

COMMENTARY

The Maoist “Problem” and the Democratic Left in India

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One key paradigmatic subtext of Naomi Klein’s argument runs in her *The Shock Doctrine* (London: Penguin, 2008) is how the supposed undemocratic, violent character of “totalitarian” Marxist movements serve to justify repressive measures by the neo-liberal state. In inviting such a repressive response from the state, “undemocratic” revolutionary left movements are presented as causing the erosion of democratic spaces and the right to dissent. But what if upholding so-called democratic spaces by shunning the undemocratic, revolutionary left is premised on blocking off emerging possibilities of radical transformation, thereby ideologically legitimising capitalist democracy?

Thus, today, even as dissident democratic leftists like Klein expose the repressive neo-liberal order and its double standards and hypocritical claims, they display a fundamental attachment to its basic premises, as they uphold and legitimise the norms of capitalist political democracy. They oppose their agonising attachment to democracy (and so-called democratic struggle, livelihood approach, rights-based discourse, subaltern approach and so on) to the “shock doctrine” and repression of the neo-liberal state in a way which excludes the revolutionary left from the field of acceptable, “legitimate” political struggle. However, as we see in India, in portraying the “undemocratic,” “totalitarian” Maoist movement as a mirror-image of the repressive state, the democratic left objectively speaks from within and, therefore, for the so-called democratic space of this neo-liberal, repressive state.

This shows that the dissident left in India has accepted democracy or democratic struggle as the only game in town, a fidelity to formal democratic norms, thereby rejecting “undemocratic” political struggle as liable to be “shocked and awed.”

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What is true is that in the face of a political threat to the very liberal democratic, or even radical democratic consensus, by a force which refuses to play the democratic game, the capitalist state invariably functions with the democratic left as its oppositional *ally*. Thus, as oppositional allies, both the state and the dissident left view the Maoist movement as a “problem”: the difference lies only in the way they understand this problem.

The debate in India on the Maoist movement, thereby, centres on whether one views this movement as a “law and order” problem or a socio-economic problem. Since both viewpoints regard the movement as a problem, the two positions can be collapsed into one. But that is precisely what is not allowed: it is in somehow retaining the two positions as distinct that the dominant order constitutes the political field as one of struggle, opposition and hence “democracy” (akin, say, to the false political distinctiveness of and competition between the Republicans and Democrats in the USA). As we shall see, this political field is sustained by blocking off the Maoist alternative from the field of vision.

The Maoist movement, also called the Naxalite movement, after Naxalbari the name of a rural town where a 1967 peasant uprising ignited this tendency within the Indian Communist movement, has the New Democratic Revolution as its declared objective, the overthrow of the “semi-feudal, semi-colonial” state through protracted people’s war. Because of this, it has always faced severe state repression. All along, the brutality with which the state sought to eliminate Maoists, in a seeming paradox, chimed well with the so-called socio-economic approach of the dissident left. In recent years, however, a good swathe of politicians and Home Ministry officials view the Maoists as a law and order problem and officially classify them as “terrorists.” The prime minister recently singled out Maoists as the single largest internal security threat.

This security-centric understanding of the Maoist “problem,” is challenged by sections of the dissident left who see it as a socio-economic problem, arising from deprivation, loss of livelihood, lack of employment opportunities and abject poverty, given a neo-liberal state abdicating all welfare functions. They argue that the “Maoist threat” is used by the government as a ruse to justify the rise of the security-centric state, with its repressive laws infringing genuine democratic voices and dissent.

Within the dissident left, the old social democratic tendency, once invested in Nehruvian socialism and planned development, with concerns about reducing inequality, poverty amelioration and so on, advocates the socio-economic approach. The adoption of neo-liberal policies by the Indian state since 1991 weakened the hold of this section within the Indian state and bureaucracy and hence its “humane” socio-economic approach cannot be understood without reference to its specific elite interests. Thanks to the presence and efforts of this faction, the once-powerful welfarist Indian Planning Commission recently instituted a study of the Maoist movement, expounding the socio-economic approach. This commentary deals with *Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas* (Report of An Expert Group to the Planning Commission, Government of India, New Delhi, April 2008, http://planningcommission.nic.in/reports/publications/rep_dce.pdf).

