengal. Naxalbari comes under the jurisdiction of Darjeeling district with its sub divisional headquarter at Siliguri. The stretch of land, where Naxalbari is situated, lies on the Terai region at the base of the Himalayas. To the west of Naxalbari, across the border river Mechi lies Nepal. The entire stretch of the land surrounding Naxalbari is covered by farmlands, tea estates and forests and small villages, consists of an area of 121 km². The large villages in the region are Buraganj, Hatighisha, Phansidawa and Naxalbari.

⁴ Contemporary insiders put the number of core Naxal's in the college at the height of militancy at no more than 30 — not a big figure, but by most accounts, the single largest Maoist presence in all DU institutions. In 1968, history student Arvind Narain Das had run for president of the college student's body elections on an openly Naxal platform. He won. "We were ready to storm heaven," Dilip Simeon, a leading member of the group, was to write later. Times have moved since. Awadhesh Sinha is additional chief secretary in the Maharashtra government. Das, Ray and Simeon went on to do their PhDs. Das, a journalist and sociologist, died in 2000. He was 52. Ray teaches at Delhi School of Economics. Simeon joined Ramjas College as a teacher in 1974. In the '80s, he was attacked brutally while leading an agitation. He is now a senior research fellow at Nehru Library. Rajiv Kumar did his DPhil from Oxford and is director of ICRIER a leading government supported rightwing economics thinktank.

⁵ "A revolution is not a dinner party, or writing an essay, a painting a picture, or doing embroidery; it cannot be so refined, so leisurely and gentle, so temperate, kind, courteous, restrained and magnanimous. A revolution is an insurrection, an act of violence by which one class overthrows another." – from Chairman Mao's Little Red Book.

of Srikakulam⁶ in Andhra Pradesh (AP), which abuts the equally remote southeastern corner of Orissa, and they gradually turned to the politics of agrarian revolution.

The Srikakulam Communists sent Nagabhusan Patnaik⁷ and Chowdhury Tejeswara Rao to Calcutta in October 1968, to hold talks with Charu Mazumdar. On their return, the newly formed Srikakulam district coordination committee convened a secret meeting where it was resolved that an armed struggle should be launched immediately. Guerilla squads were formed in the plains as well as in the hills of Srikakulam, with the objective of overthrowing the government and establishing a 'people's democratic dictatorship led by the proletariat."

The guerilla movement took off with the forcible harvesting of crops from the land of a rich landlord. On November 25, 1968 something more significant happened in the hill tracts of Parvatipuram. Around 250 tribal people armed with bows and arrows and spears, and led by the legendary peasant organizer, Vempatapu Sathyanarayana⁸ and Nagabhusan Patnaik,

⁶ Srikakulam town is the headquarters of Srikakulam district in northeastern Andhra Pradesh. With the same name there is a "Srikakulam Assembly constituency" and a "Srikakulam Parliament Constituency". Srikakulam municipality. Srikakulam was formerly called as Gulshanabad (Garden city) during Muslim rule and was headquarter of Muslim fauzdars. The British colonial rulers renamed it as Chicacole. After independence, it was renamed as Srikakulam.

⁷" The very name, Nagabhusan Patnaik symbolizes the revolutionary spirit of the Naxalbari and the Srikakulam armed struggle. A senior politburo member of the undivided CPI (M-L), Comrade Patnaik was sentenced to death in connection with five murder cases. Later it was commuted to life sentence. After the disintegration of the original CPI (M-L), Comrade Nagabhusan criticized the central line of the CPI (M-L). He was one of the signatories of the famous 'Jail Letter' that was based on Zhou Enlai's 11 Point Suggestions. In his later years, comrade Patnaik joined the Liberation faction, and became one of its polit-bureau members. He advocated the utilization of the parliamentary rostrum in a Leninist fashion in direct contrast to the boycottist nature of the undivided CPI (M-L). On 9th October, 1998, Comrade Patnaik died at a private hospital in Chennai due to renal failure." **POSTED BY CPI (M-L) - THE UNFINISHED REVOLUTION**; <http://imp-personalities.blogspot.com/> His death inspired the poet laureate of armed struggle, Sri Sri to write: "The white man then called you Bhagat Singh /The black man now calls you Naxalite/ Everyone will tomorrow call you the morning star, /Inquilab, Inquilab, Inquilab zindabad!"

⁸ **Vempatapu Sathyanarayana** (Satyam) was a schoolteacher, member of several Indian Communist organizations, and a leader of the Srikakulam Peasant Uprising of 1967, along with another schoolteacher Adhibatla Kailasam. They had started the "land to tiller" movement in Andhra Pradesh, which later spread to Koraput and Malkangiri districts in Orissa. Sathyanarayana joined the (CPI (ML)) through the All India Coordination Committee of Communist revolutionaries (AICCCR). He became a member of the Central Organizing Committee of the CPI (ML) in 1969. Later, he became a member of the new Central Committee that was elected in the first party congress with Charu Mazumdar as its General Secretary. He was also the Secretary of the Srikakulam District Committee of the party. His small booklet on Srikakulam Peasant Armed Upsurge details the nature of Naxalite influence in the early phases of 1969 and 1970 in Andhra Pradesh. It is a common belief among the Naxalite ranks, that he was killed together with Adhibatla

raided the house of a landlord and took possession of rice and other foodgrains that he had hoarded. They also seized documents, promissory notes and other records that had bound the tribal peasants to the landlord, who was also a moneylender. Several such actions followed in Srikakulam.⁹ However, by the mid 1970's the Srikakulam movement was completely crushed. More than 300 of its activists were killed in "encounters". But the fires of revolution were not to be easily doused down.

The CPI (ML) only regrouped and spread to other parts of Andhra Pradesh where we have seen periodic recrudescence. The Naxalites made several dramatic strikes in the thickly forested districts of Telangana such as Adilabad, Karimnagar and Warangal during the Emergency. In September 1976 a group of Naxalites attacked the house of a powerful landlord and Congress leader, GV Pitamber Rao, in Tappalpur village in Adilabad district. Pitamber Rao escaped but the shock of the audacious attack is said to have caused a heart attack and he died a few days later. Less than two months later on November 7, a Naxalite squad led by Kondapalli Sitaramiah, later the founder of the Peoples War Group and Muppalla Laxman Rao, presently General Secretary of the CPI (ML) once again attacked the Pitamber Rao house and killed his sons, GV Subhash and Dr. Sampat Rao. The eldest brother, Sreenivas Rao, who looked after the family's lands and businesses, and who the attackers intended victim, was fortuitously away at the family owned cinema theatre. Subhash was my classmate at Nizam College in Hyderabad and captained the cricket, basketball and hockey teams. He had little to do with the family estate in the village. The few visits were in the company of his friends like the cricketer Mansur Ali Khan Pataudi when they went out poaching on jeeps with spotlights and high-powered rifles.¹⁰ On that fateful day, Subhash expressly went to the village

Kailasam in a fake encounter in Srikakulam by the Andhra Pradesh police under the prior order of the state government around 10-11 of July 1970.

⁹ For a succinct and brief history of the Naxalbari and Srikakulam Uprisings see "**Human Rights in India: Police Killings and Rural Violence in Andhra Pradesh**" for Human Rights Watch by Patricia Grossman.

¹⁰ **Mansur Ali Khan Pataudi** is an inveterate poacher and finally the law seemed to catch-up with him. On June 6, 2005 he was charged under sections 9, 39 and 51 of the Wildlife Protection Act 1972 for killing an endangered blackbuck. The maximum sentence for this kind of offence is seven years in prison. Police also recovered two guns and 50 cartridges from the car after it was stopped in a routine police check in Jhajjar on Friday night. But as can well be expected Pataudi still runs free and can be seen regularly on TV commenting on cricketing matters, and is a high official in the Indian Premier League (IPL). Earlier in 1997, he and his wife Sharmila Tagore reportedly shot some 100 migratory birds in Kashmir's Hokersar wetland. No case was filed supposedly because they had sought and got permission for the hunt. They were in Hokersar at the invitation of Farooq Abdullah, the then chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir. Sharmila Tagore is now Chairperson of the Film Censor Board.

to take part in the obsequies of a close relative. His pregnant wife, Vani, was also with him. The Naxalites came looking for his brother Srinivasa Rao, who used to assist the father in the village. Fortuitously for him, Srinivasa Rao was at the family owned cinema theatre when the Naxalites attacked the house. The September attack apparently did make the family more circumspect. Their connections and influence probably lulled them and did not keep them from going to the village. Besides a Velama¹¹ kinsman, Jalagam Vengala Rao was the Chief Minister and the state government had even posted a police picket in the village to provide the Pitamber Rao household with protection. Another Velama kinsman, the state's powerful DIG of Intelligence, K Vijayarama Rao, later Director of the CBI and minister in the Chandrababu Naidu cabinet, belonged to the neighboring district of Karimnagar. Despite this the Naxalite squad attacked the house and hacked down all the male members present with knives and axes. They took away the weapons in the house and disappeared into the forests. The Tappalpur raids sent a shock wave throughout the state and were seen as a turning point for the movement in Andhra Pradesh.¹²

The Tappalpur raids captured the imagination of educated youth and communist cadres all over the state. Soon after the Naxalite leaders involved in the "Tappalpur raids" were able to form the "Coordination Committee" which was later rechristened as Peoples War Group. The PWG merged with Bihar's Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) to become CPI (Maoists) in October 2004. In 1978 the newly formed Congress (I) swept the elections to the state assembly defeating the Janata Party led in the state by S. Jaipal Reddy and the ruling Congress faction led by the incumbent Chief Minister, J Vengala Rao.

The Indira wave saw the induction of Dr. M Channa Reddy as Chief Minister. The new Chief Minister held out an olive branch to the Naxalites, and initiated talks, but soon it was clear that the only intention of the Naxalites was to use the cease-fire period to regroup and reorganize. The AP Home Minister, MM Hashim, began a Track II dialogue with Naxal representatives and I took part in some of the meetings. The dialogue collapsed when the underground's representatives began to threaten the

¹¹ Velama is one of the feudal-lord castes or social groups in AP state. They ruled in parts of Andhra, Tamil Nadu, Vidarbha and all of Telangana during 14th and 15th centuries and some parts of Andhra till 19th century. Velama's are considered one of the most powerful communities in Andhra Pradesh.

¹² After over three decades, the police have re-opened the sensational case and arrested a senior Maoist leader from West Bengal, Tusharkanth Bhattacharya, and produced him before a local court in Adilabad on November 3, 2007.

interlocutors to ensure that the cessation of operations was extended. The lull of the cease-fire allowed them to expand their cells in the Osmania and Andhra Universities. Many idealistic youth joined the movement, and unlike the upper class lads from St. Stephens and Presidency, these young people stayed the course and many even lost their lives. The intelligence wing of the AP Police was also reporting the setting up of bases in towns like Davangere in Karnataka and Dharmapuri in Tamil Nadu.

The Tappalpur raids had sent a wave of fear among the PWD, forest and excise contractors, many of them Congress (I) leaders, and Naxal coffers began to swell. Money, they say, is the mother's milk of politics, revolutionary or otherwise. The PWG also began a campaign to annihilate other Naxalite factions.¹³ During this period the PWG also began extending its organization into the tribal areas of the neighboring states of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa. Kondapalli Sitaramiah emerged as the charismatic leader and ideologue of the CPI (ML). But like Robespierre, Sitaramiah too was consumed by the revolution and the party that he built later expelled him.¹⁴

¹³ "In one of his most celebrated classics, Lenin showed how left adventurist trends emerged in course of struggle against right opportunism during the formative period of communist parties in different countries ('Left-wing' Communism – An Infantile Disorder) at the end of the second decade of the 20th century. He saw this as a normal teething trouble ("infantile disorder") that could lead to catastrophic consequences unless cured in time. A similar phenomenon was to be observed in our country too during the formative years of the CPI (ML)." **'Maoism', State and the Communist Movement in India'**; http://www.cpiml.org/liberation/year_2010/feb_10/article.html

¹⁴ **Kondapalli Sitaramiah**, at a young age, joined the communists. He went on to become the Krishna district Secretary of the CPI. His CPI unit was active during the Telangana Rebellion. When the CPI was divided in 1964, Sitaramiah withdrew from political life. He began working as a Hindi teacher at Fatima School in Warangal. In Warangal he befriended KG Sathyamurthy. Both men joined the Communist Party of India (Marxist Leninist). Sitaramiah became a member of the Andhra Pradesh State Committee of CPI (ML). When the CPI (ML) was torn by internal strife, Sitaramiah joined the Central Organizing Committee of the Communist Party of India (Marxist Leninist) in 1972. In August 1974, the Andhra Pradesh State Committee of COC, CPI (ML) was organized, with Sitaramiah as one of its three members. On April 26, 1977 Sitaramiah was arrested in Nagpur, when police caught him with weapons in a vehicle. He was released on bail, but absconded and went underground. In 1977 he broke away from COC, CPI (ML). On April 22, 1980 he founded the CPI (ML) Peoples War. On January 2, 1982 he was arrested in Hyderabad's Begumpet Railway Station, when waiting to board a train to Mumbai. On January 4, 1984 he managed to escape from the prisoner's wing of the Osmania Hospital.

