

# Spring Thunder Anew

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The white man called you Bhagat Singh that day,  
The black man calls you Naxalite today.  
But everyone will call you the morning star tomorrow.

—Excerpt from the Telugu poem  
'Final Journey : First Victory' by Sri Sri 1

It has been a long and tortuous route. Forty-three years ago, a group of Maoist revolutionaries conceived of and embarked upon a revolutionary road that still inspires their political descendants, alarms the dominant classes, and provokes slander and denigration on the part of the establishment left, post-modernists and well-funded NGO bosses. This is the path of protracted people's war (PPW). It relies on an alliance of the Indian proletariat with the poor and landless peasantry and the semi-proletariat to establish 'base areas' in the countryside, run them democratically as miniature, self-reliant states, carry out 'land to the tiller' and other social policies there, thereby building a political mass base to finally encircle and 'capture' the cities.

The aim is to usher in 'new democracy', a transitional stage in which capitalism is moulded to render it more compatible with democracy, thereby aiding the transition to socialism, all under the leadership of a 'Marxist-Leninist-Maoist party'. One would like to say, 'It's been a long time coming', but even today, the Maoist movement in India is nowhere near its 'new democratic' goal—the dawn has been ever elusive. Yet, the dominant classes want it throttled, and the Indian state has recently launched Operation Green Hunt—phase-2 of its present counter-insurgency strategy—to accomplish its task. What has prompted this move?

Low intensity conflict or—if one were to speak plainly—terrorism with politics in command of the repressive apparatus has been the state's modus operandi of dealing with the Maoist movement. Complementing this, and taking into account aspects of the concrete in the close nexus of wealth and power at the local level, the state supports, sponsors, and organizes a network of informers and combatants among the civilian population as part of its counter-insurgency strategy. Nevertheless, the stick and the carrot go together. The Indian state, though an instrument of the dominant classes—the big bourgeoisie, foreign capital, the landlords, a section of the rich peasants, and the controllers of the government machinery—is, nevertheless, an arena of class struggle.

Over the period since 1967, laws and policies setting limits to the exercise of the power of the dominant classes have been won largely due to the very struggles led by the Maoists and other progressive forces. The dominant classes, of course, hope that the new rules and regulations and proposed actions will drastically diminish the support base of the Maoist movement. However, those very classes have in turn devised more sophisticated ways of controlling that base, actual and potential. For the very high rate of exploitation, the rampant pillage of Mother Nature, and the devious expropriation of social property that are characteristic of neo-robber baron capitalism have to go on, which, in turn, puts severe limits on

democratic functioning, thereby keeping alive the very *raison d'être* of the Maoist movement.

How have the Maoists built and sustained the movement led by them, when their enemy, the Indian state, especially its repressive apparatus, is so powerful and the Communist Party of India (Maoist) [CPI (Maoist)], the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA), and the agrarian revolutionary movement are still weak? Uneven development, characteristic of capitalism, provides enough room for manoeuvre in the face of many a paramilitary offensive. The Dandakaranya region—the forest area situated in the border and adjoining tribal districts of the states of Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra and Orissa—is where the PLGA has established guerrilla zones. These are tracts where the agrarian revolutionary movement is strong, but where the party and its mass organizations are in power only as long as the guerrillas have the upper hand over the state's forces. Power reverts to the Indian state when they are forced to retreat.

The extensive area of Dandakaranya and beyond to some other parts of the four states just mentioned, and further on to parts of Bihar, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal are being built into a contiguous area of Maoist influence. Of course, the hilly regions with dense forest cover provide the most conducive terrain for the PLGA, followed by backward plain and semi-forest areas with some hilly terrain.

In spreading the movement, when an area is selected, a class analysis is undertaken, the concrete forms of exploitation and oppression are understood, the friends and the enemies of the movement are clearly identified, and the issues to be taken up which constitute the basis of mass mobilization are decided. For instance, in a predominantly tribal area, the economic basis of mobilization is located within both backward agriculture and forestry. When the erstwhile CPI (Marxist-Leninist) (People's War) [CPI(ML)(PW)], under the auspices of the Adivasi Kisan Mazdoor Sanghatan (AKMS), began organizing the tribal poor in the then Bastar district of Madhya Pradesh in the early 1980s, the 'enemies' were the oppressive forest, revenue and police department officials, and contractors, traders and moneylenders. Where considerable inequality in the distribution of cultivable land prevailed, landlords were also part of the adversaries.

