

Permanent Spring

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All wars are the same war because war is always going on. —James Hillman

ON 30 April 1908, two young men, Prafulla Chaki and Khudiram Bose, entered the boundary of the Muzaffarpur Club in Bihar and waited for the hated judge Douglas Kingsford to appear. They were members of *Jugantar*, the foremost nationalist revolutionary group to emerge during the Swadeshi movement in Bengal. At nightfall a horse-drawn carriage emerged, which they were sure was carrying Kingsford. A bomb was hurled into it, blowing away the rear, and severely wounding the wife and daughter of Pringle-Kennedy, a lawyer friend of the judge. He also happened to be sympathetic to Indian nationalism. Kingsford was travelling separately. Severely wounded, the daughter was dragged behind the carriage and died within the hour. Her mother died two days later. Soon afterwards, Chaki committed suicide. Khudiram was caught, and after a swift trial, hanged that August. The nationalist hagiography of these pioneering revolutionaries mentions the failure of their mission, but glosses over it to focus on their glorious sacrifice.

In 1912, a bomb thrown at Lord Minto in Delhi killed not the Viceroy, but an Indian attendant. On 9 October 1915, Deputy Superintendent of Police Jatindra Mohan Ghosh was sitting in his house in Mymensingh along with his family. Some youths came to the door and fired at him, killing him on the spot. His three-year-old son, whom he was holding, was also killed. In 1932, in an attack on the Pahartali European Railway Club in Chittagong, thirteen card-playing civilians were injured and an Anglo-Indian woman killed. The action was led by a schoolteacher, Pritilata Waddadar, who committed suicide.⁽¹⁾ Waddadar was an associate of the legendary Surya Sen. She was hailed as an exemplary patriot, which indeed she was. So were Khudiram Bose and Prafulla Chaki. And so was Charu Mazumdar, the founder of what is known as Naxalism.

A century later, people are in the same place. In June 2005, over 40 bus passengers died in a mine explosion in Nepal's Chitwan district. The Nepali Maoists' apology for this carnage must be set against the fact that the blast was wire-triggered – detonated by someone who could see the passenger laden vehicle. On 15 August 2004, the CPI-Maoist shot nine persons in Andhra Pradesh, including a legislator, his son, driver and an employee. On 12 September 2005, its cadre slit the throats of 17 villagers in Giridih. In March 2006, 13 tribals were killed and four injured in a mine blast. The Maoists apologized, stating that it was due to a failure in their intelligence.

On 25 February 2006, 25 tribals were killed and 40 injured in a mine triggered by the CPI (Maoist) in Errabore, Dantewada. In July 2006, the CPI (Maoist) attacked a relief camp in the same place, killing 30 tribals, including children. A party spokesperson referred to the children's deaths as an 'unnecessary loss'. But he continued: 'No people's war can be so clinical as to have no civilian casualty ...no class war can be conducted with clinical precision. It is very tortuous and painful, just as the daily life of the bulk of our population is no less agonizing.'⁽²⁾ It is a moot point as to whether the rest of the victims were class enemies who deserved nothing less than death.

Other radicals are no less ruthless. In August 2000, nearly a hundred people were killed in eight massacres in Kashmir. They included Amarnath pilgrims and some members of a Kashmiri Muslim family. Most of them were brick-kiln workers from central India and Bihar. On 13 August 2004, nine school children were killed by a blast triggered by ULFA in Upper Assam.

Such cases may be multiplied ad-infinitum. Yet accounts of them by the proponents of holy war barely mention, or hurry past the significance of the death that was not intended. Or the deaths of persons whose crime was that they belonged to the wrong community. Questions of innocence are brushed away by invoking some version of theodicy – God’s plan to extract good from evil. In secular doctrines God is replaced by History; hence Camus’ name for killing in the name of the future: historical murder.

Some radicals attribute guilt to everyone even remotely associated with the system. In the western tradition, ethical utilitarianism goes back to Aquinas’ theodicean doctrine of double effect. India’s patriotic assassins drew sustenance from the Gita. Theories of just war, sacred violence, collateral damage (by whatever name), and a bright future seen as providing justification for cruelty in the present, are not peculiar to Naxalism. Common to all such doctrines is a dismissal of the plight of those who had done no wrong.

