

Azad—the ‘Gandhian with the Gun’

Saroj Giri

It one has no illusions about state power and the reality of class interests, or the state's willingness to hunt down its enemies, then the killing of Azad comes as no surprise. One can clearly see that if an ordinary adivasi, one among 'the poorest of the poor', is killed by the security forces, and more so if the killing is in a false encounter, then there is enough space for sympathy for someone who in the first place was forced to take up the gun due to his desperate situation of deprivation and need. But what if the Maoist is no poor adivasi but comes from a relatively well-off family and it was not deprivation but politics which drove him into revolutionary politics, into waging war against, or rather countering the war by, the ruling order and state? Isnt it then fine for the state to kill this revolutionary, a terrorist without mitigating circumstances?

In the case of the 'poor adivasi', one can conveniently deny him agency in his being a Maoist and claim that the real agency, in its negative form, is of the government which in denying him certain rights pushed him to being a Maoist. So one can conveniently defend the poor adivasi 'taking up the gun' since the authorities have in place deprived him of any real political will: they have denied the revolutionary in him, apart from illicitly reducing revolutionary politics to the gun. The argument then rebounds to holding the government responsible for abdicating its constitutional responsibilities in looking after the needs of the poor. The adivasi is denied specifically political grounds for being a Maoist, denied that he might have his understanding of say the class character of the Indian state or ruling order over and above the fulfilment of his basic needs and the fight for his 'interests'. In this pathetic formulation, his/her being a Maoist follows from the state denying him certain rights, a by-product of the ill-thought policies of the state.

In denying the adivasi or the poorest of the poor the will to be a Maoist, it is not at all his being the Maoist (for that is treated as a by-product) which is being proscribed but it is revolutionary will as such, a will which cannot be referred back to circumstances that can be managed through government policies, through governmentality, which is being proscribed. Azad embodied such a revolutionary will: a will which cannot be precluded by any amount of tweaking, managing, rearranging of the precipitating circumstances through benign welfarist policies, development packages and rights. One cannot say, bring more of NREGA kind of policies, redistribute wealth here and there and that will do the trick - a check on the Maoists capitalizing on the discontent and poverty of the adivasi masses. For here the Maoist involved is not the poor adivasi in the first place! In fact even for the poor adivasi, such welfare policies or rights can very well merely fuel more expectations and further stokes the flames of radical change and a revolutionary will to that effect. It is such a will which the state and its goons wanted to kill.

In fact this will is most feared by the ruling classes since it does not just oppose their repression and violence but also shatters their democratic facade and forces out into the open the political articulation of class struggle, of the inequalities of wealth and power. The conditions of possibility for such an articulation are not however objective circumstances that can be managed and contained by the ruling order but involve a subjective revolutionary excess. Is it not precisely their excess, the far too impractical belief in the armed overthrow of the state, their being out-of-sync, which is what allows

Maoists the understanding of the character of the present ruling order over and above the particular acts and policies of the government. And hence following from this, a revolutionary will, throwing oneself body and mind in the actualization of this will, in being part of the people's war. Azad embodied this.

From denying the revolutionary in a 'poor adivasi' to killing a revolutionary like Azad—how much of a gap really exists? Is not the killing of Azad and the denial of any independent revolutionary will to the 'poor adivasi' part of the same logic? Thus the message is absolutely clear: radical movements, political revolutionary struggle which cannot be one way or another reinscribed and absorbed into the dominant logic of the system cannot be tolerated. If excess is the revolution, if that which cannot be managed and contained within the dominant order is the revolution, then Azad had come to stand for that.

