

Afterword

Ten years after writing that last hopeful paragraph, Bastar's future looks bleak. It may now be part of a new 'tribal' state, Chhattisgarh, but in a large part of the former district,¹ scores of villages have been emptied, burnt houses stand testimony to war, and feral cattle roam amongst the ravages of fallen crops. Over a hundred thousand people have been displaced in an anti-Naxalite counterinsurgency operation called Salwa Judum—half of them forced by the government into sub-human roadside camps where the choices are starvation or lumpenization. Large numbers have fled into neighbouring districts and states, where they camp, desperate and alone, under trees, in makeshift tents, or live at the mercy of relatives and friends, doing unaccustomed wage labour. An equal number are in the jungles with the Naxalites. Young men armed by the government wield their guns with new-found machismo, excited when they find and kill some 'dreaded Maoist' who is often a former neighbour or even a relative, but are deeply nervous at the demons they have unleashed within. And in the jungles, the Maoists carry out military exercises, defending some imagined 'guerilla zone'.² In an ironic twist orchestrated by the Indian state, young Naga and Mizo reservists, whose collective historical memories include the burning and regrouping of their own villages a few decades earlier,³ burn adivasi villages and rape women

¹ In 1998, Bastar was divided into three districts, Bastar, Kanker and Dantewada.

² The People's War Group which has been active in Bastar since the 1980s merged with the Maoist Co-ordination Centre (MCC) and Communist Party of India Marxist Leninist (Party Unity), and formed the Communist Party of India (Maoist) in 2004. Accordingly, I use the terms Naxalite and Maoist interchangeably. According to the Maoists, the 'Dandakaranya Guerilla Zone (comprising Gadchiroli, Bhandara, Balaghat, Rajnandgaon, undivided Bastar and Malkangiri) covers 60 lakh people. It is headed by the Dandakaranya Special Zonal Committee and has seven divisional committees under it. These in turn have range and village committees under them.

³ See Sajal Nag, *Contesting Marginality: Ethnicity, Insurgency and Subnationalism in North-East India*, Delhi, Manohar, 2002, pp. 246–53. The Naga Hoho and civil society organizations, however, issued an apology for the behaviour of the Naga reservists to the people of Chhattisgarh.

with impunity. Official documents of the Government of India talk about the need for development and land reform, while helicopters drone overhead and security forces cordon off villages protesting against their land being acquired for steel plants. The extraordinarily beautiful landscape of Dantewada is now militarized, perhaps lastingly so.

Constructing Naxalism as India's Biggest Security Threat

In mid-2006, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh declared the Naxalites the biggest threat to internal security in the country. While the Ministry of Home Affairs Status Paper on the Naxal Problem (2006) recognises that 'Naxalites operate in a vacuum created by inadequacy of administrative and political institutions, espouse local demands and take advantage of the prevalent disaffection and injustice among the exploited segments of the population and seek to offer an alternative system of governance which promises emancipation of these segments', the emphasis of the status paper is on Naxalite violence, and the need for an effective 'police response'.⁴ 'Development' figures somewhere, but fairly low down the list of priorities (priority 12 out of 14), and only so as to counter the Naxalites and not because the citizens of India have a right to land reform, security of tenure and employment.

'Police responses', moreover, are couched in terms that require huge expenditure rather than greater professionalism and courteous treatment of the public, even though police behaviour is a major cause of support for Naxalism.⁵ Proposals to tackle the Naxalites include: modernization of state police involving the latest weaponry and modern communication equipment; fortification of police stations and outposts in Naxalite areas; supply of mine-protected vehicles; deployment of central paramilitary forces, and the creation of more India Reserve Battalions. Under a Security Related Expenditure (SRE) scheme, states are fully

⁴ Ministry of Home Affairs, Status Paper on the Naxal Problem, Internal Security Division, 18/5/2006, p. 1 (henceforth MHA 2006).

⁵ An extract from my fieldnotes, October 1998, reads: 'The Thanedar, CS Sharma is said to have raped a Dhurwa girl from Kukanar. At first the Additional SP Sukma refused to register a case against him, and the poor girl was taken around in a jeep, ostensibly to record her evidence but really in an effort to get her to retract. The CPI tried its best to get him removed, but the Thakurs refused to cooperate. It was only after he got drunk and abused a Thakur woman, that they joined in asking for his removal.'

reimbursed for expenditure such as that on the rehabilitation of surrendered Naxalites, police insurance, or anti-Naxalite publicity.⁶

Given the emphasis of the state on Naxalite violence, it is worth looking at some of the official figures. To begin with Bastar, where in 1998 the government launched combing operations against the Naxalites with the help of sixteen companies of special armed police.⁷ Police figures for the period 1968–98 show that seventy people were killed in ‘Naxalite related incidents’.⁸ This is hardly beyond the scope of efficient policing. Deaths went up dramatically in 2005–06, but primarily because of the Salwa Judum.

Table VIII: *Deaths due to Naxalite Violence*

	2003	2004	2005	2006 (till 30.4.2006)
India	515	566	669	281
Chhattisgarh	74	83	165	187

NB: These figures include police personnel. Source: MHA 2006, Annexure II

The government worries about ‘simultaneous attacks at multiple locations by large numbers of Naxalites in a military type operation... looting of weapons at Giridih, detention of a passenger train in Latehar, looting of explosives from the NMDC magazine in Chhattisgarh’,⁹

⁶ MHA 2006, pp 6–10. See also Gautam Navlakha, ‘Maoists in India’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, June 3, 2006, p. 2187. The expenditure on publicity is visible in the signboards and printed posters along the highway in Dantewada denouncing the Maoists—rather pointless in a largely illiterate district.

⁷ *People’s March*, January 1999. *People’s March* is a magazine which carries Maoist views.

⁸ Figures provided by the Office of the Inspector General of Police in Jagdalpur, 1998. Even if one factors in the 131 attempts to murder, 95 cases of dacoity, 21 cases of loot, 2 and 3 cases of rape and abduction respectively, 60 cases of beating, 230 cases of arson, and 265 miscellaneous cases from 1968–98, they would compare favourably to average crime statistics in districts without Naxalites. Many of them are likely to be located in village-level conflicts, and to be carried out by villagers themselves as against armed squads and hence should really be part of the general crime statistics of the district.

⁹ Minutes of the 20th Meeting of the Coordination Centre held on 31.3.2006 at Vignyan Bhawan, New Delhi, F. No. II-18015/21/06–IS.III, Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, (IS Division), April 28, 2006. (Henceforth Coordination Centre Minutes).

and the fact that Naxalite activity is visible in 509 police stations out of 12,476 police stations in eleven states in 2006.¹⁰

Estimates of the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army, which was formed in 2000, suggest that they have about 7,300 weapons for 10,500 armed cadre nationwide, a 25,000 people's militia and 50,000 members in village level units.¹¹ While television footage of the guerrillas training shows most of them possessing only obsolete .303 rifles, which they have captured from the police,¹² police sources also say that they have 'AK-series assault rifles, carbines, 7.62 mm self-loading rifles, grenade launchers, mines, improvised explosive devices and mortars'.¹³

While the threat that these figures constitute may be debated, there is no evidence to suggest that the amount of weaponry and personnel that is deployed against the Maoists is justified even in the state's own terms; and in the case of Salwa Judum, it has been counterproductive. The growth in Maoist influence could easily be read not so much as evidence of their own strength but as evidence of growing dissatisfaction with the government. While the Maoists kill more civilians every year than police personnel,¹⁴ and fetishize militarism (see for instance, the statement 'hailing' the attack on the Jehanabad jail in 2005, where they argue that 'there is no alternative before the people but to arm themselves'),¹⁵ they are not alone in this. The government's emphasis on policing and militarism is also evident from the statistics it provides about the lack of police stations in Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand,¹⁶ quite forgetting that under the 5th Schedule and the Panchayats Extension to Scheduled Areas Act (PESA), these areas are meant to be lightly policed.¹⁷

¹⁰ MHA 2006, p. 2; this currently amounts to about 4% of the police stations in less than one third of the states and union territories in the country.

¹¹ Navlakha, 2006, p. 2187.

¹² CNN IBN story on the CPI (Maoist) by C. Vanaja, NDTV story by Rajesh Ramachandran.

