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War Against the People and the Historic Lalgarh Movement

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The Indian ruling classes and the central government they have set up to serve them have very recently declared one of the most unjust and brutal wars against the people which is quite unprecedented in the history of our country. Such a massive mobilization of armed forces, paramilitary forces, police forces and air forces totaling around 1 lakh personnel, along with US-Israel military assistance of various types only highlights the magnitude of the war. They have identified the Maoists as the 'greatest threat to the internal security of the country since independence' i.e., the security of the Indian ruling classes. The entire forested region in central and eastern India have been divided into seven Operating Areas, which [they] want to 'clear' within the next five years of all resistance, including that by the Maoists and other Naxalite organizations. A massive amount of money to the tune of Rs.7300 crore has already been earmarked for meeting the cost of this war.

Needless to state, this war against the people is being waged in the interests of foreign capital and domestic big comprador capital. Hundreds of MoUs have been signed between imperialists and domestic sharks and the central and state governments that would further intensify the process of plunder and loot of our vast natural resources and bring more displacement and add to the misery and ruin in the lives of the impoverished people of our country. Lalgarh, nay, the Jangal Mahal region, is a region that, as the central home minister Mr. P. Chidambaram declared, would be treated as a laboratory to undertake experiments in dealing with this 'greatest internal threat' and then to utilize that experience for crushing resistance in such states like Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Orissa. We propose to deal with the great Lalgarh movement that has already found its rightful place in the history of just struggles of our country.

The ongoing struggle in Lalgarh, nay, Jangal Mahal has already completed one year in early November 2009. This struggle is totally different from any other recent movement in our country. If Singur faced the initial experience of defeat, Nandigram could take pride in having tasted victory in course of a long bloody battle against the anti-people 'left-front'

government and terror perpetrated by the hermdads backed by the ruling CPI(M). The struggles waged in both Singur and Nandigram were directed against the land-grab movement resorted to by domestic big comprador capital and foreign imperialist capital. In both Singur and Nandigram, the parliamentary parties played some role, although in the case of the latter, the Maoist party that rejects the parliamentary path did play some role. In the case of the Lalgarh movement, on the other hand, parliamentary parties were actually rejected by the people and the Maoist party played a major role.

In one sense, the Lalgarh movement began in a different context. It started as a response against the brutality perpetrated by the police on 5 November 2008. It was, at the same time, a fight against age-old deprivation and humiliation and for the assertion of dignity and the rights of the people. However, if one takes into account the land mine attack on the WB chief minister on 2 November 2008--the day the corporate house of the Jindals inaugurated the Shalboni steel plant (it was a SEZ), then that event possibly acted a catalyst that started a snow-balling process. In that sense, it started as a response to the land-grab movement also, like those in both Singur and Nandigram.

The Lalgarh movement can be divided into Five phases: A) From 5 November 2008 to the day the dates for parliamentary elections were announced. B) From that day to 16 May when results were declared throughout the country. From 17 May 2009 to 17 June just one day before 'Operation Lalgarh' was started. D) From 18 June 2009 when the joint forces started moving into Lalgarh to 26 October when decisions were taken by the PCAPA to form the people's militia. E) From the formation of the 'Sidhu-Kanu Gana Militia' on 27 October till date. The day coincided with halting the Rajdhani Express by the members of the PCAPA demanding the release of Chhatradhar Mahato, release of political prisoners and the withdrawal of joint forces. Each of these phases has its distinctive features. If one studies the movement, one will be able to see that it was not just a movement against land grab or just for the assertion of the rights of the adivasis or against age-old humiliation suffered by the tribal people; it was more than that. And that broader aspect gradually unfolded itself as movement rolled on. One of those major aspects of the movement is their advocacy of a pro-people new model of development—a model that definitely shows the imprint of the Maoist party. This aspect of the movement hardly received any attention from the urban intellectuals. Let us take up that neglected, but very important aspect first.

New Model of Development

The model of development the Indian ruling classes and their political representatives have adopted ever since they came to power in 1947 was the policy of dependence on foreign capital and technology, which actually means the selling out of our country's economy, water, land and vast natural resources to foreign imperialist capital and domestic comprador big capital for rapacious plunder and loot. It was the Naxalbari movement and the CPI(M-L) led by Charu Mazumdar that first raised the demand for radical land reforms, opposition to and the confiscation of imperialist capital, and at the same time formulated the blueprint for alternative model of development. That programme could not be implemented by the Communist revolutionaries of the first phase of struggle for reasons into which we would not enter at present.

At a later period, the Maoists put into practice an alternative development programme in the Dandakaranya area covering mineral-rich states like Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa. The main elements of this programme are the rejection of foreign capital and technology, self-reliance, equitable distribution of resources and property among the people, distribution of land to the tiller, all-round development in the countryside

based on people's initiative and voluntary labour, and the weeding out of foreign influence and control over our economy, society, culture and politics.

