

Compound Inequalities and Political Violence in India

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Prosperity Amidst Poverty and Inequality

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India: The Specificity of Inequality

Whereas Brazil, Indonesia, and on some indicators Argentina, have recorded significant progress in reducing inequality over a period of twenty years, states a 2011 OECD report on inequalities in emerging economies, China, India, the Russian Federation and South Africa have become less equal over time. India in particular has experienced a significant increase in earnings inequality. The ratio between the top and the bottom deciles of wage distribution has doubled since the early 1990s with growth in wage inequalities between regular wage earners-i.e., contractual employees. Income inequality in the casual wage sector, i.e. workers employed on a day to day basis, has remained more stable. The doubling of income inequality over the past 20 years, continues the report, has made India one of the worst performers in the category of emerging economies. 42 per cent of 1.21 billion Indians live on less than US\$1.25 a day and that India has the highest number of poor in the world.¹

The Planning Commission (Government of India) holds that about 30 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line (March 2012 figures). However, disagreements on how many Indians belong to the category of the absolute poor happens to be an enduring, and even a constitutive aspect of the Great Indian Poverty Debate. The debate structured in the main around methodological disputes on how to measure poverty and the poor, has acquired highly technical overtones, and most of these subtleties escape non-economists, or more precisely non-statisticians. But even a non-economist can figure out that there is something very specific about poverty (as a prime indicator of inequality) in India.

For one, poverty is concentrated in a few states in the central and the eastern parts of the country: Bihar, Jharkand, Orissa, Chattisgarh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and West

¹ OECD, 2011, *Divided We Stand: Why Inequality Keeps Rising in Emerging Economies*
<http://www.oecd2011>, accessed on 31 March 2012

Bengal, along with some parts of Uttar Pradesh.² According to the 2011 India Human Development Report, these states, with the exception of West Bengal, have been at the bottom of the HDI ranking list since 1999-2000. The Human Development Index takes into account three indicators, life expectancy at birth, education indices based on literacy and mean years of schooling, and monthly per capita consumption adjusted for inflation and inequality.³

Two, poverty is concentrated in mainly two communities, the Scheduled Tribes and the Scheduled Castes, and some groups in the Backward Castes. The 2010 UNDP Human Development Report affirms that 81 per cent of the STs, 66 per cent of the SCs and 58 per cent of OBCs belong to the category of multi-dimensionally poor.⁴ In this essay I concentrate on the SC and the SC population because they suffer from double disadvantage, or what can be called compound inequalities.

Three, 56 per cent of the Scheduled Caste and 55 per cent of the Scheduled Tribe population of the entire country lives in Bihar, Chattisgarh, Jharkand, Orissa, and parts of West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh. A break up of HDI statistics state wise presents a starker picture of the overlap between poor regions and poverty/low human development indicators among SC and ST communities.

Bihar is generally held to be one of the fastest growing states in India, but it continues to have the lowest per capita income in the country. Among the Scheduled Castes, which form one fifth of the population in the state, the incidence of poverty in both rural and urban areas is significantly higher than the state average and the corresponding national average for the community. In all human development indicators, the community falls far behind other groups in the state as well as national figures for the SC community.⁵

In Chattisgarh STs and SCs together constitute 50 per cent of the state's population. The incidence of poverty among SC and ST households in the state is much higher than other social groups in the state, as well as the two communities in the rest of the country.

²Institute of Applied Manpower Research and the Planning Commission Government of India, 2011, *India: Human Development Report, Towards Social Exclusion*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, p 2

³ IHDR 2011: 2-3

⁴ UNDP 2010 *Human Development Report 'The Real Wealth of Nations: Pathways to Human Development'* p99. <http://www.undp.hdr>, accessed on 31 March 2011

⁵ India HDR 2011, p 39

More than half of rural STs and urban SCs are poor.⁶ As a whole Chattisgarh ranks low on HDI rankings with more malnourished women, underweight children, and illiterate people than the national average. Of this, fifty per cent of ST women are malnourished and the percentage of underweight children in the community is higher than in other social groups in the state. The densely populated forests and hills of Dantewada and Bastar in the south, where a majority of the STs live-10 per cent of the country's total ST population lives in the dense forests of Bastar- are the most illiterate in the state. School drop-out ratios among ST children are higher than other districts. Chattisgarh has the fourth highest incidence of poverty among SCs after Bihar, Jharkand and Uttarakhand. Ironically Chattisgarh is a mineral rich and power surplus state.