¹³ Rahul Bedi, 'Maoist Insurgency spreads in India', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, July 1, 2006.

¹⁴ MHA 2006; see also K. Balagopal, 'Maoist Movement in Andhra Pradesh', *Economic and Political Weekly*, July 22, 2006, p. 3185.

¹⁵ Press Release by CPI (Maoist), *People's March*, 6 (11), November–December 2005, p. 5.

¹⁶ 'Against a national average of 123 police officers for every 100,000 people, Bihar has just 56, Jharkhand 74, Chhattisgarh and Orissa 92 and Andhra 99.' The statistics are from Rahul Bedi, 'Maoist Insurgency spreads in India'.

¹⁷ See also chapter 6 of this book.

The overwhelming focus on Naxalite violence conceals more than it illuminates about the nature of Indian democracy. When the two ruling parties, the Congress and the BJP, have each been responsible for the deaths of thousands of citizens,¹⁸ where dowry deaths every year exceed 6,000, where the number of murders annually in Uttar Pradesh (not known for Naxalism) exceeds 7,000, and where 25,000 cases are registered annually on average for crimes against the Scheduled Castes,¹⁹ it is clear that violence or killings alone cannot account for the government's anxiety about Naxalism.

'Extortion', another crime that the Maoists are accused of and which has led to the posting of thousands of armed personnel to adivasi areas, is also a relative concept. Naxalite levies on contractors are unhealthy, even if they insist on minimum wages, since they do not pose an alternative to the contractor system or promote transparency. However, other parallel systems of informal taxes routinely operate without government censure. In Bastar, every passing jeep has to give a regular 200 rupees per month to all the police stations along its route,²⁰ while far more substantial sums are given to higher police and forest officials for facilitating illegal mining or tree felling (see last section).

Much of the discourse around Naxalism in India today is akin to what Stuart Hall *et al.* identified as the creation of a 'moral panic' around mugging in 1970s Britain:

When the official reaction to a person, group of persons or series of events is out of all proportion to the actual threat offered, when 'experts' in the form of police chiefs, the judiciary, politicians and editors perceive the threat in all but identical terms, and appear to talk 'with one voice' of rates, diagnoses, prognoses and solutions, when the media representations universally stress 'sudden and dramatic' increases (in numbers involved or events) and 'novelty' above and beyond that which a realistic approach

¹⁸ 2733 people officially died in Delhi in the anti-Sikh pogroms of 1984 (see www.carnage84.com/official/ahoojalahooja.htm), and 1254 in the anti-Muslim pogroms of Gujarat 2002 (Answer in Parliament provided by Minister of State for Home, August 2005).

¹⁹ The Hindu, 13 September 2003. The figures for dowry deaths relate to the years 2000–2 and the crimes against SC from 1998 to 2000, and in fact go up to 33,501 cases in 2001. See also http://www.neoncarrot.co.uk/h_aboutindia/india_crime_stats.html#various_crime

²⁰ These were the rates in 2006, and like everything else reflect inflation from when I first noted the phenomena in the 1990s.

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would sustain, then we believe it is appropriate to speak of the beginnings of a *moral panic*.²¹

What is then at stake is the government's image of being firm and taking action; action which may have no direct relevance or efficiency in tackling the problem at hand. While Naxalism may not be 'merely a law and order problem',²² the reaction to it upholds a certain order, often at the expense of the rule of law. In his essay on political violence, Ted Honderich invites readers to think about their feelings in the face of systematic inequality versus their feelings in the face of violence aimed at overthrowing unequal orders. The former, he argues, are characterized by passivity—people are less informed about the facts of inequality, its agents are more invisible and more ubiquitous, and the phenomenon itself is more familiar and is seen as part of a state of 'order', whereas violence is seen as a state of 'disorder'.²³

The 'Naxalite problem' is not so much about violence in absolute terms, as it is a reflection of the threat posed by Naxalites to the status quo. It is also a function of the security establishment's need to project a 'threat' that justifies more—often unaccountable—funding and forces. The everyday, essential but far less profitable task of improving governance, including policing, barely figures in the official literature on Naxalites, or even if it does, is never implemented as seriously as the security-related decisions.

When the government kills 'Naxalites' in large-scale counter-insurgency operations, it also conveniently ignores the fact that many of them are adivasis and dalits, people for whom the Indian Constitution makes special provision. If people are driven to seize their rights with violence, after waiting endlessly for them to materialize, the sensible political response would be to strengthen the enabling provisions of the Constitution. As in 1910 or 1966, in 2005–6 adivasis are still seen as incapable of thinking for themselves and it is always the upper caste, outsider leadership (the king in 1966, the Naxalites today) which is seen as responsible for incitement.

²¹ Stuart Hall et al, *Policing the Crises: Mugging, the State and Law and Order*, New York, HM Publishers, 1978, p. 16.

²² See for instance, the Draft National Tribal Policy, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, July 2006, pp. 5, 14; the Coordination Centre Minutes and MHA 2006.

²³ Ted Honderich, *Political Violence*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1976.

The Maoists in Bastar

A full account of the Maoist movement in Bastar remains to be written by someone else and what follows here is necessarily scanty, since it is based mainly on secondary sources rather than ethnographic fieldwork. V.P. Patel's study of the Naxalite movement in Bastar in 1984–5, drawing on police case files and some case studies, provides a glimpse of the kind of issues taken up in its early phases.²⁴ Initially, the Maoists came in the form of three *dalams* or armed squads consisting of 5–6 members each, crossing over from Andhra Pradesh into Bhopalpatnam and Konta, and seem to have taken up particular cases of exploitation. The *dalams* would hold meetings in villages and ask people about their problems. They threatened foresters and contractors for not paying minimum wages,²⁵ school teachers for not attending school, a *naib tahsildar* for demanding bribes for regularizing encroached land, and a primary healthcare physician for not attending his clinic and making money through private practice. On occasion, the houses of sarpanches or patels who cheated on development schemes were looted and cash and guns seized. On the other hand, several primary school teachers or lower level officials, like the peon at the Block Development Office, distributing election *dak* met the Naxalites in the course of their work and reported that they treated them courteously.²⁶ Most cases in the police records were eventually filed away since they could not trace the accused. To take a typical example:

Case No. 1, PS Golapalli, tahsil Konta, Complainant: Shri Laxman Sahu, Forester, Crime No. 3/81, Section 506, 186 IPC dated 18.1.81: The Forester was allegedly threatened by the Naxalites for not paying the minimum wages

²⁴ V.P. Patel, 'Tribal Unrest and Adventures of Naxalites', *Studies in Development Anthropology*, Madhusudan Nagar, Society for Anthropological and Archaeological Studies, 1986. Patel was then working in the office of the Director for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Bhopal. Unfortunately I have not been able to find such an independent source for the later period, which is neither Maoist nor police literature.

²⁵ The government rate for work under the National Rural Employment Programme in 1984–5 was Rs. 7. The villagers led by the Naxalites demanded Rs. 8.25 which was not acceptable to the government. See Patel, 1986, pp. 25–6.

²⁶ Patel, 1986, pp. 11–17, 19–28.

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to the labourers engaged in construction of forest road. Accused could not be identified. Case filed on 18.4.82.²⁷

Villagers were often arrested for harbouring Naxalites.²⁸ Despite this, and despite rewards for individual Naxalite leaders ranging from Rs. 1000–5000, a police document on Bastar notes that informers were hard to come by.²⁹

Patel provides some extended case studies, which are worth reproducing in full, because they bring out the texture and context of these early Naxalite activities, and the manner in which they were relayed by erring officials into government records:

Case No. 15 PS and Tahsil Bijapur, complainant—Mr Stephen, Forest Ranger, Nursery Duggoli, Crime No. 168/82 Section 156, 157, 147, 506 B, 399 IPC, Q: The complainant was threatened to loot his earnings to murder him in his residence by the armed Naxalite consisting of 5 males and 1 female. The accused Surnanna, Nilanna and Smt Padma are under arrest for this case also. Case is under consideration in the court (sic).³⁰

Patel's investigation revealed a history to this incident:

Actually, according to knowledgeable sources, a month ago of this incident, the Naxalites had come to village Duggoli and had discussions with village Patel (Headman) in his house in the evening. On their way back they also met one 'Mate' (head of the labourers) working in the Nursery from whom they enquired about the wages of the labourers and their welfare. Somehow, Forest Ranger Mr. Stephen came to know about the visit of the Naxalites and their meeting with the village headman. He brought this fact to the notice of the police. The police arrested Patel of the village and took him to Jagdalpur and put him in jail. Wife of the Patel died due to shock. In connection with the case, Patel had to attend district court many times.

