

# **LALGARH REVOLT SURGES AHEAD**

*Ayesha*

## **How the Mass Anger Exploded**

Indian history is now a witness to a heroic mass upsurge that has been going on as a basically adivasi mass uprising in the Lalgarh area in West Midnapur district of West Bengal. Ever since the landmine explosion conducted on November 2 reportedly as a protest against the SEZ bid of West Bengal's ruling party, on the entourage of Bengal's Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya and the Union Minister steel, chemical & fertilizer Mr. Ramvilas Paswan while returning from the highly state publicized inauguration ceremony of the Jindal Steel Works (A Special Economic Zone) at Salboni in West Midnapore. Police went on rampaging the tribal villages, torturing the tribals and other exploited in the dead of nights in the name of search for Maoists.

Initially the centuries-old oppressed tribals united under the organizational banner of Bharat Jakat Majhi Madwa Juan Gaonta. The revolt that started from a spark against police atrocities on the women added fuel to the fire unlocking the heaps of grievances accumulated over years and the revolt spilt the boundaries of Lalgarh and spread like wildfire to newer areas and subdivisions. The adivasis of adjacent tribal dominated districts like Bankura, Purulia, Burdwan, and Birbhum also rose in revolt. Everywhere thousands of adivasis men and women held rallies and meetings on the same issue. The upsurge had its full impact even on the areas of the CPI (M)'s strongholds.

Lakhs of people from these areas have come together to form a huge resistance movement called Police Santrosh Birodhi Janasadharan Committee or the People's Committee against Police Atrocities (PCAPA). A 13-point charter of demands was handed over to the administration. The demands included some of the longstanding demands of the adivasis and other low-caste oppressed to stop police raids in the villages at night, removal of police and CRPF camps from the villages, occupying the school buildings, hospitals, etc., release of tribals and other arrested since 1998 on mere suspicion of being Maoists and charged with cases of waging war against the State, punishment of the policemen guilty of the recent brutal attacks, and adequate compensation money to the injured locals in police brutalities etc. The people gained a significant victory by forcing the administration to agree to 10 of their 13 demands apart from the removal of some police camps. (A detailed report was published in our April '09 issue.) Having won this initial victory the people of this area are forging ahead under the leadership of the committee to continue the struggle to change their lives and living conditions for a better tomorrow.

## **Socio-Economic Profiles of Jangalmahal**

Despite the presence of a huge population of adivasis, thanks to the forest department's criminal nexus with the CPI (M), police, timber mafias and administration to loot the forests and the flawed path of development, the centuries old dependence of adivasis on forests was endangered.

A forced situation of migration continues to persist since the British rule. Clusters of adivasi villages nestled in the forests got increasingly removed from forests as such with the speed of deforestation and fake development. It is notable that in the three contiguous districts, namely Bankura, West Midnapur and Purulia is predominantly the adivasis in most cases followed by Dalits and OBCs ["Other Backward Castes"] who inhabit the region. According to the census 2001, in West Bengal out of 341 blocks, the percentage of this population in 36 blocks hovers between 40 and 59.99 percent. Jhargram subdivision

has 8 blocks including Lalgah, Binpur, Jhargam, Jamboni, Gopiballavpur—1, Gopiballavpur—2, Sankrail and Nayagram. Interestingly, socio-economic and cultural characteristics in Jhargam Subdivision, Purulia and adjoining districts of Jharkhand are more or less same. In Jhargam Subdivision itself 30 percent of the population is Scheduled Tribes (Santhal, Munda, Lodha, Mahali, Kora, Bhumij, etc.) and 18 percent Scheduled Castes who include Bagdi, Dom, Kaibarta, Mal, etc. Besides them the other major population comprises the Other Backward Classes like Kurmi Mahato, Kumbhar, Tanti, Teli, Raju, etc. Those three categories of population comprise more than 90 percent of population in Jhargam and its adjoining areas. According to the last census the Adivasi population once owners of the land are now increasingly turned in to *Khetmajors* (agricultural laborers) between 1971 and 2001.