As in Dandakaranya, such attempts are being made even at the rudimentary level in the Jangal Mahal area of West Bengal. This is evident from the following newspaper report captioned 'Welcome to India's newest secret state' by Snigdhendu Bhattacharya: "Here across a 1,000 sq.km area bordering Orissa in West Medinipur district, the Maoists over the last 8 months have quietly unleashed new weapons in their battle against the Indian state: drinking water, irrigation, roads and health centres...carefully shielded from the public eye, the Hindustan Times found India's second 'liberated zone', a Maoist-run state where development for more than 2 lakh people is unfolding at a pace not seen in 30 years of 'left front' rule. Apart from taking over the organs of the state and most notably the executive and the judiciary, the Maoists here have built at least 50 km of gravel paths, dug tube-wells and tanks, rebuilt irrigation canals and are running health centres, with the help of local villagers" (HT, 10 June 2009).

Another daily reported under the caption "Lalgarh Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (Maoist) Rise and rot of a rebel 'state'" that the People's Committee-Maoists began the following schemes: Jobs for landless--work in development projects in lieu of Rs.60-80 per day; building kutcha roads, culverts and water reservoirs and digging deep tube-wells; bringing medical teams from Kolkata; lending money to repair and build cheap houses (The Telegraph, 24 June 2009).

The first attempts were made by the PCAPA soon after it was born. It set up village committees each of which consisted of 5 men and 5 women, where decisions were taken on the basis of mutual discussion. That was followed by the formation of women's wings and youth wings of the committee. These were democratic bodies some of which bear the imprint of the old adivasi society and some, particularly the women's wing, is new and signified the true empowerment of women.

In June 2009, before the deployment of the joint forces for 'Operation Lalgarh,' a team comprising seven students belonging to the Democratic Students' Union, JNU, New Delhi and two journalists visited Lalgarh and adjoining areas for an on-the-spot investigation. That report throws some light, even if at a rudimentary level, on the development programme initiated by the people. Since then, many new steps were taken in this direction, as is reported by different sources. However, because of the existing situation and the imposition of Section 144 against entry into the region, joint fact-finding missions could not be undertaken, despite attempts from several quarters. So this report is the last published on the region. Let us state some of the features.

A) Agriculture and Land distribution: Anyone going to Jangal Mahal would be able to realize that the much trumpeted 'land reform' programme of the 'left-front' government does not have any presence there. In areas where trees have been cut to introduce land reforms, nothing has been done and vast tracts have been allowed to be converted into waste lands. Although the WB government through an act of 2004 vowed to distribute these lands among the landless adivasis, nothing has as yet been done. On the contrary, the WB government and the CPI(M) that rules it had decided to hand over thousands of acres of those lands for the setting up of a SEZ to the corporate house of the Jindals whom they are committed to serve as its most trusted lackeys against the interests of the people. Faced with such government apathy and deprivation, it was quite natural for the people of Jangal Mahal to organize under the banner of the PCAPA to initiate true land reform programme.

The Committee initiated a programme to ensure full rights of the adivasis over forest land to the landless with adequate facilities for irrigation. Opposing the government policy of welcoming multinational seed companies the PCAPA opted to build seed cooperatives through the promotion of organic fertilizers prepared with either forest ash or cow-dung.

Another important step is land distribution. The village committee decided to ensure 1 bigha [0.13 hectares in West Bengal, or 1/3 acre] of land for the landless and 15 kathas [0.10 hectares] for peasants with less land and no land for those having 5 bighas or more. The JNU team visited Bansheria village and were witness to a land distribution meeting. However, one problem was that land was not in an arable condition due to the senseless plantation of eucalyptus trees by the state government as part of its 'social forestry' project that was promoted by the World Bank. The plantation of such eucalyptus trees was aimed at drying up the land so as to facilitate future extraction of mineral resources from the region. It is a nefarious anti-people conspiracy deliberately hatched by corporate foreign capital and domestic capital with the backing of both the central and state governments. In order to undo the damage to the soil, the people decided to grow fruits and vegetables there for at least two seasons before it becomes fit hopefully for paddy cultivation again. Side by side, it was also decided that the lands of 'new landlords' such as those of the CPI(M) leaders like Anuj Pandey, Bimal Pandey or Dalim Pandey—the rural bosses-rogues-cum-moneylenders who had amassed millions by expropriating the wealth and land of the peasants as also by swindling money from governmental projects-- would be confiscated and distributed among the real owners.

B) Irrigation: In the dry Jangal Mahal belt, where rainfall is scanty, special attention is needed. However, one cannot see anything of the sort. The government has built a huge canal that runs from Mayurbhanj in Jharkhand to Midnapur town so as to provide water to the field when the rainy season was over. However, because of faulty construction, the huge canal remains dry throughout the year and the pipes that open to the fields remain completely choked. The Committee, in response to this governmental mal-development, started building small check dams and lock gates that would store the water during monsoons and preserve water flowing down from natural streams. Such a check dam was in the process of construction at Bohardanga village when the DSU team visited the place.