The Maniktola Conspiracy Case –concerning the Muzaffarpur killings culminated in 1909. Its two death sentences were later commuted to deportation. Aurobindo Ghosh was acquitted, much to the delight of nationalist opinion. His lawyer, the brilliant C R Das, concluded his defence with the words that his client stood not only before the court, but ‘before the bar in the High Court of History.’ Here is the first Indian example of political murder represented as something fit for judgement, not by the living but by the yet-unborn. Inspired by Russian nihilists, this became the characteristic narrative of the modern revolutionary, to be repeated across continents.

The insurrectionary trend in Indian communism dates back to 1948, when the so-named Ranadive line sent the CPI cadre into armed confrontation with the newly independent Indian Union, on the ground that this independence was fake. After two years, this escapade was withdrawn on stern advice from the Soviet communists. Meanwhile a schism developed in international communism, fuelled by Sino-Soviet disputes on strategy. Friendliness between India and China dissipated with border clashes in the late ’50s and Chinese military action in Tibet in 1959. After thousands of Tibetans took refuge in India, the Chinese media began attacking Nehru as a ‘running dog’ of the imperialists. The Sino-Indian war was contemporaneous with the Soviet-American confrontation over Cuban missiles (September-October 1962); and lasted until the end of that crisis. The Indian communists split between those who criticized the Chinese for aggression and those who were neutral or upheld international communist solidarity. In 1964, the latter founded the CPI(M).

The CPI remained loyal to the USSR; the CPI(M) assumed a neutral stance. But the radicals in the latter demanded revolutionary action. The United Front ministry of 1967 included the two communist parties and the Bangla Congress. Soon after its formation, workers launched militant industrial actions. Expectations among the rural poor, coupled with the aggressiveness of landed elites anticipating official hostility, led to heightened tensions. Labourers and sharecroppers in Darjeeling were organized in a union led by Charu Mazumdar, secretary of the CPI(M) district committee, and his lieutenant Kanu

Sanyal. Charu was a strong advocate of Mao's theory of people's war that called for the creation of an army of revolutionary peasants via a strategy of guerrilla warfare leading to the overthrow of the state machinery of the exploiting classes.

In April 1967, the Siliguri subdivision in Darjeeling was witness to seizures of land and foodgrain along with attacks on the landed rich. Land Revenue minister Harekrishna Konar tried to placate his ultra-left party leaders and activists, but his efforts were futile. On May 24, a police platoon was attacked by several hundred peasants in the precinct of PS Naxalbari. Inspector Sonam Wangdi was hit by two arrows and died that night. On May 25, the police fired at hostile crowds near PS Khoribari. Ten people, mostly women and children were killed. The Naxalite movement had begun, and was hailed by China as 'Spring Thunder Over India.' The CPI(M-L) was inaugurated in 1969.

Charu's doctrine was focused on killing 'class enemies' as a step towards the establishment of a people's army. The cadre named it the 'annihilation line'. What stands out is the freedom accorded to the 'petty-bourgeois intellectual activists' to instigate the murder of anyone they deemed a class enemy. The criteria were always wide-ranging enough to include peasants and workers if they were seen as informers. Little, if any thought was given to the legitimacy of such extreme punishment, or the absence of any transparent process of determining guilt. Or rather, legitimacy was seen as self-evident, as in a crime of passion. As for the leaders, it derived from the assumed superiority of the party's version of Marxism-Leninism.

In an article that became known as the murder manual, Charu spelled out what he had in mind :

'The method of forming a guerrilla unit has to be wholly conspiratorial. No inkling... should be given out even in the meetings of the political units of the Party. This conspiracy should be between individuals on a person-to-person basis. The petty-bourgeois intellectual activist must take the initiative in this respect... He should approach the poor peasant who, in his opinion, has the most revolutionary potentiality, and whisper in his ears :

"Don't you think it is a good thing to finish off such and such a jotedar?" ...We should not use any kind of firearms at this stage.

