

MAOISM IN INDIA AND NEPAL

RANJIT BHUSHAN



A Routledge India Original

First published 2016
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 2016 Ranjit Bhushan

The right of Ranjit Bhushan to be identified as author of this work has been asserted in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A catalog record has been requested for this book

ISBN: 978-1-138-92225-9 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-68549-6 (ebk)

Typeset in Goudy
by Apex CoVantage, LLC

CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	vii
Introduction	1
PART I	
Ideologues' take	25
1 Dipankar Bhattacharya	27
2 Manoranjan Mohanty	49
PART II	
Activism on ground in India	71
3 Kameshwar Baitha	73
4 Abhijit Mazumdar	85
5 Vara Vara Rao	105
6 Binayak Sen	145
PART III	
Maoism in the Himalayas	159
7 Prachanda	161

CONTENTS

8	Baburam Bhattarai	175
9	Anand Verma	193
	<i>Appendix</i>	213
	<i>Glossary</i>	237
	<i>Index</i>	247

PREFACE

Writing any contemporary history of Maoists in South Asia would have to be the work of a life time. This book has no such pretensions. Instead of relying on theoretical constructs, it depends on the voices of individuals who have been at some or the other time associated with the Maoist or radical Left movement in India and Nepal. They include politicians, participants, sympathizers, activists and media persons. It was tempting to use the interview methodology because it involves oral history and the memories and nuances of men who have been part of a historical movement. So it is not an academician's perspective but a journalistic one, which hopefully leads to a more human understanding of the subject through the voices of these insurrectionists.

I express my eternal gratitude to Raju Mansukhani for being the guiding light of this book. Sandeep Bhushan helped out with formulating ideas. Many thanks to Anand Swaroop Verma, Amit Sengupta and D. P. Tripathi for their assistance. My special appreciation goes to Routledge for facilitating the publication of the book. I am indebted to my wife Sharmila Chandra for screening the manuscript. Any shortcomings in the book are, of course, only mine.

Ranjit Bhushan
Delhi

INTRODUCTION

In 1986, when I first went to cover the Musahari block in Bihar's Muzafarpur district in eastern India as a reporter for the *Times of India*, what stood out were the high level of political awareness even in a remote hamlet such as this location. Musahari was the site of intense Left radical politics in the heydays of the Naxalbari movement back in the 1960s, directly impacted by Charu Mazumdar and his ideas. Even though two decades had elapsed since the turbulent 1960s when I reached there, and the revolutionaries had since given up their arms to settle down to more mundane activities like pursuing agriculture, they were more willing to discuss policies of crop rotation rather than bringing overwhelming changes in society as envisaged by the Naxalbari movement; it was difficult to figure out the connection between Bengal and this village in Bihar, separated by hundreds of kilometres.

It was then that the idea of writing a book on alternate politics of the kind espoused by extreme Left politics took roots. The book is important because it asks a very basic question: Why are Maoist, Naxalite and Left extremist movements taking root in the most backward and underdeveloped regions of South Asia? The book documents voices from India's Red Corridor, spanning Central/South India and extending northwards into Nepal where it has already become a mainstream political force – a force that not only fundamentally questions South Asia's development paradigm but also threatens the carefully crafted balance of power in the region.

This book will serve both as primary reference material for students and researchers working on the subject as well as an interpretative document that will impart sense and cohesion to the seemingly fragmented but formidable Maoist politics in South Asia.

In the late 1980s, during my years as a professional journalist in Patna, I had the opportunity to report on and examine the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) [CPI (ML)] movement in some detail. Bihar was in the throes of great churning then. A backward state, it fell short on all universally accepted human indices like poverty, education, health, sanitation, drinking water and others. But in addition, it had something else – grave physical and economic oppression of the low caste, the rural unemployed, the share cropper and the tenant cultivator.

You do not have to be a Leftist to realize how distorted the socio-economic order was. In April 1986, I covered the infamous Arwal massacre in Bihar's Jehanabad district for the *Times of India*. In the killings, dubbed by some as 'Bihar's Jallianwala', police opened fire on a crowd of alleged Naxalites or ultra Left wingers, who are said to have attacked them at Arwal, killing 23 people and injuring many others. It was evident that after years of repression, the rise of the Indian People's Front (IPF), a later-day version of the original CPI (ML) espoused by its leader Charu Mazumdar, applying totally different tactics, had organized this poor segment, which was now openly demanding its rights even in the backwaters of Bihar. This first-time resistance was being met with hostility by a state that was not committed to empowerment of any kind.

The second story that I covered for the news agency Associated Press was the 1987 mass rape of low-caste women in Pararia village in Aurungabad district, again in Bihar. This too was a case symptomatic of those times. According to the victims, a posse of 50 policemen surrounded their poor hutments, broke into them and systematically abused them. The police version said that a lone constable on an investigatory mission to the village had been assaulted by some villagers, who they said were either Naxalites themselves or Naxalite sympathizers. The story ran a familiar course.

In the 1980s and early 1990s in Bihar and some other parts of the country, notably Andhra Pradesh in South India, there were several such attacks and counter-attacks in a deadly game of attrition in which peasants were invariably caught up in feuds with high-caste landlords and the police.

One thing was clear though: the social structure was beginning to undergo a definitive change. The state, largely ineffectual in taking development and growth down to the last mile, had vacated its role as a welfare provider. That space had been taken over by ultras, and it is no

surprise that more than two decades down the line, both Jehanabad and Aurungabad in central Bihar – the sites of my reportage – are currently scenes of heavy Maoist activity, with its own little carved out enclaves where ultras hold sway. They are officially referred to as ‘liberated’ zones where their writ is more important than the state’s in the heart of the Indian republic.

It also gave me the opportunity to study agrarian tensions in rural Bihar where the unbridled powers of the rural rich, significant vote banks in themselves, were being increasingly put to question by the dispossessed, the guidance and theoretical education of which was being imparted by the ultra Left groups (see Appendix). The reportage in Bihar whetted my interest in modern Indian history, especially the ‘civil wars’ waged by Maoist, Naxalite and extreme Left movements.

In the 1990s as a correspondent for the *Indian Express* in New Delhi covering the Ministry of Home affairs, I had the chance to interact with security and intelligence officials in the South Block, who in effect, decided central government policies on how to deal with civil insurgencies raging in the country, and the question of Naxalites was on top of their list.

It would not be inaccurate to suggest that there has been a definite shift in official line and policy on radical Leftists; it starting off treating it as purely a law and order problem back in the 1980s and 1990s, which needed to be curbed with a heavy hand, but now even the government acknowledges the existence of grave inequities that exist in the system that needed to be addressed. To be sure, there are a plethora of security experts who still believe that law and order approach is the best way to curb dissent, but attitudes overall have been changing, even if bit by bit, in the last two decades or so.

In 2004, as a reporter for the *Outlook* magazine, I travelled to the interiors in central India’s Chhattisgarh state. I travelled through Bastar and Dantewada districts to examine the so-called Red Corridor. These two districts lie in the mineral-rich tribal heartland, which as it moves northwards, cuts through parts of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Jharkhand and Bihar states.

The issues that haunted this place are not much different from what I saw in Bihar a decade-and-a-half ago. Feudal powers rested with the high castes that were being challenged and in some cases, brought down. In Dantewada, possibly the worst-affected district, it was a simple case

of the state abdicating its responsibilities. In the interiors, doctors were not available in primary health clinics, there were no civil officials to execute government plans and the police thought it was a good idea to stay away from trouble by opting to stay put in district headquarters. Those places of governance had been occupied by regular Maoist cadre. That, in essence, was the dreaded red line.

The travels gave me the opportunity to mix and interact with Left cadres, civil officials, local politicians, security personnel, human right activists and the common people who have been most directly impacted by the spiral of violence and counter-violence in areas 'held' by Maoists. More than anything else, it gave me the opportunity of listening to the radical Left story in its entirety, from all sides.

During 2005–06, I was a visiting professor at the Centre for Jawaharlal Nehru Studies at the Jamia Millia Islamia University. The fellowship gave me the opportunity of organizing and participating in a series of seminars and workshops on the Maoist and Naxalite question at the Nehru Centre.

At the seminars, I closely interacted with grassroots activists, mid-level Kisan Sabha leaders and some leading lights from the Indian and Nepali Maoist movements. Some of the activists, with sound theoretical knowledge as well as years of agitational politics behind them, were invaluable assets in furthering my understanding of the subject.

The centre's resources were quite substantial giving me access to a solid research base and party documents relating to radical Left politics. This fellowship further acted as a catalyst and firmed up my resolve to pursue the book project on Maoism in South Asia.

In November 2005, I traveled to central Bihar to report the tactics, strategy and leadership of the Maoist movement there in the aftermath of one of the biggest attacks of its type, an audacious onslaught on the Jehanabad police station, which proved that the Maoists in Bihar had consolidated themselves during the last three decades of agitational and often violent politics.

In 2006, I interacted closely with Nepali Maoists, some of whom had temporarily made Delhi their base for over-ground politics and for holding important political meetings. The success of Nepali Maoists, as narrated and experienced by them, is in itself quite dramatic. In a matter of roughly a decade, from gun-toting 'terrorists', Nepali Maoists became national heroes and equal participants in the national government.

Are Naxalite and Maoists interchangeable words? Perhaps, yes. India's radical Left movement can be roughly divided into two phases: pre- and post-1980. In the first phase, it was known as the Naxalbari agitation; now it is known as the Maoist movement. The first phase was largely influenced by Charu Mazumdar, widely recognized as the father of the Naxalbari movement, and his ideas. The second phase, post-1980, represents a tactical shift, when a largely underground movement opted for parliamentary politics and open meetings, necessitated by the fact that a number of their top leaders, including Charu Mazumdar, and cadres were liquidated. The revolutionary prospects of taking on the might of the Indian state had dissolved in the 1980s. But it is unclear how the nomenclature changed from Naxalites to Maoists.

Can it be traced to India's economic model where the rising forces of globalization confront the Maoist movement most starkly? The globalization model – or the Sensex model – some would say, is the legacy of English colonialists, a brown man performing the roles of a white man. Indians tend to directly or indirectly integrate with the Western systems, lifestyle, literature, media and business transactions. In the words of one writer, 'A person's westernization has become the measure of superiority over his fellow Indians.'

In such a situation, while Sensex India is run top-down with the help of the new elite, led mainly by Westernized English speakers, the Maoist movement is its anti-thesis. Local languages, not English, hold sway, depending upon the region in India. So in a sense, it would not be inaccurate to say that the Maoist movement itself is a disparate set of movements, not unified whole, which offers resistance to the state that is largely seen as being increasingly pro-Western or pro-globalization, if you will.

For instance, what to a multinational company (or even an Indian one) is mere leasing or mining rights accorded to it in the mineral-rich tribal belt for setting up a project that could offer employment to local people, to a Maoist it is the biggest sign of slavery and exploitation where people's rights and environmental concerns have been thrown out of the window to accommodate global or Western interests.

That is a sharp contradiction India has to live with and find answers to. Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh brought out this point evocatively when he said that the country's development model was under threat of being jeopardized because Maoists were opposing setting

up of industrial projects in the tribal heartland, obviously places where the coal and mineral linkages can be accessed easily.

In writing this book, I have depended upon the interview methodology: oral history, memory and 'hearing' these men who are making history and are a part of a historical movement. It is by no means an academician's view of the subject but a journalistic one, relying not on theoretical constructs but a more humane understanding of the subject, through the voices of these revolutionaries. The book includes perspectives of people intimately associated with the upsurge not merely as friends and fellow travellers but also as foes who have helped to critically define the nature of Maoism in South Asia. The chapters are in the form of detailed interviews with key participants. I hope to use my experience as a news reporter to get under the skin of different narratives, rather than provide theoretical arguments about the radical Left movement, which has been the norm and accepted practice in countless books on the subject. This book will take a close and hard look at some of the important personages who have helped shape and lead the Maoist, Naxalite and extreme Left movements in India and Nepal. Included in these extended dialogues are revolutionaries, social scientists, intellectuals and media persons. The interviews are an attempt to probe the minds and actions of these leaders and will focus on critical issues of their ideology and their nuances.

The Maoist movement in India, better known by its earlier name Naxalite, is a five-decade-old radical Left insurgency centred in the country's predominantly tribal belt. Yet, its impact as a political agitation has rarely touched the lives of those who live in urban areas. For most who preside over policy planning, and who are invariably city bred themselves, Maoism still remains a fairly esoteric idea. The concept that some interior boondocks in the Indian republic are in a state of siege is most unlikely to touch a cord in the country's burgeoning metros where the effects of globalization and economic advancement are most evident.

The even more esoteric idea that a central line, or what is known as the Dandakarnya, runs through central India's tribal heartland, strongly entrenched in Andhra Pradesh, and cutting across to Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Bihar, merging into Nepal's Terai districts, are taken no more seriously than as official pronouncements of the so-called Red Corridor. In a broad sense, it is this line that is the current theatre of Maoist action in South Asia. As this book will show, there

remains a close link between the men and women who control both ends of this line in India and Nepal. They may never always be on the same page but have over the years provided sustenance to each other.

As an idea, Maoism remains compelling and continues to draw attention. Over the years, writers, journalists and social scientists have tried their hand at unravelling, recording and decoding the factors that have propelled this rural putsch, which began with one breakaway Communist Party (Marxist) (CPM) faction in the 1960s and has now splintered into several groups in India.

The concept of the romantic utopian chucking up all to change a degenerate system by any and all revolutionary methods possible has launched a thousand ideas and books, touched modern theatre and made waves on cinematic celluloid. But despite the intellectual ferment and churning that has come in the wake of the country's indigenous peasant movement, its space in public discourse remains confined to stories of violence and counter-violence, of liberated civil war zones controlled by Maoist cadres and a general lack of political direction.

A lot of this ambiguity can be placed at the inability of the Maoist or the radical Left movement to charter a road map or course of action. Its economic agenda remains hazy at best; at worst, it is a medley of theories not much different from those that come from sections of the established Left. The rant against globalization can be possibly accepted if an alternative was on offer, but that is not the case. While there is little doubt that the Maoists talk about and indeed represent the lowliest of the low, people living on the margins who have had, until quite recently, little say in determining political processes of the country, it could well be argued that the ground beneath the collective Maoist feet could be shifting. The fact that potential recruits to the Naxalite cause have found alternatives in the country's democratic space cannot be denied. Rural angst against lousy governance over the years may, for instance, find an outlet in the primary membership of a mainstream centrist political party, which too is looking for neo-converts.

In the event, the so-called Red Corridor that spans Central/South India extending into Nepal, where it has already become a mainstream political force, not only questions South Asia's development paradigm but also threatens the carefully crafted balance of power in the region. Why, after all, are Maoist, Naxalite and Left extremist movements taking place in the most backward and underdeveloped regions of South Asia?

Unquestionably, India is a land of paradoxes. In a country where Gandhi, Buddha and Vaishnav thoughts on non-violence and ahimsa are practically official creed, spilling blood seems to be the only way out to settle an issue – both in favor of and against Maoists. Equally pertinent to ask is this: India, a proclaimed welfare state, which has spent humongous amount of money for the welfare of tribals and others at the lowest end of the spectrum in the decades since Independence, has been simply unable to meet its most primary objective of providing the barest necessities to those who need it the most. Where has all the money gone? Many years ago – in his days of innocence – former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi did touch upon the theme when he said that of the Rs 100 sent from Delhi for development, barely Rs 10 reached the intended recipient in the hinterland. Such are the faults and leakages in the system. A close look at the development paradigm and its various initiatives would reveal that not much has changed in the intervening decades.

Yet, for a political movement that does not get much play in the national media, the intellectual discourse surrounding the Maoists perhaps far outstrips similar ferment in other political formations. Politicians, sociologists, writers and economists have discussed the phenomenon threadbare and frankly, very little needs to be said beyond what already exists in the public domain.

But it would be safe to say that Naxalite ideology is not a monolithic entity, neither is it one catch-all belief system. It remains fragmented and heavily divided, perhaps with one possible broad and vague consensus on the perils of globalization. While it is true that the Maoist movement in India is largely tribal and low or backward peasant in its orientation, it defies easy generalizations. Some would argue that peasants often smash stereotypes, with a great deal of vengeance. Homogeneity, historians like Mridula Mukherjee believe, can never be attributed to them; they always bounce back and surprise. She firmly rejects any notion of 'rich', 'middle' and 'poor' peasants.

For example, 'poor' peasants who were expected because of their class position to be the most militant, if not revolutionary, have often turned out to be the most docile. And 'rich' peasants who were relegated to the 'reactionary' end of the political spectrum by being called 'kulaks' have just as often been found in the leadership

protest movements. (from Mridula Mukherjee, Introduction, in *Peasants in India's Non-Violent Revolution, Practice and Theory*, Sage Publications)

There is more than a kernel of truth in this assertion. The Naxalite movement in Andhra Pradesh's Anantpur district, one of the main centres of Left extremist politics in a state that remains inextricably linked to the Maoist movement in India, was deeply connected to the powerful, rich and influential Paritala family whose three brothers for a variety of local causes and caste politics virtually nurtured the Naxalite movement. The family, particularly the oldest brother Paritala Sreeramulu, was close to People's War Group's (PWG) iconic leader Kondapalli Sitarammiah.

For former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Maoists constitute the single biggest threat to the Indian state. In a significant observation made in 2009, the year he was elected to head the Indian government for a second time, Singh noted that Maoists were 'the single biggest internal security challenge ever faced by our country'. He also told the Parliament that 'if Left-wing extremism continues to flourish in important parts of our country which have tremendous natural resources of minerals and other precious things, that will certainly affect the climate of investment'. For a country seeking foreign capital to bolster growth, the news could hardly be called optimistic.

Booker prize winning writer Arundhati Roy has emerged as one of the most important champions of the radical Left cause in recent years. Her books, essays in popular magazines and TV interviews have presented her as among the most articulate, not to mention aggressive, voices in the radical Left discourse.

Despite being charged for 'romanticizing' a rural guerrilla war, Roy has stuck to her guns. She said in a TV interview that Maoists are 'justified in taking up arms' because the government has been unjust to them and is waging a war on them. Roy said:

My fear is that because of this economic interest the government and establishment actually needs a war. It needs to militarize. For that it needs an enemy. And so in a way what the Muslims were to BJP, the Maoists are to Congress.

She went on further to say that

if I was a person who is being dispossessed, whose wife has been raped, who is being pushed off their land and who is being faced with this 'police force', I would say that I am justified in taking up arms. If that is the only way I have to defend myself.

She reiterated that there should be unconditional talks with the Maoists.

On one hand, says Roy, Maoists are seen as a 'party with an unforgiving, totalitarian vision, which countenances no dissent'. On the other, they are comprised 'almost entirely of desperately poor tribal people living in conditions of such chronic hunger that it verges on famine' akin to that of sub-Saharan Africa. These are people, she says, consistently cheated by business people and money lenders, whose women are raped as a matter of right by police and forest department personnel (CNN-IBN interview, 2010).

In a sense, just the metaphors have changed. The language and the germane of the arguments have remained the same since Charu Mazumdar lit the prairie fire back in the late 1960s.

But any form of political movement in India would keep emerging against social backwardness; economic liberalization may have taken place but social liberalization is still a relative blip on the radar – if it is some at all. For example, the Khaps in north India or caste- and community-based organizations on a pan-Indian scale. In such instances, you may be able to pull down some established icons from their pedestal, as the Naxalites did, but you just have to ignore the racketeers and social profiteers who ultimately dominate the system. What could then happen in the process is that the social system remains static because the essential status quo is never really altered.

For instance, when Bengal's youth, embittered by old heroes and under the tutelage of Charu Mazumdar, began a public attack on Gandhi, Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Vivekananda and other presiding icons for being among other things 'collaborators' and 'agents', they were missing the point.

Writes veteran analyst Sumanta Banerjee:

Curiously enough, while raving against the social reformers and literary figures of the 19th century as 'agents' of imperialism, and

encouraging the students to destroy their statues as icons of 'semi-colonial' forces, CPI (ML) ideologues remained silent about the other icons that ruled Bengali society in a more powerful way than the social reformers. These icons represented the 'semi-feudal' tradition – which was also described by the CPI (ML) as its enemy in the party programme. But neither Charu Mazumdar nor Saroj Dutta dared to challenge the hegemony of these religious icons of the feudal past that held sway over Bengalis. They never launched any campaign against age-old superstitions and religious prejudices that divided the people or exposed the hypocrisy of living religious charlatans and demagogues who were more of a threat than dead social reformers, or exhorted their cadres to attack the proliferating extravaganzas and wasteful expenditure on religious ceremonies around god men who were exploiting the poor, and culturally corrupting the very support base of the Naxalite movement in West Bengal at that time. In fact, the Naxalite ideologues could have incorporated the anti-obscurantist messages of the social reformers of the past, in their programme, to uproot the hegemony of 'semi-feudal' religio-cultural values that continue to hang as an oppressive burden on the Bengali masses. In not doing so, argues Banerjee, the movement targeted only the economic face of feudalism by annihilating its representatives in the countryside – the landlords and money lenders. (from Pradip Basu (ed.), *Discourses of Naxalite Movement 1967–2009; Insights into Radical Left Politics*)

Banerjee wonders – quite correctly – whether the absence of this anti-feudal campaign was due to the communist penchant for overemphasizing economic determinism over religious or cultural factors. 'Charu Mazumdar, Saroj Dutta and their peer group, belonged to that old tradition of Bengali radicals, who were revolutionaries at the political levels, but could often retain conservative traits in their personal habits . . .' (from Pradip Basu (ed.), *Discourses of Naxalite Movement 1967–2009; Insights into Radical Left Politics*).

With time, there have been fresh re-examinations of the role of Charu Mazumdar and his espousal of class hatred as a weapon in the hands of toiling masses. Was it a blanket order by the man in command to tackle a complex socio-economic matrix through military means? Or was it sheer adventurism, a strategy not studied and thought through in detail, but recklessly pitted against the might of the Indian state? Some

later-day adherents to the Maoist cause now believe that armed struggle was part of a larger get-up that the founder of the Naxalite movement in India proposed. It was also by no means the only prevailing sentiment; dissensions had come in the form of other radical Left stalwarts from the movement who cautioned breaking away from other forms of mass action at the expense of violence.

Sociologist Rabindra Ray has focused attention on some radical new concepts that were pretty much taboo until most recently. He strongly believes that

Charu Mazumdar, in his life as in ideas, was more a leader of revolutionaries than of the peasants. His opinion of intellectuals – erstwhile Communist party cadre and the student youth – deserve more attention than his reading of the working people. Though his presentiments of a revolutionary situation in India at the time of his rise to prominence (and especially in Bengal) stands the scrutiny of hindsight, his understanding of the mentality of peasants on which his confidence and his elevation to a cult figure among his followers of his time rest is severely wanting. He stalked almost the whole of his misguided optimism which exhorted revolutionaries to make 70s (of the last century) the decade of liberation; which saw with his following and the motivated Maoist leadership in China in the minuscule confrontation of Naxalbari, the spring thunder of revolution in India; which proclaimed in the snatching of a rifle from a policemen by a peasant the founding of the People's Army; on his mystic faith in the intense class hatred of the peasants for their superiors, which he believed was on the very point of exploding into action on a mass scale. It is this explicit, overt and self-conscious faith in the class hatred of the deprived for the fortunate and its explosive – and redeeming! – power that sets apart the thought and leadership of Mazumdar in its extremism. (from Pradip Basu (ed.), *Discourses of Naxalite Movement 1967–2009; Insights into Radical Left Politics*)

Mao Tse Tung, the original inspiration behind the Indian spring thunder, believed in home solutions for every problem; not for him could the classic contours of an ideology become the main guiding light of any political movement. While Marx and Lenin had delved into this subject

on a number of occasions, Mao had spelt it out most succinctly: 'Communists must always go into the whys and wherefores, use their own heads and carefully think over whether or not it corresponds to reality and is really well-founded; on no account should they follow blindly and encourage slavishness.' Later-day Naxalite activists in India believe that their founding fathers, while swearing by the great Chinese helmsman, ignored this one basic postulate of his.

For those who believe that the Naxalite or the Maoist movement in India just came up one fine morning, literally the 'spring thunder', it would be a case of oversimplification. What happened in the late 1960s was actually the culmination of a number of forces, till then unspent and unreleased, but wanting space.

The main issue at stake here was the long-standing debate within India's Communist movement, which virtually tore it apart finally – the question of parliamentary participation by Left parties. Traditionally, all Marxist leaders and theoreticians believed that participation in parliamentary politics was but a step towards the final aim of attaining revolution. There could be no doubt that a parliament could be no substitute for revolution and that it would be a hand maiden of the bourgeoisie parties. Lenin, for instance, held that it was the beholden duty of the Communist 'to carry on a struggle within parliament for the destruction of the parliament'.

This was the prevalent party line until the advent of Khrushchev at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of Soviet Union (CPSU) in 1956 where the Soviet leader, coming out of the shadows of Josef Stalin, propounded the thesis that peaceful transition to socialism was possible by the parliamentary path. It was designed to set the cat among the pigeons and that is exactly what it did. It sparked off a war of words between the CPSU and the Communist Party of China (CPC); the fallout of this global debate cast a long shadow over India's communists. Within the CPI, some leaders, particularly the radicals, disagreed with the Khrushchev line vehemently. By 1964, the ideological debates and never-ending personal problems took their toll, and the CPI (M) came into existence.

While CPI was seen as being pro-Soviet, the CPI (M) chose to be close to China. There was constant tussle between the sides on the issue of joining state governments, which was ultimately linked to participation in parliamentary politics. So when the first Left Front government

came to power in West Bengal, there was a general feeling that the party would raise political consciousness in the state and provide it the requisite armoury to smash once and for all the might of the bourgeoisie state: in this the Left Front government would serve as the main weapon of the class struggle.

That it did not happen that way opened the gateways of radical and violent class struggle. Author Dipankar Chakrabarti writes:

Inner-party struggle ensued right from the beginning. In West Bengal, a series of mass movements had earlier developed since the middle of 1960s. It reached its zenith in 1966 and the main initiative was provided by the CPI (M)'s rank and file. When they were in anticipation of raising the movement to a new height, the leadership showed its real color by shifting the main thrust from extra-parliamentary struggles to the blind alley of parliamentary cretinism. But still riding on the crest of this movement and amidst revolutionary rhetoric, the CPI (M) came to power in West Bengal in 1967 as a part of the united front government in collaboration with the 'Khrushchevite revisionist' CPI. The CPI (M) leadership gave a call to the people to build up struggles and promised that the police would not interfere. Revolutionary aspirations of the rank and file were raised everywhere, and massive struggles, especially land struggles, broke out. In Naxalbari area, this struggle rose to higher levels and confronted the state machinery. Under threats from the central government, the CPI (M)-dominated government resorted to bloody suppression of the movement in order to save the government. This sparked off protests throughout the party. Revolutionary communists revolted all over the country against this manifestation of CPI (M) leadership's subservience to parliamentary cretinism. (from Pradip Basu (ed.), *Discourses of Naxalite Movement 1967–2009; Insights into Radical Left Politics*)

The stage was set for yet another split in the CPI (M), and a parallel party process headed by Charu Mazumdar and the CPI (ML) came into being. It firmly rejected the Khrushchevite line on parliamentary participation and instead adopted the path of armed struggle, a phase which began in 1967 and lasted till 1970.

Into these revolutionary themes came the not-so-romantic reality of the day. In the 1960s, the early optimism of the 1950s gave way to the near collapse of the education system; students were tired of their daily dose of dreary lectures and courses that could not produce jobs and were far removed from demands of the job markets. The resultant frustration thus became cannon fodder for a generation getting used to campus rebellion; of students indulging in mass copying and tearing up their degrees and diplomas as a sign of spreading disrespect for everything traditional. To that extent, CPI (ML) activists worked hard to channelize the energies of students in spontaneous outbursts, most of which resulted in violence and anarchy.

But despite the oppression, which led to the first phase of the Naxalite movement being virtually decimated by early 1970s, it had left its imprimatur. Two to three decades down the line, the most significant impact of the radical Left movement can today be seen concentrated in the Dandakarnaya region of Central India, which embraces five states – Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Odisha, constituting the most mineral-rich districts of the country. The inhabitants here are largely tribal but they have been deprived of the natural wealth that is on offer in this region – extensive reservoirs of forest and water.

Needless to say, this area until the 1980s represented the ultimate picture of neglect. The tribals were both economically and socially backward, subjected to ruthless exploitation by the ruling classes – landlords, money lenders, government officials and later by industries, both Indian and multinational. According to some observers, the ensuing uneven industrial growth displaced thousands of locals, polluted their rivers and cut down their forests. Hunger, malnutrition and little clothes to wear went hand in hand. The patriarchal society ensured that women's rights were non-existent and at least on the face of it, little development initiatives had been taken either by the central or state governments.

Into this scenario entered the Maoists by about 1980. A number of armed CPI (ML) cadres 'infiltrated' Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra and Bastar now in Chhattisgarh (then Madhya Pradesh) and spread the 'message' of revolution. They did so by launching an extensive development programme of their own based on voluntary labor or *shramdaan*. This labor centered on providing scarcest of commodities – water.

Writer Amit Bhattacharya brings out a typical example to show how the Maoists made their early inroads with the story of a minor irrigation project. In village Dg near the small town of Basaguda, an irrigation project supplied water to seven or eight nearby villages. In the early 1980s, the dam was breached by floods and repeated pleas for its restoration were met with classic lip service, but very little else.

In March 1989, a tank-building committee comprising people from nine villages was formed and under its leadership 400 people belonging to nine villages participated in the bund construction for 26 days by giving free labour. As the year 1997–98 witnessed one of the severest droughts for many years, the Maoist Party (then People's War) decided to give 1 kg of rice each day for work. It was reported that in order to tide over the crisis coming out of acute famine conditions, the Maoists released Rs 40,000 which was utilized to buy 5,200 kg of rice. Moreover, the tank-building committee collected another 1,800 of rice from local rich peasants and landlords. To prevent any breach developing at the time of the bund construction, the committee used stone and cement by spending money amounting to Rs 60,000 collected from four village panchayats that would get water from the pond. Four hundred volunteers worked for 26 days and contributed a total of 10,400 man-days to complete the work. When it became clear that such developmental work would be beneficial to all those who had been deprived of everything, people freely joined such work in large numbers so much so that during the two years from 1997 to 1998, the inhabitants of 238 villages actively participated in the construction of 110 ponds! (Pradip Basu (ed.), *Discourses of Naxalite Movement 1967–2009; Insights into Radical Left Politics*)

Is this takeover of rural swathes by introducing their own brand of development and rough-and-ready justice the reason why the Maoist movement has continued to grow in the last four decades or so? Certainly there is evidence to believe that they have affected the social and rural milieu in some cases. In central Bihar, for instance, a region largely dominated by middle peasantry, both upper caste Hindus and Other Backward Castes (OBC), wanton violence against Dalits and other Most Backward Castes (MBC) could perhaps be described as a thing

of the past. Certainly, its intensity has declined since the 1970s and 1980s when the police, often in cahoots with feudal elements, could run rampage in Arwal (1986), Baithani Tola (1996), Laxmanpur Bathe (1997) and various other cases where low-caste Hindus could be killed with impunity. Today, given the larger presence of radical peasant cadres and greater empowerment by way of media and active involvement of grassroots-based organizations has changed things. A feudal landlord is more likely to think twice before pulling the trigger; he knows that the likelihood of him becoming public enemy number one remains high, his hired goons no longer in a position to offer him guaranteed protection.

This book is an attempt to make sense of what the Maoist movement in India and Nepal stand for, the course of their struggle, early history, their legacies, the future, the outstanding debates that have dominated the political course of Maoism in India, development paradigms and the seemingly endless spiral of violence in which the ultimate victim remains the poor and unprotected. This is done through extensive interviews with *dramatis personae* of the cause of radical Left.

Activist Binayak Sen, who spent five years behind bars on charges of sedition, talks at length about the reasons for backwardness with special emphasis on tribal nutrition, which he reckons, is among the lowest in the world. Sen, whose incarceration sparked off a worldwide human rights campaign, believes he is a free man today because of the outcry. But he points out:

I would not like to go back to jail if at all possible. But I learnt a lot of things while I was in jail. And one of the very important things I learnt while talking to several prisoners is that there were hundreds, at least in the Raipur jail, behind bars on charges that were absolutely similar to the charges that had been put against me and who had no national or international campaigns for their release and did not even know properly what the charges were against which they were accused. So while I am happy and grateful for being out of jail, until we can address the problems of people who are in jail on these charges, it does not mean much.

The effort in the subsequent chapters is to draw upon a diverse range of interviewees, both theoreticians and political activists. Few people

have such innate understanding of the Maoist movement as Prof. Manoranjan Mohanty, both as sympathizer and a fellow traveller for the last few decades. In his view, formulations like a 'red terror' zone, such as have been used to describe the tribal north to south corridor where the Maoist or Naxalite movement is evident, exists mainly in the minds and not on ground. 'A contiguous or full scale identified 150-plus liberated areas – friends and some others have used the word Red Corridor, from Nepal down to India – I think it is totally mischievous in terms of creating a scare.'

According to him, no such contiguous area exists even though there are groups that are active in states like Bihar, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. Far from terrorizing people, they are actually evening out the process of development by working in close coordination with government authorities at the district, block or sub-divisional level. Mohanty elucidates:

I myself have evaluated tribal development programmes in Andhra Pradesh; they are implemented well because the officers think that is the best way to meet the challenge of the Naxalites. If we can deliver the goods to the poor, they will not turn to the Naxalites.

He also questions the paradigm of the so-called state abdicating its role in the so-called liberated zone or areas under the ostensible occupation of the ultra-reds. On the contrary, he asserts that the state, by deploying force against rebels, is a shining example of how influential the state machinery is! 'It shows the weakness of the state, not the decline of state power', is how Mohanty turns the paradigm on its head.

It could perhaps be said that Kameshwar Baitha, the first CPI (ML) member to be elected to Lok Sabha between 2009 and 2014 from Palamau in Jharkhand, is a product of violent Left radical politics in India. Starting off as an activist in the 1970s, Baitha has quite literally risen from the ranks setting up the first CPI (ML) unit in then Bihar (now Jharkhand) Palamau region in the early 1970s, a state where the ML movement is well entrenched. The list of charges against Kameshwar Baitha is long and startling: 16 counts of murder, 25 of attempted murder, six of assault with a dangerous weapon, three of extortion – a total of 109 criminal charges!

From a grassroots mobilizer organizing the lowliest of the low in one of the most backward regions of the country, Baitha, until he lost the elections in the 2014 General Elections, remains India's first-ever CPI (ML) MP. From being an alleged explosives expert with a prize over his head, he is also what the Indian state would obviously ideally want – a radical leftist who decided to enter the parliamentary mainstream eschewing the creed of violence that he and his comrades espoused three decades ago. Though Baitha now denies that he ever preached violence or an armed takeover, it would have to be said that the reality of breaking away from the norm of underground politics and adopting an over-ground, open position is an idea that is likely to tempt many rebels in the days to come.

For those pursuing the eternal quest of bringing down Maoists to the table for getting them mainstream, there can be nothing more evocative than Andhra's cultural icon Vara Vara Rao's intimate details about how casually the state government handled the two rounds of talks held between May to July 2002 and October 2004 between Maoists and representatives of the state government. As a model, that is the only-held-so-far serious talks between with Maoists, showing how treacherous the slope is, how vested interests can stymie a serious project and how difficult it is for the two sides to come to the table.

The first of such talks were to be held with former Andhra strongman and Chief Minister Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy. The agenda was unclear and their demands were treated casually, as if dealing with outlaws. He says:

Even though we were called for talks, from the beginning, Rajsekhar Reddy, then chief minister was not in favor of talks. He had given word during the elections, there was pressure from the democrats and public opinion for talks, but he was never serious about talks . . . Only the home minister was working. There was no homework from the government side, there was no cooperation from the police department nor did the chief minister appear willing. The home minister was put in front, he was holding talks. He was an ex-socialist and talking in a very interesting way, but the government was not serious.

In a throwback to the heady days of the founder of Naxalism, Charu Mazumdar, his son Abhijit talks about a legacy, which is as strong as it is

formidable. Memories of his father are dim – he was young when Charu died in police custody.

As much as I can remember, my father went underground when I was about 9–10 years old. But I remember my father very well because we had our own children's club and used to participate in its activities. We had a very romantic vision, we organized ourselves with sticks. My father, apart from his political ideology and participation and great organizing capabilities, was very loving. He initiated us, me and my two sisters, into music and reading books. He was not an insane person who had discarded everything in life, as is made out to be. The vision of Charu Mazumdar as painted in the mainstream media is quite different from my own experience. He had a sense of detail even in domestic matters, even though he had very little time to spend with us. And ultimately we could not see him after 1969. Off and on we could meet him, sometime in Calcutta, sometime in Puri with other leaders of the Naxalbari movement. So that was the way it went on until he was killed on July 28, 1972 in police lockup.

Abhijit remains bitter about his father's death – he says it was a cold-blooded premeditated murder. In the interview with me, he talks extensively about the circumstances and events leading up to and after Charu Mazumdar's death, the main characters acting on behalf of a government willing to shoot at anything that moved and the role of the CPM and Jyoti Basu, then a minister in the Left-dominated United Front government in Bengal.

One of the most theoretical expositions on the Left movement comes from Dipankar Bhattacharya, all-India General Secretary, CPI (ML) Liberation. A keen student of the radical Left in India, he delves deeply into the major debates that surrounded the Communist movement as a whole back in the 1960s and 1970s and link it with the international communist movement, the role of Stalin and ultimately of Mao, in concretizing not just ideas but drawing a future road map, however flawed it may now seem, for thousands of young highly educated men and women in India to lay down their lives in what they believed was the cause of justice.

Bhattacharya in that sense represents an important generational change in the CPI (ML) movement, the post-Charu phase when other

prominent leaders like Vinod Mishra proposed for the first time and indeed took the party from the underground to the over-ground route of parliamentary politics. In any case, by then the Charu-led CPI (ML) had been nearly decimated, its leaders arrested or simply encountered in one of most brutal crackdowns since 1947 to quell a political movement that too had resorted to violence in an effort to achieve its goals.

Then there is the question about violence or Charu Mazumdar's theory of annihilation. There is a view that the Maoist discourse in India seldom refers to the ethical aspects of the use of violence. The queries on the killing of suspected police informers, petty government officials, heads of panchayats, mostly poor people and innocents, have not been answered adequately in any quarters.

In contrast to India, where Maoist politics has remained at the fringes, despite it being in the headlines for all the wrong reasons, Nepal presents a study in contrast. First, the similarities. Of course, there are political connections between two broad factions of the CPI (ML) and CPN (Maoists) in Nepal facilitated through a narrow forested corridor through India's own mid-lands, Central India, merging into a vast porous border with Nepal. And like India, there are many CPI (ML) groups, who have their little internecine battles, political discourses and dogmatic tussles.

But that is where similarities end and differences begin. Land-locked Nepal – sandwiched between India and China, two big Asian powers – has been an old theatre of communist activity going back to the days of Man Mohan Adhikari, one of the founders of the Nepal Communist Party in 1949, who later headed the first democratically elected communist government in the country between 1994 and 1996.

Unlike India, Maoists are at the centre of power in Nepal having headed two governments since 2006. The Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), founded in 1994, is led by Pushpa Kamal Dahal or Prachanda. Following massive popular demonstrations and a prolonged civil war against the monarchy, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) (CPN-M) became the ruling party during the Nepalese Constituent Assembly election. It led a coalition until 4 May 2009, when Prachanda resigned over a conflict with the Nepalese president Ram Baran Yadav over the sacking of the head of the Nepalese Army.

The Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) was previously known as the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist). In the most recent

elections, polls conducted for the Constituent Assembly in November 2013, the Maoists led by Prachanda's UPCN (M) were down to 26, a poor third, in a 240-strong assembly. While the defeat of the Maoists may have come as a shocker, the fact is that the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist Leninist), however status quo-ist their orientation, is the second largest leader in the Constituent Assembly at 91 seats behind the Nepali Congress, which stood the winner with 105 constituent assembly seats.

Yet, despite the dislocation and split in Nepal, there remains a coherence of action in as much as mobilizing a political agitation goes. Ten years of raging a harsh underground battle in a small country – no matter how brittle the security apparatus and ancient their other institutions may appear to be – have given the Nepali Maoists a political momentum that is simply not possible for their Indian cousins, given India's size and all manner of modern institution-building mechanisms at their disposal, not to mention elections to 16 Lok Sabhas held so far since 1947.

Former Nepal Prime Minister Prachanda, in a rare wide-ranging interview in Kathmandu, reflected on the Maoist movement in Nepal, his own role as an indefatigable warrior who used various guises during a successful 10-year stint in the underground and the efforts that went into meeting the ultimate goal of setting up a communist republic; indeed in today's modern globalized world, it would have seemed hardly likely.

Former Nepal Prime Minister and Maoist veteran Baburam Bhattarai represents that unique link between Indian university campuses and foreign students. Politics on Indian campuses has for long provided the lifeline for student activists in South Asia and many beyond that. In the case of Nepal, a long line of student activists beginning with those of Nepali Congress have honed out their early political skills at Benares Hindu University (BHU), Patna University, Allahabad, Calcutta and Chennai and countless other places. During times of a ban in Nepal, Indian campuses, bustling with union politics and ideological ferment themselves, provided ground for student activists from other countries to check out the local flavor. Bhattarai, who was prime minister between August 2011 and March 2013, recalls his days in India with candour, first as a student of architecture in Chandigarh at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) where he started to become ideologically involved. 'JNU days I remember well, they taught me and made me what I am today', he remembers with nostalgia.

That Nepal's Maoists connection with India runs deep becomes evident after you meet Anand Swaroop Verma, veteran writer and journalist, who is in a sense the resident representative of Nepal's Maoists in India. In a career spanning many decades of writing, he has interviewed, met and joined forces with all of top Maoists across the border. Verma has written extensively on Nepal and remains one of their closest connections in India.

In a lucid interview, he explains why the Maoists' popularity graph has gone down in Nepal, the reasons for their slide, the differences in perception – and reality – between being rulers and agitators.

The important thing is as long as they were in power, like Prachanda led the government for nine months and Baburam Bhattarai for a few months, they did not do anything which suggested that they were going to bring radical changes in the country. And there were many reasons why they were unable to work; they alone cannot be held responsible. They were relatively new to running an administration, they had many forces arraigned against them and most of their time was consumed in countering them.

Is there something that India's vast and fragmented Maoist movement can learn from their comrades in Nepal? Yes, says the man, arguably with the keenest nose for Maoist politics in South Asia.

Indian Maoists have a lot to learn from their Nepali counterparts and they have learnt lessons as well. In 2004, the CPI (Maoist) Party came into existence in India when the People's War Group (PWG) and Party Unity came together. After this unity you would have noticed that tactics deployed before 2004 had changed. The number of attacks on police stations increased. Earlier, hit and run tactics were the staple for Maoists, now things have changed. When they attacked the Koraput police station in Odisha, they announced on the loudspeaker that they did not want to kill the policemen but only loot their armoury. They looted the arms, put in a truck and drove up to the Koraput district magistrate's official residence. The Jehanabad jail break in Bihar had 1,000 participants. The timing of the attack was also significant. Electioneering was in the air and camera teams were present on the location to capture the daring

INTRODUCTION

assault. Some reporters present also captured the moment. Since 2004, they have moved from pure armed action to mass struggle. It is also now known that when the Nepal Maoists were in the underground and held meetings, Indian comrades would be present as members of fraternal parties.

So read on the rarely shared insights into one of the most evocative themes in modern Indian and South Asian politics.

The placement of interviews in the book is not in any order of importance; it is in fact alphabetical. Some of the interviews were governed by considerations of time and place. They were all conducted between 2008 and 2014.

Part I

IDEOLOGUES' TAKE

DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA

‘Vinod Mishra was both a great theoretician and an outstanding practical organizer’

Dipankar Bhattacharya is general secretary of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation, the most original of all Marxist-Leninist groups active in the country. Of them, it can claim to be the true inheritor of the Charu Mazumdar legacy. In 1998, Bhattacharya succeeded Vinod Mishra, founder of the Indian People's Front and general secretary of the party and the man responsible for spearheading the radical Left line in Bihar between 1975 and 1998. After topping the Higher Secondary Examination in 1979 in Bengal, Bhattacharya joined the B.Stat. programme at the Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata, and became active in CPI (ML) politics. Despite turning into a professional politician, he completed his M.Stat. degree in due course. He later worked as the general secretary of the Indian People's Front and then as the general secretary of the party's trade union wing, the All India Central Council of Trade Unions (AICCTU). He was elected member of the Central Committee and Political Bureau of CPI (ML) in December 1987. After the sudden demise of Vinod Mishra, Dipankar was unanimously elected to succeed him. In this interview, Dipankar reflects on some far-reaching tactical changes that the party adopted in the aftermath of Charu Mazumdar's death. From being an underground entity, it decided to opt in for a more over-ground role and focused deeply on Bihar, where socio-economic conditions remained among the most backward in the country. Bhattacharya talks about the important theoretical debates that surrounded CPI (ML) in the 1970s and early

1980s. In a deep evaluation of his former comrade Vinod Mishra, Bhat-tacharya explains how the Left radical tradition gathered momentum in Bihar and became the catalyst for social and economic change in a way that has not been seen anywhere else in the Hindi belt.

Q. Of the main lines that emerged post-Charu Mazumdar and the splintering of CPI (ML) factions, yours, that is the Vinod Mishra-led ML, proclaimed a different line that was away from annihilation theories to over-ground parliamentary politics. The move proved important in terms of CPI (ML)'s long-term goals.

A. If you look at the Eight Documents authored by Comrade Charu Mazumdar between 1965 and 1967 preceding the Naxalbari uprising, the documents that laid the ideological and political basis for the polarization between the revolutionary and reformist streams within the CPI (M); or most of his post-Naxalbari writings, you will never find him talking about any generalized annihilation campaign. Annihilation of reactionary landlords was envisaged as an integral part of mass assertion of the oppressed rural poor and rise of red power in certain rural pockets. Annihilation, armed struggle, boycott of elections – all these were features or forms of a revolutionary mass upsurge, characterizing revolutionary response to a specific situation and not measures intended for all times to come. With the situation turning adverse and the movement suffering a setback, in his last writings, Charu Mazumdar himself had hinted at a shift away from these forms, stressing instead on the need for a broad anti-Congress front of the labouring people based on united struggles. The reorganized CPI (ML) fought against both sweeping generalization/vulgarization of the forms of struggle that had come to be known as Naxalism and pedantic and opportunist denunciation of the basic revolutionary content of Naxalism in the name of rectification of past mistakes. Overcoming the dogmatism or one-sidedness that had crept into our thinking or practice, the CPI (ML) went on to revive and expand itself by unleashing the full initiative of the rural poor masses and raising their struggles to new political heights.

Q. What prompted this change? Can you now visualize Vinod Mishra picking up the pieces from a truncated CPI (ML) movement to arrive at the conclusion that armed struggle was not the way to revolution? His Rectification

Campaign in 1978–79 altered the course of radical left politics, in that the CPI (ML) for the first time opted for mass politics. It was a paradigm shift. It lifted the CPI (ML) movement from a spiral of violence to legitimate politics. You are, in a sense, carrying his mantle.

A. Vinod Mishra never rejected armed struggle. As a revolutionary Marxist, he neither ruled out nor advocated any specific form of struggle for all times to come, rather he believed that the question of form of struggle depended on the concrete conditions at hand. He always drew a strict line of demarcation between parliamentary struggle and the so-called parliamentary path. Inasmuch as the existing Parliament is subservient to the existing state based on the domination of the propertied classes, no revolution could be accomplished within the confines of the existing parliamentary system. The whole question of revolution revolves around not just a change of government but effecting a change of the system or the state, replacing the existing state by one that draws its power from the working people and enforces the will of the working people through a qualitatively different constitutional and electoral framework.

There have been other CPI (ML) leaders and organizations who too stressed the importance of mass work or utilization of parliamentary struggles. If under Vinod Mishra's leadership the reorganized CPI (ML) succeeded in effecting a paradigm shift, it consisted not so much in the so-called transition in forms of struggle but in infusing a new revolutionary content in the familiar forms of mass work or parliamentary struggle. Inability of the communist movement to emerge as a strong force in the Hindi belt is considered a historical handicap for the movement. Many Marxist theoreticians have blamed the lack of a bourgeois renaissance or social reform or awakening movement for this paradoxical situation. It is paradoxical because it is in the Hindi belt that the presence of feudal survivals is still most pronounced and stubborn, and communists with their agenda of anti-feudal democratic revolution should have found the Hindi belt soil particularly challenging and promising. But somewhere along the line the Indian Communist movement began to wait for a bourgeois social initiative, resigning itself to a side role in the Hindi belt. The rather economistic understanding of class and class struggle by the dominant communist school left the ground open for the socialist stream to retain and occasionally expand

its base by highlighting and often counter-posing the aspect of social oppression and backwardness to the basic reality of bourgeois-landlord rule and structural domination and exploitation of the working people.

Comrade VM never tried to remedy this situation with any eclectic combination of caste and class; he led the party in attaining a dialectical understanding of India's complex social reality. In place of the popular liberal discourse which treats castes as basic social units, classes as economic units and power groups as political units, a discourse which has also been considerably assimilated by vulgar Marxists; he fought for a comprehensive and revolutionary Marxist social analysis. Under his leadership our party has attained considerable success in exposing the organic interconnections between social oppression, economic exploitation and political marginalization or denial of political rights. The questions of dignity and power for the oppressed and the exploited have thus figured high on the agenda of our movement and this explains to a great extent the relative success of our party in the Hindi belt and especially in Bihar.

Q. How was that transition? From a rural guerrilla movement to sedate parliamentary politics – open party organs, open rallies with party banners, activated party units, seminars and the works?

A. If boycott of elections had been the revolutionary answer to the widespread mass disillusionment and rural discontent in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the assertion of the oppressed rural poor as an independent political force in the electoral arena, the very attempt by the effectively disenfranchised Dalit and landless electorate of feudal Bihar to exercise their franchise, had a profound political and social impact in the 1980s and 1990s. Much of the feudal-kulak violence, state repression and terrorist attacks that the CPI (ML) has had to endure in Bihar, Jharkhand and Assam in recent years (massacres of hundreds of members and supporters; killings of popular revolutionary leaders like Chandrashekhra in Bihar, Anil Barua and Langtuk Phangcho in Assam and Mahendra Singh in Jharkhand), and incarceration and conviction of hundreds of activists including elected people's representatives on fabricated charges under a host of criminal laws including draconian ones like TADA [Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act], can only be understood as a desperate reactionary attempt to halt the CPI

(ML)'s assertion and advance in the arena of mass struggles and electoral battles.

Q. How do you visualize Vinod Mishra? A theoretician, a practitioner? What is his role in the history of Maoist politics and folklore? He certainly believed that a correct and unified Centre was a sin-qua-non for reinvigorating the party. Your views? In more real terms, how did he impact radical left politics in Bihar, to which he was very close and which in the late 1960s, 1970s and 1980s was very feudal (it still is) and strongly anti-Dalit. I would like you to react to his role in guiding the party work on the peasant front in Bihar. As a newspaper reporter in Patna in the mid-1980s, I could see that Vinod Mishra certainly fired the imagination of a lot of young people?

A. Comrade Vinod Mishra was both a great theoretician and an outstanding practical organizer who paid keen attention to every aspect of building a mighty movement and developing a consolidated and comprehensive communist party structure in the midst of the movement. Even in the 1970s and early 1980s, when our party organization was very small, we had a vibrant democratic life inside the party with proper committees functioning, regular holding of conferences and party congresses and publication of regular party periodicals. Since the very beginning, our party promoted the culture of comprehensive study of Marxist-Leninist classics and insisted on a Marxist understanding of India's social and historical reality. Committees at all levels were encouraged to conduct thoroughgoing investigation into grass-root level social conditions and regular campaigns of party education became an essential component of inner-Party life.

Comrade Vinod Mishra was the moving spirit behind all these multifarious activities. He was the main architect of the Indian People's Front (IPF) experiment. The IPF played a crucial role in the 1980s in expanding the frontiers of the revolutionary democratic movement in the country, especially in the Hindi heartland where the old Communist parties had either failed to make much headway or had started losing ground. But with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the intensification of the global hegemonic offensive of US imperialism and the rise of Hindutva forces within India, it became necessary for the CPI (ML) to enhance its direct ideological-political role and the party's Fifth Congress held in Kolkata in December 1992 resolved in favor of the party coming over-ground.

This was the backdrop in which the IPF dissolved itself, but this in no way marked an end to the party's united front efforts or its interaction with other progressive and democratic forces. In the post-IPF years, the CPI (ML) has undertaken issue-based joint campaigns both nationally as well as in different states. The party's efforts for forging a broad-based unity of Left and democratic forces on the basis of a common programme continue unabated.

Q. Politically, the coming together of the PWG and MCC resulted in formation of the CPI (Maoist). What is the significance of this merger? What is your reading of the CPI (Maoist) and does it represent an important link in this protracted agitation?