C) Construction of Roads: If one goes to the Lalgahar villages, one will be struck by the absence of roads worth its name. During the monsoon the roads are muddy and water-logged and virtually impossible to walk on. Transferring patients, pregnant women or dead bodies become difficult tasks. The villagers of Adharmari complain that the transportation facilities are pathetic and during monsoon, the village gets totally cut off from the world outside. The same is true for many other villages as well. The Committee took up this issue and constructed roads with red-stone chips which are locally available at a cheap price. The construction was done through voluntary labour, as in the Dandakaranya region.

It is an example of participatory development where human resources are mobilized for developmental work for the people. During the Yen-an phase (1937-45) of the Chinese revolution, this principle of Mao Tse-tung was applied in many regions and helped in unleashing the creativity of the masses. In villages such as Korengapara, Shaldanga, Bahardanga, Papuria, Darigera etc, it was the villagers themselves who took part. This was unlike the earlier government projects where helplessly witnessed from a distance their development funds being siphoned off by the corrupt CPI(M) party members and government officials. According to Chhatradhar Mahato, the spokesperson of the PCAPA, unlike the state which builds 1 km of road spending Rs.15,000 [\$320], the Committee could build 20 kms spending only Rs.47,000.

D) Water, Shelter and Health facilities: A dry and arid region that Jangal Mahal is, it is difficult to get drinking and irrigation water. The Committee took initiative to set up mini tube-wells and install submergible pumps. The people also gave voluntary labour to facilitate irrigation. The Committee also took steps to ensure that government projects like the Indira Awaash Yojana reached those who needed it most. There was hardly any medical facility in the whole zone. The Committee took the initiative to set up health centres at Kantapahari, Belpahari and Chakadoba. It was a people's health centre with an ambulance van and a team of doctors from Kolkata. Nearly 1,500 persons visited the centres everyday for treatment. These health centres are now under the occupation of the joint forces and converted into paramilitary camps.

E) Education, Culture and Social Awareness: In the charter of demands placed by the Adivasi Moolbasi Janasadharaner Committee and published from Purulia, the adivasi people demanded promotion and spread of the Santhali and Kurmali languages and alchiki script. In fact, a large number of indigenous languages have gone into oblivion due to the domination of one or two languages. Quite naturally demands have been raised for the recognition of the Santhali language. This year (2009), 21st February—observed as the 'Language Day' in both West Bengal and Bangladesh—was observed as a Black Day. It was an expression of protest against the cultural domination by the Bengali language.

In fact, as has been reported in the press, as a result of globalization and the domination of one language over another, thousands of indigenous languages had already gone into oblivion and many more are awaiting the same fate all over the world. These developments take place before our very eyes, but we hardly pay any attention to them. In fact, the Lalgarh struggle has put forward the demand for the restoration of the nearly extinct languages of the people. The reality is that in areas where people's struggles are very strong, the possibility of the regeneration of local languages is a reality, and the local artists, writers and singers make their marks in respective fields of activity. In this way do extinct languages appear again. Dandakaranya has had the same experience.

Traditional weapons comprise an integral part of the adivasi culture. Thus if any restrictions are imposed on the display of such weapons by the government, the adivasi people would treat it as an infringement on their traditional culture. On 5 June 2009, the Kolkata police put a restriction on the display of such weapons at proposed rally to be organized jointly by the CAVOW—an all-India women's organization-- and the women's wing of the PCAPA. The women's wing has also initiated campaigns against consumption of liquor, superstition, pornography and domestic violence. The Matangini Mahila Samiti(MMS) has earlier took steps in this direction in Nandigram.

F) People's Court: The system of justice that prevails in our country is, needless to say, meant to serve the ruling classes. In Lalgarh, the people set up their own court—the People's Court. Here decisions are taken by the people and punishment, if any, is meted out. There was much criticism from some quarters (civil rights activists and others) against such a system of justice.

G) Fight against Environmental Pollution: Environmental pollution caused by three sponge-iron factories came under the Committee. These three factories had been causing immense pollution in the area for the last 15 years. There was a mammoth gathering of more than 12,000 people on 7 June 2009 at Lodhashuli village near Kharagpur town where decisions for the boycott of the factories was taken.

It is clear that the Committee had integrated local day-to-day issues with the broad struggle against state repression. Needless to say, this would not have been possible without the active participation of the Maoists. This has been an entirely new experience in the history of West Bengal. It did not happen in the first phase of the Naxalbari struggle. Without the active participation of the broad masses of Jangal Mahal, this alternative model of development at Maoist initiative, could not be implemented.

Intellectual Reaction to the Maoist presence and the role of the Maoists

It is crystal clear that the intellectual response to the Lalgarh struggle is basically different from what we had seen during the Singur and Nandigram struggles. Here, they did not stand up to state repression in the way many people expected them to do. On the contrary, they have become very critical of what have been going on in the region. Those who came forward at the early stage later retracted and kept mum. Meanwhile, the tide was blowing for a 'change'; the total isolation of the CPI(M) got reflected in the elections, and one section among the intellectuals found it more attractive to keep closer to the prospective winner—the TMC—in the approaching elections and receive bouquets and cushy jobs as 'biddwajjans' (learned personalities). (However, as later events have shown, some of them did not have either the wisdom or the minimum courage to stand up to state repression and constant intimidation coming from the corridors of power. In the face of such timid response from this section of intellectuals, the present writer feels the absence of late Samar Sen much).