The Report

The Report captures the Naxalite/Maoist phenomenon at three moments of its relationship with this pre-defined political field fundamentally structured around the two approaches: the security-centric one and the socio-economic approach. Given that this political field is taken as given, the Maoists are simply made to traverse it in three instances. Since these instances are interrelated and one flows into the other, they form a simple dialectic. A triadic structure is formed where the Naxalites/Maoists are, in the first instance, shown in their alienation from the system. In the second instance they are shown in their "positive content" (fighting for the rights of adivasis, land rights, forest rights and so on), which is essentially shared with the socio-economic state and also has a positive content (employment guarantee for the poor, decentralisation, tribal rights and so on).

In the third instance, the Maoists are shown to be in a position to join the system if only both sides (Maoists and the security-centric state) could reform themselves. From the first to the third instance, the Naxalites/Maoists finish a journey from alienation from the system to having something positive to offer, to then absorption in the system. Meanwhile, the basic structure of the political field comprising the two tendencies within the state – the socio-economic approach and the security-centric approach – is not only maintained and reinforced but also purged of the Naxalite/Maoist threat; all this is achieved through the humane socio-economic approach!

The Report comprises three corresponding ideological moves. The first consists of treating the Naxalites/Maoists as the consequence of the "failure" of the state's "development model," so that they are then understood as simply a by-product, an epi-phenomenon *within* the given political field pre-defined to rule them out as a political alternative. There is then the second ideological move which seeks to identify their "positive" aspect as fighting for the rights of the marginalised. It is this benevolent activity and not their political and ideological goals that are regarded as primary: beneath the veneer of political objectives, they are just a bundle of benevolent acts. Once this is settled, can the Naxalites/Maoists be very different from the benign state if only this state implemented plans for local self-government, rural empowerment, adivasi rights, Dalit rights and so forth?

The third ideological moment of the humane socio-economic approach therefore consists of finding a common ground between the Maoists and state agencies. This is supposed to provide the basis for negotiations between the two parties. Interestingly, Indian politicians who brokered the entry of Maoists in neighbouring Nepal from a people's war into "democratic politics" were precisely those who uphold the socio-economic approach to Maoists in India. The ideologically reactionary role they played in Nepal should be a warning about their character to the Indian Maoists. It will be seen that the "humane" socio-economic approach to the Naxalites/Maoists advocated by the Report presupposes stripping them of their politics as a prelude to bringing them back into the "normal political process." In dissenting from and contesting the security-centric approach, the socio-economic approach, therefore, so constructs and structures the political field that the "humane approach" it advocates towards Naxalites/Maoists becomes a way of "including them out" as a political alternative. The socio-economic approach's contestation with the security-centric

approach is premised on excluding the Naxalites/Maoists as an alternative political force.

Terms of Reference

The Report's terms of reference mean that it is not about the Naxalite movement as such but about how the state has failed to deliver in "extremist affected areas:" it is about "the elements of discontent of the people arising out of failure of the system" (p. vi). The Naxalites are said to capitalise on this discontent and win over marginalised sections of society for their political programme: "the failure, inadequacy or injustice of State mechanisms and institutions created space for the Naxalite activities" (p. 45). This is the basic thrust of the socio-economic viewpoint which, unlike the law and order approach, does not hold that the Naxalites are merely a terror group.

Instead of taking the Naxalite movement on its own terms, the socio-economic approach treats it as the by-product of the failed development policies of the present state. This approach, however, is contextualised in the larger need to defend the Nehruvian kind of developmental state against the neo-liberal, growth- and security-centric marauders who now control the state. Thus, before the "paradigm shift of economic policy from 1991," says the Report, the state policies "used to reiterate the commitment to reduction in inequality of income and wealth," but not any longer (p. 57).

The Report approvingly recalls "positive state responses" to the Naxalite movement in the 1960s and 1970s. It points out such responses from the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPI(M), a "revisionist" party and sworn enemy of the Maoists. For example, due to the CPI(M)'s land redistribution policy, "when the peasantry found that large areas of land would be distributed amongst them, their loyalty shifted from the Naxalite militants to the normal political process" (p. 56). In the 1970s, the Indira Gandhi government issued guidelines for land reform and to revise existing laws and rural unrest waned, thereby eroding the Naxalite's mass basis (p. 56).