Following an internal dispute, which ended with the expulsion of K.G. Sathyamurthy (number 2 in the party ranks) and Byreddy Sathyanarayana Reddy (militia commander in Khammam district), Sitaramiah's hold over the party strengthened. Sathyamurthy had begun questioning the Maoist character of the party, on the lines of Deng Xiaoping. Reddy had opposed Sathyamurthy's ouster. In 1991, Sitaramiah himself was ousted from the party he founded. In 1993, police caught him in his home village. After few years in prison, he was acquitted and released on humanitarian grounds. During his final years, he abstained from political activity. He suffered from Parkinson's disease. Kondapalli Sitaramiah died in his granddaughter's house

The Naxalites had greater success in the tribal areas of the neighboring states, where the depredations of outsiders, whether forest and excise contractors or government officials, had resulted in widespread discontent among the tribal people. The support base of the PWG swelled. Medical students from the Andhra Medical College, Guntur, and engineering students from the Regional Engineering College at Warangal now joined the Osmania University recruits. Like all such revolutionary movements, the cachet that went with being a revolutionary began to also attract lumpen elements, the type that would have otherwise joined the Youth Congress or the youth wings of the other major parties. Since then the Naxalites have gone from strength to strength. The Hindustan Times of 3 January 2007 has done an excellent job of chronologically summarizing the various phases of the many Communist insurrections since 1948.¹⁵

Even mainstream political parties have found it expedient to seek Naxalite support from time to time for narrow political advantage, by pandering to them and offering them concessions on coming to power. It is also believed that often support was purchased with cash. Several companies with large investments in forest-based industries also began to pay for protection. Companies often do this and we have evidence of how even India's largest business house, the Tata's, were paying off ULFA terrorists in Assam.¹⁶ Extortion is commonplace now in Naxal areas.¹⁷ In the run up to the 1983 elections to the Andhra Pradesh state assembly, the film actor NT Rama who was leading his recently formed Telugu Desam Party, dramatically declared himself an ally of the Naxalites. He even campaigned using the theme that they were "true patriots, who have been misunderstood by the ruling

in Vijayawada on April 12, 2002. He was 87 years old. His wife Koteswaramma and two granddaughters, V. Anuradha and G. Sudha, survived him. Funeral services were arranged the next day. According to press reports, only a handful of people turned up.

¹⁵ <http://www.hindustantimes.com/News-Feed/nm2/History-of-Naxalism/225549/Article1-6545.aspx>

¹⁶ **Outlook; September 29, 1997; "A Suspect Brew:** Life in terrorism-ridden Assam was bad enough. With a hostile state, the tea leaves bode more ill." By Nitin Gokhale and Soutik Biswas

¹⁷ "Many of the kidnappings were related to extortions. On 19 June 2006, the CPI (ML) Pratighatana cadres abducted senior General Manager of the Nagarjuna Cements Limited, V.V. Rama Raju and his colleague Galib Saheb from the factory premises in Kadimpothavaram in G. Konduru mandal in Vijayawada district. The abductors demanded Rs 1 crore as ransom. However, they were reportedly set free following police operations. While V.V. Rama Raju was released on 21 June 2006, Mr. Galib was released the next day. According to the police, irrigation contractors in Naxal affected districts like Warangal and Karimnagar had to pay 2-3% of their total contract amount to the Maoists. On 3 April 2006, the police reportedly recovered Rs 50 lakhs from Jupally Raghupathi Rao, the upa-sarpanch of Kudikilla village in Kollapur mandal, and Yeruvaka Shivashankar, a site engineer of VARKS Engineer Groups, who were allegedly taking the money collected from the sub-contractors of the Kalwakurthy irrigation project to be paid to the Naxalites as extortion." **3b of the Indian Human Rights Report, 2007** of the Asian Human Rights centre, New Delhi.

classes.”¹⁸ Almost a decade later during his second innings as Chief Minister he lifted the ban on left-wing extremism in the hope of once again associating himself with the movement’s political popularity. This worked out quite well for his party due to the pockets of influence the Naxalites had in several in many districts

Pandering often is a matter of minimizing the government’s response to insurgent threats, either to acquire time for political enhancements or to reduce threats to officials’ personal security. Prior to 2004, the Congress Party in Andhra Pradesh pledged to hold discussions with rebels if its candidates were elected. The party’s pledge was a tacit agreement that while talks or negotiations were ongoing, the officials would halt counter-insurgency operations, thereby providing a recovery period for the insurgents. The Naxalites also announced their ceasefire and permitted officials to campaign in the insurgent-held areas. The rebels effectively used the suspension of counter-insurgency operations and the resulting ceasefire to recruit and consolidate their position by moving openly among the population. The Congress Party did not actively support the Maoist insurgents’ ideals, but did indicate it would minimize any counter-insurgency operations in return for electoral support.¹⁹ This it did. Soon after assumption of office in 2004, the Rajasekhara Reddy government began talks with the Naxalite leadership. A tacit ceasefire was put in place. This period lasted for exactly six months till December 16 that year. The Naxalites, as in the past, used this interregnum to attempt expansion into newer areas and the police used it to gather information and reorganize their forces to effectively tackle the extremists. Suddenly Rajasekhara Reddy, who during his long campaign for political power promised to talk to the Naxalites about the “people’s problems”, shifted tack and began saying: “where is the need to talk to the Naxalites about peoples problems?” He made it clear that he was only willing to talk to them about surrender.²⁰ Soon

¹⁸ “The politics has been played earlier too. In 1982, N.T. Rama Rao played it with consummate skill. He called the Naxalites true patriots who had been misunderstood by the ruling classes. M. Chenna Reddy, Congress CM, acted no differently. In 1989, he, too, declared that Naxalites were patriots. When Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu adopted a firm approach against Naxalites, it was Rajasekhar Reddy’s turn to appease them. In other states, too, political parties and leaders have not hesitated to arrive at an understanding with the Naxalites. “[Www.hindustantimes.com/News-Feed/...is.../Article1-209723.aspx](http://www.hindustantimes.com/News-Feed/...is.../Article1-209723.aspx)

¹⁹ **COIN in the Real World** by David R. Haines;

[Http://www.carlisle.army.mil/usawc/Parameters/08winter/haines.pdf](http://www.carlisle.army.mil/usawc/Parameters/08winter/haines.pdf).

²⁰ **Naxalites in Andhra Pradesh: Have We Heard the Last of the Peace Talks?** by K Balagopal (*The Economic and Political Weekly* of March 26 – April 01, 2005);

[Http://www.epw.in/epw/uploads/articles/341.pdf](http://www.epw.in/epw/uploads/articles/341.pdf)

after the AP Police resumed operations against them and many of the prominent Naxalite leaders were killed in “encounters” – some real and some staged. The renewed and relentless pressure forced most of the Andhra naxal cadres to migrate to Maharashtra, Chattisgarh and Orissa. Many others surrendered and soon found that the vocational skills acquired in the underground had plenty of takers in India’s fast globalizing market economy. Many former Naxalites are now collection agents for private agencies employed by banks like ICICI and HDFC, who lent huge sums as vehicle loans. In recent days cell phone companies have also taken recourse to collection agents. Debt collection now is an organized business and several sons of senior police officers now own successful companies and offer gainful employment to former Naxalites.²¹ While the Naxal movement derived its name from a little West Bengal village, its Andhra Pradesh that is its real home now, and which provides it with leadership and ideological sustenance.

On December 20, 2007 India’s Prime Minister formally declared war on the Naxalite insurgency when he addressed a high level conference on internal security consisting Chief Ministers, Police and Intelligence chiefs, top civil servants and representatives of most political parties. Since then the Prime Minister has been using every available platform to call for the “crushing” of the Naxalites.²²

Clearly while India was opening up its economy and entering a faster growth trajectory and while India was even shining, the Naxalites have gathered more momentum. They are now emboldened to frontally take on the Indian state. While they still hold full sway over relatively small areas, they have made an impact in a very large area. They have made the hitherto unconcerned Indian elite, sit up and take notice. The General Secretary of the CPI (Maoist) is no longer coy about boasting about this.²³

²¹ 13 Oct 2003 ... Some of the **surrendered Naxalites** have turned into a gang of criminals leading the land mafia and extortion rackets, especially in Hyderabad ... www.tribuneindia.com/2003/20031013/edit.htm

²² Admitting that Naxal groups have succeeded in enlarging their base, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Thursday asked the states to establish specialized and dedicated forces needed to cripple the “virus”. “Although the notions of a red corridor from Nepal to Andhra Pradesh are exaggerated, we have to admit that they have achieved some degree of success in enlarging their areas of militancy,” Singh said while addressing the Chief Ministers conference on internal security. **Indian Express**, December 20, 2007.

²³ **“Q: How much of ‘Indian territory’ is under Maoist control? The Prime Minister once said 160 out of 604 districts. Was it an exaggeration?”**

A: We are indeed flattered by such statistics. But one thing we can understand from the Prime Minister’s statement, i.e. how much of a nightmare we have become to the reactionary ruling classes of India. It is an exaggeration to say that Maoists control that many districts, but our influence goes beyond that. “

[Http://naxalwatch.blogspot.com/2007_09_02_archive.html](http://naxalwatch.blogspot.com/2007_09_02_archive.html)

The Enfeebled State. This call to crush Naxalism brings to mind a line from Zafar Gorakhpuri's popular *qawwali* in the form of a competitive duet between Yusuf Azad and Rashida Khatun featured in the 1972 movie Putli Bai. It runs: "*Inke kalai dekho tho chudiyani uthane ke kabhil nahi, phir bhi talwar uthane ki dhamki...*" (a look at her wrist tells you that it is not even capable of sustaining the weight of bangles, yet she threatens to lift a sword to strike me down). I am not alluding to the weight of the PM's *kada*²⁴ but to the worn out sinews of the State that are now hardly capable of quelling any armed assault upon it, let alone assuaging the causes that force normally compliant people to resort to violence. Having traveled several times through the "Red Corridor" areas in AP, Chhattisgarh, MP and Maharashtra I have little hesitation in testifying that the insurgency has considerable popular support, particularly among the *dalits* and *adivasis* for whom trickle down has meant a little more of little less. In the forested areas of central India, the khaki wearing police, forest and excise departments are truly hated, and this is just about all the government the common people encounter. This is not a mere law and order problem, but a consequence of a failed state, which could do little to uplift the lives of the tens of millions who inhabit this region. If the state is serious about rolling back the tide of Naxalism, it needs to undertake nothing less than a total revamp of the system of public administration and adopt new paradigms of equity and justice.

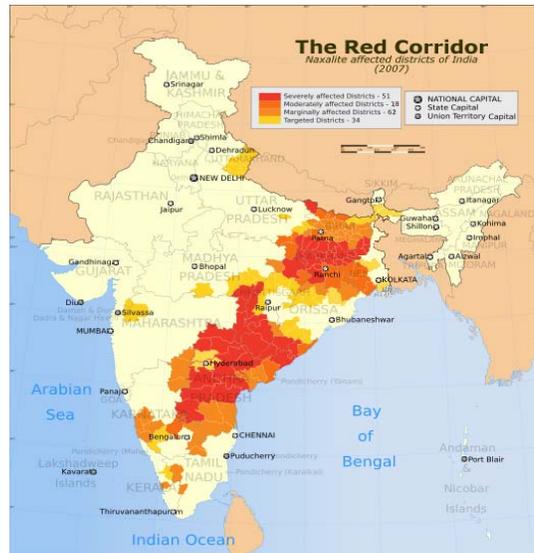
The Government of India has a typically bureaucratic response to this major crisis now gripping the *Adivasi* homelands in six states²⁵. The government

²⁴ A kara or kada or karra is a bangle, worn by both male and female initiated Sikhs. It is one of the five *kakars* or external articles of faith that identify a Sikh as dedicated to their religious order

²⁵ The Red Corridor is a term used to describe an impoverished region in the eastern India that experiences considerable Naxalite activity. These are also areas that suffer from the greatest illiteracy and poverty in modern India, and span parts of AP Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, and MP. Maharashtra, UP and West Bengal. The districts that comprise the Red Corridor are among the poorest in the country. Bihar has the lowest per-capita State Domestic Product of any Indian state, and Uttar Pradesh and Orissa are also among the poorest states in the country. Other areas encompassed by the Red Corridor, such as Chhattisgarh and the Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh, are also either impoverished or have significant economic inequality, or both. A key characteristic of this region is non-diversified economies that are solely primary sector based. Agriculture, sometimes supplemented with mining or forestry, is the mainstay of the economy, which is often unable to support rapid increases in population.