A. The Left camp in the country is undergoing constant differentiation and polarization. The merger of the People's War Group (PWG) and the erstwhile Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) [the latter actually predated the formation of the CPI (ML) but it never joined the CPI (ML) stream and always operated as a militarist organization arguing that conditions had not matured for the formation of a revolutionary communist party] signifies the consolidation of a full-scale anarcho-militaristic trend, which is not compatible with the CPI (ML), and this departure from the CPI (ML) trajectory is also reflected in the name of the new organization, i.e. CPI (Maoist). In contrast to this anarcho-militaristic trend which abjures politics and any kind of mass activity, the reorganized CPI (ML) has emerged increasingly as the rallying centre for not only Marxist-Leninists in different parts of the country but also for many sincere comrades from within the CPI and CPI (M).

Q. With this break from tradition by coming over-ground, Vinod Mishra took the CPI (ML) away from the classical Maoist mould. Did he see any future in an armed struggle, or in violence as a means to justify a political end, the classic Chinese Maoist situation? There were a number of occasions when he himself escaped death.

A. In January 1979, Comrade Vinod Mishra was encircled and injured by the CRPF at Barpathujot village under Phansidewa police station of Darjeeling district. Later in the same year, he led a delegation to China. In the aftermath of the controversial 'Cultural Revolution', China was then taking its first transitional steps towards what Deng called 'Socialist

Modernization', but deep inside the Chinese society, especially among the peasantry, Vinod Mishra could easily discern great respect and admiration for Mao. While acknowledging the validity of the perspective in which the CPC under Mao had launched the 'Cultural Revolution', he did not dismiss Deng's policies as a counter-revolution. He believed in studying and judging the entire zigzag course of socialist construction in terms of China's own conditions and not on the basis of any rigid or abstract 'socialist model'. But he never shied away from expressing his critical opinion on many aspects of China, the economic and social problems spawned by the so-called socialist market economy, the way the CPC handled the Tiananmen protests or China's passive and at times, ambiguous role in the international arena vis-à-vis the US imperialist offensive in the post-Soviet era.

Q. After the Emergency in 1977, when Vinod Mishra called for fighting 'against the metaphysical viewpoint of perfectionism', what did he have in mind? Was there a roadmap for change? Was it a war cry to bring as many groups of the CPI (ML) under one banner?

A. Communist parties employ united front tactics with a view to winning over the working people from the influence of the parties of the ruling classes and tilting the class balance of society in favour of revolution. The kind of coalition politics that we are witnessing in present-day India reflects a reverse process of the big ruling parties like the Congress and the BJP cobbling political coalitions and co-opting smaller parties into a policy consensus around the settled agenda of the ruling classes. The immediate success that smaller parties have seemingly gained in terms of power-sharing has actually pushed polity towards a two-coalition pattern where even the Left parties have been reduced to an extension of the UPA in national politics. But parties like the CPI and CPI (M) have not succeeded in gaining any bigger base among the working people by collaborating with the Congress or with regional parties like the Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh, RJD [Rashtriya Janata Dal] in Bihar, TDP [Telugu Desam Party] in Andhra or DMK/ADMK [Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam/Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam] in Tamil Nadu. Their parliamentary strength is basically a reflection of their old organizational strength reinforced by the unity of the 'Left Front' in West Bengal and Tripura and the LDF in Kerala. The CPI

(ML) obviously cannot join any coalition led by the parties of the ruling classes. Instead of collaborating with the UPA against the NDA or vice versa, we prefer to strive for an alternative left/democratic bloc.

Q. What about violence or the theory of annihilation? There is a view that the Maoist discourse in India seldom refers to the ethical aspects of the use of violence. The killing of suspected police informers, petty government officials, heads of panchayats – mostly poor people and innocents – have not been answered adequately in any quarters.

A. The question that has raised the fiercest of debates is the question of 'annihilation' as formulated by Comrade Charu Mazumdar. It is argued that there is no Marxism in this, and that it is simply vulgar individual terrorism, which has only brought about losses. It is also said that armed struggle and mass struggle must be combined and therefore, the 'annihilation line' must be condemned.

Let us first deal with the question of combining armed struggle and mass struggle. The general repetition of this phrase as a panacea has no relevance for Marxists engaged in practical work. It remains a historical fact that all mass movements acquire newer forms in the course of their advance – constantly discarding the old and creating the new – and transformations as well as new alignments of new and old forms are thus observed. Our duty as communists is to take an active part in this process so as to develop suitable forms of struggle. As Lenin says, while not denying even a bit the necessity of force and terror on principle, we shall have to develop such forms of struggle in which direct participation of the masses has been assumed and this participation has been ensured. Coming out of the bounds of neo-revisionism after the heroic Naxalbari struggle, and after engaging in some two years of revolutionary practice to build mass movements, communist revolutionaries of India faced such a situation and longed for a new form of struggle.

It was in this context that, in the heat of the Srikakulam struggle, 'annihilation' based on mass support was formulated. This sought to combine the beginnings of armed struggle with the step-by-step mobilization of the masses in struggles. And it was this basic orientation in Comrade Charu Mazumdar's line, that of combining armed actions with mass struggles – with one aspect predominating at one time – which runs through his entire political line from the pre-Naxalbari days to the end

of his life. Evaluating the successes and failures of his efforts is one thing, and very important too, for any real advance. But calling him a 'terrorist' is the height of absurdity and nonsense and betrays a servile attitude.

In the overall perspective of mass support, this particular form of struggle, which was to be combined with mass movements, actually aimed at an area-wise seizure of power. This struggle led to the formation of many peasant squads in different parts of India and also to a mass upsurge. This upsurge was sought to be organized through revolutionary committees by taking up certain programmes of agrarian reform while these squads were to be organized as units of the People's Liberation Army by conducting guerrilla actions against police and paramilitary as well as military forces, thus heading towards red power. This, in brief, was the entire process and outcome of the 'annihilation line'. Its achievements were many, and the existence of Bhojpur till this day bears testimony to this aspect.

However, it had its negative side too, and with the passage of time, this side became the principal one. In many areas, annihilation was conducted as a campaign, with a lot of indiscriminate and unnecessary killings, and it got isolated from peasants' class struggle so that no resistance could be built up against police repression, and our struggling areas were smashed. Overenthusiastic supporters of 'annihilation' – from Ashim to Dipak and finally Mahadev – raised these mistakes to the zenith and step-by-step formulated a left-opportunist line which did tremendous harm to the people and the revolution. The period then was characterized as that of immediate and general revolutionary situation throughout the world and a general revolutionary offensive was planned. Such an overestimation of the revolutionary situation led to impetuosity and the state of subjective forces was not taken into account, thus exacerbating the mistakes.

It is true that the revolutionary situation was favourable to us with the ruling classes engulfed in deep economic and political crises, and wherever possible, the proletariat had to rouse the peasantry to armed struggle and make attempts to seize political power. However, the uneven development of Indian revolution was not seriously taken into account. These certainly were serious Left deviations. And the objective law of development punished us too: mass upsurge got restricted to a few pockets and continued merely in a single area. In this context, the declaration in our first Party Congress – "Class struggle, i.e., annihilation

will solve all our problems” was definitely wrong. However, in certain pockets, annihilation combined with mass upsurges, initial attempts at organizing this upsurge through revolutionary committees with slogans of agrarian reform, and attempts to build red army out of guerrilla squads, remain glorious examples in the treasure-store of revolutionary experiences.

And it was on this basis that the Bhojpur peasant struggle, initiated by the not-too-conscious communist revolutionaries and then organized by the party leadership, emerged and was maintained during the hardest of times at the cost of maximum sacrifices – a struggle that is now developing in broader areas and in more diversified forms. And it is because of this glorious tradition that Charu Mazumdar remains alive in the hearts of millions of oppressed people of India; his line is taken to symbolize the only revolutionary line in India. By contrast, many academic Marxists and opportunist leaders kept chanting about ‘combination of armed struggle and mass struggle’ but never succeeded in reaching the broad masses or in developing a single mass struggle of any importance – not to speak of armed struggle and the so-called combination.

The pedantic attitude, displayed by some of the self-proclaimed Marxists, of doing everything and combining everything on earth, is not a solution but a travesty of solution – a purely academic exercise devoid of any concrete experience. The revolutionary line could acquire full shape only in a process and the party, while beginning with rejecting the old forms of struggle, could have brought about a new realignment of new and old forms only through a process. As for the working class movement, Comrade Charu Mazumdar correctly pointed out the need for developing new forms of struggle without rejecting the old ones and developing political struggles while not rejecting the trade union struggles. The military form of annihilation battle, the military line, was meant to serve the political line and the entire revolutionary process was aimed at developing a revolutionary mass line. Propaganda of political power among the peasants: “peasants should be mobilized for liberating their own villages and be told that not landlords but you will become the sole authority in settling the matters of the village, the land will be yours, tanks will be yours, and, after the annihilation of landlords, the police will not be able to trace who tills whose land, and so on” – taking up their psychology and explaining in most popular forms to rouse them was an important contribution of Comrade Charu Mazumdar. Such propaganda was just

the opposite of revisionist propaganda. He formulated 'annihilation' not on the basis of negating the role of masses as cowards and regarding a few vanguards as 'individual heroes', but rather on the basis of immense confidence in the tremendous creative energy latent in the masses.

Q. What, in your view, are the main gains of the radical Left movement and particularly the role of Charu Mazumdar from the benefit of hindsight?

A. Bringing the landless and poor peasants to the frontline of the country's political life – a fact acknowledged by all bourgeois and revisionist politicians and economists when they say that Naxalism grew on the discontent of the rural poor – and putting agrarian revolution on the immediate agenda by piercing through the land reform measures of the Congress government, raising the level of thinking of communist revolutionaries and the Indian proletariat from titbits of revisionist politics to the dream of liberation of the country, and joining hands with the international proletariat and oppressed masses, recruiting thousands of young people to the communist movement of India; creating the phenomenon of Naxalism, which was born in Naxalbari but acquired a concrete and developed shape only afterwards as a nationwide political trend in India, which continues to rise even from the ashes and above all, building the CPI (ML), the revolutionary party of the Indian proletariat – such are his major contributions. However, owing to over-estimation of the revolutionary situation, inadequate grasp of the objective Indian conditions, generalization of the annihilation struggle, the splits and disorganization of the party, the ruling classes' temporary stability following the Bangladesh incident and the Indo-Soviet military pact, we suffered very serious setbacks in the face of repression.

Comrade Charu Mazumdar realized that annihilation had been taken too far and that, in most cases, it could not be properly combined with mass struggles. So he assessed the situation of setbacks and disorganization of the party and called for building a politically united party and a united front of labouring people, particularly those belonging to the left parties, against the Congress regime. He called for a united front based on united struggles in general – and not necessarily armed struggle as such – and emphasized taking up land reform measures in selected areas. This was clearly a policy of retreat under new conditions. But a planned and orderly retreat could not be organized: first, because the

retreat was still supposed to be a very temporary phenomenon; so the tactics were based on the hope of a resurgence of mass struggles very soon; and second, because the policy and methods of retreat were not clearly formulated in terms of various forms of struggle and organization. With setbacks in struggle, splits in the party, and gaps in reorganizing the Party Central Committee, the rank and file loyal to Comrade Charu Mazumdar handed over all authority to him for the temporary period of reorganizing the Central Committee.

This phenomenon was given a general character by some careerists around him, who harped on the concept of 'individual authority' to further their own interests, created hurdles in the work of reorganizing the Central Committee, and ultimately betrayed the party and Comrade Charu Mazumdar. To sum up, the party's main mistakes were: it generalized the 'annihilation' form of struggle for the whole of India and took this up as a campaign. It failed to chalk out a consistent and thorough-going policy for combining this form of struggle with mass struggles in spite of an overall orientation and successes at certain points. And, even with the appearance of serious signs of setback, it did not succeed in arranging a planned and orderly retreat from military offensive to political offensive. These mistakes resulted from overestimating the revolutionary situation prevailing in India in the sense of understanding the situation as more or less of permanent upsurges, inadequate grasp of the concrete Indian situation, the wrong methodology of generalizing particularities from subjective wishes, the infancy of the party and the impetuosity on the part of the leadership as a reaction to revisionist betrayal.

With the martyrdom of Comrade Charu Mazumdar, things took a complex turn, and only after five years, i.e. in the year 1977, was it possible to really begin the process of seriously rectifying the mistakes. After Comrade Charu Mazumdar's martyrdom, Sharma and Mahadev floated a Central Committee of the party on 5-6 December 1972. With the Lin Piao episode, they parted ways in early 1973, and each in the name of his Central Committee indulged in unprincipled condemnation or eulogization of Comrade Charu Mazumdar to further their own factional interests. Mahadev, in particular, resorted to all sorts of absurdities and, in the name of 'safeguarding the purity of every word of Charu Mazumdar', put the party against the CPC and intensified actions divorced from peasant struggles. In this way, he caused great damage to revolutionary forces, particularly in West Bengal, and finally destroyed himself.

At this moment of crisis, comrades of Bihar State Committee and the newly organized State Leading Team of West Bengal shared their experiences of fight against the Mahadev-Sharma clique. They also exchanged the experiences of new upsurge in Bihar and of reorganization in West Bengal after serious setbacks. Meanwhile, comrades of Delhi also joined in this process. Then, under the leadership of Comrade Jauhar, the Central Committee was reorganized on 28 July 1974. At that time, peasant struggles were going on in Bihar, particularly in Bhojpur and Patna areas, and efforts for reorganizing peasant struggles were on in West Bengal. To guide and lead these struggles and to overcome the setback, the urgent necessity of a centre was felt. With the distortions of Comrade Charu Mazumdar's line by Mahadev, Sharma and Co., the need to defend the revolutionary essence of his line became the supreme task. The new Central Committee's proclaimed aims were: (a) defending the revolutionary essence of Comrade Charu Mazumdar's line; (b) uniting the party politically on this basis; and (c) unifying the communist revolutionaries of India.

At that time, the area of work under this Central Committee was confined to Bihar, West Bengal, Delhi and a minor part of Uttar Pradesh. After some time, many comrades of Assam joined it, too. In those days, comrades in Andhra, Tamil Nadu and Kerala were also working among the peasantry, conducting some militant struggles and fighting against trends resembling those of the Sharma and Mahadev cliques. These comrades were organized in party committees at various levels. Comrades from Tamil Nadu, in particular, were united under the State Party committee. But the reorganized party centre could not establish contacts with them, which prolonged the process of reorganization with a revolutionary orientation. In all parts of the country, revolutionary movements were being crushed and many of the comrades were either killed or arrested. After some time, the central committees of both Sharma and Mahadev also disintegrated and collapsed.

In these conditions, formation of the Central Committee was the only way open to us for uniting the party forces with a revolutionary orientation and for carrying on efforts for building up peasant struggles. With the formation of the Central Committee, peasant struggle in Bihar got a new fillip. Some armed actions and peasant struggles were also organized in Ghazipur and Ballia districts of UP and in Naxalbari of West Bengal. Comrade Jauhar always held supreme the interests of the party

and the collective leadership of the Central Committee. He personally guided the Bhojpur peasant struggle, put forward the task of building outstanding organizers and commanders who would organize and lead into military actions the forces that were coming to the forefront of the fiercest class struggle and emphasized the need of launching attacks on mobile enemy forces by army squads so as to break encirclement operations of the enemy and raise the people's morale. He termed these areas of struggle as the basis of an anti-Congress united front.

However, the Central Committee in general and Comrade Jauhar in particular had much of metaphysics. Guided by a formal and subjective approach, they indulged in the wrong practice of not taking the overall situation into account and of generalizing the particular. So Comrade Jauhar, in his philosophical article 'One Divides into Two but Two Do Not Combine into One', mechanically interpreted a 'correct line' as having only the basic and the developing aspects. This further blocked the way for any rectification of our mistakes at a theoretical level. Again, he formulated attacks on mobile enemy forces as the beginning of mobile warfare and generalized it for all places – this was a mechanical upgradation of annihilation, which gave rise to a wrong military line. Yet, no thoroughgoing and consistent policy for developing mass movements could be formulated. And the negative effects of these wrong ideas started manifesting themselves in the shape of serious losses in different areas and petering out of mass initiative on a broad scale.

In November 1975, Comrade Jauhar was martyred in the battlefield of Bhojpur. There are certain unscrupulous fellows who, in their attempt to destroy our party, eulogize Comrade Jauhar as the leader of Bhojpur to deny his most important role of reorganizing the party and restoring collective leadership and democratic centralism in the party, but for which the Bhojpur struggle could not have existed. In this way, they only insult the great revolutionary leader just for their factional interests.

Q. What was the course of CPI (ML) in this transformed phase?

A. The Second Congress of the party, held in February 1976, played an important role in uniting the revolutionary forces to encounter severe enemy onslaughts. But it only confirmed the existing political line and so, during the whole of 1976, we just maintained the party organization and the struggle in the hardest of times. Over this entire period of

1974–76, our main drawbacks consisted, firstly, in our failure to link up with the anti-Congress upsurge of students, youth and all sections of people of Bihar (the leadership of this upsurge was later captured by JP and it degenerated into impotency) and secondly, in our failure, when the movement collapsed with the arrest of leaders and repression of the masses, to provide a new guideline to organize the remnant forces. Although we maintained the political line of building an anti-Congress united front and upheld our areas as models of the same, we could not link this with the actual anti-Congress mass upsurge.

This so happened because we had a mechanical conception of the development of united front on the basis of what Comrade Charu Mazumdar had said and we refused to analyse the concrete way in which things were actually developing beyond that mechanical framework. This lesson had an important bearing on our future course. With the inception of 1977, many significant changes appeared in the international and national situations as well as in our movement. Contacts were re-established with comrades of Tamil Nadu, Andhra and Kerala, thereby providing an all-India shape to our Party. During the Emergency, all fronts had been more or less quiet barring the struggles led by us bravely, facing the hardest of times. So Bhojpur hit the headlines as soon as censorship of the press was removed.

By 1976, the dialectics of practice had clashed violently with the metaphysics in theory and, given the required conditions, the party was poised for a major change. It all began with 'rectifying the wrong ideas in the party' concerning armed units only; but, linked with major national and international changes and a resurgence of peasant struggles; it gradually developed into a full-fledged rectification campaign throughout the party. This, in brief, is how we look at the past – how we evaluate our basic achievements and major faults. There are many other minor aspects that either had been dealt with in the 1979 Party Conference or have no relevance for the present. Our analysis points out how different approaches in evaluating the past had led to the emergence of different liquidationist and anarchist trends in our movement and also how we are now combining our lessons of the past with the needs of the present in advancing the revolutionary cause.

Q. What did Vinod Mishra think about China, which by the 1990s, had been well and truly integrated into the American global economic order?

A. The CPI (ML) has always expressed its deep concern over the events in China. As reports indicate, a large number of students and innocents got killed in the army operation in Tiananmen Square. Such a tragedy in a socialist country is really unfortunate and we share the grief and shock expressed by progressive and democratic people the world over. It is also true that Western capitalist countries in general and US imperialism in particular are trying to fish in troubled waters. The United States, in league with certain anti-Marxist and anti-socialist elements in China, has been desperately trying to block any negotiated settlement of the issues involved and doing its utmost to pit the pro-democracy movement against the Chinese socialist system; thus to avenge its historical defeat of 1949.

Q. *Mao was the dominant influence at the beginning of the Naxalite movement. How could a common man in India identify with a Chinese leader?*

A. On the occasion of Mao Zedong's birth centenary (in 1993), a lot of discussions were going on throughout the country, hosts of articles were being written and many functions were being organized. This new-found interest in Mao generated a lot of hope. Even those who till the other day believed that socialism, born out of the womb of capitalism, can never go back to capitalism but can only grow into developed socialism and thereafter into communism. Those who ridiculed Mao's study *On Contradiction* were now acclaiming Mao's thought on contradictions. These discussions, these debates are indeed of vital importance. It is true that some people will try to incorporate Mao in their framework of social democracy whereas some others shall try to adjust Mao and his thought with their idealist-anarchist ideas.

Still, this debate, this discussion on Mao, will eventually help in a comprehensive and correct understanding of Mao and his thought. This is all the more necessary because in the Indian communist movement, the question of Mao and his thought has always been a debatable question and without a correct and unified idea on that, the Indian communist movement cannot be advanced to the next stage. For all these reasons, I welcome the discussion and debates on Mao that began on his birth centenary. In the beginning of the decade of the 1970s, Calcutta walls were filled up with a strange slogan; 'China's Chairman is Our Chairman'. Young people in thousands voiced this slogan as the symbol

of revolutionary defiance. The slogan was subjected to harsh criticism, as being contrary to the national spirit, to patriotism. Even Mao is supposed to have expressed his disapproval of the slogan. Later on, our party too withdrew the slogan. And yet, a crucial question remains unanswered: how come tens of thousands of Indian youth opted to express their revolutionary enthusiasm through such a slogan? They were not less patriotic than anyone else, neither were they short of nationalist spirit. In thousands they sacrificed their precious lives with the dream of the liberation of the motherland. Why then did they opt for this slogan? In other words, how did Mao, China's Chairman, get transformed into a leader of world revolution? How did he become, for the youth of different countries and for revolutionary people everywhere, their very own, their symbol of hope?

To find an answer, one has to trace the historical situation of that period. In the decade of the 1960s, all of a sudden, Soviet leadership began to say that after the emergence of the atom bomb, everything has changed; so a new thinking was required in all respects. Imperialists are now armed with powers that can liquidate millions upon millions of people and even destroy the earth. Therefore, no more class war, no more national liberation war. In short, nothing that would provoke the imperialists. Moreover, they called for a new definition of Marxism in this 'new age', the atomic age. This was how modern revisionism emerged from the Soviet Union. Mao took up the cudgels on behalf of revolutionary communists and declared that no weapon, irrespective of its destructive power, can change the fundamentals of human society. People and people alone are the motive force of history and not the atom bomb. When imperialists were raising the bogey of the atom bomb to halt the progress of revolutionary struggles throughout the world, it was Mao who made the famous declaration – the atom bomb is nothing but a paper tiger. Mao's bold assertion at that juncture inspired confidence in oppressed people everywhere and provided the necessary impetus for carrying forward their struggle. Mao had also said that a small force can gradually accumulate strength and defeat a big force. Thus, when Marxism's survival was threatened under revisionist influence, Mao reassured the people of the world and thus transcending the frontiers of China, he became one with the peoples of Asia, Africa, Latin America and of the whole world for that matter.

The emergence of Mao's thought has a history behind it. Marx and Engels had dreamt of a proletarian revolution, the revolution which in their view would begin from developed capitalist countries and then the victorious proletariat would liberate the oppressed people of colonies and semi-colonies. In real life, however, revolution did not take the direct route. Proletarian revolution first broke out in Russia. Lenin too had expected the Russian revolution to ignite the flame of revolution in countries of Western Europe. That too did not come about. Lenin, therefore, emphasized the organic linkage between the Russian revolution and the national liberation struggles of colonies and semi-colonies. He grasped the objective shift of the centre of world revolution towards Asia. He advised the communists of the East that they could not possibly know their way from Marxist books and must explore it themselves, basing on general principles of communism and, of course, the rich experiences of the October revolution.

The emergence of Mao's thought was thus no accident. As the centre of revolution had moved to the East, to Asia, emergence of a revolutionary theory from there was a historical inevitability. It could have been in India as well. Anyway, it emerged from China, and Mao was the product of this historical necessity.

Mao explored the revolutionary potential of the peasantry in China, a semi-colonial country, and even organized a red army to accomplish the revolution. This role of peasantry in the history of proletariat was an outstanding contribution to the treasure of Marxism. Building an anti-imperialist front on the basis of national consciousness was another major contribution of Mao. In the process of establishing his thoughts, Mao had to conduct bitter ideological struggles within his party as well as against the Comintern. In a protracted struggle, he eventually established his line, ideology and his thought.

Mao had great respect for Stalin. He hailed Stalin as a great revolutionary leader. But at the same time, he and only he pointed out the ideological roots of Stalin's mistakes. When Stalin was being slandered all around, when he was even being branded as a criminal, Mao underlined his contributions to the building of socialism. While pointing out the ideological roots of Stalin's mistakes, Mao unhesitatingly said that Stalin had a fair amount of metaphysics, or one-sidedness, in him. While building socialism in China, Mao blindly opposed the copying of the Soviet model. He opposed the imposition of the Soviet Party as

a super-party and, most importantly, he opposed the super-power status of the Soviet Union. He had repeatedly emphasized that a socialist country – no matter how strong it became – should never assume the airs of a super power, should never interfere in the internal affairs of other countries and should not occupy other countries by sending armed forces. When the Soviet Army was roaming around from Eastern Europe to Afghanistan under the pretext of defending socialism, Mao resolutely opposed this super-power attitude and said that if a socialist country starts behaving like a superpower, its socialism no longer remains genuine. Mao not only opposed Khrushchevite revisionism but also criticized Stalinist metaphysics. In our party's opinion, for a comprehensive understanding of Mao's thought, it is imperative to understand both these aspects. Mao repeatedly pointed out that the contradiction between capitalism and socialism is far from resolved. This struggle will go on for many years to come, may be a few hundred years, and thus the question of who will win is yet to be resolved. Soviet leadership claimed that socialism can only grow into developed socialism and then into communism. Mao said no, this is wrong. This was yet another major contribution of Mao in the field of Marxist philosophy and theory.

He had also pointed out how exactly a socialist country may transform itself back into capitalism. He opined that class struggle exists in socialist society too and there remains a bourgeoisie. This bourgeoisie organizes itself within the communist party, and capitalist roaders emerge from within the party headquarters. Later events in Soviet Union have corroborated his analysis. Socialism's retreat to capitalism and the capturing of party headquarters from within by capitalist roaders occurred in Russia in exactly the way Mao had predicted. And this is the basic reason for the growing attraction towards Mao's thought, particularly after Soviet collapse.

Summing up the experiences of various socialist countries, Mao tried to resolve this problem of great importance. This led to what is known as the Cultural Revolution in China. The Cultural Revolution ended in a failure and finally, some persons, who were in no way communists, seized power in the Party. Eventually in 1976, Mao had to declare the end of the Cultural Revolution and bring back Deng Xiaoping. In the first analysis, the aim and purpose of Cultural Revolution remained unfulfilled and in many a case, produced opposite results.

Anyway, the questions that remained unresolved do create conditions for the development of Mao's thought. In the history of revolution at every phase, certain questions remain unresolved and they, in turn, provide certain conditions for the future development of Marxism-Leninism. Success comes only after repeated failures. The Cultural Revolution failed but this is not the main thing. The important thing is that Mao pinpointed the real questions and made an attempt to resolve them. The danger has been proved real and future attempts by Marxists-Leninists in resolving these questions will bank heavily upon the essence of Mao's efforts.

So many people nowadays are evaluating Mao. That is definitely needed. But I feel the time has still not come to say anything final on the comprehensive evaluation of Mao. The Soviet Communist Party had made their own assessment of Stalin but Marxists-Leninists of the world have rejected that. Similarly, I don't consider CPC's evaluation of Mao as the last word. Well, CPC's evaluation is, of course, a part of any comprehensive evaluation of Mao. But Mao didn't belong just to China. Marxists-Leninists of the world will evaluate him and for that, history has to wait for some more time.

Today's need is to evaluate the Indian communist movement in the light of Mao's thought – to ponder over the reasons why we failed in advancing the Indian revolution. Instead of evaluating Mao on the yardstick of correctness of one's own party line, it would be better if one's own party line is judged by the yardstick of Mao's thought.

It is not that Mao committed no mistakes. Those who dream of revolution and strive for it in revolutionary struggles are liable to commit mistakes. Those who never go in for struggles can, of course, claim that they never committed mistakes. Marx, Engels, Lenin – every one of them made mistakes. But their mistakes were the mistakes of great revolutionaries. Even through their mistakes, they succeeded in carrying forward the revolutionary consciousness of people. Mao's mistakes should also be judged from this viewpoint only. History does not remember those who claimed to have always been correct. History remembers Marx, not Lassalle or Bernstein, history remembers Lenin, not Plekhanov and history remembers Mao and not Liu Shao-chi.

In 1968, when we embarked on the path of revolutionary politics in college life, we had used the word Chairman Mao in the editorial of the college magazine. There were only four or five of us in those days.

The reactionaries organized many students and burnt our magazine *Vanguard*. We protested with the slogan 'Mao is the great leader of world revolution'. Later on, when arrested, we were mercilessly beaten up for possessing Mao's books. In jail, somehow I managed to smuggle in Mao's *Selected Writings* and I would read it myself every day and translate it for the benefit of other comrades in jail. This was my favourite task in those days.

Dipankar Bhattacharya was interviewed in April 2008 in New Delhi.

MANORANJAN MOHANTY

‘This formulation of Red Terror and abdication by state is a distorted view of reality’

Manoranjan Mohanty, a leading academic and historian, understands the radical Left movement in India better than most. He is the editor of *Social Change*, a quarterly journal of the Council for Social Development (CSD). Mohanty, with an M.A. (Delhi) and Ph.D. (University of California, Berkeley), is a political scientist and a China scholar with many publications on theoretical and empirical dimensions of social movements, human rights, development experience and regional role of India and China. Currently Chairperson, Institute of Chinese Studies, Delhi, and President, Development Research Institute, Bhubaneswar, he is also a Visiting Professor in Global Studies at University of California, Santa Barbara, since 2007 where he teaches every spring. He retired in 2004 as the Director, Developing Countries Research Centre and Professor of Political Science at the University of Delhi where he taught since 1969.

Q. You have been a long observer of the Naxalbari movement. How do you view this home-grown Maoism?

A. It has indeed grown in our soil, even though Maoism is an external ideology. In itself, Indian communists had articulated the issues of landless labour in the framework of the communist movement. It was also inspired by the Bolshevik revolution. Therefore, these revolutionary formulations certainly have an international character. It has been proved as home-grown today even more than before. Since the home of Maoism has quite a different ideology today, it is hostile or indifferent

to them (Maoist groups outside China). They have nothing to do with them. Maoist groups in India and Nepal regard the Chinese Communist Party today as a revisionist party. So, your starting point is right.

Q. Has anything changed, given the length of the movement and the vastness of the country?

A. Yes indeed. Much has; at three levels. One is that very soon other groups in various parts of India have associated themselves with this trend; the Srikakulam movement, also in Bihar, Kerala, I am talking of that time. Two, the organizational development has changed the pre-organizational character totally. In other words, there are many different groups subscribing to Naxalbari ideology and Mao. Three, merger of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), People's War Group and the Maoist Communist Centre of India (MCCI) in October 2004 led to the formation of the CPI (Maoist). It is an all-India party; they have groups and regional committees; also a national character because it has structure. The most explicitly organized party is the CPI (ML), organized by the late Vinod Mishra and now they have an all India leader in Dipankar Bhattacharya. The third one has just emerged with the original name. It is called just CPI (ML) led by Kanu Sanyal and has united several groups. But even outside these organized formations, there are at least a dozen groups. This is the second change. The third change is the most significant one. There has been physical and strategic action by Naxalites during the last 40 years, responding to changes in the world situation as also changes within the country. Within the country, new alliances have taken place in the character of capitalism for the revolutionary groups to confront. One is that the earlier concept of bourgeoisie and its differentiation into comprador bourgeoisie and national bourgeoisie is now challenged by these developments. What was once considered national bourgeoisie are today the monopoly bourgeoisie and they are actually partners with the global, Western bourgeoisie, and some of them are themselves investing in foreign countries. Tata, Birlas, Infosys, Ambanis, Reliance, particularly, are with global capitalist forces. Therefore, the notion of a national bourgeoisie has now come under criticism. Conditions have changed. That dependency is not the comprador type because when Tatas or Ambanis meet with foreign capital, they don't necessarily meet them as subordinates or agents. So they are global monopoly bourgeoisie. It is one condition that has changed.

Another important development in the agriculture sector is contrary to formulation of semi-feudal agriculture. Now you have pockets of highly developed capitalist relations in the former Green Revolution areas. But at the same time, there are many areas like Vidharbha where feudal conditions still exist. But there are new complex conditions. You have state subsidy to local groups, a lot of banking money, poverty eradication programmes, a new class of contractors, new elite in the countryside and you have the Panchayati Raj, which is a new phenomenon. Progressive groups, wherever they are there, use that institution for people's gains. In most other places where they are not active, the local elite, particularly the new elite, uses that.

The third is the caste situation. The decision of V.P. Singh to introduce Mandal politics has led to caste politics and caste mobilization on a big scale. And therefore, the old class analysis does not entirely hold. Other issues like gender have also become important. That is it. This is an ideological evolution, you have a geographical spread.

Q. Do you see the reality of 150-plus districts in India under 'Red Terror' as a civil war situation where the forces of state have abdicated their role in several regions, particularly those that are in the interior and have little access to developmental processes?

A. I am afraid this formulation of Red Terror and abdication by state is a distorted view of reality. And a contiguous or full-scale identified 150-plus liberated areas – friends and some others have used the word Red Corridor, from Nepal down to India – I think is totally mischievous in terms of creating a scare. Though there are groups and areas that are active, there is no liberated zone or contiguous zone of that kind. Yes, there are major chunks of these areas and there are degrees of influence, whether you talk about Bihar, Jharkhand, Maharashtra and Wayanad in Kerala. And in these areas, surely the state has not abdicated. Number 1, where ever there are development projects of the state, they have been implemented with full cooperation of the Maoists. They have been better implemented in Naxalite areas, where bad officers are threatened and good officers take advantage of the Naxalite challenges to implement these programmes well. I myself have evaluated tribal development programmes in Andhra Pradesh; they are implemented well because the officers think that is the best way to meet the challenge of the Naxalites. If we can deliver the goods to the poor, they will not turn

to the Naxalites. On the other hand, the state is deploying para-military forces to kill the Naxalites. Therefore, where is the abdication of the state? Thus, this formulation of Red Corridor, Red Terror and abdication of the state should be reconsidered.

Q. Is it in your view a situation where various armed and political armies, a bulk of them comprising the dispossessed rural poor, have taken it upon themselves to form literally a state within a state and does this reflect the decreasing power of the state itself?

A. No it does not. The states' power is evident in the paramilitary operations; but it shows the weakness of the state, not the decline of state power. In other words, the state is not able to respond to the socio-economic demands of the people, of the poor, and as a result, they are turning to the Naxalites and it is this weakness of the state that is pushing it to go for hard action against the Naxalites and against their supporters. So it is not a state within the state, you see, it is a more complex situation. It is true that in some areas they do Lok Adalats, you know, people's trial courts and conduct summary trials and give their judgments and so on; or they also collect taxes or levies and so on. Yes, in those areas you can say that there is a parallel state which is in operation but in the whole province, or in the whole country or in the whole region, that is not the situation. And experience says that such operations by Naxalites also disappear when the state re-establishes its military presence or coercive presence. Right now in some parts of Andhra Pradesh, the state has re-established its writ, both through its paramilitary forces and by counter mobilization of people. In Chhattisgarh, this is done in a systematic way through the Salwa Judum. Therefore, even if you see those operating parallel political structures, one has to see the complexities of the situation rather than jump to the conclusion that the state has abdicated. Since many Naxalite groups are operating in the open and trying to use the state to do its job such as protecting tribal rights, implementing law against upper caste domination or patriarchy and things like that, implementing the poverty eradication programmes and so on, so the complexities of the picture should not be missed.

Q. Does it reflect, in a sense, the crisis of the state, one where the distinctions between conflicts are getting increasingly blurred?

A. Yes, there is crisis of the state, no doubt about it. And crisis of the state is evident in two respects – in the decline in welfare or responsive, positive role of the state as far the needs of the poor, landless, Dalits, Adivasis, women, backward regions and minorities' rights are concerned. That's one. The other is that recourse to coercion is so frequent, it shows a legitimacy decline, legitimate deficient state. You know the laws are not being obeyed voluntarily so outbreak of violence, whether it is pure crime by gangsters or by political groups and state forces, shows that there is a crisis of state. So in both respects, there is crisis of state. On the other hand, you can say that India is rising with 8 per cent rate of growth; now the modern situation is such that you can have both; you can have the elite having its own security in their drawing rooms, board rooms and colonies and high-tech manufacturing and service units, showing growth, even high growth, while bulk of the population is feeling alienated and remains depressed. Therefore, one has to see the crisis of the state.

Q. *As a newspaper reporter and a magazine reporter who has covered Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, I can say that in some parts, bare feudal violence that occurred frequently earlier, appears to have gone down due to the pressure of the Naxalites. Would you agree?*

A. You are right. In Telangana, oppression of Dalits has reduced so much that people readily attribute it to the Naxalites. Oppression of women, particularly lower caste tribal women, has come down so much that it is again attributed to the Naxalites. And you know the state had its laws, educational system, media – none of that could add up to what the Naxalites have achieved in reducing feudal social oppression in Telangana, Bihar and so on. At the same time, we have to note one contrary phenomenon. When there is a counter-operation by the state to kill the Naxalites, harass their supporters or kill the supporters in many places, the revenge that the feudal forces, the upper caste, the police resort to, is abominable. The revenge violence also is very much there. And so you have an overall trend of the Naxalite movement contributing to reduction of feudal violence. But we have these state operations, which have resulted in revenge violence by the upper caste and upper classes, but no doubt, your main formulation is valid that indeed, it has substantially reduced feudal violence.

Q. *How close is the Naxalite ideal to the classical Maoist one?*

A. Yes, it is very close because of the flexibility that is built into Maoism. Mao Tse Tung thought is defined as application of Marxism–Leninism, rather creative application of Marxism–Leninism to the concrete conditions of the Chinese revolutionary situation. So it was not a copycat strategy of the Bolshevik revolution. In fact, the Bolshevik strategies failed in the first two attempts between 1927 with the various uprisings and the agrarian militant struggle from 1931 to 1934 till the Long March; from Chiangsi Soviet founding in 1931 till the Long March. So, after the Long March, slowly Mao Tse Tung said, ‘No, we have to have our United Front, we have to take part of the bourgeoisie with us, the nationalist bourgeoisie; we have to postpone radical agrarian reforms for some time and focus on United Front strategy. Not a Socialist Revolution, not a bourgeoisie revolution but a new democratic revolution.’

But that was the creative methodology and Charu Mazumdar talked about creative methodology but actually he was somewhat practicing or allowed some practice of what I have called in my book *Revolutionary Violence* as ideological parallelism. But today, things have changed; the groups together have a much wider strategy, you see, from parliamentary politics to armed struggle to squad action, trade union organization to Dalit organization, Adivasi organization, women organization; anti-imperialist United Front together with middle classes and elements of patriotic bourgeoisie, even in some cases, rather authentic worker–peasant alliance formation. In other words, you have a comprehensive strategy in place now. Therefore, the methodology of Mao, namely Revolutionary Creativity, is indeed the legacy here and the broad anti-colonial, anti-feudal theme is very much there. Therefore, they are very close to Maoism.

Q. *Has the Maoist/Naxalbari movement in India taken roots in the absence of any organized Left in the rural sector?*

A. I think that now there is an organized left in the rural sector. The three groups that I mentioned out of the Naxalbari book bank, the PWG, now called the CPI (Maoist), CPI (Liberation), and Kanu Sanyal's CPI (ML) – they have basic support among the peasantry and tribal areas. Thus, there is now organized Left in the rural sector. The strength of the CPI (ML) Liberation in Bihar is only the peasantry and the Dalits.

The strength of the Chandrapulla Reddy-connected groups or groups in Andhra Pradesh are only peasants. Therefore we can't any longer say that there is no organized left in the rural sector. And the CPI (M)'s base is also rural Bengal; of course they are very hostile to the Naxalites.

Q. The Naxalite movement in India is far too split, too incoherent to formulate a single-party line. What is the future of such a political movement?

A. It is very interesting, but this shall never be one organized coherent movement because of the very nature of this movement and the problems it is tackling. This movement distinguishes itself from the CPI (M) in two respects. One, emphasizing on non-parliamentary politics and two, rejecting Congress – not only BJP politics, but also Congress politics and within that, they have three differences.

One, whether to follow an exclusive armed struggle line or go for exclusive parliamentary politics or even join united fronts with other groups. Now on these three issues, they all have been divided into three streams. PWG, i.e. CPI (Maoist) wants mainly armed struggle, CPI (ML) Liberation wants mainly parliamentary and mass movement politics with a very sharp critique of CPI (M) and the late Kanu Sanyal, you know, was between the two, not resorting to armed struggle but having a lot of mass movement and mass resistance programmes and distinguishing itself from the CPI (M). Therefore, when seen together, they have an all India presence. There is no state, no city where one or more of these three groups are absent. Therefore as I said, there is an objective basis for this ideological formulation and that objective basis has become more vindicated today in two respects.

There is challenge to national sovereignty and autonomy over the reforms, through globalization of capital or a new engineering that is in operation, so the Naxalites say that, 'Look, we have always been saying that our elite is an ally of global capital and here it is proved and in fact, the negative effects of globalization on workers, peasants, Dalits, Adivasis, women and backward regions are very well established.' Number two, the agrarian crisis in contemporary India is very deep. It has three manifestations. Starvation deaths and poverty is one manifestation – Orissa, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, etc. Then, suicides by farmers are another manifestation where the wrong kinds of Green Revolution strategies have created problems. Then there is the third element of

the crisis. The reform process and globalization promote a kind of marketized agriculture, which aims at developing industry and the service sector at the cost of agriculture.

Therefore, the future is going to be a long-drawn struggle. You have farmer suicides, you have starvation. The third is that marketized agriculture in the reform period is creating some problems. Perhaps you may not see starvation deaths; you may not see farmer suicides, but problems are there – problems of falling production, problems of non-profitability of agriculture, things like that. And lack of generation of surplus and so on. You know the Maoist revolution is an agrarian revolution and here is the evidence that there is an agricultural revolution. It is an anti-colonial revolution. Here is the evidence that global capitalism is denying you autonomy to develop the way you would like to develop. Therefore, the Maoist claim that they are being vindicated by contemporary developments and people like me are hoping that faced with the Maoist challenge, India would take a lot of structural measures to address agrarian issues. Address issues of poverty in a structural way, not relief through the guarantee of employment schemes; a deeper way by providing land, providing capital, providing rural industries to give permanent employment and so on. And developing tribal areas in a way that the tribes really feel the ownership of that association. But they feel alienated and displaced. We have done just the opposite. We have developed a service economy with some sectoral development in manufacturing industries, neglecting agriculture all together; as a result, we are confronted with massive unemployment and poverty.

And that is the objective condition that has given rise to Naxalite movement, which continues to be strong. And, therefore, the Naxalite challenge to the Indian state is going to continue for a long time. The confrontation is going to be serious and perhaps violent, because there are no signs of serious political and socio-economic response to the Naxalites. There are only administrative and coercive responses. The common minimum programme of the UPA government had said that it is a socio-economic problem and that encounter deaths would be avoided at all costs. But there is no evidence of either of this being implemented. Thus unfortunately, we are going in the opposite direction. And now the Prime Minister has equated in his Independence Day speech and thereafter many times, you know, the terrorism of the autonomy movements or secessionist movements with the Naxalite movement. So both

are supposed to be 'aatankvad' and the political understanding of either Kashmir or North-Eastern terrorism or militancy or Naxalite violence is still lacking, and therefore this gives a further lease to the Naxalite movement. It is a vicious circle. State violence would lead to more Naxalite violence and state counter-violence; it is a vicious circle and the poor people get it from both sides. They will be victims of police repression, paramilitary operations as well as Naxalites as we have seen in Salwa Judum in Chhattisgarh.

Q. Despite the changes that the Maoists have brought about, like providing a good degree of self-respect and relative security to low-caste landless labour, mainly through sustained use of violence in the countryside, the larger stranglehold of the big kulak or rural capitalist, may not have diminished?

A. That is true. On account of the type of development that has taken place, economic development has actually given rise to an agricultural capitalist class, the kulak class, which has a caste character also. They belong to either upper caste or the middle castes and in both cases, they are oppressing the landless poor or small farmers, mostly Dalits or lower castes. What does it mean? It means that there is a self-aggrandizing class of kulaks that is growing and the contradiction in the countryside is between them and the poor, the landless or landed poor. This kulak is not a modern capitalist farmer always. You know the Bihar labour working in Punjab, they don't get the treatment that a free wager should do. Very often they are bonded labour from the lower castes. Therefore, on the one hand, there is dignity of the rural poor in the Naxalite areas and repression is less, minimum wage is paid, paid regularly, the terms of contract of farming between the tenant farmer and the landowner are respected but at the same time, if you have the all India picture in mind, you have the growth of the kulaks. So both are true; one should not be cited to deny the other.

Q. While influential sections of the extreme Left, particularly CPI (Maoist), support violence to smash the status quo, the fact is that most people who have been victims of this violence have either been the poor themselves or lowly government officials.

A. I think you are right. I think that the CPI (Maoist) has not been careful about choosing its targets. Of course, any violent strategy has

its limits and this is one of the limits that sometimes, poor people and officials who have no control over what they do because they are just performing roles, become victims, like policeman or petty officials of the state performing jobs on the field. I think CPI (Maoist) has been sometimes guilty of having its targets among the poor and petty officials. And therefore you know, I have always said that violence cannot be a creed of any democrat or any revolutionary because violence means violating humanity, violating human beings, either physically or psychologically or culturally. We want to really fulfil the great civilizational norms of respect for the human being – physically, culturally and psychologically.

Revolutionaries resort to violence only as a response when all other methods have failed. And revolutionary violence therefore has to be very careful. First, only those who believe in peace and dignity of the human being can in their peace work be sometimes compelled to resort to violence. Number two, it takes place when all other methods have failed. Number three, it never replaces other methods, even when others have failed, and they have to go on. Other methods of redressal have to go on together with violence. And number four, it has to be resorted to in such a way that humanism of the revolutionaries has to come out every moment, how they respond to violence unlike the oppressor. Oppressors will show brutality, inhumanity, but revolutionaries must show humanity. Therefore, practicing violence as the last resort has very serious, political and moral conditions, and CPI (Maoists) are guilty of violating this.

Q. Would it be accurate to say that this rural resistance is an outcome of pro-industry policies followed by the Indian state since Independence at the expense of the countryside?

A. Yes. It is that and neglect of agriculture and neglect of the rural poor in the agriculture sector that have been the consequence of these policies. And this is the objective condition that has given rise to the Naxalite movement.

Q. What would you say about the importance of personalities in the late 1960s and early 1970s that led to the Naxalbari movement, people like Charu Mazumdar, Kanu Sanyal and others in Bihar and Andhra Pradesh?

A. The role of personalities is very important. But it is the ideology and the context that made those personalities more or less important. For example, Charu Mazumdar who theorized on the armed people's revolution and launched the Naxalbari uprising was the district committee secretary of the CPI (M) of Darjeeling. After he became theoretician of the All Indian Coordination Committee of Revolutionaries and then the first chairman of the party from 1969 till 1972, there was almost a cult of Charu Mazumdar, almost a parallel with the cult of Mao Tse Tung during the Cultural Revolution. And he wrote quite a lot; he was published in the Bengali magazine *Desabrat* and the English magazine published from Kolkata, *Liberation*, and his authority was much respected. He was underground, then he was arrested and then he died in jail. Today, all streams of the Naxalite movement respect Charu Mazumdar.

Nagi Reddy was another very important leader of the dissident CPI (M). He came from Andhra Pradesh, led the Srikakulam movement in 1968 but he did not join the All India Revolutionary Coordination Committee. He was another crystallizing point. He differed with Charu Mazumdar on the type and timing of armed struggle, particularly small squad action. Therefore right from the beginning, we have a Charu Mazumdar line and a Nagi Reddy line in the Naxalite movement. Kanu Sanyal was the actual leader of Naxalbari uprising and in the early years, he followed the theoretical formulations of Charu Mazumdar. After Mazumdar's death, Sanyal was in jail for a long time. I met Kanu Sanyal and Kolla venkiah in the Vishakhapatnam Central Jail. I interviewed them in November 1973. After Kanu Sanyal was released, he became inactive for a little while, then decided to set up the Communist Organizing Committee and had to unite various groups. He did not succeed very much but still some groups have come together, which is now called the CPI (ML), under his leadership.

There were many other names; Kolla venkiah from Andhra Pradesh was another important leader. He was close to Nagi Reddy but he was also independent and was trying to unite various groups in addition to his own. Nagbhushan Patnaik from Orissa [now Odisha] was one of the other leaders, a very famous name. He was an advocate but was one of the earliest to split with CPI (M) and become a member of the leadership in the All India Coordination Committee. There were others from Orissa. Rabi Das, editor of *Samukhya* and also member of the Revolutionary Coordination Committee and Gannath Patra. Nagbhushan Patnaik

was jailed and convicted in the Parvatipuram conspiracy case where he was given death sentence. Then there was a campaign to commute his death sentence. A.K. Chowdhary and Ramakrishna Chowdhary took the lead. I was part of that campaign. That was an all-India campaign and his death sentence was commuted to life but then the Janata government released him in 1978. After that, slowly, he was organizing his own area in Koraput and then he joined forces with Vinod Mishra, who had then come up with the Bhojpur organization. Vinod Mishra and Nagbhushan Patnaik build up the CPI (ML) Liberation. Then the Indian People's Front (IPF) was dissolved and CPI ML (L) continues. When Nagbhushan Patnaik died, he was the number two leader of CPI (ML) after Vinod Mishra.

If the question is whether it was a leader-centric movement, it was so in terms of the various factions that emerged. The factions didn't compromise with each other; therefore you have multiplicity of groups. Manik Guha, for example, headed CPI (ML) Proletarian Path, Ramnath set up the Communist League of India (CLI). We can mention many names in addition to Charu Mazumdar, Nagi Reddy and so on. Kondapalli Sitarammiah who started the PWG was again the symbol of the movement but other people came up and he split, the majority disowned him and he then became inactive. Therefore, the PWG, for example, is more the movement than the leader. CPI ML (L) was set up by Vinod Mishra. It was more the movement and the line than just Vinod Mishra or today's general secretary, Dipankar Bhattacharya. So to some extent, personalities were important. Nagi Reddy for example. The whole group was known as the Nagi Reddy group but it is not right to say that the Naxalite movement was just a leader-centric movement. I think it had its own dynamics, its own social base and lots of cadres.

Q. Would you say that the current Maoist movement lacks personalities like Charu Mazumdar or Kondapalli Sitarammiah?

A. Indeed, there were large personalities like Charu Mazumdar and Kondapalli Sitarammiah but as I just mentioned, the movements have acquired their own character and it is the collective leadership of various groups that now matters more than individuals and symbols. Therefore, absence of such personalities does not matter.

Q. Analysts are wont to conclude that the Naxalbari or Maoists were too divided and uneven to make a difference. Yet today, the Indian government admits that the rural resistance has now spread to over 150 districts in India. Would you say that it is perhaps the only genuine Left movement in India, even if it has no immediate impact on electoral or coalition politics of the day?

A. My assessment of the Left movement is that it is a much wider movement than the Naxalite movement. I include every party or group in the Left movement. I include Socialists also in the Left movement. I have comments and criticisms for practically every group, from Lohia Socialists to People's War, the Maoists. Therefore in my understanding, the Left Movement is very broad. Its collective influence on the system is significant but not decisive. Having said that, one has to admit that if you disaggregate the Left, some sections have made some significant and specific contribution. The CPI (M) having run West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura governments for such a long time has shown the possibilities that exist in the system itself. And also the limits. If the CPI (M) had not done this, we would not be having this experience and some of the gains of the system today. The Lohia Socialists have brought the caste question to the fore and their contribution is to make the caste issue as important as the class issue, which the Left today has made it the central core of their programme. Without the Lohia Socialists, this would not have been the case. So this is their contribution. Maoists are the most powerful resistance movements to globalization and economic reforms today that have caused so much adverse impact on the poor and the Dalits and the tribals and the backward regions. Therefore each has its contribution, and my understanding is that one has to have a wider view of the Left Movement.

Q. Then there is an old Maoist connection in the North-East where several groups for many years have proclaimed their allegiance to the Maoist ideal. Do you see a connection between the different groups that are fighting?

A. I think the situation is very different in the North-East. North-East movements are autonomy or secessionist movements. There was a period of India-China tension when some of them got training or armed support from China. That ended practically by 1979. And Naxalites in different parts of India support the autonomy movements. To that extent, they have a connection with the North-East, but otherwise

North-East movements are not either committed to the Maoist programme or Maoist ideal. Even the NSCN, which calls itself socialist, has nothing very much to do with Maoism and the other groups. The ULFA is not socialist or Maoist. Nor is the Bodo Liberation Front. Therefore, one should not simplistically link up Maoist Naxalites with the North-East autonomy movements.

Q. There are critics – and some of them have been participants themselves – who now say that the Maoist movement in India is a case of urban youth jumping into the affairs of the rural countryside of which they had very little idea.