But now, rues the Report, under the neo-liberal security-centric state, "the responsibility of the state for providing equal social rights recedes in the sphere of policy-making," essentially abdicating its constitutional obligations to the rural poor. There is a "directional shift in Government policies towards modernisation and mechanisation, export orientation, diversification to produce for the market, withdrawal of various subsidy regimes . . . hurting the poor in several ways" (p. 2). Thus, in trying to explain the rise of "rural discontent and unrest" and hence the increasing strength of the Naxalite movement, the Report locates itself in the larger critique of the state's neo-liberal policies. The increasing strength and belligerence of the Naxalite movement is taken as evidence of the "failure" of these policies.

Ideological Move One: Consequence of a "Failed" Development Model

For the Report, the Naxalites are just an instance of the "failure" of the state's present policies of development. In a political field marked by the contest between these two statist poles, the security-centric and the development-centric poles, the

Naxalite movement serves only as "raw material" to validate the claims of the now-marginalised faction of the state against the neo-liberals who control it, a contestation indistinguishable from that among the different state factions (Planning Commission vs. Home Ministry). In denying the Naxalite/Maoist movement a constitutive space in the political field, it gets presented as an epiphenomenon: precisely at the moment when the socio-economic approach promises a more humane state response towards it.

The search for how the state can provide a humane response, appear caring and maintain the "democratic way," comes at the expense of diluting the politically radical character of the movement. In its contestation with the security-centric state, the socio-economic approach in the Report takes the bold step of counting the Naxalites in its own likeness! This is accomplished by showing how Naxalite struggle for the rights of the marginalised is also (incidentally?) the main concern of the welfarist state. It is as though the rise of the Naxalite movement allows the welfarist dissident left to shower further blows on the neo-liberalists who have dislodged them from state power. This explains the "softness" of the welfarist, dissident left to Maoists in India.

Ideological Move Two: Maoists as Service-providers

Distancing itself even more from the competing security-centric approach, the Report proposes that the Maoist movement is not just a consequence of the failed development policies of the present state but is itself trying to address this problem in its own way. Says the Report: except for "the ideological goal of capturing State power through violence, the basic programmes of the Extremists relate to elimination of poverty, deprivation and alienation of the poor and the landless" (p. 70). This shows that once the Naxalites are portrayed as an epiphenomenon, overlooking their "identity" as a political force, the "humane" approach can now treat the ideology, political programme and "their declared aim to overthrow the Indian state" as also epiphenomenal to their "identity."

Thus, this humane approach to the Naxalites/Maoists is based on "excluding the ideological goal," the political content of the movement. *In therefore paring off the Naxalites/Maoists to their welfarist best as a way to counter the security-centric aggressiveness of the Indian state, this approach, in the same move, takes the political steam out of the Naxalite/Maoist movement.* In recognising what is *empirically true* about the "pro-people" activities of the Naxalites/Maoists, the socio-economic approach is "more progressive" than the security-centric approach. However, in working within the political field that presupposes the continued existence of this latter pole, this approach reinforces the given political configuration. In challenging the security-centric approach, the dissident left reasserts the existing political field, denying Maoist attempts at its reconfiguration. Contrary to what one would expect, therefore, not treating the Naxalites/Maoists as a political movement is not a "short-coming" naturally arising out of the constraints placed by the "terms of reference" on the Report. Rather, it is the result of the workings of the very logic of the Report's socio-economic approach. Thus, this approach is at its ideological best precisely when it takes a progressive position against the security-centric approach by pointing out the benevolent activities of Naxalites/Maoists in solving livelihood

problems. The Report works with an implicit assumption that the political objectives and ideology of the Maoists could very well be treated as just an outer garb beneath which the socio-economic approach discovers the Maoists' positive core: meeting the basic requirements and grievances of the people (aren't Naxalites the benevolent rebels, Robin Hood style?). The hidden ideological assumption of the Report is: are we not, after all, basically humanitarians at the end of the day, out to provide "goods and services" and livelihood entitlements to the people, so that questions of power, democracy, oppression are all secondary?