Jharkand has vast natural resources: forests, and minerals and the region accounted for 70 per cent of the domestic product of Bihar before 2000.⁷ Yet it remains one of the most economically backward states of the country. The SC and ST population constitutes 19 and 21 per cent of the state's population, and 4 per cent and 10 per cent respectively of the national population. The incidence of poverty for SC and STs is higher than corresponding figures at the all India level, with the incidence of poverty among urban SCs and STs being more than double the total urban incidence of poverty in the state. A higher percentage of children from these communities suffer from malnutrition, and literacy rates for these communities are lower than the state average as well as the all India average.

Orissa has an abundance of natural resources. It possesses one fifth of coal, a quarter of iron ore, a third of bauxite reserves, and most of the chromite in the country. Yet it is one of the poorer states in India.⁸ The SC and ST population accounts for 40 per cent of the total population of the state. The incidence of poverty among STs, which account for 10 per cent of the total ST population in the country, is the highest in the state. In respect of health indicators, the performance of the state is well below national average, and health conditions for the two communities are worse than other social groups in the state. Less than half of the ST population is literate, and both communities have a lower literacy level than the state and the all India average.⁹

⁶ Ibid pg 42

⁷ Ibid pg 59

⁸ Ibid pg 73

⁹ Ibid pg 74

Whereas Andhra Pradesh is doing well economically, the incidence of poverty among rural STs and urban SCs and STs is significantly higher than the state average as well as the national average for these two communities.¹⁰ Health indicators are poor for the STs and SCs in the tribal areas and in the drought prone districts in the south of the state¹¹. Literacy rates for these communities are lower than the state average, as well as the national average, i.e., 67.7 per cent against 74 per cent.

The Distinctiveness of Inequality

Both poverty and inequality are relational concepts insofar as some people in a given society, whether this society is national or global, possess fewer essential and non-essential goods than others. What is striking about inequality in India is that one third of the population possesses so little of essential goods such as food, health, education, and shelter. Compared to other social groups in the country, a majority of the SCs and the STs belong to the category of the absolutely poor, and are condemned to live a life below the threshold of what we recognise as distinctively human.

And they are so condemned because of a contingent and hence a morally arbitrary factor; that of birth. The overlap between absolute poverty and birth into some sections of the Scheduled Caste or a Scheduled Tribe community is not mere happenstance. People are not only poor because they do not possess the basic skills that enable them to participate in profitable transactions; they are poor because they have been born into communities that have been historically stigmatised by the caste system as the (former) 'untouchable', the 'polluting', or as the outsider. The system banished the STs and the SCs to the spatial as well as the social margins of society. They were, in addition, barred from accessing opportunities available to other members of society, such as education and development of skills, let alone participation in the public sphere as well as the personal sphere of social interaction. Children who were born into these two social categories were handed down nothing but deprivation, social discrimination, rank indignities, and performance of menial tasks as their patrimony. The relationship between lack of caste/social status and material deprivation is, therefore, causal.

¹⁰ The SCs and the STs constitute one fourth of the state's population and 9 and 8 per cent of the national population of these communities.

¹¹ Ibid pg 35

In an effort to provide remedial justice, or more precisely compensation for 'harm done', a complex of affirmative action policies enacted by the government have tried to ensure the physical presence of SCs and STs in educational institutions, public jobs, and representative forums through the quota system. The objective is to integrate communities that had been left out in the cold, into structures of decision making, and into the world of material opportunities. But even if the complex of affirmative action policies have enabled some members to access a degree of material wellbeing, even if atrocities on the basis of caste are punishable, and even if a powerful dalit movement has foregrounded the caste issue and dragged those who discriminate to judgment, these factors do not seem to have greatly influenced bigoted and inequitable social practices, in rural India at least. A 2006 research project conducted in 565 villages in 11 states of India revealed systematic evidence of the continued existence of untouchability.¹² A number of surveys have established that SC students in universities continue to feel discriminated against, and excluded from the rewarding worlds of friendships and personal interactions.¹³

