

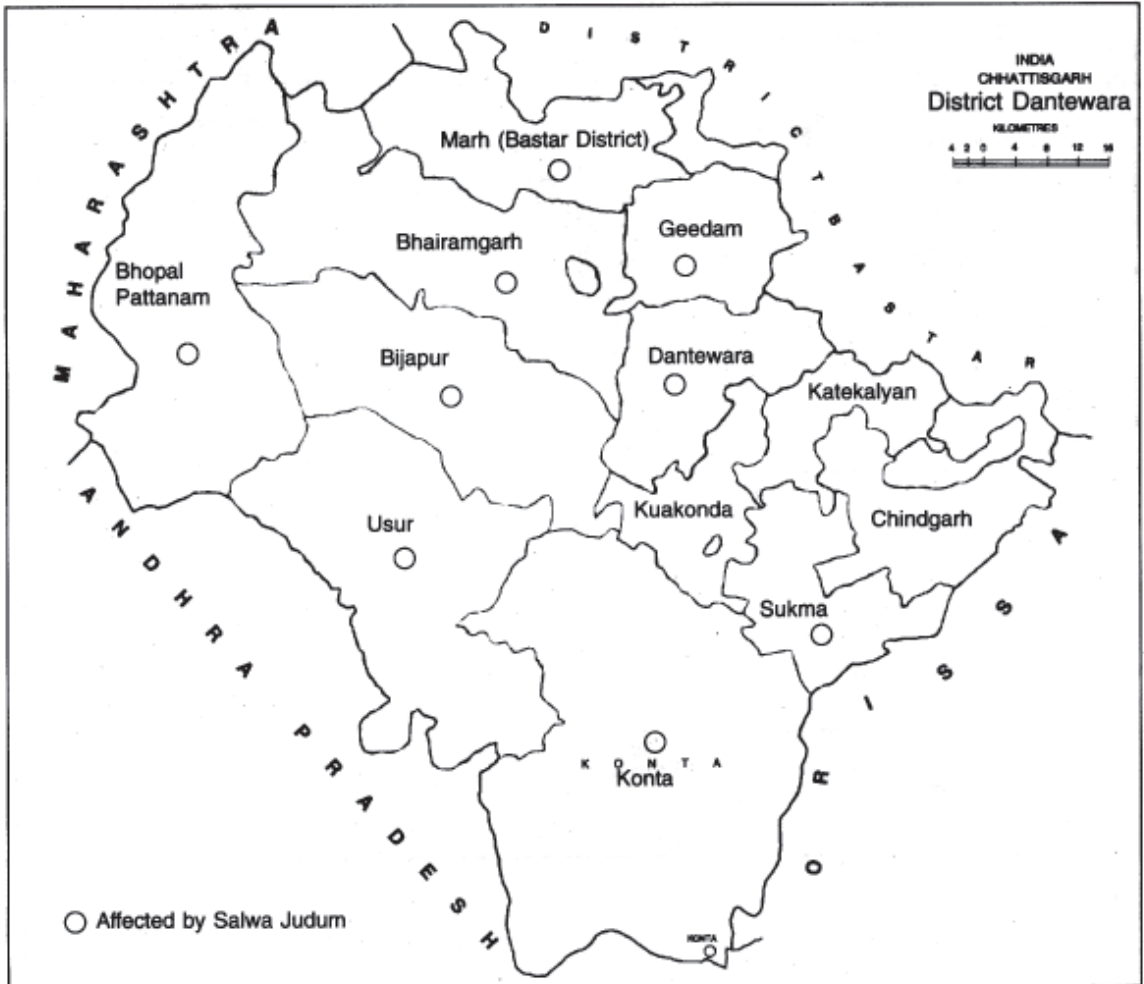
Death, Displacement & Deprivation

The War In Dantewara: A Report



Human Rights Forum
December 2006

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Human Rights Forum Publication
Publication No. 14

Copies: 1,000
December 2006

For Copies:

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© : 040-23537969

Printed at:
Navya Printers, Hyderabad.

Rs. 10/-

By Way Of An Introduction

The attention of the whole country has been on Chattisgarh for some time now. Some have viewed it with trepidation and some with enthusiasm. The trepidation and the enthusiasm are responses to the same phenomenon: the counter-insurgency strategy of arming the opponents of the Maoists and letting them loose on society. It is called Salwa Judum in Chattisgarh, and it could more prosaically be called Village Self-Defence Committees elsewhere. The 'success' in Chattisgarh is being seen as the birth - at last - of an effective societal answer to Maoism, even as the lawless police death squads of Andhra Pradesh called Greyhounds are being seen as an effective military answer to Maoism. There are reasons to believe that the Union Government at the highest level is endorsing this view.

We are not concerned with whether the State will eventually find an 'answer' to Maoism. So long as the people are the arbiters, and they are able to decide freely and fearlessly, the argument is at liberty to work itself out. We are concerned rather with how the State's answer to Maoism is sought to be devised and enforced, and how the Maoists choose to respond to these efforts of the State. Political battles are to be fought without trampling upon the rights of the people - especially the vulnerable sections of them - beyond the minimum that may be unavoidable in any such conflict. And at the end life must be better in the sense of a greater security for the rights of the most deprived sections. As for the trade off between means and ends, no easy or nonchalant answer can be accepted from either side.

It is the news of large-scale killing of ordinary people, almost all adivasis, in the political conflict in Chattisgarh that led the Human Rights Forum (HRF) to constitute a team to tour Dantewara district of that State between 12th and 16th May 2006 to obtain first hand information. Subsequently, we visited the political center of the State once again, during 12th to 16th August 2006 to speak to what is these days being called 'civil society', and ascertain its response to what is happening in the uncivil society of Dantewara, and the possibility of its taking interest in

ameliorating the tragic state of adivasi existence in that district. These efforts continue, and in the course of the efforts we have been able to obtain a cross-section of views about what is happening and is likely to happen in Dantewara. Excepting the universal aversion to the macabre creation called Salwa Judum, the views in this regard of the democratically inclined sections of the State are not uniform.

Later, on 18th November 2006, a team of the HRF met a number of adivasis who have been driven out of the forests of Konta tahsil - from the villages of Chintaguppa, Goraka, Gumpelli, Banda and Maraigudem - by the Salwa Judum and had taken shelter in Chintoor, Bhadrachalam, Dummugudem and Koonavaram Mandals of Khammam district of Andhra Pradesh, with which Dantewara has a long border. And on 26th November a team crossed over from Mallampet of Chintoor Mandal into the forests of Konta to talk to people living in the hamlets - Poosugudem and Maitha - as yet untouched by the Salwa Judum and under the influence of the Maoists. This report is the result of the extended fact finding mission spread over six months.

For the Maoists' version, we have relied on the statements they have issued and circulated, in English, Hindi and Telugu; and their response, signed by that party's General Secretary, to the appeal sent by the Independent Citizens' Initiative.

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Last Year

But these were not our first visits. One summer ago, the first news of mass killing came out of Dantewara district of Chattisgarh, and the Press began to report about adivasi disaffection with the Maoists. It was reported that there was significant dissatisfaction among the adivasis with some of the actions and decisions of the Maoists, and that the latter were wrecking vengeance against the adivasis for opposing their dictats. A specific instance, the alleged massacre of thirteen adivasis by the Maoists at the village of Kotrapal in Bijapur police district of Dantewara, was widely reported. Taking the news report at face value and sensing that some thing was seriously amiss, the Human Rights Forum circulated a letter to all civil rights organisations in the country*, proposing a joint fact finding exercise. Only one organisation responded, the Organisation for Protection of Democratic Rights (OPDR). In their company, we visited Bhoopalpatnam, Bijapur, Jangla and Kutru on 16-17 July 2005.

We could not visit Kotrapal because no taxi driver was willing to take us to a village known to be a Maoist stronghold. Not because of any aversion for the Maoists, but because, they all said, a raid by the police or the paramilitary may take place any moment in such villages, and they had no desire to get caught in the cross-fire. They were willing to take us only to a place where there was a police station, for the simple reason that they did not expect the Maoists to come there, and so it was a place safe from shootouts. That is how we happened to visit Kutru, the village where the anti-Maoist mobilisation to be later christened Salwa Judum was born, but not Kotrapal, one of the important Maoist strongholds, which has resisted the Salwa Judum the most and suffered the most.

This remains a problem to this day. Leaving aside conducted tours where you talk to select individuals, it is very difficult for a team from outside Chattisgarh to go freely to any 'Maoist' village in the areas of conflict. Or meet any but their spokespersons and that too outside the area. All the reports that have been published on the Chattisgarh situation, including the present report, must be read in the light of this fact. It may result in accepting the Maoists' version at face value,



An adivasi boy at the Errabore camp

◆ Annexed to this report as Appendix-I

or reading it down through anti-Maoist lenses, or - in most cases - some intermediate choice intended to be judicious, but in any case it renders every report incomplete to that extent.