That is why, says the Report, even though it does not directly deal with the Maoists as a political force engaged in a violent struggle to overthrow the state, yet that issue is already covered: "the link between what the report deals with, and what it does not, lies in the fact that it is in the course of providing answers to the people's problems and needs that the Naxalite movement seeks to obtain their support from the masses" (p. 45). That is, even though "Naxalite activity is not confined to solving people's grievances," yet this is why people are with them (it is: you provide stuff to the poor so that they vote for you). One is led to think that the masses support the Naxalites/Maoists only since they happen to solve their livelihood issues and are better *service-providers* than the state agencies! It is in this vein that the Report lists instances of the benevolent deeds of Naxalites/Maoists, putting them alongside those of state development agencies, easily extendable to NGOs who are service-providers. More crucially, it is not only Maoists who are treated as service-providers but ordinary people (who join the Maoists) who are portrayed as *service-seekers*. People who could be political subjects, active agents of social change and willing to "suffer" its consequences are here depicted as mere seekers of humanitarian aid. This is what Alain Badiou calls treating "Man as a victim," a "being-for-death," so that human rights become "rights of survival against misery" (*Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, London: Verso, 2001, p. 12).

If the first ideological move, in portraying the Naxalites/Maoists as an epiphenomenon – a consequence of the failed development policies of the state – laid the political field with the socio-economic approach and the security-centric approach as the two given poles, the second move (identifying their positive role in securing the means of livelihood to the people) reduces their politics to welfarist activities. This anticipates the third move, which is one of treating the Naxalites/Maoists, duly castrated, as some sort of an adjunct, a possible partner to the state's welfarist mission to ensure certain rights to the marginalised. It is on this basis that the Report recommends negotiations with the Naxalites/Maoists: which, in effect, is no less than a recipe for liquidating them, or, to put it humanely, bringing them into the "democratic process."

Ideological Move Three: Negotiations (or Liquidating Maoists)

The socio-economic approach involves treating the Naxalites as seriously engaged in efforts to provide goods and services to the rural poor, access to livelihood resources, forest rights and so on. In presenting the Maoists as plugging the increasingly large gaps left by the neo-liberal development model, the Report assumes a continuum between a socially responsible state, upholding social rights and its constitutional

obligations to the marginalised, and the Naxalites/Maoists. The Report argues that a socially responsible decentralised state will wean people away from the Naxalites/Maoists and provide the basis for negotiations with the Maoists who engage in similar activities.

In laying out this meeting ground between the Maoists and the welfarist state, *the socio-economic approach transforms the Naxalites/Maoists into potential allies*. This approach, in its third instance, thus builds a case for the state to enter into negotiations with the Maoists.

To sum up, the socio-economic approach starts, in the first instance, by portraying the Naxalites/Maoists as an epiphenomenon, a by-product of the failure of the system; then, in the second instance, portrays them in their positive aspect as service-providers; and, finally, in the third instance, opens the possibility of viewing the Naxalites/Maoists as allies in providing the solution to the system's problems. As S. Banerjee points out, the message of the Report is clear:

The Maoists may have to shelve their "maximalist" aim of seizure of power for the time being, and negotiate with the state in the humanitarian interest of the thousands of poor and innocent families who have been caught in the crossfire between the police and the Naxalites ("On the Naxalite Movement: A Report with a Difference," *Economic & Political Weekly*, 24 May 2008, p. 12).

Implicit in this approach is that Maoists should enter into negotiations with the welfarist state and suspend their violent people's war. If they don't, they stand accused of being fixated on violence and killings rather than on solving the peoples' most basic problems. (Interestingly, in neighbouring Nepal recently, once Maoists bought into these ideas of the need to set aside "political differences" and work towards "reconciliation, development and peace" for "a new united modern Nepal," their liquidation as a radical political force inexorably followed.) Hence the question: is the socio-economic approach any less than a recipe for a "democratic," or "humanitarian" liquidation of Maoists?