"The guerrilla unit must rely wholly on choppers, spears, javelins and sickles... The guerrillas should come from different directions pretending... to be innocent persons and gather at a previously appointed place, wait for the enemy, and, when the opportune moment comes, spring at the enemy and kill him...The middle peasant cadre and the petty-bourgeois intellectual comrades should be removed (from the guerrilla unit) if possible. When guerrilla actions become more frequent we have to gradually bring in these willing fighters. In fact, a time will come when the battle cry will be :

"He who has not dipped his hand in the blood of class enemies can hardly be called a communist".(3)

Charu Mazumdar foresaw a revolutionary victory in the 1970s. A man whose sole contribution to socialism consisted in elevating homicidal mania to a political principle has become an icon for the ultra-left tradition. There is no sign of a change in the expendable status of human life for revolutionaries.

Thus, CPI (Maoist) general secretary Ganapathi cites an unnamed source for the arguable observation that five times as many people died of hunger and disease in the past decade than all the casualties in revolutionary wars over two centuries.(4) Commenting on the eclipse of socialism in Russia and China, he foresees a 'bitter struggle' against communists who 'change colour', without a reflective word on the ramifications of that eclipse. The citation of death by hunger as a justification for death by revolution is grotesque; and given the regrettable tendency of communists to become autocrats, all one may look forward to apparently, is more bloodshed. Eternal war is the God of the world system.

Rabindra Ray offers some basic observations and questions about Indian Maoism.(5) The first is that Naxalism is intellectually driven. Its doctrinal inputs come from middle-class ideologues, who take it upon themselves to lead 'the people'.(6) The second is that it places utmost stress—as does the entire communist tradition—upon correct social knowledge as the precursor to a correct strategy; but has never clarified its stance regarding the criteria and the sources for arriving at such knowledge. The third is the possibility that it is not the 'correct analysis' that leads to the appropriate strategy, but rather, the already-desired strategy that seeks its own analysis, its own version of truth.

The Naxalite movement is not a movement of landless peasants and tribals seeking to overthrow state power. It is a project defined as such by those who are neither peasants nor workers nor tribals; but who claim to represent their interests. The right to make this claim was dependent upon what the earliest Naxalites referred to as 'revolutionary authority'. The mantle of legitimate authority was obtained via certification by the international communist movement, in this case from the Chinese Communist Party led by Chairman Mao.

This leads to an infinite regression : from where did the CCP derive legitimacy? From the CPSU under Stalin, who got it from Lenin, and so on. The Russian Revolution was troubled from the outset by the super-session of the autonomous Soviets by the party, but that is a digression. Suffice it to say that the legitimacy of the communist party is based upon foreknowledge of the end of history, which gives it the task to lead workers towards a classless society.(7) Its claim to represent the true, (as opposed to illusory) interests of the working class is an epistemological one, which is complicated by the lack of an epistemological theory. Hence the tradition has dealt with complexity by means of dogma rather than dialogue.

The most glaring consequence of its church-like approach to truth has been the multiplication of 'sole spokesmen' of the working class— and sole spokespersonship straddles the range of authoritarian politics.

In a recent public debate, the Maoist general secretary raised some philosophical issues.

'How does one get to know the truth from a plethora of facts? Can you say with full confidence that your perception of the reality in Dantewada is not tainted by your ideological biases against the Maoist movement and violent revolution? Is it possible for anyone, even if one claims to be a neutral or impartial intellectual, to analyse facts and arrive at conclusions correctly if she/he has an inherent aversion for armed struggle? We know that our answers will not satisfy you. How is it possible when we have different

ideological and political perceptions towards the means to be adopted to bring the oppressed out of their miserable conditions of existence?

