[To appear in Amiya Bagchi (Ed.), Beyond Marx]

Marx Arms Struggle

Nirmalangshu Mukherji
Department of Philosophy
Delhi University

Wide sections of the left in India, including most of the naxalite groups and assorted radical individuals, are severely critical of the Maoist insurgency currently unfolding in east-central India (Mukherji, 2012, Chapter 5). While I broadly agree with much of the criticism insofar as the (radical) choices for the impoverished masses of India are concerned, I also think that the Maoist insurgency has raised once again a fundamental issue in Marxist theory: What is the role of armed struggle for accomplishing a just and egalitarian society? In my view, the issue attains particular poignancy in the Indian context where a vibrant parliamentary system is in operation despite massive inequalities. Notwithstanding their murderous character, the Maoist insurgency can be viewed as one vigorous and classical response to this issue. In effect, the Maoists are challenging their left critics to be explicit about where the critics stand on this crucial issue. I do not think this issue can be set aside by drawing attention to the Maoists' alleged 'deviation' from the Marxist path in other aspects of their practice; the issue of arms still remains unsettled.

To pursue the perspective just sketched, let me begin with two recent deaths. On 24 November 2011, the bullet-riddled body of the Maoist leader Koteshwar Rao (Kishenji) was found in the forests of Jangalmahal. In the human rights circles there is a lingering concern whether Kishenji was killed in a genuine exchange of fire or it was another instance of cold-blooded murder by the State. Apart from this rather restricted interest in the bloody events of that fateful evening, Kishenji has virtually disappeared from public memory. A very similar course of opinion followed the obvious murder of the senior Maoist spokesperson Chemkuri Rajkumar (Azad) an year before. After a respectable fact-finding mission determined that Azad was shot at point-blank range possibly while in custody of the Andhra police (Bhaduri, 2011), there were demands for justice from some democratic rights groups. As the government duly maintained a stoic silence the protests died out. Neither of these deaths gave rise to an uprising by the impoverished masses for whom Azad and Kishenji gave their lives.

The similarities between Azad and Kishenji extend much beyond the state of their bodies. Both belonged to reasonably well-off upper caste families in Andhra to be able to go to college. Both joined the naxalite movement in their teens to fight for the people. In college, although Azad and Kishenji excelled in studies (with Azad going on to secure an M.Tech degree in engineering), they devoted most of their energy to build the massive revolutionary student movement that rocked the state of Andhra during the ‘70s and the early-‘80s. Apart from impressive on-campus and urban resistance, the student movement motivated hundreds of more militant students to go to villages and fight directly for and with the peasants, especially on the issue of land distribution. In time, as fatigue set in

and repression mounted, most left the resistance and looked for greener pastures; I met some of them in North America during the mid-‘80s.

In contrast, Azad, Kishenji, and many others left the academia and turned into fulltime political workers in the agrarian struggle initiated by one of the factions of the naxalite movement. While Azad devoted more attention to political organization, Kishenji emerged as one of the principal peasant organisers with many thousands of landless peasants and adivasis confronting one of the most brutal repressions launched by a state in republican India. Eventually, both Azad and Kishenji joined the People’s War Group (PWG) founded by Kondapally Sitaramaiah and went underground. For nearly three decades since, these fearless spirits roamed the hills and forests of central India to spread the fire of revolt among the destitutes left behind by the Indian state.

In sketching the life-histories of Azad and Kishenji, I do not intend to even hint at the validity of their political programme as it unfolded with the formation of PWG. In my opinion, detailed elsewhere (Mukherji, 2012, Chapter 4), turning the impressive militant mass movements of the ‘70s into a secret guerrilla warfare—among the adivasis and located in the jungles—has been a monumental blunder. In fact, by now Maoist actions are so wrong as to border on criminality. Let there be no ambiguity on this central point of ideology and practice to which I return.