Critique, Ideology

The dissident left recognises the split but does not dare traverse it and so remains wedded to the existing political field. The socio-economic approach and its critique of the neo-liberal state precludes the possibility of any radical transformation: in this sense, they are ideological. Ideological not in the sense of promoting false consciousness but in sustaining the given political field through a blocking off of the emergence of a new political field opened up by the possibility of Maoists traversing the split. In other words, it is misplaced for the dissident left to think that it is their humane subjectivity, their progressive critique of and challenge to the security-centric position that confers "recognition" on Maoists as a socio-economic problem. Instead, it might be the other way round: that *it is the "totalitarian," and "undemocratic" Maoist intervention from outside the political field, out to overthrow the existing state order, which provides the dissident left the democratic space in it to expound the socio-economic approach*. Indeed one of the recurring themes of the dissident left is how the poor and the marginalised are being forced to take up arms

and become Maoists since the neo-liberal state has abdicated its welfare functions. Arundhati Roy writes

But now more and more are reaching for guns. Will the violence grow? If the “growth rate” and the Sensex are going to be the only barometers the government uses to measure progress and the well-being of people, then of course it will (interview, *Tehelka*, 31 March 2007).

With people reaching for guns, the Maoist “totalitarian threat” is then instrumentally and opportunistically used by the dissident left to undermine the rule of the neoliberal security centric establishment by accusing the latter of undermining the ‘democratic’ legitimacy of the state, representative institutions and the government. It is thus from the shoulders of the Maoist movement that the left-learning Expert Group fired their volleys at the present ‘neoliberal’, ‘anti-people’ Indian state, claiming that ‘the left’ can better manage the existing state (the so-called ‘democratic’, ‘people-oriented’ state) – and of course ‘democratically safeguard’ it from challenges from revolutionary movements.

Thus, it is too superficial to say that the Maoist movement, because it is violent and “undemocratic,” merely becomes a pretext for the state to stifle dissent and crush democratic voices. Such an opinion, depressingly ubiquitous, displays a deep attachment to a state-centric notion of democracy and liberty. Striving to remove the Maoist pretext so that the state does not err in its repression is too considerate an attitude towards the state, as though it is not repressive in itself. More crucially, any attempt at radical transformation is ideologically demonised by this accusation of providing the state a pretext to curtail democracy.

In the course of their critique of neo-liberal policies, some of the key positions taken by this dissident left have been supporting and working towards the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, the Right to Information, opposing displacement of people by different projects like dams, mines, Special Economic Zones, forest rights for tribals and suchlike. The dissident left has also raised its voice in other cases, including opposing a situation of near civil war in Chattisgarh, where the state has been arming the *Salwa Judum* vigilante group against the Maoists and supporting the movements against displacement in Orissa.

One good instance of how the system, the political field, gets reinforced precisely by demanding and sometimes securing concessions from it has been the demand seeking human rights activist Binayak Sen’s release since he is “the good doctor” and “a true humanist” – and since his continued detention would mean “bad press” for Indian democracy. While the refusal to frame this demand by taking cognisance of his “Maoist links” augurs well for the Maoists as it preserves their radical otherness, what it also does is displace the struggle against the state as such to one against its draconian laws, repressive measures and similar particular manifestations. The point is that this critique and the movements and campaigns that it has inspired invariably remain either wedded to the dislodged or social democratic faction of the Indian state or even when it is the anti-totalitarian, neo-Gandhian, anti-modernist, “anti-state” left, a third position never emerges. The National Advisory Council formed under the present United Progressive Alliance government empirically demonstrated the character of this dissident left. This

Council was a convergence of the old Nehruvian "socialistic pattern" approach, the social democratic left of the CPI and CPI(M), the neo-Gandhian left and "non-party political formations" – pushed to unite both due to the neo-liberal onslaught as well as the Hindu right-wing upsurge. One major event which brought these different shades of left together was the 2004 World Social Forum in Mumbai.

Resistance to the CPIM government's bid to set up Special Economic Zones in 2007–08 however marked a public disavowal of this alliance and it emerged that the major section of the old social democratic left, the CPI(M), with an always unsure CPI, would go ahead with neo-liberal policies. The CPI(M) is a seasoned practitioner at effortlessly shuffling between rhetorical attacks on World Bank and IMF policies, critiquing neo-liberal globalisation, and doing just the reverse with great single-mindedness. Its anti-imperialism increasingly appears as no more than a palate from which it draws in order to keep itself alive in the game of parliamentary politics. The dissident left has, of course, actively opposed the CPI(M)'s pro-imperialist, capitalist policies and repressive measures.

