

RECALLING 'GUHA NEOGI'

## Violence and Non-Violence

**Tapan Bandyopadhyay**

WHEN A PASSION LIKE GREED BREAKS LOOSE FROM THE FENCE OF SOCIAL CONTROL IT ACTS LIKE THAT FIRE, FEEDING UPON THE LIFE OF SOCIETY. THE END IS ANNIHILATION. IT HAS EVER BEEN THE OBJECT OF THE SPIRITUAL TRAINING OF MAN TO FIGHT THOSE PASSIONS THAT ARE ANTI-SOCIAL AND KEEP THEM CHAINED. BUT LATELY ABNORMAL TEMPTATION HAS SET THEM FREE AND THEY ARE FIERCELY DEVOURING ALL THAT IS AFFORDING THEM FUEL.—*THE ROBBERY OF THE SOIL*—RABINDRANATH TAGORE

This writer belongs to those who didn't know Manoranjan Byaparee, except having heard very scantily about him from activists in civil rights movement, especially among Adivasis under the Chhattishgarh Mukti Morcha (CMM). His two-part post-editorials in the new Bengali morninger, *Yug Paribartan*, was for many like this writer a wake-up call for sharpening consciousness about what the Forbes Magazine recently called in a cover-story, 'India's Dirty War'. Consciousness about the subalterns depleting fast, such incisive analysis enlightens the civil society.

Manoranjan's father was a first Generation erstwhile-East Bengal refugee who was sent to the Dandakaranya to populate- not to rehabilitate—the unarable, boulder-strewn area of thousands of square kilometres almost without water, leave alone heavy infestation of wild animals. They were sent to the 56th village of Paralcote area where he was till 1971. In or about 1973 Manoranjan came back from Dandakaranya to West Bengal but went to Bastar region before the Lok Sabha elections of 1989. There he came into contact with the late Sankar Guha Neogi, the harbinger and father-figure of CMM. That was a bright chapter in Manoranjan's life of protestation against social, ethnic and economic injustice. Manoranjan was instrumental in organising Dalits in 133 villages and indoctrinated them to the philosophy of CMM—combining struggle for a living wage with breaking of shackles of anti-human prejudices and unbridled boozing of men. He met with Rabi Netam, an Adivasi leader. Rabi was entrusted with the task of organising the 150 to 200 Adivasi Villages in and around the 133 Bengali populated villages. Manoranjan and Rabi could communicate with each other through Chattisgarhi language. Manoranjan knew from Rabi that though Naxalites entered Bastar region from Andhra Pradesh in 13 *dalams* (groups), they could not make much headway in Chattisgarh or adjacent areas of Maharashtra or Orissa because of the CMM under the unrivalled leadership of Sankar Guha Neogi who led a peaceful struggle braving provocations for violent feedback.

Manoranjan raises two very interesting politico-social questions at a time when from the country's academic-turned politician Prime Minister to the lowliest of citizenry, barring a few activists and conscientious journalists, joining the hue and cry that the Maoists are the greatest internal terrorist threat and or they must shun violence. Many social anthropologists and behavioural economists reject this perception and suggest that hunger and malnutrition are the main terror against the 'wretched of the earth'. Manoranjan's Questions are : first, whether concerned citizens recognise that not a single gun-toting hand ever was raised nor any landmine exploded during the lifetime of Guha Neogi. His was a totally peaceful, democratic front organising the Adivasi coolies—mostly indentured—working as day-labourers

under the forest contractors, mining lease contractors and others like those, at a pittance. The first landmine exploded six or seven months after the brutal killing of Guha Neogi. It happened at Dantewara, killing 18 police personnel. Secondly, how have the Maoists or armed Naxalites become such a virulent and fierce battle-worn force? And here comes his penetrative, thought-provoking yet poignant dissection of the condition of the central jungle heartland of the country and its original inhabitants. The Adivasis were made to be disillusioned with non-violent path as violence was exported by the state in simple, poverty-stricken but tranquil hamlets which have been caressing the country's natural resources for centuries together.

It is now common knowledge that at most the Adivasi wants only to retain his own way of life, age-old customs and livelihood from the forests. They collect Mahua and its seeds, various herbs and semi-medicinal fruits and roots for their daily needs and twigs from dry branches of trees without affecting the ecological ambience. The State apparatus in conjunction with mining corporates, both indigenous and foreign, and their stooges like the forest and mining contractors, loan sharks and private mafia want not only to deprive the Adivasi of their livelihood but also to take away their homeland, because underneath lies one of the richest deposits of iron ore, dolomite, manganese, cobalt, uranium and on hillock tops bauxite, the most sought after ore for alumina and aluminium required by the arms industry. What does the adivasi possess? Only one loin-cloth irrespective of sex and not even a *katora* to eat their once-a-day rice, that too unsalted; because salt is as precious as gold to them, thanks to the sahkars and the local small traders and merchants. Adivasis collect a type of fruit whose medicinal value is tremendous but they are not made aware of it as the traders barter salt against those fruits and sell those to medicine merchants at 2000 times the purchase price.

The question remains as to why the Government and the mining megacorps want to oust the Adivasi. The answer is as simple as that if the forest remains as pristine as it had been from time immemorial, the MoUs and contracts cannot be worked upon and as long as the adivasi and its new found Messiah, the gun-toting Maobadis and the so-called DEVELOPMENT through building roads and Police Chowkis and namesake health-centres and primary schools sans doctors and teachers, cannot be built. After all contractors will pay for the next election. The corporates who finance the entire electioneering and the *Salwa Judum* are not able to mine area bordering Maharashtra in the West, Andhra Pradesh in the South, Chattisgarh in the middle and Orissa in the east, Jharkhand and part of west of West Bengal too.

Manaoranjan goes on to ask, as if to himself, the maobadis waited for 20 years protractedly : for what purpose? To him the answer comes pat that they could prove to the Adivasis and the world at large that what fate awaits the democratic movement and what reaction will come down from the government against such movements. The adivasis, after the murder of Neogiji, were disarrayed and the maobadis filled the gap, took up the reins of leadership. The balance shifted towards small skirmishes, ever-gaining grounds and more forces from the Government side deployed so much so that it is now estimated that for every ten adivasis there is one Policeman (unlike the civil policemen in the western democracies- pointed out by Gautam Navlakha, general secretary, Peoples' Union for Democratic Rights and Editorial Consultant, EPW, at a massive meeting in Kolkata in early April) in the area whereas there are

regions in the country where not a single police could be found for one thousand villagers.

The Home Minister Mr Chidambaram has proclaimed that the Maoists would be eradicated within the next three years. Manoranjan states somewhat pessimistically (may realistically) meaning, especially the Maoists that with the sophisticated weaponry and accessories available to the Government and catalytic collaboration of corporate houses and Industrial-financial oligarchies they would be annihilated without doubt, in three or 23 years. With them would go away the Adivasis and their beloved forests (with the entire ecosystem of a vast region). He goes on to appeal that though he knows that the development coterie would never give up violence as was predicted by the late Sankar Guha Neogi, the Maoists must come out in the open and sit on the discussion table so that the Adivasis and the jungles are not extinct. He poignantly enumerates that the thousands of adivasis and hundreds of police personnel who lost their lives, and lakhs who are rendered homeless are all the poorest of the poor. The upper caste higher echelons of the bureaucracy, the officers of the police and corporate managers would remain in their cozy little corners of happiness and affluence but the central heartland of India would go the Harappan way. Whenever a killing takes place, irrespective of who dies, what matters that only the poor dies. □□□