

## SALWA JUDUM

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[This paper posits three interconnected themes for perusal that have impacted each other in their functioning in the past five years and have influenced the policy formulation, its application, and the public discourse. These themes, to state, are (1) the programmes and praxis of the Maoists, (2) the counter-insurgency measures and discourse of the bourgeois state and (3) the emergence / creation of Salwa Judum, a phenomenon, in the South Bastar region of Chhatisgarh. The last one is the new addition and the most contentious theme of the contemporary discourse around which is woven, partly, the other two themes. The contention has acquired sharp shrill due to the presence of the BJP in power in Chhatisgarh, as it has 'a history of justifying violence by displacing it on to people.'<sup>1</sup> Had the Congress, the other part of the reactionary bourgeois humbug, been in power in Chhatisgarh, the discourse in the English media, and at New Delhi, would have been subdued. Since it is contentious, and new, let's begin with it, the analysis of Salwa Judum.]

In Gondi, the dialect spoken among the tribes of South Bastar, it means ghost busting (*bhoot bhagana*), purification of the place, exorcize, etc. The word was used by Mahendra Karma, the erstwhile Congress MLA, and his tribal supporters/ lackeys / hangers on for the victims of naxals who were expected, and it was attempted to organize them, to chase away/ bust out the naxals (objectified as evil spirit) from their habitat. The word was foisted upon the tribals, substantive in number (approx. 80,000), who, under the circumstances created by the naxals and the Indian state, were compelled to flee from their villages, in between January - June 2005, in search of their safety, and had descended on the road sides for shelter.

The objective of Karma was to mobilize and integrate these people into one body against the Naxals to counter their influence and to create his own political-electoral base. The tribals, by and large, had resisted / disagreed with the operational programmes of the Naxals and their 'guidance' in the social affairs of the villages;<sup>2</sup> and a segment of it was treated brutally by the Naxals. These people, particularly those, who were provided shelter and security by the state in the camps, specially erected for it, after they had fled away from their villages were denoted as *Salwa Judum* and were objectified as an aggressive planned counter insurgency body erected by the state to neutralize the naxals. What actuated, however, at the ground level in search of naxals was the application of every coercive method by the state on the tribals that resulted in their migration to charla block in Bhadrachalam subdivision of Khammam district in Andhra Pradesh or to urban settlements in Bastar. The victims of the Naxals, similarly, had moved to the camps in which a segment of it was employed by the state for the counter - insurgency measures which facilitated the area of operation and dominance of state. A part of these victims had also moved to charla block in Andhra Pradesh and to other parts of Chhatisgarh.

There were two major problems in the emergence of Salwa Judum: Firstly, the presence of the 'outsiders' mainly Telgu vanguards of the CPI (Maoist) providing 'guidance' to the local community in their daily functioning which irritated them; and secondly, the illogical application of land distribution among the tribal peasantry which further enraged a segment. Both the issues related with the programmatic and operational parts of the Maoists created condition for the migration of the tribals. It was further aggravated by the blitzkrieg of the state in search of naxals and their retaliation against 'informers' which facilitated the emergence of a condition that led to the formation of camps that benefitted the state.

The two issues, of land distribution and of the presence of Telgu cadres may be explained to demonstrate its adverse reaction on the local tribals. It may be stated here that the average landholding of the tribals in the Bastar is approximately 2.5 acres per family<sup>3</sup> which is in a technologically backward region with low productivity is insufficient even for minimal living. In such situation, the redistribution of land among the segments of tribals that too in the absence of any major disparity in ownership sparked the burst of anger, accumulated subterraneously over the years. The vanguardship of the alien Telgu cadres had created duress among the village communities through their unnecessary 'guidance' in the functioning of the traditional social relations. Segments of village communities had been resisting it in different forms. At a particular threshold when it became unbearable they ran away from their villages and when the opportunity beckoned them, they retaliated by assisting the police or independent of it.

Of late, however, the number of inmates in the camps has shrunk to around 8,000 as the rest have shifted back to their villages and the remaining are in the process of it. These camps are protected by the state as these have been the targets of the naxals. Or the reverse of it, as these camps are the fortified outposts and symbol of state which has expanded its periphery of market-relations and coercive dominance in Bastar in recent years, these are the targets of the naxals. The state had to retract its coercive presence, earlier, after the Naxals had begun their armed conflict with it. The reverse flow of tribals to their villages has occurred due to the condition created for the restoration of 'normalcy' which had been facilitated by the intense pressure of the civil society being brought upon the state and by the rectificatory measures incorporated by the Maoists in their operational and programmatic application. The twin factors have impacted the democratization of bourgeois state in Bastar to an extent and the sensitization of Naxals in their functioning.