We found during the trip of 16-17 July 2005 that there was some truth in the news that the adivasis were unhappy with Maoist opposition to the laying of roads, and with the perceived imposition of a ban on picking of tendu leaves, and that the Maoists were unreasonably impatient with the dissent. But also that the news of violence was one-sided, and exaggerated at that. No news of the violence committed by the Jan Jagran Abhiyan, the precursor of Salwa Judum, had appeared in the Press, and news of killing by the Maoists was badly exaggerated. In particular, the 'Kotrapal massacre' had never taken place. What happened was that the Maoists and their followers had resisted an attack by the Abhiyan on the 18th of June 2005 on Kotrapal, and two adivasis died in the conflict. Some accounts attribute the killing to the Maoists but the Maoists have said they died in the melee.

Later, the Maoists kidnapped about ten (twelve, in some accounts) of the raiders and killed one of them, a non-tribal by name Bhuvaneshwar Singh Thakur of Jangla. His brother Pratap Singh whom we met at Jangla, counted, in response to a specific query, just seven victims of Maoist violence between the beginning of June and mid-July 2005, whereas the Press had written about large-scale killings. We also met Ajay Singh of Bairamgarh, who would later become one of the most aggressive leaders of Salwa Judum. He came to Jangla in a Tata Sumo when we were there, mobilising support for a protest meeting planned the next day against the killing of two villagers by the Maoists at Kutru two days before. Seeing us talking to Pratap Singh, he insisted on checking our identities. Seeing that two of our team were from Warangal, he said: 'so you are from Warangal? They too (meaning the naxalites) are from Warangal, aren't they?'. We had to answer in some irritation that P.V.Narasimha Rao, the former Prime Minister of India, was also from Warangal, or as nearly so as makes no difference, to shut his mouth. But we had the opportunity a full year ago to sense what Bairamgarh, that man's seat of operation, would be like in the days to come. Which helped us avoid that place this year.

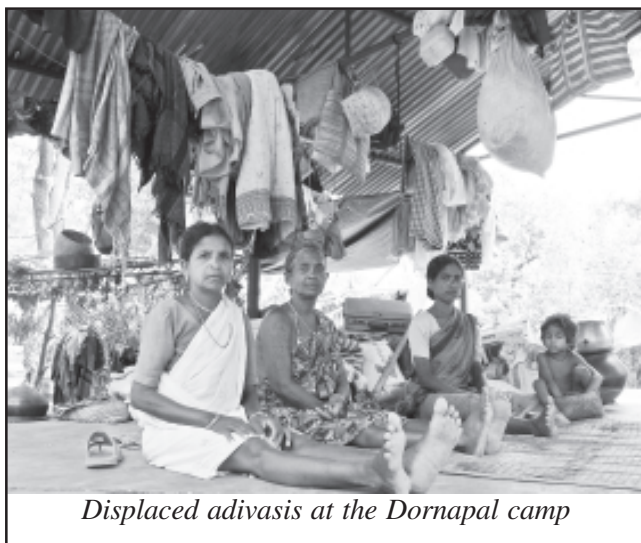
The response of the Press in Andhra Pradesh to our findings was interesting. We released a detailed Press note at Hyderabad* expressing our criticism of what was undemocratic about the conduct of the Maoists but also pointing out that the Jan Jagran Abhiyan was equally violent; and that the accounts of killing by the Maoists was exaggerated, while the violence of the Abhiyan and the collusion of the police with it went unreported. The Telugu press, which had carried lengthy accounts of Maoist attacks on adivasis, and on how the decisions and directives of the Maoists had annoyed the adivasis and alienated the Maoists from their social base, ignored our report. Though, we may add, human rights organisations and activity are in general not unpopular with it. And The Hindu, which has a reputation of being relatively more sympathetic to democratic causes than the rest of the English language Press, not only ignored our report but dispatched to Chattisgarh a senior reporter whose anti-naxalite inclinations are no secret. He went just about the time that Jan Jagran Abhiyan was turning into Salwa Judum, and published probably the first interview with Mahendra Karma, the architect of Salwa Judum, by any major daily, and a highly appreciative one at that.

◆ Annexed to this report as Appendix-II

The Background

Part of the background is the socio-economic conditions of the local people, especially the adivasis, and part of it is the specific political strategy of the Maoists.

The socio-economic conditions are not adequately captured by statistics of land holdings and other indicators of the state of being in rural India in general. The situation specific to the forest-dwellers and the adivasis among them, more particularly in its dynamic aspect in the context of policies of forest conservation need to be looked at. Dantewara is, after all, a district with more than sixty percent forest cover, whose population is 82% adivasi. And the failure of the State's responsibility needs to be understood with reference to the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution of India.



Displaced adivasis at the Dornapal camp

The Godavari basin area of Telangana, Vidarbha and Chattisgarh (two of them aspiring to be separate States, and the third a successfully separated State, in all cases on the ground of regional discrimination and neglect, in addition to a separate historical identity) is one of the major regions of Maoist activity in our country. The CPI (Maoist), under its earlier name of CPI (M-L) (Peoples War), developed widespread organisation and activity in the area. Its area of activity is substantially, though not exclusively, inhabited by adivasis, much of whose habitat is constitu-

tionally designated a Scheduled area, i.e., an area governed by the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution of India, which puts an extraordinary burden on the State in the matter of the welfare of the adivasi residents of the area.

The Fifth Schedule areas all over the country have remained a caricature of what the makers of the Constitution hoped, and the tribal areas of the Godavari basin are typical in this regard. But Chattisgarh is probably worse -more than marginally so - than both Vidarbha and Telangana. Rainfall based agriculture and the collection of what the law calls minor forest produce, has ever been the mode of economic life, and it continues to be so. Intensive agriculture is unknown. The development package of high-yield variety seeds, chemical fertilisers, pesticides and artificial irrigation, which is not foreign to the tribal communities in neighbouring Telangana and Vidarbha, is an unknown entity in the forest hamlets of Dantewara. Paddy is not transplanted but merely sown. And Jowar stalks grow to an old-world height that the rest of the country has forgotten long since. Both the crops take a full six months to grow, and yield about one-tenth of what the farmers in the rest of the country have come to regard as normal: a mere 2 to 3 quintals per acre.

The forest therefore remains an important source of support, but from the time of British rule, and more particularly after the promulgation of the Forest Conservation Act in the year 1980, the monopolisation of forests by the State, whether in commercial, industrial or environmental interest, has restricted the land and forest resources accessible to the local residents, even as their needs have been steadily increasing.

This has brought the forest dwellers, especially the adivasis, into conflict with the State, in particular the forest and police departments. The classic statement of this conflict remains the 29th report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes submitted by Dr B.D. Sharma, the then Commissioner, to the President of India on 28/5/1990. We will quote only one paragraph here:

“The first fundamental change, which was effected in this process (the colonial process of centralisation of control over resources) related to forests. In the new frame, the symbiotic relationship between the forests and the forest dwellers was not recognised and the forests became the property of the State. After the State acquired monopoly rights over the forests, a formal system was established for their management., which gradually became increasingly comprehensive and also strong. The biggest irony of this change was that the forest-dweller who has a life- long relationship with the forests - which are their very homes, their religion, their culture and their everything - was conspicuous by its absence in that frame. In this formal structure, which recognises only administrative and market relations, an all-out effort has been made to see that these life-long mother-child relationships are transformed into

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market relationships. How can this be possible? It is on account of this basic lack of understanding, that there is a state of confrontation and a regime of destruction in almost all the tribal areas which in final analysis means great injustice to the tribal people.”

And the report goes on to add at the end: “Today these people may get some real relief, even though quite meagre, only from the extremists, and thereafter they are unwittingly caught in the holocaust of a cross-fire.”

The relief they have obtained is not really very meagre. It may safely be said that the naxalites, including the Maoists, are the first political force to attract the allegiance of the adivasi masses in the Godavari basin region on any sizable scale. It is customary to discuss naxalism in terms of the ‘alienation’ of the poor from the Government. At least as far as the adivasis are concerned, to talk of alienation from the Government is presumptuous. They were never attached to the Government in the first place to speak of alienation from the Government. The presumption is perhaps based on the brahminical notion that the people are in some natural sense attached to the sovereign, and if it appears to be otherwise, that must be because they are now alienated. Insofar as adivasis of the Godavari basin are concerned, there is nothing to support this fiction. They probably owed some kind of ritual or mythic allegiance to some if not all the rulers who lorded it over these forests in pre-modern times, but there is nothing to show that there was any such allegiance to the modern Indian State. If at all one can speak of alienation in the context of these people, it is of recent alienation from the Maoists, for reasons that will be explored below.