Rumblings and Shifts

However, the space for the dissident left's democratic critique of neo-liberalism and of draconian laws is increasingly narrowing as class polarisations sharpen and the response from the masses is increasingly desperate, sometimes violent and radical, in the face of an untrammelled and ruthless state allied with an increasingly powerful capitalist class. That is, the pre-1991 political field marked by the two poles of the social democratic socio-economic approach and the security-centric, free market state is undergoing significant shifts. The spectacular rise of the neo-liberal, security-centric state has seen the transformation of social democracy – particularly the CPI(M) – from being nominally on the "side of the masses," to being openly on the side of capital and the state. This change redefines the nature and scope of the protests and resistance, including the Maoist movement.

Events around the mass resistance in Nandigram to the proposed SEZ, the brain-child of the CPI(M) party and government, made it clear that social democracy has graduated from its role of containment of the masses in the service of capital and the state, to itself spearheading the neo-liberal onslaught. Social democracy, or rather the two main communist parties, the CPI and CPI(M), have for decades been at the forefront of channelling and subverting mass resistance. It seems though that social democracy is now no longer satisfied just managing mass threats to the system – having made too many "historic blunders" in not breaking out from this lesser role – it now wants a direct stake in managing capital and the state.

While this strengthens the ruling political classes by diversifying its composition (adding the colour red), the problem for the thinking members of the ruling elite today seems to be that there is no credible "left" force out there to contain the "social discontent" of the masses. NGOs, social movements, Hindu right-wing have all failed. Further, there has been a significant exhaustion of the energies of neo-Gandhian social movements (for example the Narmada Bachao Andolan), which were committed to militant but professedly non-violent, non-hierarchical struggles. Concomitantly, there has been the shift of the entire spectrum of parliamentary

political parties, including communist parties and social democracy, openly to the right. With a security-centric and repressive neo-liberal state destroying the lives and livelihood of millions of people, the change in the role of social democracy means that there is no credible “left” political force that would contain and channel the resistance from these masses along “democratic” lines: a problem for the ruling classes but an advantage for revolutionary forces. The present conjuncture therefore opens up the possibility of a response from the masses unmanaged by one or the other faction of capital or the state. Nandigram showed how this change in the nature and role of social democracy and other left forces opens a possibility for a more radical resistance from the masses: the resistance was uncompromising and radical in a way that allowed for no negotiation and mediation. Thus, the role of middle class social activists, such as Medha Patkar, supporting the resistance was limited to being visitors to these “affected areas” – unlike earlier movements, such as the Narmada Bachao Andolan, where middle class activists actually provided leadership, albeit in a so-called non-hierarchical way.

In this situation, any left force which emerges can be expected to carry the seeds of radical change beyond the given “reality:” this is where the present expansion of the Maoist movement needs to be placed. In general, the Maoists apart, it seems that the resistance and responses from the masses are going to be less democratic and less constitutional and more violent, if not always radical. The presence of Maoists in large parts of the country enhances and deepens this process. The resistance in Nandigram derived at least some its energy and direction from the presence of Maoists; such developments carry the potential of restructuring the existing political configuration.

However, the dissident left still seems unwilling to take account of this possible turn in the political balance of forces. In refusing to understand the strength of the state and the stridency of capital in relative terms, that is, by weighing and judging it in the face of this “undemocratic and unconstitutional” mass mobilisation and resistance, the dissident left treats it in its pure and abstract existence, hence all-powerful and something we can only go on critiquing no end. Critique becomes self-referential and even self-indulgent as it is heavily invested in and fundamentally attached to the present political order. That is why, for the dissident left, the kind of resistance that falls outside of the dominant political field does not carry the seeds of any possible alternative. It only qualifies as an example of the failure of the neo-liberal state to address the “grievances of the masses.” Urgent concerns, as in the Report, about “social discontent”, “democratic overload”, “crisis of democratic governance” and the “need” to address these “genuine grievances” now reveal the fear of the dissident and parliamentary left of an emerging revolutionary armed struggle. It is here apt to recall Frantz Fanon’s characterisation of the middle classes in the struggle against colonialism: that in spite of the anti-colonial rhetoric they want the armed struggle to be stalled at all costs.