‘There is no level playing field in the merciless class war between the cruelly exploited and brutally oppressed majority on the one hand, and the wealthy, enriched at the expense of the hundreds of millions of poor on the other. In a class divided society there cannot be any absolute truth in the matters under discussion. The truth of the oppressed is different from the truth of the oppressor. This has been true right from the time of Spartacus and the unsung slave heroes who waged their struggles against slavery. Either you were with the slaves, in which case Spartacus and the rebels represented a just cause and spoke the truth, or you were with the slave owners.’(8)

In reality Ganapathi says that getting at the truth from a plethora of facts is a problem. In a class society, any person’s perception of reality will be tainted if they have an aversion to armed struggle. Disagreement with violent revolution is an ideological bias – presumably an inclination towards violence relieves one of bias. He knows his answers will not satisfy the critics, because ideological and political perceptions differ. (He does not clarify the difference between ideological and political.) In a class divided society there can be no absolute truth in the matters under discussion (perhaps he means questions of political power); and this (that there can be no absolute truth etc.) has been true for generations. [*Either you are with the slaves or with their oppressors.*]

These arguments carry the following implications: Ganapathi possesses the truth about truth. This position is superior to both ‘the truth of the oppressed’ and ‘the truth of the oppressor’, since he is neither the one nor the other, but an ideologue who knows the basically perspectival reality about truth per se. It does not concern him that his answers will not sound satisfactory. His attachment to armed struggle is the product of a correct theory, to which he has privileged access. “Discussion is futile, because if you’re not with us, you’re against us—your truth is tainted with partisanship towards the oppressors”. Since all truth has a class bias, there is no independent criteria for judging the veracity of his party line, because selecting those criteria will also involve class bias. Ultimately it all boils down to faith.

So all truth is relative and biased, except Ganapathi’s version of it, which is absolute because it is armed. Not just power, but truth itself flows out of the barrel of a gun. Even if the party line is considered just as biased as the arguments of its critics, it doesn’t matter, because after all, there’s bias everywhere. When the very notion of truth is cast into the shadow of absolutism and class bias, one has no means of judging the objectivity of any statement whatsoever, nor does hope for public debate about anything. Even the facts about exploitation, caste and gender oppression, and for that matter, the situation in Dantewada become matters of mere opinion. Ganapathi, like many other Marxist-Leninists, has announced the political abolition of truth. Totalitarianism emerges as the apotheosis of relativism.

But a discussion of civilian warfare would be half-baked without considering other warriors. During the national movement, Indian politics acquired an ambivalent relationship to militarism. The fascination with soldiering was most visible in Subhas Bose. Revolutionary terrorists were inclined to fashion themselves after the Irish Republican Army. Communal ideologues were obsessed with religious civil war—they still are. In November 1947 the AICC passed a resolution warning that ‘the activities of the Muslim National Guards, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the Akali Volunteers and

such other organizations... represent an endeavour to bring into being private armies, (and) must be regarded as a menace to the hard-won freedom of the country.'(9)

The proliferation of private armies in India over the decades proves the foresight of this warning. These formations include the Sunlight Sena, Khalistani groups, the Ranvir Sena, the Bajrang Dal, ULFA and jihadi groups in Kashmir and elsewhere. The North East is full of paramilitaries in varying degrees of proximity to legal parties. In Chhattisgarh, the BJP and the Congress jointly support a vigilante force named Salwa Judum that exists to terrorise all forms of resistance to the handover of mineral-rich lands to corporates.

Communal para-militaries, in particular the RSS, have forged a far more sophisticated method of undermining the democratic polity envisaged in the Indian Constitution than the ultra-left. This method is based on Savarkar's directive of 1942, asking Hindu nationalist cadre to infiltrate the organs of state. Aided by widespread communal prejudice, Hindutva's cadres acquired a hold over the highest echelons of state in what Gramsci called a war of position. And they have used this to launch successive assaults upon the Constitution.(10)

During the Babri Masjid demolition campaign, a retired DGP of Uttar Pradesh joined the VHP and called for India's Muslims to be stripped of voting rights. This campaign cost the lives of some 1500 citizens in 1990 and 3000 in 1992. Some years ago a retired CBI Director extolled the Bajrang Dal's 'patriotic' activities at its annual function. Senior functionaries of RAW and the Intelligence Branch openly sympathize with the RSS upon retirement –one can imagine what they were doing in service. Police officers in Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra have been promoted despite strictures against them by commissions of inquiry.