The present point is that very similar objections can and have been raised against the political programme and practice of Bhagat Singh, Khudiram Bose, Bagha Jatin, Surya Sen (Masterda), and a host of others during the freedom struggle. We do not have to adopt a Gandhian perspective to understand the utter futility of their “terrorist” actions even if it was directed against the brutal British raj. Yet, Bhagat Singh and others are

rightly viewed as national heroes despite the invalidity of their political practice. In my estimate, the heroic efforts of Azad, Kishenji, and others were more extensive and salutary as they directly confronted the modern Indian state with arms in their hands.

Maoists stand out as genuine revolutionaries especially if we contrast them with the grinning opportunists who masquerade as mandated representatives of the people. Set aside the 300 crorepatis in the Indian parliament, the handcuffed ministers and MPs charged with astronomical loot, the dynastic heirs, the pompous lawyers, and the direct representatives of corporations and mafia. Even then much of the rest, including many of those from the parliamentary left, do not inspire democratic confidence even if some of them mouth justice and socialism. There is glaring contrast between the life-histories of Azad and Kishenji and the politicians entrenched in the houses of the people. Yet, instead of dominating Indian politics, Azad and Kishenji lay dead like wild animals in the jungles while the parliamentary politicians vote on crucial public policy. What explains the monumental irony?

You might have noticed that in my brief depiction of Azad and Kishenji, I divided the Maoist movement into two broad parts. The first part consists of militant student and agrarian movements centered around vigorous mass mobilisation. The second part is highlighted by the formation of PWG and systematic build-up of armed struggle which ultimately found its locale in the forgotten forests of Dandakaranya. Many authors, including myself, have discussed elsewhere how the seeds of the mindless militarism of the last few decades was built into the earlier phase itself notwithstanding impressive mass mobilisation and militant engagement with real issues of the people. It could even

be argued that the “annihilation” feature of the earlier phase enabled the state to launch a brutal repression, especially in Andhra and Bihar, with some facade of legitimacy which in turn caused the shift to the next purely militarist phase.

Be that as it may, the net picture is that, in recent decades, the promising maoist movement has essentially degenerated into the following actions and operations: hijacking, derailment and burning of trains; blowing up railway stations, school buildings, and police stations; killing and occasional beheading of suspected informers; attack on police armories to loot hundreds of weapons and thousands of rounds of ammunition; looting of banks and treasuries; mass killing of security personnel in their camps as in Rani Bodili and Silda; ambush and killing of security personnel (and making of “ambush” videos); recruiting children as young as 12 years old for indoctrination and guerrilla training; amassing thousands of guerrillas in People’s Liberation Guerrilla Army, armed to the teeth with AK series rifles, machine guns, rocket launchers, grenades and other explosives; recruiting several thousand village-level militias who wield anything from bows and arrows to guns; colluding with varieties of mafia and private contractors to raise funds for arms; and killing of political opponents, especially from the Left and often from depressed sections of society, to grab control over an area. And so on.

It is worth emphasising that, in this second phase of direct military engagement, the Maoist movement has failed to find even basic relief—in concerns such as health, education, agriculture—for the people in the areas under their military command. In fact, there is by now substantive evidence that, in their command areas, hapless adivasis are subjected to as brutal exploitation in terms of wages and other payments as that enforced

by the private mafia that has been in operation in these areas for ages. Moreover, there is clear evidence of collusions between the mafia and the Maoists such that the influence of the mafia has actually increased during the period in which acquisition of weapons reached astronomical proportions (Mukherji, 2012, Chapters 3 and 4).

I have no space for detailing it here, yet from what we just saw, there seem to be intrinsic connections between the various strands of Maoist practices (see Mukherji, 2012, Chapter 5). A secret armed struggle requires money and foot-soldiers. Since a secret organisation impedes open interactions with people to secure their voluntary participation, recruiting children becomes an easier alternative. Similar and well-known causal sequences obtain for their dealings with mafia and private contractors, authoritarian control over cadres and people, killing of suspected informers, and the like.