Fukuyama declaring the end of history was not just a reflective comment on the 'objective' state of the world but actually a declaration of intent based on the balance of forces which is overwhelmingly in favour of the dominant capitalist system. It involved the subjective intent of the dominant liberal-capitalist order saying, wishing, working towards, making sure that history actually ended. The thesis of the end of history is no mere reflection but an active element in defending the present balance of forces, thereby ensuring its own truth: it is part of the class struggle. The excessive, violent revolutionary will disturbs and rocks the 'end of history' and hence is liable to be proscribed and killed. But this killing must be done secretly so that it appears as though the end of history is just the state of the world today (it is just so, capitalism is here to stay) and is not something which is the product of a continuing class struggle, of actually an open and contingent balance of forces which today, in the present conjuncture, is strongly tilted against communists, against the working classes.

Thus Azad is killed but had to be necessarily killed secretly. The shadowy Andhra Pradesh Special Intelligence Branch, an arm of the state, carries out its encounter killings and the civil, democratically elected government and its ministers act as though they hardly even know about it. Thus Azad's killing does not seem to have registered on any government minister or functionary—even in the context of possible negotiations and peace talks. This distribution of the secret and the open, of the undemocratic vigilante violence and the open governmental democratic initiative, of false encounters and real encounters—it is this macabre division of labour, this colossal hypocrisy of Indian democracy which Azad boldly confronted. It is the threat to his life from precisely such secret vigilante state bodies and his killing by them which enacted such a confrontation—his life did not just show or expose this interface, through critique or analysis (which presupposes a safe distance from the thing itself), but he simultaneously and directly confronted, suffered and died this hypocrisy and dark hole which is Indian democracy. The ruling order therefore deeply feared Azad - but it also fears him in his death and hence not a word on his killing from the government even though he was in the middle of dealing with the offer for negotiations by the Home Ministry.

The unmitigated excess, the so-called terror of the Maoists means that Azad the revolutionary, the 'Gandhian with the gun', cannot 'unfortunately' be humanely portrayed as the desperate, poorest of the poor taking up the gun only since his interests were not met, only since there was no other alternative to ensure a means of livelihood and two square meals a day. That he left no alibi, none of these mitigating factors to attenuate his hardened revolutionary will—this is the beauty of Azad the revolutionary, a difficult,

tense legacy. In other words he is saying to the people : that there is a fight, there is a struggle in front of all and nobody can beat about the bush by referring to antecedent circumstances or economic needs and interests. Any 'higher' and in that sense political revolutionary will is sought to be reduced to 'interests' (the real purpose of negotiations), or liable to be killed, eliminated.

Through the negotiations, through some or the other ruling class machination the state does imagine sometimes that it can turn the Maoists into another interest group, another group vying for power. But the state knows that such a possibility, for the Indian Maoists today, is still far-fetched, if at all possible. It is this thinking that it is perhaps not possible to co-opt the Maoists into another power group, that the Maoists perhaps mean what they say—armed overthrow of the state and belief in some form of communism—which drives the state to go for all out war to suppress this unmanageable, excessive will, this authentic terror. Azad embodied a pure judgement on the ruling order, on the present dispensation, which did not derive from the acts of omission or commission, or from specific policies of the government, or from the contravention of the Constitutional obligations towards the poor and so on. It was not a negative judgement on the state and ruling order, but an infinite judgement - deriving from an understanding of the class character of the state and the constitutive logic of the present system. Azad entertained no mitigating circumstances for the ruling order, he did not for example point out specific wrongs this ruling order did to this or that group. The problem is infinite, so the solution cannot be partial but must be total. That is why a revolution was needed. Marx in his *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* said that the proletariat is not fighting against specific wrongs since no 'particular wrong' is perpetuated against it : it is fighting against 'wrong in general'. Hence the proletariat claims no particular rights but stands for a revolutionary abolition of the existing state of affairs.

For one thing Azad as a political revolutionary provides no liberal, left-liberal welfarist alibi to oppose his killing. So much so, it forces so many concerned people quietly accept the inevitability of his getting killed—some might even privately say, well, the Maoists valorize martyrdom a bit too much, so let them face the music now! Such thinking that if one indulges in violence then there will be counter-violence, killing of revolutionaries by the state, is fine so far as it goes. But then this means there is also another music one cannot hear: people have to recognize that there is an open war in place. But then people deny or underplay this when they will pull out the law books and the Constitution and argue that there is no war situation as such since concerned citizens have all agreed to abide by the constitution and rule of law for the greater common good, for the interests of all and so on, as the story goes.