In 2003, the NDA regime tried surreptitiously to do away with Schedule 5 of the Constitution that protects tribal lands from encroachment. The Hindutva lobby has used its official clout to unleash captive mobs, indulge in hate-speech, pass objectionable laws, enable the entry of the RSS into state institutions, undermine citizens' rights and suborn the police and military. (The latter practice was noted by the Home Ministry under Sardar Patel on 4 February 1948, in the order banning the RSS after Gandhi's assassination.) Evidently a taste for political violence is compatible with being a senior policeman or a senior official of the state.

People are entitled to hold extreme views; even when they think they are upholding the dignity of Islam and Hinduism via the burning of books and underwear. The problem arises when people in authority misuse their formal power to promote violence. It is here that every mainstream party carries a burden of guilt. It is time for the establishment to ask itself what exactly it objects to in Naxalite activity. Is it lawlessness and contempt for the Constitution? Are these things not visible in the activities of the RSS, banned thrice since 1948? Or in the deeds of the Congress, especially in 1984? Did not the CPI(M) despatch an illegal vigilante force to Nandigram on two occasions in 2007?

Maybe India's rulers object to the Maoist desire to impose a totalitarian vision upon the country by armed force. Has not the RSS relentlessly imposed a chimera named Hindu Rashtra upon this people? Has it not descended to supervising mass murder for this purpose? People are constantly told there is no such thing as a moderate Taliban. But evidently there is a moderate RSS! These defend themselves by proclaiming their

patriotism. But Naxalites are also patriots—they see themselves as inheritors of Bhagat Singh.

Why then does the governing elite refuse to confront the vicious practices of the Hindutva brigade? Why do they start talking about 1984 whenever anyone mentions 2002 –as if one massacre demands another? Or direct mild criticism at the RSS for outdated economic ideas, when the main issue is their perpetual effort to militarize civil society?

The rulers want the poor to remain peaceful at all times, but crush democratic resistance with the same ferocity as they do terrorism. They have reduced the criminal justice system to a cruel joke—it would not be an exaggeration to say that Indian justice is a machine for the production of insurgents. They want the Maoists to decommission their army, while the RSS is free to carry on as if it were a song and dance troupe. One homicidal maniac is named anti-national, while the other is hailed as a national hero.

The constitutional order has been under attack from the outset of Independence, from right, left and centre, if such categories carry meaning any longer. India's rulers regularly protect criminals, and part of the public is complicit in this. It is richly ironic to see this ruthless and corrupt ruling class throw the rule book at Maoists.

The world over, terror has become a seamless whole, connecting the CIA with jihadis, Pakistan with *Al Qaida*, the Indian government with the RSS, Indira Gandhi with Bhindranwale, Rajiv Gandhi with Prabhakaran, Assamese politicians with ULFA, Mumbai's elite with the Thackeray mafia, the British defence industry with Indonesian militias, Putin with Russian hitmen, the Chinese communists with Pol Pot and Burmese generals, Israeli Mossad with Palestinian Hamas. Indian politicians maintain links with Naxalites: not for dialogue, but mutual benefit. As boundaries, definitions and morals proceed from ambivalence towards meaninglessness, the only choice remaining is which god to invoke, which weapons to use, which civilians to kill. Which deaths to mourn and which to celebrate.

The extreme left has no interest in the question of fascism. If the situation calls for insurrection, people are already under a totalitarian regime, so the question is irrelevant. An aside: would Lenin, Stalin or Mao have allowed intellectuals the space to conduct insurgent rhetoric? Some Maoists sneer at liberal-leftists' pre-occupation with communal harmony. This is remarkable, given that tens of thousands of Indians have perished in the past three decades in incidents linked to genocidal politics.

The problem has deeper roots. Whereas Savarkar in 1943 declared his agreement with the two-nation theory because Hindus were a nation by themselves, the same year CPI floated the idea of Muslim nationalities, and supported Partition by arguing that colonial India was a multi-national empire. There was no awareness of the fascist potential of communally defined nations. Ideology can blind the ones possessed by it.