In general, as many authors have pointed out, a secret armed struggle is incompatible with large, broad-based democratic movements. An armed struggle is necessarily secret which inevitably acquires the features of "assassins of the underground", to use some concepts from Sumanta Banerjee's recent papers (Banerjee, 2009a, 2009b). Its closely-guarded secrecy requires it to be at a distance from the people, and its recruitment also requires closed sectarian spaces. It is no wonder that armed struggles routinely engage in politics of identity, rather than class (Patnaik, 2010). Further, its necessarily sectarian character gives rise to what Balagopal has called "the invariant law of the sociology of armed insurgencies": as the State infiltrates the movement, the rebels "kill or otherwise injure agents and informers and thereby antagonise more of their own mass base, in turn enabling the State to have more agents and informers. Without exception, all militant

movements have killed more people of their own social base than their purported enemy classes" (Balagopal, 2006, 2007).

Further, as we noted, the very logistics of armed struggle requires active co-operation with the ugliest aspect of crony capitalism, namely, the underground international arms bazar. It cannot be bows and arrows anymore. The astronomical amounts of money thus required compels active co-operation with other aspects of crony capitalism such as mining, and timber mafia. Finally, an armed struggle enables the ruling order to open its fangs in full from a relatively high moral ground, causing thereby immense suffering of the people caught in the crossfire. We are currently witnessing each of these effects in Chhattisgarh (Mukherji, 2012, Chapter 5).

As the life-histories of Azad, Kishenji, and scores of other militant Maoists suggest, there is no reason to believe that, unlike scores of other insurgencies in India and outside, the Maoists are engaged in armed struggle for monetary benefits or for personal glory. Moreover, given the near-impossibility of a final victory, they are not in it even for immediate political power even if the struggle is designed to ultimately seize state-power from the capitalist-feudal oligarchy. And for this distant egalitarian goal, they are obviously prepared to lay down their lives. Further, unlike jehadists of varying hues and colours, Maoist heroism is not based on reactionary world-views designed to impose another form of unjust control of people. As with everyone else's view, Maoists' view of the classical doctrines of Marxism, Leninism and Maoism can well be debated. However, there is no doubt that, in essence, Maoist insistence on the form of struggle they advance is one of the ways of drawing the Marxist line of resistance.

In sum, the glaring problems with Maoist armed insurgency—especially its effect on its own mass base—cannot be traced to some personal or ideological specificity of the Maoists. The problems, as noted, are intrinsically related to the internal logic of armed struggle itself with the ghastly consequences that have brought immense misery for the tribal populations of east-central India. There are political contexts, of course, where armed struggles stand out as the only form of resistance (Mukherji, 2012, Chapters 1 and 5) even with unsavoury fallouts sketched above. However, in contexts such as present India where an electoral system based on universal franchise under the supervision of a fair Election Commission has taken deep roots, armed struggles do not carry the same salience of resistance as under direct fascist rule.

The parliamentary left in India has generally subscribed to this picture—with marked theoretical ambiguity, as we will see—throughout the short history of the republic of (independent) India except for a few years of intense ideological division during the armed struggle in Telengana. As we know, the naxalite movement does not think of the parliamentary left as a revolutionary force precisely for this reason; the parliamentary left is viewed as 'revisionists'. So, it is interesting to note that radical voices much beyond the 'revisionist' left have also recommended the electoral path as a genuine form of resistance to attain egalitarian goals. This includes several naxalite voices as well, as we will see.

Noam Chomsky holds that "if we are committed to certain goals, whatever they are, we would seek to attain them peacefully, by persuation and consensus, if possible—at least if we are sane and accept the most minimal moral standards. That is true no matter

how revolutionary our goals." In his prolific political writings over six decades, Chomsky has not discounted the tenability of armed struggle in certain contexts and contingencies. For example, his support to the armed resistance by Hezbollah against Israeli military offensive in Lebanon is well known. Still, he holds that the issue of armed struggle is entirely contextual and must "meet the minimum moral standards." It is deeply questionable, if in the current Indian context, Maoists have met this condition. Interestingly, a rejection of hasty armed struggle and a progressive shift towards electoral politics can be discerned within the broader naxalite movement itself. I have discussed this issue—which is virtually unknown to the general public thus enabling the state to propagate an identity between naxalites and maoists—in some detail elsewhere (Mukherji, 2012, Chapter 5).