The areas encompassed by the Red Corridor tend to have stratified societies, with caste and feudal divisions. Several areas also have indigenous tribal populations (or *adivasis*) who are disadvantaged in their relationship with other components of society. Bihar and Jharkhand have both caste and tribal divisions and violence associated with friction between these social groups. AP's Telangana region similarly has deep

has already ordered the raising of twenty-five more battalions of armed police, mostly for the CRPF and India Reserve. The Home Minister, P Chidambaram, has launched a somewhat inappropriately named offensive “Operation Greenhunt”²⁶ to beat down the insurgency. It is indeed unfortunate that the government and the establishment are seeing this as a law and order problem because more coercion by the state will only beget more against it by the aggrieved people.



In his closing remarks in The December 20, 2007 conference, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said conferences of this nature send a strong message that the “political leadership of the country can rise above our political and party affiliations when it comes to facing national challenges, particularly those concerning internal security.” The conference was attended by the full spectrum of national leadership including the BJP and

caste divides with a relatively strict social hierarchical arrangement. Both Chhattisgarh and Orissa have significant impoverished tribal populations.¹

²⁶ Operation Greenhunt is the name used by the Indian media to describe the Government of India’s ongoing paramilitary offensive against the Naxalites. The operation begun in November 2009 along five states in the Red Corridor. “In October 2009, the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) announced that it was in the final stages of planning the offensive and had received approval from the government. The Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (COBRA) would take the lead in the operations against Maoist insurgents. At the beginning of November 2009, the first phase of the operation began in Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra state when 18 companies of the CRPF were moved into the area in anticipation of the operation.

CPM and they all expressed full support for the Prime Minister's rather rare display of determination. It was clear that the entire national leadership was not just speaking but also thinking as one, as if seized by groupthink.

It was the social psychologist Irving Janis²⁷ who coined the term groupthink to denote faulty decisions a group makes when group pressures and dynamics lead to a deterioration of “mental efficiency, reality testing and moral judgment.” In his seminal book Victims of Groupthink²⁸ published in 1972, Janis analyzed the failures in decision-making that lead to failed outcomes in Pearl Harbor, the Bay of Pigs and the Vietnam War. Janis defined “groupthink” as the tendency of some groups to try to minimize conflict and reach consensus without sufficiently testing, analyzing, and evaluating their ideas. His work showed how pressures for conformity restrict the thinking of the group; bias its analysis, promotes simplistic and stereotyped thinking, and stifles individual creative and independent thought. The Nobel Prize winning scientist Dr. Richard Feynman in his appendix to the Rogers Commission Report of the space shuttle Challenger accident alluded to groupthink prevalent in the higher echelons of NASA, which directly contributed to the disaster. Psychologists now recognize groupthink as a serious disorder and it very simply means that when all are thinking alike nobody is probably really thinking. Signs of it among the nation’s top leaders are an ominous portent of things to come.

The Exploitation of the Adivasis. The spread of Naxalism is an indication of the sense of desperation and alienation that is sweeping over of large sections of our nation who have been not only systematically marginalized but also cruelly exploited and dispossessed in their last homelands. The late Professor Nihar Ranjan Ray²⁹, one of our most distinguished historians, described the central Indian *adivasis* as “the original autochthonous people

²⁷ **Irving Lester Janis** (26 May 1918 - 15 November 1990) was a research psychologist at Yale University and a professor emeritus at the University of California at Berkeley most famous for his theory of "groupthink" which described the systematic errors made by groups when taking collective decisions. He retired in 1986.

²⁸ Janis, Irving (1972). **Victims of Groupthink; A Psychological Study of Foreign-policy Decisions and Fiascoes**; Houghton, Mifflin, Boston; ISBN 978-0395140024.OLC.539682.

²⁹ **Niharranjan Ray** (January 14, 1903 - August 30, 1981) was a historian, well known for his works on history of art and Buddhism. In 1926 he stood first in the M.A. examination in Ancient Indian History and Culture from [Calcutta University](#). He received the *Mrinalini Gold Medal* in the same year for his *Political History of Northern India, AD 600-900*. He was appointed the Chief Librarian in the Central Library of Calcutta University in 1936. He participated in the [Quit India movement](#) and was imprisoned from 1943-44. In 1946, he was appointed *Bagishwari Professor of Fine Arts* in Calcutta University and retired from the post in 1965. In 1965, he became the first director of the [Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Simla](#) and remained in office till 1970. He was a member of the [Third Pay Commission](#) from 1970-73.

of India” meaning that their presence in India pre-dated by far the Dravidians, the Aryans and whoever else settled in this country. The anthropologist Dr. Verrier Elwin³⁰ states this more emphatically when he wrote: “These are the real swadeshi products of India, in whose presence all others are foreign. These are ancient people with moral rights and claims thousands of years old. They were here first and should come first in our regard.” Unfortunately like indigenous people all over the world, the India’s *Adivasis* too have been savaged and ravaged by later people claiming to be more “civilized”. They still account for almost 8% of India’s population and are easily it’s most deprived and oppressed section.³¹ There are some 573 communities recognized by the government as Scheduled Tribes and therefore eligible to receive special benefits and to compete for reserved seats in legislatures and schools. The biggest tribal group, the Gonds, number about 7.4 million; followed by the Santhals with about 4.2 million. The smallest tribal community is the Chaimal’s in the Andaman Islands who number just eighteen. Central India is home to the country's largest tribes, and, taken as a whole, roughly 75 percent of the total tribal population live there.³²

³⁰ **Verrier Elwin** (1902–1964) was a self-trained anthropologist, ethnologist and tribal activist, who began his career in India as a Christian missionary. He was a controversial figure who first abandoned the clergy, to work with Gandhiji and the Indian National Congress, then converted to Hinduism in 1935 after staying a Gandhian ashram, split with the nationalists over what he felt was an overhasty process of transformation and assimilation for the tribal's. Elwin is best known for his early work with the Baigas and Gonds of central India, and he famously married a member of one of the communities he studied there, though he also work on the tribal's of several Northeast Indian states especially in Arunachal Pradesh and settled in Shillong later in life.

³¹ **Indigenous peoples** are any ethnic group who inhabit a geographic region with which they have the earliest known historical connection. Several widely accepted formulations, however, which define the term *indigenous peoples* in stricter terms, have been put forward by prominent and internationally recognized organizations, such as the UN, ILO and the World Bank.

Other related terms for indigenous peoples include aborigines, aboriginal people, native people, first people, and autochthonous. "Indigenous peoples" may often be used in preference to these or other terms as a neutral replacement, where such terms may have taken on negative or pejorative connotations by their prior association and use. It is the preferred term in use by the United Nations and its subsidiary organizations. In Indian officialese they are referred to as Scheduled Tribes or ST's.

Scheduled Tribe members represented only 8 percent of the total population (about 68 million). They were found in 1991 in the greatest numbers in Orissa (7 million, or 23 percent of the state's population), Maharashtra (7.3 million, or 9 percent), and Madhya Pradesh (15.3 million, or 23 percent). In proportion, however, the populations of states in the northeast had the greatest concentrations of Scheduled Tribe members. For example, 31 percent of the population of Tripura, 34 percent of Manipur, 64 percent of Arunachal Pradesh, 86 percent of Meghalaya, 88 percent of Nagaland, and 95 percent of Mizoram were Scheduled Tribe members. Other heavy concentrations were found in Dadra and Nagar Haveli, 79 percent of which was composed of Scheduled Tribe members, and Lakshadweep, with 94 percent of its population being Scheduled Tribe members.

³² [Http://tribal.nic.in/indiamap.html](http://tribal.nic.in/indiamap.html) - State wise Tribal Population percentage in India.

Tribal people account for 8.2% of India's population. They are spread over all of India's States and Union territories. Even so they can be broadly classified into three groupings. The first grouping consists of populations who predate the Indo-Aryan migrations. These are termed by many anthropologists as the Austro-Asiatic-speaking Australoid people.³³ The Central Indian *adivasis* belong to this grouping. The other two major groupings are the Caucasoid and Sino-Tibetan or Mongoloid tribal people of the Himalayan and Northeastern regions who migrated at later periods. If we accept this, then the only people who conform to Nihar Ranjan Ray's description of the "original autochthonous people of India" are the Central Indian tribes. The other two broad tribal groupings have fared better in the post-independence dispensation. Within them some, such as the Meena's and Gujjar's of Rajasthan, have done exceptionally well, which should make us wonder if they should be eligible to claim benefits as Scheduled Tribes any more? Clearly all Scheduled Tribes are not *adivasis*.

In the decades after independence the exploitation has only become more rampant. The *adivasi* homelands are rich in natural resources and the new modernizing and industrializing India needs these resources. Today all the mineral resources except oil that India boasts off are to be found only in these areas and the state has not been lax in exploiting them. The only problem is that the people whose homelands were ravaged to extract nature's bounty got little or nothing of it. Even the meager royalties the states receive are mostly expended by the bureaucracy on themselves, as salaries have now become the biggest single expenditure of the Indian states. Sometimes they even exceed all revenues. At last count, before the Sixth Pay Commission's recommendations were implemented, the total wage bill of India's multi-tiered government is a monstrous Rs.193, 000 crores or about 5.6% of the GNP.³⁴ That the capital expenditure of the central and state governments has

³³ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adivasi> "Ethnic origins and linguistic affiliations in India match only inexactly, however: while the Oraon *adivasis* are classified as an Australoid group, their language, called Kurukh, is Dravidian. [25] Khasis and Nicobarese are considered to be Mongoloid groups [26][27] and the Munda and Santals are Australoid groups. [28][29][30] but all four speak Austro-Asiatic languages. [26][27][28] The Bhils and Gonds are frequently classified as Australoid groups. [31] yet Bhil languages are Indo-European and the Gondi language is Dravidian. [25] Also, in post-colonial India, tribal languages suffered huge setbacks with the formation of linguistic states after 1956 under the States Reorganization Act. For example, under state-sponsored educational pressure, Irula children are being taught Tamil and a sense of shame has begun to be associated with speaking the Irula language among some children and educated adults. [15] Similarly, the Santals are "gradually adopting languages of the areas inhabited, like Oriya in Orissa, Hindi in Bihar and Bengali in West Bengal."

³⁴ **The Planning Commission** does not foresee any significant disruption of state finances on account of increase in salaries of state government employees. "I don't think that this disruption is going to be all that

come down to about 10% of the annual budgets does not seem to worry the eminent economist who presides over the Planning Commission.

We all now know very well that big government in the absence of a responsive nervous system actually means little government, and whatever little interaction the people at the bottom have with the state is usually a none too happy one. In the vast Central Indian highlands the occasional visit of an official invariably means extraction by coercion of what little the poor people have. It doesn't just end with a chicken or a goat or a bottle of *mahua*³⁵, it often includes all these and the modesties of the womenfolk. Most tribal villages and settlements have no access to schools and medical care. Very few are connected with all weather roads. Perish the thought of electricity though all the coal and most of the hydel projects to generate electricity are in the tribal regions. The forests have been pillaged and the virgin forests thick with giant teak and sal trees are things of the past.

In Orissa over 72% of all *adivasis* live well below the poverty line.³⁶ At the national level 45.86% of all *adivasis* live below the poverty line. Incidentally the official Indian poverty line is a nothing more than a starvation line,³⁷ which means that almost half of India's original inhabitants go to bed every

crucial," Commission Deputy Chairman Montek Singh Ahluwalia said on the possible impact of adoption of the Sixth Pay Commission award by the state governments. The Pay Commission, constituted by the Centre, is expected to submit its report by early April and the state governments would be under pressure to revise the salary of state employees, once that happens. Pointing out that blind adoption of the Pay Commission award by the state governments is not a good idea, Ahluwalia said pay commissions are constituted once in 10 years and the states can do many things to neutralize the impact. The government, he said, was made to effect a big increase in salaries of its employees at the end of 10 years as the dearness allowance (DA) does not adequately take care of inflation. "So at the end of 10 years, the government will be benefiting from a squeeze in real pay because the DA was never enough so you have a big increase," he added.

³⁵ *Madhuca longifolia*, commonly known as **mahwa** or **mahua**, is a tropical tree found largely in the central and north Indian plains and forests. It is a fast growing tree that grows to approximately 20 meters in height, possesses evergreen or semi-evergreen foliage, and belongs to the family Sapotaceae. It is adapted to arid environments, being a prominent tree in tropical mixed deciduous forests in India in the states of Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Gujarat and Orissa. The flowers are used to produce an alcoholic drink in tropical India. Several parts of the tree, including the bark, are used for their medicinal properties. It is considered holy by many tribal communities because of its usefulness. The tribal's who are forest dwellers considers the tree a boon and they are keen conservators of this tree. However, the conservation of the tree has been marginalized as it is stated that the non-tribal's do not favor propagation of this tree.⁴

³⁶ **Adivasis of South Orissa: Enduring Poverty.** Sanjay Kumar. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 36, No. 43 (Oct. 27 - Nov. 2, 2001), pp. 4052-4054. (article consists of 3 pages)

³⁷ For a detailed discussion see "**Redefining Poverty: A New Poverty Line for a New India**" by Mohan Guruswamy and Ronald Abraham, Centre for Policy Alternatives. www.cpasindia.org

night starving. Several anthropometric studies have revealed that successive generations of *adivasis* are actually becoming smaller unlike all other people in India who benefit from better and increasingly nutritious diets. What little the Indian state apportions to the welfare and development of indigenous people gets absorbed in the porous layers of our government. The late Rajiv Gandhi once famously said that less than 15% of the money allocated to rural areas actually percolated down.³⁸

A typical instance of this is in the eight tribal majority KBK (Kalahandi, Bolangir and Koraput)³⁹ districts of Orissa where over Rs.2000 crores cumulatively spent ostensibly on social welfare and rural development schemes during the past three years has just vanished leaving little or no evidence of done any of the intended recipients any good. The people are not having any more of it and have taken to coercing the state, dishing out to it what its minions have been doing for ages.