The not-so-secret wish that the system, after all, must “succeed” (in say containing “social discontent”) blinds sections of the dissident left to the political alternatives that are being constantly generated in an incipient form. That is why its critique of the neo-liberal state seems more like an advance friendly warning to the state – crisis management for the state. With experience from the grassroots, the dissident left moreover knows better: it reveals its deep knowledge of the real interests of the state,

the real dangers and would not want the state to float on superficial growth-centric ideas, and bloat on the arrogance and greed of those in power. As the true voice of the state, the dissident left seems more interested in setting things right for it, so that it does not invite more trouble for itself and hence for democracy. It seems least interested in facilitating the emergence of a force that might restructure the political balance of forces in the country. Thus, when resistances, such as in Nandigram, throw up new forms of democracy and organs of power, outside of the given political system, the dissident left rushes back to revive moribund constitutional provisions of self-government and panchayats for "democratic decision-making," that is "involving communities." Amit Bhaduri (in *Development With Dignity: A Case for Full Employment*, New Delhi: National Book Trust, 2005), therefore, argues for "decentralisation through panchayats" and "development through participatory democracy" following Constitutional provisions.

Fear of the Fear

So it seems clear that it is precisely the kind of political mobilisation and response feared by the security-centric state, which the socio-economic approach of the dissident left too wants to keep out of the political field: the repressive, security-centric state complemented by the ideological, progressive approach. This state fears the masses, mass resistance and, worse, the masses becoming Maoists and, in its bid to secure itself, it imposes more and more repressive measures, trampling on human rights and so on. This erosion of democratic spaces and rights, the rise of the security-centric state is what the dissident left in turn fears. Alain Badiou ("The Communist Hypothesis," *New Left Review*, 49, 2008, p. 30) calls this the "fear of the fear:" the dissident left fearing the undemocratic consequences of the state's repressive response to mass resistance. This "fear of the fear," is, however, "a secondary, derivative emotion whose content is barely detectable." Secondly, "it has no concept of any alliance with the large masses of people" (p. 30).

Fear of the state's response and the inability to join the political response of the masses: this is the dissident left's predicament in India. Let us take the jailbreak by the Maoists in November 2005 in Jehanabad town. The debilitating assault on state power, with townspeople pouring into the jail as prisoners happily roamed around, had one policeman on duty comment that the entire town's population are terrorists. This collapse of state order and increased confidence of the masses, however, only increases the dissident left's fear of the fear: what they see is "people [are] caught between the state and the Naxalites, with the democratic space for other forms of struggle having shrunk dramatically" (Bela Bhatia, "Jailbreak and the Maoist Movement," *Economic & Political Weekly*, 17 December 2005, p. 5370).

Isolated from the large masses of people, the dissident left seeks the "right to dissent" and "democratic spaces" to defend and uphold an empty neutral space. Its critique alternates between uniquely singular expressions of radical dissent to fanciful radical chic flights. Thus, Roy ("The End of Imagination," *Outlook*, 3 August 1998), once fantastically declared herself "an independent, mobile republic," seceding from the country! To say the least, there is an unmistakable element of middle-class self-indulgence in making the search for so-called democratic spaces the

prime political task, when large masses of the people are mobilised in a collective revolutionary project way beyond these spaces.

Roy best exemplifies and, I might daresay, politically suffers the dissident left's frustrating predicament, or maybe a deadlock: non-violent social movements have reached a dead-end, NGOs are "*paltu shers*" (caged lions), and yet Maoists cannot be politically supported, even though "they are the only people able to make a dent" (interview, *Tehelka*, 31 March 2007). One just has to look at the debate around the state's involvement with the vigilante Salwa Judum and particularly the responses of independent and concerned citizens to get a sense of my argument here. Even when the state *is* Salwa Judum, the dissident left fervently scrambles for a (constitutional) democratic state which "cannot be doing this" and, in the name of making the state accountable, somehow reinstates, rehabilitates it – infusing it with life when none exists and seeing only violence and totalitarianism in the reverberations of the unknown and admittedly risky new.

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