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To get back to the relief obtained by them thanks to the politics of the Maoists, at least three heads of quite substantial nature can be identified. One is that the harassment by the forest, excise and police officials has stopped, as every body including the Tahsildar of Konta was constrained to admit in conversation with us. This harassment used to take the form of threats of being booked in criminal cases for cutting trees or grazing cattle in the forests or making/selling liquor without an excise license. It would end, not in actual booking of cases or arrests, but a bribe of cash, liquor and meat. The threat of violence by the Maoists or the people with the support of the Maoists has put an end to this to a large extent. Exploitation by traders was also put an end to by similar means. These traders are non-tribal immigrants from the north as well as south. The coastal districts of Andhra Pradesh, in fact, know a tradition of enterprising men with some capital migrating to Konta and making a pile soon by buying dirt-cheap and selling dear to the tribals. Konta is a very familiar place name in the East and West Godavari districts of Andhra Pradesh. The northern parts of Dantewara are home to similar entrepreneurs from the Hindi belt. As we shall see below, these non-tribal immigrants robbed of their birthright to trade ‘freely’ with the adivasis are among the most angry components of Salwa Judum.

However, even sympathetic local journalists who will not admit any fault of the Maoists say that with the passage of time the Maoists have started collecting funds from the traders and are no longer as firm with them as they used to be.

Second is that the forest-dwellers were encouraged, until the Maoists themselves decided round about the middle of the 1990s that it was bad for the forests and forest-dwellers, to occupy and cultivate forest land. The forest land thus encroached upon (we will use the official expression for this occupation without necessarily endorsing it) in the Godavari basin runs into hundreds of thousands of acres. In Dantewara it appears that such encroachment was more in Konta tahsil than elsewhere. Indeed, it is said that most of the habitations in the interior of Konta tahsil are newly established villages set up by immigrants who have cut down the forests. It may not be altogether unrelated to this that Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Chattisgarh are the States with the highest figures for encroachment onto forest lands, with the exception of Assam. The three States together account for about 39% of the total forest encroachment in the country (5,25,519 hectares out of 13,43,346 hectares).

This encroachment is often described as jhum or slash and burn cultivation, but not all of it answers that description. Slash and burn is resorted to on lands having a gradient, not so much because the adivasis do not know better, as that normal plowing and cultivation of crops is not possible on sloping lands unless some kind of terracing is adopted, which requires considerable work. On plain land, slash and burn is resorted to only in the first few years of encroachment, when they are scared of being evicted. Afterwards they gradually shift to tilling the soil with a plough, even using oxen in some cases. It is necessary to state this for two reasons. One, the livelihood the encroachment provides is not as meagre as the common assumption that all such cultivation is of the slash and burn type would indicate. Two, the Government's ecologically proper argument against such encroachment, namely that it results in large-scale deforestation for uneconomical ends is not altogether on target. In any case, 'for about the last eight years, the Maoists themselves have been discouraging cutting of forests', as an adivasi CPI leader and former MLA of Konta, Manish Kunjam, says.

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The third and in some ways the most important benefit the Maoist activity has given the forest-dwellers is the systematic and regular increase in the price of the tendu leaf picked by the forest-dwellers for use in the beedi industry. Beedies are tobacco rolled in tendu leaves, dried and cut to shape. The forests of the Godavari basin abound in the leaf, and for as far back as any one can remember the forest-dwellers, especially the adivasis with their intimate knowledge of the distribution of flora in the forests, have been engaged for picking the leaf. The right to have the leaf picked is most of the time contracted out by the State Governments to private persons,

generally described as tendu patta contractors. Thus the concerned State Government is fully aware of what goes on, namely that the contractor gets the leaf picked by the adivasis for an atrociously meagre payment. The intervention of the naxalites has resulted in this payment increasing up to fifty times over a period of about 25 years.

It may fairly be said that if Governments had cared to prevent this exploitation, the Maoist movement (and the naxalite movement in general, speaking of Andhra Pradesh, where all the naxalite parties have played this role) would not have gathered half the support it did in the Godavari basin area of the three States. But until they arrived on the scene, no thought was given to this criminal conduct of the contractors, not out of any absentmindedness but because the tendu patta contractors are mostly politically influential persons, either themselves leaders of the Congress party (and other parties in due course) or important financiers. The hypocrisy of the Governments' complaints about the violence or threat of violence used by the naxalites to put an end to the exploitation and force yearly increases in the wage rate must be seen in the context of this willful neglect. Administrators who willfully neglect their duty towards the poor have the least moral right to complain about the violence used by or in the interests of the poor. In any conversation with the people, the benefit obtained from increase of wage for picking of tendu leaf is often stressed most, for the reason perhaps that this is the one certain source of cash income for the forest-dwellers. And cash is increasingly essential for residents of even the most remotely situated hamlets these days: health, litigation, education, marriages, trips to and from the block or tahsil office, all require cash, and increasing amounts of cash as Governments shed their social responsibilities.

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Politics Of Armed Violence

But this is not the whole of the background. The Maoist movement is not a movement for economic benefits to the poor that uses violent methods for better results. The Maoists themselves would reject any such description as ‘economism’. It is a political movement that hopes to smash the existing State structure and establish a new State to herald a new society. This cannot be ignored in analysing the human rights situation in areas where they operate. It is necessary to see the contours of the means adopted and the strategies employed by the Maoists to their chosen end, not to approve or censure them, but to see the full extent of the responses their politics engenders in society, and how the more hostile of the responses have been used by their political enemies and the State to create the execrable object called the Salwa Judum.

That the Salwa Judum is not a popular upsurge against the Maoists but an instrument of the establishment is the one fact about which there has never been any doubt. Not only civil rights organisations and the leftist publications but the mainstream Press too has said so, in report after report. And there is also little doubt that it is an abominable instrument of suppressive politics. Yet it was not created out of a vacuum but out of hostile responses in certain sections of society to the political practice of the Maoists. For that reason, before going on to discuss how abominable the suppression has been, we need to look at all that made it possible.

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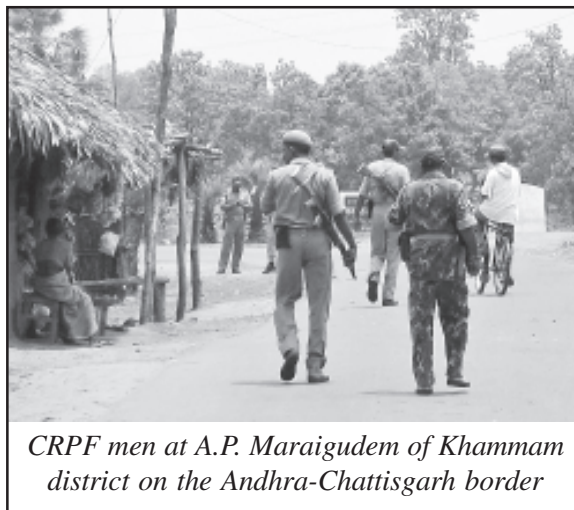
In moving towards their final political goal, the Maoists have gone farther in Dantewara, which has been declared a liberated zone, than even in Andhra Pradesh, home to the parent movement, where they have proclaimed only guerrilla zones. A liberated zone is an area

where the administration of the Maoists has in theory at least replaced the Indian State, whereas a guerrilla zone is an area where the preceding stage of armed struggle to push the State out is underway.

The nucleus of the new authority is the village administration, which is run by the Dandakaranya Adivasi Kisan Mazdoor Sanghathan (DAKMS), more simply known in the Telugu-knowing areas as the ‘Sangham’, supported by a secret Village Committee of the Maoist party.

While Maoist literature tends to depict the Sangham as the self-organisation of the people, it is in fact the organisation established by the Maoists, and there is no pejorative intent in saying so. This is so even where it is genuinely popular and representative, as it may very well be in many places. Even where the Sangham is popular, its monopoly of power is not owed entirely to the support of the villagers, but also and in the end irresistibly to the guns of the Maoist armed squads. And while the Sangham’s internal functioning may well be democratic, in the sense that airing of different views is permitted before any decision is taken, there is no freedom to set up a rival organisation or to practice one’s dissent after a decision has been taken. Any one practising alternative politics of any kind runs the risk of being dubbed an agent of the State, and dealt with accordingly.