The problems arise as people are told, only due to the violation of 'social compact', of the social contract, the violation of laws and Constitution, the withdrawal of the state from its constitutional obligations to the poor—but doesn't this line of thinking unwittingly suspend the struggle, proscribe the revolutionary will, by opening up the hypocritical hole, legitimizing the management of society and socio-economic contradictions through benign policies and rights. So human rights activists have opposed Azad's killing by solidly arguing that the state has no right to take an individual's life (Maoist or otherwise) through extra-judicial arbitrary killing. Does the state reply to this? No, it does not since doing that amounts to accepting that it has no societal legitimacy and is merely a party in an ongoing political struggle and war. The constitution and law are meant to adjudicate 'conflict of interests' in such a way that class conflict, deeper political struggle can be denied by reducing them to such conflict of interests—where they cannot be thus

reduced, where the revolutionary will asserts itself nevertheless, things like extra-judicial killings take place. Judicial and extra-judicial killings work in tandem. And by the way, it is the same agencies, the same Special Intelligence Branch which arrests in 'true encounters' one time (as with Kobad Ghandy) and kills in false encounters another time. So one sees that judicial and extra-judicial are ways of suspending, containing the political struggle. Indeed there are strong reasons to believe that it is the same Home Ministry, apparently serious about negotiations with the Maoists, which gave the go-ahead to kill Azad.

So the injunction is clear, as it was clear in the Calcutta of the early 1970s. One cannot be a pure revolutionary. A Maoist, a Naxalite is a criminal, an enemy of society, whose killing is a foregone conclusion.

Granted that the killing of Azad was then totally expected and followed from the pattern and nature of power and class relations, what is most galling is the manner in which the state refuses to foreground the fact that yes he was an enemy and so they killed him. It has to act and pretend as though it never wanted to kill him, that he was killed by chance, in an encounter. One report quotes an official of the Andhra Pradesh Special Intelligence Branch : "We raided on a tip-off. About 25 Maoists were present there. The fire-fight started late at night and ended at 3 a.m. two persons were shot dead by police, while the rest escaped". And further, "one of the dead has been identified as Cherukuri Rajkumar alias Azad, the CPI (Maoist) spokesperson. We did not know that he too was at the meeting," he added. That is, there is no real struggle, that they were carrying out something like a routine search and kill operation and had no express intention of killing him.

The Maoists also kill—but everytime they kill, they say that so and so is for example a police informer and they are killing him. It foregrounds the problem, the struggle, it declares who are its enemies, who are its friends and does not pretend to work for all, regardless of questions of class and subjective position. But the so-called democratic state does not foreground the question of power, it does not want to accept that there is a struggle which is on and that it is just one party, a contender in this struggle but presents itself as above all particular interests and particular classes. The Maoist movement through the activities of someone like Azad forces the state to come out openly as to where it stands, whose interests it serves, thereby bringing out in the open what is otherwise a hidden class struggle, obfuscated by the state and its democratic representation. But the state constantly engages in this struggle and war even as it suppresses it from coming into view, even as it constantly promotes and reproduces the conditions for this war in newer ways. Thus it plunders the forests and fields, displaces people and so on, unrelentingly, and acts in the interests of the ruling classes and yet it wants to rule as though it upholds the interests of all the people. So it can never declare that so and so was an enemy and so had to be killed. The state has no enemies, the ruling classes in a constitutional democracy act, in fact must act as though they have no enemies. And in doing this they suppress the existence of real struggle, of class relations, of class struggle—"We the people of India...", goes the preamble to the Constitution!

Thus it killed Azad but has no guts to claim it openly. It fears not the individual whom they killed but in this killing it knows that it is trying to suppress a larger fountain of struggle and rebellion.

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