The AKMS took up the question of pattas (instruments of ownership rights) on forestland under cultivation and on cultivable land in forest villages. Where landlords were in charge, the appropriation and distribution of land and grain were on the agenda. As the young, local, militant leaders in the AKMS-organized sanghams gained legitimacy and eventually displaced the village mukhias and other traditional village headmen, they increasingly influenced the decision-making process on local issues, and eventually, the *jan adalats* (people's courts), set up by them, settled disputes. The AKMS came to exercise control over the collection and sale of minor produce (for instance, *tendu patta*) in favour of the poor.

Expectedly, all this exacerbated the contradictions *vis-à-vis* the landed, the traders, the contractors, and the corrupt forest and revenue department officials, and the organized violence of the oppressors and the state was unleashed against

the Maoists (the vigilante force, *Salwa Judum*, in Dantewara district of Chhattisgarh, formed in May-June 2005, is not without precedent).

Of course, the Maoists anticipate and plan for 'strategic defence'—the decision to enter an area factors in the terrain with which they familiarize themselves. People's militia at the village level and local and special guerrilla squads are organized from the very commencement of their work, and later, upon coordination with other guerrilla zones, platoons and companies are formed, leading to a full-fledged PLGA. In situations marked by a close nexus between political and economic power, which is invariably the case in India's backward areas, the chances of violent confrontation are high. Indeed, over time, the contradictions with the exploiters and oppressors, already sharp in these areas of backward agriculture and forestry, inevitably get exacerbated manifold with the organization of the oppressed by the Maoists, and when the state sends in its paramilitary forces, a guerrilla war ensues.

The problem, from the Maoist perspective of progress in the PPW, is that they have not been able to turn any of the guerrilla zones into base areas. The latter are areas where the Maoists win the political (and military) struggle and establish a miniature state, where self-reliant economic development on the basis of 'land to the tiller', and the promotion of mutual aid and cooperation can, relatively uninterruptedly, be undertaken. It is impossible to advance the ongoing guerrilla war or the further spread of guerrilla zones without the establishment of base areas.

In the plains areas—which are less suitable for guerrilla warfare and the establishment of guerrilla zones—the higher guerrilla units have been unable to continue their operations and gradually have had to move to the forest and hilly areas. Some of the existing guerrilla zones are potential candidates for transformation into base areas, but 'the enemy' has to be defeated there and the organs of political power have to then be established, a formidable task in the face of severe repression.

Of course, the present Operation Green Hunt, from the perspective of the Indian state, is intended to turn existing guerrilla zones back into 'White Areas' where the writ of a relatively stable, reactionary government runs. And, even if the Maoists were to turn one of the guerrilla zones into a base area, there is no guarantee that it will remain one, i.e., it can revert back to a guerrilla zone. From the Maoist point of view, if they create and sustain a few base areas, the PPW will be able to sustain itself over a long period; in the absence of base areas, the Maoist guerrilla army will not last long or grow—in guerrilla parlance, the base areas are its essential 'rear'.

There is another aspect of the imperative to establish base areas—the sustenance of mass support. Difficult as it surely is, it is imperative for the CPI (Maoist) and its mass organizations to undertake economic development in the midst of the revolution, for the workers, the poor and landless peasants, and the semi-proletariat cannot be expected to put up with their abysmal living conditions over decades. But this can only take place on a relatively stable basis with the establishment of base areas, which is eluding the Maoists, and the longer this adverse situation prevails the greater the chances of withering away of the movement's support base.

The present intense phase of the Maoist movement began with the unity of the CPI(ML)(PW) and the Maoist Communist Centre of India (MCCI) -- the two main Maoist parties practising armed struggle—to form the CPI (Maoist) in September 2004. The movement's regeneration has occurred in the context of neo-liberal globalization with, among other things, a spurt in the conversion of agricultural lands into real estate, the setting up of special economic zones, the takeover of the commons, and encroachment of the natural resource base. All these have led to mass distress following the loss of non-market access to the means of subsistence and dispossession through displacement, both essentially without any legal redress for the victims. However, change must not be divorced from its interplay with continuity.