In fact, artists and writers who visited Lalgarh and met Chhatradhar Mahato after the beginning of 'Operation Lalgarh' seemed to have been particularly concerned with extracting a statement from Chhatradhar Mahato condemning Maoist violence and also openly distancing the PCAPA from them, as only then would they be in a position to mediate between the state and the PCAPA. One well-known prize-winning writer informed us through an article published in a Bengali daily Bartaman that the destruction of Anuj Pandey's palatial building was the outcome of a secret understanding between the CPM and the Maoists, as that would fetch a massive amount of money for the CPM boss from the insurance company. In this way, she exposed her appalling poverty of thinking; at the same time, she also sought to tarnish the heroic struggle of Jangal Mahal and humiliate the people fighting for their dignity and for justice. One can only pity such intellectuals. What is important for our purpose now is that the response of this section of the urban literati depends on the part played and influence exercised by the Maoists in the Lalgarh struggle.

Main points of criticism

First, the people of Jangal Mahal had been continuing their movement quite well. It is the Maoists who entered the scene from outside and made a total mess of everything and misguided and derailed the movement. It is their violent activities that brought joint forces into the scene. The result is that the people are now being sandwiched between state terror and gun-toting Maoists or 'non-state' actors, as civil rights organizations such as the APDR are fond of describing it. The most bitter attack, however, came from the two Delhi-based historians—Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar. In a journal they wrote an article in the most malicious manner, some portions of which are as follows:

"Maoists have done incalculable harm to the movement. Their activities and intentions are shrouded in mystery, their secret terror operations express total indifference to human

lives, their arms deals lead them...into shady financial transactions with rich and corrupt power brokers...They come into an already strong and open mass movement, they engage in a killing spree discrediting the movement, and then they leave after giving the state authorities a splendid excuse for crushing it" (Economic & Political Weekly, June 27-July 10, 2009).

Second, it is the Maoists who have derailed the movement towards a violent and undemocratic path. These are the main points of attack, although there are other minor points. For the time being, we will concentrate on these points.

Maoist presence

Chhatradhar Mahato has stated that the People's Committee consists of different political forces, the Maoists included. The Maoists have mass base. They are in their place as we are in ours. The Maoist leader, Kishenji made a press statement that they had been working in Lalgarh from the 1990s. In fact, from the historical point of view, the MCC had been active in the region from the 1980s and the CPI(M-L) People's War in places such as Belpahari, Garbeta, Shalboni, Lalgarh, Banshpahari, Ramgarh, Sarenga etc from the mid-1990s. The issues over which they fought were as follows: against corruption in the panchayets; to ensure proper distribution of grants coming through government projects such as forest preservation samiti which rightfully belong to the adivasis; against the felling of trees useful to the people; for raising the price of kendu leaves etc.

People in the urban areas can still remember the extent of police repression in the zone from 2001-02. Behula Kalindi and Sulochana Kalindi of Belpahari were forced to undress by the raiding police party to enable the police forces ascertain their sex. When Jaleswar Soren was not found in his house, his ten-month pregnant wife, Sulekha Soren was taken away and sent to Midnapur central jail which the government calls 'correctional home' on charges of waging war against the state. Pyalaram Mahato, an 87-year old man who was even unable to walk alone as his jail-mates would testify, was charged with the 'offence' of being a People's War squad member. A woman named Meena Sardar of Belpahari was so traumatized by what the raiding police party did to herself, her mother and her house that she lost her mental balance; when she was released on bail after spending months in jail, she became totally mad, stayed at her home with her mother by becoming a 'liability', and ultimately died in that state without any treatment. One can distinctly remember also how Prof. Kaushik Ganguly was arrested and beaten up at police lock-up, how Abhijit Sinha, a government official, was haunted by the fear of being arrested and tortured by the police and how he died near railway lines under mysterious circumstances in 2002.

The Jhinka jungle that has become news during 'Operation Lalgarh' for being a Maoist hideout, is the area where the body of the People's War activist, Ashim Das @ Kanchan was found with marks of wound on all parts of the body some years back. It was, according to the findings of civil rights bodies, a case of fake encounter killing. Many village houses were destroyed, ravaged and looted by the police and paramilitary forces. People were beaten brutally as if such acts of torture were the birthrights of the state forces, property was looted, kerosene oil was dropped into wells which were the only source of drinking water for the villagers, grain was mixed up with cooked rice, house-deeds, documents, ration cards and other things were simply taken away never to be returned. Civil rights bodies such as APDR had published many fact-finding reports of such despicable acts done by the WB police forces. However bitter it might sound, the fact is that a large section of city intellectuals paid no attention to these things at that time and were only too concerned with receiving patronage from the West Bengal government.