A. This is a very superficial understanding of the movement. In the late 1960s and 1970s, when students from Presidency College Calcutta or St. Stephens College Delhi and other university and college students joined the countryside, in those areas there already were movements with local people. Kanu Sanyal, Jungal Santhal, they were local people. Similarly in Musahari, there were local people. Leadership was centred in the city, no doubt. It was a leadership that had linkages with the local leaders. And even today, a lot of city youth go to the countryside and join these groups. But they do a lot of training to identify with the local people. So the urban element should be understood in a more contextual sense rather urban youth going and inciting the countryside, which is stable and quiet and so on. True, the urban youth has read, thought, studied the contradictions and tried to test their ideas on the countryside. But the very important aspect of the Naxalite movement is the local organization of its people.

Q. There are a few people who have argued that the Naxalite movement in India is Nihilist in character.

A. I don't think it is a Nihilist movement. The Maoist movement has short-term and long-term programmes. They work among the people; they address even their day-today needs. They don't only talk about establishing a proletarian state or revolutionary base areas and zone and so on. They have a programme. It is not Nihilism per se. They do use a lot of people's practices and institutions and protect them. But the impression of Nihilism has gathered some relevance because they blow up bridges, stations, railway tracks and so on. Now these are things that

cause a lot of difficulties for the ordinary life of common people. Sometimes they have done it in order to defend themselves against enemies, against police, against paramilitary forces and that has brought them this name that they are Nihilists, but I don't think they are Nihilists basically in character.

Q. Politically speaking, is the land reform an important issue now, considering that most mainline political parties (outside the Left perhaps) now do not even think it is important to mention the subject in their manifestos?

A. I think land reforms are extremely important. The Naxalite movement has raised this issue but the World Bank in the last two years has also now raised this issue because now they realize that unless the landless and the poor have access to productive resources, you cannot create a market in the rural economy. Mainstream parties are no longer talking about land reforms for two reasons. One is that the landed are in power, particularly the OBCs, most of them are landed and they are in power. Without land reforms, the land question will remain tense and will be stuck in the present situation of violence and debts. Today there are two kinds of problems. One, there is a lot of absentee landlordism and a lot of land is being kept as unproductive land. All these things have to be tackled. Even good economics tells us that once we give land to someone who can actually put in a family effort, there may be more productivity. Now, one argument against land reforms is that it is uneconomical; it will be small-scale agriculture. You can have many other forms of bringing small farmers together, with support in irrigation and tractor cultivation, if necessary. Land reforms and land utilization programmes go together because in some areas, the government has given small pieces of land to Dalits and Adivasis but there is no water for them. It has to be part of a package. Therefore land reforms are very important. The present method of developing the industrial sector and the service sector leaving the countryside behind, I think, is going to be seriously objected to by the poor.

Q. Would it be accurate to say that apart from West Bengal and Kashmir in the early days of Sheikh Abdullah, land reforms – that is distribution of surplus land to the landless – has not quite taken off?

A. Land reforms is distribution of surplus land and selling surplus land and government land and other forms of land to restoration of common

property, which has been taken over by the rich of the village and three, ensure that tenants or sharecroppers have control and continuous control over the land that they cultivate, by establishing various support structures or cooperatives or features that address the questions of small-scale agriculture. Land reform has come together with agriculture diversification, agriculture development programme, rural industries, so it is a package. And in that sense, land reform is a central part of rural development. It has to come with credit and all those things. To say that land reforms are outdated is wrong.

Q. Would you say that the current radical left politics is close to the ideal of land reform?

A. I mean it has kept the land reforms on the agenda. Without radical left politics, it would not be so.

Q. If merely implementing land reforms or giving more rights to the sharecropper were the only solutions, West Bengal would not be facing a fairly powerful Naxalite movement in some of its districts.

A. Now, this is why land reforms have to be part of a larger rural transformation programme. What West Bengal has done is protect sharecropper's right. It has not done things beyond that. It has not gone for cooperatives or state support for agriculture development in a major way. It has not gone for rural industries, so poverty persists together with issues of sharecropper rights. That is why it is very important to make land reforms part of a wider agenda.

Q. Ironically, the current demands for land reforms are coming from the new urban entrepreneur who sees in the vast untapped countryside, a potential to invest.

A. Indeed, World Bank's interest in land reform is precisely that. But the factual position is that the urban entrepreneur today is not talking about it. It is the World Bank talking. The Indian middle class is not talking about land reforms, the Planning Commission and Ministry of Agriculture, particularly the present minister Sharad Pawar, they are not talking about land reforms. They say it is an outdated idea whereas the radical groups, the organizations of the poor and now even the World

Bank, because it knows that without being talked about, it cannot gain any legitimacy, too are interested.

Q. In the few discussions that the Andhra Pradesh government has had with the Naxalites in the state, there is complete stalemate on the questions of land reforms. In a sense, most state legislators and the Parliament are still dominated by the big landlord who wins elections and presides over legislation and is aggressively opposed to land reforms. To the Naxalite ideal, there appears to be no bigger roadblock. Your views.

A. My views are that in Andhra Pradesh now, the people, the middle class which has been witness to the talks and the breakdown of the talks which has once again created a situation of tremendous tension and violence, believes that land reforms should be pursued as an agenda and not some symbolic land reforms as carried out by successive governments there. They are distributing government land, but that is very little. They have to have a more serious programme and the Naxalites have done the surveys and they have presented a plan of how land reforms should take place in Andhra Pradesh. So there should be a response to that plan. But you are right. It means that the kulaks and the rich peasants' power has to be curbed and they control the decision-making process and the legislators. But my view is that as the middle class comes up, it is bound to finally appreciate the need for land reforms because then there will be a contradiction between the middle class and the landlords. The rising entrepreneur class and the landlords, they too will have a contradiction. I mean entrepreneurs eventually will like a flourishing countryside to be able to sell their goods and integrate the market, otherwise the rural market will continue to be underdeveloped. Therefore, things are bound to change.

Q. What is the kind of political settlement that you would envisage with the Maoists in India? Is there any meeting ground between these two world views?

A. I am a civil liberty worker and I work in the intersection of two circles – the world of the revolutionaries and the world of the existing political system. We believe that the existing political systems, the Constitution, all the amendments and the progressive laws, they are all result of people's struggles and lots of possibilities exist in the system. At the same time, revolutionaries have an agenda that is the people's democratic

agenda and that too has to be respected. We work in the intersection of two circles and therefore, we always believe that there are possibilities of dialogue and peaceful negotiations between the state and the revolutionaries, and the Maoists of Nepal have now shown the way. After achieving the superiority of their presence in society through armed struggle, they have now agreed to have peace talks and a negotiated transfer of power which will be without bloodshed – all the bloodshed has already taken place – which has brought them to share social power in a big way. So there has to be meeting ground between the two.

Q. The response of the state has been one of either complete indifference or brutal violence. In Chhattisgarh, there is the Salwa Judum, a private army dedicated to fight the radical Left.

A. The response of the state has been not of indifference. Today in India, it is of brutal violence and repression all the way. But this repression has many forms. It may take the form of the special police like the Greyhound, which started in Andhra Pradesh, and is now operating in other states like Orissa. The rulers always have their surrendered Naxalites, like surrendered ULFA or surrendered militants. Now the state is using local people from the same area, sort of patronizing them one way or the other. This is an extremely dangerous strategy of the same community being divided into pro and anti-Naxalites and they being armed by the state to fight the Naxalites and the Naxalites are in turn also attacking Salwa Judum. So the state strategy of organizing a popular army to fight another popular movement is very dangerous. The routes of violence, the roots of the people's alienation have to be probed into and the state has to go to those roots – land reforms, minimum wage, dignity, participation, those issues.

Q. While there are crack commando forces set up by different state governments with the sole intention of 'smashing' the Naxalites, yet no state government has reached an understanding with each other on how to contain the radical left. Wherein lies the confusion?

A. In fact, it is going on in the reverse direction. Some states wanted to have peace talks. They have been directed by the Centre and the Coordination Centre of Home Secretaries and DGPs, the Task Force, the Chief Ministers Conference and so on, that there should be no relenting

on repression, and there should be crack commandos, as you have said, everywhere. Now there is more and more coordination amongst states.

Q. Could you reflect on this open hostility, one within the broad Left pantheon and the other between the Left radicals themselves?

A. Open hostility, yes because the Naxalites consider the CPM as revisionist. The Maoists party considers Liberation as revisionist. So they have intense antagonism and there is a very peculiar tradition among the Left as their closest ideological formation is also their greatest enemy. I have never been able to understand this and it has cost them quite a lot. It allows the state and the rulers to divide them and finish all of them.

Q. Do you believe that differences are irreconcilable? Certainly there appears to be point of no return in West Bengal where the CPI (M) is completely opposed to the Naxalites, even if they are not too powerful, except in some districts.

A. Yes, between CPM and the Maoists, there is no possibility of reconciliation. CPM is operating within the system which the Maoists think is revisionism and is as good as a bourgeoisie party, and CPM considers Naxalites as terrorists and therefore there is no room for discussion among them. In the case of Liberation, probably there may be some discussion. But right now, Liberation and the CPM are hostile to each other. Yet, the possibility of various ML groups coming together with socialists and Gandhians and others for particular programmes, we have seen that happening in the past. The Mumbai resistance was one example and right now, they have formed the Democratic People's Front of India.

Q. Let us look at the neighbourhood. The Maoists have recorded their most significant gains in Nepal recently. What is your view of the Maoist movement there?

A. I think the Maoist movement in Nepal has been a most creative revolutionary movement in history. At a time when imperialism was riding high, there was so much repression, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) organized the peasants against landlords, took up concrete day-to-day issues of livelihood protection in those areas in 1996 and have

succeeded in giving self-dignity to the tribes of different parts of Nepal. They have an agenda of women's movement, which makes the women of Nepal very conscious of their rights. They want to protect Nepalese forests, water; their environment agenda is very significant. So, not only anti-imperialist, anti-feudal agenda in the classical Maoist sense but also anti-patriarchal, anti-caste, federal decentralized agenda. All this has made a very creative movement.

The movement was suppressed therefore there were losses. More than 10,000 people lost their lives. But that is why they are now in power all over Nepal, outside Kathmandu. I would have personally liked that they should have just taken over the palace, they were quite capable of taking over the palace in April, but at that time, the Indian army and the American striking forces could have landed. That was a possibility and there would have been a lot of bloodshed. So right now, at this stage, they are going to come to power as the dominant force with the other parties also participating and they have a genuine people's democratic agenda which has given role to other parties; so let them all fight elections. The Nepalese Maoists have announced that they will have elections and they will fight in free elections. They have almost decided to disarm themselves and participate in the constituent assembly formation. I think it a very creative revolutionary movement. I mean there are many ifs and buts and the question of imperialist intervention from outside is not ruled out.

Q. After years of fighting in the mountains and the countryside, Nepali Maoists are quite happy to be part of the political process in the country. Do you see a similar scenario developing here, even if the two political and social contexts remain totally different?

A. I don't see a similar scenario developing in India even though the CPM has recommended that to the Maoist Party in India for two reasons. One is that Indian Maoists are dispersed in different areas of the country. Indian Maoists are not as strong as in Nepal. And Indian political spectrum is so wide that it allows rulers to have a lot of strength in different parts of the country. This is going to be a very long process of India's democratic revolution to move from the present stage onwards. So it will take time. But at no stage do I see the two coming together, the rulers and the Maoists coming together.

Q. While it is difficult to say that political events in Nepal will shape politics in India, could this primarily rural unrest hold examples to emulate in our own backyard?

A. Definitely, Nepalese revolution's success has given confidence to Indian revolutionaries. Just as the Nepalese movement was a very clearly a home-grown movement and there are Maoists all over the world and the Indian Maoist Party did have some fraternal linkages with the Maoist party in Nepal, but it was home-grown; they armed themselves, they organized their shelter, they organized their army, they trained themselves. Basically, it was a Nepal-based movement. The Indian movement would have to be India-based. To be an all-India movement to seize political power, they need a different strategy because the conditions here are different.

Q. How do you see these simultaneous, alternative movements: globalization vis-à-vis the radical Left?

A. In fact, globalization now faces widespread resistance in the Third World, especially in India and what I see is intensification of confrontation – a lot of violence, a lot of debate and extremely brutal crackdown. The Surendranagar incident showed that the central government is determined to go ahead with the steel plants and getting foreign capital. There was Tata Steel, but the others, Posco and Mittal, those are coming. With impunity they want to go ahead and there is nothing to stop them. Now with special economic zones (SEZ), they want to go ahead. But listening to the questions raised by the radical Left, the simultaneous processes of globalization and people's movement will go on and we are going to witness a long period of confrontation.

Q. Will the gradual trend towards globalization end up in neutralizing the radical Left or the Maoists? To quote one example, the Red districts of Andhra Pradesh seem to produce an endless number of Maoists now for the last two or three generations, while neighbouring Karnataka is the information technology and outsourcing hub in India?

A. But in Karnataka too, the Maoist movement is growing. In Andhra Pradesh, you had both, Maoist movement had grown and also IT and Chandrababu Naidu grew. These are not mutually exclusive trends, these

are simultaneous trends that will grow in all these areas and right now, the Reds have been on the defensive in Andhra Pradesh. So you may say that the globalization leadership has won by repression, but it is too early to say that.

Q. Where would you place the current Maoist or radical Left movement in South Asia? Apart from Nepal and India, is there a spark anywhere else? Sri Lanka was once an integral part of the youth rebellion, a sort of contemporary to the Naxalites here.

A. Maoist movements exist in all the countries of South Asia.

Q. What is your sense of Maoist economics in this part of the world? Does it seem coherent or ideologically sound, so far as you are concerned? There appears to be no well laid down economic philosophy, other than a few party documents toeing a so-called party line?

A. Here I think that Maoists have a political economy but much more needs to be done. Globalization has come up with a model of self-reliant economy; there are concrete issues of class, caste, ethnicity, gender. Then forces of globalization have gone deep into the countryside. Therefore it is necessary for Maoists to come up with policies and specifications. I think they have to improve on that.

Manoranjan Mohanty was interviewed in May 2008 in New Delhi.

Part II

ACTIVISM ON GROUND IN INDIA

KAMESHWAR BAITHA

‘Power flows from the barrel of the gun but can we do it in India?’

India’s first elected CPI (ML) Member of Parliament (MP) Kameshwar Baitha comes from the hoary tradition of violent underground Left politics for close to four decades. The list of charges against Baitha is long: 16 counts of murder, 25 of attempted murder, six of assault with a dangerous weapon, three of extortion and other minor cases of assault and battery. The ex-Lok Sabha MP says that the 109 charges against him during his time as a Maoist insurgent in his home state of Jharkhand in eastern India are all cooked up. In the 2014 General Elections, contesting for a second time from Palamu, the hotbed of radical Maoism, he lost. ‘The kind of work I’ve done, particularly my focus on the weakest social groups in my constituency, is what makes me popular’, he told me last year, when he was still a member of India’s lower house. His voters, mostly impoverished tribals and low caste Hindus, see him as a Robin Hood figure. And he believes that is his unique selling point.

Q. You are the first elected CPI (ML) MP in the Lok Sabha. Could you take us through your odyssey, from being an underground armed Left radical to the highest people’s assembly in India?

A. You should know that I am a Member of Parliament and you should also know where I am coming from, the heritage that has been bequeathed to me. Where I am sitting now, the position that I have reached, are all because of this heritage. I have not got this chair easily. The reality is that from the time I became aware of my surroundings, of

myself and the realities that govern our world, I have analysed things and situations. I reached the conclusion that this society is divided into two classes and slowly but steadily, there arose a need to establish an equitable order. The situation in the countryside was such that big landlords dominated the scene and had cornered all scarce resources. The hapless working class slogged the whole day with very little to show for at the end of the day. Their children would lie ill, in pain, without any recourse to even the most basic health facilities. My mind was on fire. Is this exploitation sanctioned by God or is it man-made? It was clear that there was no divine intervention; a handful of highly placed people have managed to mould the society according to their needs. We mobilized people; our campaign began in the 1970s. Charu Mazumdar was alive then. In my village in 1974, maybe even earlier, say 1972-73, we set up a CPI (ML) unit.

We were young then; there was youthfulness in our approach. So you can say that it was the rampant and corrupt feudal system that gave birth to my political ideas. I did not go out to study the situation; I saw examples in my village. My village was dominated by large feudal landlords whose writ ran large. We had no choice but to take what came our way. So under the inspiration of Charu Mazumdar, in Palamu's Bistrampur area, we became very active and agitations were launched. In 1973, two CPI (ML) leaders, one of whom was named Gopal, were arrested. The agitation became sharper. Then Charu Mazumdar was martyred. The CPI (ML) acquired a force under the banner of Party Unity, inspired by the likes of Kanu Sanyal and leaders like Vijay Das, currently in Hazaribagh jail. It was under Das's leadership that I began my political career. The Majdoor Kisan Sangram Samiti (MKSS) was a legal organization headed by Dr Vinayan. Under his leadership, the mass agitations launched by the MKSS became powerful. I fought for landless peasants and their self-respect, corruption and a host of other pressing issues. Under the banner of MKSS, thousands of people assembled to fight for their fundamental rights. People were opposed to the land reform laws of the period that were actually tilted in favour of the landowners, and I provided the leadership for this nascent rebellion. I joined the CPI (ML) organizational structure and became a leader immediately because I was thought of as capable. I had carefully studied the political situation such as it existed then. I provided the leadership for MKSS.

1986 turned out to be the crucial year when the Arwal massacre took place. [In April 1986, more than a dozen Dalit labourers were killed by the police in Arwal, Jehanabad district, Bihar. The protests in the state and elsewhere that came in the massacre's wake marked a new phase in the development of the radical Left movement.] Soon, the MKSS was banned. We set up a legal organization called the Majdoor Jan Mukti Parishad (MJMP). It turned out to be a big mass movement. But when it started gathering momentum, it began to hit the well-entrenched interests of a handful of people who had managed to hold on to lands – it could be *gair majarua* land or land under ceiling, benami or illegally held land. Land was grabbed under various guises like temple, mutt or masjid land. People started to launch protests at the sites of all such land held under various names. I provided leadership to that movement.

Landlords and feudal elements recognized the threat implicit in our protests and decided to join hands and tie up informally with the district and state governments. In order to crush the rebellion, they set up private armies – private armies were set up not just in Palamu but everywhere in Bihar. Every caste had their *sena* [army] – the Lorik Sena for the Yadavs, Brahmarishi Sena for the Bhumiards, Kuer Sena for the Rajputs, Suvarna Liberation Front, Kisan Sevak Samaj – there were many such private armies that had sprung up. But none of them could take on the might of people's agitations like the Jan Sangram Samiti or Jan Mukti Parishad, which were all over-ground. In time, these private armies folded up under the weight of the might of people.

I want to reiterate here that I did not assume violent leadership right from the beginning. Wherever I led, it was in the form of organizational struggle. In Delhi alone, I addressed at least 10 public meetings; I addressed people in Assam and Siliguri. Two of my open meetings were held in Kolkata under the banner of Jan Pratirodh Manch, which were also attended by many mass-based organizations. My *andolan* [protests] has always been legal but I have been persistently booked under false cases on account of being part of the CPI (ML) movement. The CPI (ML) had two kinds of agitations: one that was involved in armed struggle and the other was people's fronts in the form of workers and peasant associations, student fronts and rickshaw pullers' association. Leadership was being provided at various levels by different people; I headed the peasants' organizations. But I was named virtually in every FIR under all

kinds of charges – Kameshwar Baitha did this, he did that, etc. But I will reiterate again: I never backed the gun culture but I was always involved in people's agitations. But I fought and fought hard. That is my legacy, but it was not confined by any chance to Palamu alone; it extended to Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh.

In 2005, I was arrested and jailed. Those four years provided a useful opportunity to study politics and the role of parties. Today, parties that follow a common ideology – the Communist parties of India, Maoists and Leninists, parties who talk of revolution, change and of armed struggle – see the Indian situation as semi-feudal and semi-capitalistic. Is India's situation really semi-feudal and semi-capitalistic? Will a revolution take place in India on the lines of the Chinese revolution? Are situations in the two countries the same? In India, Maoist parties who have carved out guerrilla zones and liberated areas, who talk of setting up military and para-military organizations to take on the might of the Indian state, a state which has a powerful military and an all-India communication network, a modern state, they don't know the reality. This was not the situation in China when the revolution took place there. China did not have modern communications then; it did not have the superior weaponry that Indian forces have today. Under the circumstances, is it possible to carry out an armed revolution? Some of these issues were uppermost in my mind during my incarceration. Could methods and tactics like these work? That is a constant tussle in my mind.

I saw the parliamentary system and how it works. After all, what is this development? The conclusion I reached was that development was possible only under the parliamentary system. Since I became an MP, I have raised the voice of the poor and the dispossessed. Whenever I have had time, be it for even five or ten minutes, I have always brought it to the notice of the government that Naxalism poses the biggest danger to India. The government is looking into it. The government is worried about areas that fall under Naxalite influence.

After all, what is the reason for such a movement? I have told the government that the Naxalite movement is not an unearthly creation of ghosts; it is a problem. It involves problems related to unemployment, poverty, famine, atrocities carried out by feudal landlords, damages being inflicted on the tribal culture, problems that hit and take away their forest rights. If the government does not look into the problem but views it as a purely law and order issue where guns will be used,

the Naxalite movement will never end. The government will have to consider all this seriously. In jail, I realized that the only way out was to get into the system and inform the powers about what needs to be done; sitting outside will not help. I would have to get into the parliamentary system so that the doors to development can be opened. That is the only way to usher in change.

In today's India, an armed struggle can get you some temporary gains but there can be no real change or revolution. Whenever revolution takes place in India, it will have to be the legal way. Take the case of the rupee crashing. So what can anyone do? Look at the Food Security Bill, which was just passed in the Parliament; the rupee was in free fall that time. It was passed on 26 August 2013, which I consider a day of celebration and salvation for the poorest of the poor: Hindus have their Diwali and Holi, and Muslims their Id-Bakrid. Do the poor have a similar festival? The Food Security Bill guarantees August 26 as their festival: milk and wheat available at Rs 2, rice for Rs 3, irrespective of caste and creed. For below-poverty-line card holders – after all a majority of India is that – the passing of the Bill is truly a holy day. There were also people who opposed the Bill; Trinamool Congress, for instance, opposed the Bill and desired amendments. But ultimately it is this Bill that is going to help those who need it the most. And where does such legislation come from? It comes from being within the parliamentary system. The benefits of the Bill will also reach areas that are under the spell of Naxalites. But even after the Bill has been passed and even if rice is available at 50 paisa, people still need to buy it, and they need 50 paisa to buy that rice. Without paying power, what good is it? Without employment, even 50 paisa can become a problem. Employment avenues are limited in my parliamentary constituency Palamu and most of Jharkhand. Pass the Bill by all means but it is my job to point out the lacunae in it. If you stay outside the system, you will not be able to highlight the ills and defects of the system.

We should see neighbouring Nepal and other places where revolution has taken place – Cuba, Vietnam, Chile, China, Russia, others. But those were different times. Do those conditions prevail in India today? It is true that power flows from the barrel of the gun but can we do it in India? It is a big question, a huge contradiction.

After being in prison (2005–09), I revisited these questions and thought about these issues with a calm head. Jail life can be quite

predictable – spent in playing cards, etc.; but I did not do anything of the kind. I studied and concentrated. After much deliberation, I decided to join parliamentary politics, wrote innumerable pamphlets in jail and sent them out to the people of Palamu and took their views. There were literally millions of people on the jail gates wherever I was imprisoned; be it the Mirzapur jail, Garhwa, Daltonganj, Sasaram jail, Bhabua prison, wherever I was incarcerated. I also spent time at Delhi's Tihar Jail. People always came to see me; they never saw me as a Maoist, extremist or terrorist; they never said we will not see Kameshwar Baitha as someone against whom cases are registered. They did not say there would be *badnami* [ill-fame] in keeping in touch with me. The mass of people just brushed aside the propaganda against me. I was advised instead to enter politics. In 2007, in the Lok Sabha by-elections of Palamu, I had won but was declared defeated. In 2009, I fought the Lok Sabha seat and won handsomely.

Q. *What are the main gains of the Naxalite Maoist movement?*

A. With my movement, I was able to inspire confidence. The exploitation was so intense that the mass of common people did not even know they had the right to exist, live and eat well. Landless labourers slogged in farms all day long and got nothing at the end of the day. Their children were ill without any primary health facilities. We mobilized workers to fight for their basic rights and stand against oppression. The people became radicalized and fought and fought well, demanding and getting their rights.

Q. *Will people follow your example – leave the radical path and enter the parliamentary system as you have? Do you think more people will follow your path?*

A. When I was arrested in 2005, the reactionary media and reactionary sections of society and the administration tried to prove that it was not an arrest but a surrender. From the beginning I had resolved never to surrender. I would either be arrested or I would be martyred; there were only two ways. But the propaganda made it appear that I had gone back on both of them. I remember one night when I woke up with a start, feeling very unwell. But I had a pen and paper handy and wrote out a pamphlet where I challenged the administration to arrest me. I have

fought for 26 years; where was the question of buckling under pressure? I had dreamt of being martyred for my cause but was picked up in Sasaram (Bihar) when I was not armed. My message to the people was that while Kameshwar Baitha may have been arrested, his ideology was not. In my pamphlet I had raised questions against the executive, legislature and the judiciary – of their unholy alliance. They blame each other but it is actually an unholy trinity. When it is unholy, how can it help the country and the system?

Q. People say your constituency Palamu and adjacent areas are practically in the hands of Naxalites; are liberated areas?

A. Nothing can be farther away from the truth. Extremists have not captured any territory there. The area is not under any spell except the spell of unemployment and poverty. If the government pays attention to these issues, then solutions can be arrived at. My constituency, the Palamu Lok Sabha seat, is known for two things: one, Naxalite extremism and the other, famine and hunger. People are not sold in Delhi and Punjab but in Palamu, they are. Hotel helps, servants for homes, daily wage labourers required in Punjab – all come from my constituency. Maid servants from Palamu are transported to various metros in the country. So it is wrong to attribute extremism to Palamu; far from it. If the government helps in removing unemployment and irrigation is broad-based (we do not have water facilities); if these problems are attended to, why will extremism rear its head? Why didn't extremists take over in Punjab, Surat, Kerala or Delhi; why just Palamu, Jharkhand, Dantewada and Dandakarnaya? So, there is a reason why all this is happening.

Q. You are the first MP to win elections with a Naxalite background?

A. I was the first man to be elected to the Parliament from the Naxalite movement. The government also knows that. I was recently invited to Bengal by several MPs. I was covered in the Bangla press as the man who, as a genuine representative of the Naxalite movement, went on to be elected as MP.

Q. Do you see others like you coming to the mainstream?

A. I have adopted a new line. Many people have been influenced. That is the great debate. How do you govern? (*Rajya kaha se chalta hai?*) A

large segment of the Palamu unit of the CPI (ML) has broken away from the old line. State committee members Jugal Pal, Satbir, Rajan, several people, even the cadres have taken the plunge out of radical politics.

Q. *How did you join Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM)?*

A. I was influenced by their views and slogans: Guruji Shibhu Soren's campaigns like *jan, jangal and jameen* [man, forest and land] and rights for residents of the state. My own view was that I should go into parliamentary politics, so our views matched.

Q. *What do you think of the various development schemes that have been launched in Palamu and Jharkhand, like the Saranda Action Plan, a kind of a development initiative plan to counter Maoists? For instance, it talks of distribution of solar lamps, bicycles, transistors and musical instruments to 7,000 BPL [below poverty line] families, installation of hand-pumps in villages, distribution of land pattas up to four hectares and old-age pension to eligible families and persons? Can it work as a counter to the Maoist movement?*

A. If implemented well, particularly in the tribal areas – be it Ramkanda, Banderia, Dhurki, Chattarpur, Patan or Lohardagga – yes, it can. These are the main regions where Maoists hold sway, and these are all tribal areas. What are the main problems of the area that are to be included in the action plan? They are non-availability of drinking water, irrigation and unemployment. The action plan addresses these issues. So, if sincere and positive implementation of these plans is carried out, it will be an antidote to the Naxalite movement. We have distributed more than 10,000 houses under the Indira Awas Yojana in Bhandaria in one sub-division; we have distributed more than 4,000 tube-wells in the same area. So it is right to say that these things will help. People are getting direct employment. Where things are not happening the way they should, some officials are to be blamed, as also the contractors. This action plan needs to be broad-based.

Q. *What about welfare programmes like MNREGA [Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act]?*

A. MNREGA is a very effective programme on paper but unfortunately it is failing today; there is no guarantee of 30 days of employment as prescribed under the scheme. All the money that is coming under

MNREGA is not being utilized in many places. This means that somewhere the local administration, the state government and some others in the chain have not been able to do justice to the plan.

Q. Steel Authority of India has been asked to assist in the construction of Integrated Developmental Centers (IDCs) under its CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) activities. These IDCs would have PDS [public distribution scheme] shops, health centres, agriculture information centres, banks/post offices, markets, godowns, etc.

A. There are a lot of plans but so far, nothing appears to have happened. We have no industries in our region.

Q. But can development take place when extremists are opposed to implementing development projects in remote areas?

A. Look, the job of Maoists is to impose levies; my job is to pursue development. I have repeatedly told the government not to route money for implementing projects through the contractor; take it through village committees. These committees will facilitate money to the villagers who need it; remember the ultras never levy villagers. The system such as it prevails is that you give all the money to one individual, the contractor. The contractor does 50 per cent of the work and keeps the other half for himself; he also pays off the ultra. Officers do not go to the site but sit on the table and approve plans. So when you are taking money down to the people, it is important to involve them, set up a committee comprising them and use the money through them to reach the people. The money's safe keep should be in their hands: give a cheque to the committee and leave it in their hands. Any departmental work needs to be taken through the public, rather than a tender. That will smoothen the passage and Maoists will be unable to levy taxes when developmental programmes are going through the people; impediments would be removed. The people will take a stand for that kind of development. If people are getting their due, why should they fight for the contractor? The contractor loots so the people say 'since loot is the order of the day, let us also join in.'

Q. The CPI (ML) movement is too split and too diverse to make a uniform impact.

A. These are all long-term and deep issues. You are talking about divisions within the CPI (ML) but you will have to go further into history and time; the CPI (ML) did not emerge out of the blue. The formation of the CPI and CPM is linked to it. Today, there is the Jan Shakti in Andhra Pradesh; Satynarayan Singh was once its leader, now martyred. There is also the CPI (ML) New Democracy, which was once led by Chandra Pulla Reddy. Inside India's Communist parties, there have been great debates for many years and people have believed in different strands of thought. If that was not the case, the CPI (ML) would have remained one unit during Charu Mazumdar's time. When these leaders came out of jail, they started pursuing different themes and different experiments. Whose experiments were right continued; whose ideas were unrealistic faded away. Look at the case study of CPI (Maoists); it was brought about by the union of CPI (ML) People's War Group and the Maoist Communist Centre of India (MCC). When it happened, there were millions of people wherever they held rallies: from Vishakhapatnam to Kolkata to New Delhi's Ram Lila Maidan. The political lines laid down by them have continued. They emphasized a three-pronged prescription for bringing about change: the party, people's army and united front. In India, we have had the Communist parties, CPI (ML) parties, socialists, all armed with strong ideological and intellectual content. Armed struggle and military campaigns too were tried but there is no united front, nor any legal platforms to wage their battles. Does any Maoist party have a legal platform? Does anyone have a peasant or worker front?

Q. *The CPM has them.*

A. Please don't bracket CPM here; we are talking about Maoists. Maoists in India have no legal platform. So, for those seeking a revolution, if they do not have the most potent weapon of united front politics comprising a platform of various segments and components, workers, rickshaw pullers, slum dwellers, students, progressive sections of society, intellectuals, social workers, a large section of the middle peasant, that is the kind of united front needed. What do these Maoists have? Nothing. Without these, there can be no revolution or change. No one has been able to bring in a revolution without these basic elements; it is not possible. Not here, not anywhere else in the world. Today the CPI (ML) has drifted away from its objectives. I believe that no matter how many

arms you stockpile, how much terror you create, how many times you hold Bharat *bandhs* and disrupt the country; you can victimize people but there can be no revolution. For change and revolution, Sanjukta Morcha or united front is a given. Unless you have the support of a vast and broad coalition – you simply have to – there can be no real change.

Q. What do you think of the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Bill, 2013?

A. It is very good. This law, which was well over 100 years old, needed changes. In fact, the slogan 'land to the tiller' has gained currency. If this Act is implemented efficiently and followed seriously, a very large segment of Indian population will be empowered. Having said that, in my state of Jharkhand, which pays 80 per cent of mining revenue to the Centre, land is being acquired for private purposes. In my parliamentary constituency Palamu, there are vast coal deposits. Private companies have taken over lands of local villagers for coal production and adequate compensation to farmers has not been paid. My constituency is largely inhabited by the middle peasantry and the extremely poor. The people in my constituency are innocent and have no idea of land rates. As a result, they have been paid very poor compensation. A lot of money is siphoned off by government and non-government middlemen. I have always demanded that lands that cultivate more than one crop should be compensated three times more than the prevailing market rates while in the case of barren land, two times the market rate should be paid. In most cases, money to the tune of Rs 50,000 has been paid, which is a pittance. For public works, the land-holders' assent needs to be made mandatory. In addition, employment to members of the land-holders' families should be given. There is no scheme for resettlement and rehabilitation for those whose land is acquired. As a result, the poor peasant is facing very tough times.

Q. What about criminal cases against you – a total of 46, ranging from murder, extortion and carrying out explosive acts? You were known to be an expert in the use of explosives and mines and responsible for the death of many policemen in 2002 and at other times.

A. All bogus cases had been filed against me. Do I look like someone who can cause an explosion? I am not a bomb *phornevala aadmi*

(explosives man). My voice is the real explosion, which is the arsenal I employ. My voice is my real gun; call me what you like – rebel, war monger. I have never fired a gun in my life nor have I ever caused an explosion.

Q. How have your former comrades taken your shift? According to one version, there is a death warrant out against you by your old comrades for compromising with the system.

A. Who knows who agrees with whom, do you know yourself? How can I say who will agree with me? You are talking to me, how do I know how much you agree with me? These things can be proved in the days to come.

Kameshwar Baitha was interviewed in May 2013 in New Delhi.

ABHIJIT MAZUMDAR

‘Though Charu Mazumdar and his associates failed ultimately to bring about a massive change in society and its structure, their contribution to the growth of this Maoist ethos is now ringing all over in India and elsewhere’

In another kind of political ancestry, he would be blue blood, the natural heir to a legacy, a son anointed to take on from where the father left. Naturally, things are bound to be a bit different when that legacy is Charu Mazumdar's. Abhijit Mazumdar is every inch his father's son. Inside a lean frame resides a mind long steeped into Left radicalism. As secretary of the Darjeeling unit of the CPI (ML), he has not gone upscale in the party hierarchy. He works as any other district secretary of the party's West Bengal unit, roughing it out with the common workers, seeking no particular recognitions. Abhijit's memories of his revolutionary father are not too sharp, as he lost him when he was only 9 or 10. Those memories are far from personal though – they are political. They give you an insight into the mind and actions of the man popularly recognized as the path breaker of the Naxalite or radical Left movement in India. Charu Mazumdar comes out as a father more intent on baptizing his children politically and initiating them into music and other fine arts in whatever little time he spent at home. In this extensive interview, Abhijit Mazumdar discusses his father's legacy, Charu Mazumdar's controversial death and subsequent cover-ups, how things have changed politically – if they have – in the last four decades and what the future holds for the radical Left movement in India.

Q. *You are Charu Mazumdar's son. What is your background?*

A. I am Abhijit Mazumdar, son of Charu Mazumdar. I was born in 1960 in Siliguri. I was part and parcel of the Naxalite movement though I

was only a child then. Despite belonging to a middle class family, even after the setbacks, my mother somehow managed to send us to school and later ensured college education; currently I am a lecturer at a local college. I am also the district secretary of the Darjeeling unit of the CPI (ML) Liberation.

Q. Charu Mazumdar was the founder of the Naxalbari movement in India. Your own politics is quite a different brand of radical Left. What do you make of this generational change?

A. My father was well-known as founder of the Naxalbari movement. I don't think there is a major difference between the basic ideology that went behind Naxalbari and what we practice these days. It is the continuation of the same brand of radical Left theory and whatever people may now think of the Naxalbari movement as a violent phase of history, it was an armed upsurge of the peasantry in Bengal. For example, when you see the recent Nandigram uprising in the Midnapore district of West Bengal, we are involved. We basically made a re-assessment of the movement in the 1970s and were able to arrive at certain conclusions: how and what went wrong. So there were certain bits of changes that were undertaken in the decades that have followed, but the basic Left radical theory has not changed much. It is a generational change but the generational change is only visible in the way we have organized ourselves in the last 40 years, even after the setback, through popular mass movement (and this is the result of what you see here on the 23 March 2007 in Delhi). So we do not believe and it is not true that there is a big difference between the radical politics of the 1970s and what is going on today.

Q. How do you compare the radical Left movement of that phase in West Bengal vis-à-vis today? What would you say are the outstanding points of difference between the two situations?

A. The basic difference between the two movements, from the past and what is happening now is that in the late 1960s and 1970s, there was a call to capture state power by the peasantry itself. Today, the objective situations are not the same; there is no call, but slowly and steadily, in a big way that change is coming to stay, particularly in West Bengal and other parts of the country. It may take a long time to reassert (and

reconfirm) our ideology to grab state power by arming the people. The difference is that during that period (the first phase) we had organized a guerrilla movement and went for armed resistance against the state, but we are now heading towards such a situation where there could be a bigger people's upsurge that may well culminate into arming of the people. In my view, this is a revolutionary situation in the making. This is just the starting point. Outstanding points of differences between the two eras? The point of organizing the working class through the trade union movement was forsaken during the 1970s. That was a kind of fall during the 1970s. And now through our working class forum, we are trying to organize mostly unorganized and migratory labourers. It is a large section of the populace. So naturally, we have our task cut out to organize this large section, particularly vis-à-vis special economic zones (SEZs), throughout in India, but particularly in West Bengal. You all know about Nandigram.

Another basic thrust of the Naxalbari movement, in my view, was to know about social democracy itself, to explore the avenue of the parliamentary path, democratic elections and increasing your numbers of MLAs and MPs – eventually capturing power at the Centre.

Q. Could you elaborate this point?

A. We believe that there is one particular point where we should differentiate ourselves from the CPI (M) and CPI, the 'sarkari' Left.

Q. What are your memories of Charu Mazumdar, the father? Can you draw a portrait of him as a father? How old were you in 1968 or 1969?

A. As much as I can remember, my father went underground when I was about 9 or 10 years old. But I remember my father very well because we had our own children's club and used to participate in its activities. We had a very romantic vision, organizing ourselves with sticks. My father, apart from his political ideology and participation and great organizing capabilities, was very loving. He initiated us, me and my two sisters, into music and reading books. He was not an insane person who had discarded everything in life, as is made out to be. The vision of Charu Mazumdar as painted in the mainstream media is quite different from my own experience. He had a sense of detail even in domestic matters, even though he had very little time to spend with us. And

ultimately, we could not see him after 1969. Off and on we could meet him, sometimes in Calcutta, sometimes in Puri with other leaders of the Naxalbari movement. So that was the way it went on until he was killed on 28 July 1972 in police lock-up.

Q. He could not have got much time for family life, given the days of hectic political activity, even as an office bearer of the Darjeeling unit of the CPI (M). Later, of course, he was heading a full-blown and violent political movement.

A. It was not a violent political movement. I mean violence from which side? We Maoists do not believe in violence. It is the state that compels the political activists to take up arms. Why should we opt for armed struggle? It is the state which compels you to take up arms with their mass killings and mass arrests. In order to retaliate, you take up arms; otherwise where is the need for anyone to take up arms?

Q. Would you say that his politics affected family matters and relationships? Could it be said that his politics left a deep impact on you, personally, because sons can be influenced by fathers? Did he despair at what he saw in the end, the non-fulfilment of a dream he thought would materialize by 1975? Did it disillusion him?

A. What you have to understand is that after 1964, with the breakup of the CPI and CPM and the party congress resolution of the CPM, the advent of social democracy appeared almost certain. Today you can see that it has taken strong roots. He (Charu) started writing his eight documents in 1965. The basic thrust of those documents was to reveal the nature of social democracy that runs parallel to the revolutionary politics, even within the same party, the CPM. His influence? I remember seeing him writing down things and he was not very active during 1968 and before that, he had suffered a severe cardiac attack and was incapacitated for a very long time. Even during those days, people use to come to our place and meet him, and he used to take political classes, mostly a number of students from the North Bengal University who later became leaders themselves.

Naturally, his politics affected family life; there is nothing very unusual in that. But whatever he preached and practiced, somehow, invited the ire of the state and he was compelled to go underground 1969 onwards. But before that, he was quite sick and had become very

feeble. I remember him writing those documents and meeting comrades from all over India. Of course, his kind of politics – we were born and brought up in a very political family – it was quite natural for us to take up politics. Charu Mazumdar was my personal hero as well as a hero for the people. But he was the leader of our party. We saw people coming to him, listening to him, every day, all around. In other words, we did not find anyone else with similar charisma. It was in making before our eyes and still does.

Though no one could visually see it, the police repression in 1971–72 took its toll. So, most central committee leaders of the party were killed or lost in fake police operations, just as my father was incarcerated and killed inside police lock-up. In his later days, Charu Mazumdar wrote one significant article titled ‘People’s Interest Is Party Interest’ in which he revealed his methodology: ‘Something had gone wrong and we cannot deny it.’ But I have seen in a recent publication that the Government of India, particularly the Government of Bengal, published one statement in the name of Charu Mazumdar, when he was arrested on 16 July 1972 (he was killed on 28 July). During this police interrogation, he was made to say certain things, but this proved to be a fake document because it was not signed by Charu Mazumdar. A close associate of his, Suniti Ghosh, said the document was fake as none of the events, as described in the longish report, matched the events and locations.

Yes, there was despair at times, but he could get over it. After all, if everything went wrong in the 1970s, how come the movement has continued to thrive? If you participate in this rally, you will see Charu Mazumdar in it. When we meet someone from our party, particularly those who are the downtrodden, even without knowing the basic thesis of Naxalbari, the mere mention of Charu Mazumdar makes them say: ‘We are all bound together with his name, he is the torch bearer who came.’ So this is the tradition of India, whether we support it or not. This is a question of trust. There was huge trust he could generate and it has been disseminated amongst hundreds and thousands of people. That bears the stamp of Charu Mazumdar. So to be Charu Mazumdar’s son, I am very proud of my father.

Q. What was life like, given the violent nature of the struggle those days, when Charu Mazumdar’s annihilation line became the staple for Bengal and

radical Left politics for a period? What would be the talk at home, the political atmosphere?

A. It is not really the violent nature of the struggle that put us in the lurch. Let me explain it like this. We lived in Siliguri. It is a very small town; he was for years known as the cultural activist; he was a very popular person. In spite of the police action, repression and regular raids on our households in search of Charu Mazumdar after he went underground, there was always a pretty good social support structure – in the sense that the people of Siliguri never believed the media and government descriptions of Charu Mazumdar as a brigand or a killer who was preaching the line of annihilation. Despite all this, we never felt ourselves as social pariahs or blacked out of the social milieu. Rather, we always received support. Even in those days I remember, when my father was killed in 1972 and despite the ban on Naxalite outfits, and also the ban on CPI (ML) itself, a number of people from other political parties like the Congress and the CPM came to meet us and arranged for our flight from Siliguri to Calcutta.

So coming back to your question about the annihilation line becoming the staple for Bengal politics, yes, annihilation became a necessity. I would say that there was no such annihilation line, but annihilation started basically as an attempt to put an end to the exploitation of the feudal lords, the *jotedars* and *zamindars* and it was a call from Charu Mazumdar to the peasantry of Bengal to organize themselves into guerrilla squads and fight it out. As a consequence of that, whatever developed as a line of annihilation was basically a culmination of the political ethos of the Communist Party and once the people organized themselves, the killings went on as a political device to end the stranglehold of the feudal classes. This went on for quite some time. But as I said, there was no political line or any ideological motivation for annihilation.

The atmosphere was quite difficult for us. Police raids on our house went on and on and on. During that period, I and my two sisters were kids and we saw our mother, who was also a member of the Communist Party – and she whole-heartedly supported Charu Mazumdar during his days of incarceration and later in the underground – being very brave. She faced the situation quite boldly and I remember seeing her demanding from the raiding policemen questions like ‘how many bullets do you

carry', 'what is the make of your revolver', etc. She was very bold and challenging.

As I said, we hero worshipped our father. Whatever we are these days, the contribution of Charu Mazumdar as a father was enormous. Then my mother's role is important because whatever education we got was on account of her, because we were quite poor. She had to work very hard as a life insurance agent. It was very difficult for her to manage things, and yet she did it. Of course, we kids and my mother had the huge support of the social milieu behind us.

Q. Later, as the political climate became more and more violent and the state government, which was propped up by the CPI (M), came down heavily on the Naxalites and suspected sympathizers, it must have been difficult at home with police surveillance and harassment.

A. One thing I want to say very boldly: the beginning of Naxalbari as we saw it on 25 May 1967 was an unarmed procession organized by the women leaders of the party at Naxalbari, which was fired upon by the state government police. There was then United Front government and Jyoti Basu, who later became Chief Minister after 1977, used to be the minister in-charge of police and the deputy chief minister. He directed the police to fire upon his own comrades. The CPM leaders of the day (and not its cadres) went on a witch-hunt against Naxalites and suspected Naxalites and took the help of the Congress government. CPM leaders, in fact, then acted as police informers, leading the police to the households of revolutionaries and had them killed in huge numbers. So whenever we witness Nandigram and other such incidents, and see the role of CPM hooligans therein, we have seen similar behaviour earlier. That is why one of the thrust areas of Comrade Charu Mazumdar was to expose the nature of this social democracy, because social democracy ultimately ends up with this Fascist manifestation, which is now happening in Nandigram. So the entire logic of Charu Mazumdar and the CPI (ML) thesis is becoming all the more relevant these days.

Q. Even after so many years, you have demanded that an impartial enquiry be ordered into Charu Mazumdar's death on 28 July 1972. Could you tell us about the incidents that led to his detention and death?

A. Yes, we have been demanding an inquiry into the mass massacres that took place in the 1970s, including the killing of Comrades Charu Mazumdar, Saroj Dutta and others of the Naxalbari movement. When we took out a rally from Naxalbari to Calcutta demanding justice in 1998, we perceived that it was not going to be an easy job. In our analysis of the bourgeoisie state, like its ideological state apparatus, and also when we look at the judiciary and the Parliament, everything is ranged against the Naxalites. It becomes easy to understand why – because in 2006, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, from his speech at the Red Fort [on the Independence Day], identified Naxalism to be the greatest threat within the country. When the spectre of the 1960s and the 1970s is sought to be recreated today, how can we expect help from this state apparatus? Even then, we did not have any illusion.

When we demanded from Buddhadev Bhattacharya (former West Bengal Chief Minister and CPM leader) that he must come out with the document of the 1970s, which must be lying with the state archives in Calcutta, he denied it outright. He said that no documents are available because most of them were destroyed by the previous Congress government. That is a blatant lie. I say so because we know some common friends working for the state government, even in the state archives. They confided in us that certain police documents are still there.

A recently published book, an edited version of the daily police reports during the 1960s and the 1970s, carries a fake statement from Charu Mazumdar during his prison days. That statement issued by the police was full of lies. On one occasion, he purportedly confessed to the police that during his college days at Pabna Edward, now in Bangladesh, the money sent by his father came in handy to buy wine and *charas* [cannabis]. This is a blatant lie.

Not just that. When we come down to the daily nitty-gritties of the different reports containing the date, time and place of meetings participated in by other leaders, there are huge discrepancies. The police statement on Charu's college days was challenged by Comrade Suniti Ghosh, a very close associate of Charu and himself a great leader, responsible for providing shelter to Charu Mazumdar during his years in the underground. Ghosh categorically blasted all the claims of the police. The biggest lie was that all those statements had been attributed to Charu Mazumdar without his signature on any one of them. Later, they tried to publish it in a Bengali newspaper *Jugantar Patrika* during the 1970s,

but there were no buyers for the story. So it does stand as a very big statement.

You can understand that a leader of the stature of Charu Mazumdar was wanted by the state, by the police forces for a long time even after he went underground in 1969 and he was arrested from a Calcutta household on 16 July 1972. The important aspect was that he was never taken to the court, and there was no trial because the state was afraid of taking him to an open trial. So, in the name of interrogation, they put him up in the Lal Bazar lock-up for 12 days. And he was killed on 28 July 1972. And I remember that the previous day, i.e. 27 July, the police administration allowed us – myself, mother and two sisters – into the Lal Bazar lock-up and we could see our father. What we could see were a couple of things: one, he said that dreaded police officers like Debi Roy and Vibhuti Chakrabarty, the notorious ones who killed a large number of Naxalite activists during that time, come every afternoon and interrogate him for very long periods. Charu Mazumdar was also a cardiac patient, and he always needed medicines to subside his angina pains.

What the police did was to withdraw all sorts of medications. We never saw an oxygen cylinder, which was needed for a patient who was ill. In an indirect manner, by withdrawing his medication and by putting him through hours of interrogation, his health was made to deteriorate, which ultimately led to his death. He was not tortured physically, but what they did culminated in his death. Later, when my mother demanded that the body be handed over to her for being taken to Siliguri for cremation, they refused. They were scared. So the body was taken to a cremation ground in Calcutta. The entire ground was surrounded by Central Reserve Police (CRP) and other forces. They got us to confirm that the body was indeed that of Charu Mazumdar. There was a great furore over the matter. Predictably people ask ‘why did you not do anything since 1972?’ The reason was my mother was apprehensive about a public inquiry and demanding justice. She became a person who was not ready to face the world.

Q. A former top-ranking policeman Prakash Singh, who saw your father during his final days in custody, recalls with surprise that ‘such a weak and frail man had so much fire left in him’. At the same time, he was also surprised at the rather tame arrest of the revolutionary.

A. Though I have not read the book published by Prakash Singh, a dreaded police officer of that time, history tells us that in as far as frailty of the physique is concerned, in no way does it put limits on your ideology and the fire inside your mind. Ideology is very important. In the case of most leaders in history, you find their small frame did not limit their ability to guide people. It is rather a question of analysing history. One most important facet of the 1960s and early 1970s was the leaders – not just Charu Mazumdar but all his associates and the entire party – then questioned the legacy of the nineteenth-century history of Bengal and the role played by great social reformers from Ishwar Chand Vidyasagar to Ram Mohan [Roy] and others. What we today call subaltern history also came up during the 1960s and one most important influence on that writing was the Naxalite movement.

Though Charu Mazumdar was not a historian himself, he made us think in a different manner, questioning the entire bourgeoisie history written by British historians. He started questioning it and the fallout was the breaking of the idols in Calcutta and elsewhere. That could be an excess to the thesis, but these days, when we consider the impact of the Naxalbari movement, ideologically and historically, it questioned the entire history and to move from one great part of history to another revolutionary phase of history – that was the critical thing. When we look at the media of the 1960s and the 1970s, you find that the entire logic of Naxalism, as it appeared in the press, was flawed. To use the words Naxalites or Naxalism itself is a misnomer. It started from Naxalbari, a very remote corner of this earth, but Naxalbari itself was a legacy of the Telangana movement and the Tebhaga movement. For the first time in the history of the Indian communist movement, one communist party demanded that state power should be grabbed by the toiling masses, by the peasantry and the working class people. That was the great historical departure from the entire ethos of the communist movement in India. This is questioning history and the role played by the big names of nineteenth-century social reformers from Bengal and their role in strengthening British imperialism on the soil of India. That is why such a weak and frail man was powerful; indeed he was no exception but part and parcel of the historical make-up of a great leader.

It is true that the state terror that accompanied Charu Mazumdar's arrest was not resisted by comrades all around. The one major cause for that was that his shelter was exposed and betrayed by some of his party

comrades. So it was a betrayal from within the party. Otherwise it was not possible to get him arrested. You find the entire account of his arrest from Suniti Ghosh's narrative, which is quite logical.

A section of the middle class went against the revolutionary movement as it was turned off with the annihilation theory as well as the breaking of idols of great personalities from the nineteenth century. Rather the middle class base of the party became vulnerable. It was very difficult for Charu Mazumdar to find shelter; and the ones that he did were arranged mostly by Suniti Ghosh. So that was the major reason why the arrest was so mild and timid.

Q. Would you say that the politics of that phase shaped your political thinking and helped you to arrive at the juncture where you now find yourself?

A. Not just me. As I told you earlier, I am just a small activist spearheading things in Darjeeling district and am also part of the West Bengal state committee. But Naxalbari happened in a big way. Not just me. I am insignificant, but the path devised by Charu Mazumdar and other leaders of the Naxalbari movement has a ring of truth and we can see it now; it is happening all over the country. The state tried to subjugate and smash it altogether, but they could not do it. Why? Because of the revolutionary potential of this thesis. The state and the media try to brand us as armed brigands moving from one place to another, attacking the police forces and the common people. That is why they coined this word Naxalism; it is an epistemological shift from the earlier revolutionary phase. We think that Naxalbari itself was the culmination of the Tebhaga movement and the Telangana movement. In the late 1960s, there was a severe food crisis in India. The objective situation was such that Charu Mazumdar believed that by 1975, entire India would be liberated.