When the Naxalites came to know about the death of village headman's wife and harassment to Patel by the police, they again visited Duggoli village in broad day light and forcibly entered the house of the Ranger on gun's point. They forced him to bear the responsibility of arrest and harassment to Patel by Police and also death of Patel's wife. They extracted money from him to the extent of Rs. 3,000/-. They also threatened him with dire

²⁷ Ibid., p. 11.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 18.

²⁹ AN Singh, *Naxalpanthi Gatividhion Sambandhi Teep*, c. 1990 (cyclostyled document prepared by the Bhilai Zone Police Chief).

³⁰ Patel, 1986, p. 16.

consequences if he does not pay minimum wages prescribed by the government to the labourers. It was reported that the money extracted by the Naxalites from the Ranger was paid to Patel of village Duggoli as a monetary help for mental agony he faced.³¹

Gradually the Naxalites consolidated themselves into far more than itinerant Robin Hoods, though attacks on individuals continued, justified as 'feudal obstacles' who 'were burnt in the revolutionary fires of the people's struggle' or 'cruel landlords' who 'died a dog's death at the hands of people'.³²

By 1995, according to Maoist literature, Gram Rajya Committees elected by the gram sabha began to be formed in villages.³³ Mass organizations, the most prominent among which were the Dandakaranya Adivasi Kisan Mazdoor Sangathan (DAKMS) and the Krantikari Adivasi Mahila Sangathan (KAMS), took up issues such as compensation and relief for famine, demands for greater medical and educational facilities, or higher rates for tendu leaves, managing to raise the rates in South Bastar from 2–3 paise per bundle of 50 leaves in 1981–2 to 85 paise in 2005.³⁴ At the village level, these organizations are colloquially called *sanghams*, and every village where the Maoists were active had a sangham of 10–12 members. In some places, they overthrew the leadership of the perma and patel,³⁵ whereas elsewhere, the traditional leaders continued to decide on rituals, festivals etc, while sangham members concentrated on calling meetings on economic or political issues.³⁶ In villages which had decided to support the Maoists, anyone who didn't attend meetings would be fined. In a pattern that shows the deep structures of administrative reform at work,

³¹ Ibid., pp. 20–1.

³² P. Shankar, *Yeh Jungle Hamara Hai*, New Vistas Publications, 1999, p. 16.

³³ *New People's Power in Dandakaranya* (henceforth NPP), Calcutta, Biplabi Yug, 2000, pp. 7, 21.

³⁴ *People's March*, January 1999.

³⁵ For instance, the Majhi of 60 villages around Dondra in Konta complained that he had stopped going to settle cases which the village panch couldn't arbitrate because the Naxalites would demand that the fine of Rs 300–400 levied by the Majhi in the form of a feast for the village must be returned. (Fieldnotes 1990).

³⁶ *Masses of Dandakaranya Rebel In the Path of Liberation* (henceforth IPL), Calcutta, Radical Publications, 2005, pp. 2–3. This was corroborated by villagers whom I spoke with in camps, or in villages.

those majhis who were appointed by the government in the 1930s judicial reforms (discussed in chapter 6) in Bijapur, Bhairamgarh, and Dantewara were more prone to side with the government than the majhis who evolved out of clan formations as in the Marh.³⁷ Maoist literature claims that they have engaged in considerable development work over the last twenty years, including creating schools, clinics, ponds, cattle detention yards, and orchards;³⁸ and consciously promoted Gondi language and literature, at least in certain revolutionary forms.³⁹ The KAMS is said to have taken up issues of bigamy, forced marriages, and the involvement of women in social and political decision making in the village.⁴⁰ Video footage on television channels shows that they drew huge crowds to their demonstrations, and to performances of their cultural troupe, Chetna Natya Manch.⁴¹

Not all villagers were or are equally involved in the movement, though the vast majority seems to have tacitly consented. For instance, Lemu Dhakad of village Valnad,⁴² whom I met in the relative safety of Bastar district in 2006, where he had fled with his family, said that the *dadalog* (elder brothers, local term for Maoist leaders) would come to his village and hold meetings. The Marias were active participants but the Dhakads were reluctant to go because they were expected to eat with the Marias. The Maoist leaders would then scold them for practicing casteism. While he supported the demands of the sangham, e.g. for higher rates for tendu leaves, he did not always support their methods, which included frequent hartals at which people were expected to attend or threatened if they did not. On the other hand, Ninu, a Raut from village Perkaal—a village in the Marh across the Indrawati from Bhairamgarh with equal numbers of Rauts and Marias—said that everyone in his village supported the Maoists. Distribution of land, cattle, and grain to the poor in his village was a peaceful affair—

³⁷ See this book, pp. 166–70.

³⁸ NPP, pp. 49–51, 53.

³⁹ *People's March*, 7(1) January 2006, p. 7. A booklet I was given by the police, *Sawal* (questions), of Gondi songs published by the Bastar Adivasi Khet Mazdoor Sangh, dates to 1987.

⁴⁰ Shankar, 1999, pp. 100–5.

⁴¹ *People's March*, 7(1) January 2006, p. 12, IPL, p. 18, Sahara Samay and CNN-IBN programs.

⁴² I have changed the names of both people and villages except in those cases which are already published.

with those who could afford it being asked, rather than pressured to give up land.

Throughout this period (from the 1980s to 2005), the police were mostly ineffective, fortifying themselves in barbed wire police stations, reporting occasional 'encounters' when they needed to get rewards.⁴³ Starting from 1983, when the 30th battalion of the MP Special Armed Forces (SAF) was posted to Bastar, the security forces have increased but these too have failed to stop the Naxalites militarily. In 1991 a joint front of the Congress, BJP, and CPI was launched against the Maoists, called the *Jan Jagran Abhiyan* (People's Awareness Campaign).⁴⁴ The CPI withdrew from it in 1992 after the Maoists killed two of their leaders in Basaguda and Konta. 1991 and 1998 were also years when new police stations were sanctioned such as in Tongpal, Barsur, Katekalyan, Bhansi, Pharsegad, Gadiras, Chintagufa, and Bheji.⁴⁵

For many villagers, the presence of the Naxalites meant they could get on with life unmolested. For instance, villagers in Jhadgaon, a forest village in Bijapur tahsil, said in 2005 that thanks to the *dadalog*, the forest staff had not visited the village for two years. The people there had migrated from Pinkonda (elsewhere in Dantewada district) and everyone now had some land, although there were only twenty five pattas or legal titles in the entire village. In its early years, the Naxalite movement was associated with major reclamation of agricultural land from forests.

On the other hand, the government has used the Naxalites as an excuse for absolute abandonment, though there is little evidence that in the parts of Bastar where the Naxalites do not exist, the situation is much better. A survey I did of the school in Buda Talnad village near Bijapur in 1998, revealed that there were 120 students registered in

⁴³ Conversations with local journalists in Konta, Dantewada, Bijapur, 1990, 1998. This is supported by figures from A.N. Singh, p. 9, and a typewritten Naxalite document from approximately the same period, which lists the names of those killed in encounters in the 1980s, along with atrocities on women, the parents of Naxalites, suspected sympathisers etc.

⁴⁴ See PUDR et al, *When the State Makes War on its Own People*, Delhi, 2006, pp. 11–12. (henceforth PUDR et al 2006). This movement too seems to have involved attacks on villages but on a smaller, localised scale and was less violent, and the Maoists retaliated equally, winning back ground.

⁴⁵ IG Bastar figures, 1998.

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the primary school of which 60–70 attended every day but there was only one teacher for all five classes. The teacher for the middle school (6th–8th grades) had barely passed the 8th class himself, so his capacity to teach 20 youth was in doubt. The administration was refusing to appoint *shikshakarmis* (temporary teachers) unless they paid bribes of rupees five or ten thousand. The village as a whole had given up expecting any child to pass school. Few in the village qualified as below poverty line (BPL) for government schemes, in part because the land records do not reflect actual holdings. One patta of 80 acres had 150 people listed on it, but since the patwari took Rs. 500 to make any change, few bothered to update their titles.

