

Social Transformation and the Question of Political Violence

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“Force is the midwife of every old society pregnant with a new one.” – Karl Marx

At a time when the spectre of Maoism is haunting India's ruling classes, a vehement debate has been launched by the media, academics, and intellectuals on the question of violence. The likes of Manmohan-Chidambaram-Buddhadeb have also been referring to it of late, by making constant 'appeals' or threats to the revolutionary forces to 'abjure violence'. As if the masters of the country who never lose sleep over the violence caused by the present exploitative system leading to the death of lakhs of indebted peasants, millions of stillborn and malnourished children, or the tens of thousands perishing in the absence of the very basic health facilities, the three hundred women who die in pregnancy or child-birth everyday in the country, or for that matter the 77% of the population living on an average daily income of less than Rs.20, has been rudely awakened by the practice of political violence by the revolutionary masses. Simplistic and false distinctions between democratic struggle vs. armed struggle, mass movement vs. 'militarism' etc. have also been resurrected, reflections of which are seen in the present political discourse in JNU as well.

Such facile debates on violence play down the fascist violence unleashed in the vast countryside by the feudal lords, rich peasants, village strongmen and their armed goons over the small and marginal peasants, dalit landless labourers and adivasi peasants. It does not recognise the coercive extraction of surplus labour by big capitalists from millions of workers in the 'unorganised sector', existing in the state of bondage or semi-bondage. The cacophony over 'violence' seeks to submerge the anguish of the classes and sections who have suffered for centuries the burden of exploitative and regressive production relations in our society, replete with daily violence. It conveniently covers up the forcible and violent subjugation of a whole people or nation in the name of 'territorial integrity', as the experience of Kashmir, North East or Punjab exemplifies. For the oppressed masses, violence is an everyday experience, a fact of life. They know it well, as they are the targets of this violence. For Marxists too, violence has never been the central issue. What is central is the question of putting an end to the exploitation of one human being by another and of one class by another, through revolutionary social transformation.

Revolutionary social transformation is the essence of Marxism: The great teachers of Marxism, including Marx himself, emphasised the absolute necessity of the use of force in order to overthrow the exploitative classes and for the capture of political power by the oppressed.

Marx and Engels in the concluding paragraph of the Communist Manifesto wrote, “The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions.” While summarising the concrete historical experiences of Paris Commune, the first ever worker’s government that “stormed heaven” and overthrew the bourgeoisie from the seat of power in 1871 through armed insurrection, Marx stressed the need of the proletariat to organise and arm itself in order to defeat the bourgeoisie and to defend the victories of the revolution. On the eve of the Bolshevik Revolution, Lenin emphatically upheld the necessity of revolutionary violence in his State and Revolution, “the liberation of the oppressed class is impossible not only without a violent revolution, but also without the destruction of the apparatus of state power which was created by the ruling class”. Mao, who was at the helm of the Chinese Revolution and who developed the strategies and tactics of revolution in the colonial and semi-colonial context, noted that “the seizure of power by armed force, the settlement of the issue by war, is the central task and the highest form of revolution.” No wonder, the question of violence that has been so clearly addressed by generations of Marxist revolutionaries, is deliberately obfuscated not only by the proclaimed anti-Marxist, but also by the pseudo-communists who have deviated from the path of class struggle and socialism. By criminalising the armed resistance and revolutionary violence of the oppressed, they openly or implicitly facilitate and justify the repression of the rulers, thereby siding with the oppressors in the violent class struggle.

Revolutionary social transformation and the capture of political power by the oppressed is not possible without revolutionary violence: The theory and practice of Marxism as well as the history of worldwide communist movement shows that no radical reordering of the society is possible without the oppressed classes confronting the violence of the oppressors with revolutionary violence. The quest for maintaining ‘peace’ and ‘order’ in any society with exploitative social relations, is nothing but a ploy of the ruling classes to continue unhindered the existing exploitative system. The Indian ruling classes is also no exception to this. Even India’s First War of Independence in 1857 or the various tribal rebellions during the colonial period were violently suppressed by the British colonial army. The agrarian armed struggle of Telangana under Communist leadership was crushed by Nehru’s Congress government after the transfer of power in 1947 through the deployment of Indian Army. Similarly, the national liberation struggle led by the Mizo National Front in the North East was quelled by the use of army and air force, which also involved the forced displacement and ‘clustering’ of 80% of the total Mizo population in resettled villages. The national liberation movements of the people of Kashmir, Nagalim, Manipur or Asom etc., who have been fighting to achieve the democratic right of self-determination, have likewise been confronted militarily by the Indian state. ‘Peace’ in Punjab was established in 1980s through a violent extermination campaign that culminated in the storming of the Golden Temple by the Indian security forces during ‘Operation Blue Star’. The violence perpetrated in all these cases, which have confronted the ruling classes of the country, has been variously justified by the ruling classes and their political parties, including

those wearing the mask of communists, the CPI and later the CPI(M). Most of these movements have strived for democratic revolutions under the leadership of their respective national bourgeoisie. The Indian ruling class comprising of the feudal and comprador big bourgeoisie however has repeatedly resorted brutal suppression of the revolutionary potential of these people's movements and their democratic aspirations through the use of the state and its coercive apparatus, primarily the armed forces.