Beginning in May 1967, armed communist revolutionaries led a poor-tribal peasant uprising in Naxalbari that was crushed by the repressive apparatus of the state within a few months, but the movement spread, and 43 years later, the 'people's war' still goes on. In the first phase of the movement, from the late 1960s to the Emergency in the mid-1970s, the revolutionaries organized the poor and landless peasants based on armed guerrilla actions centred on the 'adventurist' line of annihilation of class enemies.

But internal differences over strategy and tactics soon led to the fragmentation and debilitation of the original party, the CPI(ML), and the brutal counter-insurgency campaign of the state crushed the movement, the final blow coming with the declaration of Emergency in 1975. What was, however, significant and lasting, although there are no traces of the movement where it all began, was the total rejection by the revolutionary left of the cultural, moral and political values that the establishment left had imbibed, since 1951, from the dominant classes.

With the revival of the movement in the post-Emergency period, all the major factions of the CPI(ML) seemed to have adopted, to a lesser or greater extent, the line of the Andhra Pradesh Revolutionary Communist Committee—that of building mass movements backed by armed squads to defend the gains made by the former. And, paradoxically, in this phase (1977-1990s) it was the CPI(ML)(PW)—although it focused on the building of a people's army and guerrilla zones in the countryside—that organized legal and open activities through the Rythu Cooly Sangham, as also of students, youth, intellectuals and cultural workers. However, the crushing of these by the state provoked a tendency to assign greater priority to the building of a people's army and guerrilla zones in the countryside.

Elsewhere, mainly in Bihar, a prominent part of the movement, led by the CPI(ML) (Liberation), made a significant departure from the very core of the basic path that had been conceived by the original CPI(ML). The shift was towards mass movements sans armed struggle, even conceiving of a confederation of mainstream left parties. This, however, landed the party in an identity crisis for the new direction heralded a return to theoretical proximity vis-a-vis the CPI (Marxist), against which the MLs had rebelled in 1967.

Sadly, the change of strategy took the CPI(ML) (Liberation) towards parliamentarianism, which seems to have affected the further development of the party's mass movements. In any case, it seems to have lost a large section of its mass base with the 'Mandalization' and 'Kashiramization' of the political agendas

of the 'bourgeois' parties. The return to armed struggle has been ruled out, at least for the present, given the CPI(ML) (Liberation)'s dismissal of that trend of the movement as 'anarcho-militarist'.

However, the unfolding of its strategy of new democratic revolution—via mass movements sans armed struggle—according to its inner logic has encountered severe impediments from the dominant classes. Just like in the case of the CPI(ML)(PW) and its 'legal' mass movements of the 1980s, the CPI(ML) (Liberation) could never have been allowed, unhindered by the dominant classes, a free run on its political programme.

The reverberating slogan of the CPI(ML)(PW) and the MCCI, 'Naxalbari—ek hi rasta' (Naxalbari—the One and Only Path), seems to have won the day, at least for the foreseeable future, more so after the two parties united to constitute the CPI (Maoist) in September 2004. After the demise of the Soviet Union and the completion of the 'great leap backward' to capitalism in China, capitalism on a world scale has taken its gloves off—it has little qualms in resorting to brutal forms of expropriation in the process of accumulation, akin in some ways to what it did at its birth. Accompanying this is the class discrimination inherent in the practice of law where peasants, forced off their lands and denied access to the commons, have virtually no recourse to justice.

Resistance seemed the only way out—in such circumstances, 'to rebel is justified.'

The Dandakaranya region, rich in natural resources—land, water, forests and minerals—has become one of the main arenas for expropriation of social property by the Indian big bourgeoisie and foreign capital, mediated by the state and union governments. Planned mining and industrial projects and development of eco-tourist resorts have spurred the construction of highways, roads, railways, hydro-electricity, and an underground pipeline (taking a slurry of iron ore to Visakhapatnam port), which, taken together, constitute, in the official parlance, 'development'. The identities of the beneficiaries and the victims of this process of capitalist development tell a lot about the character of India's dominant classes.