Table IX: *Bastar, Kanker and Dantewada, 2001 Census*

	<i>Bastar</i>	<i>Dantewada</i>	<i>Kanker</i>
Area sq km.	14,974	17,634	6,506
Population	13,06,673	7,19,487	650,934
Population density	87	41	100
No. of villages	1461	1,220	1068
Literacy rate total	43.9	30.2	72.9
Percentage ST pop.	66.3	78.5	56.1
No. of PHCs	57	34	21
No. of primary Schools (from govt website).	1473	918	NA

In 2004, a tour through polling booths in Konta tahsil during the Lok Sabha polls, revealed several deserted villages and schools (notified as polling booths) which were shut in response to the Maoist call for boycott of elections. Judging by the goat droppings at the entrance one had evidently not been opened for several months. Yet, by this time, the region had already been militarized with the CRPF conducting elections and ‘votes’ were ‘cast’ from these booths—in the Vidhan Sabha (VS) elections, for the then ruling Congress, and in the Lok Sabha (LS), for the ruling BJP.⁴⁶ In short, whatever ‘democracy’ exists in this area is being fashioned in the villages, and not through the ballot box.

⁴⁶ Kolaiguda (LS 63, VS 98), Pentapad (LS 23, VS 27), Gachanpalli (LS 126, VS 17).

Salwa Judum: Purification Hunt

Salwa Judum is a real Gandhian movement.

KPS Gill (Security Advisor to Chhattisgarh Government)⁴⁷

This is an unconventional war, its an undeclared war, so it's a dirty war, do you understand me? Guerrilla wars are always this way, give it to him in the head, all over the world, in a dirty war anything goes.

Pancho, a veteran of the war against the Sendero Luminoso, Peru.⁴⁸

In the summer of 2005, news reports started appearing of a 'spontaneous', 'self-initiated', 'people's movement' against the Maoists, known as the Salwa Judum.⁴⁹ A literal translation of this Gondi term, is not the government preferred 'peace campaign', but 'purification hunt'. The district administration claims that upset with the Maoist strike call on collecting tendu leaves and opposition to development works like road construction and grain levies, people in some 200 villages began mobilizing against the Maoists, going on processions and holding meetings. In response, the Maoists fired upon Salwa Judum meetings, burnt homes, and forced some 15,000 people to flee in the initial stages. The administration did its best to deal with this humanitarian crisis by putting up twenty seven makeshift roadside camps.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ As former Director General of Punjab Police, K.P.S. Gill is widely credited with the mass disappearances and killings in Punjab. See Ram Narayan Kumar et al, *Reduced to Ashes*, Kathmandu, SAFHR, 2003.

⁴⁸ Pancho, Vietnam in the Andes, (a navy veteran's account of the war against the Shining Path in Peru). In Orin Starn et al, *The Peru Reader*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1995.

⁴⁹ On the Salwa Judum, see PUDR et al, 2006, and Independent Citizens Initiative, 2006, *War in the Heart of India* (henceforth ICI 2006). While I am indebted to other members of both these investigations, they are not responsible for my views here. In those conversations in which I participated or events I personally witnessed, I have used my original notes rather than cited the reports. See also Human Rights Forum Press Releases, August 2005 and May 2006; Open Letter from the CPI to the Prime Minister, 16.11.2005; Asian Centre for Human Rights, *The Adivasis of Chhattisgarh: Victims of the Naxalite Movement and Salwa Judum Campaign*, 2006 (henceforth ACHR 2006), and articles on www.cgnet.in.

⁵⁰ Interview with K.R. Pisda, 28.11.05; Naxaliyo ke khilaf Aam Janata ka Jan Jagran Abhiyan Varsh 2005, Abhiyan ko Safal Banane ke liye Karya Yojana, Zilla

Accounts of how Salwa Judum started vary.⁵¹ In one version, which both Mahendra Karma, Congress MLA from Dantewara, leader of the Opposition and local leader of the Salwa Judum, as well as a Maoist leader told the Independent Citizens Initiative—and which was independently corroborated by some villagers, following a bomb blast on 24 March 2005 near Karremarka village in which five CRPF personnel were killed—Mahendra Karma, held meetings in the villages around and asked people to join him in a campaign against the Maoists. There is plenty of other evidence too suggesting that the Salwa Judum originated in government planning.⁵²

Even without this, however, its status as a government programme rather than a people's movement is scarcely in doubt. A work plan for the Jan Jagran Abhiyan 2005 drawn up by the Collector, K.R. Pisda, an adivasi himself from Rajnandgaon, details the tasks to be carried out by each department, noting that 'if innocents die in large operations, higher up authorities must keep quiet. Unless Maoists are killed in large numbers people will have divided loyalties, and for this, police must be given targets.'⁵³ The Chief Secretary of Chhattisgarh informed a coordination meeting on Naxalism held in March 2006 that 'they would first gear up the Salwa Judum movement in the 2 blocks before extending it to new areas as this movement has proved to be an effective instrument in countering naxalites.'⁵⁴ The MHA status paper notes that 'keeping in view the importance of Salwa Judum movement...., the State Government has been advised to enhance the deployment of security forces to provide effective area domination, ensure safety of Salwa Judum activists and strengthen security of relief camps.'⁵⁵

What we know now, is that these 'spontaneous' or 'self initiated'

Dakshin Bastar Dantewada (henceforth Collector's Work Proposal), p. 3; MHA 2006, pp. 9–10.

⁵¹ ICI 2006, p. 8, PUDR et al 2006, p. 15.

⁵² A police video tells us that 'Operation Salwa Judum' was initiated from January 2005 onwards; Asian Age (October 31, 2005) quotes the DGP Chhattisgarh as saying that Salwa Judum had been introduced as a 'pilot project' in 2 blocks of Dantewada district. There is also the mysterious phenomenon of letters inviting people to attend Salwa Judum meetings issued in the name of a non-existent Sodi Deva, letters which local journalists found were emanating from the Police headquarters in Jagdalpur. See also MHA Annual Reports of 2004–5 which mention the need to promote 'local resistance groups' against the Naxalites.

⁵³ Collector's Work Proposal, para 10.

⁵⁴ Coordination Centre Minutes, p. 9.

⁵⁵ MHA 2006, p. 10.

meetings by ‘innocent Salwa Judum activists’ were accompanied by the security forces and involved arson and forcible evacuation. Villages that refused to attend such meetings were automatically assumed to be Naxalite villages, and were burnt, and people herded into camps. Others came to avoid being attacked. The SP, Bijapur, Mr Manhar, is heard saying in a wireless message to subordinates that was recorded and released to the press by the Naxalites, ‘The janjagaran people are telling very clearly to villagers “you come with us first time, or second time. If you do not come third time, we will burn your village.”’⁵⁶ By their own admission, both Mahendra Karma and KR Pisda, attended all or most of the Salwa Judum meetings.⁵⁷

A state level CPI team which talked to people in camps in November 2005 found complete mayhem in the villages on the western side of the Bailadilla mountains:

In village Mundbedi, the CRPF came in October accompanied by 50 Salwa Judum people. They took 40 kg rice from the house of N., along with chickens, pigs, goat and whatever they could lay their hands on. Village Kavad has 36 houses. The Salwa Judum burnt four of these houses and right there cooked 20 kg of rice, 20 chickens and one pig. The villagers ran to the forests out of fear. While leaving the Salwa Judum burnt 2 quintal of kosra and 40 kg of rice. In the neighbouring village Hiril the Naga battalion burnt all the houses and slit the throat of one Karam Pandu. In village Burji, the Salwa Judum forces came on 30 September and ate 6 pigs and 6 chickens on the spot. They took away 10 goats and 30 vessels, mahua, grain etc., cut lemon and sulphur trees and broke one cycle. People from 60–70 houses ran away out of fear. The Salwa Judum also looted Rs. 10,000. In village Mallur, a thousand strong Salwa Judum procession came in October along with the CRPF. They beat up 17 youths badly and took them away, forcing them to join the Judum. The CRPF slit the throat of Ursa Sonu and threw him on the roadside. Mallur, Palnar and Tamodi villages also suffered burning and looting. In Palnar, 30 people were forcibly taken away, of whom Sukhram, s/o Godi was killed...After emerging from Kavad, the Salwa Judum also attacked villages Pidiya and Andri. 30 houses were burnt in village Pidiya, and Santu s/o Aitu shot by the CRPF. The Salwa Judum stole 2 pigs, 200 hens, 10,000 rupees, and ate 3 goats on the spot.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ While officially the government denies it, the authenticity of this recording has been confirmed to journalists by other senior police officials. Manhar was transferred from Bijapur to the State Human Rights Commission.