Pakistan's crisis in 1970 could have been the starting point of a popular reassessment of the anti-democratic partition of 1947. The CPI(ML) could have articulated a discourse devoid of the hateful views of communalists. But the leadership was incapable of formulating any viewpoint outside the framework favoured by the Chinese communists, for whom the question of sovereignty seems to have been settled

by the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648; and what goes on inside a nation state is no one else's business.

Dreamers of a classless society found it too utopian to question the partition of India. Consequently in 1971, Naxalites were the only Indian political current that supported Yahya Khan. They also advised revolutionaries in East Pakistan to defend Pakistan's integrity. This was in line with the Chinese preference for dictators in Sri Lanka, Sudan, Chile and Cambodia. All that counted was anti-Sovietism.

In four decades the Naxalite movement has rarely if ever confronted the communalists. During the late '80s an ultra-left group in Punjab defended Hindu villagers against Khalistani threats, but such tendencies are exceptional. Indian communists could have united to defend the Babri Masjid, but the utopian sound of this hypothesis shows where their endemic factionalism has taken them. Naxalites have shown no inclination to resist Hindutva. The assassination of a VHP Swami in Kandhamal in August 2008 was their first significant attack on a communal figure. Despite the Maoists' avowal of the deed, Hindutva forces retaliated against Christian villagers, killing nearly 40 people and forcing tens of thousands to flee their villages. The naxalites were unable to protect the people from the consequences of their actions.

The term revolutionary violence tends to disguise reality. The practice of murder and face-to-face killing brutalizes activists and creates shockwaves in society that outlast any gains to the intended beneficiaries. 'People's war' has added to the cycles of revenge already at work.

There is no doubt that the state and its vigilantes engage in brutal campaigns in defence of vested interests. Must socialists be equally brutal, or hold themselves to a different standard? There are valid points in the Maoist critique of corporate industrialization. These points have been made by others, and there are many resistance movements that are not Maoist. The defining feature of the Maoist agenda is an insistence on killing. This is their responsibility, for despite all talk of the state declaring war and so on, the Naxalites declared war at their very inception. This is convenient for governments that want to tar all democratic resistance with the same brush.

What do the cruel deaths of Miss and Mrs Pringle-Kennedy signify? Or the death of a three-year-old son of a policeman? Or of the millions killed since then? Does the invisibility of certain victims give them a silent status? Perhaps the significance lies in their consignment to nothingness within the radical imagination. Not only are they dead, but their death has no meaning. This indifference to life is the mark of the nihilism that has overtaken the revolutionary spirit. It is sad to see the latter celebrate its subjugation by avowing the ancient cult of martyrdom.

There is an old adage that says truth is the first casualty of war. Eternal war means eternal deceit. But who is deceiving whom? Nevertheless, unexpected deeds can transform reality more than predictable ones. If Maoists were to renounce violence whilst challenging the government to demobilize the RSS, Salwa Judum and other right-wing militia, they would expose bourgeois hypocrisy and electrify the situation. As they could have done in other contexts in 1971 and 1992.

If any political groups wish to combine radical partisanship with the claim to represent society at large, they need to eschew the practice of historical murder. That would enable a forthright dialogue. No 'revolutionary science' can establish the need to kill. Truth does not have a class character; nor do grief, brutality and conscience. Some things are neither Hindu nor Muslim, neither proletarian nor bourgeois. There is no war to end all wars, no ultimate death penalty that will put an end to all death penalties. Hindu Rashtra is not the final solution to the so-called 'minority problem', nor is 'people's war' the final answer to class exploitation.

A people's army is an oxymoron, because all armies get absorbed into the age-old, self-regenerative structure of militarism. Armies tend to belong to themselves; political armies lean towards totalitarianism. There are no final solutions to anything. Yearnings for finality are best quenched in avowedly metaphysical speculation, rather than in the political domain, where they have had sinister results. It is not so ironical that politburos are the last refuge of dogmatic faith. It is time for them to discard their special knowledge of the End of History and return to ordinary life. □□□

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