The reality is that the Maoists did not fall from the sky, nor did they come from a different planet; their social root lies in the soil of Jangal Mahal, however disturbing it might sound to the (a-)historians and sections of those 'learned personalities'. The list of proclaimed Maoist 'offenders' that the police forces have furnished will show that with the sole exception of Kishenj who hails from Andhra Pradesh, all others are sons and daughters of the soil—either adivasi or non-adivasi. Some of them are Sasadhar Mahato, Jagori Baske, Karan Hembrom, Bimal Mandi, Jyotsna, Tarit Pal, Sudip Chongdar and Sumitra Sardar. (HT, Kolkata Plus, 26 June 2009). According to reports, all of them did political work in the region at one time or other. Thus the statement that the Maoists are external to the movement, that they have just entered the scene all on a sudden and taken control of it, does not have any factual basis at all.

As to the 'sandwich' theory circulated by sections of the intellectuals and the media, it can be said that the advocates of this theory hereby have actually been portraying the masses in a way that they are devoid of any thinking of their own, that they are like unthinking, unfeeling robots who can only follow, but cannot lead. In this way, these urban intellectuals, themselves keeping a safe distance from the actual field of battle, pose as being possessed of all earthly knowledge and from whom the 'ignorant' adivasis must learn the art of how to conduct the movement. The sooner these 'learned' fellows come to their senses the better.

Peaceful 'democratic' movement and armed 'undemocratic' movement

The Lalgarh movement has given rise to debates that are old in states such as Andhra Pradesh, but new in states such as West Bengal. Such issues had come up time and again from within human rights organizations and 'civil society' whenever armed resistance developed or revolutionary armed struggles gained in strength. The issue has been hotly debated earlier within the APCLC (Andhra Pradesh), PUCL, PUDR, APDR, BMC (WB) and very recently within Lalgarh Aandolan Samhati Mancha (Lalgarh Movement Solidarity Forum) or Lalgarh Mancha (Lalgarh Forum). According to some intellectuals, the 'peaceful and democratic' movement of the adivasi masses of Lalgarh was derailed by the Maoists and it took a violent turn as a result. The view that comes up is that democratic struggle should be peaceful, and when it takes a violent turn and the people get armed, then it loses its democratic character. To them, 'democracy' is identified with order and peace, and if there is disorder and violence, then it becomes un-democratic. Needless to say, such ideas have been very carefully and successfully planted by the state propaganda machinery through media and other means and well-known historians as also intellectuals have become victims of such campaigns.

History, however, proves otherwise. It is not the people but the state which is armed to the teeth, and it is the state again which uses all conceivable methods of violence to keep people under subjugation. Peace-loving people are thereby forced by the state to raise the banner of armed resistance, as the real perpetrators of violence leave behind for them no option other than that. History is replete with many such examples. The great slave revolt under Spartacus against the might of Rome in 73BC that shook the slave empire to its foundations was not at all a peaceful affair; on the contrary, it was armed and violent in nature. Was it undemocratic in character? The great peasant rebellion in Germany under Thomas Munzer in the 1520s was clearly armed and violent. Was it also undemocratic? The great Taiping peasant rebellion in mid-19th century China (1851-64) also was one of the greatest peasant revolts and very much an armed affair. Was it undemocratic? The history of British India is also full of examples of armed anti-colonial struggles such as the Great

Revolt of 1857 or those by Bhagat Singh, Surya Sen, Bagha Jatin, V.G. Pingle and many others. Many revolutionaries courted martyrdom with the aim of making our country free from colonial subjugation. Could those movements be branded as 'undemocratic'? The reality is that all these struggles represented the genuine interests and aspirations of the Indian people and were just and democratic in character.

In the class society of today, class contradictions, conflicts and sometimes, class wars are inevitable. The ruling classes had always exploited the majority of people, killed and maimed them, perpetrated terror and, in this way, extracted the sole right, the legitimacy to perpetrate terror against the people whom they pretend to serve. Names such as the 'Greyhound', 'Cobra', 'Scorpion', 'Jaguar' and many other state-trained police-butchers only betray the violent character of the Indian state. Whenever, in response, the oppressed people themselves take up arms, break that state monopoly over the means of violence and 'legitimacy' enjoyed by the state to control masses, the ruling classes raise the bogey of law and order and utilize that legitimacy to drown people's movement in pools of blood. If anybody calls that resistance struggle 'terrorism', then that 'terrorism' definitely is of a different character.