The link that the Indian state has tried to forge between group representation, redistribution, and presumably recognition has, in effect, proved tenuous. In some cases, members of both groups have claimed the right to redistribution as well as recognition with some success. In other cases they have been able to access a degree of essential material goods, but continue to be deprived of recognition. And in yet other instances, both redistribution and recognition continue to dodge persons, as is the case of a majority of the SCs and the STs in the poorest regions of Orissa, Bihar, Chattisgarh, and Jharkand. It is precisely this segment of the population that continues to suffer from double disadvantage; that of social stigma and material deprivation. The two constitutive features on occasion reinforce each other, and on other occasions acquire autonomy from each other. *The mix of reinforcement and semi-autonomy is best conceptualised as compound inequality.*

¹² Shah, Ghanshyam, Harsh Mander, Sukhdeo Thorat, Satish Deshpande, and Amita Baviskar, 2006, *Untouchability in Rural India*, New Delhi, Sage

¹³ Shankar L Gaikwad, 1999, *Protective Discrimination Policy and Social Change: An Analytical Study of State Action on Scheduled Castes in Aurangabad City*, Jaipur, Rawat.

Addressing Compound Inequalities

Admittedly compound inequality poses a peculiarly intractable problem for political intervention. Politics can negotiate distribution of scarce resources. The matter requires vision, courage and commitment, but as history has shown us it can be done. How does politics negotiate recognition? How does it lay down parameters of what human beings owe each other by virtue of being human? For too many troubling factors cast their dark shadow on this precise issue; aspects that relate to group identity and psychology, all of which does not lend itself easily to political negotiation or intervention.

It is precisely the complexities of compound inequalities that has been identified and targeted by the extreme left. If we look at the regions in which the armed guerrilla squads of the Maoists operate, these dovetail neatly into areas in which the doubly disadvantaged live and work. Maoism has erupted in a hilly and thickly forested corridor that runs from Bihar through Jharkand and Chattisgarh in the centre, down to Orissa and AP, and some parts of Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, and West Bengal. Tellingly intensive armed engagement has taken place in the southern part of Chattisgarh; Dantewada, Bastar, Kanker, Rajnandangaon, and Narayanpur, districts which, as documented above, are the poorest in the country.¹⁴

The outbreak of armed struggle in these areas can best be explained as a response to a triple failure: the failure of the central and the local state to deliver justice to territorially concentrated communities, the failure of the representatives of these communities to represent the plight of their constituents in various forums, and the failure of civil society movements, and in particular the dalit movement to make the well-being of the people who suffer from compound inequality their prime concern. The consequences of this triple failure at worst and neglect at best have been serious. The most marginal of the SCs and STs suffer from avoidable harm, eke out a bare existence, continue to be subjected to rank indignities, and die premature deaths. This is an empirical fact of Indian society as much as Maoist political violence is.

Into the political vacuum created by systemic neglect and indifference have stepped the Maoists with their ideology of a new world geared towards the interests of the poor and the oppressed, and their strategy of Peoples War. The link between compound

¹⁴ Map International Institute of Strategic Studies <http://www.iiss.org/publications>, accessed on 21 April 2012

inequalities and the outbreak of armed struggle is clear. The 2009 draft report by Sub group IV of the Committee on State Agrarian Relations and Unfinished Task of Land Reforms set up by the Ministry of Rural Development was to focus on precisely this dimension of political violence in India. Though the Fifth Schedule dispensation in 9 states which have a significant presence of tribal people placed a special responsibility on the executive power to protect the tribals, stated the report, the state has defaulted. The enormous powers held by the executive have not been used efficaciously even once in the past six decades. Neglected by the government, and non-governmental organisations, and consigned to unmitigated exploitation, the tribal people initially gave the Naxalites succour, but have now become their base. The presence of the Naxalites in central India is a response both to past and to future land alienation, the failure of the government to live up to its constitutional mandate, and the withdrawal of the state from its responsibility to protect the tribal realm. Protective legislation that was enacted in the aftermath of Naxalbari has proved no guarantee, or any indication of the efficaciousness of legislation, concluded the report.¹⁵