Maoist literature also depicts the Sangham as a replacement of the traditional structure of authority in tribal society, and therefore anathema to the tribal headmen and priests. But it is an alternative to the panchayat raj structure and the gamut of administration of the modern Indian State as well. It is necessary to see these aspects of the phenomenon since the Maoists draw from their premises the conclusion that only the traditional village headmen and tribal priests are opposed to the Sanghams. Firstly,



CRPF men at A.P. Marraigudem of Khammam district on the Andhra-Chattisgarh border

to believe that disabling the traditional structure of authority in the tribal hamlet will displease only the tribal elders who wield feudal authority is to misunderstand the meaning of tradition. Tradition is an integral part of the meaning of the world as perceived by the community, and its demise or disablement can have an unsettling effect that goes well beyond the material deprivation caused to the tribal elders by the loss of power. Some of the incidents of extreme cruelty perpetrated by adivasis of the Salwa Judum on their fellow adivasi supporters of the Maoists, reported in Maoist literature, appear to indicate some deep-seated hatred which cannot be explained by mere loss of authority by the tribal patels and priests, or loss of land by tribal landlords. It is indeed remarkable that very cruel acts by the Salwa Judum are reported by the Maoists without any attempt to answer why adivasis should behave so cruelly towards their own tribespeople, even their own kith and kin in some cases. Where the victims are Gothi Koyas (Muria)

and the Salwa Judum members are Koyas (Dorla), one can perhaps understand it as communal hatred, but that is not always the case.

Elected representatives in the panchayat raj system too are deprived of their authority by the monopoly of the Sangham, and are likely to be resentful. Unlike the tribal elder whose authority has no place in the values of democracy and rationality subscribed to by the Maoists, the elected sarpanch expresses a right that belongs to the same realm of values. The people have freely elected him or her, and the law, in the form of the Provisions of the Panchayaths (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA, as it is known in short) has endowed the panchayats in the Scheduled areas with extensive powers of self-governance which the elected sarpanch may well be eager to wield for the benefit of the community. And none less than Dilip Singh Bhuria, the architect of PESA, believes that Madhya Pradesh, the parent State of Chattisgarh, has made the most honest beginning in the implementation of PESA. Why then should the elected sarpanches of the Scheduled areas silently accept the usurpation of their power by the Sangham, with the Maoists' gun behind it? The Maoists may reply that what the Sangham is doing is to actually implement PESA minus official interference, but even if that is so, it will be no consolation to the elected sarpanch since it will not be under his or her leadership.

But the replacement of the Indian State by the rule of Maoists goes beyond establishing the monopoly of the Sangham in the villages. It is a common comment that excepting only schools and hospitals, no other institution or establishment of the Chattisgarh Government was allowed to function by the Maoists. That in fact no department of the Government including those of Education and Health functioned even tolerably well in the forests of Dantewara, as the District Collector of Dantewara himself admitted while talking to us, would be an argument, at least to the common mind, for forcing them to function and not for forcing them out. At any rate, there are bound to be people who see it that way and they cannot all be condemned as reactionaries. That public works were not allowed to be taken up, and roads were not allowed to be laid is a complaint heard from so many that it is difficult to dismiss it as anti-Maoist propaganda. The Maoists'

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answer, given in their response to reports about the causes of the conflict in Dantewara, is that they do not mind if roads are laid but they will obstruct them if they are for the benefit of corporate interests or the movement of the paramilitary. The most recent statement, their reply to the appeal of the Independent Citizens' Initiative, says:

“We haven't placed a blanket ban on all kinds of roads and railway lines. We oppose the laying of only those roads and railway lines that are meant for looting the wealth from the region and for enemy troop movement.”

Right or wrong, this would mean that they should have obstructed only roads meant for the use of corporate capital or the paramilitary. But the ban takes on a

different complexion when they start digging up a pre-existing road needed and used by the people, on the grounds that the paramilitary may use it to raid the Maoist strongholds.

The road connecting Konta to Gollapalli would hardly answer to the description of a highway laid for corporate capital to penetrate the forests. It is the only road connecting the tahsil headquarters of Konta to hamlets deep inside the forests to the west of Konta in the southern half of the tahsil. In fact there are only two roads linking the forest hamlets of Konta tahsil to the National Highway No.221 that runs north from Konta through Sukma to Jagdalpur. One runs from Dornapal to Jagargonda and the other from Konta to Gollapalli. Jagargonda and Gollapalli are the two places in Konta tahsil, other than Konta itself, where there is a police thana. These two roads are vital communication links for the forest dwellers. Of them, the Konta-Gollapalli road has been dug up so thoroughly by the Maoists that for villagers living in forests in the south of the tahsil, travel to the tahsil headquarters means a long trek by walk, or at best a bicycle, through the forests; or crossing over into Andhra Pradesh at a suitable place such as Maraigudem or Mallampet, to catch a bus to Chintoor or Chatti and from there a walk down to Konta across the border. Too many people have spoken of the digging up of this road to give credence to Maoists' protests in the matter. In any case, in the last phase of our fact finding mission, we visited Maitha on the Konta-Gollapalli road, and could verify the allegation, plus the fact that the despoliation of this road has been going on for many years, and is not a defensive response to the recent escalation of paramilitary and Salwa Judum raids.



*School building at Maitha in Konta tahsil
blasted by the Maoists*

There is considerable resentment among the forest dwellers in this matter. Maraigudem is a village that straddles the two States. Seen from Konta, it is a remote village, deep inside Maoist territory, but it is accessible by motorable road from Chintoor in Khammam district. The portion of the village in A.P is called A.P.Maraigudem and that in Chattisgarh is called M.P.Maraigudem. (As an aside, the adivasis in the interior of Dantewara, at any rate in Konta tahsil, still refer to their State as M.P and not Chattisgarh, a fact that reflects their irrelevance in the ruling dispensation of the State created largely in their name). Adka Ramu is a tribal resident of M.P. Maraigudem. He is a very talented person, being skilled in more than one craft of utility to rural life: masonry, carpentry, house-painting, etc. He could earn a decent livelihood if allowed the opportunity. He was in a pensive mood when we met him on 16th of May at his house. He had no particular view about the Salwa Judum. They had not yet come to his village but it was rumoured that they might come the next day. Would he go with them? 'I will see. I will talk to them'. The reason? 'What can I do? The Maoists dig up the road from my village to Konta every time it is repaired. I have to walk all the way to Konta whenever I have work there. How can I live?'. It is quite possible that the Maoists will identify him as a

member of the tribal elite. That is why we have described his accomplishments concretely so that all the parties to the debate may understand what is meant by the words used by each.

Five months later, on 18th November, we met Kattam Sankuramma and her husband Doolaiiah, of M.P.Maraigudem, now living as refugees at Regulapadu in Koonavaram Mandal of Khammam district. The Salwa Judum had come to M.P. Maraigudem and gone, and forcibly taken away a lot of people, beating and abusing them. They could not tell us whether Adka Ramu had gone with the Salwa Judum, but they themselves had not. Doolaiiah would not talk, for like most of the refugees in this conflict, he is terror-struck. But Sankuramma is very vocal. 'We did not like their beating people. If they had asked us politely we would have gone with them. After seeing their violent acts we have run away to this place', says she. They are Koyas and have relatives at Regulapadu. It must be added that they had 10 acres of land back home, to identify their economic status. It must further be added that given the productivity levels, those ten acres mean hardly one acre in the plains, as explained above.

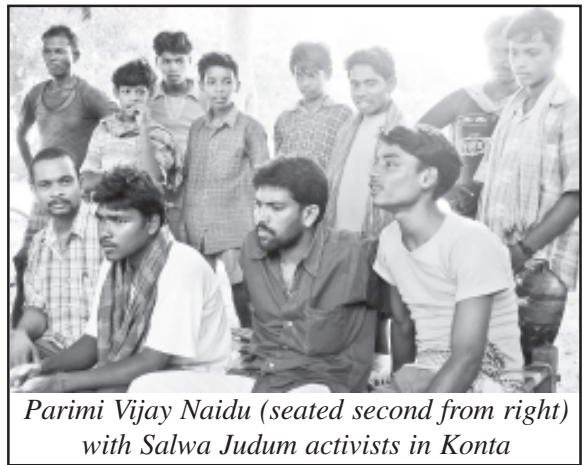
Destruction of school buildings is another objectionable act which the Maoists have tended to make light of. The Maoists have blasted and destroyed 37 school buildings in Konta tahsil during the months of February and March this year. In fact March was the worst month. They blasted 28 educational institutions between 4th and 8th March. To the question posed by the Independent Citizens' Initiative in this connection, the Maoists have answered that 'neither the people nor our Party thinks it is wrong'. Their explanation is that the schools are being built only to house the paramilitary and 'once they are occupied by the forces, (they) are transformed into torture chambers and concentration camps and there is no hope that they will be used as schools in the near future'. At Maitha, however, we were told that the anganwadi and school buildings were blown up to prevent them from being used as camps by Salwa Judum and the paramilitary, even before they were used as such. And the structures were not new or recent, and certainly not built to house the CRPF. Children of that and neighbouring villages such as Poo Sugudem and Bandaru Chelaka had been studying in the school much before the present crisis. As for the people having no objection, it is difficult to see how that could be true, considering that the students who were studying there have now been admitted in tribal welfare residential schools in Andhra Pradesh. That could have been possible only by passing them off as local tribals, with the connivance of their kith and kin across the border, which evidently would not be possible for all the residents of the Dantewara forests. Many have therefore simply given up studies.