⁵⁷ Interview with K.R. Pisda, 28.11.2005; Interview with Mahendra Karma, 22.05.2006

⁵⁸ CPI letter, 16. 11. 2006

In a few cases like Kotrapal, the village militia resisted an attack on 18 June (while the CRPF hid all the while under a bridge). The militia kidnapped twelve people, out of which they killed one and released the rest. Kotrapal was then repeatedly attacked and burnt, and all its residents taken to Matwada camp. Some seven sangham members were killed and many more arrested.⁵⁹ People from neighbouring villages said they could see the flames from Kotrapal leaping high into the sky, and were scared.

Lemu of village Valnad, told me 'we were ordered by the Patel and Sarpanch to attend Salwa Judum meetings. People lost out on several days work because they were taken to different villages as part of Salwa Judum processions. Mahendra Karma would himself give the orders to burn houses.' Later, he said, the Naxalites killed Somu, the son of the village sarpanch Hari (because they couldn't find the father), and Bichem Hemla, the upsarpanch, both of whom had been responsible for taking people to Salwa Judum meetings.⁶⁰ All the villagers were forced to come to Bhairamgarh, where they had to live with knee high mud and rain in tarpaulin tents.

Lemu added, six or seven sangham members from village Valnad did not come into camp, and the Naga battalion would visit the village daily from 6 pm–10 pm, and then again another shift would go all night trying to hunt down these men. Rathu, who was committee president, was caught in the jungle where he was safeguarding the grain of the entire village, along with 25–30 other sangham members from Valnad and neighbouring villages.⁶¹ Rathu was killed on the

⁵⁹ See PUDR et al 2006, p. 19.

⁶⁰ See also the account of Palnar and Gongla villages, in PUDR 2006, p. 22–3, and the list of people killed by the Maoists on pg 40–1, which includes several people who took their fellow-villagers to join Salwa Judum. The actual names and dates Lemu told me figure on this list, which enabled me to authenticate the veracity of his account. It is not clear whether all these people went to Salwa Judum because they were ordered to, to avoid having their villages burnt, or out of support.

⁶¹ According to People's March, 'The revolutionary masses of DK, while taking up counter offensive operations did not neglect measures either for self defense or production work. People of many villages have set up sentry posts along the four corners of their village to maintain a twenty four hour vigil. Some others constructed temporary shelters in deep forest pockets. People removed all their grain, livestock, money and other valuables to safe dumps in the forest. They are continuing their agricultural activities under the protection of the people's militia and other wings of the PLGA. It will not be an exaggeration to say that almost each and every village from Kotrapal to Kunta have become bastions of mass resistance.' *People's March*, January 2007, 8 (1): 14.

spot, while the rest were beaten and arrested. Chamu, another sangham member, was hiding in a sulphur tree when they brought him down and took him to the jungle and killed him. Chamu's brother, once with the bal sangham (the Maoist children's brigade) was made into a Special Police Officer (SPO).

As we sat talking in the gathering dark, I could almost smell the fear on Chamu's breath, as he was hunted down, animal like, and indeed the fear that Lemu himself experienced for telling these stories to a stranger. Yet, he had to talk, catharsis overcoming caution. Lemu was among the fortunate few who could leave the camp. He got Rs. 15,000 compensation for his house which had been broken—he didn't know whether by the sangham or by the Salwa Judum—but even that the Patwari stole by getting someone else to sign for him. Lemu, who once had 5 acres of land, is now surviving on daily wage labour. He plans to go back only when it is completely safe, unlike Markami Lakhma, who, he had heard, went back home to sow his fields in 2006 and was killed by the Maoists. People are apparently writing letters to the Maoists asking to be allowed to come back, desperate to prove their neutrality in a war where almost everyone is a victim.

Each village, each death, has a story; stories never reflected in official statistics, and on one side at least, completely untold. Marh villages like Bail, Dharma, Satwa, Dunga, and Takilod on the 'Maoist side' of the Indrawati river are completely cut off, separated from the Salwa Judum not just by a river but by an ocean of suspicion. Villages like Nelgoda which they once crossed on their way to the weekly market in Tumnar—exchanging pleasantries perhaps, or stopping for a drink of sulphur before crossing the river—are now the frontlines of this undeclared civil war. They are unable to come to the markets or even to get basic medical attention, and have to walk three days to markets in Orchha in the north. Not just villages, but even families have been divided.⁶² Malu Raut of village Perkaal, I was told, was crossing the Indrawati to join the rest of his village in Bhairamgarh camp when he was accosted and questioned by the Naga police. He was so scared, his mouth would not open, said Ninu, so they shot

⁶² Several children in camp, including one who had been separated from her mother by Salwa Judum, tried to petition President Kalam when he visited Raipur. (End Salwa Judum, kids to tell Kalam on State Anniversary, *Indian Express*, November 7, 2006). But after their plans were revealed they were not allowed to meet him. Raipur resident, pers. com.

him. In November 2005, as part of the PUDR team, I witnessed the arrest of five 'dreaded Maoists' from Satwa village, who turned out on closer inspection in the police station to be a young girl, a one eyed man, and three other men of varying degrees of infirmity. The river was in flood, one said, and all the boats had been taken, so they could not cross.⁶³ If you are not in camp, according to the government, you are a Maoist.

In Mankeli village, we talked to tense villagers who were about to 'surrender' the next day. They had been attacked thrice, their houses looted and burnt. The second time, the Naga reservists took away some 5–6 young boys and girls and the village headman and forced them to act as informers. Twenty year old Modiyam Bhadru was thus identified and killed while on his way to have a drink with a friend. Aitu and Kova, both sangham members, were shot on October 3 while working on their fields. The Naga forces came and stayed in the village school one night. The Maoists broke it the following day to prevent this happening again. As we were leaving Mankeli, gun shots rang out, presumably part of the Naga combing operations in the area. Three men who had been talking to us minutes before, ran for cover while the woman beside us turned rigid with fear, before she too dropped to her knees. A month later, Dantewada District Police chief, P. Das was quoted as saying:

Rebels have been fast losing base in their stronghold in Dantewada district. Around 35 senior Sangham members surrendered at a function in Mankeli village, 412 km south from state capital. Over 5,000 local people attended the function from nearly 22 villages....The surrendered rebels, working with Sangham promised to work for the development of poverty-stricken Bastar region having world's best quality iron ore.⁶⁴

In February 2006, the Salwa Judum 'came' further south to Konta, rather like the long anticipated invasion of Iraq which everyone knew was going to happen, and yet when it did, were surprised at their own powerlessness to stop it. Here too houses were burnt—in Arlempalli, Gaganpalli, Asirguda, Regadigatti, Neelamadgu—the list goes on. One Salwa Judum activist from Dubatota village himself confessed to me burning quite a few. But in Konta, the Maoists retaliated violently,

⁶³ These five have subsequently disappeared. Their relatives have no idea where they are—all they know is that 'the Salwa Judum took them'. (ICI 2006, p. 27)

⁶⁴ IANS, December 28, 2005.

brutally, in what they call a 'tactical counter offensive campaign'.⁶⁵ On February 28, they blasted a truck carrying Salwa Judum activists at Darbhaguda, in which some twenty seven people died. Armed squads attacked the camps at Gangaloor, and Injeram to 'liberate' those trapped inside, but also to inflict exemplary violence on the SPOs. In Errabor, on 17 July, 31 people were killed, and the entire camp was torched, under the watchful protection of the police and CRPF.⁶⁶ Camp residents attacked Mahendra Karma when he came visiting, and he had to be whisked away.