Just to take a small sample for now, among radical intellectuals located at the left of the parliamentary left, Balagopal (2006) asks the leading question: "what would have been the result if Maoists had decided to concentrate on exposing the anti-poor bias of the government and extend their mass activity to a point that would have given their aspiration for State power a solid mass base." Sumanta Banerjee (2009) remarks with studied caution: "in India, a parliamentary republic, despite large-scale corruption and criminality, still enjoys democratic legitimacy among wide sections of the people and the major contending social groups who find the multi-party democracy useful for ends that make sense to them. The system apparently has not yet exhausted all its potentialities of exploiting the hopes and aspirations of the Indian poor and underprivileged sections." Ratan Khasnabis (2010) holds more directly that "wherever a parliamentary system is available alongwith institutions of decentralised power at different levels (state

assemblies, district councils, *panchayat*s, and municipal councils), radical organisations might use these effectively to prepare the grounds for revolution such that the masses are increasingly aware of an alternative socialist system." By raising "the choice between armed struggle and parliamentary path as mutually exclusive," Khasnabis continued, Maoists have turned "possible friends in the working class into enemies." This led to the "boycott of trade unions, peasant organisations, student councils, teacher's associations, employees' associations, and the like." Only armed squads remained whose "membership required skills for slitting throats."

Turning to direct naxalite activists, Asim Chatterjee (2010) reminds Maoists of the significance of electoral democracy: "a lesson from history is that, while elections have never led to fundamental social change, there has never been a revolution in a country with parliamentary democracy." By rejecting elections, Maoists are "rejecting the masses themselves by a rejection of their aspirations;" as a consequence, perhaps the "revolutionary war is turning into the party's war." Santosh Rana (2010) is even more outspoken. According to him, the Indian case contrasts sharply with that of Russia and China because there "the people had accepted the party rule in the name of the class since bourgeois parliamentary democracy was rudimentary or non-existent in pre-revolutionary Russia and China." In India, "parliamentary democracy, despite all its travesties, has taken roots down to the villages." Thus, "revolutionaries have to move ahead in India not by shrinking the parliamentary democracy but by expanding it. For us, the basic question should be more and more power to the people in order to make the democracy meaningful in the lives of the millions."

Dipankar Bhattacharya (2010) in fact makes the point that, some decades ago, the electoral system in Bihar was so much under the violent control of private armies maintained by the big landlords that some limited forms of armed struggle was needed to defeat these anti-democratic forces so that the rural poor can exercise their franchise freely. It is reasonable to view the entire armed effort by the Maoist party in Nepal as a means to establish a republic with universal franchise for the people; thus, once the monarchy with its brutal royal army was defeated the armed struggle was halted even if an egalitarian society in Nepal remained a distant dream. Similar remarks apply to armed struggles in Nicaragua and other parts of Latin America, as we will see in a moment. In a crucial sense, these efforts lend something of an absolute value to the establishment of a free and largely fair electoral system at all levels of governance.

Interestingly, not all Maoist leaders hold identical views on the supremacy of armed struggle and of the Maoist party. The Maoist ideologue and politbureau member Kobad Ghandy, currently lodged in Delhi's Tihar jail, seems to advocate a much broader perspective. In two recent write-ups sent from prison (Ghandy, 2011a; 2011b), he reviews the world-situation with incisive analysis. After surveying the general economic collapse of the capitalist countries in the Western hemisphere, he turns to remedial options. In this connection, he applauds some recent developments in Latin America.

> In Latin America, from Ecuador to Brazil, Bolivia to Argentina, elected leaders have turned away from the IMF and US, taken back resources from corporate control, boosted regional integration and carried out independent (of the US) alliances around the world. In Venezuela Chavez has cut poverty rates by half, tripled social spending and rapidly expanded health care and education.