A lot of your friends [the media] often ask me if the whole thing was merely romantic idealism and the participation of urban intellectuals – students left urban centres to work in villages to organize people. My answer to them is that every bit of revolutionary ideology contains a modicum of romantic ideals; otherwise you cannot think of a better future. Until and unless you shape your romantic ideals through this painstaking process of ideological advances, you cannot change this world. And though Charu Mazumdar and his associates failed

ultimately to bring about a massive change in society and its structure, their contribution to the growth of this Maoist ethos is now ringing all over in India and elsewhere.

When we talk about the Naxalite movement, we talk about India and we talk about Bengal. But what about Bangladesh? You go to Bangladesh; there has been a resurgence of Naxalism since 1974. I am with the CPI (ML) now. I am with the mass movement, and I am with the Central Committee – rather we are guided by the Central Committee of the CPI (ML). We are growing on a large scale everywhere in India. So I belong to the party and it is very much there. It is viable, it is palpable and I am very proud of that.

Q. Charu Mazumdar wrote extensively during his years as a political activist. Have you read all or some of his works? Which would you say influenced you the most?

A. Yes, he wrote extensively as a political activist and political leader. Since my boyhood years, we used to read him. And there was a family ritual of reading his documents and other writings within the family, particularly on 28 July, the day of martyrdom, every year. We used to borrow phrases from my father's writings, commemorate and read him. There are two things that impressed me the most. One is the exposure of social democracy in its Indian form 1965 onwards and also the historical content of the entire ideological movement, for instance questioning the nineteenth-century history of Bengal. The second was the nature of comment on the state – on the bourgeoisie to brand them as compradors. These were the hallmarks of Charu Mazumdar's major formulations. It is very important. It influenced not only me but has been subsequently influencing hundreds and thousands of people in India.

His three things have influenced me the most. The first is the revolutionary content of his thesis. This includes the way he exposed the socio-democratic pattern of the Indian communist movement, like exposing the part played by Jyoti Basu and his followers. The second is the nature of the Indian state – the bourgeoisie and the bureaucracy and the pillars of the state, the feudal structure. The third is questioning the social reform heroes of nineteenth-century Bengal. That has influenced me a lot, in the past as well as the present. My intellectual take on the theses of the Naxalbari movement is based on these vitals.

Q. The legacy of Charu Mazumdar – is it difficult to live up to it?

A. Charu Mazumdar's legacy is the legacy of the revolutionary movement in India. For me, I borrowed it from my family traditions. But until this emotion is not translated into political activity, it does not have any meaning. It gets lost. So that is the legacy I have to live up to. I hero worship my father, and I am emotionally attached to my father. But that in itself is not enough to lead me to my essential goal. Unless and until there is a party – if we believe in Leninism, the party ultimately is the organ for the transfer of power, the transfer of the entire machinery and the transfer of history as well. I believe that Charu Mazumdar played his historical role. He was not very different from, let's say, Bhagat Singh. There is an entire legacy of Bhagat Singh. Similarly, the Naxalbari tradition sees its origins in Charu Mazumdar. It could have been anyone else. But the time has now come that we stop thinking only in emotional terms. Remembering Charu helps us to look at the past and to bring up a new future. The essential ingredients of the Naxalbari movement are what make it popular amongst the toiling masses. Seventy per cent of the party cadres come from different parts of the country.

Q. Tell me about the state of the Maoist movement in India. Did your father visualize its current shape – the number of splinter groups and its geographical spread?

A. Maoists these days belong to one or the other faction of the CPI (ML), the erstwhile People's War Group and the Maoist Communist Centre. Historically speaking, the People's War Group was the fallout of the 1970s movement, borrowing every ideological nuance that had been preached by Charu Mazumdar. The MCC, on the other hand, never joined the Naxalite movement; they had their own course. Later, these two groups amalgamated themselves into CPI (Maoist). We find that most of the articulation has been given by MCC. PWG had some mass base, particularly in Andhra Pradesh and other areas. When you think of these corridors and extending the corridor to the Nepal Maoists – the Nepal Maoists have always denied that they ever had a connection with the Indian Maoists – there appears to be a single course of action.

Organizing the peasantry, mostly Adivasis, into guerrilla squads fighting it out with the state – this appears to be a strategy with a limited

vision because the state has, over the years, become stronger and more efficient in smashing an armed upsurge. As and when it becomes a mass upsurge and we start arming the people, it will become difficult for the state to handle the situation. Like what happened during the Charu Mazumdar era, but the only thing they adopted from his lessons was to form guerrilla squads. We think the vision is limited. In my view, they [CPI (Maoist)] should have adopted other avenues of mass mobilization; otherwise when you think of recent trends, for example the tie-up with American imperialism in the Indo-US nuclear deal, there is enough ground to mobilize mass opinion on the subject. Otherwise, if you take the view that 'all we are concerned with is armed retaliation', then the theory does not seem too feasible. That is the major loophole in the Maoist movement in India.

I don't think my father visualized all that we see in the name of the Maoist movement in India. Earlier, when Charu Mazumdar wrote his last article 'The People's Interest Is the Party's Interest', it proved to be a very significant document for us. In a very major departure from his own line, he said that we should go in for organizing the people and we should take care of daily bread earners. For example, when coming to Delhi by this train, we saw a large number of child labourers coming to Delhi and other places in search of work. How do you co-relate the two? This is the reality. So what is going to be the formation of your party addressing the general common issues of the people? If you restrict yourself to just armed struggle and guerrilla warfare, then how do relate your cases to this basic reality of the day? That is a major flaw I notice in the Maoist movement. But we believe that they are revolutionaries but with anarchist tendencies. Anarcho-militarists we shall call them. Militarism cannot solve the problems of the day, it is quite limited.

Q. Do you keep in touch with his contemporaries, the ones who are still around? Is there an occasion when you debate and analyse the course of the radical Left movement in India for well over three decades, a 'prairie fire' ignited by your father?

A. Yes of course. We keep in touch with old leaders of the Naxalbari era. One of them is (now late) Kanu Sanyal. Often, we meet him and organize joint agitations against the starvation deaths of tea garden workers and when Iraq happened, we took out joint processions and

after Nandigram, we went for a state-wide bandh. That was the joint venture we had with Comrade Kanu Sanyal's CPI (ML). There are occasions when we debate and analyse the course of the Maoist movement in India. This is part and parcel of our daily work. Whenever a statement is issued by the Central Committee on Nandigram, the authorities become agitated about Singur, Nandigram and SEZ [Special Economic Zone]. Why? Because they see the spectre of Naxalbari happening again. I say that history never replicates itself in the same fashion, but ideology does. It is something that never dies. There has to be resurgence. If you believe this is scientific logic, this is Marxism. There has to be a lull before the storm. Of course, it is a long struggle, 20 to 30 years, but that does not matter. Even Comrade Vinod Mishra mentioned in his writings that Naxalbari was merely a dress rehearsal. So who knows? Nandigram has raised passions and, maybe, this is what would lead to our ideal in the long run. This is the making of the revolution and you cannot just predict what might happen the next day. The prairie fire has spread to other places; from the hills to the seas, we find Naxalism. It is viable and gives us much hope and an understanding of the entire Communist movement in India.

Q. You have now been agitating about Singur and Nandigram. What do you think is the future of Special Economic Zones (SEZs)?

A. The process of SEZs was started off by the central government and followed up by state governments all over, with the amendment and passing of an Act in 2005 by the West Bengal state government. This is open collusion with imperialist forces and ensuring that there are conditional ties to be fulfilled. As far as Nandigram is concerned, we believe that it is a temporary relief for the state government, but is bound to come up in a big way in the future. Even the central government has stalled it till 2009, ensuring that there will be no new SEZs until then. But there are two important aspects here. SEZs demolish all kinds of rights earned by working class since the 1940s and 1950s through mass movements, earned through toil, and they demolish people-enacted acts like the Tea Plantation Labour Act. But when you look at SEZs, the thrust areas are that the working class will not have any trade union of their own. So there is no bargaining capacity but in exchange, they are provided with a lot of facilities.

Think of Singur. The cost of the entire project, so far as compensation is concerned, is Rs 130 crore. Out of this Rs 130 crore, more than Rs 100 crore will be given by the state government from the state exchequer as compensation to the victims. So it is through coercion that the state government is trying to make the project feasible. We also believe that SEZs are just the tip of the iceberg. When you follow all the conditionalities of the imperialist, you have to succumb to the demand from big industry, not just Indian but that from abroad as well. Like Salem, Nandigram has shown us the way, how to put up resistance and the scale of the resistance; think of the scale of resistance and retaliation from the state, like brutal killings and mass rapes and other such goings on even beyond the scale of Gujarat. Surely, the CPM or any other state government will come down upon the protestors very heavily and brutally and begin preparations for SEZs in right earnest again. But having said that, the example of Nandigram will be followed by others and the peasantry will fight against SEZs. So really, the future of SEZs is not yet determined. We have seen one measure of resistance at Nandigram. If this resistance is pursued in other areas of the country, there will be no SEZs. It is not easy. It is only the communist revolutionaries organizing the peasantry who could put up the ultimate resistance to SEZs. So clearly, the future of SEZs is yet to be determined.

Q. *Do you see the time coming for launching a second Tebhaga movement, particularly in West Bengal?*

A. If you say Tebhaga movement, we will go beyond that. Our slogan was that we should launch a second independence movement, the second war of independence, which has already begun in different parts of India. And it needs to be spearheaded by Communist Party – it is not only Tebhaga, it is Telangana, the Naxalite movement; ultimately the lessons of Naxalbari; and how we relate it to Singur, Nandigram, Dadri and Karimnagar.

At Singur, we had a small party presence, but at Nandigram, we did not have any one. And yet, the moment we reached there, we went in for organizing the people and got massive support. That changed the complexion of the scene from thereon. We got massive support from the peasantry. So this is not just a second Tebhaga movement, as I told you, but the launch of the second war of independence against the forces of

imperialism, neo-liberalization, against grabbing of land in the name of SEZ and for securing the rights and prerogatives of the working class people of India, particularly in the unorganized sector. We are there, but we cannot claim that that we have done it. We are in the process, in the making. If we cannot prove ourselves as leaders of the masses, the relevance of Naxalbari would be lost. It is as simple as that. So, our effort should always be to be at the frontline of the battlefield, leading a mass upsurge and if that is tantamount to armed uprising, we are all for it. There is no ambiguity about this issue.

Q. Do you see that the land reform question is no longer the preserve of the radical Left only but even multinationals and Indian industrialists want SEZs; that is acquiring tribal and village land for developmental purposes? For tribals and others in the radical Left movement, that is sacrosanct.

A. SEZ is not land reform. It is the opposite of land reform. When the Left Front government came to power in 1977, in their 36-point charter, the first issue on the agenda was to implement land reforms. Partially, they did also. There is no denying that they did implement some partial reforms and the benefits went to Bargadars and small peasantry, but after new economic policy was introduced in 1991, the track followed by the state government is a reversal of land reforms. And when you think of industrial lobbies backing the SEZ effort, it is not really industrialization. When you think of Singur, of the 1,000 acres of land, only 300 acres of that would be given for the Tata factory. They were actually planning a real estate sort of thing. The starting point of this resistance to land grabbing began near Siliguri at the Chandmani tea estate where the state machinery, under the guidance of the then Left Front urban development minister, Ashok Bhattacharya, got the administration to clamp a curfew, surrounded the handful of workers, and two people died. But he was on the spot. Industrialization means grabbing of land, developing real estate out of land. Another aspect is the McKinsey kind of jugglery of words; the changes in the agriculture sector have led to more and more farmers opting in for cash crops. When the NDA government came to power, its manifesto contained several points. Of them, three points were debated all over India. One was the Ram Mandir issue, another was uniform civil code and the third point was corporatization of land. But no one had quite predicted the importance of this third

point. It is only industrialization or corporatization of agriculture with diktats from McKinsey and others.

When you implement SEZ, one portion of the land should be given to agriculture. Without agriculture, no economic unit can survive. This is a reversal of land reforms. Once you have distributed unaccounted land to the farmers and the tillers, how can you now demand that land should be corporatized? And this process of unifying small plots of land into a big sector for farming under the big bourgeoisie like the Tatas and the Birlas contains the seeds of corporatization of land. If this was to become the norm, the entire bargaining capacity of the farmers would be lost. So, this, in my opinion, constitutes a bigger threat.

Q. The ruling Left Front government in the state is blaming Maoists for the violence in Nandigram. Your views?

A. This is an easy take. Coin a term and say that Maoists are behind the disturbances. When you think of Nandigram, the whole resistance came from the farmers, mostly by women and children in the frontline. When you think of the Maoist movement and retaliation, you think of land mines. These are taken as sure signals of the participation of the Maoists. There was no land mine in the region, no massive armed struggle. Otherwise, would it have been possible for the police and CPM goons to enter the zone and go for mass killings? So this entire canard of Maoists presence in Nandigram is sheer nonsense. It is quite easy these days. Whatever happens, blame it on the Naxalites. It is easy to say that an entire movement is being perverted by the Maoists. Any breakdown in law and order gives the state the justification to retaliate. No one is going to believe it.

Q. Considering that new lands are now going to be acquired by state governments throughout the country for SEZs, is it going to be the new battleground between the forces of liberalization and those of the radical Left?

A. The resistance movement vis-à-vis SEZs has already become a battleground for the forces of liberalization and those of the radical Left. If by the radical Left, you mean the Maoists, then no. Radicalism lives with us. We are the radical Left basically. Radicalism is a breakaway from the tradition of one brand of communist movement. When you are questioning the basis of this 'sarkari' Left, you will see that we are

fighting the CPM, CPI, RSP and the Forward Bloc together. Radicalism has come to be identified with the Maoists. We don't believe that. Radicalism is the way you organize people, radicalism is to fashion out a new future for the toiling masses. This is radicalism. I believe so. It is not that Maoists are radicals and we are the liberals, roaming around in Delhi.

Q. In the case of SEZs, money offered as compensation for acquiring land is very low, as compared to what is being offered by private sector industrialists. Is that, in your opinion, a legitimate reason for the grouse and hostility of the farmers?

A. For us, this is not a bone of contention so far as compensation is concerned. By SEZ we mean special exploitation zone. We believe that with SEZs, the government is going for One India, Two Systems. No compensation, however high, is adequate. When you see the permits of Singur and Nandigram, it is not only the amount of money involved. Rather it is a question of livelihood. And not just for one generation. When you look at the farmer, he is saying, 'Look, I am not going to give my land away.' Some CPM leaders who demanded that children of peasants should not limit themselves to farming, and become doctors and engineers, should realize that most of the students admitted to medical colleges and engineering institutes in Calcutta already come from peasant backgrounds. Certainly, there are many students from Midnapore, from Singur itself, who are studying in the capital. So what the CPM is saying today has already been going on now for some time.

No compensation will suffice because it is a question of livelihood, a question of culture, a question of legacy and education. Land is not an item to be dispensed with. It is not a commodity that you take from one place and transfer it to another place. Not just the owners of the land, what about the *bargadars*, the sharecroppers, what would be their fate? During the harvest, in Singur itself, they produce more than five different crops at different points of the year. Sharecroppers and agricultural labourers come from the neighbouring Burdwan district, and they make their own shanties and participate in harvesting activities. What about them? When you begin calculations, the Left Front government said that there were 12,000 landowners. The landowners owned these 1,000 acres of land. But if you agree that 12,000 landowners are there, so according to the Land Acquisition Act, which was passed in the 1940s,

there are 40 per cent of labourers and sharecroppers . . .' What happens to them? So there can be no question of compensation. It could be in crores, so what? More far-reaching issues like displacement need to be addressed.

In addition, there is no rehabilitation package. Farmers are not getting land in lieu of their lost land. So it is not a question of whether they have been paid a larger sum in Haryana and why they are not paying similar compensations in Singur and Nandigram. Not for us. We are totally against the SEZs because we believe that they are special exploitation zones where there is going to be One India, Two Systems. And like a revolutionary party, our goal is just and equitable distribution of resources. So these measures are not going to satisfy not just us but the people of Singur and Nandigram also. After all, the people there have risen up in arms. It was not our making. But it is our job to spread our message and participate in the goings on there.

Abhijit Mazumdar was interviewed in March 2007 in New Delhi.

VARA VARA RAO

**‘It is not a civil war situation – movements are being built;
there are pockets and armed struggle areas’**

Vara Vara Rao is a communist, a well-known Maoist sympathizer, renowned poet, literary critic and purveyor of Andhra Pradesh’s potent Maoist movement. He has been a poet for over 40 years and an orator and a teacher who taught Telugu literature to graduate and undergraduate students. He founded *Srjana* in 1966, a successful quarterly forum for modern Telugu literature, a project he pursued till 1992. As a cultural icon of radical Left politics and one who has considerable standing and credibility across the political spectrum after decades of public service, Rao was deeply involved in two rounds of negotiations as a Maoist emissary with the Andhra Pradesh government; first with the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) government in May and July 2002 and then with the Congress government in October 2004 in Andhra Pradesh. In this intense and wide-ranging interview, he, as a ring-side observer of what went behind the scenes and in front, discusses the historic failure of these talks in Andhra, the betrayals, complexities, the dramatis personae involved in those fruitless discussions and the past, present and future of the radical Left movement in Andhra Pradesh, once its epicentre, and of the movement in general. Rao has spent a large part of his political time behind bars. His political and literary activities so enraged the Andhra Pradesh government that he was arrested under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA) in October 1973. The Andhra Pradesh High Court struck down the order and released him after a month-and-a-half. The High Court judgement asked the government not to resort to such actions against writers unless their writings

have an immediate and direct bearing in a physical action. After a few months, the government charged prominent leaders under the Secunderabad Conspiracy Case; Rao was one of the 41 implicated in the case, which was filed in May 1974 and ended in his acquittal in February 1989, after 15 years of prolonged and tiresome trial. He was denied bail several times and finally came out on conditional bail in April 1975. Vara Vara Rao was arrested again on 26 June 1975, on the eve of the Emergency, and detained under MISA. He was among the last to be released, much after the Emergency had been lifted and only when the new Janata Party government repealed MISA itself. In this interview, he talks about how difficult is it to negotiate with governments. While the state has on one hand expressed its desire for talks and the Union home minister and others routinely express their desire to lead the 'misguided' youth into the mainstream of politics, in reality, Rao believes it is no more than lip service and a smokescreen. The practical difficulties in getting varying ideologists across the table for peaceful negotiations represent the biggest challenge to the Indian state.

Q. You were part of the intense negotiations between the CPI (Maoist) and successive TDP and Congress governments in Andhra Pradesh over ten years ago. Then you and your Maoist colleagues pulled out of the talks. Is there a possibility of going back to the table?

A. No. It may not be in the near future. When the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) government was in power, Chandrababu Naidu [the Chief Minister] had called CPI (ML), then known as the People's War Group. He called us for talks on account of pressure from public opinion as well as the democrats, and particularly the efforts put in by the concerned Citizens Committee. He met the leadership of the CPI (ML), People's War Group, Shyam and Mahesh and persuaded them to go for talks; *Varta*, a Telugu daily, also conducted a big public opinion campaign-cum-survey. Of course, there were situations for him, particularly in two contexts. After Gujarat [the Gujarat riots in 2002], he issued a statement that Narendra Modi should step down, and his choice for the presidential candidate was Krishna Kant. On these two issues, he had some reservations with the NDA government and with L.K. Advani for a brief period. Between 5 and 20 June 2000, we sat and finalized the modalities. To finalize the modalities, Ghadar and I were People's

War representatives, and from the government side was represented by TDP Ministers, Vijay Rama Rao – who was earlier chief of CBI [Central Bureau of Investigation] and also worked in different capacities in AP-IPS [Andhra Pradesh Indian Police Service] cadre – along with one T. Sitaram from Srikakulam. But despite it being a unilateral ceasefire from our side in January 2002 and again in March 2002, the government continued encounter killings even during the talks.

We had three sittings. On these three days too, there were encounter killings. Mischievously, they were staging encounter killings of other groups of CPI (ML) people or some other non-concerned ML people. Of course, we protested. They said it does not concern you. We are holding talks only with you. We said we are against the fake encounters. Anyhow, the party [CPI (ML)] itself sent a letter confirming that on 20 July, they would come for talks. So on 20 June, the modalities were finalized. At one stage, Vijay Rama Rao said that Ramkrishna's demands are like the Preamble of the Constitution. They are also enshrined in the Directive Principles of State Policy, so we don't have any objection. They also agreed to discuss democratic rights and the land question, the Adivasis' lands for example. It turned out that before the second round of talks on 9 July, Chandrababu had settled his issues with the NDA government. One, he said that Gujarat is an internal matter and he will not interfere in its affairs. About the presidential candidate, he was convinced about Abdul K. Kalam. So there were no issues. Advani had also cautioned him against holding talks with Naxalites, saying it was a very sensitive issue. Chandrababu took it as an indication that talks need not be held at all. So after 9 July, the government started saying that until you give up arms, we will not go for talks. We said it cannot be a pre-condition.

On 20 July, the party agreed to come, but immediately after the talks and modalities were over, they intensified encounter killings of CPI (ML) and People's War Group also. They killed the squad member in Warangal, killed women squad members in Khammam and it climaxed on 2 July, when the government arrested and killed Padma, a member of North Telangana CPI (ML) People's War State Committee. Perhaps, the party wanted to include her also in the talks because she was a state committee member and also a woman. The killing was meant to convey to us that the Chandrababu Naidu government does not want talks and is using this opportunity to kill the people. Our party had withdrawn from talks and later developments, you know, the encounter killings

increased and ultimately resulted in the attempt on Chandrababu's life on 1 October 2003, and it also expedited elections.

Interestingly, elections in 2004 had turned into a kind of referendum – of course, I am not using this word for myself; it was Chandrababu Naidu who said that these elections are a referendum on three issues: One, on his model of development taken from the World Bank; two, on his policy about Naxalites; and three, on statehood for Telangana. This is a referendum. That is if you vote for me, I will continue this model of development of the World Bank; I will deal with the Naxalite issue as a law and order issue and I will not support separate statehood for Telangana. These are the three issues, he said, and asked the people to exercise their franchise as a referendum. It was in fact a risk he had taken. He had advanced the elections as a result of that. On the other hand, the Congress, which had an alliance with TRS and also poll adjustments with CPI and CPM, announced its stand on these three issues. It said that it will oppose the World Bank model. About Naxalites, it said they would not be treated as a law and order problem but as a socio-economic issue and they will hold talks with Naxalites unconditionally. On the third issue, of course, they are vague. Congress says that TRS has signed on the second SRC (States Re-organization Committee). TRS says no – we did not sign the SRC. Congress agreed that after the elections, it will put up a bill about separate Telangana.

Anyhow, they were positive towards the Telangana issue but it never became a determining issue in the elections. On the first two issues, because if you analyse the results, the TRS candidates did not win with such an overwhelming lead but Congress won overwhelmingly because it promised these two things. They won the elections. But during the elections and after the results of the elections, there were encounter killings happening. The Cabinet was formed on the 14 May and Jana Reddy became home minister. On 14 May, he made an announcement in the media and on TV that he will call back the Greyhounds into the barracks, and he will ask them to stop the combing operations. There will be no encounters and we will go for talks, he promised. While welcoming it, the CPI (ML) People's War Group demanded ceasefire. I met the home minister on 3 June. Kannabiran met him, as did the Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee (APCLC); other democratic people met him asking him to declare a ceasefire. We were saying that the state should first declare ceasefire and also see that the vigilante groups,

surrendered Naxalites, etc., were stopped from indulging in wanton killings. During the TDP government, they operated in the name of Tigers, Nallamalla Tigers, etc. So you stop these vigilante groups and inquire into their killings and misdeeds. We allege that they are in nexus with the police department.

Interestingly, recently you might have seen a news item, one Tiwari, an IPS officer in the Andhra Pradesh cadre, who was very mischievous and notoriously responsible for operating these vigilante groups, acquired hundreds of acres of land for himself and his henchmen in the police department along with surrendered Naxalites. He was caught red-handed and sent to Andhra Bhavan (in Delhi) as an officer. Recently, in some misappropriation and corruption charges, he was suspended from the central government also. So, we proved this nexus between the police department and the vigilante groups. The chief minister was silent on that. Finally on 16 June, CPI (ML) People's War Group and also CPI (ML) Jansakthi said that they will observe ceasefire. And we asked for a reciprocal statement from the government.

On that day, eight writers – me, President of Virasam, Kalyan Rao, Jwalamukhi, Ratnamala, Katyayani, Yaqub, Pani and others – met the home minister. Since the party has declared ceasefire, you must also reciprocate, we told him. The minister was convinced about our argument for lifting the ban on CPI (ML) People's War Group and its mass organizations. The home minister took us to the chief minister. The chief minister said that he would not be able to lift the ban as long as the squads were moving in the village with arms. We said that since there is a ban on Radical Students Union, Radical Youth League, the Rhythu Coolie Sanagam and all these mass organizations, since there are no frontal organizations or mass organizations to campaign for them; that is why these squads are moving. If you lift the ban on them, I think in the village, the Radical Youth League and the Rhythu Coolie Sanagam will work on the issues of the rural people. Likewise, the Singareni Karmika Samaakya will work for the coal mine areas. This was our suggestion. The chief minister said 'let us see'. Finally on 20 July, they organized a meeting. By then the party, CPI (ML) People's War Group and Janasakthi had sent a set of rules or modalities to be observed during the talks. Also, it had named its representatives and mediators. It named Gaddar and Kalyan Rao and me as representatives of the People's War Group and CPI (ML) Janasakthi had also decided on Chandranna and

Srinivas Rao as its representatives and as mediators; the CPI (Maoist) had suggested the names of Sankaran, K.G. Kannabiran, Hargopal and B. Tarakam. CPI Janasakthi's mediators were A.B.K. Prasad and Kesavarao Jadhav (all Maoist sympathizers and agitators).

On 20 July, the home minister had arranged a meeting with representatives of both parties and mediators in the secretariat to discuss the modalities. I presented the modalities sent by both the parties. We were asking for lifting of the ban. The mediators too were vehement in asking for the ban to be lifted. The minister tried to link the two issues. The modalities comprised seven clauses. One clause said that the squads will not move about with arms. The spirit was that they will hold the guns but not use them. That was the ceasefire. That was the spirit of the ceasefire. But the police had amended the modality by saying that the squads should not move with guns. This seventh clause has become the most controversial issue. Discussions were held, but the home minister linked the issue of lifting the ban with the issue of not moving in the villages with guns – that seventh clause. All of us opposed it. We wanted to sign with reservations on that clause, but the mediators suggested that on such an agreement, there would not be any exceptions or reservations. Anyway, we signed the seventh clause; we had agreed that the squads will not move with guns in the villages.

In any case, all modalities had been put forth by the party. The government did not work out anything; no homework had been done by the government. All the homework had been done by the party. They were sending all kinds of suggestions from time to time. It was signed and because of it, on 21 July, the government lifted the ban. In fact, the term of the ban ended on 21 July 2004, and the government said that the ban on the People's War Group and six front organizations would not continue. There were preparations for talks and many meetings were going on in the villages and other places; Martyr's Day was celebrated and Martyr's Stupas were constructed and lakhs of people started coming. Before 13 July, many meetings were held. On 13 July, the party announced its representatives and the same day, a covert operation took place in the Warangal district. They tried to kill the Secretary of the CPI (ML) People's War Group, Yadanna, on the Warangal-Khammam borders. We naturally protested.

The state government appointed a commission. They appointed a supervisory committee but it was not given any powers. Unless the

government and the party call for a joint investigation, it cannot go ahead. Of course, for this and the killing in Anantpur district and one or two other issues, they appointed the Balgopal Commission, but so far what has happened to it, we don't know. They were not fair even on that day. We were preparing the modalities, but eventually, they did not join. The government had also not sent any invitation to them; they had sent invitations only to these two parties. So these two parties together sent the demands for the talks or the issues they would raise in the talks. It was an elaborate list of demands.

Q. What, in your opinion, were the main stumbling blocks to talks? Was it a question of carrying arms or was it an issue of land reforms?

A. There were 42 demands from both the parties, broadly categorized into three segments: the first was democratic rights; the second was on land reforms and third was self-reliance. In these categories, there were distinct issues: for example under democratic rights, they were asking for implementing fundamental rights, right to speech, right to association, right to belief, right to life, release of political prisoners, stopping encounter killings and also conducting judicial inquiry into killings, in missing cases, vigilante groups and many other such things. Finally, it was decided that talks will begin on 15 October. They agreed to come to Hyderabad. The government had also agreed. On 11 October, they came out from the forest of Nallamala. On behalf of CPI (Maoist), till then People's War Group, Ramakrishna, Andhra Pradesh secretary, Sudhakar, Andhra-Orissa Border secretary, Ganesh, committee member of the CPI (ML) People's War of North Telangana special zonal committee – the three representing the CPI (ML) (People's War Group) – Amar, Secretary of CPI (ML) Jansakthi, Riyaz, member state committee, were representing CPI (ML) Janasakthi came for talks. They came on 11 July from Chinnanrutla, Nallamala forest to Guththikondabhilam, where a memorial was built for Comrade Charu Mazumdar and other martyrs. Guththikondabhilam was the place where a secret meeting was held when Charu Mazumdar had come to Andhra Pradesh and where the CPI (ML) Andhra Pradesh was formed in 1969. Panchadi Krishnamurti, Chaganti Bhaskar Rao and others had brought Charu Mazumdar to Guththikondabhilam; so it is a historical place. Under the leadership of Charu Mazumdar, the

movement had started from there. So, a great memorial was erected there and lakhs of people had come.

When we came out from the forest at Chinnanrutla, there was a rousing reception in every village. When we started in the morning at 10 a.m., even though Chinnanrutla is in Prakasam district and Guntur is adjacent, it took us eight hours. In every village there was a rousing reception and a historic meeting was held. In that meeting, Kannabiran and M.T. Khan spoke besides the party leaders and the representatives. From there, we reached the Manjira guest house in Hyderabad. At a meeting on 13 October in Manugur of Khammam district, an Adivasi area, a martyr plank was erected for Chandrapulla Reddy and others. Here, the CPI (ML) Janasakthi had started its struggle in 1972 where Batthula Venkateshwara Rao was killed. The next day, there was a 'Meet the Press' organized by the Working Journalists Union of Andhra Pradesh where Ramakrishna announced the formation of the CPI (Maoist), unifying CPI (ML) People's War Group and MCC. That was one reason, I think, why the government went back on talks.

Interestingly on 15 October, an invitation was handed out to People's War Group and also to CPI (ML) Janasakthi, its status not having changed, even though overnight, the status of CPI (ML) People's War Group had changed. But the devil has to be given its due; the government did not take that technical objection. They did not raise issues linked to the MCC. Maybe, because there is no MCC in Andhra Pradesh; maybe because in South India, there is no MCC. For them, it was just a change of nomenclature. Whatever the reason, those issues were not raised and we went to talks at the Chenna Reddy Institute of Human Resources and Development. The atmosphere was cordial and on behalf of the government, there were eight people, four senior ranked Cabinet ministers of the Congress Party: Home Minister Jana Reddy, Revenue Minister Prasad Rao, Social Welfare Minister Koneru Ranga Rao and Tribal Welfare Minister Redya Naik. If you see the composition, the issues raised by the party would be revenue, social welfare, tribal welfare – these are the issues. Later, Congress president Keshav Rao was there, as was Purushottam Rao and Karunakar Reddy (then TTD chairman and very close to the chief minister). Palaugu Venkat Rao, a Congress spokesman, too was there, and he was supposed to hold socialist views. So there were eight on their side, the mediators were there and ourselves. Sankaran was chosen as the coordinator of the

meeting, he had to conduct the meeting because he was officially recognized by the government as a mediator.

On 15 October, the hurdles began to show up. Till then, the modalities and the demands had been sent by us. But there was no government signature. There were no joint signatures on anything, either on ceasefire or the modalities. The party insisted on joint signatures. Between 21 July and October, a great debate was conducted on the issue of the seventh clause. We had signed as representatives, but the party did not accept it. The party was against it. This explained the delay. The government was saying that you have to accept that a debate had been held. Meanwhile, people like K.G. Satyamurthy were propagating that the party had agreed and that is why the representatives had signed; but now they are going back because of public opinion. This was not true. In fact, the details were leaked. The understanding was that they would not be leaked. But some department people had leaked it to K.G. Satyamurthy. Anyhow, a debate went on. Finally, the government and the party agreed to discuss this seventh clause, along with our main demands. Along with democratic rights, land reforms and self-reliance, we discussed the seventh clause also, whether to move with arms or not, that can also be discussed. Both the parties had agreed on that. After the agreement had been reached, we were invited for talks. And on 30 September, a huge meeting was held in Nizam College, which was attended by lakhs of people.

At that meeting, we presented these three categories to the public – we were three representatives, each one of us taking a subject. We also declared that both the parties would come for talks on 7 October. Of course, because of a by-election in Hyderabad, it was postponed. The whole announcement had been made at a public meeting. On 15 October, there was a deadlock about the joint signatures. The government was not willing to take joint signatures. Ramkrishna's letters were with the government – two letters granting acceptance about discussing the seventh clause when they sat with the main demands. Ramakrishna's letters were with the government and home minister's letter was with Ramakrishna, but Ramakrishna and the home minister together did not sign any paper. The mediators said that it amounted to a joint agreement because his paper is with you and your paper is with him. So legally, it amounts to both parties having agreed. By lunchtime, we reached the consensus.

On the second day, we took up democratic rights. The government easily accepted our demands: we will accept fundamental rights, we will not object to anything, we will think of releasing political prisoners. But Ganesh, who had been a political prisoner for many years, was not released. We were expecting that at least he would come, and he would be given a parole, but he was implicated in M.P. Subbiram Reddy's murder case.

They were discussing all issues, but on the question of vigilante groups, they were silent. We gave categorical examples to show that these vigilante groups have a nexus with the police. For example, in the TDP government, one Sammi Reddy who was a bodyguard of Vijay, secretary, Karimnagar district CPI (ML) People's War Group and also a state committee member, killed Vijay while he was sleeping. That was the arrangement. When Sammi Reddy was in jail, the SP [Superintendent of Police] of Karimnagar talked to him and turned him into a covert. Not knowing what had transpired in jail and acting in good faith, the party had taken him in, so he pretended loyalty to the secretary and the party. At his surrender, he openly talked about killing Vijay; he was given Rs 10 lakh as reward. It was shown on the electronic media and in the press. This, in fact, Balgopal (former civil right activist), has also petitioned in the High Court. How is it that when one says he has killed so and so, he is rewarded instead of being booked? What is this? The High Court did not admit it. It is now in the Supreme Court. It is still being argued. So such things happen. We brought this up. There is one D.T. Naik, an additional DG [Director General of Police] in Andhra. At his daughter's marriage, a surrendered Naxalite presented him with a valuable necklace. It has been captured on video camera.

In fact, on all such issues, the nexus between the police and the surrendered Naxalites has been repeatedly highlighted. The media has written about it, and the electronic media has played it [the video recording] up. It reached such levels of propaganda that the Chandrababu Naidu government had to appoint the Rangachari Commission led by a senior IAS [Indian Administrative Service] officer to probe this. But since no police officer was willing to cooperate, Rangachari said that he was helpless. We brought all these issues to the notice of the government, but they were not categorical about anything. We will review the cases, respect rights, etc., but there was nothing substantial. For all meetings, the police continued to create hurdles and stopped people from attending them. The only thing was there was no loss of life.

The second day onwards, we took up the land reforms issue. Very elaborately, land reforms were discussed. Both parties put up 35 categories of land where surplus is more than the ceiling. And our statistics say that there is about one crore acre of surplus land in Andhra Pradesh. Every detail and supporting tables were presented by us. Between about 25 entities – individuals, firms or industries – they hold thousands of acres of land on the outskirts of Hyderabad. If you have seen the *Tehelka* tabloid, one approach paper was given by Anoop Saha; you will find the list there. We got the figures from the collectorates [office of the District Collector] of Hyderabad and Ranga Reddy districts. We told the authorities that these figures may not be the last word but they should appoint a Land Commission whose members are experts in land reforms and who have also worked in the sectors of social welfare, tribal welfare and Dalit welfare. Let them go into these details. How much surplus land is there, to who it should be distributed, who are the landless, what are the modalities to be observed and so on.

For the other part, we suggested that surplus land be distributed. This was our categorical demand. This is our understanding of land reforms. We are not asking for land to the tiller – our goal is that, but we were not asking for it here. We also made it clear that our talks were not for state power or land for the tiller, but these talks are for those issues that can be covered under the Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles of State Policy. We are not going beyond that. We are asking for prohibition. It is not under Fundamental Rights but is covered under the Directive Principles. We are not saying that when we come for talks, you have to give power to us or accept our philosophy. People like Balagopal said that we were asking for everything under the sun. That is not true.

So the first phase of talks concluded on that day. The third categories of demand, i.e. self-reliance, under which comes globalization, privatization, liberalization, workers' wages, retrenchment of workers, women's issues, Dalit issue, tribal issue, minority issue, reservations, untouchability, killing of Dalits, statehood, ban on liquor, ban on gutka – all these issues were there under the self-realization category, but no talks were held on these issues.

So, to take up the discussion on this third item, both parties said that they will come back on 16 November. Then they [the government] said that instead of November, come back for talks in January when land is going to be distributed under the Indira Plan. Even though we were

called for talks, from the beginning, Rajsekhara Reddy, then chief minister, was not in favour of talks. He had given the word during the elections under pressure from the democrats and public opinion for talks, but he was never serious about talks. He never participated in the talks; he never called the democrats; he never talked to them. Only the home minister was talking to us. There was no homework from the government's side; there was no cooperation from the police department nor did the chief minister appear willing. The home minister was put in front, and he was holding talks. He was an ex-socialist and talking in a very interesting way, but the government was not serious.

As compared to the TDP government, they had adhered to certain things. They had declared the ceasefire, and though there were some covert attempts, there was no killing. From their side, there was no loss of life during those three to six months. From 14 May to 18 October, the government had been given an impression, particularly by Intelligence DG [Director General] Arvind Rao, that if the parties are called for talks, at least a section of it will give up arms. This was because they had the impression of the Telangana arms struggle, who had also given up arms. They also had the examples of surrendered Naxalites before them. Arvind Rao was told that one top leader, who was number two in the People's War Group and who had later surrendered in 1978 itself, had given him an impression and information that People's War Group was willing to surrender. At a meeting in Jubilee Hall at Hyderabad where 45 of CPI (ML) Pratighatna people had surrendered, it was all a drama. Rajsekhara Reddy has gone on record saying that he was given to understand that a section of Naxalites were willing to surrender. A democrat has told me and I do not have any reason not to believe it, Reddy said. Before the talks were held, he made that statement. This means that he was under that illusion.

This illusion was shattered on 14 October itself when Ramakrishna announced the formation of CPI (Maoist). The government was under the impression that a section of People's War Group was willing to surrender but the unification indicated that the situation had become hotter. For the Intelligence Department, particularly for Arvind Rao, it was an eye opener. On 15 October, when we met, there was a stumbling block about the joint signatures, so talks could not proceed. We had lunch and then dispersed. We sat and insisted on a joint statement but the government was not willing. Arvind Rao had organized a conference

of all superintendents of police of Andhra Pradesh and asked them to get ready as the talks had failed.

We got out of the Chenna Reddy Institute and all the media people said that they had been told that the talks had failed. Apparently, Arvind Rao had told them through a tele-conference that the talks had failed. The government realized that even if they agreed on one issue, it would go against the interests of the World Bank. By then, the Congress was slowly going in for World Bank reforms. During the election campaign, Rajsekhar Reddy said that they would not introduce the development model of the World Bank. In the campaign, Reddy used to say every day that Chandrababu Naidu had become a bonded labour to the World Bank – *paleru*, a Telugu word. People go to the World Bank for loans, and I will go to Australian bank. Reddy was making such statements, but slowly, they were pressurized or maybe they were willing, because the Congress policy is tilted towards the World Bank. So even if one of these issues was implemented, they could not have gone with the World Bank, particularly land reforms.

The impression that democrats and intellectuals had was that the subject of urban land had also become an irksome issue for the government because the corporate sector and the media were involved. It was sensational news. That was one reason why the talks did not take off. The other reason was the unification issue. Land is a sensitive issue because of the corporate sector. Landlords with surplus land are one thing and corporate sector acquiring surplus land is another issue. And then we had submitted a list of members for the Land Commission. We had suggested K.R. Venugopal to be the chairman. He had worked in the Rural Development department, central government and Prime Minister's Office; he was a very reputed officer with great integrity. He has written and worked on Adivasi land reforms; then Sankaran has worked with Dalits and Adivasis, and then Balagopal – all these people have worked on Dalit and Adivasi issues and their problems. We gave this list and the party went to the forest on 20 October and in the rural areas, people started putting up red flags on lands that they thought were surplus lands. The government made a hue and cry, complaining that we did not wait. They alleged that we had given a list of surplus land and proposed the Land Commission and its members but we did not wait. The mediators also said you wait for some time. All mediators asked us to wait till January.

The party advised the cadres to remove the red flags and wait till January. Then repression started growing. No meetings were allowed. In one or two places, statues erected in memory of martyrs were destroyed. Slowly, they started restricting the meetings, stopping the meetings, arresting people and conducting covert operations. Three covert operations took place. They tried to kill the Mehbubnagar district CPI (Maoist) War leader, and they also tried to kill the Karimnagar district's Secretary, CPI (Maoist). They tried to kill the Warrangal district Secretary of CPI (Maoist). We gave this list to the Committee of Observers, the supervisory committee, which had Dr Chakrapani, associate professor at the Ambedkar Open University, as its convener. But since they did not have powers, they did not do anything. It was also given to the Balagopal Commission, but nothing happened.

Suddenly on 6 January, an encounter took place in the Warrangal district where CPI (ML) Janashakthi district member, Raj Reddy, was killed. It was a fake encounter. He was meeting some people when he was killed. On 8 January, Lakshmi from Kurnool, an executive committee member of AP Chaitanya Mahila Samaakya, who also ran a tailoring shop in Kurnool, was killed in a fake encounter; this was just the beginning. On 13 and 14 January, when our Revolutionary Writers' Association Conference was taking place in Vishakhapatnam, three encounter killings took place in Karimnagar, Warangal and Prakasam districts, respectively. Ten people were killed, including a woman and a mass organization activist. A woman activist, an Adivasi, was mass raped and killed by Greyhounds in the Nallamala forest. In Warangal district, Nalla Vasanth, vice-president, Telangana Raastra Samithi, and Sudharshan, state committee member of Telangana Janasabha and also a postal employee in Nizamabad, were killed in a fake encounter; both of them were members of legal organizations. They were not underground activists but had gone to meet the leadership of North Telangana to discuss Telangana. The attempt was actually to target the North Telangana CPI (Maoist) secretary, Jampanna, committee members like Somanna and others. They (the government) thought they had the information, and hence, they went there and fired. The leadership escaped, but the legal, over-ground people could not escape. In fact three others, all squad leaders – Bommiah, Malla Reddy and others – escaped. While they were going into the forest, we got information that the Greyhounds were out again. Kannabiran talked to the home minister. Home minister

said that we will call back the Greyhounds who had gone on combing operations. That means immediately after the first round of talks, combing operations had started. Encounters had also begun in January. So on 16 January, the party gave a statement that we were going back on talks. And if this situation continues, we will retaliate.

Even then we did not give up. We said that if the government announces a ceasefire and abides by the ceasefire, if there are no encounter killings, we will think of it, but right now we are withdrawing from the talks and we will retaliate if the encounters continue to take place.

Q. How important is the formation of the CPI (Maoist)?

A. It is very important. Unless a single CPI (ML) party, Bolshevik in its spirit is formed, Indian revolution is not possible. Indian revolution cannot be achieved with two or three disparate CPI (ML) parties. As in Russia, under the leadership of Communist Party Bolshevik, the revolution took place. If an Indian revolution is at all to succeed, it can only do so with a single party. In the 1960s, there was a CPI (ML) under the leadership of Charu Mazumdar. Of course, there were other parties. In the South, there was Unity Centre of Communist Revolutionaries of India (Marxist-Leninist) (UCCRIML). Such leaders as Nagi Reddy and others were also there, but post-1972, after Charu Mazumdar's death, many splinter groups came up.

From the 1990s onwards, there was again an attempt to reunify ML groups. On reunification, it seems now that the parties that are engaged in armed struggle and who believe in boycotting elections are coming together. Those who are fighting elections are also unifying. You can take big examples. Under Kanu Sanyal, a CPI (ML) was formed from Bengal to Kerala, whatever is its strength. CPI (ML) Liberation is there, as is CPI (ML) New Democracy. On the other hand, those who boycott elections and are seriously engaged in armed struggle – CPI (ML) Party Unity, MCC and CPI (ML) People's War Group – are also there. By 2004, these three parties had unified. I think sooner or later, the parties that boycott elections and are engaged in armed struggle will unite. Parties that are participating in elections are getting united. Even CPI (ML) Naxalbari is working together with CPI (Maoist). A day has to come when all these parties amalgamate into one party to lead the Indian revolution.

Q. *Do you see it happening in your lifetime?*

A. Certainly it will happen. Lifetime is a long time. Those who have come into action slowly, some of them will become like a new CPI Marxist party. In 1964, the hope was that CPM will take up class struggle. This did not take place, so in 1967 Naxalbari happened. Suppose those parties who say that 'we are using the Parliament as a forum only'; when they end up finally in the Parliament itself, I think the cadres in it will get disillusioned and will join the armed struggle.

Q. *Do you believe in armed struggle as the only course of revolution, because the prevailing view is that the annihilation theory underwent a lot of change after the first round of Naxalite movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s?*

A. Armed struggle is one thing and annihilation of class enemy is another thing. Armed struggle is the main struggle, supported by mass struggles and mass organizations. Mao put forward the view that for a revolution, a land army and a cultural army were needed. When it comes to the question of annihilation of class enemy, it was a CPI (ML) 1970s resolution but this was diluted by 1974. For that matter, during 1970, in Andhra, because of the experience of the Telangana armed struggle and a united front under the leadership of Andhra Mahasabha, we realized that, unless you have mass organizations and mass struggles, armed struggle is not going to succeed. That's why Revolutionary Writers Association was formed in 1970.

Interestingly, on one hand, CPI (ML) in its first Congress in 1970 said that we should not have any legal organizations and we should have no mass organizations and mass struggles – underground activity and class annihilation is the only way. The Andhra Pradesh Revolutionary Writers Association was formed on 4 July 1970, to propagate the Naxalite movement. In 1972, Jananaty Mandali was organized as a frontal organization of the CPI (ML) to propagate its politics. *Pilipu*, a Telugu magazine, was started to propagate the CPI (ML)'s politics. This is because of our experience in Andhra Mahasabha, which was a united front where Communists worked from 1930s to 1944. Only in 1944, others in the Andhra Mahasabha realized that the communists were working in it without disclosing their identity. So that was the United Front policy implemented in China and implemented during the Telangana armed struggle. We had that experience; particularly Kondapalli Sitarammiah

had that experience because he was there in the Telangana armed struggle fighting in the Munagala area. Before his death, Charu Mazumdar also realized that revolution was not only class annihilation. Without legal organizations, mass organizations supporting the armed struggle to achieve the people's war revolution is not complete.

In the last article, he wrote:

When I said that trade unions are revisionist and trade unions' shackles have to be shattered; my spirit is that trade unionism should be shattered, not trade unions. My only worry is that trade unions are being split into political parties' frontal organizations and the working class is being divided. I did not want that. My wish was that we should work in a majority trade union in a factory or a militant trade union in a factory. And when the union gives a call for a strike, we should participate and observe. Participate in the strike, give militant slogans, asking the factory owner certain demands and try to turn the strike into a gherao or dharna. That is my spirit. I am not against trade unions but I am against trade unionism – the collusion of trade union leaders with managements.

Charu Mazumdar welcomed the publication of *Pilupu* (The Call), and he also welcomed the organization 'Virasam' (Revolutionary Writers Association [RWA]). He welcomed the organization of Jan Natya Mandal. Charu started reaching out to the people in 1972 itself because of people like Kondapalli Sitarammiah. The leadership of Kondapalli Sitarammiah did not implement class enemy annihilation unless the class enemy became a stumbling block for political organization. By 1974, the Central Organization Committee of the CPI (ML) was formed.

In 1976, during the Emergency, a joint statement with the CPI (ML) general secretary under the leadership of Pulla Reddy said, in reference to Srikakulam, that class enemy annihilation is a form of struggle, not the only form of struggle. Since Srikakulam, we have observed that in every action, Adivasis would insist on annihilating the class enemy, whether land owner or money lender, and hundreds of people would participate under a Subbarao Panigrahi or a Bhaskar Rao in action. So let's us hold our opinion before we say that class enemy annihilation is un-Marxian. Let future history prove who is right and who is wrong. That need not be a hurdle for our unification. That was the joint statement. That is the

turning point. And finally, Sitarammiah made it very clear in a condolence meeting of our comrade, Chinnalu, who was killed by goons, that retaliation is not revolution. People were giving the slogan that we will kill ten for one, we will retaliate, and so on. Killing of class enemy is not revolution. He did not put it in a negative way.

He said that agrarian revolution is like a peasant being engaged in agriculture. The tiller goes to the land and turns it into cultivable land. In doing it, he would remove the thorns and remove the stones. If a snake comes, if it is a non-poisonous snake, he will remove it with a stick. If it is a poisonous or dangerous snake and tries to bite him, then he may decide to kill it. We will not do a *sarpa yagya* like in Mahabharata. Before engaging in cultivation, he will not go in search of snakes. He will engage in agriculture and if snakes come – if any obstruction comes – he will try to remove it. He will not look for obstructions per se. That is not the method of the cultivator. So if you apply it to organizations, as Charu Mazumdar said, go to a village, and stay with Dalit families – he did not use the word Dalit – but Scheduled Caste families. One family cannot give you food, so collect food from every house. While collecting food, ask the Schedule Caste people to gather at one place and eat with them, live with them, ask them who the class enemy in the village is, annihilate him and start organizing. That was what Charu said in 1970. Kondapalli Sitarammiah made an amendment. He said do all these things and after doing so, start organizing. If the landlord in the village or the class enemy in the village comes in the way of your organization, he will not let you go a step forward; if need be, annihilate him. Organization first and annihilation last, if need be. If suppose the landlord runs away from the village and class enemy cooperates with you, you need not annihilate him.

Interestingly, that was the difference between the Srikakulam struggle and the Telangana armed struggle. Basically, you can see that after the setback in Naxalbari, where it came in six months, in Punjab, the setback came in two to three years. In Andhra, the Srikakulam setback came in two years, because by 1972, the whole leadership was killed in fake encounters, including Vempatapu Satyam and Adibatla Kailasam, who were leaders of the movement. In Bengal and Punjab, the movement did not prosper. Only in Andhra Pradesh could the movement recover. In 1974, the regional committee meetings of the CPI (ML) Central Organizing Committee (COC) took place in Nagpur

where they decided that 'till now we were only doing squad actions, we have to now implement the mass line and build mass organizations'. By then, certain mass organizations had come up, students' movement had arrived, but they were not given shape. So based on that mass line, certain mass organizations started coming into place. Radical Students Union, the Radical Youth League – such organizations came into being. Meanwhile, the Emergency had been clamped and there were warrants against the Radical Students Union. Radical students went underground, underground in the sense that they did not want to get arrested. During the Emergency, the party asked the radical students to study the 20-point programme announced by Indira Gandhi. She had promised that land would be given to the landless poor and to those who did not have shelter. So the students were asked to examine whether the 20-point programme was being implemented and whether land relations in the villages had changed. They surveyed for 21 months and came out with reports. At the micro level, it was like the Hunan study that Mao Tse Tung had made in China.

Immediately after the Emergency, you saw an upsurge, particularly in the Jagitial and Sirisilla taluks of Karimnagar and Asifabad and Laksettipet taluk of Adilabad. All agricultural landless occupied surplus lands under the occupation of landlords and put red flags. On 8 June 1978, there was a meeting in Jagitial of Karimnagar district. Some 40,000 people came to that meeting from 150 villages putting their flags on occupied lands and petitioning the CPI (ML), saying we have occupied the lands, put our red flags there. You must now give 'pattas' for it. The petition was made to the Secretary of the CPI (ML) People's War Group. I attended that meeting. I spoke at that meeting; in fact, I was the main speaker there. We put those petitions in gunny bags. There were two full gunny bags. It was truly an upsurge.