In sharp contrast, the Maoists have initiated, albeit in a small way in some pockets in Dandakaranya—considering that they have managed to set up only guerrilla zones, not base areas—a series of popular activities. These include 'land to the tiller', mutual aid and cooperatives, the diffusion of modern knowledge about agriculture, together with the distribution of better seeds gathered from elsewhere, the deployment of voluntary labour in the construction of tanks with canal systems, measures to obtain 'just' prices for agricultural commodities and minor forest produce, and so on.

However, in the present adverse circumstances, an alternative pattern of industrialization benefiting the victims of neo-robber-baron capitalism can only be conceived of, not implemented. Meanwhile, adivasi livelihoods based on agriculture and minor forest produce are in jeopardy. The mining and industrial projects, the infrastructural facilities, including hydro-electricity, have led/are leading to mass displacement and environmental damage.

Indeed, the classic peasant question of dispossession via class differentiation in the 20th century is now metamorphosing into dispossession through

displacement and environmental degradation. At the macro-level, millions of rural people are being rendered proletarians (in the form of casual and contract labour), hungry, malnutrition-ridden, homeless and landless paupers, forced migrants, threatened autochthonous peoples, lumpen proletariat, and so on. Indeed, those who hold on as poor and middle peasants against all odds are forced to grapple with the non-viability of agriculture in the context of higher input prices and freer trade in agricultural commodities under WTO auspices.

Fundamentally, the 'people's war' (of resistance) is about the path of development —the neo-robber baron capitalism in which the poor are the victims or 'new democratic' development in which they are the intended beneficiaries. In Dantewara, Bastar and Bijapur districts in Chhattisgarh, in the context of large-scale acquisition of land by corporations in what is a mineral-rich region, entire villages have been evacuated and villagers forcibly herded into camps, from which those who escape are branded Maoists and hunted down. Indeed, the vigilante group, *Salwa Judum* (SJ), which organized the evacuation and forced herding 'was created and encouraged by the [state] government and supported with the firepower and organization of the central forces.'

No, this quote is not from a report of one of civil liberties and democratic rights organizations, but taken from chapter four of a 2009 draft report authored by Sub-Group IV of the Committee on State Agrarian Relations and Unfinished Task of Land Reforms, set up by the Ministry of Rural Development, New Delhi. Without mincing words, it refers to 'the biggest grab of tribal land after Columbus' in the making as being initially 'scripted by Tata Steel and Essar Steel who want seven villages or thereabouts each to mine the richest lode of iron ore available in India.'

However, the land-grab operation, after nearly five years of violent attacks, loot, destruction, intimidation, rape, and killing on an unprecedented scale, and the forcible mobilization of the displaced into SJ ranks, has not succeeded, thanks to concerted resistance by the people and the Maoist guerrillas. However, the very failure has prompted a move to phase-2 of the state's counter-insurgency strategy. Greater emphasis is now being placed on trained commandos (instructed in jungle warfare) and a larger contingent of central forces, as part of Operation Green Hunt, wherein an attempt will be made to separate, indeed isolate, the tribal peasants from contact with and influence by the Maoist insurgents by creating 'fortified villages' or 'strategic hamlets' as the US forces tried to do in Vietnam.

Most likely, Green Hunt would concentrate on select guerrilla zones (it has already been launched in south Dantewara [in Chhattisgarh] and the contiguous Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra) and, over a period of two, three or five years (claims made by various representatives at the central and state levels), try to wipe out the PLGA and the party's mass organizations. (As for the party, there have been some press reports suggesting plots to assassinate its top-50 leaders.) Faced with an offensive of this kind, the Maoist guerrillas will likely extend the arena of the struggle, in turn, even daring to organize in the urban areas, but in the process some of the existing guerrilla zones will likely be converted back to 'White Areas'. Of course, the effectiveness of protests in India and elsewhere and

the resistance offered by the tribal people and the Maoist guerrillas would set the limits to the state's onslaught.