The character of the present Indian society, the tasks of the Indian revolution, and the necessity of armed struggle: The Communist Party of India followed a revisionist policy from its very inception, and tailed the Congress during anti-colonial movement. After 1947, the undivided CPI got enmeshed in the quagmire of parliamentarism, the question of revolution being never seriously addressed. The CPI(M) too had a similar analysis about the Indian society as CPI, for whom sharing of political power with the ruling classes through parliamentary elections became the single-point agenda. It was the great Naxalbari armed agrarian uprising in 1967 which blazed the trail of revolution in the subcontinent, combining revolutionary theory with practice. Hailed as the 'Spring Thunder', the Naxalbari movement for the first time correctly analysed the character of the Indian state and society, its class composition, and the need of armed struggle. Quite contrary to the understanding of CPI, CPI(M) and other such revisionist forces, which characterised the Indian society as bourgeois democratic, the Naxalbari movement established the semi-feudal and semi-colonial character of the Indian society. It identified the Indian state as the combined class-rule of feudalism, comprador big bourgeoisie and imperialism, who are the targets of the Indian revolution. The task was to bring in the New Democratic Revolution under the leadership of the proletarian party. 'Land to the tiller' became one of the important programs of the revolution, which mobilised the landless and small peasants. This also gave the framework to understand the caste question with all its significance from a Marxist perspective, a question which was so far ignored or brushed aside by the revisionist communist parties.

Since the contradiction between the broad masses and feudalism was identified by the Naxal movement as the primary class contradiction in the Indian society, the fight against feudal exploitation and state oppression was conducted through armed agrarian struggle, on the basis of worker-peasant alliance. In the period of 1967-74, the Naxalbari movement made initial efforts to implement the strategy and tactics of protracted people's war through area-wise seizure of power, building base areas in the countryside, and developing people's revolutionary power by replacing the power of the Indian ruling class. Though the movement suffered serious setback due to severe repression in the '70s, Naxalbari showed the oppressed masses of the entire subcontinent the path of liberation through an intensified class struggle against their oppressors, whereas the revisionists offered only class collaboration. Naxalbari was a clear break from those who have abandoned the path of Marxism, and rejected revolutionary violence in the name of 'democracy', or for 'making use' of the parliament. Marxism-Leninism-Maoism became the

political weapon of the people, while armed struggle for capturing political power the strategy. 42 years of Naxalbari's glorious legacy has proved beyond doubt that in the Indian social reality, it is the only path of revolutionary social transformation. To ask the revolutionary masses to 'abjure' violence therefore is to ask them to give up Marxism, and class struggle. As long as the ruling classes retain its powers to exploit and oppress through open and systemic violence, political violence of the oppressed will continue to be relevant, justified, and necessary.

Naxalism is not the problem, it is the solution: The expansion of the revolutionary movement over the last four decades to a vast region of central, eastern and southern India has now strengthened to become the 'largest internal security threat' for the ruling classes. The people, particularly the adivasi masses, have successfully overthrown the old exploitative system in large swathes of Dandakaranya, and are creating in its place embryonic forms of people's government (Janatana Sarkar). The masses are now running their own affairs through revolutionary people's committees, ushering in a people-centric development. They are also defending the gains of the movement by building armed people's militia, involving the entire population. They have fought back state violence perpetrated through the armed forces or [Salwa Judum](#), and successfully prevented the corporate loot of their resources. The present war on people is nothing but an intensification of the class struggle between the rulers and the ruled, moving towards an all-encompassing civil war. The world-wide economic crisis is pushing the Indian state towards intensified exploitation of the people and their resources, whereas the mass resistance is also taking more militant form, drawing large sections of the oppressed classes towards the revolutionary movement. In such a volatile context, there is every possibility that the present imperialist crisis will turn into a revolutionary one. History has shown that the crises of imperialism have weakened the domestic and imperialist ruling classes, thereby paving the way for revolution. The question therefore is not of choosing violence over non-violence, but of Marxism over revisionism and fascism, of freedom over exploitation and injustice.

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