That reminds one of Mark Twain, the American writer. At the centenary year of the French Revolution in 1889, he wrote a novel entitled *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. The Jacobin period or the period of Danton and Robespierre during the French Revolution has been branded by many as the 'Reign of Terror'. While criticizing such a view, Mark Twain wrote:

"There were two 'Reigns of Terror', if we would but remember and consider it: the one wrought murder in hot passion, the other in heartless cold blood; the one lasted mere months, the other had lasted a thousand years; the one inflicted death upon ten thousand persons, the other upon a hundred millions; but our shudders are all for the 'horrors' of the minor Terror, the momentary terror, so to speak; whereas, what is horror of swift death by the axe compared with lifelong death from hunger, cold, insult, cruelty and heartbreak? What is swift death by lightning compared with death by slow fire at the stake? A city cemetery could contain the coffins filled by that brief Terror which we have all been diligently taught to shiver at and mourn over, but all France could hardly contain the coffins filled by that older and real Terror—that unspeakably bitter and awful Terror which none of us has been taught to see in its vastness or pity as it deserves".

Mark Twain was not a revolutionary; however, his inquisitiveness and sensitivity helped him arrive at a truth. In the late 1920s, Mao Tse-tung talked about terror of two types, while he analyzed the Hunan peasant uprising. One was white terror or counter-revolutionary terror; and the other was red terror or revolutionary terror. He wrote:

"A revolution is not a dinner party, or writing an essay, or 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 act of insurrection, an act of violence by which one class overthrows another. A rural revolution is a revolution by which the peasantry overthrows the power of the feudal landlord class. Without using the greatest force, the peasants cannot possibly overthrow the deep-rooted authority of the landlords which has lasted for hundreds of years. The rural areas needed a mighty revolutionary upsurge, for it alone can rouse the people in their millions to become a powerful force".

These facts are not unknown to the writers, historians and others who ruminate about their craft and actually keep a safe distance from the field of battle; however, whenever it comes to connecting them with the present situation, they fail to seek truth from facts, their logical

mind ceases to respond, their sense of history suddenly loses its steam, and they betray their utter inability to grasp the essence of that historic struggle.

It has become obvious that the Lalgarh struggle has posed a serious problem to the civil rights movement, democrats and sections of the urban intellectuals. When the masses were attacked and tortured, when they protested through processions, meetings, petitions and other 'democratic' methods as permissible by the government, and did not raise the banner of armed resistance, the city-bred intellectuals stood by their side and raised their voice. There was no problem in Singur and Nandigram; in the case of the latter, despite the presence of armed resistance, as the mainstream TMC party was also active there. But the Lalgarh story was entirely different. Here the urban literati are confronted with the emergence of the resisting warrior masses and in their presence, are at a loss what to do, what position to take. This is an entirely new situation, unlike any in West Bengal for many years. This entirely new situation has placed them in a dilemma, and they are yet to cope with and digest it and then take a position on it. That is why we find sections of the APDR, APCLC, PUDR, editors of some little magazines and others condemning both state and 'non-state' violence in their statements, articles and public speeches. The transformation of the 'repressed masses' into 'warrior masses' have reduced them to such a pitiable condition!

On 16 September 2009, one English daily organized a thought-provoking discussion in Kolkata with the caption 'Surely the Maoist is not one of us'. Most of the speakers sought the genesis of the Maoist emergence in the 'failure of the system to deliver'. Let us quote a few lines from the report: "When a landlord takes away a villager's wife, keeps her in his house to sexually abuse her and orders the husband to go away when he pleads with him for returning his wife to him and his two children, what is he supposed to do? Mouth platitudes about non-violence and peace? 'Or take up arms against a sea of troubles and by opposing end them?' In one such case a youth in Andhra Pradesh went straight into the jungle, organized a group of about 25,000 people, killed the landlord and ended by being Maoists". This is part of the speech delivered by Prof. Hargopal from Andhra Pradesh, which only corroborates the view that it is the oppressive state that breeds armed resistance (The Statesman, 17 September 2009).

There is one important point on which we believe most of the people will be in agreement, the Maoists included. This is related to the death of civilians, of medical staff, government officials on polling duty in the Jangal Mahal region over the last few months or common innocent civilians. As to the deaths due to mine blasts of the medical staff and polling officials in the Belpahari area of West Medinipur some months ago, the Maoists have tendered apology time and again as those civilians were mistaken as security forces. One may note here in passing that Kshudiram Bose, the revolutionary from Bengal, made a similar mistake when he killed the Kennedy couple, instead of the notorious magistrate Kingsford back in the 1910s and was hanged by the British rulers. These acts—even though done unknowingly—were rightly criticized by cross-sections of the people. In the recent period, another such act took place, this time in Jharkhand. One intelligence official, Francis Induwar, was beheaded by the Maoists. That raised a hue and cry among the central home department and media in varied magnitude. While the Maoists later, as reported in the press, made self-criticism for adopting such a method of exterminating an enemy. However, this particular act needs a bit more consideration.