The five thousand Special Police Officers (SPOs) appointed by the government at a salary of Rs 1500 per month, (irregularly paid), are particularly vulnerable to Maoist counter attacks, having been made complicit in a war many of them did not realize they were enlisting for. Many joined thinking it was 'just another government job', and their aggression is now fuelled by fear. Several are minors (as are the Maoist fighters), and are trained in basic drill, and armed with .303 rifles.⁶⁷ For some, the power has gone to their head, and they repeatedly stop and search vehicles, and extort money from shopkeepers and travellers. In April 2006, the Maoists kidnapped fifty seven people from Manikonta village, and subjected them to a 'people's court'. While forty four were released, thirteen men were killed, for being, according to the Maoists, 'paid SPOs and SJ goons who had committed terrible atrocities on the people in the name of Salwa Judum...the fact that hundreds of people who were present in the jan adalat resorted to this extreme measure shows the pent up anger and righteous indignation of the people intimidated since June 2005 without a let up'.⁶⁸ The government gave their widows

⁶⁵ Salwa Judum falters! Retaliaton takes a Real people's War Character. People's March, January 2007, 8 (1), pp. 14–19.

⁶⁶ See People's March, *ibid.*, for a further list of attacks on police stations and camps which are proudly listed.

⁶⁷ The ICI 2006, p. 17 points out that 'Under the MP Police Regulations (adopted by Chhattisgarh), the government has the powers to appoint Special Police Officers (Sec 17, 18, 19 of the Police Act 1861). These SPOs are meant to be recruited in special situations of "unlawful assembly or riot or disturbances of the peace", when the regular police force is not sufficient (Sec 17). They are not meant to counter a long term problem like guerilla warfare. The SPOs are meant to be people of standing in the area who can ensure peace, not minors and certainly not lumpen elements with allegedly criminal pasts.'

⁶⁸ Reply to Independent Citizens Initiative's Open Letter to the CPI (Maoist), from Ganapathi, General Secretary CPI (Maoist) October 10, 2006.

Rs 2 lakh, but they didn't seem to know what to do with this money, with their husbands dead and their village divided. They had been forcibly brought to camp, to begin with, in February 2006. The women said they wanted neither the Naxalites nor the Salwa Judum, they wanted peace and they wanted to go home. The compensation in no way reflects the costs, to people of being dragged into civil war.⁶⁹

Non-tribal camp leaders rule the area giving orders to the *thanedars* and to civilian officials like the Sub-Divisional Magistrates. These leaders have dubious pasts—like Madhukar, a school teacher in Kutru, who by his own admission, rarely attends school; Ram Bhuvan Kuswaha of Dornapal, who was a contractor and was allegedly targeted by the Maoists for reneging on his labour payments; Ajay Singh of Bhairamgarh, who has several criminal cases against him, and who told a visiting journalist, 'We finished off the village (Kotrapal)...People were excited. Of course they destroyed the houses.'⁷⁰ Other willing recruits to the Salwa Judum come from the ranks of Mahendra Karma's supporters, relatives or sarpanches whom the Maoists had prohibited from electoral canvassing or attacked for looting village funds. For instance, said Ninu whose village fell in the same panchayat, Soma, Sarpanch of Merkul village in Bhairamgarh tahsil, drew money from the block office for widows' pensions in collusion with the gram sachiv but did not distribute it. He was then attacked by some sangham members, but survived and joined Salwa Judum. Later, the Naga battalion forced the rest of the village into camp.

Camp existence is particularly miserable for women, many of whom are allegedly being used as sex slaves by Salwa Judum activists. Tarpaulin tented slums, with bare floors and open sides, the camps lack space, sanitation and privacy. Relief rations are siphoned off in large quantities by camp leaders, while residents survive on sporadic food for work programs. Some camps have been made into permanent settlements (reportedly the government plans to establish 581 new villages, attached to police stations),⁷¹ but interviews with senior officials revealed no clarity or even thinking on what people were to do for their livelihoods..

The Maoists have published lists describing brutal gang rapes. Along with their catalogue of people killed by the Salwa Judum and their village wise count of houses burnt, this suggests a high degree of organization, even under siege. The National Commission for Women which made a brief visit in December 2006 was, however, unable, to

investigate any of these further, presumably owing to the controls exercised by the Salwa Judum. As part of the ICI, I spoke to one woman in jail, charged under the Arms Act, who said she had been accompanying her brother on a family visit when they were stopped by the CRPF. Her brother was shot, and she was pulled off the seat of the cycle, and gangraped by the CRPF on the road. She was taken to the local thana and raped repeatedly over the next ten days. The other women in jail said she was so bruised when she came, she could hardly walk. Other prisoners said that they had been picked up on their way to market or simply while working on their fields. A number of sangham members have been forced to 'surrender' and are being kept in chains.⁷²

Many markets in the area have shut down, and traders complain that the Salwa Judum is bad for business. Prices of essentials like rice and kerosene have gone up five or six fold in the affected areas putting them beyond the reach of most ordinary villagers. The prices of goats have fallen to rock bottom in Sukma, as people sold off their livestock before the Salwa Judum could get to them. On the other side, the *andar wale* (people inside with the Maoists) have taken away those that are abandoned.

The degree to which the Chhattisgarh government has been able to marshal popular consent to its worldview, and to blank out the scale of state terror is remarkable. What the newspapers report is only a total count of deaths and violent attacks, mostly by the Maoists and some killings by the police or CRPF, of Maoist guerrillas creating the impression of endless one-sided violence and just deserts. The hundreds of murders and forced disappearances perpetrated by the security forces and vigilantes do not figure at all in official reports and barely even in media coverage.⁷³ While some of this might be explained

⁶⁹ Action Plan for the Rehabilitation of Naxal affected persons and Naxalites who have surrendered, Directorate of Public Relations, Government of Chhattisgarh, October 2004.

⁷⁰ Somini Sengupta, In India, Maoist Guerillas Widen People's War, *New York Times*, April 13, 2006.

⁷¹ Hitvada, March 13, 2006.

⁷² ACHR 2006, p. 40.

⁷³ The foreign press, e.g. the Guardian, New York Times and BBC were quicker to pick up the story of Salwa Judum than the Indian national press, which took almost a year to visit Dantewada.

by the fact that Salwa Judum activists and the paramilitary make it difficult for independent observers to visit villages and investigate incidents of violence, it does not account for the media refusal to carry Maoist press releases including visual evidence of burnt houses and dead people, which is harder to invent. The Chhattisgarh Special Public Security Act 2005, which banned the CPI (Maoist) and its front organizations, as well as Salwa Judum attacks on local journalists like Kamlesh Paikra of Bijapur and Afzal Khan of Bhopalpatnam who tried to report objectively⁷⁴ may have made reporting more dangerous, but does not account for the degree of self-censorship practised. Perhaps some of the money spent on anti-Naxalite propaganda finds its way into the willing hands of corrupt journalists.⁷⁵ But beyond all this, as Stuart Hall et al, point out, the media is structurally poised to reproduce the state's viewpoint, despite its self-definition of being independent and objective.⁷⁶

Media dependence on 'accredited', and regular news sources, and the relationship between beat reporters and the police this creates, leads to a situation in which the police are the 'primary definers' of crime news. Their 'primary definition sets the limit for all subsequent discussion by framing what the problem is.'⁷⁷ Despite the numerous opinion pieces criticizing the Salwa Judum, news reports carrying a far greater appearance of 'facticity' routinely reproduce and iteratively inscribe the government's description of the Salwa Judum as a 'people's movement' and 'peace campaign'.⁷⁸ Decontextualized presentation plays a critical role in reproducing the status quo, providing no background to explain the rise of Naxalism in the area. The one-sided coverage also sets up a structure of emotion where the gruesome Maoist attacks on SPOs and camps exercise a strong hold on popular imagination, without a parallel revulsion being created towards state violence.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ On Kamlesh Paikra, see PUDR 2006, p. 27; on Afzal Khan, see www.cgnet.in

⁷⁵ MHA 2006, pp. 6–10.

⁷⁶ Stuart Hall et al, 1978.

⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 59, 69.