The above picture makes it abundantly clear that on the one hand West Bengal's adivasis far surpass others as *Khetmajors* (agricultural laborers) and on the other hand it is this section of population that is rapidly getting displaced from agricultural activities particularly under the CPI (M) led 'Left' front rule. In other respects too like in education, use of mother tongue as medium of education, etc., they are the most exploited. The wages of *Khetmajors* too are very low, and despite so much talk of uplift, a big chunk of the adivasis goes to *Namal* (low lands) as migrant labourers every year. Not only the Adivasis, but also the so-called low castes all suffers in this exploitative system. In the Lalgah revolt the Mahatos, now recognised as OBCs, have participated in mass-scale, showing their anger at their deprivation at every stage and the prevalence of state terror on all the exploited and deprived. The bond of unity has spread to all adivasis and non-adivasi poor for the perpetual exploitation, backwardness, cultural deprivation and most of all the reign of terror let loose by the state.

Maoists have officially supported this mass revolt but the People's Committee against Police Atrocities is a mass based committee with live demands of the cross section of repressed people in Jangalmahal. It is true Jangalmahal is the region where the Maoists have been fighting for the cause of poor tribals, nontribals and other common people for their rights, their development, their livelihood, and so on. From their principled stand Maoists are the only party upholding the people's grievances over years. Adivasis and other downtrodden have high respect for the Maoists. And the Maoists ranks too are comprised basically of the adivasis. But the Committee is not controlled by the Maoist party. The villagers are the decision makers, and the committee has been set up by them. On their 10-member committee in every village, 5 are men and the rest 5 women. Two persons, a man and a woman, from every village committee are part of the central coordinating committee. Every decision is being ratified by these committees. **One great contribution of the Lalgah struggle is the emergence and crystallisation of a new democratic setup for participatory democracy.**

With every passing day the committee went on to gain more strength. The fire of the unabated movement spread to the adjoining tribal populated districts. Many new organizations of the tribals were formed and oppressed masses in their thousands rallied, protested, put forward their own demands, and are showing solidarity with the people of Lalgah. They protested against police atrocities in Lalgah. In Bankura Mr. Ranjit Hembram, former *panchayat samiti sabhapati* and two zonal leaders, Mr. Ramu Duley and Mr. Tulu Hembram were struck with arrows when they were accompanying a police contingent to Nakhrapahari, to douse the flame of agitating adivasis. Migrant tribal workers in other districts came out in support and joined in the struggle of the Lalgah people.

Protests flourished in the CPI (M) strongholds too. In Kharagpur near Changuyal, a large section of CPI (M) tribal members and supporters of the youth wing DYFI participated in the road block programme on the national highway claiming "they are adivasis first then CPI (M)". The student wing of the Kurmis, Chhatra Kurmi Sangram Committee made a common cause against police atrocities, brought out a motorbike procession of 100 persons to boost the confidence of the villagers against the ruling CPI (M)'s notorious motorbike brigade. Terrified by the intensity of the movement reaching out to newer zones and

even making inroads into the strongholds of their party, Mr. Biman Bose, the state secretary of the CPI (M) branded the movement as a secessionist flare-up to separate the tribal belt of West Bengal and merge it with the neighbouring state of Jharkhand.

The ruthless ruling CPI (M) resorted to barbaric violence similar to the one it used in Nandigram and unleashed a reign of terror in a vain bid to tame the tide of adivasi uprising. It let loose its armed goons hailing from other places, to recapture its lost ground with the help of police in the revolting Jangalmahal area. Over the last few months, West Midnapore, Purulia and Bankura districts have seen the emergence of local and imported CPI (M) vigilante groups called *harmad bahini*. Mostly in civilian clothes, sometimes in army gear, the *harmad* drive around in motorbikes, cars and trucks sporting CPI (M) flags, use firearms freely.

On 4 December, the Chief Minister of West Bengal Buddhadeb Bhattacharya held out a threat in the state legislative assembly: “It is the foremost political task right at this moment to isolate the Maoists from the Adivasi people”. (*Ganasakti*, 5.12.08). And in a desperate bid to sever the bond between the exploited adivasis and other sections of downtrodden masses and the Maoists, the CPI (M) could not keep its faith solely on the CRPF, STRACO, paramilitary and the state police forces. 50 truck-loads of hired CPI (M) goons and police informers – *harmad* gangs – were brought to Jangalmahal from Gorbeta, Cheruah, Jamtala, etc. in disguise of common villagers. The gun toting ruffians swung into action along with the marauding motorbike brigade to terrorise the people of Jangalmahal. They forcibly went on to clear off the road blockades holding out threats to the people, so as to crush their just democratic movement against state repression.