First, the first two instances were clear cases of mistaken identity, but the third one was not. It is related to the method of killing, and not the killing as such. The region in which he was killed is a tribal belt, and sharp weapons such as axes, knives etc are used by the tribals as their traditional weapons. Let us simply cast aside for the time being the veil of 'civilization' from our person and for a time keep in mind the hard reality that in the name

of this very 'civilization' as created by capitalism and its clients in countries like India, the ruling classes had over the decades only perfected the methods of torture on people, prisoners and all dissident voices not only in Vietnam, Afganistan or Iraq, but also in Kashmir, Chhattisgarh, Nagaland, Assam, Andhra Pradesh and other states that would put to shame even some of the most brutal characters in history. While most of us will, in all likelihood, disapprove of the adoption of such a method of beheading for killing a 'foe', one can legitimately ask the ruling elite, sections of the media and the security forces whom they train up for committing unheard-of-barbarity on their own people whether they--the perpetrators of violence--themselves have the moral right to raise such moral questions at all.

Second, this part of criticism appears to me to be quite amusing and self-contradictory. As has been pointed out before, sections of the urban literati and some civil rights activists have expressed their disapproval in the taking up of arms (meaning firearms) even for self-defence by the adivasis of Jangal Mahal. The urban literati would rather accept their wielding of traditional weapons, but not the firearms. If that is the case, then what is the harm in beheading a person as in that case traditional weapons rather than firearms were used.

Let us now pass on to another aspect. The major section of the 'civil society' of West Bengal has learnt to accept state-sponsored violence as natural and somewhat legitimate, in the sense that it can be taken for granted. To them, therefore, the perpetration of state terror against the people of Lalgarh is the legitimate application of legitimate violence (we include in it arrests, interrogation, long period of incarceration, not to speak of torture in police and jail custody); they had never questioned or challenged the legitimacy of that state-sponsored violence. What they are concerned about is that there should be no excess and the casualties should be less. They talk only about legality, about laws being trampled down, but hardly talk about justice. They do not question the system; they only tell the government to abide by rules and not to deviate from them. To them, governments are elected and thus have broad support of the people, and that these do not have any class character of their own. But when the Lalgarh masses dared to take up arms in response to that state-sponsored violence and used the same weapon against the state machinery and the CPM hermdads to pay the oppressors back in their own coin, and renounced the 'democratic and peaceful' path as looked at by that section of the 'civil society', then that resistance struggle which is legitimate and just from the people's point of view, came to be considered impermissible under the law and would merit criticism and even condemnation from their side.

To some people, there is hardly any difference between state-sponsored violence and 'non-state' violence and both are condemnable; in the eyes of some APDR people, 90% condemnation is to be reserved for the former and 10% for the latter. The same is the attitude of some of the editors of Bengali little magazines/periodicals such as Aneek—as is evident in signature campaigns—which quite religiously devotes some pages in its issues to the condemnation of the 'non-state' 'senseless' violence committed by the Maoists or the resisting warrior masses of Lalgarh. The pertinent question here is: could the violence committed by the state against the people and that done by the people against the state agents be the same? Would they also denounce—even if not in the same breadth—the 'violent' struggles as championed by Bhagat Singh, Surya Sen or the peasant rebels in Telengana? Would they condemn the heroic armed resistance and national liberation struggles of the people of Vietnam, Afganistan or Iraq? Every year, the Indian state is spending millions on the modernization of its forces whose main purpose is to subdue and crush people's movements, while lakhs of people are dying every year out of malnutrition and hunger. Have they ever challenged the legitimacy of the state to rule? Have they ever

demanded large-scale demobilization of armed forces and paramilitary forces and the diversion of that massive amount of money to the cause of people's real development? Struggles can be of different types—just and unjust. If they make no distinction between just struggles and unjust struggles, between the violence perpetrated by the state forces and hermdads/salwa udum goons on the one hand and the violence committed by the armed people, on the other, then they would have also to denounce the long tradition of people's heroic armed resistance down the ages both in our country as also outside.

The struggle in Jangal Mahal is not a spontaneous movement; it has been a politically conscious movement, as its process of unfolding made it clear. By now, it is obvious that the Maoists have been playing a major part in it. The urban literati should not grudge it, because who is to lead and guide the movement, what form that movement would take is to be decided by the sons of the soil themselves, and not by those who keep a safe distance from it.

The movement is coming out with new features, new methods of struggle at regular intervals—participation by the broadest masses, ingenuity, alternative model of development, formation of people's militia ('Sidhu Kanu Gana Militia' drawing its name and inspiration from the past, from the names of two Santhal leaders of the mid-19th Santhal rebellion in colonial India), women coming into leadership and probably also taking part in policy-making—all these and many other things have made the movement stand apart from others that preceded it. The direction that it is taking drives home the fact that some concrete political ideology, a fair amount of knowledge about military strategy and tactics and seasoned political brains stand behind it as guiding spirits. Without the active role of the Maoists, the movement would not have taken such a shape. This constitutes its main strength.