He does not reject these bold initiatives as "revisionist" and "reformist" and does not denounce the fact that these regimes assumed power after massively popular elections. In his (2011a), Ghandy holds that one way to ensure welfare of people is to hold sustained dialogue between alternative models of development. The Maoist model, partly penned by Ghandy himself I guess, is of course one of them, but he agrees that the model proposed by the National Advisory Council, constituted by the Indian parliament and chaired by the Congress president Sonia Gandhi, is also an equal contender. In general, although he urges that a "pro-people government should divert huge sums of money for the real welfare of the people rather than for war games of the big powers," the need for protracted war to achieve this end is nowhere mentioned.

To cite Noam Chomsky (2010) again: "the neo-liberal onslaught against democracy—its primary thrust—has imposed even narrower limits on functioning democracy, as intended." Yet, it does not follow that "the attack on democracy cannot be beaten back." "Electoral politics," he asserts, "has in the past achieved gains in human welfare that are by no means insignificant, as the great mass of the population understands very well." Following Chomsky, then, an outright rejection of electoral politics—especially in the (rare) contexts such as India where it has "achieved gains in human welfare" in the past—signals Maoists' basic disconnect with the "great mass of the population."

The point I now wish to raise in a *volte-face* is that, for all its reassuring moral flavour, the preceding perspective on armed struggles may well be viewed as a bundle of confusion from a strict Marxist point of view. I must also add that the "strict" Marxist view is also the widely-shared common sense view. If there is a generally

inaccessible sophisticated view then it needs to be so articulated as to reach the struggling people.

According to the strict view, the road to socialism inevitably requires an intermediate proletarian state which enforces a radical restructuring of society. The veteran revolutionary of many battles, Pramode Sengupta (1967), emphasised this crucial point very early in the naxalite movement. Sengupta cites Professor Sushobhan Sarkar, the eminent historian, as follows (my translation from Bengali) :

> Materialism, realism, class-conflict, class struggle, revolution through a seizure of state power, elimination of exploitation, construction of a new transformed society, a classless social order in the future, these may be thought of as the fundamental doctrines of Marxism.

Unfortunately, I have no space here for evaluating Professor Sarkar's deeply historical arguments in support of the cited view of Marxism. What is of interest right now is Sengupta's response to Sarkar (my translation):

> The question is, if these are fundamental doctrines of Marxism, then what is the difference between Marxism and bourgeois liberalism? Liberals have no problem with any of these doctrines; the revisionists before the first war agreed with these; currently, most Congress leaders are also likely to agree, they also talk about socialism, a society without exploitation, etc. The list that Sarkar has presented as fundamental doctrines of Marxism carefully ignores the real fundamental doctrine, namely, dictatorship of the proletariat—this is the center of revolutionary Marxism.

The struggle for socialism then is routed through a seizure and dismantling of the existing (bourgeois) state power. Since the current ruling classes, especially its capitalist arm, will not surrender state power out of moral compulsion, they must be compelled to do so. As the ruling classes control—in fact, own—the instruments of repression, only a protracted armed struggle can ensure the emergence of a proletarian state. Since the war is protracted, preparations to that end must begin simultaneously with economic struggle itself as soon as suitable conditions of locale and arms are achieved.

From this perspective, participation in the electoral process not only postpones the inevitable, it corrupts the very character of democratic struggle in the process. Thus, the Maoists observe,

> It is an error to hold that, alongwith other war-strategies, [participation in elections] is another war-strategy if it fits in with the strategy of seizure of power through protracted war.

It is an error because participation in elections "has nothing to do with the ebb and tide of revolution." Electoral participation—indeed, any sustained reformist activity—is misleading and counter-productive. As the Maoist General Secretary Ganapathy (2009) asserts, "it is important to guard against getting bogged down in legalism and economism and forget that masses have to be prepared for seizure of power."

The net result is that radical authors such as Asim Chatterjee are plainly inconsistent when they advocate both participation in elections as a strategy while maintaining that elections have never led to fundamental social change; and those such as Santosh Rana who advocate that "revolutionaries have to move ahead in India not by shrinking the parliamentary democracy but by expanding it" do not have a revolutionary agenda at all.