After the Singur and Nandigram incidents the CPI (M) party’s gangsterism is widely known to the citizens of Bengal and of India as well. The ‘Left’ Bengal government has taken up the lines of the notorious and despicable ‘Salwa Judum’ of Chhattisgarh by trying to pit a section of tribals against the vast majority of struggling tribals. The CPI (M) formed ‘Pratirodh Bahini’ in tribal inhabited villages by floating and working under the apparently innocuous banner of ‘Ganapratirodh Committee’ (People’s Resistance Committee) and Adivasi o An-Adivasi Aikya Committee (Adivasi and non-Adivasi Unity Committee) with the help of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha. (Incidentally only a few weeks back, Mr. Sibu Soren, the chief of JMM was blamed by Bengal’s CPI (M) state secretary Mr. Biman Bose as having alliance with the tribal movement and that he was instigating the flare-up). The CPI (M) put up a few pro-CPI (M) tribal figures at the forefront to show that the whole armed onslaught on the resistance movement as a tribal retaliation. The CPI (M)’s notorious leaders like Dipak Sarkar, Bijay Pal, Satyen Maity and others remained the masterminds of the whole operation to crush the struggling people.

After the victory in the non-*adivasi* dominated Jhargram municipal polls, the emboldened CPI (M) got its machinery geared up to get a toehold in Jangalmahal. The CPI (M) hatched up a well-calculated conspiracy sitting in its Allimudin Street headquarters, and roped in “Disham Majhi” of Majhi Madwa Juan Gaonta organisation by hoodwinking the Majhis and Madwas to wield their social power in order to stem the tide of tribal insurgency. They arranged a big gathering at Bhulabheda roping in people of different places on December 8, 2008 and tried to put it up as a spontaneous out pouring on the part of the Lalgah people against the ongoing struggle. Ridiculously enough, the CPI (M)’s weekly mouthpiece *People’s Democracy’s* Mr. B Prashant, in his piece of writing, as a vainglorious attempt unwittingly acknowledged that it was a CPI (M)- led meeting “Thousands upon thousands of *adivasi*...all united under the CPI (M)....” But the tribals and the non-tribals of Jangalmahal could realize the evil design of the CPI (M) and showed their backs on the much-hyped next meeting on 18 December at Chakadoba.

But the fascist CPI (M)’s move to capture Jangalmahal with the help of police forces working hand in hand with the CPI (M) armed goons is being resisted defiantly by the people all over Jangalmahal.

Wherever the road blockades were cleared, those were again put up. The CPI (M) party office in Belatikuri village in Lalgargh was burnt down by the agitating adivasis in retaliation to the attempts of the CPI (M) to clear up barricaded roads. On February 2, 2009, a PCPA meeting was held at Khas jungle attended by hundreds of people. When the police tried to enter, the people resisted. Within five minutes the *harmad* drove up in six jeeps and opened fire on the people, killing three. The people retaliated and burnt three of the jeeps of the goon gangs.

After all these incidents CPI (M) armed gangs are regularly organizing attacks on the villages of Jangalmahal in a desperate bid to gain control over the area before the Loksabha elections. On 26 February, 2009 The Madhupur village of Salboni was attacked by 150 CPI (M) miscreants. Villages under the Lalgargh area are under unremitting armed attacks by CPI (M) goons, but the brave resistance put up by the tribals makes it difficult for the CPI (M) to destroy their unity. The movement of tribals and non-tribals under the banner of People's Committee is continuing uninterruptedly in face of this onslaught. The ongoing horror of the murderous *harmad* gangs launching attacks on the people in tandem with the police forces and the people's heroic resistance was well captured and graphically detailed in an eye witness account by a correspondent of the national weekly, *Tehelka* in a report published in its 25 April, 2009 issue.