A year earlier, the 2008 report of the Expert Group set up by the Planning Commission, Government of India-‘Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas’- provided a stinging critique of tribal policies and administration. “Equal status and equal dignity is not merely a Constitutional right but also a basic human right. Inherited institutions of caste, gender, and unequal property have traditionally deprived the majority of society of this right. Widespread practice of social discrimination, untouchability, domestic violence and atrocities against the weaker sections is an index of the failure of the promises made to the oppressed people of this country.”¹⁶The report went on to observe that though a large number of people are angry and feel alienated from the polity, matters have been brought to a head by the armed struggle waged by the Naxalite movement. The movement, which began in West Bengal and is now four decades old, has spread over a wide area, “affecting and influencing the lives of lakhs of

¹⁵Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, 2009, Report of Sub-Group IV of Committee on State Agrarian Relations and Unfinished Tasks of Land Reform, http://dolr.nic.in/agrarian_committee.htm accessed on 20 March 2012, chapter 4

¹⁶ ‘Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas’,2008, http://www.planningcommission.gov.in/reports/publication/rep_dce.pdf pp 1-2

people.” According to the estimates of the Government of India, the movement is now active in about 125 districts spread over 12 states.¹⁷

These reports catalyse memories of an earlier critique mounted against the state by another committee of the Government of India. Following the outbreak of the Naxalite revolt in North Bengal and the formation of the CPIML, the ministry of home affairs set up a committee to investigate the reasons for agrarian unrest. The report submitted in 1969 was titled ‘The Causes and Nature of Current Agrarian Tensions’. It stated that the basic cause of unrest was the defective implementation of laws enacted to protect the interests of the tribals. “Unless this is attended to, it would not be possible to win the confidence of the tribals whose leadership has been taken over by the extremists. “Persistent inequalities”, went on the report to state, “may lead to a situation where the discontented elements are compelled to organise themselves and the extreme tensions building up with the ‘complex molecule’ that is the Indian village may end in an explosion.”¹⁸

At first glance nothing seems to have changed since 1967, either in the conditions in which a majority of the SCs and the STs live and work, the ideology of the extreme left, or indeed the response of the state to these groups. The GOI refusing to recognise Maoism as a political problem continues to see it as security threat, or/and as a product of incomplete development in backward regions. It did so at the turn of the 1970s, and it does so today.

Both the context and the agents of change have, however, altered in definite ways. The context for the outbreak of Maoism in the first decade of the twenty first century is the agrarian crisis in general, and the handing over of swathes of resource rich land to global and Indian corporates in particular. The Dandakaranya region, a forest area which borders four states Andhra Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Maharashtra and Orissa, and which covers three districts, Bastar, Kanker, and Dantewada, has become one of the main sites for the seizure of land by state governments acting on behalf of the corporates.¹⁹ The 2009 draft report by Sub group IV of the Committee on State Agrarian

¹⁷ *ibid* pp 2-3

¹⁸ In A.R Desai ed 1986 *Agrarian Struggles in India After Independence*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press

¹⁹ According to D’Mello, the main players are Arcelor Mittal, Essar Group, Vedanta Resources, Tata Steel, Posco, Rio Tinto, BHP Billiton, and Sajjan Jindal group. Bernard D’Mello, 2010, ‘Spring Thunder Anew, Neo-Robber Baron Capitalism vs “New Democracy” in India’ <http://monthlyreview.org/commentary/spring-thunder-anew>, accessed on 19 March 2012, p 17

Relations and Unfinished Task of Land Reforms summed up the problem succinctly, as the “biggest grab of tribal lands after Columbus in the making”.²⁰ The script of the grab, continued the report, has been authored by Tata Steel and Essar Steel who wanted 7 villages or thereabouts each, to mine the richest load of iron ore available in India.

Appropriation of land and resources and consequent displacement of tribals and poor SCs from their habitat is not new. Yet there is something distinctive about what has come to be known as primitive accumulation today. Unbridled appropriation of non-renewable resources such as iron in Chattisgarh, Jharkand, and Madhya Pradesh, bauxite in Orissa, and diamonds in Bastar through legal as well as illegal mining, the establishment of Special Economic Processing Zones, hydro-electric plants and industrial units, and the use of open cast mining techniques carries serious implications for tribal life; ecological devastation and massive displacement.