I guess the Maoists generally categorise this last category of left thinkers as revisionists. I set aside a possible Maoist response to the other side of Chatterjee's perceptive remark that there has never been a revolution in a country with parliamentary democracy at least in the recent era in which parliamentary democracies have proliferated around the world.

We thus reach a fundamental dilemma. In terms of the sections of this essay thus far, each of the repugnant aspects of the Maoist movement can be traced to their militarism. In general, at least for contexts of formal electoral democracy such as India, an armed struggle, not to mention a protracted one, is bound to degenerate into a sectarian anti-democratic madness; as such, an armed struggle is in fact an impediment to the very idea of resistance. People's democratic resistance typically collapses and disintegrates whenever Maoists show up with their arms: the most recent examples are of course Nandigram and Lalgarh in West Bengal (Mukherji, 2012, for more).

In fact, Maoist armed struggle is usually happy hunting ground for a variety of reactionary forces. For example, the area now under the state of Chattisgarh, which was recently carved out of greater Madhya Pradesh, used to be a fertile ground for peasant and worker movements under varieties of communist banner. Especially, in the greater Bastar area in southern Chattisgarh, the Communist Party of India used to have a very strong base among adivasis and poor peasants. After the Maoist took armed control of the area, the right-wing BJP now has 11 out of the 12 assembly seats, Congress has the other one; in contrast, the CPI has virtually disintegrated with most of its veteran local leaders and activists in prison (Hardikar, 2011; Mukherji, 2012, Chapter 1).

Yet, we just saw that the very concept of a revolution aiming to establish a socialist order, according to strict Marxism, is vacuous without the accompanying idea of an

armed struggle for the seizure of state power. Unless this classical consequence of Marxist theory is critically analysed and perhaps rejected or otherwise altered, the ideological pillar on which the current Maoist armed struggle relies cannot be dismantled. In fact, this classical conseqeuence is also the source of much ideological ambiguity and uncertainty in non-Maoist Marxist forums. Thus, even the parliamentary left, not to mention the varieties of naxalite groups cited above, has never really *given up* the ultimate necessity of a final system-seizing armed struggle, even if the actual process of initiating such a struggle is postponed for over half-a-century by now, presumably on grounds of 'tactics'.

In my view, this ideological ambiguity not only lends apparent legitimacy to an otherwise illegimate Maoist insurgency, it is also the source of much meaningless but never-ending ideological squabble about the 'state' of revolution: whether the conditions are ripe (or not) for a revolutionary takeover of the bourgeois state. The resulting bickering over 'left adventurism' on the one hand and 'right deviation' on the other has ruined the prospects of united people's struggles. Moreover, this ultimate fascination with an armed overthrow of the existing state lends only an opportunistic—technically called 'tactical'—support to the fundamental forum for people's freedom, namely, the electoral system.

It will not be unreasonable to conclude that the people are by now aware of both of these infirmities—call for armed struggle and dismantling of the electoral system—underlying the very idea of the (communist) left. The common view is that the Maoists are engaged in these infirmities right now, the rest of the communist left will indulge in it when they eventually muster enough seats in the parliament. It could explain, in large

part, the failure of the communist left to penetrate any significant section of the basic masses across the country even after an effort that started nearly a century ago. In turn, it could also explain at least local attraction to the Maoist party for the unabashed character of their programme (Mitra, 2011). It has been a win-win for the ruling classes.

I do not have a master solution to this disturbing dilemma. I will just outline some possible ways of rethinking about the issue.

As a prior condition, suppose, given what we saw of the Maoist movement—and one could add turbulent recent histories of FARC in Colombia, LTTE in Sri Lanka, *Tehrik-e-Taliban* in Waziristan, and other "predatory" insurgencies such as Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front, National Patriotic Front and Movement for Democracy in Liberia, Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda, *Sendero Luminoso* in Peru etc. (Mukherji, 2012, Introduction)—we reject the idea of armed struggle as a necessary form of revolutionary struggles. Especially, in contexts such as India, suppose we settle for some combination of militant parliamentiarism backed by massive popular resistance. Which aspects of strict Marxism is likely to be affected in such a scenario? It seems to me, for whatever it is worth, that serious re-thinking is needed for at least three aspects of strict Marxist-Leninist theory. I can only briefly state these aspects without entering into detailed analysis.