When we came back to Karimnagar, the district collector there issued a DO [demi-official] letter asking all his subordinate officers to implement land reforms. Interestingly in 1978, the situation in Karimnagar was different because there was no experience of the Telangana armed struggle there. The landlords there held 500 to 1,000 acres of land and behaved atrociously towards the tillers. There was bonded labour, and there was ill treatment of women. The landless poor of the region implemented an effective social boycott. Instead of annihilating the class enemy, mass organizations of the party decided to socially boycott such

landlords, that is, such class enemies. 'Don't cooperate with him, don't be his bonded labour, don't do agriculture with him, do not go to their houses to do manual work.' Interestingly, in Karimnagar district, only six landlords refused to cooperate with the mass organizations and their demands; they were boycotted and had to flee to towns. Others cooperated; they had surrendered. These six people went to Chief Minister Chenna Reddy of the Indira Congress who had become a chief minister for the first time, and he declared these districts as disturbed areas. Encounters started.

You can find the cultural manifestation of this protest as well. There is a festival in Telangana called Batkamma, a nine-day festival where water flowers are placed at the landlords' forts. Dalits said for the first time this festival should be held at their own houses instead of the landlords. But they were intimidated and killed by landlords. So in 1980, they took to arms. So the concept of class enemy and annihilation in Andhra Pradesh under the leadership of Kondapalli Sitarammiah was never taken in that spirit.

Q. *Would you say that armed struggle is the official view of the CPI (Maoist), given the vast powers of the Indian state to wear down any political movement?*

A. For that matter, a communist party means that. A communist party is an underground party. It will work with its mass organizations, legally and over-ground. If you compare it with the body of a human being, it is the mind which runs and controls everything. All other organs of the body are visible, except the mind and heart. The Communist Party is the mind of the movement. Interestingly, even Sundaraiyya in his last days, during the Emergency, had put before his party this proposition.

All of us though came out in 1964 to wage a class war, joined the Parliament and worked only legally. We did not have any secret party within ourselves. This resulted during the Emergency in the arrest of all these people and warrants were issued and some of us had to go underground.

He said that let us maintain this. At least, a small section of the party leadership should be underground. A time may come when we may have to protect ourselves. Of course, the party did not accept this and that

is why Sundaraiyya, who was all-India secretary, was sent to Andhra to work as the state secretary. From there too, he was removed and sent to Vijayawada where he died. I am giving this example because the Communist Party in Burma lived underground for decades all together, though there was no armed revolution.

The Communist Party believes in class struggle; one of its main struggles is the armed struggle. Thus it has to be underground and has to be secret. For a Communist party to wage a class struggle, power grows out of the barrel of the gun. Yes. Marx said that force is the mid-wife for revolution. What does he mean by force? What happened in the Paris Commune? What happened in the Bolshevik Revolution? What happened in the Chinese Revolution? What happened in the Vietnamese Revolution? In all these revolutions, people under the leadership of the working class, the proletariat, waged armed struggle, supported by many kinds of mass struggle and even dialogues and peace talks. While the Vietnam struggle took 20 years, dialogue in Paris was going on. Its main form was armed struggle. Mao said that power flows out of the barrel of gun, and the gun is controlled by man.

About state power, compared to Vietnam, America was so powerful but Vietnam defeated it. Compare Cuba to America. Cuba is a little island. In addition to people's support, if you choose a guerrilla struggle, you achieve revolution. It is not a stationary struggle; it is not a stationary war. Therefore armed struggle is the official programme of the CPI (Maoist).

Q. You have been a poet yourself with ten collections of poems translated into several Indian languages. You are reported to have said, 'Writing is an intense part of the liberation struggle.' You have also said that you can be killed for your poetry. Could you elucidate?

A. It is not me. Premchand has said that a writer is a soldier who holds the pen ('yeh kalam ka sipahi hai'). He had formed the Progressive Writers' Association with Sajjad Zaheer. It was the time of the Second World War. All over the world, Fascism was rearing its ugly head. The communists to take up cudgels, pen and all cultural activities against Fascism, had formed the Progressive Writers Association and also Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA). Maxim Gorky was asking during the Second World War, whose side are you on? The Spanish Civil War was

the glorious chapter before the Second World War; it was waged when Franco refused to give power to an elected parliament. The elected Spanish parliamentarians took upon themselves to fight Franco's dictatorship and appealed to democrats all over the world to cooperate with them. And in this, it was the writers and cultural activists all over the world who joined the Spanish Civil War. Christopher Caudwel, Ralph Winston Fox, Lorca and many others took up arms and joined the Spanish Civil War. All these people joined in their thirties. And history says that though they lost the Spanish Civil War, they postponed the Second World War by four years. This happened in 1936. That was the time when Sri Sri wrote his first poem 'Jayabheri' in honour of the Spanish Civil War. Mulkraj Anand from India went and joined the Spanish Civil War. Many people, artists, writers and cultural people joined the Spanish Civil War.

And that again you will see in the Naxalbari and Srikakulam struggles – writers joining, cultural activists joining, people like Saroj Dutta and Dronacharya Ghosh joining the movement; Subbarao Panigrahi entered the people's movement in Srikakulam and chose the folk and farm instruments to propagate the struggle in oral tradition. Earlier, he was writing dramas and enacting them in universities and theatre. So, writers, artists and activists directly jumped into the revolutionary movement, inspired by Srikakulam struggle. Even during Telangana armed struggle, that was the spirit I have seen in my boyhood days in school. Even with Sarat Chandra, I find he was an activist in the national movement; he was district president of the Hoogly Congress party. While he was in Burma, he supported the revolutionary movement. Premchand was saying '*kalam ke sipahi*' (soldiers of the pen). So I was influenced by these people in my school days. I was impressed by Sri Sri's writings in my school days.

I was convinced that writers have a role to play in social transformation. A writer alone will not change society, but the writer will help with his ideas to change society. With that intention, we started a magazine in 1966 called *Srjana*. For all these years till 1992, we have run the magazine, and my wife Hemalata is the publisher. In fact, she has been jailed twice in 1978 because we were supporting the Railway strike. George Fernandes became a minister in the central government when she was arrested. In 1984, she was arrested again for sedition. They gave her two years' rigorous imprisonment and was later acquitted by the High Court on technical grounds. So we have been publishing this magazine for

26 years with an understanding that we support social transformation and change.

Inspired by Naxalbari and Srikakulam, we formed the Revolutionary Writers Association and then we realized the importance of what Mao said during Yenan talks. 'For revolution we need two armies, the army on land and the cultural army of writers, artists and cultural activists.' When you support a revolution, when you openly say as we say in Virasam, when we preached all the time that much of what was happening in Naxalbari and Srikakulam was revolution. These revolutionaries were the real people's heroes, the real political leaders for the masses. The real political parties come from the masses and they are trying an alternative politics for us; the Parliament has become a hoax. All this we are openly saying. Virasam held its first conference in October 1970 in Khammam. We have published our first anthology called *Jhanjha*. In another anthology called *March*, which came on the formation day of Virasam on 4 July 1970, on the cover page itself we put our dictum that he who arms the people is the real revolutionary. In fact, I would say that Lusan in China gave a call for arms. Writing about five young writers killed by the Japanese imperialists, he had given a call to the people to take up arms; the title of the article is 'Call to Arms'. Likewise, in our *March* anthology, we have given a call to take up arms and said that it was the poet's duty to give a call to the people to take up arms. Interestingly, if you see the transformation of Telugu poetry, Gurujada 100 years ago was saying that a poet should work like the cuckoo hiding behind the leaves. Nearly 70 years back in 1940, Sri Sri wrote that poetry should be stimulating enough to get you marching forward. By the 1970s, we reached a stage where they said that poet is he who arms the people. Changes had come in society and we were aware of it. We also published a poetry called *Jhanjha* in the first conference. Both these books were banned by March 1971. We challenged the ban in court. The court upheld the ban. Writers were arrested under Preventive Detention (PD) Act and then in 1973 under MISA. Then came the Secunderabad Conspiracy Case. It ran for 15 years. Finally, we were acquitted in 1989. I was in jail in the Secunderabad Conspiracy case for 11 months. I was bailed out on the condition that I shall remain in Hyderabad. Meanwhile, Emergency came and again, we were arrested. Interestingly, our membership was 100 in 1975; 35 of the 100 were arrested during the Emergency under MISA. The whole core of the Revolutionary Writers'

Association was in jail, including our general secretary. For 21 months we were in jail. From jail, we used to run our magazine and ensure its distribution in other jails.

From 1978 onwards, many attempts have been made on my life. When the Radical Students Union held its second conference in Warangal, people who had left Kondapalli Sitaramiah's leadership formed another party and distributed cyclostyled pamphlets saying they would kill me. Then ABVP people tried to kill me. The CPM too tried the same. Then MCPI people tried to kill me and in 1985, the police tried to kill me. Comrade Ramnatham was killed on 3 September 1985 in broad daylight in Warangal in place of me because I was not there in Warangal on that day. I used to say that I am living on bonus. Recently on 14 February 2002, an attempt was made on my life. They conducted a 'reconnaissance', but I had accidentally left for Chennai just 15 minutes earlier.

For four years, I had to stay outside Andhra Pradesh – three of them in Delhi and one in Mumbai. On 15 May 2004, the UPA government was formed with the promise that they would hold talks with Naxalites unconditionally. Let me elaborate. A committee was formed to claim dead bodies of those killed in encounters. Gaddar was its convener. An attempt was made on his life on 6 April 1997. Someone came and fired five bullets at him. Since then, attempts on the life of leaders of the mass movement started. Later, Purushottam, a leader of APCLC, was killed. Dr Ramanatham, vice president of APCLC, was murdered on 3 September 1985 in Warangal. Between February 2001 and 2004, I went to Andhra Pradesh intermittently, very cautiously because there is also a Ramnagar Conspiracy case against me. On 3 September 1985, Ramanatham was killed in my place. So there was a clear cut message to me that I was to be killed. I was on bail in the Secunderabad Conspiracy Case, but I had to cancel my bail to save my life. On 26 December 1985, I volunteered to go to jail to save my life.

In April 1986, Nalla Adhi Reddy was the secretary of CPI (ML) People's War Group state committee. He, along with his six associates, was arrested. And then, the authorities hatched one Ramnagar Conspiracy case under TADA [Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act], because since 1985, they had implemented TADA rigorously in Andhra Pradesh. Interestingly, this was a non-Congress government implementing TADA! Some 16,000 people were implicated in TADA cases, along with me and Balgopal. In May 1986, I was implicated in the Ramnagar

case. So I went to jail and remained there till March 1989, for about three-and-a-half years, under TADA. I was also put into isolation inside the prison. I have written my prison diaries, 'Letter from Prison', in which I have described the '1000 Nights of Solitude'. Marquez wrote '100 Years of Solitude'. The diaries have also appeared in the *Indian Express*.

Q. What is the most significant achievement of this Maoist/Naxalite people's struggle that has lasted out in varying forms since the last three decades or so?

A. The achievement is not merely of Naxalites or Maoists as you put it, but of the Communist movement as a whole. During the Telangana armed struggle, it was the Communist party, the undivided CPI. Under its leadership, they campaigned against bonded labour, increase in wages in agriculture and land to the tiller that led to an armed struggle and as a result of that, in Andhra alone, in 3,000 villages, 10 lakh acres of land was liberated between 1946 and 1951. That was phase one. The second phase was in Srikakulam, 1968 to 1972. And the third phase is from 1978 till now. In Telangana, it was a rampant system of bonded labour. People who worked as bonded labour thought themselves to be slaves to the landlords, to the master. Culturally too, they thought that they had been born into this world to be the slaves of landlords. The same exploited people in the 1930s under the leadership of the Communist parties realized that they too were human beings. The same people took up arms against not just the landlords but the Nizam and indirectly against British colonialists also.

Like Komuram Bhim, an Adivasi leader in Adilabad district, who declared independence in 12 villages, fought against the Nizam. All of them once believed they were bonded labour, but they realized in time that they too were human beings. In Srikakulam, Adivasis thought they were Kambaris (slaves) in their own agricultural lands, which were turned into *podu* lands and were occupied by the money lenders, so they have become slaves in their own lands. They realized their folly and fought against the system. Interestingly, in Karimnagar, there is a saying that 'the dust under your feet has risen and fallen in your eyes'. The feeling that 'we are slaves' was completely gone. They realized that it was they who were the productive forces and creators, not landlords. Landlords were just parasites living off their work. This kind of awareness is a significant achievement.

If you go to Andhra Pradesh today, particularly Telangana, social relations in the villages have changed because of the Naxalite movement. For long, the Brahman, Reddy, Velama and other high-caste people exercised their hold, power and monopoly on the villages. Now the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) have become propertied and politically the deciding factor in Andhra Pradesh. This has an indirect bearing on the bourgeoisie parties and when in 1983, the Telugu Desam was formed, its support base, particularly in the Telangana, was the OBCs. That Dalits joining the party could become ministers was unimaginable before 1983. The domination of the Velama-Reddy and Brahman communities ran for 400 years. During the Kakatiyas, it were the Velama-Reddys who were the 'samant' kings or the ministers. Shudras joining political power is a result of radical politics. The Jagitial movement brought into its fold women as agricultural labourers and beedi workers in the movement. Dalits as agricultural labourers and Adivasis joined the movement. Among the Adivasis, 40 per cent of women have joined the squads. Their way of living and their cultural habits have also changed. So, at the level of consciousness, these changes have been brought about.

Lenin says that when people think that the present-day government cannot govern us and looks up to revolutionaries for help, then that is one strong reason for revolution. The one big change is that in Andhra, no middle class member or intellectual will just dismiss the Naxalite movement as violent. They recognize it as a political movement, which has an alternative programme for the people. Suppose, tomorrow if they come to power, they have a blueprint to rule the state. You know that since 1978, liquor is being auctioned because it gets good revenue for the government. Since molasses is used to prepare liquor and molasses come from sugar factories and during those days, the sugar industry was under government control so, the whole liquor industry was under government control and in turn, they would hand out tenders.

Revenues from the Congress regime to NTR [N.T. Rama Rao] government rose to Rs 800 crore because in every village, NTR started liquor shops in the name of government liquor shops. He made it his own cadre. During NTR's second regime, i.e. 1985 and 1989, revolutionaries used to catch hold of these auctioneers but suddenly in 1987-88, womenfolk in the coal mine areas demanded that liquor should be banned. They themselves closed down bars, beer shops and liquor shops. In Godavarikhani, a coal mine area, there were 60 liquor shops. In coal

mine areas, the workers would drink a lot, so the women got together and ensured that this was stopped. In North Telangana, liquor shops were closed by the radical youth and the working class, by the radical movement for that matter, particularly women. NTR was forced to sell liquor in the police stations through dairy vehicles in the form of milk packets.

I think people outside Andhra Pradesh should know this. NTR got the credit for banning liquor, for implementing prohibition when he had come to power in 1995. But his history in 1988 was this. He raised revenue from liquor from Rs 188 crore to Rs 800 crore because there was a liquor shop in every village. When radical women voluntarily banned the sale of liquor, particularly in the coal mine areas, NTR forcibly sold liquor through police stations and through dairy farms. The party has implemented land reforms on ground. They have occupied surplus land, put up the red flags, distributed land amongst the labour class – there may have been some mistakes, that is a different thing – but they did distribute, and then demanded that land be distributed as part of public policy – that it be legitimized. That is one achievement.

My point is, if you compare it to erstwhile states in India, Andhra Pradesh's Naxalite movement is regarded as alternative politics. There may be differences about its methods, but everybody accepts that it has an alternative programme. Interestingly, today in Andhra Pradesh, except Jayaprakash Narayan from Loksatta, no other intellectual supports globalization. That support too he may not give in writing. He opposes strikes, subsidy on electricity and other things. Except him, all other intellectuals – you take the well-meaning bureaucrats, university professors, all of them – right from K.R. Venugopal to Sankaran to Kanabiran to Haragopal to Balagopal – all these are anti-imperialist and opposed to globalization. And this is because of the radical movements there. All of them are convinced that revolutionary parties are the only alternative politics committed sincerely to anti-globalization and World Bank policies. All other parliamentary parties have proved that they are for World Bank reforms, including regional parties, because all of them were in power, either with the NDA or the UPA. In the states, they have been in power. So this is one achievement that is proven.

If we now we take up any kind of united front programme, against globalization, against the Afghan war, against Saddam Hussain's capital punishment. If you go for a united front organization, 40 to

60 mass organizations will join with us – to hold meetings, to protest, to hold demonstrations; this is an achievement. From a banned underground party, it is now recognized as an alternative politics in today's situation.

Q. Do you see the reality of one-third of the districts in India under 'Red Terror' as a civil war situation where the forces of state have abdicated their role in several regions, particularly those which are in the interior and have had little access to the developmental processes?

A. First, I have objection to the use of the word 'Red Terror'. The revolutionary movement is not a terrorist movement. As a matter of fact, it is not just the revolutionary movement, but the nationality movement, and democratic movements are also not terrorist movements; whether it is in Kashmir or whether it is the North East, or internationally Palestine or Iraq and everywhere, revolutionaries – including those struggling for national liberation – cannot be called terrorists. It is like colonialists using such words against Bhagat Singh and other patriots.

It is not a civil war situation. We have not reached that stage. Movements are being built; there are pockets and armed struggle areas. The CPI (Maoist), in its document, says that the Andhra Pradesh–Orissa border is a special guerrilla zone. Telangana was a special guerrilla zone, but there has been a setback there. Dandakaranya is a strong guerrilla zone; we visualize it as a base area. In Jharkhand, there are special guerrilla zones, which in time may become a base area. But they do not use the word civil war even in places where the movement is very strong and where there is hegemony of the party. In Adivasi areas, no people are involved against the Naxalites. The media is calling Chhattisgarh a civil war area, and Salwa Judum is created by the government for use against Adivasis. It is not that Adivasis are there voluntarily in Salwa Judum. They are forced to be in Salwa Judum. Even the SPOs (special police officers) who are given Rs 1,500 and appointed by the government are not voluntary. Once they are given a free choice; they will go over to the forest and certainly will not continue in the Salwa Judum. So even in Chhattisgarh, the media and the government want to depict it as a civil war saying that Adivasis are fighting against the Naxalites; of course, Adivasis are being used to kill Adivasis, but that does not mean it is a civil war. It is a class war. In fact, it is a class struggle against the

exploiting classes, the ruling classes, particularly the comprador stooges of MNCs and imperialism.

Such movements do exist in the backward areas. When we say backward, they are not inherently backward, but they are kept backward deliberately by the comprador class because uneven development is one characteristic of imperialism. For the First World and the Second World to flourish, there should be a Third World. For metro cities to flourish, there should be very backward surrounding rural areas. For a major male, there should be subservient women and children. There is no equality. This kind of uneven development is a characteristic of imperialism. That is why areas are kept backward – like Telangana for coastal Andhra, Vidharbha for Maharashtra, Dandkarnya for certain places in Madhya Pradesh. After the Bolshevik and the Chinese revolutions, Lenin himself has said that it was like a cycle chain. You can cut it where it has become weak. You apply this principle; the Chinese Revolution has applied it too. A long-term, protracted agrarian revolution in China realized and decided to choose very backward areas. In every aspect, the radical movement here is agrarian revolution. In agricultural field, you have to get down somewhere. You will choose a place convenient to you, an area kept backward deliberately. For a guerrilla war or an agrarian revolution, it will be advantageous to you and disadvantageous to the enemy. Village is a strong place for the revolutionary movement because people there are engaged in agriculture while city is headquarters of the enemy. So you start from the village, tapping into the landless poor and the agricultural labour, to the middle class and the middle peasant. Landlords, who were socially boycotted, ran away from the village. Liberate the villages, one by one. Finally, the revolutionaries will capture the city. So that is the method. Naturally, for the enemy, it is at a distance. He cannot reach. For revolutionaries, they live among the people.

Q. You have remarked that the radical Left is indeed a parallel power . . .

A. I never use the word 'Left'. I always use 'radical' or 'revolutionary'. Left has become an obscure word today because the Left has left its communist moorings and joined parliamentary parties. I don't know if I have used words like parallel power. Of course, in certain areas, Gram Rajya Committees were formed, particularly in Bastar, North Telangana

district and Jharkhand. In Bastar, in 3,000 villages, Gram Rajya committees were formed. Why are they a parallel power? Just because they refused to pay taxes and boycotted elections? That is the time they exercised their hegemony and particularly after 1995, the CPI (ML) People's War special congress decided to offer an alternative development plan. After the 1991 new agrarian policy, people were opposed to imperialism, onslaught of landlords and so on. So people said let us give an alternate programme. So, an alternative development programme was given in the 1995 special congress of the CPI (ML) People's War Group. Till then, Party Unity had not joined the People's War. And that is where the Gram Rajya committees came up in the villages. Under the Gram Rajya committee, there would be a village development committee. Under the village development committee, there would be many other committees.

The programme of these Party-guided Gram Rajya Committees is to exercise political power and undertake minimum programmes, involving all the people, except the enemy, like the landlords who may not cooperate. These committees work towards land to the tiller, land reforms, irrigation water, drinking water, primary education, seeds, manure and so on. They even forced the government to give electricity. This is one thing that they (revolutionaries) cannot do. All other things, you involve the people and get work done. In other words, all powers to the people, all powers to the Gram Rajya committees. They have exercised their power, but after Salwa Judum and military actions, Naga battalion and all that, and encounter killings in North Telangana, their movement has slowed down.

Q. *In your visits to other parts of the country where similar situations exist – Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, parts of Maharashtra – is there a similarity of agitations you see, apart from different party lines?*

A. I have not visited much of Bihar and Jharkhand; I have visited Odisha and Maharashtra more than those states and it is true that similar agitations are happening there. In Odisha, the southern part of which is close to north Andhra (i.e. Malkangiri, Gajapati), there is a strong movement amongst the Adivasis. In Maharashtra, there is Gadchiroli and Sironcha. The radical Left influence exists in towns and cities like Mumbai. When it comes to anti-imperialist programme, anti-feudal

programmes, particularly in mass organizations, there are Maoist groups that are active. Even if there are differences among the parties, for example, CPI (Maoist) thinks that CPI (ML) Liberation is 'revisionist', but in mass organizations, we do not have any objections to working with CPI (ML) Liberation. Likewise in Andhra Pradesh, the CPI (Maoist) and CPI (ML) New Democracy have some skirmishes also. They call each other names but work in the mass organizations together, including on the cultural front. When it comes to anti-state and anti-imperialist programmes, in the legal and mass fronts, we have no problems working with anyone. Except those in power, we have no objections to work with anyone – Gandhians, Sarvodaya leaders, freedom fighters, we work with them – like the Mumbai Resistance. Recently, seven ML organizations together have protested against the Indian Social Forum; many such programmes have existed. Right from 1992, we are doing it.

Q. What is your opinion of Maoism in Nepal, where a political movement of the grassroots has scaled heroic heights? Is there something that Indian Maoists can learn from Nepal?

A. Yes, we do acknowledge that they have scaled heroic heights and that too within 10 years because I had been to Nepal in August 1995. In fact, when I was there for a week, there was great turmoil because Parliament was closed and they had petitioned the Supreme Court. Maoists were protesting in front of the King's Palace, and the Royal Army had attacked them and tried to kill Baburam Bhattarai. We were witness to it; my wife, Kanchan Kumar, and I were there to inaugurate a literary and cultural organization, which Krishna Kumar had started. He is no more now and is a martyr. During that time, we met Prachanda and Baburam Bhattarai. Immediately after, they started the armed struggle. Till then, they were legal or semi-legal, but we were able to meet them. Within 10 years, they could liberate 43 among the 80 or 83 districts in Nepal, could make the government come for talks – a big achievement for them. At the same time, in terms of the topography, politics and other things, there are many differences between India and Nepal. Historically and topographically, the two are very different. Nepal can at best be compared to the Dandakaranya area. No access, no transport, no communication system to those areas that are 'liberated'. That is one thing. India has a very strong Parliament. In Nepal, the government worked

at the will of the king. It has a weak Parliament. During Naxalbari-Kherebari, the formation of ML party had taken place in Nepal, influenced by the Naxalbari movement; they accept Charu Mazumdar as their leader and are deeply influenced by the Mao thought. Now it is called Maoism also.

Interestingly, when I went to Nepal, I saw that the people had faith in Pashupati, the Hindu god and Marxism-Leninism, both at the same time. A typical admixture. It is not a strange thing in Nepal that someone who utters Marxism-Leninism and Maoism is also a devotee. You can be a Hindu, you can be a Maoist – maybe because of its neighbourhood, China and Naxalbari (in India) and the country itself being a Hindu state. That's why ML people have joined the Parliament and they have become ministers as well. There is nothing new in that. This is so because without a kind of social transformation, these things are accepted. Likewise, the Parliament is there, but at the will of the monarch. Take the case of the Royal army. The concept in a country like Nepal is that a neighbouring country will not attack it. If it attacks, Nepal cannot protect itself. It maintains good relations with neighbours and that is why an army is needed only to protect the king from its own people, maybe. But since people had faith in the King, that problem did not arise. After Gyanendra, it may have come, but it was not there earlier. A kind of understanding like between the English king and the people was there. The army in Nepal is not used for war; that is why they could not do anything. Whereas the Indian army has fought and lost with China, it can always win against Pakistan. For that matter, we have a strong and dangerous army. Of course, it is controlled by the Parliament, so there can be no comparisons between the two armies.

Basically, the Indian police is stronger than the Nepal army. The training, which the Indian police got in the early days of Naxalbari (in West Bengal), in Punjab, and particularly after the 1980s in Andhra, when they created the Greyhounds when people like M.V. Narayan Rao, Vijay Rama Rao, K.S Vyas, H.J. Dora, Arvind Rao and such others trained the Andhra police and Greyhounds. Now these police forces go to Bengal and even to Nepal to train the police there to attack the Maoists. So, the presence of such a strong police force here, the communications system and the Parliament, the centralized force – all these things are different from Nepal.

The sacrifices they (revolutionaries) made were momentous – 16,000 people killed within 10 years. In the 40 years of struggle, 16,000 people were not killed here. So certainly their willpower, their sacrifices and their fighting spirit have to be emulated. At the same time, there is a difference that one has to understand. In today's concept you have to ask, multi-party system is not acceptable here, going for elections is not accepted here because for the Indian revolution, the two main dangers are the caste system and the Parliament. This was not the case with the Chinese Revolution. Though Russia had a Parliament, it was not as strong as in India. Lenin once joined there and later did not join, but the Parliament was not as strong there. So these are the two challenging tasks for the revolutionary movement there. Caste is one. There was no caste problem in China and Russia; of course, Russia had the nationality problem, and India too has a nationality problem. We have a caste problem, a nationality problem and the Parliament.

Q. Prachanda had once said that Indian Maoists appeared to have lost their way. Do you agree with this formulation?

A. If he has said that, I don't agree. Whether these were his words or the media reported it, I do not know. If he says that Indian Maoists have lost their way, I don't agree at all. Nepal's conditions are different. Nepal's situation is different. Even in those conditions, even in those situations, if he chooses multi-party democracy and joins the Constituent Assembly, I think it is not acceptable. I don't think the whole party and the cadre of people have accepted it there. I see in the media that Dalits are objecting to it, women are objecting to it, others are objecting to it, so problems are there. The contradiction lies here. Categorically, the Maoists say they oppose the monarchy. At the same time, they say that the people want monarchy; they are willing to accept even a nominal monarchy. That is the issue. Before Gyanendra, when Birendra was the King, he was only a titular head. Parliament got some recognition. When you started, you started with a class struggle for a new democratic revolution. Only for this new democratic revolution, you need Maoism. See that there is no monarch. Or for a multi-party democracy, you need not have Maoism for that. When you have chosen Maoism, it means you have chosen it for class struggle and a new democratic revolution. Joining constituent assembly, opting for elections, coming into

multi-party democracy – I don't think is new democratic revolution. I don't think that it is guided by Maoism.

Of course, I am not here to comment on Nepal. It is their problem and their situation. At the same time, I expect that Prachanda also must concede that whatever the CPI (Maoist)'s stated path there is, it is their problem, their issue, they are better judges than Prachanda because I have seen in the media that Nepali Maoists say they have no relation with Indian Maoists except at the political level and at the same time, he said that there is no corridor, it is myth. This is true. When you accept it as true, only as Maoists they have political solidarity, nothing else. In which case, one need not interfere into the other's issues.

Q. Do you have fraternal connections with Nepalese Maoists? Our experts talk of a 'revolutionary corridor beginning in Pashupati and ending at Tirupati'.

A. As you said fraternal connections, yes. As for the revolutionary corridor, it is only the media or the experts who talk about it. In fact, Indian Maoists have also said that there is nothing like a corridor. Interestingly, it is because the multinational companies want to build a corridor from the North East to the South into Kerala forests to explore the mines in the forest and to exploit the cheap labour in the forests in Jharkhand, Orissa, Chhattisgarh, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. You want to create a corridor for multinational corporations, so you say that the Reds, the revolutionaries, are building a corridor from Nepal to say Kanyakumari. All false propaganda, there is nothing like that.

Q. As a newspaper and then a magazine reporter who has covered Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh, I can say that in some parts, feudal violence that occurred frequently in the past appears to have gone down due to the pressure of Naxalites. Would you agree?

A. Yes, that is true. Even in Bihar, where they have organized many kinds of *senas* – Bhoomihar Sena, Brahmarishi Sena and so on – have all disappeared. Interestingly, now the state has stepped into it. In Andhra Pradesh there has been a spate of encounter killings. Your question has it. Encounter killings in Bihar and Jharkhand have been less; state repression is lesser than compared to Andhra Pradesh because recently, till the formation of CPI (Maoist), the main conflict was between the landlord *bhoomihars* and the grassroots masses

under the leadership of MCC or other revolutionary parties. The same was the case in Andhra Pradesh between 1978 and 1984–85. From 1985, landlords receded into the background or ran away to towns or gave up lands and read the writing on the wall. Now the state is doing what has to be done for the benefit of the landlords and the compradors. I think that situation will come in Jharkhand and Bihar as well.

Q. How close is the Naxalite ideal to the classical Maoist one? Critics say that there was an original Mao Tse Tung thought, which has now been elevated to the level of an 'ism' – Maoism. Do you see any contradiction between the two?

A. No. After all, the Naxalite movement is the outcome of the Great Chinese Proletarian Cultural Revolution of 1966. Charu Mazumdar had described it as the Third World Revolution. The Bolshevik Revolution, the Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Cultural Revolution have all influenced the Indian revolutionaries. So that was the influence. The Naxalite and Srikakulam movements were based on that; that's why there is an intellectual participation, a writers' participation there. Right from the beginning they called it the Mao Tse Tung thought; now the parties realize that it was actually Mao's era. Because today's Maoism is Marxism-Leninism. Yes, there is no contradiction.

Q. Has the Maoist Naxalbari movement in India taken roots in the absence of any organized Left in the rural sector?

A. Yes, in the absence of any organized Left in the rural sector, as you said. One is in 1964, United Communist Party of India was split and CPI (M) was formed and the people pinned their hopes on it taking them to class struggle. All the development programmes that Jawaharlal Nehru and the Congress party took under his leadership were slowly coming to be known as futile programmes. If you call it a socialist pattern of society, cooperative agriculture, five-year plans, though imitated the Soviet Seven-Year Plans and all that, mixed economy was a name in which public sector units were given to Soviet Russia and East Europe and the private sector to America, Japan and other Western countries. Many people were not satisfied with this. Before that, the Indo-China war took place, which not just the communists but people like Sunderlal

and Maxwell have called India's China war and not Chinese aggression. While they thought that the Communist Party was slowly becoming nationalistic and chauvinistic, CPI (M) was born. Then a broad debate ensued between those who were only blaming India, because Chou En Lai had placed many alternatives before Nehru who did not accept any of them due to pressure from the conservatives. All these things were there. It is part of history now.

So people, naturally, expected the CPM to take them to class struggle. It did not take place. Not just that. One interesting thing had taken place in 1967. In the general elections results, a kind of anti-Nehru feeling had arisen. In 1964 Nehru died and the CPI-CPM split took place in the same year. Till then, the communists were pinning their hopes on Nehru. Nehru died and the Communist Party also was divided.

By 1967, Indira Gandhi had become the prime minister. In the same year, the discontent against the Nehru family's rule had started simmering all over the country. People like Acharya Kripalani, Ram Manohar Lohia, Rajaji, Minoo Masani and many others were gaining prominence. Some of them were conservatives, some of them socialists, but together, all of them planned to see that the Nehru family rule ends. There were united electoral fights against the Congress party, and in nine states, non-Congress governments were formed. This is an interesting development. Among these nine states, Bengal was one. In Bengal, when Ajoy Mukerjee came out of the Congress party, he formed the Bangla Congress. With him, the CPI (M) had a united front. And in the elections, he won five seats of the so-called Left Front; CPI and CPM won 80 seats. On account of their pre-election understanding, Ajoy Mukerjee became chief minister and Jyoti Basu, the deputy chief minister and also home minister. Before elections, the promise of CPI (M) was that there are six lakh hectares of land in the hands of the jotedars or the landlords. If we come to power, we will take away that land and distribute it among the Adivasis and landless poor. In fact, Charu Mazumdar's own line had come from this. This was the promise. During that period, Charu Mazumdar was the Siliguri divisional secretary of the CPI (M) in the Darjeeling district. This was not Charu's line but the line promised by the CPI (M) during elections. Charu had made a survey of surplus land and based on that, CPI (M) may have made this promise.

After the CPI (M)'s promise and the beginning of the election campaign, Charu Mazumdar wrote eight historical documents – Occupy

the land, display your power in the villages, organize the village panchayats and all powers to the people. He wrote these eight documents. Immediately after the elections and since the CPI (M) had promised it during the campaign, Santhals forcibly occupied lands in Naxalbari and Kheribari – 10,000 hectares of land; 10,000 people came and claimed that the land belonged to them. This was 23 May 1967. Till 25 May, they remained on that land with their bows and arrows – primitive weapons. Finally on 25 May, Jyoti Basu called not just his police force but also the CRPF [Central Reserve Police Force] and fired upon the crowd, where seven women and four children died. That is the beginning of Naxalbari. So when you say that there is no organized Left, the answer is both yes and no. People like Charu Mazumdar were in it, Kanu Sanyal was in it, Jungal Santhal was in it. Since it was their party which was making the promise, they were just implementing it. But they did not know that the promise would be a hoax after coming to power. So the question is not whether there was any organized Left but that there was no intention of the Left parties to take up grass-roots issues. The cadre that thought it was a revolutionary party was disillusioned and came out and organized the class struggle. That was Naxalbari.

Of course, people had come out of the Left – people like Kanu Sanyal and Charu Mazumdar – but those who struggled on the land were freshers, that is the Naxalbari generation. You cannot say that the CPI (ML) is a split-away group of the CPI (M). No. Only some people like Kondapalli Sitarammiah, Chandrapulla Reddy and Nagi Reddy came from the CPI (M) but the whole cadre, the youth, the new generation came to be known as the Naxalbari generation.

Q. The Naxalite movement is far too split, too incoherent to formulate a single party line. What is the future of such a political movement?

A. That the Naxalite movement in India is far too split is true of the 1970s, particularly after 1972. It was incoherent also but since the 1990s, efforts are on to make it a single party and the future of the political movement, as I earlier said, is in founding a single CPI (ML) – unless a Bolshevik party was found, the Bolshevik revolution could not have taken place in Russia. Similarly, an Indian revolution is possible only under a single, united revolutionary party. And I think, revolutionary

parties are going ahead with that goal. Now unity is the central trend in the twenty-first century.

Q. Despite the changes that Maoists have brought about, like providing a degree of self-respect and relative security to low-caste landless labour, mainly through sustained use of violence and agitation in the countryside, the larger stranglehold of the big kulak or rural capitalist, may not have diminished.

A. No, the power of the rural capitalist is diminishing, particularly in places like Andhra, they have shrunk into the background. Now their interest is being served by the state. In fact, V.S. Naipaul, when he came to visit me, asked me whether I had seen the class struggle as a boy – then Nizam's rule and now Chandrababu Naidu's reforms of which he was a supporter – and what difference I saw between the two? Give me in single word, he said. Nizam used to exercise all powers. During the Nizam's time, there was a landlord called Ramachandra Reddy. He had a big fort. The administration used to be in the fort itself. The government-appointed sub-inspector used to have his police station in the landlord's fort itself. If anything occurred in the village, they had to first report to the landlord and not to the police station. The landlord would decide what was wrong and what was right. He would fine both the parties and keep the deposit for himself; both the parties had to pay, whether it was just or not. Whoever he found at fault would be handed over to the police. There too, his men would come and beat the supposed culprit. The landlord was legislature, executive and judiciary – all rolled into one. This was the situation when I was a boy – 60 years ago.

Now the situation is that all powers are vested in the state. There is no independent judiciary, legislature or executive. On one hand in the villages, landlords have read the writing on the wall and agreed to give away their lands. In fact in 1990, a very interesting thing took place. I am talking about 1978 when a collector issued orders that land reforms should be implemented on a war footing. This is one instance. Then Chenna Reddy was the chief minister and he declared some districts to be 'disturbed areas'. On 6 May 1990, the Rhythu Coolie Sangam conference was held in Warangal. Nearly 14 lakh people attended that conference. In 1989, there was severe repression; about 16,000 TADA cases were slapped. Intellectuals like S.A. Rauf, Balgopal and me were put under TADA. TADA cases were slapped against peasants and students.

Like Latin America, there were cases of 75 missing people. There were encounter killings. Unforeseen repression existed during NTR's regime – 1985 to 1989. When NTR lost the elections, there was a huge upsurge again. During NTR's years, Gaddar and Jan Natya Mandali, who were underground, came out. When we organized meetings, lakhs came to Nizamabad, Karimnagar, Adilabad, Indravelli – all the places. Finally in May 1990, for the Rhythu Coolie Conference in Warangal, 14 lakh people came. Rhythu Coolie Sangam was formed in 1981 and was attended by A.K. Roy. In 1983, it held its Karimnagar conference. Their third conference was to be held in Rajahmundry in 1985 but it could not take place. It took place in Warangal in 1990.

That conference declared that, as per the government's own regulations, surplus land fixed to the ceiling, that is anyone holding more than 54 acres of land, has to be occupied. The revolutionary movement had gone a step ahead. Now we say that any land held by absentee landlords can be occupied because ceiling does not matter. If he leaves his land here and lives in a city, you can occupy his land because he is not tilling his land. He is an absentee landlord. Living in towns, he is doing the work of informer to the state. Let him be amongst his people if he has to cultivate land. In certain areas, 20 acres of land is enough for a landlord. The Gram Rajya committees will decide how much land he needs. If he has another profession – if he has another agency or a factory, he need not have land also. So we will categorize. It is not a blanket order saying we should have 54 acres of land. It will depend upon the village, the situation of women, the situation of organization, etc. So occupy the land.

Interestingly when V.P. Singh was prime minister, he declared in Delhi that we must make laws that give scope for those who till land. The news that 14 lakh people attended the Warangal meeting had reached Delhi as well. Immediately after the meeting, I was coming from Warangal to Hyderabad, some 145 km apart, the entire roadside and the vast fields were awash with red flags. In Warangal district – I come from there – all landlords had agreed to give up surplus lands. Not just surplus lands but whatever agriculture labourers were asking for, the landlords were ready to give up. And hundreds of people have come up with stamp papers petitioning the courts to transfer the lands in the names of tenants, landless poor and agriculture labourers. In 1990, I turned 50. My former classmates and contemporaries were landlords in my district. All of them came to me with stamp papers saying, 'we are ready to part with

our land. We will go to the court in Warangal, we do not have any quarrel with you.' One landlord in a village called Raghavapuram, which is near my village, and one Christian missionary, who had 60 acres of land in Janagaon town – only these two people – complained to the police that radicals had occupied their lands. No one in the district was willing to oppose us and everyone was quite keen on a compromise.

Interestingly, from January 1990 to September 1990, nine months, there were no encounter killings in Andhra Pradesh. Meetings were permitted. By September, they slowly started their repression because people were occupying lands and landlords were threatened. A near Red rule was enforced. In the beginning of 1991, a government order was issued that all the land transactions that took place in 1990 and 1991 – even if they had been taken in courts – are null and void. See the difference. In 1978, the collector issues an order that land reforms should take place on a war footing. In 1990, the chief minister issues a government order that all transactions that took place in 1990–91, even if they were done in courts, stand null and void. This is the change in the attitude of the government.

Vara Vara Rao was interviewed in September 2007 in New Delhi.

BINAYAK SEN

‘Development has to be a political process’

Binayak Sen, national vice-president of the People’s Union for Civil Rights (PUCL), is India’s best-known human rights activist. He is a trained paediatrician, public health specialist and activist. He is the recipient of several awards, including the Jonathan Mann Award, the Gwangju Prize for Human Rights and the Gandhi International Peace Award. He was convicted on charges of sedition by a local court and his appeal is pending at the High Court. Binayak Sen originally started working as a paediatrician, extending health care to poor people in the rural-tribal areas of the Chhattisgarh, doubling up as a human rights activist. While Sen has worked with the state government on health sector reform, he has also strongly criticized the government on human rights violations during the anti-Naxalite operations, while advocating non-violent political engagement. In May 2007, he was detained for allegedly supporting the outlawed Maoists and violating the provisions of the Chhattisgarh Special Public Security Act 2005 (CSPSA) and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act 1967. Sen first applied for bail before the Raipur sessions court and then the Chhattisgarh High Court in July 2007, soon after his arrest but was granted bail by the Supreme Court of India only on 25 May 2009. In 2010, he was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment by Raipur Sessions Court for sedition and helping Naxalites to set up a network to fight the state. He was granted bail on 15 April 2011 by the Supreme Court of India, which gave no reason for the order. Sen has filed an appeal before the Chhattisgarh High Court and the case is still pending. In this interview, Sen

reflects on his detention, his years spent working for the poorest of the poor as a practicing medic and someone who supports the cause of non-violent peaceful talks with the Maoists, urging the government to listen to their side of the story – something that has not happened till date. He especially delves on nutrition, his area of specialization, to show that despite much of India shining, there are even larger parts of the country that are not.

Q. Comrade Binayak Sen, your term in prison between May 2007 and April 2011 marks a heroic phase in the chapter on human rights struggle and triumph. What were your own feelings?

A. There was a national – in fact, international campaign – which saw unprecedented levels of participation from sections of society that normally do not get involved in such issues. And I am extremely grateful for that campaign because that is why I am sitting here today. The fact is that I was convicted and given a life sentence by the trial court; the Supreme Court has now given me bail and suspended my sentence, which is why I am sitting here talking to you. I think we need to realize that there is a major problem; there are people who are incarcerated for years without any proper justification with fabricated cases put up against them. The entire judicial process is complicit in this business of validating ascribed identities and then targeting them – that is something of a phenomenon on such a scale that my personal happiness can only have so much significance. What is important to realize is that there is a much bigger phenomenon and everyone has to articulate for themselves their own positions in this discourse and what they intend to do about this particular issue. Without that, my release would not have been considered successful.

Q. The public outcry and national and global support – which included the likes of Aruna Roy, Jean Dreze, Noam Chomsky, 40 Nobel Award winners and staff of your alma mater Vellore Christian College, protests on the streets led by Sharmila Tagore and Aparna Sen – calling for your release gives hope to the human rights movement in this country. How positively do you see this development?

A. There is a confrontation; I think there is a fascist streak going through our society today and in response to that, there is a course of

resistance and justice that is developing. So this is a marker in that confrontation. I think that the challenges of human rights that we are confronted with are far too grave. We need to celebrate this, if not as a victory then as an achievement. At the same time, as I said before, the human rights challenges that confront us are of such massive proportions that we need to set our eyes on the true dimensions of the challenges. I do see it as positively as I can but there are other markers. For instance, there is the Niyamgiri judgement and the process that has put the Vedanta acquisition on hold. That is something that we all need to celebrate but at the same time, there are so many massive challenges that we are confronting that we have to be conscious of the dimensions of the task before us.

Q. When we look at the history of the charges made against you, do you think there is the need in law to re-define charges like sedition? At the moment, such as it exists, it has a rather wide ranging outreach. I ask this question because the basic laws governing the country, the Indian Penal Code (IPC), is of 1860 vintage and has seen no significant additions in the last 153 years.

A. I am not a lawyer so I cannot talk about the IPC as such. I think the phenomenon in which a colonial power hands over the reins of the administration to its Indian coordinates; this is a very problematic exercise in itself and the legal and judicial consequences of that do need to be thought about carefully; but since this is not my subject, I would not like to talk about it. At the same time, what I would like to talk about is this law of sedition, for instance, it is a real shame that a country which professes to be a democratic country should have a law like sedition on its books because Gandhi was convicted on sedition charges; in fact, he was given six years in prison whereas I was given a life sentence. He was released after two years because he developed appendicitis while in jail and he was operated upon, and after that, he was allowed to stay at home. Tilak was indicted for sedition not once but several times but look at what is happening in our country today. We have movements in which thousands of people have been charged under sedition; in the Kudankulam movement, which is absolutely peaceful; it is their right to oppose the decision of the government. But there are thousands of people in Kudankulam who have been charged with sedition. This is ridiculous. Sedition charges are supposed to be laid only after specialized application

of mind by senior people in the administration. Is the government trying to tell us that senior people in the administration applied their minds to the cases of sedition against these 3,000 people? This is a complete outrage in terms of the law. So as far as law of sedition is concerned, People's Union for Civil Liberties and many of my other colleagues' and human right organizations in the country have made attempts to get this law repealed. As long as this law and other similar laws remain on our statute books, we can only call ourselves a democratic society with a bitter smile.

Q. During your time in prison, did you see other activists like you arraigned on various charges?

A. I would not like to go back to jail if at all possible. But I learnt a lot of things while I was in jail. And one of the very important things I learnt while talking to several prisoners is that there were hundreds at least in the Raipur jail, behind bars on charges that were absolutely similar to the charges that had been put against me and who had no national or international campaigns for their release and did not even know properly what the charges were against which they were accused. So while I am happy and grateful for being out of jail, until we can address the problems of people who are in jail on these charges, it does not mean much. Also, the people are in jail because the way in which the society is constructed and people live their lives in this society, makes so many of these so-called criminal activities almost inevitable. Starting with people fighting over bits of land which are their only resource and in which people confront one another, makes it appear that the state is not responsible for this confrontation. Meeting such people and hearing about their life stories – so many of my fellow prisoners honoured me by telling me about their intimate problems and their life stories – was a real privilege for me and a real learning experience. I met many people who were in a similar condition as me.

Q. Tribals illegally confined in Chhattisgarh jails continue to languish, despite the issue receiving traction during the kidnapping of Sukma collector, Alex Paul Menon in April 2012. A high-powered committee set up by the state government has released only one prisoner till date. How much is denial of justice a factor in the anger of Adivasis not merely in Chhattisgarh but in other states as well?

A. Yes, there were certain negotiations that were carried out and I know only what appeared in newspapers. I have no privileged information about any of these processes, except that certain very senior human rights workers who one has known over the years were involved in that process. In fact, the government has not kept its share of the bargain and it has consistently reneged on carrying out whatever it has undertaken in the course of peace and other similar negotiations and this is also the experience of the Andhra peace talk process. So, it is natural for people to question the utility of such negotiations over a long term. Unless all the parties take part and do so in good faith, long-term results are not going to be available. And not just that: every failed process makes it difficult for the next process to achieve success. So it is a very sad development that is happening.

Q. How severe is state repression in areas that are deemed Naxalite? In states like Andhra Pradesh, for instance, the government crackdown in the last couple of years has been severe and there have been many cases of gross violations of human rights.

A. I only know what I read in the newspapers and what I hear from the people but the government has killed activists who were taking part in this confrontation. These kinds of approaches to the problems can only be short term. If you take a sufficiently long-range view, it is not going to solve the problem because the real issue is the problem of survival of these communities and if this problem remains unaddressed, nothing will change. Moreover, unless the kind of divisions that are being perpetuated in productive forces in society are addressed, things will remain the same.

Q. There are fears that a separate Telangana will boost Naxalite presence in the proposed state with most of its 10 districts badly affected. What are your views?

A. That question is obviate because the government has already taken a decision to grant statehood to Telangana. I am not qualified to talk about the nature of the Naxalite movement in these districts but the decision has already been taken so now, they have to go ahead with the processes of carving out the Telangana state. The decision has been taken in the Union Cabinet to go through this process so whatever the

formalities are, will be gone through as and when the powers that be consider it possible to do so.

Q. You have always backed peaceful talks with militant groups. How complex is that process? Elsewhere in this book, Vara Vara Rao talks in detail about how every round of meeting between officials and (so-called) Maoists in Andhra Pradesh about a decade ago would begin with suspicion and end up with no results, acrimony and more encounter deaths.

A. I have been very much interested in this whole process of negotiating peace and why it is necessary and how it can be done. This is so partly because I consider K.G. Kannabiran who was president of the PUCL and whose memory is a great resource for us and also people like Professor Hargopal who have participated in the Andhra peace process. I consider them as my mentors and whatever interest I have taken in this whole matter of Naxalite organizations and the nature of the state, it has been actuated mainly by the hope that one could also initiate similar processes of peace making in other areas of the country. So, I am very interested in this whole process of trying to negotiate peace talks but the processes that have occurred so far have led to a very bitter fruit. So, people who have staked their lives in these processes will be discouraged by the results that have emerged thus far.

I cannot see any way of resolving these tensions without going through the process of peace negotiations. So, if it is an inevitable requirement, the sooner we meet it the better it will be for the participants. But the point is that this does not seem to inform the kind of action that we see, the kind of threads guiding the action of the party people involved in these processes. But, at this point of time, there seems no way to take things ahead.

Q. This entire spiral of violence and counter-violence – socially and economically, how does it make a difference?

A. I think that the way in which the Maoist problem is being posed by the state is fundamentally flawed and I would like to go into it. One of the things that actuated me in my professional life has been my interest first in poverty, inequity and justice and in particular, the nutritional consequences of these social determinants. The World Health Organization (WHO) has come out with a report on the social determinants

of health, which it says are the prime determinants of the health of any community or population. So, we are now back in an era when the problems that confront us are the same as what Friedrich Engels talked about were the conditions of the working class in England. We have now reached a situation where a significant section of the people of India is actually making considerable progress in their prosperity. And it is not a small proportion; it is a fairly significant section of the entire population.

But there is an even bigger section of the population who is not just remaining static but whose position is actually deteriorating. And my particular interest in nutrition tells me that half of our children – that is half of our infants below one year up to the age of five – between 45 and 50 per cent of all these categories are malnourished; that is as far as children are concerned. Half of the deaths that occur in children below the age of five are associated with malnutrition. What I would also like to emphasize is that for adults, we have a body mass index as a ready reckoner of the nutritional status, which is easy to measure and easy to calculate. We find that large sections of the adult population are malnourished. WHO says that any community or section of the people in which more than 40 per cent of the population has a body mass index of below 18.5 should be considered as a population in famine. Now, if we look at the National Institute of Nutrition (NIN) figures, roughly 36 per cent of the total adult population is already living in a state of malnutrition; their body mass index is below 18.5. If you take special sections like the Integrated Tribal Development Areas (ITDA) areas, data shows that 40 per cent of the men and 49 per cent of women have a body mass index of below 18.5. These are the shocking realities. This implies that there are large sections of populations who are unable to meet even minimum calorific requirements.

Apart from this, their diets are also deficient in every constituent that can be measured; the NIN is capable of measuring and for which they have recommendatory allowances. What are we dealing with here? We are dealing with a population that is living in chronic, stable famine. This section of the population is only able to survive because of its access to common public resources; water, land, biodiversity and knowledge and practice of biodiversity. All these resources are part of the common property that people are able to enjoy. Today, under the doctrine of eminent domain, all these common properties are being handed over

on a platter to corporates as part of the globalization programme. And this is putting the survival of all these communities under risk. And these people cannot be expected to acquiesce in their own destruction. So when these sections protest, or when they resist the process of expropriation, they are punished for their activities.

By labelling it as Maoism, then its resistance taken on an ensemble of appearances and rubrics; Maoism is just one of the forms that this resistance is seen in. But this process of labelling and creating an ascribed identity and attacking that identity for whatever reasons is something that is not going to solve the problem and it is going to make the problem worse for the communities that are already under stress as well as for the people who are pursuing this suicidal course for the country. And so, I think that wisdom would lie in trying to achieve a *modus vivendi* in which everyone can partake of justice and equity. So, talking about Maoism as some kind of esoteric phenomenon, that it is coming into a situation and creating structures, maybe that may or may not be true. But the point is that in this labelling, we have to recognize the more fundamental realities of the nature of the problem and address the problems as such. And trying to propagate state-based structures is something that is not going to solve the problem.

Q. *Do you see this conflict intensifying?*

A. Yes, I do see this conflict intensifying. Unless we are able to address, recognize and articulate the problem as it exists – doing that, in my view, is not going to be possible under the rubric of propagating state-based structures. I think we have to trust the processes of democracy and we have to try to propagate those democratic structures that enable greater control of people over their own destinies. And unless we make that possible, this confrontation is not going to go away; it going to get worse.