“The moon was red on the night of April 10 in Lalgargh, filtered through the cloud of red soil thrown up in the air a few hours earlier. An angry mob of 6,000 adivasi men and women had marched barefoot that afternoon, drawn by the rousing, urgent sounds of *dhaks* – local drums – signaling red alert. As the beats rang out, man, woman and child dropped what they were doing and reached for a weapon, clutching bows in one hand sickles, axes, hacks in the other. Bamboo casks full of arrows rode on their backs, their colorful tails made of feathers from jungle birds, fluttering wind. Inside sheaths, the sharp glistening triangle of steel waited in readiness. The air echoed with frenzied slogan: ‘we cannot be stopped. Not this time.’

“Section 144 has been clamped in the area, there were strong restraining orders. A 500-strong police force has arrived with AK-47s and SLRs to take control. But the adivasis –angry, inexorable – were determined to violate the order and cross over to neighboring Bankura. They were protesting months of police atrocities. The men in uniform facing them were only an added inflammation. Both parties negotiated through their respective loud speakers – one seated on the roof of jeep, the other peddled on a cycle rickshaw. Unprepared for this organized show of strength, the police watched, shouted – and watched. The adivasis crossed over. They wanted the release of three community members arrested that morning. If they weren't released, they said, they would ‘create trouble again’ the following day. All the three were released. ...

“On 11 April, the day after the stand off at Lalgargh, in the village of Madhupur, a few kilometers away, adivasi men and women armed with traditional weapons are lying in trenches, hiding in jungles, standing at points of vantage – guarding territory. The night of the red moon had been long. Now as the police try to enter a village again, another face off is triggered. By noon, as the police retreat, the villagers spot the *harmad* coming. They position themselves around the village in a one kilometer radius from the huts and start firing. At 6 pm, while the firing is still on, SP Verma speaks to TEHELKA on phone and says, ‘Yes, the CPI (M) cadres are firing, but there has also been firing from the adivasi side, So far, no one is injured. Our police forces are there to help control the situation.’ ...

“The afternoon after the firing, a group of men are resting on the borders of Madhupur. It's has been another long night. One of them has fallen asleep resting his head on his rubber *chappals*, his palm clutching a cask of arrows, ready to wage war even in his sleep. Who knows when they will be back next?

Ask them what they will do if the *harmad* keeps getting closer, and they smile and say, ‘They have weapons, we have people. We will show them what our strength is.’”

## **Women as Leaders and Active Participants**

If the Singur struggle forced the door open for the mass participation of women along with men to save land and livelihoods, the Nandigram struggle added greater dimension to the militant participation of women. Like in the Bengal-wide *Tebhaga* movement in 1946—47, in Nandigram too women came forward to resist attacks by police and mercenaries. In both places many women were martyred. In Lalgarh or in Jangalmahal as such women’s role assumed extra-dimension by virtue of their coming up to the leadership level. Ever since the Maoist-led struggles spread to the three districts of West Bengal, police camps were set up in large numbers; night raids, incidents of rape, indiscriminate arrests, cruel torture in police custody, etc. became the order of the day. For so many years now myriad times small-scale protests were seen against police atrocities with women in the forefront.

Lalgarh struggle radically unlocked the leadership potentials of women, somewhat rousing the long lost matriarchal elements of direct intervention in matters encompassing the whole society. It is a fact that *adivasis*, dalits and other socio-economically exploited women equally participate in the productive process along with their men folk. But patriarchy did not allow their leadership role in political affairs. Media reports have regularly highlighted the Maoist propaganda meetings for political education of the wretched of the earth. More than that, the joining of local tribal and other women belonging to the bottom of the caste-class category, arrests from within their ranks and even killing of women activists from them have had a significant impact in these areas on the women as a whole. Lalgarh struggle has pitch forked to the limelight scores of women representatives in more than 158 villages. The village committees have turned upside down the conventional, parliamentary party-oriented and administrative structures of leadership paying lip service to women’s empowerment under conspicuous male domination.

It is the novel feature that in each and every village at least 50% of women’s representatives have been ensured through active participation of women against police terror. This is a new phenomenon in the history of political movements in India, Bengal in particular. Through this participation, community heads who mostly became tools of the CPI (M)-led administration, lost their earlier authority. This is neither the so-called mainstream politics nor the pure sub-alter consciousness of the past. Elements of class struggle are pronouncedly present cutting across all tribal and dalit and other communities centering on the demands against police-CPI (M) - administration led atrocities and for the end of exploitation and for real development.