First, since the idea of armed struggle arose in the classical conception of a principal contradiction between the proletariat and the capitalist order, it might be instructive to examine whether the classical notion of a proletariat or working class is too restrictive for contexts such as India. Authors like Asim Chatterjee and Santosh Rana address this issue

only partially when they criticise the control over the working classes exercised by the worker's or proletarian party: as Rana puts it, "there is no reason to believe anymore that the rule of the communist party is synonymous with working class rule." So, Rana is also aiming ultimately for a "working class rule", albeit in terms of a truly representative worker's forum. At least for the dynamics of revolutionary struggle, and not necessarily for understanding the economic basis of that struggle, it could be that the notion of a proletariat needs to be replaced with a wider notion of the "whole" people to capture the "inclusive" character of "class politics" that "unites people leaving a small minority as the "enemy," as Prabhat Patnaik (2010) observes. By now, it is totally unclear if the classical notion of a proletariat captures the full thrust of "class politics" that is needed to foster a "redistributive vision" of future society.

To say this is not to miss the brilliance of Marx's original proposal in linking the crucial economic role of labour with the political role of the working class in radically altering the class relationships of the existing system. Given the early state of european capitalism, under study in Marx, with little distributive effect in the rest of the society, the crucial role of the working class in attacking the capitalist order at its most significant joint carried immense historical sense. Arguably, partly as a response to Marxist challenge, the social order now looks vastly different from what Marx saw, especially in the context of third-world economies outside the western developed hemesphere. Much scholarly work has been devoted on this issue in recent decades.

As many authors have pointed out, the classical industrial proletariat now occupies a less significant role in the economic order; also, it has been possible thereby to isolate and ostracize the political role of the industrial working class in its local domain. Yet, the

general scene is that a miniscule percentage of population, say, the top 5%, controls most of the wealth of an economic order; in fact, there is great inequality even within the top 5%. In India, for example, over 75% of the population survives at about half-a-dollar a day while a handful of corporate oligarchies control over 80% of the wealth in the neoliberal era. The classical industrial proletariat is no longer representative of this vast impoverished humanity that is now fragmented into a complex array: the landless, the marginal farmer, the unskilled worker, the petty trader, the rural school teacher, the urban slum-dweller, the domestic worker, the unemployed youth, the menial worker in individual work-places such as a service boy in a road-side teashop, and the scattered population of adivasis along the margins (Mukherji, 2012, Chapter 2). While it is obvious that a meaningful resistance must somehow unite this sea of suffering humanity, it is beyond credibility that this unity can take place under the leadership of the industrial working class. In fact, it is unclear what will that leadership mean if this class does not even represent the totality. This is the point about the necessity of the concept of "whole people" resisting the existing social order.

Second, we might wish to revisit the attitude of a revolutionary struggle towards the existing state, for example the state as enshrined in the Constitution of India. Do we aim towards a seizure of this state to dismantle it as discarded "toilet paper" as the Maoist spokesperson Azad put it before he was gunned down by forces of counter-revolution? Or, we seize the state as it is to expand the revolutionary opportunities offered in its constitution? Again, Chomsky's remarks (Chomsky, 2010) may be instructive:

> In the long term I think the centralized political power ought to be eliminated and dissolved and turned down ultimately to the local level, finally, with

> federalism and associations and so on. On the other hand, right now I'd like to strengthen the federal government. The reason is, we live in this world, not some other world. And in this world there happen to be huge concentrations of private power which are as close to tyranny and as close to totalitarian as anything humans have devised, and they have extraordinary power. They are unaccountable to the public. There's only one way of defending rights that have been attained or extending their scope in the face of these private powers, and that's to maintain the one form of illegitimate power that happens to be somewhat responsive to the public and which the public can indeed influence. So you end up supporting centralized State power even though you oppose it. People who think there is a contradiction in that just aren't thinking very clearly.