The migration of non-tribals is a long story. Way back in 1945 the Revenue Department of the Nizam's Government in Hyderabad commissioned the Austrian anthropologist, Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf,⁴⁰ to study the

³⁸ **Times of India** of 14 October 2009: "Twenty-five years after Rajiv Gandhi said that for every rupee sent to the common man, only 17 paise reached him, the debate is back on what constitutes a huge indictment of the delivery system in welfare schemes. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh told reporters in Mumbai on Sunday that leakage of funds was not as big as mentioned by Rajiv Gandhi. "Leakage of funds earmarked for development does exist but I don't admit these leakages are as big as was mentioned by Rajivji," he said.

By coincidence, a day later, Planning Commission deputy chairman Montek Singh Ahluwalia told a seminar that the former PM was correct about the extent of leakage. He said a Plan panel study on PDS recently found that only 16 paise out of a rupee was reaching the targeted poor; as he went on to suggest that 1% of every scheme money be earmarked for monitoring and evaluation.

While their opinion on the magnitude of pilferage may differ, the top policy duo has cranked open a debate at the core of the campaign for 'aam aadmi'. When Rajiv Gandhi spoke during a visit to Kalahandi in 1985, it was an indictment of the system in the pre-reforms era, which triggered a controversy. "

³⁹ The KBK districts account for 19.80% population over 30.60% geographical area of the State. 89.95% people of this region still live in villages. Lower population density (153 persons / sq.km) in comparison to 236 for Orissa indicates difficult living conditions and an undeveloped economy. Tribal communities dominate this region. As per 2001 Census, about 38.41% people of these districts belong to the Scheduled Tribes (ST) communities including four primitive tribal groups (PTG), i.e., Bondas, Dadai, Langia Sauras and Dangaria Kandhas. In addition, 16.25% population belongs to the Scheduled Castes (SC) communities. Literacy rates are also far below the State as well as National averages. Female literacy is only 29.10%. As per the 1997 census of BPL families, about 71% families in the region live below the poverty line.

⁴⁰ **Christoph Von Furer-Haimendorf** was born on June 22, 1909 in Vienna, Austria. When Christoph was young, he dreamt of going to India to see what it was like to live there. He felt that the best way to travel to India would be to experience it as an Anthropologist. To make Christoph's dream come true, he went to the University of Vienna and worked hard to build a career as an Anthropologist. There he studied archaeology

condition of tribals in the state and make appropriate policy recommendations.⁴¹ The four studies of the tribal groups in the northern areas of Hyderabad narrate how in the settled villages of the tribal areas outsiders owned most of the land under cultivation. A typical instance is the Koya (Gond) village of Ragleyanguda in Yellandu taluq. The total area under cultivation here was 1616 acres. Of a Koya population of 254 there were only five Koya *pattadars* who together owned 24 acres in all. It is the same story today and the Adivasi has been pushed further into the remaining jungle or into menial existence while the land has been appropriated by Hindu and Muslim settlers. They are now the majority in only a fraction of their original homelands.

The Land of the Koitur. There is a vast and mostly forested region spanning almost the entire midriff of India from Orissa to Gujarat, lying between the westbound Narmada and eastbound Godavari, bounded by many mountain ranges like the Vindhya, Satpura, Mahadeo, Meykul, and Abujhmar, that was once the main home of the original autochthonous Indian, the *Adivasi*. Though this is the home of many tribal groups, the largest tribal group, the Gonds, dominated the region. The earliest Gond kingdom appears to date from the 10th century and the Gond Rajas were able to maintain a relatively independent existence until the 18th century, although they were compelled to offer nominal allegiance to the Mughal Empire. The great historian Jadunath Sarkar records: “In the sixteenth and seventeenth century much of the modern Central Provinces (today’s MP) were under the sway of aboriginal Gond chiefs and was known under the name of Gondwana. A Mughal invasion and the sack of the capital had

and physical anthropology and acquired his doctorate in anthropology by writing his thesis on a comparison of two peoples in the northeast area of India.

World War 2 broke out when Christoph tried again to return to India. As a native of Germany with a German passport, he was arrested. To his luck though, he was relocated to study other groups of people that weren't very well studied or understood at all. These different groups, the Chenchu's and the Reddi's interested him because he was able to compare the peoples he was studying now to the Naga Hill people he had previously studied. After the war was over, he was appointed to be the Advisor for Tribes and Backward Classes to Nizam's Government of Hyderabad and helped to deal with the new issue of land reform of the peoples. Christoph's goal was to make sure that modernization did not phase out the culture and language of the people, which he was in charge of. In 1949, he was given a lectureship at School of Oriental and African Studies. From there his educational work really sky rocketed. In 2 years, he went from a lecturer to reader, then Chair of Asian Anthropology. The following 25 years he was there, he encouraged the use of fieldwork to enrich studies for both student and faculty alike.

⁴¹ **Tribal Hyderabad – Four Reports** by Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf published by the Revenue Department, Government of H.E.H the Nizam, Hyderabad 1945.

crippled the great Gond kingdom of Garh-Mandla in Akbar's reign and later by Bundela encroachments from the north. But in the middle of the seventeenth century another Gond kingdom with its capital at Deogarh, rose to greatness, and extended its sway over the districts of Betul, Chindwara, and Nagpur, and portions of Seoni, Bhandara and Balaghat. In the southern part of Gondwana stood the town of Chanda, the seat of the third Gond dynasty and hereditary foe and rival of the Raja of Deogarh." But the glory of Deogarh departed when the Maratha ruler of Nagpur annexed Deogarh after the death of Chand Sultan.⁴² Incidentally the Gond ruler of Deogarh, Bakht Buland, founded the city of Nagpur. Jadunath Sarkar writes about him thus: "He lived to extend the area, power and prosperity of his kingdom very largely and to give the greatest trouble to Aurangzeb in the last years of his reign." In fact the one big reason Aurangzeb could not deploy all his power against Shivaji was because the Gond kings were constantly at war with the Mughals and kept interdicting the lines from the Deccan to Agra. But of course the history of modern India is not generous to them.

Jabalpur was another one of the major centers of the Garh-Mandla kingdom and like other major dynastic capitals had a large fort and palace. Temples and palaces with extremely fine carvings and erotic sculptures came up throughout the Gond kingdoms. The temple of Boramdeo at Kawardha⁴³ in Chhattisgarh still stands as a testimony to levels of culture and craft attained during the heydays of the Gonds.

During the British days this region constituted much of the Central Provinces of India later to become Madhya Pradesh. This is the main home of about seven million Gond people who are India's largest single tribal grouping.⁴⁴ The Gonds are now a culturally and linguistically heterogeneous

⁴² " Pp 338 -344 from "A Short History of Aurangzib" by Jadunath Sarkar, Orient Blackswan ISBN 978-81-250-3690-6

⁴³ The **Boramdeo Temple** Set amidst the picturesque surroundings of Maikal Mountains and dense forests near Kawardha (134 kms from Raipur) is a perfect blend of religious and erotic sculptures. It is carved on the rocky stones in the Nagar style. This temple was built in the period of 7th to 11th century A.D. The Shiva Lingam in the temple is beautifully carved and the artistic appeal beckons the visitors. The Boramdeo temple has a resemblance with the Sun temple of Konark and the Khajuraho temples, and that is why it is also called the Khajuraho of Chhattisgarh. The "Madwa Mahal" near the Boramdeo temple is another beautiful historic monument, worth seeing. Madwa Mahal is known as the memorial of the marriage of Nagwanshi king and Haihawanshi Queen. 'Madwa' is a word from the local dialect synonymous to marriage pandal

⁴⁴ **Anthropometric and Genetic distance between Gonds of Central India;** by Urmila Pingle in **American Journal of Physical Anthropology.** 1984 Nov; 65(3): 291-304 A morphological and genetic

people having attained much cultural uniformity with the dominant linguistic influences of their region. Thus, the Gonds of the eastern and northwestern Madhya Pradesh region that now includes the new state of Chattisgarh speak Chattisgarhi and western Hindi. But the Gonds of Bastar, which is at the southeastern end of this vast region and a part of Chattisgarh, are different in this respect. Though there are many tribal groups like the Halbas, Bhatras, Parjas and Dorlas, the Maria and Bison Horned Gonds are the most numerous. The language spoken by them, like that of the Koyas of AP is an intermediate Dravidian language closer to Telugu and Kanarese. There is a history to this.

According to Sir WV Grigson, ICS. who in 1938 wrote the still widely referred to "The Maria Gonds of Bastar"⁴⁵, the Bastar princely family was descended from the Kakatiya kings who reigned at Warangal from AD 1150 to 1425. According to Bastar tradition and folk songs after Pratap Rudra Raya, the greatest of the Kakatiya kings was killed in battle with the invading forces of Ahmad Shah Bahmani, his brother Annam Deo fled across the Godavari into Bastar. Bastar was then constituted of a group of loosely held feudal dependencies of Warangal.

Annam Deo then founded a line that continued till 1966 when the last ruler, the much revered Pravir Chandra Bhanj Deo was killed at the instance of the

study was undertaken on five Gondi-speaking populations of Central India (Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra States). There has been no systematic biological study on this large Dravidian-speaking tribal group, amounting to 13% of the total tribal population of India. Data was collected on 16 anthropometric measurements and seven genetic markers (blood groups, hemoglobin, G6PD and plasma protein polymorphisms) on the Raj Gonds, Kolams, Manne, Koyas and Plains Maria Gonds. Various genetic distance measures such as Mahalanobis's D² and Nei's and Sanghvi's measures and cluster analysis techniques were used to determine the relationship between these groups based on anthropometrics and genetic variables. The statistical analysis revealed the Gonds to be a heterogeneous group in both morphology and genetic characteristics. The morphological and genetic distances between these five groups when projected graphically revealed that the spatial distribution of these Gonds generally corresponds to their present geographical distribution. However, the actual relationships between each of the Gond populations show differences when based on these two biological variables, the possible reasons for this being discussed in the paper. The emphasis of this study is on the importance of geographical proximity in producing morphological and genetic similarity between populations, brought about by a short distance as well as similar geographical factors (such as soil, terrain, flora, etc.) drawing these populations together under a common ecocultural umbrella.

⁴⁵ **Sir Wilfred Grigson's** detailed, accurate, and comprehensive ethnographic study, **Maria Gonds of Bastar**, first published in 1938, has attained the status of a classic of Indian tribal studies. This is a reprint of the 1949 reissue with commentary and a forty-page note by the author on the Maria Gonds of Chanda and Durg. Publisher: Oxford University Press, USA; 2nd Impression. Edition (March 12, 1992) ISBN-10: 0195628551 ISBN-13: 978-0195628555

MP government of Dwarka Prasad Mishra for having resisted the Congress party's attempts to extend its influence into the region and for championing the rights of the tribal people. When Pravir Chandra ascended the *gadi* in 1936 he was the twentieth in his line to reign in Bastar. Such is the reverence for Pravir Chandra Bhanj Deo among the tribals that even today his pictures are sold in the shops at the entrance of the great Danteshwari temple at Dantewara.⁴⁶

Telugu inscriptions at the temple town of Barsur and Kuruspal on the Indrawati River tell of a line of Telugu kings, the Nagavansi that ruled Bastar even as early as the eleventh century. But this is not important anymore. What is relevant is that the Gonds of Bastar are now considered by anthropologists to be a distinct group and are referred to as the "Koitur". Grigson even writes that the Maria and Bison Horned Gonds of Bastar resent being called Gonds.

Wherever the Gonds still speak their own language they refer to themselves as *Koi* or *Koitur*. It is only in the Telugu regions that a name close to what they call themselves, *Koya*, is used for them. Anthropologists generally refer to only these "Teluguized" Gonds as Koitur and even though there are large groups of Koitur living in AP and Maharashtra, Bastar is truly the land of the Koitur. The old Bastar state when it was incorporated into independent India as a district of the former Central Provinces was an area as large as the state of Kerala.⁴⁷ This district has been made into two with a second district

⁴⁶ Pravir Chandra Bhanj Deo 25 June 1929 - 25 March 1966 was the 20th Maharaja of Bastar who was killed in 1966 by the then Congress government of Madhya Pradesh for championing the cause of his subjects. He fought for rights of the tribal people. His subjects adored the last Kakatiya ruler of Bastar. He was born in 25 June 1929 and was educated at Rajkumar College, Raipur. He succeeded to throne on 28 October 1936.