“I want to stress from the Adibasi point of view, that land is and must be the bulwark of aboriginal life” Jaipal Singh from Bihar, representing the Scheduled Tribes had argued to great effect in the Constituent Assembly. “Equality”, he went on to say, “sounds well; but I do demand discrimination when it comes to holdings of aboriginal land.” Today one of the main causes of the intensification of poverty among the STs is land alienation. The poorest of the poor have been made to pay the price for India’s growth story. It is in this context that the Maoists have intensified armed struggle against the state and identified this aspect of exploitation as the cause of ill-being.

The second remarkable aspect of the current phase of Maoism is the consolidation of two influential groups, the CPI (ML) Peoples War and the Maoist Communist Centre into the Communist Party of India Maoist in 2004.²¹ The merger brought to an end the second phase of Maoism that was marked by bouts of fragmentation. Two powerful groups have now been welded into one. The PW’s traditional field of influence has been Andhra Pradesh, and that of the MCC, Bihar. The new party commands a larger territorial reach for launching both mobilisation and armed struggle, even as the two

²⁰Report of Sub-Group IV of Committee on State Agrarian Relations and Unfinished Tasks of Land Reform, conclusion to chapter IV

²¹ The PW was the result of a merger between CPI(ML) Party Unity operating in Jehanabad and Gaya district of Bihar, with PWG which was operating in AP. The PWG was formed by Seetharamaiah who had broken off from CPIML the parent organization of Naxalite movement. MCC which was influential in Bihar had formed an alliance with the Revolutionary Communist Centre of India-Maoists in 2003. The formation of the MCC goes back to 1969 when Kanu Sanyal disagreed with Charu Majumdar’s decision to discontinue the party journal *Dakshin Desh*. He subsequently broke away and formed his own party.

armed wings have merged into the Peoples Liberation Guerrilla Army. The military strength of the Maoists is estimated to be anywhere between 9000 and 10,000 armed fighters, possessing access to 6,500 firearms, with 40,000 cadres of the party providing support.²²

Foregrounding the interests of the poorest of the poor who have been denied the basic rights that are the due of every citizen of India, Maoism rejects the parliamentary road to democracy. The only way in which genuine democracy can be realised is through armed struggle. The underlying message is that the intractability of compound inequalities that stamp the lives of the SC and the ST communities demands political violence, which can shatter oppressive and exploitative relationships and succeed in taking-over state power. In contrast to structural violence, which is held to define Indian society, Maoist political violence is intentional, exercised by an particular agent, and targeted towards an identifiable end, the destruction of an oppressive class state and the establishment of a Peoples Democracy.

The Ambiguities of Political Violence

Given the existence of deep and entrenched inequality, oppression and exploitation that wracks the lives of the poorest of the poor, is political violence always wrong? This anxiety ridden question admits of no certain answer. For even as we recognise that violence is profoundly dehumanising, any moral evaluation of violence will have to take into account both the context and the objective of violence. If the context of Maoist violence is institutionalised compound inequality, the objective is to establish a state that is responsive to the needs of the poorest of the poor. D' Mello writes that in pockets of the Dantewada region, the Maoists have established guerrilla zones. Here land has been transferred to the tiller, aid extended to poor farmers, cooperatives set up, measures to obtain just prices for agricultural commodities and minor forest produce initiated, modern knowledge about agriculture disseminated, better seeds gathered from elsewhere distributed, and voluntary labour to construct tanks with canal systems

²² *The Economist*, 2006

deployed.²³ The basic preconditions for wellbeing have been set in place by Maoist cadres.

Maoist cadres have taken on another problem that has consistently defied political intervention, the recovery of self-respect for those who have been born into indignity and injustice. Sumanta Bannerjee, a one-time Maoist, suggests that the objective of the earlier Naxalite movement was not only to assure access to basic material goods, but also to secure justice and equal treatment for the landless labourer and the tribal. The Naxalites, he suggests, gave back izzat or self-respect to the downtrodden peasantry, which had been socially discriminated against and exploited for centuries. In a world where the upper class landlords treated the doubly disadvantaged as untouchables, denied them their civic rights, and had no compunction in abducting their women and raping them, Naxalite politics inspired precisely this section of the poor to assert themselves as equal human beings, and resist humiliating codes of conduct imposed upon them by the upper castes. He cites the voice of an old Bauri peasant in a village in Burdwan district who said in 1969 that Naxalbari had enabled him to walk with his head held high. He no longer had to make way for the upper castes when they crossed his path.²⁴ Similarly Kunnath who has done considerable field work in Bihar suggests that violence is perhaps a necessary precondition of the recovery of self-respect, involving very often the killing of notorious land lords and moneylenders, occupation and redistribution of their land, imposition of fines, and summary executions.²⁵