On the occasion of the International Women’s Day, 8 March, People’s Committee against Police Atrocities floated its women’s unit. In presence of more than 5000 women, this women’s committee was formed with the name: Women’s Unit of People’s Committee against Police Atrocities with Sraboni Soren as the convener of the unit at Narcha in Lalgarh.

## **People once again force the state to remove police camp using the weapon of Social-Boycott**

The attempts of coercion and intimidation of the CPI (M) and administration could not make Jangalmahal people retreat in fear. The movement made the administration bow down and the promises were made by the administration to remove the police camps and consider all their demands. People’s Committee against Police Atrocities removed its first two demands on the basis of the Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya’s apology in the legislative assembly. But on the same day of 7 December, 2008

after an agreement was reached through negotiation, the CRPF raided the same Chhotopeliya village at night soon after the road blockades were withdrawn. The CRPF was besieged by hundreds of villagers and were freed only after the officer of the CRPF team publicly held his ears, apologized and saved his soul with the intervention of the leaders of people's committee. True to its bamboozling character, the state going against the agreement between administration and the people's committee, re-deployed police and CRPF in the Ramgarh police camp and seven other police camps which were vacated earlier. This betrayal on the part of government led to simmering discontent in the whole region of volcanic Jangalmahal.

With the redeployment of police and CRPF, People's Committee against Police Atrocities gave a call to the people of Kalaimuri, Madhupur, Nadaria and surrounding areas of Salboni for non-cooperation, for social boycott of the police and for not selling the essential items to them. Heeding to the call shops refused to sell food and other daily needs to the police jawans. As a result the jawans of the second Battalion State Armed Police camp in Kalimuri faced shortage of cooking materials and were virtually on the verge of starvation. As such the administration had no go but to vacate that camp which was in existence for the last two years. Not only that the people have been maintaining a 24 hour vigil to prevent the entry of policemen in to that area. The people caught hold of some EFR jawans who tried to sneak in to that area, confined them for a couple of hours and released them only after they wrote a bond admitting their fault and declare that they would not venture further in that area.

### **Government's Vain Attempts to Douse the Raging Fire of People's Discontent**

The discontent and unrest that is unfolding again among the adivasis and non adivasis has forced the state government to announce a slew of 'development' measures for the so called uplift of tribal community. After decades of criminal neglect the 'left' ruled state government, has woken up suddenly to the miseries and deprivation of perennially oppressed and exploited population of Jangalmahal. The CPI (M) is running 32 years of its rule, but the tribals and other backward classes are still rooted in endemic poverty. The CPI (M) state government has miserably failed to ensure food, clothing and shelter—the bare necessities for existence to the people. How come they can expect this government to ensure potable water, health service, education, electricity and better road facilities for a better living for the tribals and other low castes people perpetually living in penury? They are not provided with the necessary items in ration shops, whereas those are sold in open markets at high prices by ration dealers with the help of the political mafias.

Though almost all of the people in that area fall under the category of below poverty line they are not even granted their BPL (Below Poverty Line) ration cards. Strangely enough, a department of Development Council of Eastern Region is in place. The notorious Sushanta Ghosh of Keshpur massacre has been made an in-charge of this department, ostensibly for the development of the scheduled tribes. And the result? Crores of rupees are sanctioned, regularly, expenditure reports too are also put in the assembly, but the paltry amount of even 0.3% doesn't reach out to the adivasis and the backward classes. Eastern Region Development Council was allocated with funds of 30 to 80 corers for 2007—2008 fiscal year and 42.49 crores for 2008—2009 fiscal year by the West Bengal government. 30 to 40 crores per year for one crore of people living in 12,500 villages in 78 blocks! Which means government allocation (Eastern Region) is only rupees 30 to 40 per head, per annum.

Thanks to starvation and half-starved stomachs, 83% adivasi women of that region suffer from malnutrition and anemia. Further, a central representative team, after a survey of West Midnapore, Bankura, Purulia districts gave out a report: the eight panchayat samitis of Jhargram subdivision were

allotted 1 crore 21 lakhs 41 thousand rupees from the Central Backward Region Grant Fund for 2008—2009 financial year, only 36 lakh and 50 thousand rupees has been put into use and the rest 70% has to be returned by the state government. So, it is well understandable what the actual situation is. The developmental funds earmarked for the tribals in those districts either remain shelved or are pocketed by the corrupt CPI (M) leaders and panchayat members in connivance with the local administrators. The pathetic scenes of Amlasholes are the actual picture of the ‘left’ ruled state government’s criminal apathy.