He was immensely popular among his people, as he took up the cause of the local tribals, and provided political leadership against exploitation of natural resources of the region, and corruption in land reforms, thus he was perceived a threat by the then ruling congress people. On March 25, 1966 he was killed in police firing at the steps of his own palace at Jagdalpur along with many of the royal court. Officially the death toll was twelve including the ex-king and wounded were twenty; the police had fired sixty-one rounds.

⁴⁷ Bastar state was situated in the south-eastern corner of the former Central Provinces and Berar, bounded north by the Kanker State, south by the Godavari district of the Agency area of the Madras Presidency, west by Chanda district of the former princely state of Hyderabad, and the Godavari river, and east by the Jeypore estate in Orissa. It had an area of 13,062 square miles (33,830 km²). **Kerala** is a state in southwestern India. It was created on 1 November 1956, with the passing of the States Reorganization Act bringing together the areas where Malayalam is the dominant language. The state has an area of 38,863 kms².

Dantewara carved out of it, and with the old Antagarh tehsil now becoming a part of Kanker district.

I have been visiting Bastar since I was a teenager in the mid 1960's when I crossed the Godavari with my father in pursuit of a man-eating leopard near the village of Pujari Kanker nestled in the Abalaka range. Since then a great many changes have come about, as they have elsewhere, and have mostly been to the disadvantage of the Adivasi. The process of Hinduization combined with Hindi culture has reduced the egalitarian Koitur to the bottom of the social strata. Dr. Kalyan Kumar Chakravarthy, Director of the Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya, Bhopal has written eloquently and cogently on this in his concluding chapter "Extinction or Adaptation of the Gonds" in the book "Tribal Identity in India" also edited by him.⁴⁸ The Sangrahalaya established for the exclusive study, research and preservation for posterity the unique aspects of India's tribal societies and their culture, has most beautifully and imaginatively recreated these on the Shamla Hills overlooking Bhopal's magnificent lake. Public attitudes in metropolitan India however seem to have been conditioned by the works of artists like JP Singhal⁴⁹ who has through his popular calendar art of bare breasted tribal women titillated millions and served to establish the generally prevalent view of these people. Popular Indian cinema has consistently depicted tribals in a lurid and garish manner. It is common to have them painted black and dancing in grass skirts in a new musical genre called the Bollywood Tribal Fusion.⁵⁰ Even the Ramayana cannot be deemed exempt of having nurtured certain attitudes about *Adivasis*. What was the monkey army about? If we have to give it the status of a historical narrative then are we to believe that talking monkeys existed? Or possibly a now extinct race of androids? Or was it poetic license that the writers took to describe indigenous people in the manner they were thought of? More likely is that it reflected prevalent racial attitudes at the time of writing that persist because of the sanctified

⁴⁸ **Tribal identity in India: Extinction or Adaptation!** Published in 1996, Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya Bhopal, India). LCCN 97906674; Dewey: 305.8.00954; LC: GN635.I4 T6743 1996.

⁴⁹ A legendary name in calendar art, J P Singhal is best known as the man who popularized calendar painting as an art form. For a period of 35 years he ruled the world of calendar design producing over 2500 paintings on a variety of subjects including mythology, children, tribals and rural India. With over 75 crore reproductions of his paintings, Singhal was singularly responsible for popularizing art in households. <http://www.indiaprwire.com/pressrelease/art/2010022344138.htm>

⁵⁰ You'll see it done with tribals too. Have you noticed how Bollywood portrays its "tribals" with a distinctly (stereotypical) African flavor? The most famous example, of course, is that weird group of "tribals", people in blackface no less, marching through the forest in the middle of the night in **Shalimar** chanting "*Oo la la la hoo, Oo la la la hoo, phurr phurr*", while Dharmendra sings, "*Hum bewafa hargiz na the...*" <http://indiequill.wordpress.com/2007/06/20/indias-gypsy-rom-elsewhere/>

status of the mythology.⁵¹ Several scholars have indeed written about this, but the need to be politically correct is overridden by popular belief and sentiment.

Much of the dense forests of Bastar have since been chopped down and the animals hunted to near extinction. Once great herds of wild buffalo have been reduced to a mere handful precariously surviving near Kutru. There are only a few tigers left in the beautiful Kanger Valley Reserve.⁵² The traditional existence of the Koitur is as much threatened. Migrants from other parts, now increasingly from the Hindi speaking areas of old Madhya Pradesh have settled in large numbers and have reduced the indigenous population to a minority in many areas particularly in and around Jagdalpur and Kondagaon.

The National Mineral Development Corporation, a PSU, operates India's largest iron ore mine in Bailadilla in Dantewara district.⁵³ Instead of bringing prosperity to the local people it has done irrevocable harm. Few benefits of this economic exploitation have trickled down to them while the ecological degradation of the area is devastating. Even worse has been the social degradation that has visited the Koitur Gonds in general and the

⁵¹ In **The Aryan Debate** / ed. by Thomas R. Trautmann. - New Delhi: Oxford University Press. 2005. - Xliv, 289 S. II Kt. - (Oxford in India Readings: Debates in Indian History and Society). ISBN 0-19-566908-8, Trautman writes that the Ramayana is a story of conflict between the Aryans and the indigenous people of the 'Indian' land. Many historians have accepted this viewpoint. The description of Rama as a tall, fair, sharp-nosed etc shows uncanny resemblance to the 'Vedic people' or the Aryans, the stock of people who migrated from central Asia and settled in the Indian subcontinent. When they first interacted with the 'locals', they gained a superiority complex due to their looks, lifestyle and their warring style. Their superiority complex is visible by the way they describe the indigenous people, for example Ravana is described as dark, snub nosed, squat, muscular and hairy. He is also depicted as a worshipper of cults that have tribal ingredients. The descriptions match the Dravidian stalk of indigenous people. The animal army of Rama can be easily interpreted as the people of different tribes, whose names were those of animals, like the tribe of langur, the tribe of bears. Even if this point is prone to debates, it cannot be denied that all the tribes even today contain these totems.

⁵² For a better understanding of the richness of fauna in these regions read "**Wild animals in Central India**" by A.A.Dunbar Brander, Natraj Publishers, Dehra Dun, ISBN: 81-8158-117-4

⁵³ Incorporated in 1958 as Government of India, fully owned public enterprise. **NMDC** is under the administrative control of the Ministry of Steel, Government of India. Since inception involved in the exploration of wide range of minerals including iron ore, copper, rock phosphate, lime stone, dolomite, gypsum, bentonite, magnesite, diamond, tin, tungsten, graphite, beach sands etc. India's single largest iron ore producer and exporter, presently producing about 30 million tons of iron ore from 3 fully mechanized mines viz., Bailadila Deposit-14/11C, Bailadila Deposit-5, 10/11A (Chhattisgarh State) and Donimalai Iron Ore Mines (Karnataka State) which are awarded ISO 9001-2000 certification.

sexual exploitation of their women in particular by people from the so-called civilized sections and regions of India.⁵⁴

Enter the Telugu Speakers. The migration of Telugu speaking people in the areas near the Godavari has also continued unabated and they have done in southern Bastar what they have done in Adilabad, Warangal, Khammam and East Godavari. They have swamped the tribal population, exploited them mercilessly and have reduced them to penury and second class citizenship in their ancient lands. And quite ironically it is from these that the nucleus of the Naxalite leadership has emerged. Though the Naxal movement is now almost entirely centered in the *Adivasi* homelands one cannot but notice a disconnect between what the tribals seek and what the Naxalites provide. Few adivasis have heard of Mao Zedong or care for what he stood and did. The Naxalites on the other hand deify him. To them that China's Chairman is still the Chairman! They are steeped in the dialectics and folklore of that phase of China. Few of them have studied Mao or have even read about him. One even doubts if any of the St. Stephens or Presidency College students who so romanticized Mao would have known much about him.⁵⁵

I recall a rather surreal conversation I had with a group of Andhra University students who had taken to the hills with the PWG. In late 1983 I was on my way to Chintur in East Godavari district and was driving down from Bhadrachallam skirting the Bastar border. At the village of Edugurallapalle

⁵⁴ Pp 88, Chapter, "**Development and the Future of Tribals**" by Indra Deva in "Social Science and Social Concern" Ed. By S.B. Chakrabarti. Mittal Publications, Delhi 110035, ISBN 81-7099-062-9

⁵⁵ "**The Private Life of Chairman Mao**" by his long time personal physician Dr. Zhisui Li. (Random House 1996, ISBN-10: 0679764437) According to the book, Li witnessed Mao's private life on a day-to-day basis, mostly dealing with Mao at the height of his powers. Li alleged that Mao appeared anxious of the public but was indifferent to the problems of the Chinese people. It also describes Mao's signs of illness, paranoia, as well as neglecting dental hygiene (Mao's teeth were coated with a green-colored film, and when Li touched Mao's gums, pus oozed out). The book details Mao's alleged personal depravity and sexual politics. It is also an account of the political intrigue within Communist Party leadership, excessive use of propaganda (such as putting rice fields near railroad tracks), as well as Mao's excitement after Richard Nixon's visit to China, around the time his health started to deteriorate.

Mao most admired the Emperor Qin Shihuangdi (reign 221-206 BC) who founded Imperial China. Qin vastly expanded China by absorbing small nations. He constructed roads and canals, introduced weights and measures and began building the Great Wall. Qin also killed and persecuted wantonly. He killed Confucian scholars and burned classical books. But Mao considered all these minor aberrations and argued that the good outweighed the bad. This was Mao's attitude when he was told that over 10 million people died in the 159-61 famines after the Peoples Communes were formed. Just like Bal Thackeray's admiration for Adolf Hitler because he built autobahns and Germany powerful!

(literally means seven horse village possibly because it was an official horse station with provision to stable seven horses in the old Asaf Jahi days?), my companion and I ran into some Naxal's. Like college educated young people they were quite eager to get into a discussion and soon the discussion veered around to the internecine battle between the various groups. My new friends described one of the other major factions as Lin Piaoist⁵⁶ and considered them the main enemy of their faction.⁵⁷ Like amoeba the CPI (ML) founded by Charu Mazumdar has undergone frequent meiosis and mitosis, splitting and uniting all the time. If it didn't have so many bloody consequences it might even be quite funny. At last count there are no less than fifteen Naxalite parties. The sheer absurdity of sitting in the jungles of Dandakaranya and debating the merits or otherwise of the departed Lin Biao did not seem to strike them at all. What had all this got to do with the immediate problems of the *adivasi* people?

Yet today the entire greater homeland of the Koitur Gonds in Maharashtra, Chattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh is under the thrall of the Telugu speaking Naxalite leadership, which now has an increasingly symbiotic relationship with rapacious forest and PWD contractors, and corrupt officialdom. Some may argue that this relationship is inevitable since any revolutionary movement needs to sustain itself. There is good precedence for this. Josef Stalin regularly extorted money from the oil barons and moneyed interests in Baku, apart from kidnapping and robbing banks to finance Lenin in his distant exile, which kept him in places, like London, Vienna and Geneva.⁵⁸ Whatever be the means of financing, it is in remote and isolated Bastar that the insurgency has found a true home and has had its greatest impact. Yet

⁵⁶ **Lin Biao**, born as Lin Yurong; (December 5, 1907– September 13, 1971) was a Chinese communist military leader who was instrumental in the communist victory in the Chinese Civil War, especially in Northeastern China, and was the General who led the Peoples Liberation Army into Beijing in 1949. He abstained from becoming a major player in politics until he rose to prominence during the Cultural Revolution, climbing as high as second-in-charge and Mao Zedong's designated and constitutional successor and comrade-in-arms.

He died in a 'plane crash' in September 1971 in Mongolia after what appeared to be a failed coup to oust Mao. After his death, he was officially condemned as a traitor, and is still recognized as one of the two "major Counter-revolutionary parties" during the Cultural Revolution– the other being Mao's last wife Jiang Qing– for which he is assigned a large portion of blame.

⁵⁷ The pro-Charu Mazumdar CPI (ML) later split into pro and anti-Lin Biao factions. The pro-Lin Biao group NBBRC became known as Central Organizing Committee / Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) (Shanti Pal) and the anti-Lin Biao-group later became known as Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation.

⁵⁸ [Pp 178-185 Young Stalin by Simon Sebag Montefiore; Vintage Books; ISBN 978-1-4000-9613-8](#)

this is not an isolated insurgency as the Telangana insurgency of the late 1940's was.⁵⁹ The forest tracts of the central Indian highlands are almost contiguous and link up with the forests of Chota Nagpur in Jharkhand and are easily linked with the Nepali Terai where a fraternal party is now a major player in working out new constitutional arrangements. Its thirty thousand combatants sit in UN maintained camps as the political process goes on.