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Not only school buildings but also pucca buildings of all kinds have been prevented by the Maoists from being built. When we heard in July 2005 that they were coming in the way of the construction of panchayat buildings too, the rationale was not clear and therefore the allegation was doubted. But just as the destruction of

school buildings is not a statement against education, the prevention of the construction of panchayat buildings is not a statement against panchayat raj institutions. In both cases the rationale is that there should be no pucca buildings in villages that the paramilitary could use as shelter or for setting up camps. This is symptomatic of how the working out of the Maoist strategy of guerrilla struggle against the State creates needs for the organisation that are not congruent with the needs of the people, and could in fact be against the interests of the people. It is for this reason that democratic activists should be cautious in identifying all the needs of the guerrilla struggle as the ‘interests of the people’. The Maoists may well contend that while there may be some want of congruence in the immediate sense, the two needs are identical in the long run, but that is a matter of political belief and not a self-evident fact.

At least two persons told us that drinking water bores drilled by the Government were pulled up and destroyed by the Maoists, saying that people should only drink water provided by the Sangham. This would be in tune with the notion of a liberated area where the Government is not permitted to administer, for good or for bad, but we are reporting this view without endorsing its credibility, because one of our informants was admittedly reporting what lawyers would call hearsay, and about the other, a CPI person by name Soyam Mukesh, it can be objected that he has a big axe to grind. One brother of his was killed by the Maoists, another (Soyam Mooka) is an important leader of the Salwa Judum at Konta, while he himself, having once been block president of Konta, is now living the life of a refugee at Chatti just across the border in Khammam district.



Parimi Vijay Naidu (seated second from right) with Salwa Judum activists in Konta

That the Maoists got irrigation tanks constructed by mobilising local labour is a fact that has received much appreciation, and deservedly so. But one comment we heard from an adivasi resident of the Konta camp (which was reiterated by a CPI leader in Sukma) was that if the same works had been undertaken by the Government, they would have received wages for the work done, whereas they had to work gratis for the tank got constructed by the Maoists. And in either case they would have also used water from the tank. The comment struck us as very strange when we first heard it but it is not as outrageous as it seems. If the Maoists had allowed the Government to do what it could or would, and supplemented it by mobilising voluntary labour to do what it could not or would not, this complaint would have been merely perverse. This is what a reformist movement may have done. We are not expressing any view whether the reformist way is better than the revolutionary way, but the fact remains that in the face of a perceived radical opposition to any and all development work undertaken by the Government and its substitution with works done by voluntary labour, the argument that if the Government were allowed to undertake the same works the labour would have been remunerated sounds less contrived. It can be dismissed

only if it can be contended that the Government would never have undertaken the construction of any irrigation works at all, and while we do think that a serious argument could be made that the Chattisgarh Government's enthusiasm about development works in Dantewara is new found and aimed merely at discrediting the Maoists, not every one is obliged to find it convincing.

The grain banks created by the Maoists by seeking compulsory donations from the relatively well to do farmers too has also received appreciative comment, and again deservedly, but again the tribals who have a little more land than the others see this as robbing them of the fruits of their labour to feed the armed squads and their dissolute followers. If the comment had come from only the very rich it could have been dismissed as selfish talk, but it is not so easy to dismiss it when it comes from the middle class among the adivasis. The issue for us is not whether the comment is right or wrong but that it is an understandable response, and it has its consequences. A general observation that deserves to be made in this context is that every decision of the Maoists, whether in their guerilla zones or liberated areas, even if it is well intentioned and can be supported by reasoned arguments, is seen as an order supported by guns, which creates resentment among those who differ with them and believe that they too have a reasonable case, but dare not press it beyond a point. Whatever internal democracy the Maoist institutions such as the Sanghams may allow, there is little democracy for those who disagree with their policy decisions. This resentment is fertile ground for recruitment of a hate-filled private army such as the Salwa Judum.

The literature of the Maoists speaks of distribution of the land of tribal landlords to the tribal poor as one of the reasons for the tribal elite developing hatred for them and joining the Salwa Judum. In fact, at the very beginning of the rise of Jan Jagran Abhiyan in the summer of 2005, we were told by a dalit taxi driver who lives in the town of Bijapur and has no stakes either way, that those well-to-do tribals who have been asked by the Maoists to give up part of their land to be distributed to the poor among the community, have developed hostility towards the Maoists and are with the Abhiyan. While it appears true that there are tribals with sizable extents of land, measuring up to fifty or even one hundred acres in a few cases, the productivity is miserably low: two or three quintals of paddy per acre, as against twenty to thirty quintals, and even up to forty, that regular paddy growing areas witness.

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The redistribution undertaken by the Maoists is then from the lower middle class to the poor, and that has its own consequences which one cannot comprehend within the landlord-landless framework. A CPI leader however gave us his own assessment of such land distribution. He says that in Konta tahsil there was collective occupation of forest land by adivasis, who divided up the land after occupation. But it was not divided equally. Some retained much more than the others. The Maoist land struggle, he says, was merely a redistribution of such unequally distributed land, and that there was no land

struggle at all in the old settlements. We are stating this view without comment because we had no opportunity to cross check it.

The forcible recruitment of youth into the Maoist organisations is a complaint we heard from many. It was said that the Maoists demand of each family that one able bodied boy or girl should be sent to join ‘the movement’. As the Maoists have denied this allegation, and we have no independent confirmation, we leave it at that, except to add that if or to the extent it is true, it can create legitimate resentment, since joining the Maoist movement can mean death. This is especially so if the recruits are very young. In fact, in the case of extreme youth, even voluntary recruitment may be resented by the parents as exploitation of the gullibility of a teenager. The Maoists’ answer to this issue raised by the Independent Citizens’ Initiative, namely that they follow a strict age limit of 16 years rather than 18 years for determining adulthood, because in the area of their activity the adivasi boys and girls mature politically quite fast, may not convince all parents. Perhaps even 18 years, which may be old enough for voting, is not old enough for holding a gun. ‘The age of consent’ would depend upon what is being consented to, and armed revolution would seem to require a higher than a lower age of consent than other political activity. As for sticking firmly to the proclaimed limit of 16 years, it is good if they do at least that in Dantewara, because we know that tribal teenagers of less than 15 summers have died gun in hand in Andhra Pradesh.

Killing of persons perceived to be enemies of the Maoists or agents of the State is an integral part of the strategy of establishing armed hegemony over society. The killing began with exploiters such as non-tribal traders. There would be little general resentment in that stage. In fact, at least in retrospect, most people say that such acts had the positive effect of deterring exploiters in the Scheduled areas. And such selective killing could only be occasional. Manish Kunjam of the CPI says: ‘Till two years ago, they would kill selectively, but the killing has increased thereafter. They killed 13 or 14 persons last year in Konta’. A government employee who has worked in the Jagargonda area, which is a stronghold of the Maoists, says that they may have killed about 15 persons in the area in the decade prior to the present flare up.



Mahendra Karma ‘in conversation’ with HRF members at Dantewada

With the declaration of the region as liberated area, the use of violence extends beyond deterrent killing of exploiters, to repelling collaborators and agents of the State and opponents of Maoist authority. And its justification is no longer so obvious to every one. Each killing that could be perceived as unjustified could lead to the birth of one or more opponents of Maoism. Parimi Vijay Naidu, an Andhra settler at Konta, is one of the most vocal spokespersons of Salwa Judum at that town. His paternal uncle Parimi Gopala Rao was a CPI leader who was killed by the

Maoists. Vijay Naidu recalls that killing with resentment as occasioned by political rivalry and nothing else. That he himself obviously has no sympathy for even the CPI, and clearly speaks Sangh Parivar language is a different matter.

At the SPO training camp at Kasoli in Geedam block we had occasion to see one more dimension of the issue. The spread of the ideology of Hindutva in the tribal areas of the country has been a source of great anxiety to democratic activists for some time. The damage this could do was revealed by the Gujarat carnage in which adivasis participated on sizable scale with slogans scripted by the Sangh Parivar. The modus operandi of the Sangh Parivar has been to first alienate the adivasis from their cultural practices and beliefs, and encourage them to identify with brahminical Hindu practices as being superior and truly 'Indian'. Murtis of Ganesh and other Hindu deities are distributed as objects of true veneration. Bhajans are held for these Hindu deities in the tribal hamlets, which is made an occasion for inculcation of Sangh Parivar ideology through the narration of the sub-continent's history according to Golwalkar. In Dantewara the Gayatri Parivar appears to have been the chosen vehicle.