A relevant point that is worth mentioning is that the CPI (M)-led state government of Bengal with profound pride focused in its mouthpiece (*Ganasakti*, 5 March, 2009) that West Bengal has come second in a nationwide evaluation on the basis of various types of work of panchayats. But the ground level picture tells a completely reverse tale of the corrupt functioning of panchayats of Jhargram subdivision that unmask the state government’s farcically woven myth of ‘development’: Under the one-hundred day National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), in the two months, i.e., in September and October at Binpur – 1, Lalgarh village panchayat, not a single farthing had been expended despite the money being earmarked for it. The administration failed to provide jobs for a single family at Baita and Dharampur village panchayat areas under these blocks in the months from September to December 2008. It is learnt from the government website that at Binpur—1 block, in 10 village panchayat areas in a 7-month period on an average, among the people who obtained job cards secured jobs on application only for 20 days.

The picture is no different in other blocks. According to the above source, in West Midnapur 7 lakh 545 job cards were issued and 2 lakh 15 thousand and 582 persons applied for jobs. In areas dominated by scheduled tribes under that programme only 10.13 percent got jobs. And in the whole of West Midnapur a mere 9.2 percent women got jobs. To repeat, in the 100 day-job programme in the tribal dominated Binpur-1, Binpur-2, Salboni and Jhargram block the miserable job guarantee is on an average 20,9,12 and 15 days respectively.

As a whole, in the seven months ending in December 08, in Lalgarh, the NREGA could provide only 7 days’ job out of 100 days! With the Lalgarh revolt the CPI (M) led administration suddenly started giving ‘patta’ (land title) to some people after so many years of its rule. With election round the corner, BPL cards are now being distributed in the name of rectifications. Such overdrive was never seen in the past three decades. The “Status of Rural Electrification in West Medinipur” published on 31 January 2009 exposes the tall claims of the ‘Left’ Front government on development in backward areas in more than three decades of its rule. It shows that out of 2,953 *muza* in Jhrgam sub-division electricity reached only 953 *mawza*.

The high voltage ‘development’ bid of ‘left’ ruled state government it is only to dispossess the marginalized tribals and other low castes people of Jangalmahal of their natural resources, their water, forests and land (containing mineral wealth ) and hand it over to big corporate houses to serve their interests. Now the very survival of people of this region is at stake – the proposed steel plant at Salboni is a case in point. As such they have decided to organize themselves and fight to build a brighter future by relying on their own strength.

## **The Spirit of Lalgarh Struggle Lives On**

Now, it is becoming increasingly difficult for the CPI (M)-ruled state government to make the tribal mass to swallow these bitter pills of ‘development’ down their throat. The People’s Committee against Police Atrocities, apart from its 13-point demand, is also coming up with the question of the people’s age-old exploitation and deprivation. So their democratic way of mass movement is taking up much larger

shape and raising pertinent questions regarding the ‘development’ paradigm, dispossession and their survival.

The people’s Committee has undertaken real development measures which the government has failed to deliver. The Committee has started one hospital and taken up measures to sink tube wells and develop alternative irrigation system. The People’s committee has set to work at Barpetia, Bhardanga, Katapahari, Krishnakumari to sink tube wells. It is also taking up the responsibility to desilt Barpelia canal, which will require Rs.8 lakh. The Committee is collecting donations from people for such developmental work. This has become a cause of extreme worry for the state government. India claims to be the largest democracy. But whenever a mass uprising happens with its just and democratic demands, it is labeled as Law and Order problem and is crushed down barbarically with arms, revealing the most undemocratic nature of the State and governments. But the people of Jungalmahal are determined to continue their struggle come what may.