“Enemies of the Brahmin Samaj”! During my last visit to Bastar a few years ago, I encountered well-armed insurgent groups in two different places. On my way from Narainpur to Barsur on the forest road along the base of the Abujhumar Mountains, we ran into a roadblock laid by visibly armed men just a few kilometers out of Chota Dongar. Providentially it was on a straight and I was able to stop my vehicle at some distance and reverse my direction of travel. Back at Chota Dongar where a large weekly market was underway as we stopped to catch our breath and also to witness the cockfights, we ran into a bunch of very scared, very drunk, and very armed policemen who insisted we see photographs of what a Naxalite squad had done to a colleague the week before on the same road. His head was smashed with boulders. When we told them of our encounter with the other side just a short distance down the road, they showed absolutely no interest in engaging them and strongly urged us to return to Narainpur, which we promptly did.

⁵⁹ **The Telangana Rebellion** was a Communist led peasant revolt that took place in the former princely state of Hyderabad between 1946 and 1951. The Communist Party of India led this revolt. The revolt began in the Nalgonda district and quickly spread to the Warangal and Bidar districts. Peasant farmers and labourers revolted against the Nizam and the local feudal landlords (jagirdars and deshmukhs) who were loyal to the Nizam. The initial modest aims were to do away with the illegal and excessive exploitation meted out by these feudal lords in the name of bonded labour. The most strident demand was for the writing off of all debts of the peasants that were manipulated by the feudal lords.

At the same time the Nizam was resisting the Indian government's efforts to bring Hyderabad into the new Indian union. The government sent the army in September 1948 to incorporate Hyderabad into Indian Union. The Communist party instigated the peasants to use guerilla tactics and around 3000 villages (about 41000 sq. kilometers) came under peasant-rule. The landlords were either killed or driven out and the land was redistributed. These victorious villages established communes reminiscent of Soviet Mir (socials) to administer their region. These community governments were integrated regionally into a central organization. The CPI under the banner of Andhra Mahasabha led the rebellion. Few among the well-known individuals at the forefront of the movement were great leaders like P. Sundarayya, M. Basavapunniah, C. Rajeshwara Rao, Raavi Narayana Reddy, the Urdu poet Makhdoom Mohiuddin, Hassan Nasir, Arutla Ramachandra Reddy and his wife Kamala Bai and others. Sundarayya became the Gen. Secretary of the CPM and Rajeshwara Rao of the CPI after the split in 1964.

The forest bungalow at Narainpur is right opposite the main bus stand and when we went out that evening to make calls to our homes, the phone booth owner told us about what happened just a short while earlier. It seems that a group of armed policemen had boarded a bus bound from Chota Dongar for Narainpur. Midway, near Mahimagawadi, the bus was stopped and a group of armed Naxalites boarded it. The policemen were at the rear of the bus and the Naxalites sat in the front. In between sat many terrified passengers. The bus made its way to its destination and all aboard, the enemies of the state, the agents of the inimical state and innocent villagers alike disembarked and dispersed into the night. Quite clearly there is a balance of terror now in Bastar that forces co-existence. The gun ruled and the state has almost entirely withered away.

After the formation of Chattisgarh political power, instead of reflecting the tribal density and aspirations, generally passed into the hands of the Hindu elite. For a short period the new state had in Ajit Jogi, a former IAS officer and professedly a tribal belonging to the Marwahi tribe, as its first Chief Minister. Jogi was controversial from the very beginning. His tribal status was challenged in the courts. He was also a Christian. He faced many corruption charges, but this degree of corruption is just par for the course for an Indian politician. Nevertheless the ire of the Hindu upper castes are reserved for the dalits and adivasis who grab office from the traditional groups who provide the leadership to all of India's major political parties. Perhaps the biggest recommendation for him came from a Sub-inspector of Police in Narayanpur who fired a flaming glob of spittle reddened by *paan* at an invisible Ajit Jogi and described him as an enemy of the Brahmin Samaj. To be that in Bastar, where the real enemy is the creeping Hinduization with all its attendant values and exclusionary practices, seems to me a good start to the process of saving its tribal society from extinction. All over the rest of India's central highlands our policies by forcing the Adivasis to merge their identities with that of the encroaching culture have crushed them into a becoming a feeble and self-pitying underclass.

The armed police first went into Bastar, now in Chhattisgarh in 1966. The Gond people in Bastar revolted against the corrupt and exploitative ways of the Madhya Pradesh Congress government of DP Mishra. Pandit DP Mishra, a Sanskrit scholar of some repute, was very closely identified with the powerful *bidi* and *tendu* leaf interests in Madhya Pradesh. He was also a Hindu traditionalist with all the social habits and prejudices of the Brahmin orthodoxy. His interest in Bastar was mainly for its abundance of *tendu*

leaves and teak in its rich forests. In those days the Bastar forest began at Keskhal and went down all the way to the Godavari in the south, and the Sabari in the east. Even today you can see remnants of the virgin teak forests in Abujhmar that will give you an idea of what this forest was like. All that has now long vanished. The forests have receded south of Jagdalpur and even around Dantewara, what you see are leftovers of that great forest.

DP Mishra's government began the vandalization of Bastar that continues even today. When the *adivasis* began to protest against this assault on their habitat and began rallying around the traditional ruler, Mishra unleashed the police. Matters came to a head on 25 March 1966 when the police fired on the *adivasi's* who congregated in Jagdalpur to pay the customary Dussera homage to their Raja, Pravir Chandra Bhanj Deo. Not only did the MP police kill scores of *adivasis*, but they also gunned down the Raja in his home in cold blood. Soon after this incident central forces were deployed in Bastar and one got a first hand look at the havoc they wrought. The armed forces only repeated what they had done in the Naga Hills. In those days the armed forces used Lee Enfield .303 rifles and the *adivasis* used bows and arrows and the occasional muzzle-loading gun. With the advent of the AK-47 capable of delivering over 650 rounds per minute combined with an intimate knowledge of the terrain, the Naxalites, now mostly *adivasi* volunteers are not as disadvantaged as before. In the recent months the police have been at the receiving end and the Prime Minister is a worried man.

The only sign of the state here were the pockmarked buildings that once housed government schools and primary health centers (PHC's). At the village *haat* near Dantewara, as we stood watching cockfights a naxal patrol quietly came along and took *talashi* of our vehicle. They had a few good laughs over the cartons of mineral water we were carrying but refused to pose for pictures. Two days prior to this the vehicle was stopped and searched in AP's Warangal district by an armed police patrol. The Sub-inspector leading the team was drunk, as were most of his men. The first question was whether we were carrying firearms? Then they wanted to know how much cash we were carrying? Then things got a bit hairy. They wanted to know as to how we had entered the forest area without "permission". One got the distinct feeling that only our facility with English and the Delhi license plates prevented an encounter. And now Dr. Manmohan Singh's only serious proposal is to raise twenty-five more battalions of such fine fighting men to defend our democratic way of life and to uphold the Constitution?

Clearly there are two distinct reasons for the present unrest in the *Adivasi* homelands of India. The first and probably the more important one is the struggle for identity against the creeping Hinduization or de-culturation of *Adivasi* society. *Adivasi* society was built on a foundation of equality. People were given respect and status according to their contribution to social needs but only while they were performing that particular function. Such a value-system was sustainable as long as the *Adivasi* community was non-acquisitive and all the products of society were shared. *Adivasi* society has been under constant pressure as the money economy grew and made traditional forms of barter less difficult to sustain.⁶⁰

In his well-regarded ethnographic monograph “The Reddi’s of Bison Hills”, the anthropologist Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf⁶¹ recounts an incident he was witness to while studying this small tribal community near Parantapalli in the Paloncha Samasthan of the erstwhile Hyderabad State. It seems that a *sambhar* hind wounded by pursuing hunters living on the opposite bank of the Godavari crossed over to the shallow waters on the southern bank. The tribals here, who are still considered to be among the most backward and who at best of times went mostly hungry, instead of seizing the *sambhar* drove it back to the other side as by custom the prize belonged to the first group. This quality of altruism will seldom be seen in

⁶⁰ “In matters of trade, the **Adivasis** followed a highly evolved system of honour. All agreements that they entered into were honoured, often the entire tribe chipping in to honor an agreement made by an individual member of the tribe. Individual dishonesty or deceit was punished severely by the tribe. An individual who acted in a manner that violated the honor of the tribe faced potential banishment and family members lost the right to participate in community events during the period of punishment. But often, tribal integrity was undermined because the non-tribal’s who traded with the Adivasis reneged on their promises and took advantage of the sincerity and honesty of most members of the tribe.”
http://india_resource.tripod.com/adivasi.html

⁶¹ At the end of the war, **Haimendorf** was appointed to the position of **Advisor for Tribes and Backward Classes to the Nizam's Government of Hyderabad** to deal with the complicated issue of land reform. In the course of his work, he set up various educational and other schemes for tribal peoples, all with the aim of preserving and safeguarding indigenous cultures and languages. He also accepted a teaching appointment at Osmania University, which he later relinquished, after ten years in India, to accept a lectureship at the SOAS in 1949. Within months of his initial appointment, he was made Reader, and then Chair of Asian Anthropology in the School in 1951. During his 25 years as Professor, until his retirement in 1976, Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf saw the department through a period of quite exceptional growth, always encouraging his staff and students to conduct field-work as frequently and intensively as possible. He published ten ethnographic monographs based on his fieldwork, including *The Chenchus* (1943), *The Reddis of the Bison Hills* (1945), *The Raj Gonds of Adilabad* (1948), *The Sherpas of Nepal* (1964) and *The Konyak Nagas* (1969). He also published several other volumes of essays and theoretical works, including *Morals and merit* (1967) and *The tribes of India: struggle for survival* (1982), which drew heavily on his fieldwork.

any of our Hindu villages, where exploitation and forcible expropriation of property is a common fact of life.

The cleanliness of *Adivasi* villages and homes is a treat to one's eyes. The houses are colorfully painted and decorated, neat and clean. The surroundings are also kept clean. Even a Konda Reddi home, constructed on a raised earthen platform and made of bamboo and palm thatch is airy, neat and kept exceptionally clean. The Santhals, who make very picturesque houses, have an exceptional eye for beauty and aesthetics. They are also deeply concerned with personal hygiene and the cleanliness of their surroundings. A Santhal folk tale says "God placed rice inside a husk so it would remain clean". This is in stark contrast to homes in Hindu and Muslim dominated villages, which even in the wealthier areas of India are appallingly dirty and downright filthy. It is therefore, quite ironical, to see proposal after proposal from NGO's and other institutions seeking funding for community work in tribal areas citing the inculcation of cleanliness as among their main goals.

Tribal societies came under stress due to several other factors. Over the centuries the extension of commerce, military incursions on tribal land, and the resettling of Brahmins amidst tribal populations had an impact, as did ideological coercion or persuasion to attract key members of the tribe into "mainstream" Hindu society. This only led to many tribal communities becoming integrated into Hindu society as lower *jatis* (or castes). Quite clearly Hindu ways with their emphasis on stratification did not and still do not provide for any improvement in the status of the *Adivasis*. This and the failure of the government to provide even a modicum of development and improvement on the physical quality of life has left in its wake room for newer kinds of proselytism's. Marxism-Leninism/Maoism is one of them. The other creeping encroachment is that of the Christian missionaries who with their deep pockets and pocketbook conversions promise an exit from the material drudgery of life. Many *Adivasis* have found a good via media. Christian missionary provided education and healthcare in return for a supposed adherence to the Christian faith. Since the demand by Atal Behari Vajpayee in 1998 for a debate on conversion, the RSS and its front organizations have stepped up attacks on Christian missionaries and tried to drive them away from. The gruesome killing of the Australian missionary, the Dr. Graham Staines and his two children, which followed soon after

captured our headlines for a brief period.⁶²

The failure of Government in the tribal homelands is well documented. Even the Prime Minister was forced to admit it. In the same meeting of November 27, 2009 Dr. Manmohan Singh conceded that the Indian state and establishment have abused and exploited the country's more than 80 million tribal people. "There has been a systemic failure in giving the tribal's a stake in the modern economic processes that inexorably intrude into their living spaces. The alienation built over decades is now taking a dangerous turn in some parts of our country. The systematic exploitation and social and economic abuse of our tribal communities can no longer be tolerated." The Prime Minister also said the country's authorities "must change our ways of dealing with tribal's" and give them a "healing touch." It is "highly important," declared Singh, to integrate the tribal peoples "into the development processes... But this should not become a means of exploitation or be at the cost of their unique identity and their culture. This is the space the Naxalites are now exploiting,

A Tradition of Revolt and Resistance. The *Adivasi* revolts predate the advent of the Naxalites by more than a couple of centuries. Displaced from their homes, alienated from their lands and deprived of their resources, the tribal people have often taken to armed revolt in the past. In the Rampa region of East Godavari district more than a dozen tribal revolts occurred between 1770 and 1924. The main causes of these were the general discontent with the local administration and jagirdars, and traders and exploitation by outsiders. One revolt, between 1879 and 1916, was against the creation of forest reserves and restrictions on tribal people's access to the jungles.⁶³

Alluri Sitaramaraju who became a local legend led the 1922-24 rebellion, against the restrictions on shifting cultivation, and access to forests and the tyranny of petty local officials. In Adilabad district, which has a predominant Gond population, the Bebijhari uprising in 1940 was against exploitation by non-tribal people and land alienation, and restrictions on shifting cultivation and access to forests.⁶⁴

⁶² "One thousand years of Shame" by Mohan Guruswamy in **The Indian Express**, February 3, 1999.