The phenomenon of Salwa Judum coerced the tribals to come into the vortex of capital which is different from the normal economic compulsion created by the bourgeoisdom in its routine functioning. It was an unusual phenomenon that dented, forever, the traditional property relations of the tribals premised on the subsistence peasant forest economy.

Chhatisgarh's creation, as the new province of Indian federation, of which Bastar constitutes the major part, was intended, as is the objective of creating any new province, to expand, primarily, the contemporary globalized bourgeois property

relations into the interiors of the tribal regions which still carry the other different forms of preceding property relations. In the conflict between the past and the present, the bourgeois state is required to remove the remnants of the past. The property relations of the tribal peasantry premised on the subsistence economy with an average land holding of 2.5 acres per family and low productivity needs radical transformation to be in sync with the contemporary property relations of labour and capital. Creating condition for it requires their migration or eviction which in turn requires formulation and application of certain measures, financial or coercive. The presence of the naxals provided a perfect alibi to the state to expedite the application of its objective. More, the uprooting provided cheap labour to the business so required for accumulation and reproduction of capital. The establishment of the production process in Bastar lessens the cost of production of heavy industries now mostly under private ownership.

The act against the naxals created condition for the migration of the tribal peasantry out of their habitat. In fact, more precisely, the programmatic operational impact initiated by the naxals leading to protests, violence and migration of peasantry has already created condition to suit the state to throw the baby with the bath water. The strategy devised is two pronged: (a) to initiate public discourse about the 'developmental' role of the state and its counteract by the naxals, and (b) to project naxals as a threat to democracy which needs to be countered. The idea is to isolate the naxals and neutralize them through coercive apparatus in order to eliminate any organized challenge to the state. To it, the state attempts to break off the linkages between the civil society and naxals who stand together for collective justice for citizens and operational transparency of administration despite the ideological and methodological differences between the two. Simultaneously, the state also began the armed encirclement of naxals to hunt down its cadres and terrorize their support base. On both the counts, however, the state had only partial success, and many times, it had to retract its steps under the intense pressure of the civil society. Similarly, the business agenda of capitalism has only partial success though under the development paradigm it has pushed through some of its projects erected on the graveyards of the tribals who resisted it. And it is certain that interruptedly, it will trample upon the preceding property relations in Bastar, as it did in Khammam / Warangal districts of Telangana region, to replace it with bourgeois property relations of capital and labour. It is, however, equally certain that had there been no naxals in Bastar, its contemporary social relations by now would have been different in comparison to what it is today. The naxals have delayed the inevitable of capital-labour social formation.

### **NAXALS**

The different factions of the CPI (ML), now primarily dominated by the CPI (Maoist), carry a legacy of collective memories and knowledge of party traditions of India and abroad which has few problematics reflected in their programmes and method of application. The most important, contextually, is the peasant question, the economic policy of globalization, and the boycott of election, particularly by CPI (Maoist). These problematics require an indepth analysis to understand Indian society for its revolutionary transformation.

Let us begin with the peasant question which was part of the problematics within the Communist Parties during Marx time as well. For clarity, one may recall Marx-Engels's understanding of peasantry under capitalism by citing Engels who had stated that there was no use in the party for the peasants who expect from us the perpetration of his dwarf property.<sup>4</sup> Marx, similarly, had cautioned his colleagues in the Communist League in 1850 not to distribute the estates among the peasants.<sup>5</sup> Their reasoning against the reestablishment of peasant cultivation was two fold : First, it is "not the social but isolated labour that predominates; and that, therefore, under such conditions wealth and development of reproduction, both of its material and spiritual pre-requisites are out of the question and thereby also the pre-requisite for rational cultivation" (Capital Vol.3, Part VI, Chap XLVII, Sec V); secondly, under capitalism, a peasant is inevitably doomed under the relentless pressure of market. The history of European capitalism is a testimony of it. Where the peasants exist, it remains an unfinished agenda of capitalism. In such theoretical backdrop and with the benefit of knowledge of European history, if a party still persists with the programme of distribution of lands to the peasants, the party is inevitably to doom. For, the distribution of land to the peasants is at best a bourgeois historical task. It's not an act of Communist party to apply a bourgeois programme for the seizure / to retain state power which unfortunately the communist parties in India and abroad have been implementing after Engels' death.<sup>6</sup>