It is said even by CPI leaders who have no great opinion of the Maoists that they put a full stop to the spread of the Gayatri Parivar. We had occasion to know by what means they did it and what consequences followed. The Kasoli camp in Geedam block was full of Gayatri Parivaris who had suffered violence at the hands of the Maoists. While the Parivar teaches the adivasis to stop eating meat and drinking liquor, the Maoists, says Sonuram Kosra of Bangapal, convenor of the Gayatri Parivar, 'beat me and forced me to eat meat'. This was as far back as the year 2001. Other Parivar members in the camp also told us that the Maoists said, 'you fellow, you are a Gond, eat meat'. And that they used force or the threat of force to make them eat meat. Perhaps some obeyed, but a sizable number have landed in the Salwa Judum out of resentment.

The RSS must be having the last laugh. After the forcible shifting of the forest-dwellers to the roadside camps, the RSS has captive cadre. That the camps have become training centers for the RSS is the view of even senior Congressmen and journalists. Ramachandra Singh Deo, scion of a former royal family, former Minister in the Madhya Pradesh cabinet, and senior Congressman, resident of Raipur, is emphatic that the Salwa Judum and the camps it has helped create are breeding ground for RSS cadre. He is so agitated about it that he has revised his opinion that the Salwa Judum created by his fellow-Congressman Mahendra Karma was a good thing, and now wants it disbanded. At least one senior journalist at Raipur supports this view. But he adds that in Chattisgarh, as in Madhya Pradesh of old, Congress dispensations have never been inhospitable to the RSS.

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One apprehension expressed across the border in Khammam district of Andhra Pradesh is that the Maoists who were originally based among the Koyas have found

that the Koyas are a little soft whereas the Gothi or Gothi Koya community is more militant, and have shifted to them for support. We may add at this point that throughout this report we shall use the names of these two communities commonly used in the Telugu speaking areas. Koya becomes Dorla as one moves north, and Gothi Koya becomes Muria. Koya is short for Koya Dora, and the plural of Koya Dora is Koya Doralu. Doralu could easily become Dorla. But the logic of the metamorphosis of Gothi or Gothi Koya into Muria or vice versa is less obvious.

The State, it was feared, had cleverly turned the Koyas to its side, and the resulting conflict is therefore a war among the tribes. If that were indeed true, it would be very alarming. Communal conflicts, once born, do not die easily. And they can lead to large-scale violence among the masses.

The State, it was feared, had cleverly turned the Koyas to its side, and the resulting conflict is therefore a war among the tribes. If that were indeed true, it would be very alarming. Communal conflicts, once born, do not die easily. And they can lead to large-scale violence among the masses. Rwanda is an extreme example of recent times, but there have been many in history, especially contemporary history. Adivasi activists of other States too have expressed the opinion that the Salwa Judum - Maoist conflict is a war between the Dorla and Muria communities.

Fortunately, the view in Dantewara was different. In fact, mention of this apprehension evoked considerable surprise in Dantewara. It was agreed that the support of the Maoists has gradually been shifting from the Koyas to the Gothi Koyas. The reasons given turn around the perception of the character of the Gothi Koyas as more hardy. That they take more easily to Maoist militancy is one explanation, the other being that they have a greater need of land and responded well to the Maoist encouragement to cut down forests about a decade ago. A Koya tribal farmer at Maitha on the Konta-Gollapalli road told us that the Maoist 'problem' started with Gothi Koyas coming from afar and clearing forests with Maoist assistance. But it appears that the first beneficiaries of forest clearance with the support of the Maoists were the Koyas and it was only as the Koya community started settling down that the Gothi Koya community entered to fill the space.

But it is denied by most people in Dantewara that there is any communal divide - as yet. In fact Mahendra Karma himself is a Gothi Koya. (His real name, says an adivasi leader of Khammam, is Madakam Masa or Madakam Masadu in the Telugu version). The fact seems to be that as there is a greater concentration of Koyas near the highways, there is probably a disproportionate concentration of Koyas in the Salwa Judum, which is easier to recruit for, outside the reach of Maoist armed squads. That there is nothing more to it than this is the view heard in Dantewara - perhaps the only pleasant thing one was told after crossing over to Chattisgarh.

It may be that adivasi activists of Khammam have extrapolated their own experience in imagining a Dorla-Muria divide. The Gothi Koyas are not native to Andhra Pradesh. The Khammam forests are an exclusive preserve of the Koyas. Over the years, much before Salwa Judum, there has been an influx of Gothi Koyas from Chattisgarh into Khammam, driven mainly by hunger and

landlessness. On 26th November, as we moved into the Dantewara forests from a convenient point in the Khammam forests, we saw a couple of persons walking fast towards us, with bags of provisions slung across poles. When questioned they turned out to be Murias from far away Nangaras, who had cleared forests hardly 15 km from Bhadrachalam, ‘with the help of the M-L party’, and were contentedly moving back and forth between their original home and their adopted home. They had been arrested and jailed for having cut down the reserve forest once, and spent a few months in the district jail at Khammam, where they learnt to speak some kind of Telugu, but were not deterred from proceeding with cultivation in the reserve forests.

These immigrant Gothi Koyas have settled down in about three dozen settlements in Khammam district, cutting down the reserve forest with the support of the Maoists and making a meagre living for themselves. The local Koya tribe initially reacted with hostility to this influx. Rumours were spread that the Gothi Koyas were very violent and indulged in human sacrifice. Stories of Gothi Koyas hacking and carrying away the heads of people sleeping in the open at night were propagated. In some places the Koyas informed the forest department of the presence of Gothi Koya hamlets in the reserve forests and got them burnt down.

Fortunately, the Maoists, where they were present, and the adivasi activist groups of Khammam, though they consist exclusively of persons of the Koya community, played a very positive role in teaching better sense to the Koyas. The hostility has substantially died down but the memories linger.



The Jan Jagran Abhiyans And The Salwa Judum

Periodic efforts have been made in Dantewara, with official blessings, to counter the Maoists by mobilising violent groups from out of local people, and the Maoists have met it with violence. In the past the Maoist counter-attack has been successful. With Salwa Judum, the opponents of the Maoists and in particular the administration of Chattisgarh evidently hope to turn the tables permanently. The Salwa Judum leaders in the roadside camps invariably say, when asked when and how they expect to go back to their habitations, that it will be after the Maoists are driven away from Dantewara.

Mahendra Karma, MLA of Dantewara, has always been at the center of these efforts to mobilise mobs against the Maoists, described in the past by the Hindi expression Jan Jagran Abhiyan, and now as Salwa Judum, an expression said to be of the language of the Gonds, about whose meaning however there is no unanimity. While the CPI leaders talk as if they were the main force in the first Jan Jagran Abhiyan of the years 1989-1991 (the date of this Abhiyan is variously given as 1989-1990 and 1990-1991), others see it as started by the then BJP government and joined by other parties including the CPI. At any rate, all the electoral parties took part in it. Not only the Maoists but others too say that Mahendra Karma, formerly of the CPI, took active part in it. The activity of the Abhiyan consisted in mobilising groups of people, conducting public meetings spreading hatred about the Maoists, attacking villages and persons sympathetic to the Maoists, forcing the sympathisers to denounce the Maoists, and if they resisted, handing them over to the police. Those who surrendered in this process had to join the Abhiyan's subsequent attacks on other villages. After a while the Maoists counter-attacked the Jan Jagran Abhiyan leaders and killed quite a few of them. The CPI, in particular suffered considerable casualties. Simultaneously,

the CPI also concluded that it had joined hands with the wrong kind of people to counter Maoism. In any case the Abhiyan died out and the Maoists surged ahead.

The second Jan Jagran Abhiyan of 1997-98 was led almost exclusively by Mahendra Karma. It originated around his native village of Pharaspal near Dantewara, but a Maoist publication speaks of attacks committed by the Abhiyan in the Bijapur-Gangaloor area in the year 1997 where about 180 Sangham members and sympathisers were forcibly taken and handed over to the police. Though this Abhiyan too died within a couple of years, victim of Maoist counter-mobilisation and attack, these two attempts set the pattern of assault on the Maoists. The pattern has been followed with much more systematic brutality in the third round by the Salwa Judum, operating as a private vigilante group, in tow with Central Paramilitary forces, the CRPF and the Indian Reserve Battalion from Nagaland.

This explains the various stories about the genesis of the Salwa Judum. The attempt to create groups in society that would function as a battering ram against the Maoists has never been far from the thoughts of the rulers of Chattisgarh. Unlike their southern counter-parts in Andhra Pradesh, they never succeeded in creating a completely brutal police force that would fight the State's battle with the naxalites. Therefore efforts were on to encourage the victims of Maoist political strategies to group for attack. This is in many ways the worse of the two repressive strategies, if one is forced to express a choice. The first criminalises the State whereas the second criminalises society. Enclaves of freedom and dignity may survive in a criminalised State but not in a criminalised society.