At the same time, the presence of the Maoists and the resisting warrior masses is also the reason why sections of the urban literati keep aloof from it. It appears that had the adivasi people kept aside firearms (AK-47s, landmines etc) and took up their traditional weapons (bows and arrows, axes etc) to stand up to the combined assault of the CRPF, COBRA, Straco, BSF, EFR, Greyhound, American satellite, state intelligence, army, Air force and of course, the CPM hermdads and in that totally unequal war inevitably lost the battle, these intellectuals would have derived silent pleasure (or if not so, would have been stimulated to take the field), and like during Nandigram, would have given the call for a big procession (silent, of course!) with candles and with giant banners again demanding 'Hang Butcher Buddhadev' (or Butcher Chidambaran also?), and would have again derived much pleasure by seeing their own faces in newspapers and TV channels. Lalgarh would thus have turned into a second Nandigram. It would have been defeated. And like the peasant rebellions in China, which were utilized by ruling classes throughout ages to initiate dynastic changes due to the absence of new productive forces and correct political ideology, the Lalgarh struggle would also have been utilized, as Singur and Nandigram struggles have been utilized recently for election battles, to initiate 'change' in the way sections of the urban literati, not to speak of the parliamentary political parties, envision it. Whether one likes it or not, the struggle of Lalgarh has moved in a different direction. This constitutes its strength. For those who long for a society where human values would triumph over the lust for profits, the Lalgarh struggle holds the promise of hope for the future.

Today, the Lalgarh struggle is not confined within the borders of Jangal Mahal region. It has extended far beyond, providing inspiration to people of other states; it has also been accepted as the new symbol of defiance and resistance by the democratic and freedom-loving people in other countries of the world. Movements in solidarity with the Lalgarh struggle have already developed in the urban areas of West Bengal as also in other states;

solidarity gatherings, meetings and conventions have also been taking place in foreign countries such as UK, Greece etc. The central government has joined hands with the American intelligence and state governments and initiated the 'Operation Greenhunt' against the people of our country—in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar, Orissa, West Bengal and other states in the name of combating the Maoist movement.

The central home minister, P. Chidambaram did not mince words when he said that they were treating the Lalgarh operation as laboratory for experimentation and that his policy would be one of 'zero tolerance' towards the Maoists. It is a clear threat to the people; it means state-sponsored genocide and brutality to be perpetrated against the people. They are doing it because they have already pledged (through MOUs etc) to hand over vast stretches of our country full of natural resources to the hands of domestic and foreign big capital for rapacious plunder and loot, and those who are resisting this plunder---Maoists and others—have been singled out for attack and extermination in the name of 'development'. The people of Lalgarh have stood up against this with their heads held high. Today or tomorrow, all the intellectuals, human rights activists, teachers, artists, writers and other democratic people would have to take some stand. Should they allow our country's natural resources to be sold out to corporate capital by the central and state governments which would bring more ruin to our country, or should they stand up as true patriots to oppose it?

Over the last decade and more, there had been much military collaboration, besides collaboration of other types, between the American and Israeli governments, on the one hand, and the Indian government, on the other. The American FBI has opened its office in the capital, if not also in other Indian cities, many years back and joint military exercises between the American and Indian armed forces have been taking place regularly in Mizoram and other areas. American and Israeli military officials are keeping regular contacts with their Indian counterparts. And if armed resistance of the Indian people and Communist revolutionary movements develop further despite the massive armed mobilization by the central and state governments for the 'Operation Green-hunt'—and I am not talking only of Maoist insurgency—then, as it appears now, a time will not be long in coming when the people of India would have to confront American soldiers on the Indian soil. Confronted with such an eventuality, how would the civil rights activists, intellectuals, editors of little magazines and other sections of urban literati react? How would they respond when they would see people of their own country, their brothers and sisters dying, falling down but rising up again and putting up armed resistance against the foreign aggressors like that in Indochina in the wake of the American imperialist aggression? Would they condemn that people's armed struggle then also, as some of them are doing today, on the ground that that struggle smacked of violence? Would they behave and act like patriots, or would they act like unthinking robots and still keep on murmuring that the aggressors also have their right to life?

In 1932, one year after the Japanese aggression in China, Soong Ching Ling, the wife of Sun Yat-sen and one of the leading personalities of the China League, a civil rights body, wrote an article on the duties of the League. China at that time was torn by civil war between the Communist Party and the Kuomintang and was controlled by a number of imperialist powers in one way or the other. In that article, she dealt mainly with the plight of the political prisoners in China (the overwhelming majority of whom were the communists), voicing demands for their unconditional release. When confronted with the question whether the China League supported the revolution (meaning Communist revolution), Soong Ching Ling made it clear that the League stood for the ultimate victory of the people and the assertion of their rights, and that victory could be attained only through

revolution. Urban literati and civil rights activists in India may find the essay quite illuminating.

Let us now come back to India. Many of us living in India still do not know who to look forward to for guidance and leadership; but what many of us do feel is that how we live today is far removed from how we ought to live, that the present system has already outlived its utility, has been failing to deliver and that some fundamental change is necessary in the interests of the majority of the people. Is Lalgarh showing the way?

It is high time that we should raise our collective voice against this unjust war waged by the central and state governments against our own people, and also demand large-scale demobilization of armed forces and paramilitary forces and the diversion of that massive amount of money from the nefarious goal of committing genocide on our people to the task of creating a new society fit for human living.

[End]