Not only that, their approach towards the economic policy of globalization has a flaw which is un-Marx like. Marx, it may be recalled, had critically supported the policy of globalization known in his time as Free Trade as it played a catalytic role in social revolution by hastening the end of remnants of feudalism (eliminating the peasants) and bringing in capitalists and wage earners face to face globally without any escape route for capitalism. His support was premised on three counts: first, it facilitates the rapid universal development of technology and its benefits to the people; secondly, it dissolves the prevailing non- class contradictions within nations and among the nations, and thirdly, it precipitates the contradiction between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat by dissolving the middle class like peasants, small traders and manufacturers, etc, to hasten the social revolution. In ideal form, he argued, all economical laws under globalization act upon the whole world and will eventuate in the emancipation of the proletarians.<sup>7</sup> Maoists, on the contrary, are opposed to the open market policy of the bourgeoisie to protect the uprooting of the peasants and other sections of the middle class. Their opposition impacts deleteriously on the intended social revolution for which they claim to be fighting for. Their praxis is a negation of their professed outlook.

A similar predicament exists in their boycott of electoral politics which is contrary to Marx's praxis of participation in the bourgeois electoral politics despite its limitations. It may again be recalled here that during Marx's time, the French / German and other Communist Parties participated in the electoral process and were guided by Marx-Engels in the formulation of their programmes which were addressed to the proletariat during elections to seek vote for the party candidates to form the government.

The fallacy of the bourgeois electoral politics and its debilitating impact on the communist parties was known for decades to both of them; yet they did not abandon it.

Rather they struggled for the voting rights of the proletariat. They were, of course, critical of their comrades' praxis, particularly of members of legislative bodies who compromised with the principles and programmes of proletarian movement and thought that being people's representatives make them infallible.

Boycott of elections marginalizes the Maoists from the masses and provides opportunity to the state to malign them as terror organization, to isolate them and finally, to eliminate/neutralize them. As elections are one of the procedural and deliberative methods to seize state power in a historical context, for which the masses fought for generations, a boycott of it segregates the Maoists from the masses. The bourgeois, of course, has used the evolving mechanisms of liberal democracy to its advantages; but a steadfast commitment to principles and programmes without any compromise, as Engels had suggested,<sup>8</sup> is a better option than boycott. More importantly, the recent urban electoral trend indicates a 'boycott' of elections by the labour who deliberately abstains from voting as mark of protest against the fraud perpetrated by the bourgeois parties. It's, therefore, always better to let the boycott come from the labour rather than from the vanguards.

The participation of tribals in the electoral process in Bastar reflects a trend and their mindset.

### CONCLUSION

The tribals known as *Salwa Judum* are internally displaced people of Bastar. Displacement/re-location/rehabilitation of people for rapid development of capitalism has been an integral part of government's policy; and the use of coercive apparatus/extra- economic measures, similarly, has equally been its integral part in the application of this policy. The displacement in Bastar for the application of the contemporary globalized bourgeois property relations was already under-way before 2005. The acts of Maoists triggered the exodus. The state seized this opportunity for its counter-insurgency acts against Naxals and to create a condition for further exodus of the tribals. A combination of the two created the phenomenon of *Salwa Judum*.

Fortunately, the pressure of the civil society has restored few semblance of 'normalcy'. Tribals, most of them, have returned to their villages. The state has restrained its blitzkrieg. Its counter- insurgency measures are, however, operational. The Maoists, similarly, have rectified their illogical reforms but their armed anti- state acts continue. Those, the tribals, who are on neither side of the spectrum continue to suffer as suspects. This is the tragedy of Bastar. □□□

### Notes and References :

1. See Nandini Sundar, *Sovereign and Subaltern*, OUP, 2007, pp. 288
2. This was accepted by Narayan Sanyal, a polit bureau member of the CPI (Maoist), Nirmalakka, and Reddy, leaders of the different armed wings in different zones. Tusharkanti Bhattacharya, member of the Central Committee in their separate interviews with the present writer in Raipur, Jagdalpur and Warangal Jails respectively.
3. This data was calculated for this paper by the Office of the Collectorate, Bastar district from the available official records.
4. K Marx and F Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol.27, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1990, p.495.

5. K Marx, *The Revolutions; of 1848*, Vol I, Penguin Books, 1973, p.328.
6. For detail work, see Himanshu Roy, *Peasant in Marxism*, Manak, 2006, New Delhi.
7. K Marx and F Engels, op.cit, Vol. 6, p.290; for a focused work, see Himanshu Roy, "Marx on Global Trade", *Frontier*, Autumn Number, 2002.
  8. See, Ibid, Vol. 27, pp.549-53.