So, every day is a new day coming up with new hopes for the tribals and nontribals of Jangalmahal fighting for their democratic demands. They are determined to boycott the coming elections to the Parliament. As they have realized that it won’t change anything in their lives. This belief among the people is clearly reflected in the words of a villager who spoke to *Tehelka* presenting the people’s upsurge in a new light thus; “It is not just about police atrocities. We are tired of waiting for development. We have no water, electricity, NREEGS, BPL cards or even a hospital nearby. So don’t blame us for being enraged. What is the point of these elections if it isn’t going to change anything in our life?”

Their undeterred movement will continue till they come out victorious. Inspired by the Lalgarh resistance other tribal and non-tribal poor people dominated areas are on the ferment. Recently, in 4 blocks of Purulia district 1 lakh 50 thousand adivasis formed a similar committee. The name of the organization is Adivasi Mulbasi Janaganer Committee. Over the last few months, the movement has also spread roots in to CPI (M) strongholds like Raipur, Shimlipal and Saringa blocks of Bankura district, the Borolampur sub-division of Purulia district and parts of Birbhum district. These are not areas where police atrocities have taken place, but the movement has struck a chord as a way for adivasis to assert their political identity – changing the face of the resistance movement.

The war drums of the warriors of Lalgarh boomed on the streets of Kolkata on April 24, 2009 as thousands of tribals carrying their traditional arms - bows and arrows, axes and swords - marched in unison giving out revolutionary slogans in an unprecedented show of people’s strength and solidarity less than a kilometre from the state’s seat of power at Writers’ Building when they took out a rally. The six hour victory rally brought Kolkata to a halt. This rally highlighted the surging spirit of the warriors of Lalgarh in their determination to carry forward their ongoing rebellion.

Pt

## **People of Jungalmahal Boycott Elections**

*In West Bengal’s Jungalmahal area the people’s message was loud and clear. We don’t believe in the system. And it echoed throughout the Maoist strongholds in that region on April 30, when 14 constituencies across nine districts went to polls. Media reports indicate that an unprecedented election boycott was observed in the tribal-dominated areas of West Midnapore, Purulia and Bankura*



as well as the Dooars region of North Bengal. Eight booths of Lalgarh saw no voters; in Belpahari 13 booths stood empty and in the other areas of the state 96 booths registered no polling. Of the 30,000 voters in Lalgarh not more than 100 voted. The media reports that even the CRPF personnel on poll duty were surprised. An Assistant Commandant of the CRPF told the media: "We have experience working in Maoist troubled zones. We have not seen such type of low voting in other states

## **Statement on the incidents in Madhupur village on 11<sup>th</sup> April, 2009 by members of the fact-finding team who had visited the village**

*Five members of the All-India Fact Finding team were present in Madhupur village of Salboni I Block on 11th April 2009 from around 10 am to 12 noon. On reaching the village, the members found the villagers anxious and agitated. A group of 25-30 police personnel carrying firearms had tried to enter the village ten minutes ago. From accounts, when the women of the village resisted and refused them entry, the police threatened to beat up the women. The villagers then gathered in full strength and forced the police to leave the village.*

*In the presence of the fact finding team members, the villagers prepared for a procession to warn nearby villages against possible further entries by the police and the Harmad Vahini. People from other villages who had been informed soon joined the procession. Women participated in large numbers. They were completely peaceful, not carrying any fire-arms, and not in a mood for any confrontation. Members of the fact finding team left as the procession was beginning.*

*We later came to know from the villagers that the procession had been fired upon by the Harmad Vahini near Memul, a village adjacent to Madhupur. Members of the procession were forced to flee, and women in Memul had to lock themselves up in their houses. It appears that the Harmad Vahini also destroyed some of the houses in Memul, and tried to break do doors.*

*Given the past experience of the villagers, it appears that the attempted entry of the police in the morning is linked to the attack by the Harmad Vahini, subsequently, which seems to lend credence to the fears and distrust of police by the people of Lalgarh.*

*12th April, 2009*

*Madhupur fact-finding team:*

*Vidya Das, adivasi rights activist, Agragamee, Kashipur, Orissa*

*Gautam Navlakha, PUDR, consulting editor, EPW*

*Cohn Gonsalves, supreme court lawyer, Human rights law network*

*Budhaditya Das, student, DU*

*Manika Bora, student, JNU*

[This main article and the two side-bars are from *People's Truth*, #6, July 2009.]