The ugly task the State set for itself in Chattisgarh was never an impossibility. That there are many reasons for sections of adivasi society to see themselves as victims of Maoists, we have indicated sufficiently in the previous section. And also that not all of them are necessarily of the oppressor classes, as Maoist literature would have us believe. As such, the grouping is not plainly of the wicked against the virtuous, though its intention is wicked. On the other hand a combination of circumstances led to greater dissatisfaction than normal in the summer of the year 2005. First, there was drought. Then, there was cessation of tendu leaf picking in Dantewara. The Maoists, in their response to criticism of their ways, have vehemently denied having dictated a strike of leaf-picking activity, and some sympathetic journalists at Dantewara tried to tell us that it was the agents of the Government that spread the rumour in and around Gangaloor in Bijapur police

district that the Maoists had banned picking of tendu leaf, and before the latter could clarify the matter, the season was over. But there is enough reason to believe that they did call for a strike in the matter.

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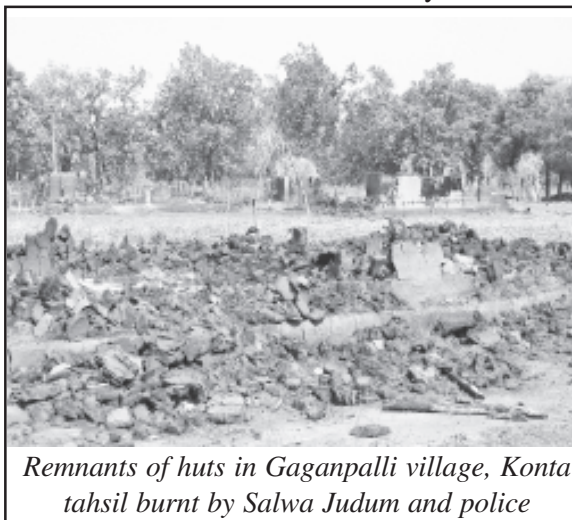
The fact is that the Government wanted to put the contract for collecting tendu leaf in the hands of cooperative societies of local people rather than contractors. It was there earlier and the Government wanted to bring it back. It also wanted to reduce the wage rate by half,

from 90 paise per bundle to 45 paise, claiming that inasmuch as the picker is also a member or share-holder of the society, what is lost as wage will come back as dividend.

The openly proclaimed intention was to hit at the fund raising capacity of the Maoists by eliminating the contractors. The Maoists saw this as an attempt to hit at them and resisted it by calling for a strike of picking of the leaf. The rationale of opposing cooperatisation of tendu leaf picking is that it would put an end to the regular increase of the wage rate achieved when the leaf was bought by well-heeled contractors.

But as tendu leaf picking is a major income earner in the lean months of April and May, there was bound to be widespread dissatisfaction with the call for strike. In fact, it appears that tendu leaf sales and therefore its picking had become very irregular for some years by that time. The demand for increase in wage rates and for 'party fund' for the Maoists appears to have dampened the enthusiasm of prospective contractors.

Leaf picking had become a fitful activity in much of Dantewara even before the year 2005. In the year 2005 it almost came to a stand still. Experience of Andhra Pradesh, where the naxalite parties have discovered this truth the hard way, would show that there must have been quite widespread resentment. Adivasis living in even the most remote areas cannot do without liquid income these days, and tendu picking is the best resource for that. They want more and better payment and are immensely grateful to the naxalites for increasing it almost fifty-fold over the years, but would nevertheless resent even a well-intentioned ban on it.



The government moreover was able to persuade people that while it would normally have undertaken employment-generating works in such circumstances, the Maoists would not allow it to do so. Here, again, whether or not the Maoists would have stopped drought relief works, there were enough instances of their obstructing public works in the area for the government's propaganda to succeed.

This seems to have set off a process of meetings of villagers here and there, first in the villages near Bijapur, to discuss the situation. The village of Kutru is frequently mentioned as the focal point of this mobilisation. Some reports speak of initial mobilisation in Tadimendri, Matwada, etc. All of them are in Bijapur police district and quite close to Bijapur. The question posed by some observers, namely whether these meetings were spontaneous or organised loses its significance when we realise that a constant search was on from the side of the establishment to encourage people to form groups against the Maoists, and on the other hand the people had enough reasons to gather and discuss the fallout of Maoist strategies.

Indeed, Maoist literature would show that in addition to the problem of unemployment and livelihood, the people were also agitated by the attacks they had to suffer from the police and paramilitary forces for acts of violence committed by the Maoists, namely blowing up of CRPF vehicles and killing their occupants, obstructing the supply of provisions to the CRPF camps, etc.

What can however be said is that the establishment jumped in quickly, and thus began the third Jan Jagran Abhiyan from about the first week of June 2005. Except that Mahendra Karma, who was an important figure in the first two Abhiyans, chose to name the third one some thing exotic, there was nothing new in intent or execution, though the intensity of its brutality has been many times that of the past. Indeed Karma himself puts the Salwa Judum in the same sequence of the two previous Jan Jagran Abhiyans and takes pride in the fact that he had a role in all. He raves and rants as he speaks, not merely in public meetings but even in a personal interview, to the point that the interlocutor is legitimately scared that he will be hit, and one has to wonder whether Dantewara would be what it is today but for the immense hatred this one individual has for the Maoists. And while some at least of the tribals who are manning the Salwa Judum camps may have some genuine justification for hating the Maoists, this man has none. He is corrupt and power seeking and needs the adivasis of the district as an unchallenged base for his ambitions. The Maoists are an obstacle to his kind of ambition.

The other vocal leaders of the Salwa Judum are non-tribal traders and businessmen. They are Hindi-speaking in the Bijapur area and Telugu-speaking in Konta. They are hate-filled and vicious. A point that has perhaps not been adequately noted is the Sangh Parivar ideology that pervades their thinking. All of them may not actually sport khakhi shorts but their minds do. A few minutes' conversation with any of them would serve to establish this point. Without implying any saffron conspiracy behind the Salwa Judum, we are inclined to regard this as a very significant aspect of the matter, and one that has been very insufficiently recognised in the literature that has come out till now on the Salwa Judum phenomenon.

However, at the bottom of the Salwa Judum are the adivasi foot soldiers (there are however a few adivasi leaders, too). They are the overwhelming majority of the Salwa Judum cadre. Most of them have their own grievances against the Maoists; whatever may be the degree to which such complaints are honest and justified. But they are now tools in the hands of ambitious political leaders and ideologues like Mahendra Karma, and are leading precarious lives. They are on the

one hand a source of immense terror to the ordinary adivasi living in the forests, and on the other canon-fodder for the Maoists. For all the viciousness they have exhibited in the raids they have undertaken on Maoist territory and villages in the company of the CRPF or the Nagaland battalion, they are as gullible as their counterparts on the other side, and as uncared for and undernourished.

As already said, the method of mobilisation adopted

Vocal leaders of the Salwa Judum are non-tribal traders and businessmen. They are Hindi-speaking in the Bijapur area and Telugu-speaking in Konta. They are hate-filled and vicious.

by the third Jan Jagran Abhiyan called Salwa Judum, is the same as in the first two. We heard a graphic account of the phenomenon at the Vanvasi Chetna Ashram of Sarvodaya leader Himanshu Kumar at Kavalnar. Himanshu Kumar has been vocally critical of the Salwa Judum and has led a courageous campaign for peace in Dantewara. Kavalnar is quite close to Pharaspal, the native village of Mahendra Karma. While Karma operates on a wider terrain, the Salwa Judum in and near his native village is run by his brother-in-law and sarpanch of Pharaspal, Channu Karma. Every house in the area must compulsorily send at least one able bodied person to participate in the rallies organised by the Salwa Judum. These rallies are not peaceful demonstrations but violent lynch mob attacks on persons believed to be close to or supportive of the Maoists. Any one who refuses to participate in the lynching must pay a fine of Rs 700 and suffer 7 lashes. The people of Kavalnar, who had no particular hatred for the Maoists, also participated in one operation and killed three persons. We were told of one widow of Keshapur who was unable to run behind the rampaging mob up a hill and came down and sold her land to pay the fine. The threat was that if any one does not join the mob and does not pay the fine, he or she would be handed over to the Nagaland battalion.

The havoc wrought by the Salwa Judum, on its own and in combination with the paramilitary forces, is by now widely reported*. Excepting the burning down of houses, or rather whole hamlets, it is difficult to get first person accounts of other acts of brutality. But there is little doubt that the conduct of the Salwa Judum and the paramilitary, especially the Indian Reserve Battalion from Nagaland (briefly referred to as the Nagaland battalion), has been extremely brutal. There is no better index of this than the stark fear on the faces of the victims of Salwa Judum whenever its name is taken in conversation with them. These victims



A Salwa Judum slogan board

have divided themselves into three categories. One, those who have unwillingly but out of fear for their lives ended up in the roadside camps. Two, those who continue to live in their forest habitations, out of reach of the Salwa Judum, but in constant fear of an attack. What we heard of their mode of life from the refugees, who had crossed over into Khammam district, is that they are not in fact living in their habitations but in the neighbouring hills. They come down once in a while to cultivate their land, and again climb up the hills. And three, the hundreds - perhaps thousands - of families that have moved into Andhra Pradesh, mainly Khammam district. Their number is not known because they have no desire to announce their presence and invite the wrath of the police and forest officials of Andhra Pradesh. A report published in the magazine Down to Earth dated 31st October, 2006 has given their number as 20,000 but the source of that figure is not known. If any one could know, it would be the district administration of Khammam but that

august entity has not given any indication that it is even aware of their presence in the district.