Q. *Salwa Judum continues to exist in Chhattisgarh despite court orders and a national outcry over the issue. Are the recent attacks on Congress leaders in Chhattisgarh and killing of police officers in Jharkhand a natural corollary of violence being used by organizations like Salwa Judum?*

A. As a human rights worker, I cannot approve or condone any kind of violence; so whether the violence is the violence of the state or it is the violence of non-state actors – all violence is anathema as far as

the issue of human rights is concerned. Having said that, unless we are able to recognize the problems as they exist on the ground, and address them adequately, this problem is not going to go away. In the case of Salwa Judum, the Supreme Court (SC) has proscribed it. It has ordered the disarmament of the armed cadres that were created in the process of Salwa Judum. Three days after the SC issued its orders, Mr Raman Singh, the Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh, in a public statement said that he would be reinstating all those special police officers (SPOs) who had been raised in the process of Salwa Judum in regular jobs in the police force. Out of 3,200 posts that were created in the course of putting in place the Salwa Judum, I think close to 2,000 were absorbed in the police.

Q. The Planning Commission is implementing the Integrated Action Plan (IAP) for 82 selected tribal and backward districts for accelerated development. The aim of this initiative is to provide public infrastructure and services in 82 Naxalite-affected/contiguous districts. The nature of major works/projects taken up by the districts under the IAP include construction of school buildings, school furniture, Anganwadi centres, drinking water facilities, rural roads, panchayat bhawans/community halls, godowns/PDS shops, livelihood activities, skill development training, minor irrigation works, electric lighting, health centres/facilities, ashram schools, construction of toilets, etc. Why do you think these are not working?

A. One would rather have programmes like the Integrated Action Plan than not have them. In the desperate situation like what we have in India today with huge number of poverty-stricken people, it is essential to have these programmes as they exist. But at the same time, we also need to recognize the political limitations of these programmes. Neither do these programmes have any element of local participation or control, nor is there any kind of local democratic politics associated with these. So, unless we are able to incorporate an element of localized democratized politics in these developmental processes, we are not going to achieve any long-standing improvement in the situation. Ultimately, development has to be a political process, it cannot be an administrative phenomenon based on flow of funds. In the 73rd and 74th amendments that have been made to the Panchayati Raj Extension to Scheduled Areas Act, we have the provision for decentralized

political participation in the developing processes, but unless those potentials are actually achieved in practice, the long-term benefits of these programmes would not be realized.

Q. In other words, you are saying that these plans are not working – or are they working?

A. No no, definitely they are working but only partly; for instance, the public distribution system – it is working to some extent. People are saying, for instance, that in Chhattisgarh, there is a very good public distribution system. Notable intellectuals like Jean Dreze have gone into the field situation in Chhattisgarh and said that it is working very well. Possibly true. But these are comments on the operational effectiveness of the programme. They do not even address the question of the benefits of the nutritional situation of the people. Now we have a Comptroller and Auditor General's (CAG) survey in Chhattisgarh, which says that 64 per cent of children in Chhattisgarh are malnourished. If the *chawal wala baba* [reference to Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Raman Singh] actually has such an effective public distribution system for the last so many years, then at least the children's programme would have been effective in reaching a large section of the population. But they are not. Gujarat too may have large sections of population who are malnourished. So the question is of inequity, and the question of justice; these are questions that have to be addressed directly, *sue generis*. They cannot be addressed through other programmes. Unless these questions are addressed on a political platform, you will not be able to secure the political involvement of the beneficiaries of the programme.

Q. The citation of the Jonathan Mann Award for Global Health and Human Rights, which you received in 2008, says: 'Dr. Sen's accomplishments speak volumes about what can be achieved in very poor areas when health practitioners are also committed community leaders . . .' Do you see yourself as a community leader?

A. No, in fact I repudiate this idea and the repudiation is not out of any great humility that I possess. It is a core belief that we have about the way in which programmes need to be conducted. We came to Dalli Rajhara (in Chhattisgarh) where there was a militant organization, and Chhattisgarhi working people who were trying to legislate a better life

for themselves while working in the iron ore mines of the Bhilai steel plant. And they were fighting against different forms of exploitation and expropriation. All this because they wanted to build a better society for themselves in the slums of Dalli Rajhara. There were 10,000 workers and an absolutely vibrant organization, men and women working equally in mines, which was extremely demanding work. They wanted to build a better life for themselves. We consider it as our privilege as professionals – and there were so many of us who came from all parts of India – to be able to join hands with these communities and work towards a better future. So the point is that primacy has to be given to the political process. The political process has to take the heat and it is the control of the people that validates this political process. Thereby, unless that validation is present, merely having charismatic leaders is not going to change anything.

Q. You have worked with the state government on health sector reforms. What was your experience?

A. In fact, there was a wide-ranging process of structural reforms in the health care system in Chhattisgarh and we were part of a committee that was formed basically to work out what we called the ‘mitanin’ programme and what subsequently came together as the accredited socialized activists or Asha. The concept of ‘mitanin’ was developed in this committee, which I was very happy to have participated in. The concept of mitanin, as we had developed it at that time, was of a person who would articulate the community’s quest for receiving primary health care as a right – as a person who would articulate this right to health care in the community in the face of available government services and would protest when this right was not honoured. In fact, in the initial stages, the mitanin did not mean anything and there were a lot of questions about why the mitanin was not paid. We had no intention of producing a voluntary worker. What we had intended was that once this person had qualified for the minimum training, then she would be paid out of the panchayat funds so that when she had to articulate the rights in the face of governmental negligence in the health care system, she should be in a position to do so and she should not have to confront in that situation people who were actually her bosses paying her salaries. So this is the reason why we wanted the mitanins to get their salaries from the panchayat system.

We also wanted that a defined set of protocols should be made available which would have mandatory status, standard treatment protocols and standard treatment guidelines, in which there would be diagnostic and therapeutic processes that would be specified in terms of entitlement that people were supposed to receive. This was supposed to be universally applicable. What we have today in the form of Asha is the community-level bureaucrat who actually performs all the bureaucratic functions that the government intends to carry out among the people. This was not something that was part of the original formulation. This is actually a betrayal of the original idea of the mitanin.

I had written about this issue long ago in an article titled 'The Myth of the Mitanin', which, among the people who were associated with the mitanin programme, caused considerable controversy. The point is that all these developmental programmes, including the health programme, have to be seen as political processes. Unless it is seen as a political process, unless it is seen as a process in which the community members themselves or through their representatives are able to exercise power over the way in which the programmes are run, the services are not going to improve.

Q. You were also part of the 40-member Planning Commission Committee on Health in 2011. Are you still involved? Did the forum allow you to push through some of your own ideas on health?

A. There has been a lot of controversy about this participation. The steering committee on health was not a powerful committee. It was supposed to ratify the recommendations of the high-level expert group on universalized health care, which it did. It had two meetings of four hours each, in which about 40 people participated. After the second meeting, we submitted our recommendations and that was the end of our involvement in the Planning Commission. There is one thing that is clear. I have not been appointed as any kind of official in the Planning Commission. The reason why it had become so famous was because Mr Raman Singh (Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh) made a big issue out of the whole thing and said he would not go to the Planning Commission as long as I was involved in it. This was perfectly OK with the Planning Commission because Mr Raman Singh was sending in his bureaucrats to the Commission to receive the funds that were due from that body and so, it made no

difference whether Mr Raman Singh was participating in that process or not. Now that I am no longer associated with the Planning Commission, the whole question has reached its natural resolution.

Now, coming to the question of what effect did the Planning Commission have – forget about the steering committee of which I was a member – the high-level expert committee was actually a sub-committee of the Planning Commission's health department itself; they had put out a printed set of recommendations which were extremely detailed. I don't agree with a lot of it but at least it was a serious attempt to engage with the health problems that affect the working people of India. But to actualize the recommendations of the high-level expert group would have required an increase in the government spending on health care from 1.1 per cent of the GDP to around 3 per cent of the GDP. Mr Montek Singh Ahluwalia rejected the recommendations of the high-level experts group on the pretext that resources were not available. More resources that are needed for this revolution in health care in India are actually given as tax breaks to many corporate entities in India today and similar amounts are also pardoned as non-performing assets for the bank loans given to the largest corporate houses. But for this programme, which would have provided health care to all the working people in this country, Mr Ahluwalia's claim that resources were not available – the legitimacy of that position is open to interpretation.

Q. What would you say about the legacy of Shankar Guha Niyogi?

A. I was working in the same organization as Shankar Guha Niyogi. He asked me to come and join the organization; that is why I joined. He had a huge impact on the lives of the workers and the life that workers had created for themselves in Dalli Rajhara mines attached to the Bhilai steel plant. These were very poor workers who were facing displacement. Under Shankar Guha Niyogi's leadership, they were able to usher in major improvements in their living standards and their cultural world as residents of Chhattisgarh. So, it was a great privilege for us to have worked with him.

Q. So in a sense, you are the inheritor of Niyogi's legacy . . .

A. I cannot claim that; that is for others to say. We are working according to our likes, whatever we were able to understand. In 1988, I had left

Dalli Rajhara to take my work elsewhere in Chhattisgarh. And since 1992, I have been working in the Dhamtari district along with my colleagues in an organization called Panther.

Q. Why is the Maoist movement only concentrated in the tribal areas of India? The Naxalite movement is mainly based in the tribal horseshoe belt, which also constitutes India's most mineral-rich areas: Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.

A. I am not privy to the internal cogitations of the Maoists but deprivations and displacement are also the greatest in these particular areas. My presumption – this is how I would like to see it – and what we read in the press is that the Maoists are planning to extend to other areas and so on. But I don't know the reality of these things because I am not, as I said, privy to their cogitations.

Q. Finally, what are your own thoughts on Maoism?

A. I am not a practicing Maoist. Neither am I a scholar of Maoism. My own thoughts about Maoism are not of any great consequence as far as the overall picture is concerned. Having said that, what I would like to stress is that under the rubric of eminent domain, under the rubric of globalization, huge communities of people in India are finding that their survival is at risk. The process of expropriation that the state is involved in, garnering the resources and handing them over to corporate entities, people are resisting these processes because their survival is at stake, the survival of their communities is at stake. Instead of trying to put labels on these processes, I think that the fundamental nature of these processes needs to be understood. We need to address these questions in an atmosphere of dignity, justice and equity. This is my understanding of the times and this is how I look at these questions.

Binayak Sen was interviewed in November 2013 in New Delhi.

Part III

MAOISM IN THE HIMALAYAS

PRACHANDA

‘To abolish feudalism and to abolish the feudal autocratic monarchy in this country, a price has naturally to be paid’

Pushpa Kamal Dahal, or Prachanda, is Nepal’s presiding Maoist deity. Between August 2008 and May 2009, he served as the country’s prime minister. For waging a guerrilla war for close to a decade from the shadows and apparently faceless, he comes in the league of great communist underground warriors, a sort of an Asian Fidel Castro or Che Guevara. His leadership, which was mostly conducted from behind the scenes, changed the face of politics in the tiny Himalayan kingdom for all times to come. He led the CPN (M) during the decade-long insurgency. Ultimately, elections were held in 2008 and the CPN (M) emerged as the strongest party. The Constituent Assembly of Nepal elected Prachanda as Prime Minister in August 2008. He resigned as Prime Minister on 4 May 2009 after his attempt to sack the army chief, General Rookmangud. In this rare interview conducted in Kathmandu, Prachanda reflects on the movement he led, the tactics he adopted to keep the war going and constant travels in hiding; it is a riveting manual for how best to wage war against the state. Prachanda talks about how the great mobilization took place, his relations with India and more importantly, Indian people, the souring of contacts with Indian Maoists and the uniqueness of the communist movement in Nepal.

Q. Sir, could you tell us about your journey from being the leader of one of the biggest underground movements in the world to finally heading the Nepal government in August 2008?

A. It is really very encouraging and a unique experience. We had to lead the insurgency for 10 long years to bring about revolutionary change in society and arrive at a comprehensive peace agreement and to participate in elections and lead the first republican government is something is very unique in its nature. I think that in a very short span of time, we have passed this transition period, from insurgency to peace and to leading the government. How far I understand the communist movement, the world history of the communist movement and the experience of the communist movement, this kind of experience is rare. Though there is a serious debate all over the world, particularly in the international communist movement over whether this is right deviation or is it something new? We are trying to understand and develop Marxism, Leninism and Maoism as we synthesize and this debate is going on. I feel that serious responsibility lies with our party to synthesize all the experiences of insurgency, peace process, leading the government and drafting a new Constitution according to the aspirations of the masses of people. This unique experience should be synthesized; we are in the process of synthesizing this experience.

Q. *In a sense, the victory of the CPN (M) and your own role in the decade-long struggle to change Nepal's basic political system falls in the category of those heroic communist leaders who have led revolutions like Mao, Fidel Castro, Che Guevara and others.*

A. In the communist movement, it has been established that a revolution cannot be repeated. Revolution can only be developed according to the concrete situation of every nation and every country. Therefore, the revolution that Lenin led in the Soviet Union cannot be repeated in the way of the Chinese revolution as Mao led the Chinese Communist movement. The same holds true for Fidel Castro and Che Guevara. Revolution has not been repeated; they had developed their own ideology, own political tactics and successfully led their revolutions. Accordingly, in our case also, we are having our own experience of applying the universal theory of Marxism to the concrete situation of Nepal and in that sense, we have achieved considerable success in abolishing the feudal monarchy and to create a tremendous political change in Nepal.

But we cannot say this is a victory of revolution; it is a process, a revolutionary process is going on and the form of struggle has changed.

We have not abandoned all the revolutionary cause, revolutionary aim and our objective of transforming the society in a revolutionary way – economic, political, cultural and all other aspects. The process is going on. My point is that in the experience of the entire history of the international communist movement and the history of the old revolution, we can see that every revolution develops its own unique ideological, political and tactical orientations. It is only then that it can achieve success. We achieved success in abolishing the feudal monarchy, creating a democratic atmosphere and moving forward with the revolutionary cause in a new situation. In that sense, we have achieved considerable success; it can be said. But I do not want to compare myself with Mao, Che Guevara and Fidel Castro. They had their own unique experience; they did a great job in leading their revolution and we are also trying to do our best, working according to the universal theory of Marxism.

Q. Yet in the modern age, when nation-states have leverage to modern communications and modern security systems, for such a political change as the abolition of monarchy to take place is no small achievement.

A. I think that all modern communication and development in science and technology and globalization of finance capital – all these things create their own complications and in a strange way, they also lead to positive atmosphere for revolution. These include both negative and positive aspects of the change that is going on in science and technology and imperialist finance capital. I think that any Maoist, any communist, should be sincere when analysing the concrete situation of the world and the dynamics of change that have occurred during the whole process of revolution and counter-revolution of the twentieth century. And we are now in the twenty-first century and the communist of the twenty-first century has the responsibility to synthesize all positive and negative experiences of the past. In that sense, our party and myself try to understand the dynamics of change that is going on all over the world and our own experience of the 10 years of people's war, what we exactly achieved and how soon our movement should be transformed in such a way that it does not perish, that it does not become the next example of failure of the revolution – like in Malaysia, in Burma, Turkey, Peru and elsewhere, so many countries of Latin America; we cannot afford to repeat the examples of failure.

We have to take the risk to lead the revolution in such a way that it does not perish but creates a new atmosphere, a new debate and discussion in the movement. In the sense of 10 years of people's war, we came to realize that in the conflict mode situation, our regional situation of South Asia, our own national situation, our own experience, we came to the conclusion that we should participate in the peace process. The basis of the power we gained in the rural areas and whatever we achieved through the sacrifices and bravery of our cadre – we needed to institutionalize it in such a way that we achieve some victory and on the basis of that victory, we can move forward again towards the revolutionary cause. In that sense we – my party and me – proposed to the parliamentary party to come to an understanding for an agreement against the feudal monarchy. In that sense, the parliamentary party previously did not understand the real dynamics of our proposal but later on, when King Gyanendra himself suppressed all political parties and took all powers in his own hands, then the parliamentary party realized that without the support of and agreement with Maoists, without supporting the Maoist proposal, it was not possible to regain power from the monarchy.

In that sense, India also played some role to create a conducive atmosphere for the understanding between the parliamentary party and the Maoist movement, our party. Ultimately in Delhi we came to a 12-point understanding between parliamentary party and Maoist movement. In essence, in content, the proposal was first forwarded by our party, put forward by myself, to create the requisite atmosphere and the right strategy for abolishing the feudal monarchy because it would be a tremendous political achievement in the history of our country. In that sense, I proposed it, ultimately to develop an understanding that was achieved. That led to such a situation that there was people's war and mass movement going on at the same time; it is something unique and very surprising. According to my knowledge, in the entire history of the communist movement, this kind of experience cannot be found.

We were attacking the district headquarters and army barracks; at the same time a peaceful mass movement was also going on. We instructed our supporters to participate in the mass movement as much as possible. Mr Girija Prasad Koirala was the leader of the parliamentary parties – seven political parties – and I was the leader of the Maoist party. There were frequent discussions and interactions. Even Girija Prasad Koirala

requested me to focus on attacks on particular districts, and only then will the monarchy be weakened. I also instructed Mr Koirala to continue the mass movement in a big way. In that sense, it was really a coordinated people's war and people's movement. They were coordinated in such a way that it cannot be considered a repetition of any previous event in history; it was something new – an initiative we had taken and this created an atmosphere for abolition of the monarchy and establishment of a federal republic. Therefore, this is a unique experience.

Q. Most experts, particularly in the West, had written off the communists until Nepal's revolution. Now there seems to be a rethink.

A. Exactly, this was because the communist movement was first initiated in Europe in developed capitalist countries like Germany, England and France. Later on, the movement shifted from Europe to Asia, particularly Russia. After that, it shifted to eastern countries like China and now the focus is on third world countries, particularly Asian countries because all the contradictions between working people and capitalist bourgeoisie have been sharpened in this area. Naturally, according to the law of development, it has been centralized in Asian countries and Nepal, which is located between giants, China and India, and all the contradictions are concentrated in this area. Therefore it is natural that the communist movement is more powerful in this area and here in Nepal, right from the beginning of the formation of the Communist Party, all ideological, political struggles have been waged and thousands upon thousands of Nepalese youth and intellectuals dedicated themselves for revolutionary change in this country against the feudal autocratic monarchy. This created a fertile land for the communist movement and now there is a big debate going on after our experience in Nepal as to whether it is correct or not. Will it lead to a revolutionary change, a new synthesis of ideology or not? The debate is going on. We have to wait and see for some time but I think ultimately we will be able to synthesize all the experiences of the Nepal revolution.

Q. Your own role as an underground leader for nearly a quarter of a century is regarded as charismatic. Your ability to coordinate and lead from behind-the-scenes is considered legendary. Even as late as 1990, your public profile was little known in Nepal. Was this deliberate?

A. It was all related to all our ideological, strategic and political line of the party. Just before the initiation of the war, I was not so underground. It was like semi-underground. When I was party member at that time, I was also a teacher at a high school in the Gorkha district and after that, I became a whole-timer of the Communist Party and I engaged in the underground ideological, political works. When I was elected as central committee member, I fully focused my attention to the philosophical and strategic issues related to the revolution. In that whole process of understanding, analysing and synthesizing our experiences, I came to the conclusion that for the time being, I shall be more underground; I shall not be exposed more than required as a public figure. I had to grandstand and keep my focus; only then could we secure our movement. If I had decided to expose myself in such a small country, then it would be very difficult to lead the insurgency and the war. Therefore, it was to some extent planned, according to our party line, according to the strategy of that time. Thus, it is quite natural that our line led me to the underground in an effort to focus my entire attention to leading the war, to understand the geography, culture, history and everything of Nepal, South Asia and the world. It led me to believe that for the time being, I should be underground clandestinely to lead the movement and when the situation changed, when we achieved considerable success, then we reached the conclusion that the time had come to expose ourselves and move forward in the peace process and now I am here.

Q. *Could you tell us a bit about your days in the underground, organizing the poor landless peasantry in Nepal and injecting into them the consciousness to change or even overthrow a political system?*

A. When I was underground, I developed a principle that I should not be stable or rigid in terms of my location. There should always be mobility; mobility inside Nepal, I should always be on the move. It is only then that I can secure my party and the leadership and create that atmosphere and lead the revolution. At the same time, mobility in terms of moving in India. India is a vast country and there are thousands and thousands of Nepalese workers who live there. So we developed a strategy to use the vast Indian territory and a huge number of Nepalese people to mobilize them. To live there in the underground, I needed to organize them and it was quite a positive experience. I was there during

10 years of people's war and moved around in more or less 10 to 15 states of India; from West Bengal, Delhi, Haryana, Punjab, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, everywhere. It was a very unique experience. Through that process, I came to understand not only the problems of Nepalese people working there but also the problems of Indian people: What Indian politics is doing and what is the real situation in India? It was very beneficial for me and time and again I was there in India and in Nepal, always mobile. And that experience is very unique. It is really interesting to understand.

Q. Did you have comrades in India to help you? After all, how else would you move around?

A. No. We had no connection with the Indian state; we only had a connection with the Indian people, Indian working people and Nepalese people. It is an open secret that we have a fraternal relationship with Indian Maoists. At that time, there were no Maoists; there was a People's War Group, MCC and we had fraternal relations with both these groups. It has been an important learning curve to understand the experiences of each other, to even see some technical aspects; but when we entered into the peace process, during that period the two groups had unified into CPI (Maoist). When they unified, we also played a positive role in encouraging them; we gave suggestions to unify the movement. This division will not help and our delegation participated in the first congress to establish the CPI (Maoist).

Q. Was it at Abuj Marh in Chattisgarh?

A. I think it was in Dandakaranya. I was not present there; my delegation was there. But when we developed the strategy of peace process here in Nepal, serious ideological debate started with the CPI (Maoist). They think that the line we were advocating was rightist opportunist revisionist line; we told them whatever they were saying was dogmatic because it was not suited to the Indian situation. This kind of debate erupted even before we entered into this discourse. Even when the proposal came, a debate erupted and when we entered the peace process, all our connections have been severed. We don't have any direct connection and they have openly criticized us as a reformist party and we are criticizing them as dogmatic and mechanical and sectarian party.

Q. How did this political transformation come about – the shift from underground to parliamentary or mainstream politics?

A. I think according to the norms and values we have achieved to develop and understand the system, directly it is not parliamentary politics. What we have decided to develop is a whole state on the basis of class, ethnicity, women and regional issues. These should be settled and this state will be a transitional state; it will not directly be a parliamentary state and it will not be a new democratic republic; it would be somewhere between them. This way we came to the conclusion that this kind of a transitional state would be represented by an elected constituent assembly, and whatever Constitution will be drafted by it, we will support it as the verdict of the people. Hence, this transition period is going on.

I don't believe that we have already entered into parliamentary politics because we are saying that there should be federal democratic state that can address the basic demands of marginalized people, workers, peasants, Dalits and *janjati*. The new state should address their basic demands. The debate is going on. And the form of governance should not be just a Westminster-like system. It should have a directly elected president; we are debating this issue. So we cannot say that we have already participated in the Parliament. This is a transitional state, constituent assembly is near, the debate over drafting a new Constitution is going on and it has not yet been decided as to who will ultimately win. This will be decided only after the Constitution is in place.

Q. On the questions of tactics, the once powerful Maoist movement of Nepal appeared to have split vertically. There seems to be little reconciliation over whether Maoists should participate in the liberal democratic processes of the country or choose to go back to the underground to wage the kind of struggle they had waged before coming to power.

A. This is, to some extent, natural. Although people have serious concerns and questions have been raised about the split of our party, as far as I am concerned, it is quite natural. A party of the insurgency, which led the people's war for 10 years and transformed itself into a peaceful and competitive party. Naturally there will be a serious ideological debate within the party. That debate has been raging, and some of our comrades did not understand the dynamics of the change going on. The failure of the revolutionary process after Mao's death – from Indonesia to Burma,

Malaya, from Latin American countries like Peru – what has happened is a series of failure of the revolution; what are the causes behind the failures? Our comrades did not understand and they tried to mechanically copy from the experiences of history. I tried to debate with them, I tried to convince them but I was not able to because it was natural that once they formed their own party, a new situation had arrived. They also realized that it was not possible to mechanically copy the revolution and it is also not possible without any new ideological development to continue the revolution. The one thing I must say to you is that now we are trying to redefine the party. We are trying our best to create that atmosphere and to put aside all the bitter experiences. All the negative experiences we are trying to set aside and we are trying to reunify the party.

Q. What about the defeat you suffered in the assembly elections?

A. It was really unexpected for us. Our party as a whole did not expect to be the third party in the assembly. There are so many internal and external causes behind it. Anyway, we summed up that it is a big blow for us – for our party and the movement. It is not a defeat in the war but a defeat in the battle. It is a political battle in which we suffered a major defeat but we will try to sum up this experience and move forward in the war, the political battle; it does not mean people's war. My meaning is political battle. We were defeated in the political battle but we think that in another battle, we will do well and reunify the party. We will lead the masses in such a way that we will get a major victory.

Q. The 10-year civil war claimed approximately 15,000 lives. Was violence inevitable in the scheme of things?

A. I think that to abolish feudalism and to abolish the feudal autocratic monarchy in this country, a price has naturally to be paid. People have to pay some price and make sacrifices to achieve victory. We think that during the period of the war, more than 15,000 people have laid down their lives and it was this sacrifice that created the possibility of abolition of the monarchy and enter the phase of federal democracy. In a political sense, it is a tremendous achievement that no one can deny. But the process has not been finished and we shall be fully alert to our final cause.

Q. Tell us a little about the future of Maoism in south Asia. In India, security experts believe that there is a revolutionary corridor that starts in south India and ends up here in Nepal. You are an old India hand.

A. The situation has changed somewhat. According to our analysis, South Asia is a very fertile land for revolutionary change for the communist movement. We are consistent in that ideological synthesis. But strategically, we will have to develop a new line on how to coordinate with each other; all the progressive, leftist and communist forces should come together to understand the dynamics of change that is going on all over the world. Without understanding or synthesizing all the old experiences, the so-called globalization and liberalization, it will be very difficult to fulfill the historical task of South Asian communists.

Q. What are the similarities and differences between the Maoist movements of India and Nepal?

A. Nepal is a small, landlocked, mountainous nation while India is a vast country. The population of Nepal and India cannot be compared. But there are many similarities; in their history, culture, and there is a uniqueness of South Asia that is common to Nepal and India. We have common concerns and basically a common understanding between the two countries. As far as the communist movement is concerned, the Nepalese communists try to understand Marxism in such a dynamic way that it should not be rigid and mechanical.

But in India we see that Maoists have not tried their best to understand the whole process of change and devise their strategy and tactics accordingly. There are some differences between Maoists in India and Nepal not only in this context but also in that when MCC and People's War were fighting with each other, killing each other, we were surprised that both parties are fighting for a communist revolution, for a new democratic revolution, but they are fighting with each other. We tried our level best to impress upon them that this will not help the country or the people. India is a vast country. To even negotiate with the government, you must have influence in the middle class or else you cannot move forward. That kind of debate was there.

Q. Is there any Indian radical Left leader who has impressed you?

A. In my youth, I had a dream for a revolution and I was very much influenced by Charu Mazumdar. His fighting against revisionism was impressive. There are so many leaders but I was very much impressed by him.

Q. *What, in your view, are the outstanding achievements of Nepal's Maoist movement? Importantly, how did it impact social relations in Nepalese society, particularly its rural areas which are poor, neglected and backward?*

A. Till now, the biggest achievement of the Maoist movement in Nepal is abolishing the feudal monarchy, creating a new atmosphere and the whole democratic change. The other is empowerment of the marginalized and depressed classes, Dalits and women, and ethnic groups in this unique democratic process of change that is going on. These are the major achievements of the Maoists in Nepal.

Q. *When in power, you recommended the abrogation of the 1950 treaty with India. Of course, there are people in Delhi who also believe that in the twenty-first century, such treaties have no real meaning. Nonetheless, it did spark off speculation about Nepal going closer to China. Your views?*

A. I think it is a very sensitive and strategic issue. From the time of British rule in India, particularly from the time of the 1816 Treaty of Sugauli, the process of unequal treaties has been initiated. According to our analysis, the 1950 treaty is the continuation of that tradition of unequal treaties. Therefore, we had demanded that all unequal treaties should be reviewed and changed and new treaties are required according to the dynamics of change that is going on in India and Nepal. According to that change, new treaties should be there. As first prime minister of the democratic republic of Nepal, I visited India to convey our concern about the 1950 treaty and all other treaties. Nepalese people have serious concern. That treaty was signed by the Rana regime, which was a very feudal, very autocratic rule. Therefore, people wanted to change it. There was a feeling that all these treaties should be reviewed.

The process has not moved forward but we think that all unequal treaties should be reviewed and new treaties should be there according to the aspirations of the people of India and the people of Nepal. As far as the question of China is concerned, with India we have an open border and a common history and culture and all kinds of things are

there. It cannot be compared with China. China has its own policies of non-interference; we did not have a big problem with China obviously because we did not have an open border with it; there was a huge Himalayan range. We have our own different cultures, languages and other things and there are no similarities. With India we have so many similarities; therefore we have so many problems. (Laughs) Anyway, we have started to settle all these issues in a very positive way, according to the aspirations of the people and the change that is going on all over the world. And therefore in that sense, I tried to put forward some sort of tripartite understanding between India, China and Nepal, and this will create a very positive atmosphere for political stability and economic prosperity of this region.

Q. Do you see yourself returning back to power in Nepal?

A. I think so. Although it is not an easy job but I think so because after summing up all the experience, we can assume the leadership of this country and we will move forward in a very unique way, not mechanically but very pragmatically and lead this country to economic prosperity and in the process of economic prosperity, we can create the ground for a socialist revolution.

Q. Your triumph over the monarchy is historic but the respect that monarchy has as an institution in the mind of the common man in this country is still quite huge. The Raja has had an important role historically in this country.

A. I don't think so. Traditionally, people had some sort of respect for the monarch. Till King Birendra was there, they had respect for the institution; the traditional and cultural people in Nepal were very much attached to the monarchy. But after the royal massacre (on 1 June 2001) took place where all of Birendra's family was killed, the process of understanding the monarchy and the palace has changed in the Nepalese people, and it has created a very positive atmosphere for all. I can say that some people, traditional people, after the abolition of monarchy, have been concerned with our inability to draft a Constitution. There are concerns about the political leadership because they believe that it is unable to provide stability and lead to economic prosperity as expected by them. Therefore, traditional people have found some room again to say that monarchy was good. When the king visits some place, there will

be considerable number of people who will go to see him but that does not mean that people have huge attraction or affection for him. That is not the case. Many people understand that monarchy cannot help us, only a republican system can create that atmosphere.

Q. Could you tell us something about yourself, Prachanda the man?

A. I was born in a poor family in Pokhran. Due to grinding poverty, my family sold off their belongings in the harsh hilly tracts of Pokhran and decided to settle down in Chitvan in Terai district. I completed my high school from Chitvan. When I was 17, I came under the influence of communist thought. This was the time when the area was witness to a number of people's agitations. There were agitations against Indian expansionist policies. These were my early influences and impacted my thinking in times to come. This area was also known for being inhabited by big Indian capitalists, and I saw first-hand the exploitation of poor labor at their hands. I was also deeply influenced by China's Cultural Revolution. I joined the Communist Party, formally becoming a member of that party. I was in touch with veteran communists from Nepal, and we discussed issues and narrowed down our differences. Class struggle was reaching new heights, and I organized a big rally of women and peasants in the district. There were two prominent lines flowing in the country's communist movement, but I stayed with the revolutionary line. One faction of the party led by M.B. Singh quit, and that is the time when we carried out a deep analysis of the international communist movement and the trajectory of the communist movement in Nepal. That helped, intellectually, to consolidate on a certain line of thought and mature views about our movement.

Q. In the course of your movement, did you feel that America always backed the monarchy in Nepal?

A. America's policy towards us has been generally negative. They are still trying to unite all anti-Maoist forces against us and that no agreement should be reached between different political parties. That was their aim. The Americans are not just suspicious of what is happening in Nepal; they are also opposed to Chinese and Indian policies in the region. In their thinking, both these vast Asian countries have the potential to improve and become entities in their own right. Washington

does not want that at any cost. They have no economic interests here; their interest is only political.

Q. What about differences between you and Baburam Bhattarai that were widely reported?

A. There were differences but we have ironed them out smoothly. But in any case, the problems were blown out of proportion by the media. I would also like to make it clear here that the differences were based on the great ideological debates of the day, on the future of the movement not just in Nepal but the world. But let me stress, our differences were not a struggle for power. He never challenged my leadership. The differences were over adopting the right path ahead. And it was because of this that we took the debate to another level and reached a unity based on higher values.

Prachanda was interviewed in March 2014 in Kathmandu.

BABURAM BHATTARAI

**‘I remember my JNU days well; they taught me
and made me what I am today’**

Of all leaders from the Nepal's Maoist firmament, Baburam Bhattarai remains the closest to India. He spent many years, first as an undergraduate student of architecture in Chandigarh, then pursuing masters in architecture from Delhi, before reaching his natural destination, Jawaharlal Nehru University, which also became his holy grail, a place where he read, learnt, imbibed and participated. It also became a launching pad for a larger Left radical career back home in Nepal. Bhattarai was Nepal's 36th prime minister from August 2011 to March 2013. He is senior Standing Committee Member and vice-chairperson of Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist). Long regarded as the principal ideologue of Nepali Maoists, Bhattarai was in the forefront when his party launched a people's war in Nepal in 1996. It ultimately changed the political system in Nepal; the decade-long civil war transforming the tiny Himalayan kingdom from a monarchy into a republic. Here in a wide-ranging interview, he remembers his days as a student in India, early political education, the vibrant political life on Indian university campuses, the course of the Maoist movement in Nepal, days spent in the government and the larger philosophy of not just being Maoists but successful Maoists.

Q. *You spent your student days in Chandigarh. Under the Colombo Plan you studied Bachelor of Architecture. How was Chandigarh?*

A. In 1972, I topped the intermediate science examination in Nepal; so I was offered a scholarship under the Colombo Plan to study

architecture in the Chandigarh College of Architecture, and from 1972 to 1977, I did the five-year course. I completed my Bachelor's course. I fondly remember the days in Chandigarh; it was one of the most beautiful cities in the world, most well-planned city and being a student of architecture and being there, it was very exciting. During my underground days, sometimes I used to sneak into Chandigarh. (Laughs) The city had a nice environment, wide open spaces; I used to go to the Rose Garden, spent time there and go to the Sukhna Lake for boating. I still remember those days. We had a very good library in the Punjab University. Besides architecture, I used to read everything I could lay my hands on. Those were exciting days – the Vietnam war was going on, Che Guevara was the craze among the youth – going through various books – those days at Punjab University, I was not very politically inclined – but I was inquisitive about the world. Random things from Gandhi to Che Guevara. I was very impressed by Che Guevara; so I had the idealistic feeling. My country was very backward, and Nepalese people were looked down upon by the Indians. So that feeling of working for my people just occurred there and with that feeling, I founded a students' organization there, the Nepalese Students Association. I was secretary of that association till 1976. That was my first experience at student politics. In 1977, I wanted to pursue higher studies so I came to Delhi School of Planning and Architecture. That is how I drifted into politics.

Q. Were there enough number of Nepalese students in and around Chandigarh then?

A. Yes, there were Nepalese students in Punjab University and engineering college and various other technical institutes, the PGI [Post-Graduate Institute]; so we decided to form our organization, organize programmes and hold get-togethers. When I shifted to Chandigarh, an idea had occurred to me; why not have an all-India association of Nepalese students. I started making contacts with people all over India. I was supposed to be a good student those days, and all the good students from Nepal used to go to study in India. They used to get scholarships whether to engineering or medical or agriculture institutes in Punjab and Haryana. So, I had contacts with all of them. So when I joined the Delhi School of Planning and Architecture in Delhi, a post-graduate

course, the same year I organized an all-India meeting of Nepalese students in Chandigarh itself, in October 1977. I was elected president of all-India Nepalese Students Association; that was my plunge into politics.

Q. How was the atmosphere at the Delhi School of Architecture? Was there activism? Normally students from courses such as architecture or the sciences are not as involved in politics as students from courses like history or political science?

A. The Delhi School of Planning and Architecture was more of an elitist school; now it is a deemed university, but those days it was affiliated to the Delhi University. It was quite exciting, that place, boys and girls used to sit together and mix around and by that time, I was already into student activities. The same year there was a big movement in Nepal – a political movement against monarchy. Pakistan Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was hanged by the military dictatorship and students organized a demonstration against it. That flared into a movement and snowballed against the monarchy in Nepal. In India, we organized solidarity marches in favour of the democratic movement in Nepal. I organized the movement and that was the first time that I was arrested.

But the School of Planning and Architecture was itself not very political but certain people there were. There used to be students from Iran then; there was a movement against the Shah of Iran and they would also organize demonstrations and we used to express solidarity with them. During this period I built contacts with Nepalese workers in Delhi. We used to organize programmes and that way, I slowly came into contact with student activists of Jawaharlal Nehru University. My circle widened and, in fact, I was the most political of student activists in the Delhi School of Planning and Architecture. There was also Iran students' movement and slowly, the atmosphere there began to get politicized; there were people like Arundhati Roy. My would-be-wife was her classmate. There were also other people there like Jarrad. He was the most politically conscious of all students at the School for Planning and Architecture. I remember he organized a fast in favour of some demands in the School of Planning and Architecture. It was for the first time that a fast like that had been planned in that institution. So slowly, student activism entered that place. I was also active outside the campus.

Q. From being a student of architecture, you went on to do a PhD on under-development from JNU. How did this switch occur?

A. In fact, why I shifted to Delhi was not just because I wanted to pursue technical education. I came to Delhi to read books, know about the world and indulge in political activities. I came in contact with Nepalese immigrants and all the political parties of that time. Political parties were then banned in Nepal so all political leaders were underground. Thus, when I realized that I had a good network of students all over India, I decided to organize them into an association. Leaders of different political parties – Nepali Congress or Communist parties – back home contacted me and I did not have to go to them. I came in contact with B.P. Koirala and other Communist leaders and through them, various other people with political background, both in Nepal and India. So when I completed my Master's degree from the School of Planning and Architecture, coincidentally by that time, my student activism was well established. There were democratic and Left-oriented teachers there. My principal at the School of Planning and Architecture, who was a Bengali, introduced me one day to Prof. Moonis Raza, who was one of the founders of Jawaharlal Nehru University. He had come to our school as an external examiner. I was a brilliant student and was politically active. So I was introduced to him as 'this boy is very intelligent as well as a student activist, maybe you have some interest in him'. That is how I met Prof. Moonis Raza, who immediately had a sense and said 'why don't you join JNU?' I grabbed the opportunity. I joined his centre – The Centre for Regional Development. I was a student of architecture and urban planning. I went from urban planning to regional planning so the scope was naturally expanded. On account of Prof. Moonis Raza, I happened to join JNU.

Q. How many years did you spend in JNU?

A. I joined in early 1980 and I stayed there till 1985. So for five to six years, I was in JNU. For a year, I had an accident and some brain concussion; so I had to rest for an additional year.

Q. What are your memories of JNU? Those were the days of radical politics and JNU was generally a hotbed of politics.

A. Those days it was a hotbed for radical politics. In fact, I got my honing in Marxism from JNU, both theoretically – I got to read a lot

of books, magazines and journals in the libraries – and there was a lot of student activism; late-night meetings and discussions were organized every day in the campus. There were all sorts of political ideologies in JNU; students from all political persuasions so I used to sometimes interact with them. I remember my JNU days well; they taught me and made me what I am today. I will never forget the contribution that JNU made in my life.

Q. Who were your contemporaries there at that time?

A. I was never too involved in student activities as such in JNU. I was already a leader of the Nepalese students union and I was involved in organizing Nepalese workers in Delhi; so most of my time I spent doing that in nearby Faridabad, Ghaziabad and all those industrial areas.

Q. Was it a problem to organize Nepalese workers? Was the Indian government okay with it?

A. Of course, Indian agencies would watch us. (Laughs) I did not join any student organization of JNU; I maintained my neutrality. But in JNU, I became a Marxist and I had Marxist-Leninist-Maoist leanings; my sympathies were with the CPI (ML) groups, though that time, they were very small but with SFI [Students Federation of India] and AISF [All India Students Federation] combine, they used to win elections. There were free thinkers, non-SFI, and non-Left people. I used to listen to all of them and maintain my equidistance from all of them but I did not vote any particular panel in the students' union elections. I tried to maintain my neutrality. I was a committed Marxist-Leninist and Maoist but there was no Maoist organization; there were only small groups. So we had to vote either SFI-AISF panel or Free Thinkers. People like D.P. Tripathi and Prakash Karat had all graduated from JNU, and they used to come frequently. Ananda Kumar, Digvijay Singh – I had good acquaintanceship with them.

Q. Do you keep in touch with them?

A. I am in touch with them and I keep in touch with my teachers. Quite sad that Prof. G.K. Chaddha, who taught me and then later on became vice-chancellor, died the other day. Prof. G.S. Bhalla was also my teacher. When I was prime minister, I visited Delhi and he had

come to meet me. I fondly remember these people. And my teacher Atiya Habib, a very motherly lady, showered affections on me. I remember these people. I am in contact with D.P. Tripathi, Sitaram Yechury, Prakash Karat and the rest.

Q. An earlier generation of students and political activists from the Nepali Congress spent considerable time honing their political skills on Indian university campuses like the Benares Hindu University (BHU) and Patna University. Does this make India a sound nursery for student politics?

A. You are right. In those early days, most students from Nepal went to Indian universities for higher education. People like B.P. Koirala and Pushpa Lal Shrestha, founder of the Communist Party of Nepal – all these people were in India. In fact, our political party, the Nepali Congress and the Nepal Communist Party, both of them were formed in India. All our leaders got their political initiation in India. In the earlier days, BHU, Calcutta University, Patna University, Allahabad University – most of our leaders studied there. Later on, this focus shifted to Delhi.

Q. You are the principal author of the election manifesto brought out by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists) in 2008.

A. Yes, I was assigned the job of drafting the election manifesto of my party during the first assembly elections in 2008. I drafted the poll manifesto. Fortunately for me, the working plans and programmes were to be implemented by me when we were elected. What plans and programmes we offered were consistent with the democratic revolution and our democratic socialist programme. It included political, cultural and ideological policies and it is collective decision making with our leader Prachanda who is the chief of the party. I provided inputs for the party.

Q. How did you bring about this change in Nepal? Revolutions of this kind took place in the days of the yore not in a modern globalized environment.

A. When we waged 10 years of armed people's struggle against the monarchical system, it was to usher in a new democratic revolution where women, Dalits and other marginalized segments of society should have a say in the new state and for that, we wanted to abolish the old Constitution and elect a constituent assembly. That was our main

demand; we wanted to abolish the monarchy and we wanted to introduce a new democratic system that was more inclusive and representative. With these ideas, we joined the peace process and participated in the constituent assembly elections. The Nepalese people had long cherished the idea of having a constituent assembly, abolition of monarchy and setting up of a republican state; it was the Maoist party which made it possible. So that way, it was part of the democratic revolution since the old democratic parties did not complete their job. In fact, the constituent assembly elections, republicanism, secularism, federalism – they were all democratic demands. They should have been raised by those parties but they did not do so. They just followed the Constitution as laid down by the king. So when we raised the democratic demands, people supported us. That way we emerged as the largest party in the constituent assembly. Unfortunately, since our agenda was quite progressive, old forces that enjoyed the previous system conspired against us. They used delaying tactics and we did not have much experience in running the government, even though ours was the greatest revolution in the world. That way we were encircled by rightist and counter-revolutionary forces.

Within our own party, there was a two-line struggle on these issues; whether we should have joined the peace process or not. So both internally and externally, we were encircled. Then the peace process failed to produce the Constitution and we had to go for fresh elections and by that time, the revolutionary fervour had cooled down and the party had split, giving the old reactionary forces enough time to regroup. So all these factors went against us and our numbers were reduced in the constituent assembly; but still the agenda given by us – republicanism, federalism, secularism and democracy – became important. Now every political party swears by them. Whether we are in a majority or minority, this is the specific agenda held up by the constituent assembly and no new constituent will oppose these principles.

Q. Are Maoists, at least in the context of South Asia, doomed to splits and divisions in pursuit of their well laid down goals? Do you believe the Maoist movement in Nepal is split?

A. The split was not very big in Nepal but unfortunately, the Maoists have a general tendency to split; that is the pattern even in other

countries. After the 1960s when the Maoist parties came into existence, after years of activism, they started splitting. You can see this in India, Turkey, Philippines and Peru – wherever there has been a Maoist movement. This tendency is there maybe because they champion a revolutionary line, maybe they do make some mistakes and dogmatism creeps in leading to frequent splits. But in Nepal, we tried to learn from those mistakes and experiences, so our effort is to unite as many people as possible, as many groups as possible. Our party never split; few individuals at times give up the movement but the party never split. But that way in Nepal, we tried to learn from the negative experiences of others.

Q. Do you believe that taking a position standing outside the mainstream is not the same thing as being in the government, taking decisions, balancing all kinds of interests?

A. Of course, it is a big challenge. We are revolutionaries, we want to bring changes in society, do away with all sorts of discrimination and have an egalitarian, democratic, socialist society; that is our ultimate goal. But the situation is not very favourable. It is being dominated by big capital, so pursuing the cause of socialism is very difficult these days. Nonetheless, discrimination and exploitation of large number of people over large areas will force people to organize themselves and fight and we will accept that. The basic cause of a Marxian-Maoist revolution will remain valid but the method of struggle itself would change. It varies from country to country. Like in India, they have a sort of a bourgeoisie democratic system; so there the people continue to fight against different, more advanced systems. But in Nepal, we had an authoritarian, monarchical system; so we had to raise the democratic fervour higher. So differences are there. But when we joined the peace process and emerged as the largest party in the constituent assembly and joined the government, even though it was a coalition government, we had to make compromises. And then we had to work within the bounds of the old laws and regulations, the old judiciary and bureaucracy that were very conservative institutions. So it was quite difficult to manage but we still tried to maintain our revolutionary character while delivering to the people through the old apparatus.

Q. How was your experience as prime minister?

A. I was in power for 19 months. The tenure was most challenging because I had to complete the peace process signed between our party and the government. So our major function was to facilitate the integration of the People's Liberation Army and the Nepal army. So that is one challenging job that we tried to complete. As prime minister, I had to head the committee overseeing this integration and this was a major achievement of my tenure. And the making of the new Constitution, though it was the job of the constituent assembly; as prime minister, I had to play the role of a facilitator. I did my best but unfortunately, we were not able to give the Constitution. I regret I could not deliver much. But on governance, to bring about socio-economic change and giving relief to the people, I tried to initiate some measures like expansion of roads in urban areas; our roads were so crowded; this type of work I initiated. I started some big projects as well where I tried to invite investment by forming a Board of Investment. As prime minister, some of my projects were quite appreciated but unfortunately, during my tenure, I did not have the opportunity to present a budget as the Parliament was dissolved. We had to sit through an ordinance and since the president was from the opposition party, he did not cooperate and without the president's cooperation, I could not present the budget. That way, though people had expectations on the economic front from me and I could have done something different, but unfortunately the president played a very negative role. Despite that, people have some sympathies for me because they think I would have delivered but I did not get the opportunity.

Q. *You have seen the trajectory of the Maoist movement in India. While we can talk of Peru and other places, and while there are many Maoists in Nepal, you more than anyone has been closest to India. How do you see it all?*

A. We had political relations with Indian Maoists. The Indian government suspected we had links, but later on, even the Indian government acknowledged that it was not true. When they saw us in the peace process, they knew it was not the case. We had some political links but apart from that, we did not have any other connection. Unfortunately, after we joined the peace process, they (the Indian Maoists) did not approve of this political line so our relations have virtually snapped. We have no ties with them now. At times, we have contacts under legally

permissible limits but apart from that, we don't have any relations, any contacts.

Q. But isn't there a general intent or purpose? The debate whether to participate in parliamentary democratic processes or to stay underground? Isn't it a permanent contradiction? Elsewhere in this book, I have interviewed Kameshwar Baitha, the first CPI (ML) Lok Sabha MP in India, who also expressed similar thoughts. What do you think?

A. I think it is different in Nepal; each country is different. India has a Parliament and you can utilize it for airing your views but in the case of Nepal, we have not joined the Parliament; in fact, we have done away with the old parliamentary system and we had an interim Parliament here in Nepal. In fact, it is not even called Parliament; it is an interim legislature but they wanted to use the word 'Parliament', so a compromise was arrived at and it was called legislature parliament. (Laughs) So we wanted to make it a new system, a democratic system, which is not like the original parliamentary system, so that is the difference. We have joined the democratic and peaceful path to bring about change and revolution in Nepal but we have not joined the parliamentary system whole hog. This is the difference. I don't think there are many people who appreciate this.

Q. But even in Nepal, you have had difference of approach even to enter the legislature?

A. No, all Maoists had participated. In the earlier constitutional assembly, they were there; later on they split and did not participate but they are as such not against constituent assembly. There are certain other differences.

Q. On 4 February 1996, you gave the then government a list of 40 demands relating to 'nationalism, democracy and livelihood', ending domination of foreign capital in Nepali industries, business and finance, abrogation of the discriminatory treaties, including the 1950 Nepal-India Treaty, confiscation of land under control of the feudal system and its distribution among the landless and homeless. How much have you achieved since then?

A. In fact, this 40-point demand that I presented as the president of the then United People's Front, open arm of the underground party,

acted as an open manifesto of the people's war in Nepal. Through these 40 demands I had raised the issues of nationalism, democracy, issues of livelihood and issues of social change. We came out during the peace process and tried to implement whatever we had promised. The core political demand among those 40 points was to have elections within a timeframe. Once that was accepted, we decided to join the peace process. Without that, we would not have joined the peace process. After we joined the government, there were other issues like implementing land reforms. Two commissions were set up. Of course, there was not enough time to implement it all. A land reforms commission was formed. Its report has been submitted. Other live issues of federalism, giving rights to minorities, Madhesis and others, rights to women and Dalits have been accepted. These were our main demands. On the issue of relations with India, the 1950 treaty was signed by the last autocratic Rana prime minister just six months before being overthrown. It was a treaty not liked by the masses, the people of Nepal. A treaty signed by the autocratic Rana ruler with India needs to be changed. That is the demand. It is a general demand of the Nepalese people. Those days we raised this (issue) as a matter of agitation but when we joined the government, through diplomatic channels, we talked to the government of India. This is an old treaty, 60 years old, signed in a very different context.

Now the context has changed; so much water has flown down the Ganga and the Baghmati rivers here. Aspirations of people have changed too; why not update? Of course, we want to have good neighbourliness and working relations with India because India is our largest economic partner. We have an open border with India, so we cannot afford to have hostile relations with such an important neighbour. To strengthen our relations between people to people and government to government, such old treaties need to be updated. It goes in the interest of both the countries. So this has been our position and we believe it is time for another agreement.

Q. How did you mobilize, in your 10 years in the underground, a movement so large in such a backward state, nearly as backward as India?

A. It is not as if being Maoists, we mobilized only poor people, it was not like that. The class question was the main question because many people

are poor and unemployed, but that is one aspect. We organized women, we organized Dalits, oppressed minorities, Muslims, we organized people living in remote mountainous areas, the Madhesi, who were oppressed by the old state. So this way we brought in a broad coalition of different classes, nationalities and groups. Thus, our movement was broader than what people thought. That is the reason why our movement spread all over the country in such a short span of time.

Q. How were your days in the underground; how difficult or easy was it?

A. Those days, when I remember them, were quite exciting; those 10 years, 1996–2006, in the underground. This was the period of armed struggle. Before that, I was the open face of the party, nobody knew the others. I headed the open United People's Front before we started the armed struggle. So I had some difficulties because people knew me. In the initial days, I met with some difficulties. So when we started the people's war, we decided that we will keep our headquarters in Nepal. In fact, I was in charge of that area, western Nepal, near Pokhara. So we had established the headquarters but later on we realized that it was not very safe. Then we decided that we need a headquarters in India as well. In India, there were so many Nepali workers that it was difficult to make out who was Nepali and who was Indian. Thus, we had two headquarters – one in Nepal, one in India.

Q. Where in India?

A. We were mobile, different cities; Delhi, Mumbai, Patna, Gorakhpur, Varanasi, Allahabad, Lucknow. Our headquarters kept on changing.

Q. Nepal and India have open borders.

A. Yes. On our side we had our People's Liberation Army (PLA) volunteers and on the Indian side too, there were Nepalese workers.

Q. You were the ship between the PLA and the Royal Nepalese Army (RNA), given that relations between the two were hostile in the course of your underground struggle?

A. Exactly. The integration between the two took place quite amicably. Unfortunately, because of differences within our own party, the

6,500 people from the RNA who were expected to join did not join and instead opted for voluntary retirement. But there was one commander of colonel's rank, one Lt. colonel, 13 majors – altogether there were 71 officers who joined the Nepal Army (NA), in addition to 1,400 other cadets. They share good working relations with the NA.