⁶³ For a detailed account see "Tribal Revolts" by V.Raghaviah published (1971) by Andhra Rashtra Adimajati Seva Sangh, Nellore

⁶⁴ **How the tribal revolt began?** by Asha Krishnakumar in **Frontline**, Volume 21 - Issue 19, Sept. 11 - 24, 2004

Elsewhere in India too the *Adivasi* ferment predates even the freedom movement. As soon as the British took over Eastern India tribal revolts broke out to challenge alien rule. In the early years of colonization, no other community in India offered such heroic resistance to British rule or faced such tragic consequences, as did the numerous *Adivasi* communities of now Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Orissa and Bengal. In 1772, the Paharia revolt broke out which was followed by a five-year uprising led by Tilka Manjhi who was hanged in Bhagalpur in 1785. The Tamar and Munda revolts followed. In the next two decades, revolts took place in Singhbhum, Gumla, Birbhum, Bankura, Manbhum and Palamau, followed by the great Kol Risings of 1832 and the Khewar and Bhumij revolts (1832-34). In 1855, the Santhals waged war against the permanent settlement of Lord Cornwallis, and a year later, numerous *Adivasi* leaders played key roles in the 1857 war of independence.

The British through massive deployment of troops quelled *Adivasi* uprisings in the Jharkhand belt across the region. The Kherwar uprising and the Birsa Munda movement were the most important of the late-18th century struggles against British rule and their local agents. The long struggle led by Birsa Munda was directed at British policies that allowed the *zamindars* and moneylenders to harshly exploit the *Adivasis*. In 1914 Jatra Oraon started what is called the Tana Movement (which drew the participation of over 25,500 *Adivasis*). The Tana movement joined the nation-wide Satyagraha Movement in 1920 and stopped the payment of land-taxes to the colonial Government.

During British rule, several revolts also took place in Orissa that naturally drew participation from the *Adivasis*. The significant ones included the Paik Rebellion of 1817, the Ghumsar uprisings of 1836-1856, and the Sambhalpur revolt of 1857-1864.⁶⁵

Clearly the Government needs to think its way through this more carefully and with far greater intelligence than it has shown itself capable of so far. It must be able to distinguish *Adivasi* aspirations from Maoist intentions. The former needs to be nurtured while the later needs to be defeated. But the problem is that this is beyond the capability of the public administration apparatus we have in place now.

⁶⁵ [Http://india_resource.tripod.com/adivasi.html](http://india_resource.tripod.com/adivasi.html)

In the Heart of Darkness. If you place a map of India in front of you and put a finger on what you think is its very center then the chances are good that your finger will cover a tiny place called Multai in the Betul district of Madhya Pradesh. Over 35% of Betul district is made up of tribal's of whom the Gonds account for a quarter of the total population. The other major caste groupings are the Pawars and Kunbis, both backward castes whose economic and social condition may only be marginally better than the *Dalits* and *Adivasis*. The plight of the *Adivasis* is probably even worse in this part of the Satpura range where the deforestation is now total and what is left is a monsoon dependent arid and dusty landscape of small farms on rolling hills from which a marginal living can at best be pried out in the good years.

Multai is a small market town, about sixty kilometers south of Betul on what passes off as being a national highway that links Nagpur and Bhopal. It is also the source of the Tapti River that like the better-known Narmada flows westwards to debouch into the Arabian Sea. It's a dirty and smelly town with overflowing sewage channels and piles of cattle dung and extrusions of pig shit that make walking on the narrow lanes dicey. It's on the main north-south rail line but few trains stop here. I have driven through Multai several times over the years and had so far not even cared to stop by for a cup of tea at a roadside *dhaba*. It's that kind of place.

In the third week of November 2008 I finally stopped by at Multai and spent the good part of a week there and in the surrounding villages. What one saw was distressing and depressing. In the small village of Jhulpa (pop.495) the *sarpanch*, Radhubhai Kumre, an *adivasi* woman stated the problems with dignified brevity. There is a severe water problem and that 80% of the men had gone to Bhavnagar in Gujarat as migrant workers. Of the 550 acres owned by the villagers, only 50 acres are irrigated by wells. The rest depend on rain. Gonds comprise 60% of the population with 30% Pawars and the rest Dalits, a composition which puts them pretty low in the order of priorities of the powers that be. The village along with the neighboring village of Kondhar had received only 70 quintals of wheat under the Food for Work program. Both which together have a working population of 500 persons can thus provide work for only a hundred persons for just seven working days. She also told me that Namdev Wadbhude, the government appointed secretary of the village panchayat and a class III government employee has not showed up in the village for over two months. On the other hand whenever he determines there is work to be done, he summons the *sarpanch* to Pattan town where he lives.

The only outsiders who seem to regularly visit the village are the goons of MP's most favored excise contractor who regularly beat up the Gonds who are each allowed to distil unto 5 liters of *mahua* liquor for personal consumption. But if they distil their own booze, and maybe even sell a bit the official excise contractor, Som Distillers, loses business. The company makes significant contributions to keep the political machineries of both the major parties, the BJP and Congress, well greased and hence the police are not about to take any action on them. It was the same sorry story in village after village. Somgad, Ambori, Kondhar....

It was another story in the large village of Berul (pop.5500). The population mostly belongs to the relatively prosperous *Mali* community and the major crop of the area is cabbage. There is almost 1500 hectares under this and the farmers get a yield of about 20 tons or two truckloads per hectare. The price of Rs. 10-12000 per ha they get just about enables them to break even. This works out to 50-60 paise per kilo is nowhere near the Rs.10-12 per kilo the consumer pays, suggesting that only the middlemen prosper in the chain. The road joining Berul to Multai is in a worse state than the usual MP road, meaning there are more potholes than tarmac on it. It also means that the trucks charge more. Electricity is intermittent. The village boasts of one room government clinic and a part of the newly constructed school building recently collapsed. The villagers consider themselves fortunate that it collapsed during the night. A retired SDO who now lives here told me that he now realizes how pernicious and uncaring the system he served so long actually is. This is a prosperous village when compared to the Gond villages, but the mood of hopelessness is worse here than there.

A famous Indian (guess who?) said that the soul of India lives in its villages.⁶⁶ Some now say that Bharat lives in the villages and India in the towns. But Bharat sees India everyday for TV now reaches out almost every village where people get to see what is happening in the towns, cities and metropolises where liberalization has given the middle class a new lifestyle and where globalization is the new mantra. Will they just sit back and watch the show? Or will they be soon demanding that something comes their way also? This is the mother lode of discontent waiting to be tapped in most of

⁶⁶ "**The soul of India lives in its villages**", declared M. K. Gandhi at the beginning of 20th century. According to the 2001 Indian census, 74% of Indians live in 638,365 different villages. The size of these villages varies considerably. 236,004 Indian villages have a population less than 500, while 3,976 villages have a population of 10,000+.

India. The national political parties have other pre-occupations. It's the small regional parties and the Naxalites who are tapping this. A tourist brochure of the MP government describes the state as “the heart of India” when it would be more apt to describe it as the empty belly of India. Nevertheless if one insists that it is the heart of India, it must be its heart of darkness.

What is to be done?⁶⁷ _There is no need to seek solutions in VI Lenin’s prescriptions. And for that matter in Mao Zedong’s. Solutions lie within the Indian Constitution and in the universal principles of justice and equality. In the early days of our Republic, Jawaharlal Nehru on the advice of people like Verrier Elwin sought to insulate the tribal areas from the predations of the new order that was emerging in India. The migration of outsiders into the traditional *adivasi* homelands continues unabated. This need to be reversed and the census data that will be available after the currently underway Census of India will provide enough information about who is a local person and who is an outsider. There are 332 tribal majority *tehsils*⁶⁸ in India, of which 110 are in the Northeast. Thus we see that in as many as 222 *tehsils* spanning a population of over 20 million.⁶⁹ Even so this is less than a quarter of the total number of tribal people in India, which the Census of 2001 estimated was about 84 million.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ "What Is to Be Done?" was a political pamphlet, written by VI Lenin at the end of 1901 and early 1902. A novel by Nikolai Chernyshevsky with the same name inspired the title. The piece called for the formation of a revolutionary vanguardist party that would direct the efforts of the working class. Lenin thought that left to their own devices, workers would be merely satisfied with "trade unionism and that only a revolutionary party could direct a "scientific" socialist revolution." "The history of all countries shows," he wrote, "that the working class, exclusively by its own efforts, is able to develop only trade-union consciousness," that is, combining into unions, etc. Socialism, however, is the product of the intellectuals. The piece partly precipitated the split of the Russian Social Democratic Party (RSDLP) between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. The former became Lenin's revolutionary party, while the latter preferred to take a more moderate path to liberal government that they hoped might eventually lead to socialist revolution.

⁶⁸ A **tehsil** also known as **tahsil, tahasil, taluka, taluk, taluq, and mandal**) is an administrative division, also known as a sub-division in some states. Generally, a tehsil consists of a city or [town](#) that serves as its *headquarters*, possibly additional towns, and a number of villages. As an entity of local government, it exercises certain fiscal and administrative powers over the village panchayat's and municipal councils within its jurisdiction. It is the ultimate executive agency for land records and related administrative matters. Its chief official is usually called the tehsildar.

⁶⁹ **An Atlas of Tribal India:** With Computed Tables of District-Level Data and Its Geographical Interpretation (Hardcover) by~ Moonis Raza and Aijazuddin Ahmed. New Delhi: Concept Pub. Co., 1990.

⁷⁰ [Despite the waves of migration that have reduced the adivasis to minorities in their traditional](#) homelands, leaving [few tribal majority areas in Central India, many tribal languages and dialects continue to flourish.](#) Almost 9.6 million and Santali speak the Bhil/Bhilodi language [by almost 6.5 million, which are more than the 5.5 million](#) Kashmiri or [2.5 million Konkani speakers. In the case of the former it is the basis of seeking](#)

The Fifth and Sixth Schedules under Article 244 of the Indian Constitution in 1950 provided for self-governance in specified tribal majority areas.⁷¹ In 1999 the Government of India even issued a draft National Policy on Tribals⁷² to address the developmental needs of tribal people. Special emphasis was laid on education, forestry, healthcare, languages, resettlement and land rights. The NDA government even established a Ministry of Tribal Affairs. The draft was meant to be circulated between MP's, MLA's and Civil Society groups. A Cabinet Committee on Tribal Affairs was meant to constantly review the policy. Little has happened since. The draft policy is still a draft, which means there is no policy. But it must also be stated that this sudden concern for tribals was mostly motivated by the fears of conversion to Christianity that would have precluded their assimilation into the Hindu samaj. Thus, even though the states of Chattisgarh and Jharkhand were carved out of Bihar and Madhya Pradesh, real tribal issues relating to their culture, way of life and aspirations were not addressed. Political power has still, by and large, eluded them. Even when tribal leaders come to the fore they are quickly sucked into the ways of the traditional ruling classes and prove no less avaricious and corrupt.⁷³ Not to be left behind the UPA government drafted the Scheduled Tribes (Recognition of Forest Rights) Bill in 2005 but did not act upon it due to pressure mounted by self-styled wildlife activists and the wildlife tourism lobby.

[a separate nation while in the case of the latter it is the basis of seeking a separate state. For more details see Census of India, 2001.](#)

⁷¹ The Fifth Schedule of the Indian Constitution ('the Fifth Schedule') provides for the administration and control of tribal lands (termed 'scheduled areas') within nine states of India. The Fifth Schedule provides protection to the Adivasi (tribal) people living in scheduled areas from alienation of their lands and natural resources to non-tribals. This constitutional safeguard is now under imminent threat of being amended to effect transfer of tribal lands to non-tribals and corporate bodies. This move has serious implications for the very survival and culture of the millions of tribal people in India. The Fifth Schedule covers Tribal areas in 9 states of India namely Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Orissa and Rajasthan.

⁷² The Indian government has released a **draft national policy on tribals** to address the issue of developing this section of the population in "an integrated and holistic manner". For the first time since the formation of the Indian republic, 60 years ago, the **Ministry of Tribal Affairs** released the draft document whose aim is to "uplift the tribals who have been facing acute poverty, alienation from land and lack of livelihood opportunities," in many parts of India. The document was released in New Delhi on July 21, 2006.