Considering the extent of ill-being that stalks the lives of the poor, considering that both the state and civil society groups have done little about ensuring wellbeing of the poorest of the poor, and considering that among the SCs and the STs living in central and east India there is more denial of self-respect, more infant mortality, more malnourishment, more ill health, more illiteracy, and more premature deaths than the rest of the population, it is difficult to definitively pronounce that violence is illegitimate. Those who suffer from compound inequalities are identifiable individuals who have names and aspirations, identities and hopes, children and

²³ Bernard D'Mello, 2010, 'Spring Thunder Anew, Neo-Robber Baron Capitalism vs "New Democracy" in India' 21 March 2010 <http://monthlyreview.org/commentary/spring-thunder-anew>, accessed on 19 March 2012, p 17

²⁴ Sumanta Bannerjee, 'Reflections of a One-Time Maoist' in Alpha Shah and Judith Pettigrew edited *Windows onto a Revolution*, Orient Blackswan

friends. Premature deaths and ill-being could have been prevented, and it was within the power of the state to change their future. But nothing has been done and things have worsened. We have few defences against the political violence argument of the Maoists. Empirical facts prohibit the taking of uncompromising stands on political violence.

Can Political Violence Prise Open Compound Inequalities?

The debate on the morality of violence is however a tricky one, so let us eschew moral judgements for another time and place and inquire into what the prospects for revolutionary transformation in India are. And it is precisely here that the picture seems bleak. Political violence in Maoist ideology, at least in the ideology propagated by Mao Tse-Tung is not the prime factor in revolutionary transformation, political mobilisation is. The decisive factor in armed struggle, Mao had theorised, is not weapons, but people who are convinced of the rightness of a cause. “The richest source of power to wage war lies in the masses of the people.”²⁶ Of course, it is possible for armed cadres to coerce local populations into supporting them. But if the idea is to liberate people whose futures have been yoked to compound inequalities, and to create a new society based on redistribution and recognition, this strategy will necessarily prove counter-productive.

The problem is that villages are not neutral sites into which an armed group can march and proceed to persuade, influence, and rouse people to action. Each village has its own complex social hierarchies, its own feuds with each group wishing to score points off another, its own structures of informal economies, and its own loyalties to the government and to other power structures. Political mobilisation rapidly turns into a contest between existing loyalties, and loyalties to a cause that is weighted in favour of the poorest and the most exploited. The task demands a degree of patience, some amount of impatience, a readiness to understand, agree, and disagree, and a talent to convince. All this needs time.

However it is precisely time and space for intense, sustained and prolonged political mobilisation that is denied to the Maoists. The Indian state has marshalled formidable military arsenals, mounted a military onslaught on the Maoists, and surrounded guerrilla zones. When the energies of the Maoists armed wing are

²⁶ Mao Tse-Tung, 1975, ‘Selections from Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung’ Abridged by Bruno Shaw, in Sam C. Sarkesian edited *Revolutionary Guerrilla War*, Chicago, Prescient.

focussed on defending their areas of engagement, opportunities for unremitting political persuasion, dissemination of ideology, and harnessing energies to a cause cannot but be scarce. Since they seem to have underestimated the military power and the will of the Indian state, the Maoists as D'Mello points out, have not succeeded in turning any of the guerrilla zones into base areas where they can establish a miniature state based on self-reliant economic development, and land to the tiller.²⁷ Setting up of alternative social and political, economic and cultural relationships is the other integral feature of Maoist revolutionary strategy. But it is precisely this that has been precluded by the military power of the Indian state.