⁷⁸ See for instance, 'Naxals had stepped up attacks against villagers after the launch of Salwa Judum (peace campaign) with the participation of the local population,' Rediffnews, September 28, 2006; or the *Times of India*, October 30, 2006, where again they uncritically reproduce the phrase 'Salwa Judum (people's movement against Naxals).' These are fairly typical.

⁷⁹ For media coverage of violence in which their governments are involved, see Daniel C. Hallin, *We Keep America on Top of the World: Television Journalism and the*

News coverage of the Maoists is, however, a double-edged sword for the administration, with front-page coverage of Maoist violence in local newspapers creating the impression of growing Maoist strength.⁸⁰

To summarize, for the people in this so called 'people's movement', one year of the Salwa Judum has resulted in life being disrupted in nearly 644 villages or over fifty percent of the district,⁸¹ some 150,000 displaced, of which 45,958 were officially in camp as of February 2006,⁸² anywhere between 500 and over a thousand killed, and over 3,000 houses burnt.⁸³ Despite a huge rally (60,000 by some accounts) held by the CPI against Salwa Judum in November 2006, at the time of writing the terror has spread to new areas—Bhopalpatnam and Sukma, and villages continue to be attacked. If the government had its way, it would start Salwa Judum even in areas where there has never been any Naxalite presence.⁸⁴ The sentiment on the street is overwhelmingly against the Salwa Judum, and both Maoist and police sources suggest that recruitment to the militia has paradoxically gone up. Indeed, the Maoists are fast acquiring mythical proportions.

And yet, despite the evident failure of its policy in terms of checking violence or reducing support for the Naxalites, the government response has been to further militarize the area. At the time of writing, twenty seven battalions have been posted to Chhattisgarh, helicopters are being rented from private firms at a cost of Rs 8 crore annually, ostensibly for aerial surveillance and airdropping of personnel,⁸⁵ and the Counter Insurgency and Jungle Warfare College at Kanker is training combatants to advance into Abujmarh. Rumours that the

Public Sphere, London, Routledge, 1994; Edward Said, *Covering Islam: How the media and the experts determine how we see the rest of the world*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1981; Siddharth Varadarajan, 'Weapons of Mass Deception: Iraq and the American Media', *India International Centre Quarterly*, 30 (1), 2003, pp. 131–41.

⁸⁰ This is one of the reasons advanced by the Collector for advocating controls on the media. Collector's work proposal, p. 25.

⁸¹ Government of Chhattisgarh Press Release, June 4, 2006.

⁸² Figures provided by The District Collector, Dantewada to the Chief Secretary, Chhattisgarh, March 2, 2006.

⁸³ These are estimates, based on a combination of Government, Maoist and independent sources.

⁸⁴ In G village, for example, the thanedar tried to instigate Salwa Judum processions, but villagers resisted.

⁸⁵ Rajeev Bhattacharya, Private firms to supply copters for war against Red terror, *Indian Express*, October 25, 2006.

army may be brought in to fight the Maoists grow apace. Both BJP and Congress continue to insist that there is no alternative to the Salwa Judum, and the National Human Rights Commission remains wilfully oblivious. In May 2006, the United States offered to help the Chhattisgarh government but after protest by the parliamentary Left, this offer of assistance was publicly declined.

The parallels to counterinsurgency campaigns in places like Guatemala, El Salvador, or the Philippines are striking: the burning of villages, forced relocation—first into transitional camps and then model villages or strategic hamlets, the creation and arming of civil patrols—which are claimed to be autonomous bodies of villagers but are completely run by the army or security forces, and the hunt for survivors and guerrillas who are in flight in the forest. In Guatemala, where such armed conflict has taken place between the government and guerrillas, the Commission for Historical Clarification found that the army was responsible for ninety-three percent of the human rights violations and the guerrillas for three percent. The guerrillas apologized publicly but the army did not.⁸⁶

Like the Indian government's 'multi-pronged strategies' to tackle Naxalism, the strategic hamlet programme as applied in Vietnam envisioned 'development' as well:

The Strategic Hamlet Program was much broader than the construction of strategic hamlets *per se*. It envisioned sequential phases which, beginning with clearing the insurgents from an area and protecting the rural populace, progressed through the establishment of GVN (i.e. Government of (south) Viet Nam) infrastructure and thence to the provision of services which would lead the peasants to identify with their government.⁸⁷

And what does this mean for the state? The BJP, in particular, has a history of justifying violence by displacing it on to 'people'—whether the destruction of the Babri Masjid, the 'action-reaction' theory of the Gujarat genocide, or now the Salwa Judum. However, the problem goes further. As Gramsci presciently pointed out, 'A weakened state structure is like a flagging army; the commandos—i.e. the private armed organizations enter the field and they have two

⁸⁶ Victoria Sanford, *Buried Secrets, Truth and Human Rights in Guatemala*, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, p. 19. See also, Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, *Vigilantes in the Phillipines*, New York: LCHR, 1998.

⁸⁷ *The Pentagon Papers*, Gravel Edition, Boston, Beacon Press, 1971, p. 128.

tasks: to make use of illegal means, while the State appears to remain within legality, and thus to reorganize the State itself.⁸⁸ As for the implications of the Salwa Judum for India at large, a nation held together by multiple insurgencies, where, increasingly, the definition of security by the security establishment trumps all notions of public safety and only power certifies what is truth, the claim of being 'democratic' appears increasingly hollow.

Forests, Mining, and Frontier Life

In conjunction with its counterinsurgency campaign, the Government of India is increasingly acting as an agent for major industrialists, by enabling them to acquire land, not through transparent market processes or compensatory development, but by invoking colonial measures like the Land Acquisition Act. The creation of states like Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, while responding, at least in the Jharkhand case, to the aspirations of ordinary people, has in effect worked to intensify predatory industrialisation. The Government of Chhattisgarh Industrial Policy (2004–9) notes that industries will be given maximum incentives for setting up mega projects in the most backward scheduled tribes predominant areas (like Dantewada) (Para 4.4.10). It is perhaps not a coincidence that these areas are also the most mineral rich.

In Dantewada, Essar Steel Chhattisgarh Ltd. is currently trying to acquire 900 hectares for its steel plant, centred in the villages of Dhurli and Bhansi near Dantewada, while its 267 km slurry pipeline connecting Bailadilla and Visakapatnam, has apparently cut down forests in a 20 m width as against the 8.4 m width it was sanctioned.⁸⁹ The Tata Steel plant at Lohandiguda, for which the company wants 4500 acres, has run into opposition by 10 villages whose lands will be acquired. The recently revived Bodhghat Hydroelectric Project, the Jagdalpur–Dalli Rajhara railway line, and the Polavaram dam will also involve large-scale forest diversion and displacement.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Antonio Gramsci, 'State and Civil Society', in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (eds), New York, International Publishers, p. 232.

⁸⁹ IA of 2005 in WP 202 of 1995, Bhupesh Baghel vs Union of India.

⁹⁰ Bodhghat would require 5734 ha of forest land, and the Dalli–Rajhara railway line 259.94 ha. MoEF Press Release, February 6, 2004.

Under PESA the government is required to consult villagers before their land can be acquired, but increasingly across the country, such 'consent' is obtained by dubious means. A small section of the village, sometimes even one family, is propped up against the majority, to show divisions of opinion in favour of the project. In the villages to be acquired by both Essar and Tata in Dantewada and Bastar, gram sabhas were held under the coercive shadow of Section 144 prohibiting large assemblies and paramilitary presence, and people were forced to sign their consent.⁹¹

As the last chapter showed, the non-tribal constituency rooting for such projects is steadily growing larger. The non-tribal population in the area has expanded so dramatically in less than a decade (1991–2001) that moves are on to de-reserve Jagdalpur and Kanker constituencies. Land prices around Jagdalpur and in places like Chitrakote with tourism potential have shot up hugely. Among adivasis themselves, leaders like Mahendra Karma are ready to sell their people out. When Mahendra Karma was asked what he thought about shares for adivasis in projects using their land, he laughed contemptuously and said, 'All this sounds good on paper'. As for employment for the locals, 'since tribals will consume any compensation they are given, they should be given work in ancillary industries. Instead of tractors, use them for land levelling.'⁹²

The connection between the Salwa Judum and industrialization is evident from an 'orientation' programme for Salwa Judum activists and SPOs reported by ACHR: Mr. Achla (Konta SDPO) told the villagers in camp, 'You leave your forests and shift to the road sides. You will be adequately compensated by the industrialists and commercial concerns, who are ready to take your land and develop it. You will get employment and other provisions. But if you stay back in the forest, Naxalites will kill you.'⁹³ At a minimum, no one would dispute that 'sanitizing' the area of Maoists and ensuring 'peace' is necessary to lure investors.