Q. So in a sense, this integration of the two forces was an achievement of a very high order.

A. Yes it was a unique experience we had in Nepal. The other day, the chief of army staff was awarding a colonel's insignia to our ex-PLA commander.

Q. How do you see the Maoist movement in Nepal? Do you see Maoists making a political comeback? What according to you are the main hurdles?

A. We want socio-economic change and the Marxist project is to go from one stage of society to another. So Nepal is right now passing through feudalism to capitalism. According to our new assessment, after our struggle, a major part of the bourgeoisie democratic or the capitalistic revolution has been completed in Nepal. Now we have to consolidate the democratic gains and develop productive forces so that they can lay the groundwork of a future socialistic revolution. This is the formulation of our party. We are yet to make the new Constitution. Despite our reduced numbers, the constituent assembly will make the new Constitution and that will more or less mark the completion of democratic revolution in Nepal. And then the phase of socialist revolution will begin and it could be a longer phase. So our party and we are trying to reorganize ourselves, develop our ideology further. Our ultimate goal is to move towards a class-less society, a long haul. The spirit of revolution has to go from generation to generation. So, after the completion of the democratic revolution, we should prepare for socialist revolution. For that we have to pass through various stages and our party is preparing for that. Nepal's Maoist movement is learning this way. Maoism is not, after all, waging a war all the time.

The idea is to bring about transformation, move towards a higher stage of development of society – that is the revolution. It is not always violent; it is peaceful violence. You always try to use peaceful means but once that is obstructed, you have to resort to arms. We would like to go

through democratic and peaceful means to a higher stage of society. But if it is blocked, if the ruling classes forge to conspire a consensus against us, impose a war on us, we have the right to resist that. Otherwise, our party always likes to pursue peaceful means.

Q. You have seen the trajectory of the Maoist movement in India. Your thoughts?

A. The whole Marxist project, the way Marxism was applied in the twentieth century – there was a big encirclement of imperialist forces, where it became difficult to move ahead on the revolutionary path. But once in power like Soviet Union and other places, the system of socialism practised was not very attractive to the general masses. One supreme leader ruling throughout his life type of system does not go well with the modern-day outlook of the general masses of people. So though the basic philosophy of Marxism is correct, the goal of a classless, egalitarian society is correct, so is the programme, mission and policy of socialism, but the founding fathers of Marxism-Leninism and this philosophy never designed a particular model of state or party. You have to try to develop and further a model yourself. We cannot afford to repeat the mistakes of the old model – the collapse of the Soviet Union presided over by Stalin. In my opinion, we need to give more powers to the working people; we want our socialist democracy to be superior to bourgeoisie democracy. In that sense, the real working people should have the right to participate in the management of state affairs; that is the vision that Marx and Lenin had – the days of the Paris commune and initial Soviets. That strength has to be applied to our situations so the question of developing a real participatory democracy for the general masses of the people, that should be the project which communists should follow. Only then can we make substantial gains. Otherwise, we will just go about repeating old mistakes. Then it would become very difficult to take the movement further.

So for Maoists and Marxists, the idea is to learn from past mistakes and move towards being a better society, a better world to live in. Ultimately, as I see it, the so-called globalization is in fact creating a ground for igniting all the workers of the world. That is why when Marx and Engels visualized the *Communist Manifesto*, workers of the world unite,

the growth of science and technology and the economic system, the development of global systems, it was ultimately preparing the ground for large-scale socialism. It may not happen in my lifetime but after a few generations. I believe we are moving ultimately towards global socialism. Therefore, I remain quite optimistic.

Q. What do you make of the Indian context specifically? You were reported as saying in the media a few years ago that the Indian Maoists had lost their way.

A. It is up to them (Indian Maoists) to start off on their own path. I would not like to say that Indian Maoists had lost their path. My understanding is that communists have a right to charter their own path, suited to their own country. No two situations are similar. India is in a different stage of development, and Nepal is in a different stage of development. The general philosophy may be the same but political programme of the party would differ. So it is up to the Indian Maoists to charter their path, so I would not like to comment on that but if in Nepal they find anything suitable, they can learn from us, just as we are trying to learn from their good and bad experiences.

Q. How did the world react to the Nepalese revolution? In India, there was a lot of excitement, particularly in the radical circles in ML groups, perhaps not in the CPM or CPI.

A. There was a lot of excitement and positive expectations from the people. But there were also questions about whether what we were trying would succeed. There were these questions. But in general, people all over the world took it very positively, as I learnt from party reports and media. In the twenty-first century, the 'other' camp predicted the end of history and end of ideology after the Cold War; the communists came up with their own ideas and showed a new path of liberation to mankind. It should send a positive message to the international working class movement.

Q. On your personal website, you have expressed the desire to become the progressive bridge between India and China.

A. Yes, we had used this metaphor. The earlier metaphor was used by the old King of Nepal. When there was a big empire here in South

Asia, the founder of Nepalese state, King Prithvi Narayan Shah, used the metaphor 'Nepal is the connect between two boulders, which means you can't act much, you are just squeezed between two huge states, so you remain inactive, introvert and yet preserve your independence; so that was the idea 200 years back. Once I joined the government, I floated this idea. You see, the world has changed. There has been globalization and science and technology, development of communications and transportation – the Himalayas are no longer the barrier. Then why can't Nepal act as a bridge between the two big states of India and China? We should not be looking inwards, now we need to look outwards. There is a lot of economic development taking place in China and also in India. We tried to take advantage of that by acting as a bridge between these two economies. So our idea should be to not just act as a connect between two boulders but a vibrant bridge between two big economies and two countries. So this is the new narrative I wanted to introduce in our foreign policy.

Q. That did trigger apprehensions in New Delhi?

A. Yes, it was with good intentions but I had no objective of putting any doubts in the minds of our friends in India or people there. We want to have good relations with both India and China. They themselves are cooperating, and their annual trade is reaching over a hundred billion dollars. So, we need to have good relations with both our neighbours, which we would like to turn into our national interest and advantage. Being against India or China – even if we want to, we cannot; they are too big, too powerful. So it is in our own self-interest to maintain good relations with our good neighbours so there is no reason for them to doubt our intentions or otherwise.

Q. How much would you say was Mao's influence on the Nepalese Maoist movement? In India, it was evident since the early days of Charu Mazumdar. But just how much of its impact was felt in Nepal?

A. None, in fact. We have no contact with the Chinese, no contact with the party or the government. Just because we follow the radicalist Mao line and just because our party's name is Maoist, it would be wrong to say that therefore we have very close relations with China. Of course,

we want to have good relations with all but we do not have special relations with anyone. The Indian Maoists are not termed pro-China just because they use the term. (Laughs) People have that sense anyway. We have more contacts with India. I have so many friends in India. With China, we have developed recent relations only.

Baburam Bhattarai was interviewed in March 2014 in Kathmandu.

ANAND VERMA

‘The aura you acquire when in the underground, it starts to get reduced once you are in the government’

Anand Swaroop Verma, veteran journalist and writer, is deeply connected with the Maoist movement in Nepal as well as India. He has worked with several newspapers and magazines since 1966, published books and has been at the forefront of the counter-culture movement. Between 1970 and 1974, Verma worked in *Aakashvani*’s Hindi department. As a staunch advocate of alternate journalism, he is best placed to examine the course of the two political movements in India and Nepal, familiar as he is with the nuances of the agitation and also has personal contacts with top leaders on all sides. In this interview, Verma takes a dispassionate view of Nepali Maoist trajectory and analyses how they succeeded and where they went wrong. He also makes an objective assessment of the Indian side of the Maoist story and is well placed to compare and contrast the two biggest Maoist struggles in South Asia.

Q. *How do you account for the sliding popularity of Maoists in Nepal – from a comprehensive victory in the 2008 elections to the third position in the November elections? The Maoist movement in Nepal is a shining example of a grassroots agitation morphing into a major political formation with the support of the people. Would you say that after joining the government, certain infirmities cropped up in the movement?*

A. There is no doubt that the Maoists’ popularity graph has come down as compared to 2006. From the period when they were underground to when Maoists joined the so-called mainstream and parliamentary

politics, there has been a slump. They were very popular in the underground but when they joined the government, things were not the same. And it is also natural, because the aura you acquire when in the underground, it starts to get reduced once you are in the government. The important thing is: as long as they were in power, like Prachanda-led the government for nine months and Baburam Bhattarai for a few months; they did not do anything, which suggested that they were going to bring radical changes in the country. And there were many reasons why they were unable to work; they alone cannot be held responsible. They were relatively new to running an administration, they had many forces arraigned against them and most of their time was consumed in countering them. As a result, development and other things were neglected. One of the reasons was that they were caught up in the transition period. This period would have ended if a Constitution was in place, fresh elections had been held and a new government would have been in place. Hence, a decline in their popularity was a natural corollary.

People were also disillusioned with their lifestyle; that too is natural. When Maoists lived in the jungle, their lifestyle was different. After becoming prime minister, there were compulsions that no prime minister can avoid; he has to live in the prime ministerial bungalow, he will be given security. These were small reasons but large enough to widen the gap between the Maoists' cadres and their leaders. This is as far as Prachanda is concerned. When a comrade went to meet the prime minister, he would have to make entries at the reception, then the security detail would inform the prime minister and the cadre man who had unlimited access to the leader in the underground would naturally have to wait. A lot of their cadres stopped meeting their leader. But this was by no means restricted to Prachanda, who was prime minister. Even the other leaders who started to live in urban surroundings introduced changes in their lifestyles, which should not have happened. The situation reached a point where the cadres began to get alienated from their leaders.

But despite all this, Maoists continue to be the biggest force even today; they have the largest mass base of any political party; they may have split into the Kiran (Mohan Lal Vaidya Kiran) and the Prachanda factions, but their influence remains. The people of Nepal believe that they are the true leaders of the country capable of changing the order as compared to other parties. In the 2008 elections, the Maoists emerged

on top with 120 out of the 240 seats. Today, they have only 26 seats out of that 120. There are two or three reasons: a decline in popularity, split in the party on ideological grounds, which meant that a large section of radical Leftists worked against the Unified Communist Party (Maoist) during the elections because the Kiran faction wanted to boycott the elections.

Q. Maoists in Nepal have claimed that there was large-scale rigging in the November polls but independent observers say that is not the case.

A. There is no doubt that selective rigging was carried out on a very large scale in Nepal during the November elections. Rigging has taken place in some areas where Maoists were very strong, like Kailali, Kanchanpur, Dham and some constituencies of Jhapa. In the last elections, the margin of Maoist victories from these constituencies was 15,000 to 20,000. This time they lost elections in all these constituencies because of some reasons. While the polling was fair, there were lots of irregularities between the polling booths to the counting centres. I was their national observer in two elections and I saw that polling boxes were sealed after the conclusion of elections and duly signed by presiding officers and taken to the counting centres where the counting would take place. This time, polling boxes were taken by the army to the cantonments where they were kept for several hours under military custody and agents were thrown out.

Prakash Chandra Lohani, a senior politician and former minister who is close to the monarchy (he held portfolios of agriculture, foreign affairs, etc., in previous governments), whose essay was published in *Kantipur*, Nepali edition of *Kathmandu Post*, detailed how the rigging had taken place. His article revealed how the army had driven away the polling agents. These polling agents have also registered their complaints. On the basis of these complaints, activists from Prachanda's party decided to boycott the counting. Seals had been forcibly broken on counting boxes. On the fourth day of the elections, ballot boxes were discovered in two police stations in Kathmandu, which led to an agitation there with newspapers publishing photographs. People protested outside the police stations until late in the night and were charged. So there is no doubt that rigging and irregularities did take place. But despite all this, I believe that if the popularity of Maoists had

not reduced, if their popularity had remained what it was, then things would not have reached the stage they have. No one would have dared either. But because of their internal differences, they have slipped to the third position.

Q. What would you attribute the success of the Maoists in Nepal after a 10-year agitation to – shifting from a guerrilla warfare unit to a key democratizing force within Nepali politics?

A. It is important to remember that the Maoists' 10-year-old agitation was basically centred in the rural areas of Nepal. And when they began their armed struggle in 1996 in Nepal, the global communist movement was in retreat; the Soviet Union had been dismembered, theories like Clash of Civilization and End of Communism were in vogue – all products of American think tanks. They had announced the demise of the communist movement in the world along with the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The Shining Path guerrillas with the arrest of their leader Abimael Guzman in Peru had gone into retreat. The Maoist movement in Columbia had reached a stagnation point. So, when Maoists began their armed struggle in Nepal in 1996, conventional opinion had it that the time was not right, that similar movements worldwide appeared to have no future. But the Maoists in Nepal had charted out a new path and tasted success. Their biggest achievement was that they had no support from anywhere or any country.

You will remember that Vietnam had a supply line from China during its struggle. Progressive forces around the world had lent their backing to the Vietnam revolution. But when the armed struggle was launched in Nepal, it was a period of setbacks for the international communist movement. In addition, two of Nepal's giant neighbours, China and India, were both opposed to Nepal's Maoist movement. India was totally with the Americans while four Nepalese Maoists were languishing in Tibet's jails. Of the four, two had been awarded death punishment, which I have documented in my film on the basis of clippings; I have their names as well. In the meantime, with the success of the Maoist movement, diplomatic efforts were launched for their release. The reality is that even China was supporting the king while India and other countries in the region were helping the official Nepalese army with arms. India's then foreign secretary, Kanwal Sibal, had held a meeting

in Paris in 2002 of donor countries contributing to Nepal's kitty. There he told other member countries that there was no point in sending arms enthusiastically to Nepal because nearly 70 per cent of them were being looted by the Maoists. The Maoists therefore had no choice. They were looting Nepalese government arsenal and banks to fill up their coffers for the war effort. But they had total support of the people of Nepal; in other words, it was a 100 per cent indigenous movement.

This was the biggest achievement of the movement; it had no outside assistance. This movement was so popular because it was close to the people. For 10 years, they weakened the structures that sustained feudalism in villages; they did not break it but certainly damaged it. They managed to put into place an administrative set-up. I had taken a delegation to Nepal when the Maoist movement there was at its peak. It included some journalists working in the mainstream media in India and they saw for themselves that on the main roads there, toll tax barriers were erected both by the government and the Maoists, but most people preferred the latter. Maoists or members of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) were patrolling the highways and when we talked to villagers, they told us that PLA patrolling had helped reduce brigandage. This was the basis of their public support. But it is important to remember that this support was basically confined to the country's rural areas. As far as Kathmandu, Birganj, industrial cities like Biratnagar and other urban areas are concerned, they were not that influential or powerful.

The Nepalese monarch too was satisfied with this scenario: while Maoists ruled the villages, the monarchy's writ ran over urban areas. Of course, the king's revenue had dropped down to a trickle because Maoists were collecting taxes that would normally go to the government. But this tacit understanding did not suit the Maoists. The dominant feeling there was that they would have to begin shifting their influence to the country's urban pockets. Prachanda believed the time had now come to merge the armed struggle with mass struggle; some kind of fusion needed to be achieved. It was in pursuance of this theory that people began their shift towards urban areas.

In 2005, it had become a problem both for the Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxists Leninists) to work as political entities. That year, the monarchy achieved a coup by concentrating all powers into its hands. Earlier, Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba had been removed as part of the monarch's ongoing consolidation

process. Parliamentary parties branded this move as a retrogressive step by the king. To checkmate it, they began the anti-retrogressive movement by protesting and holding *dharnas* in urban areas, even as the king's army was using strong-arm tactics against them. In the rural areas, they would be attacked by Maoists who would brand them as pro-feudal. These parties felt the squeeze and were looking for an outlet. The Maoists too were caught in a jam, unable to break away the shackles and expand. The two aspirations converged. As part of this convergence, the 12-point agreement was reached in November 2005 between seven parties and the Maoists.

This became the basis of the 2008 Maoist government in Nepal and the coronation of Prachanda as prime minister, an arrangement that continues to date. In this, India sensed an opportunity to tame the Maoists. Under these conditions, Maoists asked Nepali Congress leader, Girija Prasad Koirala, to join in and launch an anti-monarchy struggle in the country's urban areas. But Koirala was reluctant to go along; there could have been many apprehensions in his mind; maybe he did not like to go to Rolpa, a Maoist base and the site of a bitter Maoist-Nepalese army stand-off. On Koirala's suggestion, the 12-point agreement between the two sides was concluded in Delhi; Koirala and indeed the Nepali Congress is regarded as an old New Delhi ally. The common aim was the overthrowing of the monarchy and selecting a constitutional method of governance.

Q. *What would you say are the main differences between the Maoists movements in India and Nepal? What are the similarities?*

A. India's Maoist movement has two phases. One before 1980 and the other after that. In the first phase, it was known as the Naxalbari agitation; now it is known as the Maoist movement. The first movement suffered a setback with the murder of Charu Mazumdar when Siddhartha Shankar Ray was the chief minister. A large number of comrades were killed and there was general massacre. For Maoists in Nepal, there were both advantages and disadvantages. Their advantage was that their enemy was very visible, the monarchy. Yet it was difficult to describe the monarch as an enemy. In Nepal, the monarchy was 250 years old, and the king was regarded as an incarnation of Vishnu. In other words, he was like God. It was a big challenge to change this notion about the

king. So, while the enemy was clear, it was not easy to describe him as such. But the Maoists with their sheer dint of hard and committed work among the masses managed to change this perception. They did it by educating the rural poor and it was a hard and slow process. In 2001 palace massacre, the monarch was killed. This helped the Maoist cause in a very big way.

No one in Nepal is willing to believe that Gyanendra was not behind this massacre. I reached Kathmandu within three days after this killing. I saw truckloads of young men shouting slogans, breaking the curfew, calling for death to Gyanendra and his son Paras. I had then written that this is the last monarch of Nepal; when people began to demand death to the two who were regarded as incarnates of Vishnu, it became very clear that the days of monarchy were numbered. The people had become disillusioned with political parties because in 1991, multi-party democracy had come into being after a 30-year panchayat style administration. In the next 13 years of multi-party democracy in Nepal, there were 13 governments that came and fell. There was so much instability and corruption in political parties that the common man was totally disillusioned. Still, the people had pinned some hope on King Birendra; there was the feeling among the people that the palace would always be their saviour when the chips were down. But Gyanendra's capturing of the throne after killing Birendra disillusioned the people with monarchy as well. The people thus came to put all their trust on the Maoists.

In the case of India, the situation is different. India is a very big country and there is uneven development. Agriculture is highly developed in Punjab as compared to UP and Bihar. Region-wise, Indian Maoists have faced an uphill task. The influence of foreign capital in India is very big while it is relatively small in Nepal. The full impact of globalization, as is evident in India, has left Nepal virtually untouched. Globalization in India has created a new class of elite, which is not interested in any bloody revolution. It favours peaceful methods of change; a man like Kejriwal should arrive on the scene and set things right. This was not the situation in Nepal. In Nepal, the swiftness with which the Maoists turned a stationary warfare into a mobile one and the way it faced and defeated forces of the state – the PLA commander-in-chief Prachanda squarely defeated the commander-in-chief of the Nepal army Birendra – things like that cannot take place in India.

In fact, situations between the two countries are very different. Nepal's social and economic structure and the overall consciousness of people are quite different from India. The positive thing in Nepal is that there is political awakening in the masses; the same cannot be said about India. In Nepal, many battles have been fought against the monarchy, most of them proving to be unsuccessful, except by the Maoists. They certainly have to be credited even if it is true that certain aberrations crept in at a later stage. They finished the monarchy. The Maoists enjoyed the advantage of this political awakening in Nepal. The other important factor is that Nepal was never a colony. The mentality of the people there is not colonial. India was a colony for many years and the de-colonization of the mind, which should have taken place, never happened. That this did not happen was bad enough but add to it the fact that post-1990, India was re-colonized. That resulted in cultural perversion of a kind that is very difficult for any force wanting a change, specially a radical change. Indian Maoists want a radical change in production relations and radical land reform revolution. All this is very difficult. In India, you will see that senior officers prefer to speak in English or else it is taken as a sign of inferiority. In Nepal, the most senior government functionary converses in Nepali; there are also those who do not know English but are none the worse for it, there is no inferiority complex. So, while the goals for Maoists in the two countries are not different, the way to reach there and the stages taken to achieve their goals are very different.

Q. *Is there something to learn from Nepal Maoists for their Indian comrades?*

A. Indian Maoists have a lot to learn from their Nepali counterparts and they have learnt lessons as well. In 2004, the CPI (Maoist) Party came into existence in India when the People's War Group (PWG) and Party Unity came together. After this unity, you would have noticed that the tactics deployed before 2004 had changed. The number of attacks on police stations increased. Earlier, hit-and-run tactics were the staple for Maoists; now things have changed. When they attacked the Koraput police station in Odisha, they announced on the loudspeaker that they did not want to kill the policemen but only loot their armoury. They looted the arms, put them in a truck and drove up to the Koraput district magistrate's official residence. The Jehanabad jail break in Bihar had

1,000 participants. The timing of the attack was also significant. Electioneering was in the air and camera teams were present on the location to capture the daring assault. Some reporters also captured the moment. Since 2004, they have moved from pure armed action to mass struggle. It is also now known that when the Nepal Maoists were in the underground and held meetings, Indian comrades would be present as members of fraternal parties. There was sharing of information between the two and Indian Maoists learnt a lot from their Nepali comrades.

But since 2008, when Maoists in Nepal went into parliamentary politics, Indian Maoists became critical. But Maoists in Nepal believed that theirs was the right way suited to the situation in their country. They never said that Indian comrades should follow them. Even though there was a wrong story attributed in *The Hindu*, which said that Indians should emulate the example from across the border. When Prachanda was asked by a journalist about what advice he would give to Indians, his reply was that he could not give any advice; if the Indians chose to study their example and it suited them, they should go ahead. In a TV interview, CPM leader Sitaram Yechury had said that Indian Maoists should look at Nepal and emulate their parliamentary path, which had helped them to assume power in Nepal and that they should give up armed struggle. In the same show, I also said that Indians do need to take lessons, weaken the feudal structure in this country and assume the parliamentary road to power. Yechury was just looking at elections and not the fact that Nepali Maoists had reached the parliamentary stage after a 10-year-long armed struggle. The lesson that Indian comrades can learn from Nepal is how they achieved the fusion between armed struggle and mass struggle. It is important to remember that if there was no mass struggle in April 2006, if there had not been that mass agitation in Kathmandu for 19 days, which was basically backed by the Maoists, monarchy would not have been finished in Nepal. This is the lesson they have to learn; Indian Maoists have not been able to launch a mass struggle and that is a lesson that needs to be learnt.

Q. *Are there fraternal links between the two Communist Leninist parties of Nepal and India, for instance with the CPI (Maoist)?*

A. Absolutely, there are fraternal links between the two based on ideologies. Maoists in Nepal had fraternal links with Maoists in Peru,

Columbia and Philippines. Likewise, Indian Maoists too have fraternal links with similar struggles elsewhere in the world. They do have fraternal relations but not much more than that.

Q. Maoists in Nepal trace their influence to Mao and the Peruvian Shining Path.

A. True. It is a fact that wherever there is a Maoist movement, whether India or Nepal, in agrarian societies, particularly in South Asia, Mao's theories are held as a guiding force and inspiration. The fundamentals are undoubtedly Marx, Lenin and Stalin but the basic influence is Mao's. Maoists in Nepal were certainly inspired by Mao and the Shining Path movement in Peru. If you look at the documents in Nepal, you would see that there is a subtle critique of the Shining Path, of how that movement in Peru had centred just on Abimael Guzman and after his arrest, the movement suffered deep setbacks. A study of their party documents would also reveal the influence of Nicaragua on Nepali Maoists. Once when Sandinista forces started to participate in elections after a long period of armed struggle, they went off the track. It has to be said that similarly, Nepali Maoists too have somewhat lost their way in similar circumstances.

Q. Government estimates provided in early 2003 on the strength of Communist Party of Nepal Maoists CPN (M) indicated that there were approximately 31,500 combatants, 48,000 militia, 150,500 active cadres and 100,000 sympathizers. Do you think the numbers are accurate?

A. Of the numbers given here, the figures of combatants appear to be inflated. Naturally, when there is a struggle going on, it is important to inflate numbers to put the enemy on the defensive but the numbers of militia, active cadres and sympathizers is quite accurate. I would put the figure of combatants down to 20,000 to 25,000. It is likely that actual figures are never even known except to the leadership or the central committee. It is also likely that there were more sympathizers than the figures you have mentioned.

Q. In October, the government completed the integration of 1,450 former Maoist fighters into the Nepalese army. This integration marked the conclusion of a November 2011 agreement that all political parties signed allowing for

a maximum of 6,500 former combatants to be integrated into a specially created general directorate under the army in non-combat roles. Has it worked?

A. Integration of the PLA into the army became a tricky question. As per the peace agreement in 2006, merging the two armies into one national army was proposed but there were many strings attached. Maoists believed that first the Constitution (of the country) ought to be in place before the armies were integrated. Political parties believed that the peace process ought to be completed and for that, integration was vital. This sparked off a long-lasting debate as to what should come first. Maoists insisted that even if the integration process was complete, there was still no guarantee that the Constitution would happen. Other political parties felt that if the Constitution came into being, Maoists will always hold the upper hand. In a way, it meant a loss for the Maoists. To begin with, they agreed to the integration, much against their earlier position. This was what caused the split.

The integration which followed was on humiliating terms for the Maoists as none of their demands were met. On the question of ranks, the process laid down by Maoists was not followed. The PLA was disturbed at this integration. When the integration was finalized, Baburam Bhattarai headed the government, thereby increasing pressure on Maoists; they had the option of effecting the integration differently. Things reached such a pass that the Nepalese army had to capture a PLA base in Shaktikhor as the latter was not keen to integrate; so in a sense it was forced. Only a few went along with the integration while a number of others sought voluntary retirement. It was a sad chapter in Nepal's history. After the integration, Prachanda told journalists that there was neither a Nepalese army nor a PLA, there was just a national army, which would provide protection if the country needed it. He was talking as if the Maoist rule had come to stay.

Today in January 2014, Maoists have nothing, neither a base, nor an army nor the political strength. It was keeping this danger in mind that Mohan Vaidya (leader of the rebel Maoist group) predicted that the party was headed towards self-destruction. Today he has been proved right. Questions like whether or not there should have been a general directorate become meaningless. Today the country is in the grip of bourgeois forces against whom the Maoists fought. The army belongs to the state. If the character of the state has not changed, if social conditions

have not changed, if the social structure remains the same, if your main agenda of introducing fundamental changes in the system had worked, then you could have said that the army would have been truly a national army. Now you have finished a pro-people army like the PLA with nothing left but the national army. So, the Maoists who were riding high yesterday are today down in the dumps, utterly defeated.

Q. So will the Maoists bounce back?

A. They will have to strategize afresh even though it is true that of all political forces in Nepal, Maoists are the only pro-people outfit today. They may have reduced strength in the Parliament and the Vidhan Sabha and as a political party; but they continue to be popular with the people. This cannot be judged by votes. In casting of votes and their counting, all kinds of irregularities have taken place. Their agenda is very popular among the people. The people in Nepal want fundamental changes to take place in the social structure; they want an end to upper caste domination in politics and the involvement of marginalized sections of society in politics. This is the core of Maoist agenda whether of Prachanda's or Kiran's. Historically if you see, Leftists in Nepal's politics, even before the arrival of Maoists, and if you combine the votes of all hues of Left in that country, from small to big outfits, the Left vote is larger than the right or centrist votes put together. The time has come for Maoists to review where they went wrong; they have to assess changes in their lifestyle and lessen the gap between them and the people and their common cadres. The conditions that prompted the rise of the Maoist movement in Nepal continue as before. If you look at it philosophically, if the conditions remain as they were, then the setbacks that they have faced are only temporary. Maybe it would not be led by Prachanda or Kiran but given that the objective situations have not changed, the Maoist movement has to re-emerge in Nepal.

Q. Are tensions between Maoist combatants and the Nepalese army negotiable because the main trigger to the current impasse was Prachanda sacking a top army general?

A. Prachanda was prime minister when he sacked the then army chief, Gen. Rupmangat Katawal. Prachanda was an elected representative of the people while the general was an army officer, a bureaucrat. So

in every respect, the prime minister was the superior authority. There were at least three occasions when the army chief Katawal openly defied Defence Minister Ram Bahadur Thapa (from the Badal party). The prime minister warned the army chief saying that he was duty-bound to listen to the defence minister. But the general refused to pay heed. In such a situation, it became important for the prime minister to sack the army chief.

The other thing is that the then Indian ambassador to Nepal, Rakesh Sood, told Prachanda that he should not sack Katawal under any circumstances, warning that the consequences of such an action would not be good. This exchange was also made known to the media, thanks to the Indian embassy. This 'leak' also made it an issue for Prachanda. Prachanda had taken oath as prime minister on 15 August 2008. On 13 or 14 August, Prachanda had received an invitation from China to attend the closing ceremony of Beijing Olympics and he had agreed. No sooner did he take oath that Ambassador Sood told Prachanda that he should not go to China because India will not like it. Prachanda replied that since he had given his approval, he would stick to his decision. There is also a little background to it. During the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony, China had invited Nepal's president Ram Baran Yadav. He too was advised against attending the ceremony by Ambassador Sood and Yadav had agreed. This became big news in Nepal's papers. There was a general feeling in Nepal that India was playing big brother, that New Delhi was dictating to them what to do on things that were not strategic in any way.

This forced Prachanda's hands. Traditionally, the Nepalese prime minister, after his swearing-in, was bound to visit India. Prachanda and company found this tradition a little odd, almost like going to a temple. He was asked why this tradition was being broken. Prachanda replied that had there been any programme in India, he would have gone happily. And in any case, there is no law which makes it mandatory for the prime minister to visit India first. The Katawal episode soured relationship between the two countries, rather between the ruling elite in India and the ruling Maoists in Nepal. The ruling elite in India never trusted Prachanda despite the fact that he visited India and even told a meeting that his first political visit as prime minister was to India. But the Indian government regarded this as eyewash. A big editor told me that Katawal should not have been removed but I countered by saying that as elected

Prime Minister, Prachanda was well within his rights to remove his army chief. But the editor insisted that there can be no comparison because democracy was still nascent in Nepal. But I said that if a navy chief in India could be removed by its defence minister, then a comparison can be drawn. But I still feel that what Prachanda did was very appropriate.

Q. Do you believe that the Maoists under Prachanda aligned themselves closer to China as compared to India, their traditional ally?

A. Nepal is sandwiched between two vast countries, India and China. It is surrounded from three sides by India, literally India-locked, while one side is open to China. Traditionally Nepal's Communists, not just Maoists, like late CPN (UML) leader Madan Bhandari, who told me in an interview in 1991 that they did not believe that Nepal had any special relations with India, that there is no such thing as special relations. Our relationship with India will be based on the ideals of Panchsheel and political relations with China and India will be equidistant. In the social and cultural field, we have special relations with India because our cultures are the same; both are Hindu *rashtras* (as Nepal was then). Prachanda too says that in the political field, the same theory of equidistance holds. He said that unlike other monarchs of Nepal, we will never play the India card with China and vice versa. India has a China phobia. India's ruling class has a big brother attitude towards its neighbours and believes that a country's sovereignty is determined by its size. You cannot judge a country's sovereignty by its geographical and economic status. Hence, India's ruling class always regards her sovereignty as larger than her neighbours'. At least that is what India's neighbours think. So, India should handle these issues very delicately and carefully, which it does not.

All Nepalese prime ministers, irrespective of their party, when they are on a visit to India have to affirm that they will not let their country be used for anti-India activities. It is important for them to say it. As far as China is concerned, it is important to remember that post-Mao China is not the country that would export revolution to different countries. If there is any Chinese sympathy for Nepal's Maoists, it is not because they are Maoists but because they are the only ones who are seen as a counter-balance to American influence. Maoists, at least theoretically, can stop the spread of American influence because the Maoist thought and American ideology are diametrically opposed to each other. Hence,

it may appear sometimes that China is backing Maoists. China is just acting in its national interest.

Beijing is also concerned about Tibet because it also shares a border with Nepal; Tibet is in a state of perpetual unrest. In addition, most Tibetan refugees are in India and their free Tibet movement is not dead; it is alive. Khampa revolutionaries from Nepal have also caused some disturbances in Tibet. So for China, to keep a handle on Tibet, it is important to keep a handle on Nepal as well. That is why China has always backed the monarchy in Nepal, whether it was King Birendra or Gyanendra. Even during the 10-year-old Maoist armed struggle in Nepal, Beijing always backed the monarch. China has always backed those who have ruled Nepal. As far as the population of Nepal is concerned, they look upon China with a lot of respect. Roads build by the Chinese and the Indians and development works carried out by both countries are a study in contrast, and they can see the difference. In 1964, China had constructed the Kodari national highway, which links Tibet to capital Kathmandu. That highway helped the locals in terms of transportation to remote areas and the movement of goods. A lot of goods are brought from China and Tibet into Nepal.

If you look at the parliamentary debates in India in the 1960s, there was great outrage. With the 1962 China war and the beginning of the construction of the Kodari national highway, it was feared that India will become very vulnerable because Chinese tanks will roll down from Kathmandu to Gorakhpur and into the Indian mainland. But since then, neither the Indian foreign ministry, defence ministry nor the home ministry has ever indicated that the road poses a strategic threat to India in any way. So this is pure China phobia; egged on by the Americans, the Indian media raises these issues from time to time. And it is on this basis that India sometimes puts Nepal, Burma and Bhutan in the dock over its China fears.

Q. Do you see geo-politics changing in this region if Maoists emerge as a larger force in Nepal from what they are now? For instance, could Beijing have a bigger role to play in South Asia if Prachanda and company return with more powers at a future date?

A. If Maoists emerge as a larger force in Nepal and continue to hang on in power and provide relief to people, a larger message will go out to the

people of South Asia that the Maoists can do it. This is precisely what India's ruling class and its bourgeoisie party do not want. India, through its ambassador Rakesh Sood, also had a role to play in Prachanda's toppling. It is common in democracies that elections are held, results come and a government is formed; this is what happens in India also. But in Nepal, recall that election results came out in April 2008 and Prachanda's party emerged as the largest party. But he took his oath only in August 2008. Between April and August, persistent efforts were made to thwart a Maoist government in Nepal by a lot of forces, including India. Since it was for the first time in South Asia that Maoists had won an election and were set to form a government, everyone was opposed to it, particularly capitalist forces like America.

It will not suit these countries to have the Maoists in a strong position in Nepal with their current agenda. Of course, if the Maoists were to opt for the social democracy route, then all their actions will be forgiven. But strong Maoists will inspire many others in the region. Remember American President Eisenhower; he talked about the Domino theory. Before him, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, he talked about the Domino theory – if Communism enters Vietnam, it will slowly spread to other South East Asian countries, they argued. Similarly a strong Maoist government in Nepal will have a direct impact on India and surrounding countries. I believe it will be a big morale booster for similar forces in these countries and a strong precedent for likeminded people to follow. They will be setting an example in a country which is totally in the grip of feudalism and no bourgeoisie country would want that.

Q. What is your view of the Prachanda Path? Maoists say that it is a home-grown version of radical left movement, suitable to Nepal's situation? According to Nepali Maoists, 'The party considers Prachanda Path as an enrichment of Marxism, Leninism and Maoism'

A. Today, even Maoists in Nepal do not talk of Prachanda Path. But when Prachanda Path had emerged strongly, I had objected to it at a meeting in Nepal. I had said it would promote a cult. And just as I had opposed the slogan given during Charu Mazumdar's time 'China's chairman is our chairman' as being too individualistic, I opposed Prachanda Path. The Maoists said this theory did not have universal applicability; they said Prachanda's fusion of armed and mass struggle is what

constitutes Prachanda Path. But now, even Prachanda's party itself has dropped it.

Q. *The role of women in the country's Maoist movement was, was according to some, as high as 40 per cent of the total work force including the militia. That certainly is a very high number. In India, the number of women combatants is reportedly less.*

A. The Nepalese Maoist movement, wherever it has reached, women had a big role to play in it. Women in Nepal, particularly in the rural areas, have been exploited in several ways. Nepal is a patriarchal society where women have had a secondary role. Second, Nepal was a Hindu state. The status of women as enshrined in *Manusmriti* has had an impact. It is the same Hindu religion that has sired the caste system and has encouraged all kinds of feudal tendencies and women have been its victims.

The other factor is that the economy was very backward; economic backwardness and a patriarchal society took its toll in Nepal. In many areas in Nepal, particularly the hilly tracts, it is common to see men relaxing in the sun and women doing hard labour. Since the system was feudal, there was physical and sexual exploitation. In such trying conditions, the way the Maoists organized women can be a classical study for sociologists to make. In the PLA for instance, more than 40 per cent of its members were women and a number of them were commanders and in senior positions. The Gorkha jail break incident of March 2001 was one of the biggest in South Asia when six women dug a tunnel out of the jail.

It is also true that a number of major events that took place in Nepal were not highlighted deliberately. The end of the 250-year-old monarchy (institutionally speaking 250 years, monarchy existed in other forms earlier) in Nepal was one of the biggest events of this century. Many struggles had taken place to finish this monarchy at various times in history. There was Laxan Thapa who was martyred in the cause of fighting against monarchy. So the fight against monarchy and feudalism had been going on for a long time. But invariably, the leadership would strike a compromise with the ruling class in Nepal. It was for the first time in 2008 that monarchy officially came to an end in Nepal. But for some reason, an event of this magnitude was not that well highlighted. I am

reminded of the novel based on the Soviet Revolution of 1917, *How the Steel Was Tempered* by Nikolai Ostrovsky, where a character asks another character, 'Look we have achieved so much, captured so many factories, etc., but there is no news about us, why is it being suppressed?' The other character replies, 'Such news reports will give ideas to other persons, that's why.' So this has been going on for a long time; systematically such news is either suppressed or played down.

In a letter written by Bhagat Singh's friend, Sukhdev, to Chandrashekhar Azad, he wanted to know why their pamphlets were not being published while Gandhi's statements appeared every day. The dominant sections of society – of which the media is also a part – do not want the status quo to change. Even today, the way in which the media 'creates' new agitations, it is the same story. Which is why the biggest achievements of the Maoists of ending the monarchy and turning it into a museum were deliberately not highlighted. Even there, the achievements of women were enormous. The way in which they captured police stations was pure guerrilla action. They broke jails. Women managed communes that were set up by Maoists; they managed schools and fought with rifles. This was the big Maoist achievement in Nepal, the way in which they empowered very weak women into a fighting force.

Q. *According to the United Nations, the number of children under 18 and enrolled for the Maoist cause was as high as 12,000. Do you agree with the numbers?*

A. This is a very tricky question. Yes, there were child soldiers but this cannot be interpreted in traditional terms. The myth of the child soldier was created. The situation was such that whole families were members of the PLA and the party. Father, mother, big brother – all of them were enrolled. So where do the smaller siblings go? There were also those people who had left their families back in villages and gone to fight for the Maoist cause and were living in Maoist hideouts in the jungles – and there were thousands of such families living in the liberated zones. So, everyone who lived in these zones worked for the party. It would be simple to say that a child who picked up a gun was a child soldier, per se. These children never joined the actual battle but lived in those camps where the majority of combatants lived.

There were also incidents of children being kidnapped from schools. When I went to Europe, I was asked in Norway why Maoists were kidnapping school children. I was showed a news-clipping that said that a school bus filled with children was kidnapped and the children returned three days later. I asked them if the children had been returned after a ransom was paid. They said no. Then I said why would children be kidnapped if there was no ransom. The reality was that children who were kidnapped were of the Maoists; they would be picked up at the point of gun and taken to where their parents lived, spent time with them and then returned. If you have not taken ransom and have returned children safe and sound, then it is likely that they were taken for indoctrination; it is also likely that they were indoctrinated by the parents themselves. This was like a voluntary kidnapping. School teachers knew it but if they said as much, they would be shot by the Royal Nepalese Army for colluding with Maoists. I have seen those camps and have shot a film on them – you can see small children playing in the camps – there are arms and ammunition lying around and the children seem familiar with them. The whole atmosphere was like that. So they cannot be called child soldiers in the way they were described by the Americans.

Anand Verma was interviewed in January 2014 in New Delhi.

APPENDIX

Reporting on the subject of Maoism since the 1980s in newspapers and magazines has been a great learning curve. Given here is a sample of my published work. They demonstrate that the Maoist movement and my career as a professional journalist ran a parallel course.

1 LINES DRAWN OVER BATAIDARI ISSUE

**Published in the Patna edition of *The Times of India*
on 11 October 1986**

By RANJIT BHUSHAN
The Times of India News Service

MUZAFFARPUR: The tension is there to feel in Sadiqpur village in the Saraiya block of this district, about 30 km. from the main town. The basic issues involved are those which have tended to reflect on the growing agrarian tensions in part of the state where the unbridled powers of the rural rich are being increasingly put to question.

This particular case not only epitomises that, but also raises serious doubts about the efficacy of the implementation of land reforms in the traditionally landlord-dominated areas of the state.

The village, a motley assemblage of about 100 houses, is dominated by the upper castes with a few families of harijans and backwards, most of them being landless and living off subsistence by doing manual work. In the heart of the village is piece of land, about 18 acres and 12 decimals,

owned by a prominent landlord of the area, Mr. Jagat Prasad Singh, a resident of Lalu Chhapra village under the nearby Paru police station. This land was distributed among 32 persons who were given deeds and tenancy rights of the land on July 15, 1981, during the tenure of the then Chief Minister, Dr. Jagannath Mishra.

Earlier, in 1974–75 this land had been distributed on paper to these persons under the state Land Ceiling Act (government order number 457). The actual implementation followed in 1981.

Mr. Raghunandan Thakur, also a resident of Lallu Chhapra village, and said to be a relative of Mr. Jagat Prasad Singh, filed a case in the court of the then additional collector, claiming bataidari right over the land distributed. The court of the additional collector awarded the decision in the favour of Mr. Raghunandan Thakur.

The deedholders immediately filed a petition with the then district magistrate of Muzaffarpur district, Mr. A.K. Rath, who reversed the decision of the additional collector. Mr. Raghunandan Thakur went in appeal to the chairman, board of revenue, Mr. Bishram Prasad. After a three-month long deliberation, the board of revenue ruled in the favour of Mr. Raghunandan Thakur making him a sikmi bataidar. Since then the deedholders have gone to the high court where it is lying at the moment.

According to Mr. Shivchandra Ram, aged 30, and one of the 32 deedholders, the land was distributed in 1981. He was the recipient of 20 decimals of land in the distribution network. Mr. Shivchandra Ram said that the rent for the land was fixed and all the deedholders were paying the rent and receiving the receipts.

On September 15 this year, the deedholders received an order (number 12) saying that as per the board of revenue all the order including the orders of the district magistrate and the additional collector stood nullified. The message was also conveyed to the deputy commissioner for land reforms (DCLR) of the district.

While the district magistrate, Mr. Debashis Gupta, told this correspondent that no orders had been passed usurping the deedholders, documents prove that the directive was clear – six bataidars headed by Mr. Raghunandan Thakur, Mr. Ramdev Mahto, Mrs. Budhni, two widows, Mrs. Chamelia and Mrs. Tetri were given tenancy

rights over the land. Documents prove that this order was passed on September 19, 1986.

According to some of the deedholders, Mr. Jagannath Rai and Mr. Raindev Mahto, two of the six bataidars, were security men of the landlord, Mr. Jagat Prasad Singh, and the three women were widows, but actually their husbands were working as servants in the house of Mr. Jagat Prasad Singh. The deedholders alleged that Mr. Raghunandan Thakur was related to Mr. Jagat Prasad Singh.

Mr. Shivchandra Ram said all the six bataidars were representatives of the landlord, who was not willing to part with his piece of land.

On September 24 this year, the bataidars filed a case under section 107 of the Indian Penal Code, in the court of the sub-divisional officer (west) of the district. Though the district magistrate denied clamping ban orders under section 144 on the land, deedholders allege that section 144 has been imposed on the land.

In the dispute for supremacy over the land, the deedholders are said to be supported politically by the socialist unity centre of India (SUCI), whose activists are working overtime in the area.

Interestingly, the rayati papers given to Mr. Jagat Prasad Singh in 1961 make it clear that the piece of land he held had no bataidars. The claims of Mr. Raghunandan Thakur to be a legitimate bataidar of the disputed land seem questionable.

The deedholders say the question of vacating the land does not arise as they have been paying the rent since 1981. According to them, violence can erupt any moment because of the provocative postures taken by the 'hitmen' of the landlord. Despite orders, musclemen of Mr. Jagat Prasad Singh have forced cattle into the field for grazing. They were under constant threat of being assaulted or even killed.

The district magistrate admitted that the situation was 'precarious' and violence could erupt any time. 'Any dispute related to land can be unpredictable, and the district administration is going to take full precautionary measures after the Durga puja,' Mr. Gupta said.

It also reflects on the entire system of justice and law and order as well, because according to the residents of the village, the local police is virtually impotent to enforce any discipline and the circle officer of the block, the highest administrative authority, has already been threatened.

2 LAND DISTRIBUTION ESCALATES TENSION

**Published in Patna edition of *The Times of India*
on 20 November 1986**

By RANJIT BHUSHAN
The Times of India News Service

MUZAFFARPUR: The distribution of homesteads to the landless in this district had led to an escalation in tension between the upper case landlords and the lower case 'beneficiaries' of the Bihar privileged persons homestead tenancy Act of 1949, with the former resisting tooth and nail the implementation of the Act.

Chochaha Chapra village in the Paru block of the district is an alarming indicator to the tension brewing among these 'beneficiaries' who are being slowly but steadily eased out of their land by the landlords with the bureaucratic apparatus either indifferent to or conniving with the landlords' eviction 'drivers'.

Gaura tola locality of the village, 40 km. from here is split evenly between bhumihars and backwards comprising nuniyas and doms. The only lands the latter own are those on which they have built their hutments and which now threaten their existence.

The tola, inhabited by the nuniyas, consists of land distributed under the Bihar privilege persons homestead tenancy Act. It stipulates that the landless would acquire a minimum of three decimals and a maximum of six decimals of land. The Act also specifies that land be allotted to those who have no place to live in and to workers who were staying as raiyats land of landlords.

Two 'khatians' of Mr. Shivbalak Ojha, a prominent landlord, measuring 12 decimals and 0.49 hectares were distributed to tenant Sunner Mahto and an additional 0.40 decimals to his brother Lakhan Mahto. Both of them were nuniyas.

In 1965, the landlords filed a title suit in the court of the munsif magistrate against the tenancy rights of the nuniyas and won. According to Lakhan Mahto, the title suit was allegedly won with the help of 'fake applications' submitted by the landlord. Subsequently, an inquiry report submitted by an official of the local administration also admitted that the 'landlord acted with vendetta'.

The report said since the distribution of the 'khatian' bad relations prevailed between the two parties and the landlord was always trying to 'evolve' ways and means to get the land allotted to their former raiyats.

Since the publication of the report, the landlords of the area, all important Congress functionaries, were terrorising the nuniyas. Even while cases were being instituted against the nuniyas, the landlords, according to the villagers, sent out armed gangs to assault the occupants. The nuniyas, especially the two brothers, were repeatedly threatened.

On November 9, 1981, hoodlums of the landlords set fire to the houses of the nuniyas and destroyed whatever little food-grain they had. According to Lakhan Mehto, 'the marauders burnt my house, assaulted my family members and cut off the left hand of my wife'. Lakhan Mahto and some other nuniyas and doms of the village approached the district authorities but to no avail. According to Ram Balak Ram, aged 40, the failure of the administration encouraged the criminals of the area. 'All of us are being threatened at regular intervals.'

The report of the local official said land of Ram Balak Ojha was inhibited by the nuniyas and doms as ratyats. It also said 'the land was given to Sunner Mahto and Lakhan Mehto for the purpose of building a house by Ram Balak Mahto'. On the basis of the official's report, the circle officer of Paru block distributed deeds of the land under the amend rules of the Land Ceiling Act of the state government.

The distribution of deeds to the nuniyas has in no way helped them. The landlords have shown scant regard for such government directives. In August last the house of Lakhan Mahto and some other residents were pulled down and their belongings burnt. Sitting in a hutment in the midst of the village, very few persons were willing to divulge information about the landlord. 'We fear, reprisal after you go back from here,' said the villagers.

Muscle is not the only way by which the nuniyas are being harassed. According to the villagers, many of them have been falsely implicated in cases filed by the landlords. Jagat Rai, who dared to interfere when the landlord's henchmen came on their 'routine' mission, was implicated in case of violence. Four other members of his family have also been dragged into cases which range from stealing wheat and theft to violence.

According to the villagers, the local police have virtually no say in the running of the law and order machinery.

A Lok Dal worker, Lakhan Ram said, 'this place is going to turn into another place of massacre if the administration does not take adequate steps to counter the landlord threat'.

3 MUSAHARI: EMBERS STILL BURNING

**Published in the Patna edition of *The Times of India*
on 18 December 1986**

By RANJIT BHUSHAN
The Times of India News Service

MUZAFFARPUR: Musahari, about 100 km. away from here, is a picture of relative tranquility now. Nearly two decades ago it witnessed the beginnings of 'left adventurism' in the state. The peasant revolt came in the wake of the naxalbari movement in the sixties.

The first thing noticeable in Musahari is the villagers' political awareness. The talk always invariably veers onto the caste system. 'There are only two castes – the rich and the poor,' a man comments. Much of the political philosophy here stems from this. Folklore, especially that perpetuated by the media, would have us believe that Musahari is going to prove another flashpoint. The conditions, however, are nowhere near as revolutionary as that.

In its entirety, the movement inspired by the low-caste tenants began in the mid-sixties and petered out by the end of the decade. The important leadership in the Mushari movement was 'encountered' in phases. Almost the single prominent leader, Raj Kishore Prasad Singh, and Taslim were killed by the police. In the police oppression that followed hundreds of activists and sympathisers were shot dead or tortured and many more were arrested, thus forcing the organisation to retreat. The struggle ebbed out.

What has time done to the heroes of the Musahari movement? Ram Chandra Paswan earns his livelihood by running a rickshaw which was provided to him by the government under the welfare scheme meant to rehabilitate the 'misguided youth' of the sixties. He was picked up in 1969 by the police when he was 16 for organising sedition against the state. A full-time member of the CPI (ML), Paswan was attracted towards the theory of 'class annihilation'. After spending 10 years in prison, he now supports the Congress electorally, realising in the process

the futility of such political movements, like the one he participated in the sixties. 'The process became one of mindless individual killings,' says he with rancour. He admits that there were confusions even then, but most of his comrades refused to analyse them.

Apart from driving a rickshaw he does farming on a piece of land, which he does not own. Are conditions ripe for change? No, he says emphatically. Not until the people change.

For Ram Briksha Ram, the ideal of revolution is as new as it was in 1970 when he was arrested for 'fighting for minimum wages in Musahari with violence'. But the years of imprisonment have not reduced his faith in class struggle, though he almost violently speaks against the theory of annihilation and the lack of an organised struggle. But, optimism lives. Even though the movement failed, the landless have acquired a degree of self-respect, the minimum wages have been raised, but the socio-economic fabric has remained the same. Ram sees a difference. Now the young men who are organised lack the same fervour, but the movement has definitely gathered more content than it had two decades ago.

Almost anyone in Musahari would and can analyse the peasant movement. The villages are full of stories of police repression, of bravura and eventually of gratitude. A visitor is looked upon with eyebrows raised.

Described in police records as the 'man behind the Musahari revolt', Chakradhar Sahi, now committed to the upkeep of his family, was a member of the CPI before he joined the CPI (ML) in 1966 during the split. He admits that 'mistakes' were committed, reasons which led to the movement losing momentum. Apart from condemning the senseless killings, he looks for the reasons of the failure outside the mainstream of the movement. Does he foresee any revival of the Naxalbari upsurge? 'May be in the future when the confusions are solved, when a corrupt state will crumble under the weight of its own contradictions.'

A number of programmes sought to be implemented in Musahari have subsequently not been introduced. A case in point is the pilot project for rural employment which was introduced exclusively for Musahari in 1972. Newspaper investigations reveal that of a total population of 1,25,770 of Musahari block, only 13,201 workers had been registered under the scheme and the public accounts committee discovered a number of irregularities committed in the implementation of the scheme.

For Ram Prit Ram, the single biggest disillusionment with the failure of the Musahari movement is the rearing of the communal virus in the

villages, including Musahari. 'It justifies the failure of the left movement as a whole.'

Joining the CPI (ML) in 1968, he began organising the landless for payment of minimum wages in Musahari. He was arrested in Siliguri in 1969 where he was working as an activist in the night and selling vegetables by the day. After spending eight years in solitary confinement, he feels that the role of the individual in history is somewhat limited. The armed revolt proved fatal and blind allegiance to Charu Mazumdar led to the downfall of the movement.

He tried his hands at the elections and contested as a left candidate from the Bochaha constituency in the vidhan sabha polls where he lost to the Congress candidate. Barely, concealing his disdain for the other 'left' parties like the CPI and the CPM, he says that one important reason why the naxalbari movement failed even in Musahari was the hostile attitude of the other left parties. But one thing that Ram Prit Ram is sure of is that no party can claim to be the sole 'vanguard' for being a catalyst in change.