Chomsky is obviously concerned more directly with class-orientations in developed capitalist countries such as the US. Nevertheless, it can be argued (Mukherji, 2012, Chapter 2) with telling evidence from the ground that even third-world capitalist-feudal orders essentially satisfy Chomsky's general picture. Even in the Indian context, it is possible to identify growingly powerful anti-people forces for whom a democratic state based on pluralism and parliamentary system is a hindrance. The menacing rise of communal-fascism illustrates just one of those forces, there are others. If this picture is largely correct, then it is the historic responsibility of the left to protect the existing state and expand its operations in favour of the masses. This is one way of interpreting massive pro-people operations undertaken by Chavez in Venezuela and, to an extent, by Lula in Brazil, as noted by Kobad Ghandy.

Third, while the bourgeois democracies in the West generally validate the classical Marxist picture, electoral democracies in the third-world perhaps offer revolutionary opportunities of a non-classical kind. I mentioned Kobad Gandhy's appreciation of recent developments in Latin America, especially Venezuela. India continues to be an intermediate case between genuine parliamentary democracy and capitalist-feudal oligarchy, until the democratic space offered by the electoral system expands beyond current formalism via sustained mass resistance. It could be that some of these third-world democracies, warts and all, have already shown the way of incorporating the twin notions of whole people and the sustainability of the existing state as electoral democracy gets further entrenched among the masses. It could be that the diversity and the heterogeneity of the Indian people and the widespread struggle for democracy that has emerged from this post-colonial base has already gone beyond some of the classic tenets of strict Marxism.

References

Balagopal, K. 2006. Maoist movement in Andhra Pradesh. *Economic and Political Weekly*, July 22.

——. 2007. The limits of violence. *Himal*, December Vol. 20, No. 12.

Banerjee, Sumanta. 2009a. Revisiting the 'underground'. *Economic and Political Weekly*, February 14, Vol. 44, No. 7.

——. 2009b. Critiquing the programme of action of Maoists. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 14 November.

Basu, Pradip. 1998. *Preparations for Naxalbari*: *A Post-modernist analysis* (in Bengali). Calcutta, Progressive Publishers.

Bhaduri, Amit. 2011. The magic-realistic slaughter of Azad. *Outlook Magazine*, 31 January.

Bhattacharya, Dipankar. 2010. Communist movement in India and armed struggle (in Bengali). *Aneek*, July.

Chatterjee, Ashim. 2010. Maoist path of armed struggle (in Bengali). *Aneek*, July.

Chomsky, Noam. 2010. An Interview with Noam Chomsky. Jean Bricmont and Julie Franck (Ed.) *Chomsky Notebooks*. New York, Columbia University Press.

Ganapathy. 2009. Interview with Rahul Pandita. *Open Magazine*, October 17.

Ghandy, Kobad. 2011a. World economy splutters: dark clouds on the horizon. *Mainstream*, Vol. 49, No. 17, April 16.

——. 2011b. Geo-politics of the present-day international economic crisis. *Mainstream*, Vol. 49, No. 34, August 13.

Hardikar, Jaideep. 2011. "Bastar's choice: Take up gun for govt. or Maoists," *The Telegraph*, August 5.

Khasnabis, Ratan. 2010. "Leninism and Armed Struggle" (in Bengali). *Aneek*, July.

Mitra, Ashok. 2011. Streams of *adivasis* are joining the Maoist camp. *The Telegraph*, Friday, December 2.

Mukherji, Nirmalangshu. 2012. *Maoists in India*: *Tribals under Seige*. London, Pluto Press.

Patnaik, Prabhat. 2010. The choice before Maoists. *The Telegraph*, 15 July.

Rana, Santosh. 2010. Interview. *Seminar*, March, 607.

Sanyal, Kanu. 2010. The history of the CPI (ML) from 1969-1972: An evaluation. *Class Struggle*, April.

Sengupta, Pramode. 1967. "Professor Sushobhan Sarkar's 'Marxism'" (in Bengali). *Kalpurush*, 2. Reprinted in Basu (1998).