Mahendra Karma is a controversial figure, not only for his role

⁹¹ Letters from the Dantewara Bhumkal Samiti and the Sangharsh Samiti Belar to the Chairman, National Commission for Scheduled Tribes, September 2006. Interviews with villagers in Lohandiguda, October 2006.

⁹² ICI 2006, p. 15.

⁹³ ACHR 2006, p. 41.

in Salwa Judum, but for his part in the *Malik Makbuja* scam of the 1990s. As mentioned previously (see p. 198) the MP Protection of Scheduled Tribes (Interest in Trees) Act 1956 was abused by people who would buy land cheap in order to profit from the sale of trees on it. Karma, the Madhya Pradesh ombudsman (Lokayukt) found, was a king among thieves, in that he did not pay even this amount in full, despite selling the trees on the land within six months at a profit of almost Rs 16 lakh.⁹⁴ The Malik Makbuja fraud involved not just agents who offered to 'help' adivasis with the paperwork required, but forest officers who allowed trees to be cut on forest land by claiming they were really on private land, and senior revenue officials like the Commissioner who bent rules to 'favour influential persons like Mahendra Karma (the then Member of Parliament), Rajaram Todem (presently Deputy Leader of Opposition in M.P. Legislative Assembly) and other influential merchant families like Suranas, Awasthis, Brij Mohan Gupta.'⁹⁵ Despite being charged by the CBI for corruption in 1998, no further action has been taken against Karma.

And even as the rich and powerful decimate forest cover with official connivance, ordinary adivasis find their rights even further restricted.⁹⁶ Joint Forest Management, while ostensibly aimed at transforming people-forest relations has worked instead to either displace traditional systems of forest management,⁹⁷ or to appropriate the 'orange areas' which were being cultivated by villagers.⁹⁸ Many of these 'wastes' are now being covered by jatropha plantations. The Van Dhan Scheme

⁹⁴ Final Report of the Lokayukt Committee on the Felling of Trees on Malik Makbuja and Other Government Land in Bastar District (M.P.) March 1998, p. 31.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 22.

⁹⁶ The Hitavada, November 11, 2005 reported there were over 2.5 lakh forest cases against tribals in Chhattisgarh, mostly for illegal felling for domestic use and ferrying of wood by bullock cart. 16,886 cases were pending in Bastar district, 8897 in Kanker, and 5915 in Dantewada. The state government had decided to close all of these.

⁹⁷ Traditionally, villages in the area had protected their forests by engaging watchmen amongst themselves who were paid by contributions from each house. People from other villages who wanted to use the forests were charged a small fee known as *devsari*, *dand*, *man*, or *sari bodi*.

⁹⁸ 'Orange areas' are claimed by both the forest and revenue departments, as a consequence of the blanket transformation of nistari forests into protected forests in 1949.

started by Collector Pravin Krishn in 1999 aimed at ending the stranglehold of traders over the trade in tamarind and other non-nationalised forest produce, by funding self-help groups of villagers (van dhan committees) to buy tamarind and sell it on to the government-run TRIFED. However, it soon collapsed in the face of bureaucratic rigidity, official collusion with large traders and cold storage owners, transfer of the initial group of committed officers, and a fall in the price of tamarind.⁹⁹ Many of the youth who participated in these van dhan groups were served recovery notices in 2006 for fairly large sums of money ranging from Rs 7,000 to 70,000, to make up for the loss.

As always, life in Bastar continues to have a frontier feeling, where any amount of money can be made, if you have the wits and the administration is behind you. Illicit tin mining has been going on since the decade of the 1990s in the belt from Katekalyan to Kukanar. The ore is brought from near Bacheli (Bailadilla mines) and smelted by villagers using hand turned fans in charcoal furnaces. The operation is financed by the Marwaris and Thakurs of Tongpal who smuggle it out in their motorcycles to Orissa and Andhra, paying off the police stations involved.¹⁰⁰ While villagers and forest staff may be unhappy at the destruction of the forests for making charcoal, they are powerless to take action in the face of police connivance. The Thakurs are also successful at buying off protest—for instance, one village whose land was affected by mining was paid one black goat, one pig, one ram, one silver umbrella, and a pair of silver glasses for its village shrine. A 2006 news report notes that the tin slag, which villagers were selling for Rs 30–40 per kilo also contained valuable radioactive material like thorium and uranium, which smugglers were marketing to Singapore, China, and South Africa.¹⁰¹

Pyramid schemes are the rage in 2005–6, with scores of youth signing up their friends to make money. Economic differentiation

⁹⁹ For further details of JFM, Malik Makbuja and the Van Dhan scheme in Bastar, see Nandini Sundar, 'Is Devolution Democratisation?' *World Development*, 29 (12), 2001, pp. 2007–2024.

¹⁰⁰ In 1998, the rates I was given by a smuggler in Tongpal for his monthly hush payments were: Rs. 13,000 to the Police Station in Tongpal (of which Rs. 3,000 was for the Thanedar), Rs. 5000 to the additional SP, Sukma, Rs. 8000 to the SP, Dantewada.

¹⁰¹ Fieldnotes, see also article 'Bastar ka Atomi Khazana Taskaro ki Muttho Mein' in *Dainik Bhaskar*, October 10, 2006.

is far more visible in the villages now than ten years ago, with some farmers taking out loans to sow sugarcane and soya, and hiring tractors. Migration has increased drastically, with contractors taking work gangs as far afield as Punjab and Goa, either for road construction, agricultural labour or factory work. Sometimes people stay away for two to three years at a stretch, returning with very little money, after all the expenses for their food and travel have been cut by the contractor. The average wage appears to be Rs. 1000–1200 per month, which is far lower than the official minimum wage. Ravi who worked in a soybean packing factory in Nagpur, on twelve hour days, said he signed for Rs 140 on the books but got paid only Rs 80 by the contractor. Experiences of migration are sometimes harrowing—one group of 40 boys from Bastar walked home all the way from Gujarat without their wages, doing odd jobs along the way, because they had a fight with their Oriya contractor. While labour rates are low, agricultural wage rates are even lower—in 2006, they were collectively negotiated up from Rs 10 to Rs 15 for weeding and Rs 30 for making bunds.

Religious divisions in and around Kukanar continue to be strong, with the additional element of the Bajrang Dal thrown in. The saffron outfit was especially successful with Bhagat families in 2003–2004. They distributed trishuls and knives and reportedly burnt down a house in Soutnar, where a film on the life of Christ dubbed in Dhurwa was being shown. By 2006, their influence is said to have waned somewhat. However, Salwa Judum camps have provided an excellent opportunity for fronts of the RSS like the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram or the Vishwa Hindu Parishad to proselytise. Jagdalpur town has been radically transformed with a big Kali temple and statue of Hanuman overtaking the old temples, and effigies of Ravana are being burnt at Dusshera much to the dismay of most adivasis, for whom this practice is completely alien.

The *kuraal* continues to be sung, although in fewer villages, while VCDs, which were easily available even ten years ago, have achieved a new popularity with the making of Halbi films. These films, made by traders in Jagdalpur, employ both adivasis and uppercaste urban youth to enact adivasis and contain plenty of ‘tribal dances’, ethnographically framed, but suitably modified to the Bombay film style.

The old mango orchard in Jagdalpur through which I cycled on my way to the archives, has been cut down to create a garbage dump. The Indrawati has been diverted to a smaller stream in Orissa, and

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no longer flows with its old strength or beauty, creating problems for villages downstream. Dayaro Pujari is now dead. A bust of Pravir Chandra Bhanj Deo stands outside the palace walls, and the Agricultural College on the road to Lohandiguda is now named the Shaheed Gunda Dhur Krishi College. Mahendra Karma claims that the Salwa Judum is the second *Bhumkal*. When the government claims the mantle of resistance, there is reason to be worried.