More than 70 per cent of the land deeds have still not been distributed in Musahari even though there are periodical visits by Congress leaders. One of the discernible changes in the last decade in the block, this correspondent was told, is the role of the ruling Congress workers who are active in the area in an effort to stem the tide of 'extremism'. Congress offices have been set up in all the villages of Musahari. The government has strengthened the intelligence network in the area.

Above all, is the increasing capital investment in the fields. While the bullock carts are visible, also very much in focus are the tractors that plow, and the tube-wells that work.

4 TRIBAL WOMEN ACCUSE POLICE OF RAPE, DEMAND JUSTICE

Put out by Associated Press wires in February 1987

By Ranjit Bhushan
Associated Press Writer

Pararia, India (AP) – At least 20 poor, low-caste women in this remote village in Bihar state say they were beaten and raped by local policemen

avenging an attack on a fellow police officer. The women say that a posse of 50 policemen surrounded their village on the night of Feb 18 and systematically broke into mud and thatch huts with iron rods and sledge hammers.

Men and women were beaten, and girls as young as 13 were raped along with their mothers. Reports of the incident were slow in filtering out from the village in Bihar in Northwestern India because there are no phones and only a dirt-road links to other towns.

The district government has ordered an inquiry and suspended 14 policemen, but the villagers say that suspension from duty is inadequate and the guilty should be jailed and punished. The incident has been highlighted by the press as yet another example of helplessness of the poor in rural India's caste-ridden society.

Peasants in Bihar have frequently been caught up in feuds with higher-caste landowners, and police – also divided on caste lines – have been accused of taking part. The attack at Pararia 'appears to be an attempt to terrorize villagers who were fighting against police atrocities', said the national *Sunday Observer* newspaper.

The trouble apparently began on Feb 11, when a police constable searching for a missing woman arrived in Pararia, which is about 200 kilometers (120 miles) southeast of the state capital of Patna. The constable was beaten up by the villagers and chased away, said police superintendent R.C. Sinha. One week later, a mob of policemen encircled the village of about 30 mud huts and fired several shots in the air to scare people into staying indoors, the villagers say.

The women recall what happened next with horror. 'Four policemen came in, breaking open the door and assaulted me and my husband,' said Parvati Devi, who is 16. 'They stripped me in front of my husband and raped me one by one.' Kamala Devi, 40, said that 'About 10 policemen broke into the house after we did not open the door when they knocked. I was humiliated by six policemen, and the other four gang raped my daughters.' The daughters are Manju, 16, and Josha, 13, she said.

The villagers say that at least 20 women were raped and that the policemen also looted jewelry and goods worth 50,000 rupees (3,800 US dollars). Village men say they were beaten with rifle butts when they tried to stop the rampage. Five married women have filed formal charges with the police. The others, most of them unmarried, are afraid to do so for fear of being rejected by society.

Sinha, the police superintendent, has pledged that 'We will punish the guilty.' He declined to discuss the incident any further. Villagers, however, are not convinced justice will be done. Jairam Mahto, whose daughter Radiya, 26, was raped by five policemen said, 'The more I pleaded, the more I was beaten up. There is no law in this part of the world. Imagine seeing your own daughter being raped.'

Violence is endemic to Bihar, India's most lawless and feudal state, where upper-caste landlords hold sway with 'private armies'. The lower caste people, most of them impoverished and illiterate, are often targets. And sometimes they fight back. More than 450 people have been killed in inter-caste clashes, private army attacks and revenge killings in the past five years. The villages are so isolated that they are vulnerable to attack. From Pararia, the closest concrete road is 15 kilometers (9 miles) away and the dirt road connecting it jags through a dry river bed and several ravines.

In New Delhi, a joint statement by India's five major women's organizations condemned the Pararia rapes as 'barbarous' and called on the government to ensure the guilty were punished. 'This is an indication of the total devaluation of women which itself is a sign of degradation of the society,' the women's group said.

5 LOCATING JEHANABAD

Published in *Hardnews* in its December 2005 edition

Ranjit Bhushan Delhi

The Maoist attack needs to be situated in a wider context of political organisation, mass base, mobilisation, ideology, strategy and tactics

The November 13, 2005, simultaneous attack in Jehanabad on the police lines, the school where the assembly elections' ballot boxes were kept and storming of the jail premises and whisking away of their leaders in addition to hostages, most of whom were killed, represents a definitive phase in India's Maoist politics. Next day, the police personnel on duty went on a wildcat strike, demanding that the suspension against the superintendent of police be withdrawn, as well as adequate protection be provided against Maoists. Jehanabad for long has been the

bastion of extreme left politics. But just how much has this support base grown over the last few decades? The well-planned attack, according to eyewitnesses, was carried out by anywhere between 500–1,000 armed activists. Police personnel were on election duty, so their deployment in the main town was not heavy.

There was little information about an activity whose planning must have involved a number of persons for some period of time. But intelligence apart, there are other factors that must be taken into account. Jehanabad, central Bihar, unlike the heavily forested districts of Chhattisgarh or Jharkhand, is a plain where hit-and-run tactics are difficult to execute because there is practically no cover. The fact that after conducting a raid on such a scale the attackers were able to melt away along with their captives reflects the extent of political activity among the social base in the area. The attackers escaped detection easily.

In less than four decades after it was launched in May 1969, it is clear that Charu Mazumdar and his comrades, some of whom like Kanu Sanyal continue to be active, set a ball rolling. In latest official figures offered by the union ministry of home affairs, over 150 districts in India out of a total of 540-plus districts, are under the grip of 'Naxalite terror'. These are districts where outside of the main town, the state's forces of law and order and its norms of governance have ceased to be effective. These include 'liberated areas', where a parallel system of administration runs its course. That is to say that about a quarter of the Indian republic would be deemed to be functioning almost entirely outside the purview of the Westminster system. This does not mean that all these 150-odd districts are wholly independent. What it means is that, on an average, about three to four assembly segments in each of these districts (a district could have anywhere seven or eight assembly segments) are areas of activity of armed left politics.

The September/October 2004 merger between the People's War (PW) group and the Maoist Coordination Committee to form the Communist Party of India (Maoist) brought together considerable mass bases of the constituents with their organisation and military capacity. According to officials in the Bihar government, the Jehanabad attack is almost certainly the work of CPI (Maoist) because an audacious attack of this magnitude has not yet occurred in Bihar where extreme left groups, particularly the MCC, have for long dominated the countryside in central Bihar with a sustained degree of violence. Recurrent attacks in Andhra

Pradesh (AP) on police personnel, leaders of panchayats and government officials have intensified. There have been mounting attacks on police posts and government offices, with the toll of casualties rising by the month. In AP alone, according to a media report of October 25, 2005, CPI (Maoist) activists had forcibly occupied 1,142 acres of land in Kurnool and Prakasam districts. Around the same time, they had reportedly occupied and re-distributed 2,005 acres in Guntur and 10,000 acres in Karimnagar. Reports of land being grabbed in the districts of Telangana and surrounding areas come in daily. There are people's courts (jan adalats) where delivers 'instant' justice.

'Liberated areas'

The junction of states adjoining Bastar district (Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Orissa and Maharashtra's Gadchiroli district) which is now the operations base of the CPI (Maoist), could be described as 'liberated area'. Dantewada district arguably forms the epicentre of India's Maoist insurgency. It is extremely backward and impoverished and borders AP on one side and Maharashtra's tribal districts on the other. There are no police posts, two primary health centres had been taken over by Maoists and a block-divisional magistrate in a neighbouring block had not attended office for months. There was no forest official around, because the government cannot guarantee their safety. Finally when an assistant engineer of the public works department (PWD) was located, the man was in a hurry to get back to the district headquarters in Dantewada. He stated that efforts to construct a metalled road there had been foiled by Maoist groups who had on one occasion dynamited the construction material brought in for road construction. After that, the administration had given up, mainly because they could not find government employees volunteering for the job. In the districts of Bastar and Dantewada in Chhattisgarh, and indeed all districts in the neighbouring states, developmental activities, already measly in the past, had ground to a halt because roads pose a security threat to armed insurgents by facilitating easy movement of security forces. Electrification would make hiding difficult.

The Maoists have a fiscal regime. In Dantewada district, for example, it was mandatory for all contractors to part with a portion of their money to radical left groups. Traders have to pay a cut to keep their businesses

running and industrialists who want to exploit the mineral rich belt are bound to pay an extortion price. In contrast, the state's ability to collect its dues is weak. In Dantewada, no tax official had shown up for several years and one report submitted by the sales tax department in Raipur, capital of Chhatisgarh, in 2004 was candid enough to suggest that since tax was already being paid to the Maoists, there was little justification in levying any other surcharge because that would entail, among other things, going to the affected areas. Red flags waved over certain plots of land in interior Dantewada. These are disputed territories and the landlords, in some cases, give way to the Maoists, who in turn distribute the land. However, if the landlords wish to challenge the Naxalites, they are clearly putting themselves at risk. In some Instances local officials present there and even the landlords pay a tax to keep themselves on the right side of the Maoists.

This junction of states is important to the Maoists because, as gleaned from an interview that this reporter had with a mid-level area commander of the CPI (Maoist), Dantewada provided ideal protection. No sooner did a police crackdown begin, activists and leaders kept slipping from one state to the other, the remote locations and deep forests providing them ample cover. He also revealed that it was here that the cadre went into hiding after the attack on former chief minister of AP, Chandrababu Naidu, in 2004 from the AP police and its anti-Naxal crack squads.

Mobilisation

Creating a 'liberated area' involves careful political work. Maoists new to an area look for an appropriate intervention, say a local dispute around a temple or village pond, to establish themselves, and need to demonstrate through their leadership that it is possible to challenge age-old feudal norms. The armed backing helps, though by itself it is inadequate to explain widespread mass support. Field reports conducted in Bhojpur district in Bihar in the 1990s revealed that when the first Maoist groups made their approaches to low-caste villagers for purposes of mobilisation in the late 1960s one of the main reasons why people came to them was their quest for arms, because a majority of them felt that without arms, no one would listen to them. There is little doubt that the use of arms made the local feudal powers, for the first time then, aware of a

retaliatory power. Over the years, they have learnt to be more cautious in their dealings with people who were of a lower status than them.

Lower castes, women, dalits, and other oppressed sections are mobilised through meetings, bandhs, chakka jams, jan adalats, and gheraos.

There can be no doubt that in the case of central Bihar, in the districts of Jehanabad, Aurangabad, Patna, Bhojpur, Arrah and others, nearly four decades of radical left politics have greatly undermined feudal power and restored the dignity of labour. Attacks on low-caste women have come down and if there are still some cases of dalits being burnt at the stake, retaliation is almost guaranteed. That is the reason why an attack on Jehanabad can be organised with such impunity and with such deadly effect.

The land question is central to the radical left. Market-led liberalisation of the post-1990s has been unable to uplift India's rural population (74 per cent, according to the 1991 census, of which 61 per cent is directly dependent on agriculture). Agrarian reforms have been virtually absent, and in the past fifty years, according to figures released by agriculture minister, Sharad Pawar in 2004, which are also the latest available on the subject, barely 1.25 per cent of the total surplus land (a mere 51 lakh acres) has been distributed in India since 1947. The marginal farmer who has less than 2.5 acres of land constitutes roughly 55 per cent of the rural workforce and another 37–38 per cent are completely *landless*. *Agricultural* workers do not always get minimum wages; rights of *sharecroppers* are not secure. There is enormous under-employment, and on an average, an agricultural labourer gets only about 137 days employment in a year. Rural indebtedness is an acute problem, with farmer's suicides only an indication of the enormity of problem. Quoting government figures, Maoists say that nearly half of the peasant households are indebted with Andhra Pradesh leading the way (82 per cent), followed by Tamil Nadu (74.5 per cent) and Punjab (65.4 per cent). Given the preponderance of the 'large farmer' in Indian parliamentary politics, radical agrarian reforms do not appear on the horizon.

The tribal question is critical to the Maoists. Of the 5,633 communities listed by the Anthropological Survey of India's People of India project, 635 were categorised as tribal. It would be no exaggeration to state that *tribals constitute the insurgency's biggest constituency. Much mobilisation rests on tribal rights to livelihood and resources.*

Caste remains a reality for the Maoist movement as it does for other political actors. While the rank-and-file of Maoist activists come from the lower castes and dalits who in most cases constitute the landless, the leadership has come in different phases from upper and intermediary castes. In the case of Bihar, for instance, the bulk of the MCC leadership came from the Yadav community. So some MCC members working for Lalu Yadav in the state in some previous assembly elections has always been the accepted norm. During elections, it is not uncommon for members of outlawed organisations to mobilise support for their caste candidates.

State response counterproductive

The home minister's statement on September 19, 2005 is characteristic. 'The problem of Naxalism has to be addressed by ensuring effective and sustained police action against Naxal violence and, at the same time, accelerating socio-economic development of the affected areas,' said Shivraj Patil addressing the closing of the first meeting of the Standing Committee of Chief Ministers of the Naxalite-affected states in September, 2005. That the Maoist insurgency is not a law and order problem seems not to have sunk in despite compelling advice to the contrary. The chief minister of Andhra Pradesh, after holding some preliminary talks with Naxal groups announced the problem is intractable and has now refused talks. The chief minister of Karnataka is ready to talk 'if the Naxalites give up arms'. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) chief ministers of Chhatisgarh and Jharkhand have declared an all-out war on Naxal groups. In the latest initiative to reform the police (a euphemism for *stepping up anti-Naxalite operations*) the government has earmarked Rs 2,000 crore for the process. In comparison, barely Rs 2 crore per annum per Naxal-affected district has been allocated for developmental purposes. While these states run contiguous to each other, there is no coordination between the police forces, except for one agreement that the Andhra Pradesh police have with their Chhatisgarh counterparts.

To make matters complicated, anti-Maoist vigilante squads (named variously), helped by state's security forces, are proliferating after they first sprung up in Bihar. The state has sub-contracted its license to kill to paramilitary forces, without insuring the means to recall the license and thereby burying the concept of the rule of law. In Bihar itself, clashes

between the upper-caste landlord dominated private armies and Maoists have claimed over 1,000 lives (official figures) in the last decade or so. Not surprisingly, the most powerful of them in Bihar, the Ranvir Sena, has not been banned, while some Maoist groups have been declared unlawful. The BJP government of Jharkhand has created a counterinsurgency force called the Nagrik Suraksha Samitis (NSS), consisting in the main of high-caste landlords and their hirelings, which has targeted many unarmed civilians in its so-called anti Maoist campaign. In the last couple of years, all too suddenly, a number of these counterinsurgents have mushroomed in Andhra Pradesh. With names like Fear Vikas, Green Tigers, Tirumala Tigers, Narsa Cobras and Kranthi Sena, these groups have terrorised low-caste labourers in the Andhra countryside, accusing them of being Maoist sympathisers. Tales of the unlawful and arbitrary antics of these village defence committees and other extra-state armed actors created to counter Maoist armed presence do not reassure.

With obsessive concern with countering Maoist terror with state force, longer term ways of bringing about lasting peace are relegated to the sidelines. It must be borne in mind that the Indian Maoists can trace their legacy to peasant rebellions, agrarian struggles, tribal insurgencies and millenarian movements in pre-independence India, Telen-gana is only one such. As an ironic reminder, one of the three attacks in Jehanabad was carried out on a school named after Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, one of the leading lights of the All India Kisan Sabha movement. History cannot be undone by force alone.

The author, a senior journalist, is visiting professor, Centre for Jawaharlal Nehru Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia University

6 NEPALESE MAOISTS' LAST CHANCE

Published in *Sahara Time* in 17 June 2006 issue

Ranjit Bhushan

THE KEY question in Kathmandu these days is how much the latest tumult in the Himalayan kingdom will help the Maoists? More importantly, is the possibility of the Maoists marching upon Kathmandu and seizing power a real one now? Also are the powerful Nepali Maoists

likely to be pacified by the almost overnight whittling of the monarchy? In that sense, the recent events in Nepal could be considered, in some sense, 'historic'.

First, the all-powerful institution of the monarchy was stripped of all its traditional and constitutional powers, and almost reduced to a non-entity. Second, the world's only Hindu kingdom was declared a secular country. And the Royal Nepal Army was brought under Parliament instead of the king, as it had been all these years. The declaration by Parliament in fact strikes at the source of the king's powers: the military, which hitherto enjoyed absolute immunity, and his imposed divine status that makes him superior to the rest of his countrymen – the much celebrated Gurkhas are as much part of the military folklore in Nepal as in India.

That all options before the king had closed was evident on April 24, when he ceded the power he had hijacked unconstitutionally 15 months ago. Two days before that, the chief of the loyal – and erstwhile – Royal Nepal Army had warned the king of colossal loss of life and property if the king did not give up most of his powers: Interestingly, political observers say that even the Maoist radicals – in their private conversations – admit that despite a clearly visible anti-monarchy mood within the movement for democracy, a traditional country with a nearly 85 per cent Hindu population was not yet ready to reduce the institution to a non-entity.

Significantly, public disenchantment with the country's Hindu status, they say, was a direct fallout of the overt support the palace received from the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and its leader Ashok Singhal, who not only supported the royal takeover but also promised to parade about 2 billion Hindus all over the world in support of the world's only Hindu king. Between a Hindu state and a secular democracy, the Nepalese opted for the second.

In an effort to keep the Maoists on board, the Koirala Government has recently constituted a high-level probe into excesses committed by the state to suppress the movement for democracy. In the process, it arrested at least five former Ministers and suspended three top security chiefs. This and other similar actions had rightly raised concerns over the government's fairness and competence. More seriously, this was taken as a signal that the government would politicise the security forces. But the

declaration in Parliament, which reads like the country's agenda forward, has temporarily allayed those fears.

The Maoists, who have declared a ceasefire and expressed a willingness to join the peace dialogue, are busy with extortion and recruitment to what they call the people's army. Although the government has promised that the dialogue will begin soon, the Maoists' attitude has triggered suspicion that they want to use the ceasefire period to consolidate their position, as they've done twice before.

India, which had played a large role in November 2005 in bringing the Maoists and the seven parties to the table of parliamentary democracy, is now rather wary of the Maoists' behaviour. More so with its own revolutionary corridor running from Andhra upwards to Nepal, mostly in the hands of Naxalites. Adding to India's problem is its position on the Maoist groups in its own country which is that the government will not hold any dialogue with them so long as they use violence as an instrument of politics. And while CPI (M) politburo member, Sitaram Yechury, hopes that the successful entry of the Maoists in Nepal's political main-stream would inspire Indian Maoists to follow suit, such a quid pro quo does not look like an immediate possibility.

In reality, Nepalese Maoists have already made their intentions very clear. They have started a round of hard bargaining, demanding the Prime Minister's post in the interim arrangement even before they have agreed to demobilisation of arms – a process which could be a bone of contention between Nepal and India, with the former favouring some degree of international involvement, preferably by the UN, and India – like in Kashmir – opposed to any international mediation on the matter.

The failure of the peace process, or its tardy progress, has the potential to sabotage the historic blueprint, a direct outcome of the movement for democracy. In fact, the success of this movement so soon has also sent a warning message to the Maoists that it was also a rejection of violence – both state-sponsored and Maoist-backed. While the seven-party-alliance will continue to receive international and domestic support to move ahead on the declaration, it may be a last chance for the Maoists as their unreasonable demands and actions would once again bring them under targeted attack of the international community, not to mention Nepal's own security forces.

7 MAOISTS HIDE THEIR WEAPONS

**While playing the classic game of getting
into power at all costs**

Published in *Sahara Time* in
28 January–3 February 2007 edition
Ranjit Bhushan

THE PASSAGE of the draft Interim Constitution of Nepal was on January 14 and 15 coincided with US Ambassador to Nepal, James Francis Mortality, telling select journalists that low calibre arms and ammunition were being smuggled from Bihar 'so that they can put crummy weapons into the containers under UN supervision instead of modern weapons'. The envoy was referring to the Tripartite agreement between the Maoists, the government and the United Nations, which says the guerillas will barrack their soldiers in seven main camps and 21 satellite ones. Their arms will be locked up in storage containers monitored by UN in camps to ensure their soldiers do not intimidate anyone. Only after the UN certifies that the process is complete, will the government induct the guerillas into the Cabinet.

The UN monitors have begun counting the weapons of the Maoists. While it is easy to assume that the way is getting cleared for the Maoists to enter formally the interim government, the path remains far from clear. The US Ambassador's statements just reflect that there are still a number of things that have to fall into place.

The Nepalese home minister, Krishna Prasad Sitaula, has denied the US allegation saying that the 'UN had started managing Maoist arms and the government believes that the Maoists will hand over their weapons to the UN.'

The question of arms supply from India has been a source of constant debate. Indian home ministry reports say that the burgeoning illegal, low-grade arms industry in Bihar and UP, which cater to the needs of petty criminals and smugglers, have been supplying weapons to Maoists in the last decade or so.

This apart, Indian officials are taking the Maoist's United Front tactics quite seriously and believe that the Nepal's radical left are the closest to textbook Maoists. It was on July 15, 1940 that Mao

successfully used the 'United Front Strategy' to fight against the Japanese by combining with his arch enemy Chaing Kai Shek. And it was in November 21, 2005 the Nepali Maoists following the United Front strategy, decided to go for the 12-point agreement with the agitating political parties. At that point of time neither the agitating political parties nor the communists could have brought the monarchy down on their own.

Fact file

- The UN monitors have begun counting the weapons of the Maoists
- The question of arms supply from India has been a source of constant debate in Kathmandu
- The Maoists in Nepal are quite adept in using Mao's United Front strategy in achieving their objectives

Indian officials say that the Maoists in Nepal are quite adept in using Mao's United Front strategy in achieving their objectives. The Indian assessment is that once the monarchy and the royalists have been neutralised, the Maoists will focus their attention on the democrats. Meanwhile, there has been a steady stream of criticisms on some of the provisions, but many were of no consequence except a few. These included the charge that the Constitution is more a political document and not a legal one. Since it was drafted by political leaders and not by legal luminaries, it could be seen as a political document. Secondly, it is not a final document and is just an interim arrangement till the elections are held for a constitutional assembly.

In addition, the judiciary is not independent. A meeting of all the justices of the Supreme Court met informally on January 7 and decided to approach the political parties to amend the provisions relating to the appointment of judges. Interestingly, a major and a valid objection was made by Koirala himself who said that the interim constitution has given too much power to the Prime Minister. This is true and perhaps no damage will be done till Koirala continues. But the critical question is what after Koirala?

8 ALTERNATE LEFT

Published in *Financial Chronicle* on 6 June 2014

By Ranjit Bhushan

With the fall of the organised Communist parties, could another variant of the Reds emerge from the heart of India?

Away from the low pitch rhetoric of the Left Front politics, now crushed under the jackboots of BJP and Trinamool Congress, another, perhaps more potent alternate Left politics is playing out in the heart of the country. In a narrow but long corridor, runs the writ of Maoists or radical Leftists, most of whom are known by their nomenclature Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist).

All of them without exception trace their lineage back to the founder of the Naxalite movement, Charu Mazumdar, who was killed in police custody in 1972. Since then, for close to four decades, this rural insurgency has grown, despite police repression and political indifference.

Security experts and analysts who have christened this as the Red Corridor, see in it the germs of future trouble if not addressed in time. The corridor that begins in Nepal, enters Bihar and runs through Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha and Andhra Pradesh, ends up kissing parts of Kerala. The ensemble, from North to South India, is complete.

According to latest ministry of home affairs figures, close to 60 out of 543 districts in India are under the grip of Maoists. Odisha has nine affected districts, Jharkhand 14, Bihar seven, Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh 10 each, Madhya Pradesh eight, Maharashtra two and West Bengal one.

Most Maoists in India gladly admit that they have fraternal links with their counterparts in Nepal, who from a ragtag bunch of rural guerrillas, have transformed themselves into that country's mainline political force.

By all accounts, the movement in India is currently epicentred in Chhattisgarh, whose thick forest cover provides excellent hiding and training grounds for cadres, most of whom are heavily armed. It is easily accessible; getting into Odisha, Andhra Pradesh or Maharashtra is the

easiest thing in the world, particularly when most states lack an inter-state agreement on how best to tackle Maoist violence.

Just what is an affected district? In Chhattisgarh's Dantewada district for example – the country's worst affected Maoist district – the writ of the state stops running at its district headquarters. Beyond that, in the lush verdant greens, doctors do not attend primary health clinics, which have been taken over by radicals, revenue officials never show up in their offices in outlying hamlets, the lower levels of the district administration are non-existent and the police prefer the safety of their headquarters. Stray industries face a shutdown. No one, it seems, wants to take a chance in the wild.

The ministry of home affairs in a statement to the Lok Sabha last year said that more than 15,000 civilians and security forces had been killed in Maoist or Naxalite-related violence in India in the last six years. In June last year in Chhattisgarh, the entire top leadership of the Congress, including former Union minister VC Shukla, was wiped out in an audacious Maoist attack on a party convoy, which was returning in the evening after addressing a public rally.

The spiral of violence never stops. Despite the pro-poor stand of Maoists, the men and women who have been caught up in the crossfire, are indeed lowly government officials, village doctors, minor constables and poor tribals who have nowhere to go.

But there is also an increasing realisation both in New Delhi and affected state capitals that treating the Maoist problem as a law and order issue, will not do. It is no surprise that Maoism or radical Left brand of politics has come up in some of the most impoverished areas of the country, notably its tribal belt, which has seen steady erosion of tribal values and customs, debasement of land and the deprivation of the fruits of development that have made the rest of the country richer.

There is another paradox here. In 2010, former prime minister Manmohan Singh told Parliament that growing Maoist activity threatened India's industrial future. Most of India's minerals are located within sights of this Red Corridor. Coal, iron ore and other linkages have to be obtained for setting up plants but that will not happen if Maoists do not allow companies to come in and set up shop.

The problem here is that we are no nearer to finding a solution because of government intransigence and there appears no meeting point between the two sides. The first round of negotiations between

the government and the ultras in Andhra Pradesh in 2005 – the only serious dialogue between the two sides so far – degenerated into a farce.

In May 2012, the Sukma district collector in Chhattisgarh, Alex Paul Menon, was abducted by Maoists. The release was brokered by human right activists and others on the ground that some innocents, who they said had been picked up wrongly, would be released by the state. But that never happened. Now there is more bad blood than ever before.

BD Sharma, a former civil servant and a Maoist interlocutor who is well respected on all sides, told Financial Chronicle: 'You can never have peace until the government treats these people as outlaws.' Sadly, there seems no way out of this logjam, at least for the moment.

ranjit.bhushan@mydigitalfc.com

(The author is currently writing a book on Maoists.)

GLOSSARY

Backward castes Other Backward Class (OBC) or the backward castes is a collective term used by the Government of India to classify castes that are educationally and socially disadvantaged. It is one of several official classifications of the population of India, along with scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. The OBCs were found to comprise 52 per cent of the country's population by the 1980 Mandal Commission report. This figure had shrunk to 41 per cent by 2006 when the National Sample Survey took place.

Bargadars Operation Barga was a land reform movement throughout rural West Bengal for recording the names of sharecroppers or bargadars while avoiding the time-consuming method of recording through the settlement machinery. It bestowed legal protection to the bargadars against eviction by the landlords and entitled them to the due share of the produce. Operation Barga was launched in 1978 and concluded by the mid-1980s.

Benami Benami transaction is referred to any deal in which property is transferred to one person for a consideration paid by another person. The Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Act, 1988, prohibits benami transactions and the right to recover property held benami. It came into force on 5 September 1988.

Bhumihar Brahmin, Babhan or Bhumihar is a Hindu Brahman community mainly found in the Indian states of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Bengal, Bundelkhand, Madhya Pradesh and in Nepal.

Bodo Liberation Front Active militant group in Assam and north east India demanding a separate state. This is one of the many Bodo groups operating in the area.

Charu Mazumdar was a communist revolutionary and is regarded widely as the founder of the Naxalite movement in India, even though there were other prominent Left radical leaders like Kanu Sanyal and others who were equally, if not more prominent. He died in police custody on 28 July 1972, after being arrested by the police on 16 July. His writings continue to inspire young men and women even today.

CPI (ML) The Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) was formed by the All India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries in Calcutta (now Kolkata) in 1969. The CPI (ML) advocated armed revolution and denounced participation in the electoral process. As a result of both external repression and a failure to maintain internal unity, the movement degenerated into extreme sectarianism. After the death of its supreme leader Charu Mazumdar in 1972, the party split, splintering further into many groups. Today, there exist a large number of political organizations whose roots are in the CPI (ML) movement. All groups save one, have eschewed armed revolution and annihilation and practice over-ground politics like contesting elections, students union and trade unions. The Communist Party of India (ML) led by Dipankar Bhattacharya is the largest faction of the CPI (ML) that has survived all twists and is now a prominent factor in national Left politics of India.

CPM The Communist Party of India (Marxist) is the main Left party of India, even though after the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, its MPs have slumped into single digits.

D.P. Tripathi D.P. Tripathi is Rajya Sabha MP representing the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP). As a student, Tripathi was president of the Jawaharlal Nehru University Students Union and later taught at Allahabad University as professor of politics.

Dalit Dalit is a designation for a group of people traditionally regarded as untouchables. They are a mixed population, consisting of numerous social groups all over India, speaking a variety of languages, practicing many faiths. In 2001, they comprised 16.2 per cent of India's total population.

Dandakarnaya Dandakaranya covers about 35,600 square miles of land, which includes the Abujmarh hills in the west and Eastern Ghats in the east. It includes part of Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Andhra Pradesh in Central India. The area spans about 200 miles

from north to south and about 300 miles from east to west. This area is known as the centre of Maoist activity in India.

Ernesto “Che” Guevara Guevara (14 June 1928–9 October 1967), commonly known as Che, was an Argentine Marxist revolutionary, physician, author, guerrilla leader, diplomat and military theorist. A major figure of the Cuban Revolution.

Gair majarua land Common land in Indian villages used for functions and other society events. These lands are a constant bone of contention over their use.

Indian People’s Theatre Association (IPTA) an association of Left theatre-artists whose goal was to bring cultural awakening among the people of India. It was also the cultural wing of the Communist Party of India (CPI).

Jharkhand Mukti Morcha It is a state political party in Jharkhand. It performed poorly in the Lok Sabha elections when it won two out of 14 seats. Shibhu Soren is its long-time president.

JNU Jawaharlal Nehru University, also known as JNU, is a public central university in New Delhi, India. In 2012, The National Assessment and Accreditation Council gave the university a grade of 3.9 out of 4, the highest grade awarded to any educational institution in the country.

Jungal Santhal (died 1981) was one of the founders of the Naxalite movement along with Charu Mazumdar and Kanu Sanyal, a venerated figure among tribals in Bengal and adjoining areas.

K.G. Kannabiran (1929–2010) eminent human right activist and lawyer.

Kanu Sanyal (1932–2010) was one of the main leaders of the Naxalbari uprising and founding member of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist).

Khap: Sarv Khap is a system of social administration in parts of north India.

Kisan Sabha All India Kisan Sabha or the All India Peasants Union was the name of the peasants front of the undivided Communist Party of India (CPI), an important peasant movement led by Swami Sahajanand Saraswati in 1936, which later split into two organizations, by the same name.

Kolla Venkiah Prominent Naxalite leader from Andhra Pradesh, active in the early 1970s.

Kondapalli Sitarammiah Kondapalli Sitarammiah became a communist at a young age and joined the CPI, the only Left party in India then. He was active during the Telangana rebellion. When the CPI was divided in 1964, Sitarammiah withdrew from political life. He began working as a Hindi teacher at St. Gabriel's High School in Warangal, Andhra Pradesh. He later joined the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist). Sitarammiah became a member of the Andhra Pradesh State Committee of CPI (ML).

Kudankulam movement The Kudankulam anti-nuclear movement in the southern state of Tamil Nadu is protesting against the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Project.

Long March Military retreat undertaken by the Red Army in 1934–35. Mao Zedong's long march is popularly believed to have established communist rule in China.

Madhesis People of Nepal who reside in the southern plains region, the Outer Terai. Terai is a flatland stretching from the foothills of the Himalayan region in the north to the Vindhyachal region (Vindhyachal mountains) in the south situated in central Nepal. The term Madhesh implies to the Gangetic plain and the Inner Madhesh area bordering Nepal with India on the southern side and spreading north up to the foothills of Siwalik range. The Terai region is geographically and culturally distinct from the hills. According to the population census in 2011, it occupies 23 per cent of total area and 51.03 per cent of the total population of Nepal.

Majdoor Jan Mukti Parishad (MJMP) Ultra-red organization.

Maoists Maoism, known formally as Mao Zedong Thought, was developed during the 1950s and 1960s as the political and military guiding ideology of the Communist Party of China. Holding that political power grows out of the barrel of a gun, Maoist organizations refer to Mao's People's War, mobilizing large parts of rural populations to revolt against established institutions by engaging in guerrilla warfare. Notable Maoist organizations and armed groups currently exist in several countries, particularly in the more impoverished sections of the developing world. Examples of contemporary Maoist movements globally include the Shining Path in Peru, the Unified Communist Party of Nepal and India's CPI (ML) groups. In India, the term Maoist groups are of relatively recent coinage. Before 1980, it was popularly known as the Naxalite movement.

Maxim Gorky a celebrated Russian writer and political activist.

Mazdoor Kisan Sangram Samiti Worker-Peasant Struggle Association was a mass organization in eastern state of Bihar. MKSS was founded in 1981 by Dr. Vinayan and others. The following of MKSS was largely made up of Dalits.

Moonis Raza Raza was an Indian educationist of international repute, regional planner, inspiring and exceptional mentor, academic administrator, prolific speaker and freedom fighter.

Munshi Premchand (31 July 1880–8 October 1936) was an Indian writer famous for his modern Hindustani literature. He is one of the most celebrated writers of the Indian sub-continent and is regarded as one of the foremost Hindustani writers of the early twentieth century.

Nagbhushan Patnaik (1934–98) Frontline Naxalite leader and active participant from Odisha.

Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) A Naga nationalist group operating in North-East India. Their stated objective is to establish a sovereign state, 'Nagalim' unifying all the areas inhabited by Naga people in north east India and adjoining Burma.

Naxalbari or Naxalite movement These are names of various communist guerrilla groups in India. Naxal comes from the name of the village Naxalbari in West Bengal, where the movement had its origins. Naxalites are considered far-Left radical groups who find ideological salvation in Maoist political ideology and thought. Starting off from Bengal, it has now developed roots in lesser developed central and south India. For the last 10 years or so, the movement has found resonance in sections of displaced tribals and locals fighting against what they call 'exploitation' by Indian and foreign companies.

Niyamgiri judgement Landmark judgement in favor of environmental activists. The Supreme Court on 18 April 2013 ruled that the Vedanta Group's bauxite mining project in the Niyamgiri Hills of Odisha will have to get clearance from the gram sabha, which will consider the cultural and religious rights of tribals and forest dwellers living in Rayagada and Kalahandi districts of the state.

Parvatipuram conspiracy case Scores of Naxalite leaders and cadres were booked under the conspiracy case in 1969, many of whom were already behind bars as undertrials.

People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) PUCL is India's oldest and the largest human rights organization, active for many decades.

People's War Group Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) People's War, usually called People's War Group (PWG), was an underground Communist party. It merged with the Maoist Communist Centre of India to form the Communist Party of India (Maoist). The party was a member of Coordination Committee of Maoist Parties and Organizations of South Asia (CCOMPOSA).

Prakash Karat Prakash Karat is former general secretary of the Communist Party of India (CPI), a position he has held since 2005.

Professor G. Haragopal Belongs to the Centre of Human Rights, University of Hyderabad, who has a 20-year track record of mediation with the Maoists in Chhattisgarh and elsewhere.

Progressive Writers' Movement A progressive literary movement in the pre-partition British India consisting of different writers groups around the world. The groups were Left oriented and sought to inspire people through their writings advocating equality and attacking social injustice and backwardness.

Radical Youth League RYL is a frontal organization of the Communist Party of India (Maoist), a Naxalite group operating mainly in Andhra Pradesh.

Rajputs Rajput is a member of one of the patrilineal clans of western, central, northern India and some parts of Pakistan. They claim to be descendants of ruling Hindu warrior classes of North India. Rajputs rose to prominence during the ninth to twelfth centuries.

Rhythu Coolie Sanagam Maoist organization in Andhra Pradesh.

Salwa Judum It is right-wing to far-right civilian militia mobilized and deployed as part of anti-Maoist operations in the central Indian state of Chhattisgarh, aimed at countering Naxalite violence in the region. The militia consisting of local tribal youth received support and training from successive state governments in Chhattisgarh.

Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay (15 September 1876–16 January 1938), a Bengali novelist and short story writer of early twentieth century.

SEZ With a view to overcome the shortcomings of multiplicity of controls and clearances, absence of world-class infrastructure and an unstable fiscal regime and with a view to attract larger foreign

investments, the Indian government announced the setting up Special Economic Zones (SEZ) in April 2000.

Shankar Guha Niyogi (14 February 1943–28 September 1991) was founder of Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha, a labour union in the town of Dalli Rajhara in Chhattisgarh state. He succeeded in sustaining the mine workers' movement for 14 years from 1977 till his death in 1991.

Sitaram Yechury (born 12 August 1952), is a senior leader and General Secretary of the CPM.

Suniti Ghosh (1918–2014) He became closely associated with the Tebhaga struggle in 1946–47 and accepted membership of the Communist Party of India (CPI). He left the party after the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party in 1956. After initial refusals, he was persuaded to join the CPI (M) when it was formed; but by 1966 he felt 'enough was enough' and left the CPI (M). When the peasant uprising in Naxalbari in 1967 was led by some communists of the Siliguri area after their release from prison, he joined the Communist revolutionary movement. He became a member of the All India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries (AICCCR) and later, a member of the Central Committee of CPI (ML). He edited the central organ of the CPI (ML), *Liberation*, from its inception till April 1972.

Surendranagar incident Police firing in October 2012 in which three Dalits were killed. It later snowballed into a big agitation.

Tarimala Nagi Reddy Communist leader from southern state of Andhra Pradesh.

Tebhaga movement It was a militant campaign initiated in Bengal by the Kisan Sabha of the Communist Party of India in 1946. At that time sharecropping peasants (essentially, tenants) had to give half of their harvest to the owners of the land. The demand of the *Tebhaga* (literally sharing by thirds) movement was to reduce the share given to landlords to one third.

Trinamool Congress The All India Trinamool Congress, abbreviated AITMC, TMC or Trinamool Congress is the ruling political party in West Bengal. Founded on 1 January 1998 as a breakaway faction of the Congress party, it is led by its founder and current Chief Minister of Bengal, Mamata Banerjee. It is currently the fourth largest party in the Lok Sabha with 34 seats.

ULFA United Liberation Front of Assam is a separatist group in Assam.

Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) The Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) is a leading Nepalese political party. It was founded in 1994 and is currently led by Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal or Prachanda. Following massive popular demonstrations and a prolonged civil war against the monarchy, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) became the ruling party after the Nepalese Constituent Assembly Elections, 2008. The Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) was previously known as the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist). It formally unified with the Communist Party of Nepal (Unity Centre-Masal) in January 2009, resulting in its full, current name. In the most recent elections, it has emerged as the third largest party in the Constituent Assembly winning 80 out of 575 seats.

Vedanta acquisition London-listed mining group Vedanta Resources' \$9.6 billion acquisition of Cairn India in 2011.

Vijay Das Naxalite leader.

Vinod Mishra Prominent CPI (ML) leader. Mishra was the political architect of the process of re-orientation of CPI (ML) Liberation. By 1976 the party had adopted the position that armed struggle would be combined with building a broad anti-Congress democratic front movement. The process further elaborated through an internal rectification process initiated in late 1977. In the early 1980s CPI (ML) Liberation began building an open non-party mass movement and the Indian People's Front was founded in April 1982. The construction of IPF, through which the underground party could develop links with other democratic forces on the basis of a popular, democratic and patriotic programme, was based on interventions by Mishra. After the fifth party congress of CPI (ML) Liberation, Mishra left his underground life. He made his first public appearance in 25 years at a rally on the Parade Ground in December 1992. Although he broke with the dogmas of the early CPI (ML), he never renounced Charu Mazumdar's legacy.

Yādav It refers to a grouping of traditionally non-elite pastoral communities or castes in India and Nepal that since the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has claimed descent from the mythological King Yadu as a part of a movement of social and political

GLOSSARY

resurgence. The term 'Yadav' now covers many traditional pastoral castes such as Ahirs of the Hindi belt, Gavli of Maharashtra, the Goala of Andhra Pradesh and the Konar of Tamil Nadu. In the Hindi belt, 'Ahir', 'Gwala' and 'Yadav' are often used synonymously. The Yadavs are included in the category of Other Backward Castes (OBCs) in many Indian states.

INDEX

- All India Central Council of Trade Unions (AICCTU) 27
- All India Students Federation (AISF) 179
- American global economic order 41–2
- Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee (APCLC) 108
- annihilation, theory of 34–7
- anti-Congress 28, 41
- anti-Dalit 31
- armed struggle: Bhattacharya, Dipankar 28–31; Rao, Vara Vara 120–5
- Arwal massacre 2
- Associated Press 2
- Baitha, Kameshwar: CPI (ML) movement, split 81–3; criminal cases 83–4; death warrant 84; development schemes 80; Integrated Developmental Centers (IDCs) 81; Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) 80; Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Bill, 2013 83; liberated areas, in Palamu 79; Member of Parliament (MP) 73–8, 79; MNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) 80–1; Naxalite Maoist movement, gains of 78; parliamentary system 78–9; remote areas, development projects in 81
- Banerjee, Sumanta 10
- Basu, Jyoti 91
- Benares Hindu University (BHU) 22, 180
- Bhattacharya, Amit 16
- Bhattacharya, Buddhadev 92
- Bhattacharya, Dipankar 20; All India Central Council of Trade Unions (AICCTU) 27; anti-Congress front 27; armed struggle 28–31; Central Committee and Political Bureau of CPI (ML) 27, 38–9; annihilation theories 28; under one banner 33–4; Chinese Maoist 32–3; Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation 27; individual authority, concept of 38; Mishra, Vinod 31–2; parliamentary struggle 28–31; social and economic change 28; theory of annihilation 34–7
- Bhattarai, Baburam 22; Colombo Plan 175–6; Communist Party of Nepal 180; contemporaries 179; Delhi School of Planning and Architecture 177; experience 182–3; in India 186; Indian context 189; Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) 175, 178, 179; landless and homeless 184–5; Maoist movement in

- India 183–4, 188–9; Maoist movement in Nepal 181–2; Marxian-Maoist revolution 182; modern globalized environment 180–1; Nepal Army (NA) 187; Nepalese Maoist movement 190–1; Nepalese revolution 189; Nepalese workers, Indian government 179; in New Delhi 190; People's Liberation Army (PLA) 186; personal website 189–90; prime minister, Nepal 175; radical politics 178–9; socio-economic change 187–8; students and political activists 180; underground days 186
- Bodo Liberation Front 62
- Bolshevik revolution 49
- Central Reserve Police (CRP) 93
- Chakrabarti, Dipankar 14
- Chhattisgarh Special Public Security Act 2005 (CSPSA) 145
- Chinese Revolution 137
- Clash of Civilization and End of Communism 196
- Communist League of India (CLI) 60
- Communist movement: Hindi belt 28
- Communist Party (Marxist) (CPM) 7, 32
- Communist Party of China (CPC) 13
- Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) 50
- Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) [CPI (ML)] 2, 11, 14, 15, 19–21; transformed phase 40–1
- Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation 27
- Communist Party of Nepal 197
- Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) 21
- Communist Party of Soviet Union (CPSU) 13
- Comptroller and Auditor General's (CAG) 154
- Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities 81
- Council for Social Development (CSD) 49
- CSPSA *see* Chhattisgarh Special Public Security Act 2005 (CSPSA)
- cultural revolution 32
- Dahal, Pushpa Kamal *see* Prachanda
- Dalits 16, 30, 124
- Dutta, Saroj 11
- Gandhi, Rajiv 8
- Ghosh, Suniti 95
- Global Health And Human Rights 154–5
- globalization model 5
- Great Chinese Proletarian Cultural Revolution of 1966 139
- health sector reforms 155
- Hindi belt: Communist movement 28; social and economic change 28
- IAP *see* Integrated Action Plan (IAP)
- IDCs *see* Integrated Developmental Centers (IDCs)
- India: Communist movement 13; identify with Chinese leader 42–7; Maoist Naxalbari movement in 139–41; Naxalite movement 6, 8; political movement in 10
- India's economic model 5
- Indian Penal Code (IPC) 147–8
- Indian People's Front (IPF) 2, 27, 31
- Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) 125
- Integrated Action Plan (IAP) 153–4
- Integrated Developmental Centers (IDCs) 81
- Integrated Tribal Development Areas (ITDA) 151
- IPC *see* Indian Penal Code (IPC)
- IPF *see* Indian People's Front (IPF)
- IPTA *see* Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA)
- ITDA *see* Integrated Tribal Development Areas (ITDA)
- Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) 22
- Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) 80

- Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Bill, 2013 83
- Land Commission 117
- land reforms and land utilization programmes 63–5
- Left extremist 1, 7
- Left movement 37, 61
- Lok Adalats 52
- Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) 80–1
- Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA) 105
- Majdoor Jan Mukti Parishad (MJMP) 74–5
- Majdoor Kisan Sangram Samiti (MKSS) 74
- Mandal politics 51
- Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) 32
- Maoist Communist Centre of India (MCCI) 50
- Maoist economics 70
- Maoist movement 18; first phase 5; in India 9, 17; in Nepal 17, 67–8, 135–7; in tribal areas 158; pro-Western or pro-globalization 5; second phase 5
- Marxism, definition of 43
- mass rape of low-caste women in Pararia village 2
- Mazumdar, Abhijit: background 85–6; CPI and CPM, breakup of 88–9; Left movement 86–7, 98–9; Mazumdar, Charu: detention and death 91–3; influence of 96; legacy of 97; Maoist movement in India 97–8; memories of father 87–8; Singh, Prakash (police officer) 93–5; Naxalbari movement 86; police surveillance and harassment 91; political activity 88; political thinking 95–6; Special Economic Zone (SEZ) 99–100; violence in Nandigram 102; violent nature 89–91
- Mazumdar, Charu 2, 10, 11, 14; died in police custody 20; Naxalbari movement: 1960s 1; pre- and post-1980 5
- MCC *See* Maoist Communist Centre (MCC)
- MCCI *See* Maoist Communist Centre of India (MCCI)
- MISA *See* Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA)
- Mishra, Vinod, sudden demise of 27
- MJMP *See* Majdoor Jan Mukti Parishad (MJMP)
- MKSS *See* Majdoor Kisan Sangram Samiti (MKSS)
- MNREGA *see* Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA)
- Mohanty, Manoranjan 18; alternative movements 69; crack commando forces 66–7; economic development 57; feudal violence 53; in North-East, India 61–2; land reform 63–5; Left movement 61; Maoist economics 70; Maoist movement in Nepal 67–8; Maoist/Naxalbari movement 54–5; Marxism Leninism 54; Naxalbari movement 49–50; Nepalese revolution 69; Nihilist movement 62–3; open hostility 67; political armies 52; political movement 55–7; political settlement 65–6; pro-industry policies 58; Red districts of Andhra Pradesh 69–70; Red Terror 51–2; role of personalities 58–60; socio-economic problem 56; special economic zones (SEZ) 69; urban youth, Naxalite movement 62; violence 57–8, 66; West Bengal 67
- Most Backward Castes 16
- Mukherjee, Mridula 8
- N.T. Rama Rao (NTR) 130
- National Institute of Nutrition (NIN) 151
- Naxalbari movement *see also* Maoist movement: 1960s 1; India's economic model 5; Mohanty,

- Manoranjana 49–50; pre- and post-1980 5
- Naxalite movement: in Andhra Pradesh 9; India 6, 8, 13; monolithic entity 8
- Nepal, Maoist movement in 181–2, 193–4
- Nepali Congress 22, 197
- Nepali Maoists 4
- Nihilist movement 62–3
- NIN *see* National Institute of Nutrition (NIN)
- NTR *see* N.T. Rama Rao (NTR)
- Other Backward Classes (OBCs) 16, 130
- Outlook* (magazine) 3
- Patna University 180
- PDS *see* Public distribution scheme (PDS)
- People's Liberation Army (PLA) 186, 197
- People's Union for Civil Rights (PUCL) 145
- People's War Group (PWG) 9, 23, 32, 50, 200
- Planning Commission Committee on Health 156–7
- political movement: in India 10; Mohanty, Manoranjan 55–7; Rao, Vara Vara 141–2
- Prachanda: AbujMarh in Chattisgarh 167; America's policy, monarchy in Nepal 173–4; and Bhattarai, Baburam 174; assembly elections 169; civil war 169; Communist movement 170; experience 161–2; feudal autocratic monarchy 169; Indian radical Left leader 170–1; Maoist movement 168–9; Maoist movements: achievement of 171; India vs. Nepal 170; modern communication and development 163–5; monarchy 172–3; Nepal going closer to China 171–2; Nepal's basic political system 162–3; Nepal's revolution 165; political system 166–7; political transformation 168; Prime Minister, Nepal 161; self introduction 173; underground leader 165–7; with Indian people 167
- Preventive Detention (PD) Act 127
- Public distribution scheme (PDS) 81
- Radical Left 133–4
- Rao, Vara Vara 19; annihilation theory 120–4; armed struggle 120–5; CPI (Maoist) 119; feudal violence 138–9; Indian Maoists 137–8; land reforms 111–19; low-caste landless labour 142–4; Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA) 105; Maoism in Nepal 135–7; Maoist Naxalbari movement in India 139–41; Naxalite movement 139; Naxalites or Maoists, achievement of 129–32; Nepalese Maoists 138; political movement 141–2; Red Terror 132–3; Secunderabad Conspiracy Case 106; Telugu Desam Party (TDP) 105–11; writing, liberation struggle 125–9
- Ray, Rabindra 12
- Red Corridor 3, 6, 7
- Red Terror 51–2, 132–3
- Reddy, Y.S. Rajasekhara 19
- Revolutionary Violence* (Mohanty, Manoranjan) 54
- Roy, Arundhati 9–10
- Salwa Judum 152–3
- Sanyal, Kanu 50
- Secunderabad Conspiracy Case 106
- Selected Writings* (Mao) 47
- Sen, Binayak 17; Chhattisgarh Special Public Security Act 2005 (CSPSA) 145; conflict intensifying 152; Global Health And Human Rights 154–5; health sector reforms 155; human rights movement 146–7; human rights, gross violations of 149; Indian Penal Code (IPC) 147–8; Integrated Action Plan (IAP) 153–4; Maoism

- 158; Maoist movement, in tribal areas 158; Maoists in Andhra Pradesh 150; Niyogi, Shankar Guha 157–8; People's Union for Civil Rights (PUCL) 145; Planning Commission Committee on Health 156–7; prison term 146, 148; Salwa Judum 152–3; Telangana 149–50; tribals 148–9; Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act 1967 145; violence 150–2
- Sensex model 5
- SEZ *see* Special Economic Zone
- SFI *see* Students Federation of India (SFI)
- Singh, Manmohan 5, 9
- Sitaramiah, Kondapalli 9
- Social Change* (journal) 49
- socialist modernization 32–3
- Soviet Communist Party 46
- Spanish Civil War 125–6
- Special Economic Zone (SEZ) 69, 87, 99–100, 102–5; acquiring land, compensation for 103–4; Singur and Nandigram 99–100; tribal and village land acquisition 101–2
- Srikakulam movement 34, 50
- States Re-organization Committee (SRC) 108
- Students Federation of India (SFI) 179
- TADA *see* Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA)
- Tea Plantation Labour Act 99
- Telugu Desam Party (TDP) 105–11
- Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA) 30, 128–9, 142
- tribals 15
- Tse Tung, Mao 139
- Tung, Mao Tse 12
- UCCRIML *see* Unity Centre of Communist Revolutionaries of India (Marxist-Leninist)
- Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) 21–2
- Union for Civil Liberties 148
- Unity Centre of Communist Revolutionaries of India (Marxist-Leninist) (UCCRIML) 119
- Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act 1967 145
- Verma, Anand Swaroop 23; and Prachanda 206–7; children 210–11; Communist Leninist parties, Nepal *vs.* India 201–2; Communist Party of Nepal Maoists CPN (M) 202; Lohani, Prakash Chandra 195; Mao 202; Maoist combatants *vs.* Nepalese army 204–6; Maoist movement 204; Maoist movement in Nepal 193–4; Maoist victories 195; Maoists emerge 207–8; Maoists movements, in India *vs.* Nepal 198–200; Nepalese army 202–4; nepali politics 196–8; Peruvian Shining Path 201–2; Prachanda Path 208–9; women combatants 209–10
- Virasam (Revolutionary Writers Association (RWA) 121
- World Health Organization (WHO) 150, 151
- Zedong, Mao 42