In the absence of base areas, the movement now seems to be in a difficult situation—the Indian state has made it almost impossible for the CPI (Maoist)'s political-cum-military strategy to unfold in accordance with its inner logic. The movement is, of course, a direct consequence of the tragedy of India ruled by her big bourgeoisie and governed by parties co-opted by that class-fraction. Operation Green Hunt stems from the fact that the movement now threatens the accumulation of capital in its areas of influence, defined more broadly by the dominant classes as the so-called 'Red Corridor', and therefore, the Indian state is bent on throttling it.

It seems that sections of monopoly capital—including Arcelor Mittal, the Essar Group, Vedanta Resources, Tata Steel, POSCO, Rio Tinto, BHP Billiton, and the Sajjan Jindal Group—have given an ultimatum to the state governments concerned and the Union government that they will dump their proposed mining/industrial/SEZ projects if the local resistance to their business plans are not crippled once and for all. Surely, the wealthy oligopolists and financiers have friends in high places in Washington, London, Tokyo, Brussels and/or New Delhi.

As radical democrats, as between neo-robber-baron capitalism and 'new democracy', one cannot pretend to be neutral. Evoking so-called 'sandwich theory' that the 'innocent adivasis are caught in the crossfire' between the Maoist guerrillas on the one side and the armed apparatus of the Indian state on the other, thereby morally equating the violence of the oppressed and the oppressors, is to endorse what the Indian state is doing—backing the neo-robber barons to the hilt.

Neo-robber baron capitalism is based on the exploitation—appropriation of part of the product of the labour of others—of human beings, the pillage of nature and the expropriation of social property by any and all available means, these in the context of a close nexus between business and politics. As a specific form of monopoly capitalism, business strategy/tactics of the larger enterprises in the more monopolistically structured sectors focus ever more on ways and means of 'snatching' the surplus from relatively smaller enterprises in the more competitive sectors (the latter will be protected in a 'new democratic' regime).

In the neo-liberal milieu of deregulation, all these processes are generating inequality on an unprecedented scale. It is not irrelevant that India has the same number of \$ billionaires as Germany, although the latter's GDP is four times the former's, and Germany's per capita GDP converted at market exchange rates to US \$ is more than 40 times India's. And, in 2004-05, 77% of India's 362 million strong unorganized labour force (which makes up most of India's total labour force) earned less than Rs 20 per day (44 cents at Rs 45 to the \$).

A 'new democratic' regime—the Maoist alternative to neo-robber baron capitalism—in the main will abolish landlordism and implement 'land to the tiller' in India's countryside and safeguard India's sovereignty, dealing with the imperialist powers on an equal footing. It will also confiscate the property of the imperialists and the big bourgeoisie—those at the apex of wealth, power and privilege—and hence stymie the anti-democratic opposition to socialism from

their representatives and backers. From an ecological point of view, the redistribution of income and wealth—as a result of such a programme—will lead to a more just distribution of carbon footprints within the country, and priority will be assigned to satisfying the reasonable needs of all, in keeping with Maoist ethics.

Of course, 'new democracy' in India is nowhere yet on the horizon. Nevertheless, the ruling classes and those who govern on their behalf have realized that what they are up against is not merely a guerrilla army backed by a large section of the people in its areas of operation, but a party with a vision and a plan that does all it can to implement, against all odds, and which, if successful, will strip them of their wealth, power and privileges.

Evidently then, there is a lot at stake between neo-robber baron capitalism on the one side and 'new democracy' on the other—for the neo-robber barons and their representatives, for the adivasis of Dandakaranya and beyond, indeed, for the Indian people, and, for a better world. □□□

Notes :

1. Thema Book of Naxalite Poetry edited and introduced by Sumanta Banerjee, Calcutta, 1987. Bhagat Singh, an Indian anti-imperialist and socialist revolutionary martyr (shaheed), was hanged on March 23, 1931 at the age of 23. Naxalite is what a Maoist in India is generally called. The name derives from the village of Naxalbari in West Bengal where the Maoist movement in India originated in 1967.

*[Source : Marx Laboratory]*