This is not to say that nothing has been done. The Maoists have dramatically foregrounded the interests of the poorest of the poor, an agenda which has been washed off the success story that India has written for itself. But they seem to have also misjudged the strength of India's formal democracy; the legitimacy it commands, its capacity to reconcile political equality with social and economic inequality, and its ability to reclaim lost ground. The major 'security threat' posed by Maoism has sent alarm bells ringing in the corridors of power. If the Government of India has launched a military onslaught against Maoism, it has also initiated a number of measures designed to reverse legacies of underdevelopment—the Backward Development Initiative, the Backward Regions Grant Fund, Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojna, NREGA, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, and the National Rural Health Mission in underdeveloped areas.

It is precisely at this point that the diminution of the Maoist agenda becomes apparent, somewhat painfully so. The ultimate objective of launching a People's War to overturn existing forms of power, and to create a people's democracy, has been pre-empted by the onslaught of the security forces. All that the Maoists have been able to accomplish in the guerrilla zones is to secure the basic preconditions of livelihood. But there is nothing in this agenda, points out Tilak Gupta that is not there in the programme of mainstream parties. If perchance, the central and the state governments of the 'affected areas' deliver to the people social and economic political goods, will not the immediate agenda of the Maoists be rendered redundant?

²⁷ Bernard D'Mello, 2010, 'Spring Thunder Anew, Neo-Robber Baron Capitalism vs "New Democracy" in India' 21 March 2010 <http://monthlyreview.org/commentary/spring-thunder-anew>, accessed on 19 March 2012

History bears testimony to this. Sumanta Banerjee tells us that the social base of the Naxalites began to erode in 1972, precisely at the time, when the government began to develop areas under the command of the Naxalites, and introduce selective measures to ameliorate poverty in Naxalbari and among the Girijans of Srikakuum, for instance supply and credit schemes, and marketing. Operation Bargha in West Bengal created an entire class that benefited from land reforms. Over time, the legatees were transformed into a class of sub-elites, which quickly began to wield power over the landless. The centre of Maoism thereupon shifted to areas that were bypassed by land reforms, Bankura, Midnapore, Purulia, which border Bihar. Bannerjee reminds us of Charu Majumdar's warning, that land grants make the poor peasant into a middle peasant, and that economism drives a wedge between the peasantry. It is this very strategy which is being used by the government to divide the poor and the landless peasant.

If lack of sustained mobilisation diminishes Maoism to a development programme that delivers benefits but is by no means cast in the mould of radical consciousness, the use of political violence is also diminished. Unless politics controls violence, the reverse can also occur. Without political consciousness or the awareness that violence is to be used for certain specified ends, violence can best be likened to a quagmire that relentlessly sucks people into its murky depths. From here there is no escape. In other words, when violence holds individuals and groups in thrall, moral disintegration follows. For we cannot control violence; violence controls us. Fanon had told us long ago that when the colonial finger writes the alphabet of power in blood and gore, the script is ineffaceable and the imprint it leaves on the body politic, indelible. Violence leaves stigmata much like the murder of Duncan left blood on Lady Macbeth's hands: "What, will these hands ne'er be clean?" How then can a new society free of oppression and exploitation be created?

Moreover, what precisely does violence accomplish in the absence of sustained political radicalisation? Spectacular acts of political violence, kidnappings, arson, bombs, random killings, may appear daring but these belong essentially to the realm of performance. They reduce people to an audience, and political violence to a spectator sport. The paradox is that the Maoist cadres do not seem to have either the space or the time to radicalise populations, but they employ violence. In the

process they forget Mao's dictum that the prime precondition of revolutionary transformation is political mobilisation not violence per se.

Conclusion

Inequalities come in many shapes and sizes. One sort of inequality is material; that some people have so little of the goods that are considered essential for living a life that can be considered human-health, education, shelter, and food. The other kind of inequality is social, when people are subjected to indignities and humiliated simply because they are born into a group that has been historically stigmatised. When the first sort of inequality is superimposed upon the second sort we get compound inequality that in history has proved peculiarly resistant to political intervention. This empirical fact needs to be registered when considering or evaluating the phenomenon of political violence. We should not be too quick in coming to a conclusion about the propriety or the impropriety of political violence, its wrongness, or its impermissibility. We cannot settle the question of political violence of the extreme left, because compound inequalities speak for themselves, what we can do is to point out that the necessary preconditions of political violence have simply gone missing. The Maoist agenda has been reduced in many different but related ways. In the meanwhile the question of whether the prison of compound inequalities will ever be broken, stalks the biography of a globalising India.