⁷³ [Take the cases of Shibu Soren and Madhu Koda, which seem trouble us so much. It is well known that many of our more "mainstream" leaders have accumulated more or have caused the public exchequer far greater losses. The award of the 2G spectrum which is reported to have caused the nation tens of thousand crores has not caused the Telecom Minister, A Raja, any discomfiture. Even the Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, has on occasion defended him. The recent exposes relating to IPL cricket where politicians of all hues and colors are active players has not caused any problems to them.](#)

Even before Independence on December 16 1946, welcoming the Objectives Resolution in the Constituent Assembly, the legendary *adivasi* leader Jaipal Singh⁷⁴ stated the tribal case and apprehensions explicitly. He said: “As a *jungli*, as an *Adibasi*, I am not expected to understand the legal intricacies of the Resolution. But my common sense tells me that every one of us should march in that road to freedom and fight together. Sir, if there is any group of Indian people that has been shabbily treated it is my people. They have been disgracefully treated, neglected for the last 6,000 years. The history of the Indus Valley civilization, a child of which I am, shows quite clearly that it is the new comers — most of you here are intruders as far as I am concerned — it is the new comers who have driven away my people from the Indus Valley to the jungle fastness...The whole history of my people is one of continuous exploitation and dispossession by the non-aboriginals of India punctuated by rebellions and disorder, and yet I take Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru at his word. I take you all at your word that now we are going to start

⁷⁴ <http://www.tribalzone.net/people/jaipalsingh.htm> **Jaipal Singh Munda**: January, 1903 – March, 1970. A distinguished parliamentarian, a sportsman of international repute, an educationist, a politician with great vision and courage, a powerful orator with mastery over multiple national and foreign languages, Jaipal Singh Munda was a multi-faceted personality.

With a typical Munda ear for music, love for dance and theatre, the “man extraordinary” was destined to lead the Adivasi movement. A student of St John’s College, Oxford, Jaipal graduated in 1926 with Honours in Economics. At Oxford he made a name as an all-rounder, excelling in studies, sports and in debating. He was an Oxford blue in hockey and a regular columnist on hockey in the London press. He was the president of the Junior Common Room at St John’s College, an honour not non-British student managed. As the president of the Oxford *Indian Majlis*, Jaipal Singh interacted with personalities like C.F. Andrews, Annie Besant and Lala Lajpat Rai. The leader of the Swatantra Party, N.G. Ranga, a contemporary of Jaipal in Oxford had said of him, “ Even in those days, Jaipal would never tolerate denigration of Indians by the British, he was unique in many ways”.

In 1927-28 Jaipal Singh was selected as an Indian Civil Service probationer that required two years of training in Oxford. During this period, he was appointed the captain of the first Indian national hockey team in the Olympic Hockey Tournament in Amsterdam in 1928, where India won the gold. He led his team successfully through all the matches. However, he did not play in the title clash with Holland, as he had to return to London for his ICS final.

Jaipal Singh scored highest marks in ICS viva voce, but was asked to repeat a year as he broke the term for his Amsterdam trips. He felt humiliated at this, especially after his hockey laurels for which even the viceroy of India had wired congratulatory messages to him. He resigned from ICS and took up a job with Burma Shell as a senior executive, appointed directly by the chairman of the company. During his posting in Calcutta, he married Tara Wienfried Majumdar, the granddaughter of Woomesh Chandra Banerjee, the first and the third president of the Indian National Congress. In 1934, Jaipal Singh joined as a commerce teacher at the Prince of Wales College at Achimota, Gold Coast, Ghana. In 1937, he returned to India as the vice-principal and the principal incumbent of the Rajkumar College, Raipur. In 1938, he left the school and joined as the colonization minister and revenue commissioner in the Bikaner princely State and was promoted as foreign secretary. Jaipal Singh thought that with his varied experience he could be more useful to the country through the Congress. His encounter with Rajendra Prasad at the Sadaquat Ashram in Patna, however, did not go well. The then Governor of Bihar, Sir Maurice Hallet offered to nominate him to the Bihar Legislative Council but Jaipal Singh declined. Sir Hallet and the Chief Secretary of Bihar, Robert Russell, then suggested that he return to Ranchi and take charge of the Adivasi movement that had just started. The return to Ranchi was Jaipal’s homecoming.

a new chapter, a new chapter of independent India where there is equality of opportunity, where no one would be neglected.” The Resolution, to Jaipal, was simply a modern restatement of his own people’s point of view. In *adivasi* society, there was no discrimination by caste and gender. Thus “you cannot teach democracy to the tribal people; you have to learn democratic ways from them.” The *adivasis* paid dearly for taking Jawaharlal Nehru at his word. Even if the provisions of the Constitution were implemented in some measure if not all of its spirit and word, the present situation would not have come to be.

But there are several paradoxes that must also be dealt with first.⁷⁵ The most important of these is that to provide good government in the worst of law and order environments. A better civil administration structure must come up in place of the one present. This means the best officers drawn from across the country. Perhaps it is time to constitute a new All India Service, similar to the former Indian Frontier Administrative Service. The IFAS was an eclectic group of officers drawn from various arms of the government. Unfortunately it was merged into the IAS.⁷⁶ All tribal majority areas must be consolidated into administrative divisions whose authority must be vested with democratically chosen leadership. This body could be called the Adivasi Maha-panchayat and must function as a largely autonomous institution. All laws passed by the state legislatures must be ratified to the satisfaction of the Maha-panchayat. Instead of the state capital controlled government, the instruments of public administration dealing with education, health, irrigation, roads and land records must be handed over to local government structures. The police must also be made answerable to local elected officials and not be a law unto themselves. The lament of the *Adivasi* about their role in their government is well known. It is the subject of many a folk song.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Chandigarh, April 9 (IANS) **Vice President M. Hamid Ansari** said “The public domain is witnessing a debate on the crisis of governance in the country in recent years and the focus of this debate is on the ethical dimension of it. The palpable public disenchantment with it (governance) has directed the focus of the debate on the ethical dimension of the framework of governance. This too is reflected in the report of the second Administrative Reforms Commission, which begins with a candid acknowledgement that governance is the weak link in our quest for prosperity and equity.”

⁷⁶ A special service known as the **Indian Frontier Administrative Service** was established in 1957, to administer the Northeastern states. This service was doing a commendable job of adequately administering the Northeastern states with due regard to cultural and tribal sensitivities of the people. For reasons best known to the government, the Indian Frontier Administrative Service was abolished in the later half of the sixties and merged into the IAS.

⁷⁷ “And the Gods were greatly troubled/ in their heavenly courts and councils/ Sat no Gods of Gonds among them. / Gods of other nations sat there/ Eighteen threshing-floors of Brahmins/ Sixteen scores of Telinganas/ But no Gods of Gonds appeared there/ From the Glens of Seven Mountains/ From the twelve

The local community must get all the royalties for the minerals extracted from their areas. Till recently the royalty paid by the extractors was a meager Rs.27 per metric ton. It has now been raised to 10% of the market price.⁷⁸ The cost of extraction is estimated to be not more than Rs.250 per ton. The export price has never fallen below Rs. 1500 per ton. In February 2010 the landed price per ton of Indian iron ore in China was \$128, which is over Rs.6000 per ton.⁷⁹ So one can imagine the margins the private and state owned exporters are raking in. Similar advantages are also accruing the Indian producers of steel, like Tata Steel and the state owned SAIL. But the real problem is that this relatively small amount of over Rs.4600 crores because of the enhanced royalty will accrue to the state government's coffers and like before little will filter down. It now needs to be mandated by law that for minerals extracted in tribal areas the royalty received should be entirely earmarked to the local administration. Only the *Adivasi* Mahapanchayat should be vested with the power to give mineral exploitation licenses to corporations.

If land is required for industrialization, the prices must be fixed to the satisfaction of local government authorities and not arbitrarily set by distant bureaucrats to suit the convenience of the investing corporation. We cannot have any more episodes like that in Kalinga Nagar⁸⁰ where the Tata's got *Adivasi* lands at a fraction of their market value. Tata's and others now want to exploit Bastar's iron ore. We have before us the experience of the

hills of the valleys." Page 151, from a song of the Pardhans or bards of the Gonds. Translated by Captain J. Forsyth in " **The Highlands of Central India**" reprint published in 1996 by Asian Educational Services. Original published by Chapman and Hall, Ltd., London 1919. ISBN 81-206-1159-4

⁷⁸ The CCEA has approved 10 per cent royalty on iron ore. Royalty rates on many other minerals have also been revised. A formal notification for the same is likely to be issued in a day or two," a top mines ministry official told PTI. "The government is likely to earn Rs 4,629 crore from the changes in the royalty structure based on the production levels of 2007-08," he said. In 2007-08, the government had earned an estimated Rs 2,280 crore. Last fiscal's details could not be ascertained. Press Trust of India / New Delhi August 12, 2009.

⁷⁹ "Iron'ic? Story of the Great Indian Loot." By Shankar Raghuraman in **The Times of India**, Hyderabad, June 5, 2010

⁸⁰ **Tata Steel** signed a memorandum of understanding with the Orissa government for the Kalinganagar project in November 2004. More than five years on, 300 families are yet to be moved from the site. The project saw violent agitation against land acquisition in 2006, when police firing killed 14 tribals. Human rights activists have blamed industrial projects for displacing tribal's, a cause taken up by Naxalites on a war footing, literally. According to a recent Citigroup report, tribals are among the biggest victims of displacement. Although they comprise nine per cent of the population, their land is 40 per cent of the land acquired till date.

Nerurkar admitted the Naxalite movements had local support. "There is a dissatisfied lot," he said. "Tata Steel wants to adjust to this issue by working with the communities. We have been doing this for 100 years and will continue to do it."

National Mineral Development Corporation's giant iron ore extraction project at Bailladilla in Bastar's Dantewara district. The locals get nothing but the most menial jobs and in return their hitherto pristine environment is ravaged beyond recognition with the streams choked with the debris of excavation. In 2007 the Andhra Pradesh government, in complete contravention of the laws governing the conversion of notified forests and tribal homelands and in a total reversal of the pre-election commitments of the Congress party, has signed agreements with Jindal South West (JSW) of the Jindal group and the Anrak company of Ras-al-Khaimah to mine bauxite in the picturesque Araku Valley in the eastern district of Vizagapatam. This is estimated to displace over 100,000 tribals while creating jobs for a mere four hundred. The state government expects to receive a royalty of Rs. 64.5 crores while the two companies are slated to rake in Rs. 1260 crores and Rs. 2350 crores respectively.⁸¹ Clearly this kind of exploitation of tribal homelands and loot of the state has got to stop. And above all if natural resources must be exploited, then the local communities which bear the brunt of the suffering and burden due to displacement and pollution must benefit the most. This is possible only when the public administration system is decentralized to ensure that local governments feel responsible for their people. That is why the Fifth and Sixth schedules under Article 244 of the Indian Constitution were enshrined in it in 1950. Clearly sixty years is long enough to give the provisions of the Constitution life?

The real tragedy of the matter is that it is not as if the authorities are not aware of the oppression and exploitation of our tribal people. The Supreme Court while dealing with a case relating to the acquisition of tribal land in Sundergarh district of Orissa by the Mahanadi Coalfields Ltd., a Government of India enterprise, found that people whose lands were taken two decades ago were still not paid any compensation. In a stunning rebuke to the government a bench of the Court comprising of Justices Aftab Alam and BS Mohanty termed its development policies "blinkered" and held it responsible for "fuelling extreme discontent and giving rise to naxalism and militancy." The Court also referred to the large-scale displacement of tribals from forest land in the name of mining and development and said that the "non-settlement of their rights and non-provision of timely compensation of

⁸¹ "Development? 1 L to lose land, jobs for 400." By G.Arun Kumar in **The Times of India**, Hyderabad on June 5, 2010.

their lost land has created the worst kind of hatred among them towards development, possible giving rise to extremism.”⁸²

Another manifestation of “civilization” here has been the incidence of venereal diseases and the numbers of children fathered by NMDC employees who exploit liberal adivasi values. Clearly we need a new paradigm of development to work here. Merely establishing a “plantation” does not develop an area. In return for their land, heritage and sheer cultural assault on their mores and values, the poor Maria Gonds of the region have got nothing. Sure India needs more iron ore, but people like the Tata’s must be made to pay a price commensurate with the costs they will impose. If hydrocarbon reserves are opened to exploitation to the highest bidder, surely a similar and possible more equitable way can be found for the extraction of other mineral wealth? Just like Mr. Ratan Tata pays full value for acquiring Corus or Jaguar, he must now learn to pay full value to the people of the region who own the land. Mr. Tata will do well to visit an Indian reservation in the USA, where the community now gets top dollar prices for their resources.

In the life of a nation, things are never too late. Changes in course can always be charted. All that is needed is to realize that State is floundering and that it has made huge mistakes perpetrated huge injustices and has inflicted huge sufferings on tens of millions. The people who are vested with the control of the State must have the humility to realize this. It’s never too late for a new beginning. But first the Prime Minister of India must have the bigness of heart to beg the forgiveness of India’s *Adivasi* people and seek a new beginning.

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 July 22, 2010

⁸² “Skewed growth to blame for rise of Naxals: SC” by Dhananjay Mahapatra (TNN) in **The Times of India**, New Delhi on July 21, 2010.