Of these internal refugees, some have settled down in hamlets where they have kith and kin. The Koyas are more fortunate in this than the Gothi Koyas, for the Koya community is spread over the two States. The only relatives the Gothi Koyas can find in Andhra Pradesh are the denizens of the three dozen hamlets set up in the earlier round of immigration, living precariously under the daily threat of eviction by the forest department of Andhra Pradesh. Those who have no one to shelter them have moved deeper into the Khammam plains, seeking employment of any kind, and often finding none.

We had thought that these refugees would be the best source of information about what really happened in Chattisgarh, but did not bargain for the trauma the events leading to their migration has caused. We met such persons at Gollaguppa, Alligudem, Mallampeta and Regulapadu. Without exception the men among them gazed at us with traumatised faces, neither comprehending nor answering the questions. Language was not the barrier, for we took with us people who spoke the tribal tongues, and anyway most of them can speak Telugu/Hindi. The women were slightly more forthcoming. The most vocal were their local hosts who narrated what their guests preferred not to speak about at all, but how much of it was actually told to them by their guests and how much an extrapolation from what they thought they knew, is a matter for speculation. Apart from the traumatic memory of the Salwa Judum attack on their hamlet back home, they live in the constant fear that their present location may be found out by the Salwa Judum and they may come and take them away by force. This fear is not fanciful, for more than once, the weekly hats at Edugurallapalli, Thummala and Chintoor in Khammam district were attacked by the Salwa Judum coming in vans from Konta. Such attacks would perhaps still be going on but for the resistance put up one day in Chintoor, which made the Salwa Judum apologise and withdraw.

The other hope we had was that the people still living in their own villages in the Dantewara forests would be good informants. As said earlier, there are many points on the Dantewara-Khammam border from where one can, with some exertion, walk down to hamlets that, seen from the tahsil headquarters of Konta, look like remote and inaccessible habitations in Maoist controlled territory. We visited Maraigudem, which is right on the border, and Poosugudem and Maitha, a few kilometers inside. All the three hamlets are in Konta tahsil. But the villagers were

Apart from the traumatic memory of the Salwa Judum attack on their hamlet back home, they live in the constant fear that their present location may be found out by the Salwa Judum and they may come and take them away by force.

no more forthcoming than the inmates of the Salwa Judum camps and the refugees settled in Khammam district. Paralysing fear of the Salwa Judum, and a tight-lipped non-committal response to questions about the Maoists would about sum up their attitude. But they do answer questions about their state of being. No schools for their children, no hospitals or any kind of medical help and no access to the administration to avail the minimal welfare measures available; fear of visiting Konta, even if the road dug up by the Maoists would permit the

exertion, for any purpose including medical or veterinary help, for the Salwa Judum may capture and confine them; the desperate need to visit the weekly hats across the border at Chintoor or Edugurallapalli to sell the minor forest produce gathered in the forests and buy what the forest cannot give them, but fear that the Salwa Judum would attack the camps and take them away: want, fear and neglect is their lot.

It is possible to estimate what the camp-dwellers on the highways of Dantewara have lost in terms of livelihood opportunities. But about those left behind in the forests and leading hunted lives, and those who have migrated to Khammam and are living hand to mouth, any such estimate would be difficult. Even an estimate of the number of people involved is difficult. The whole of it however adds up to a colossal tragedy of displacement and deprivation, affecting perhaps up to one lakh people. At the time of our visit to the Salwa Judum camps in May 2006, the official figure for the number of persons living in the 17 camps spread over the reverse-L shaped stretch from Konta through Dantewara to Bhoopalpatnam, was 54,768. The Down to Earth report published at the end of October puts it at 49,000. Maoist publications have suggested that the people brought to the camps by force are going back to the villages, but the reality does not appear to be so.

What was done in Mizoram to fight the Mizo insurgency is being replicated in Dantewara: clear the forests of human habitations, deprive the insurgents of their human support, then kill the insurgents and establish peace.

One of the purposes of burning down the hamlets was to ensure that there would be no place for them to go back to. Secondly, the administration in Chattisgarh would not easily permit them to go back. They were driven into the camps as a matter of conscious policy in order to clear the forests and isolate the Maoist armed squads. The camps are quickly being replaced by colonies of pucca tenements, and at places such as Injaram the colony is fenced all round. What was done in Mizoram to fight the Mizo insurgency is being replicated in Dantewara: clear the forests of human habitations, deprive the insurgents of their human support, then kill the insurgents and establish peace. It was a brutal 'success' in Mizoram, and the democratic movement in India is paying in Dantewara the penalty for not having protested effectively enough against that brutality.

But it is not only the people forced into the camps that are displaced. Those who have escaped this fate are not living settled lives in peace in their hamlets. They spend much of their time in the hills and come home clandestinely. They lack access to the essentials the outside world could provide them, such as schools, hospitals and markets. They too are displaced persons, by any reasonable definition of that term.

And the third category of people, namely those who have run away to Khammam district of Andhra Pradesh, are indubitably displaced and perhaps the worst off. They live in perpetual fear, either that the Salwa Judum will find them out or that the police or forest officials of Andhra Pradesh will send them back. Their number is not certain, except that wherever one goes in Bhadrachalam Division, and in many places beyond too; one hears people speak of Gothi Koyas who have recently come from Chattisgarh living in huts set up at some corner of the village. The

huts are in most cases not put up near the main habitation, but in some corner of the wastelands surrounding the village fields. That the number of these refugees' runs into thousands is clear, but tens of thousands may not be an exaggeration.

Since every report must have a framework of purpose, we wish to make it clear that the need to reverse this massive displacement and deprivation is the impulse behind ours. There are many more aspects of rights involved in the Dantewara tragedy: the right to life which includes the right not to live at the mercy of killer gangs enjoying unwritten immunity, the right to struggle for a dignified and decent existence, the right to follow the politics of one's choice, the right not to be neglected, ill-treated and oppressed by the administration, the right not to be put outside the framework of constitutional fundamental rights merely because one participates in or supports militant politics, the very basic right that the society one is living in shall not be criminalised, etc. Nevertheless we believe that the priority as of now is to ensure that these displaced persons are enabled to go back and live in their habitations, and earn their livelihood in the forests and the lands that have been theirs.

This would perhaps under any circumstances have been the most urgent need, but there are two reasons why it is more so today. Parliament has passed the Scheduled Tribes & Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Bill, 2006 and the displaced adivasis of Dantewara cannot get the benefit of the Act unless they get back into possession of their land.

Secondly, there is a universal suspicion that the Government of Chattisgarh intends to hand over the lands cleared of adivasis to corporate interests, and once that happens they can never get back the land. We have heard many say that this is in fact the hidden agenda behind Salwa Judum. We have not found enough material to support this suspicion, and are of the opinion that Salwa Judum is essentially a counter-insurgency strategy and not a strategy for corporatisation of the forest lands. Nevertheless, post displacement, the idea of handing over the land to the Tatas or Ambanis is likely to be found attractive by the rulers of the State at Raipur, who are vying with neighbouring Orissa and Jharkhand in bending over backwards to woo corporate companies to set up shop in the forest areas of the State and undertake mining and worse. Once that happens, the adivasis of Dantewara will lose irremediably.

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A Few Word Pictures

These pictures range territorially from the banks of the Indravathi in the north to Konta in the south, and in time from the state of affairs prevalent in May to that of November 2006. They are meant to add flesh and blood to the bald description of the situation given above.

The journey from Konta to Dornapal is eerie. The forest is dense and the road, though called a national highway (NH 221), is atrocious, and except at the villages of Injaram and Errabore, you do not see a soul on the road. You bump along the road, hoping to see a dog or a hen run across the road, but no. Huts by the side of the road are empty and uninhabited. Some, as at Dubba Tota, are burnt to cinders. It is as if some pestilence has struck this forest and emptied it of its human residents. It is only after you cross Dornapal that you find inhabited huts by the roadside. As you approach Injaram and Errabore you are met with a checkpoint run by tribal youth who have an assortment of weapons with them, including wooden models of guns. They stop you, may be search your vehicle and take their time to let you go, some times after taking some money. If the number plate of your vehicle says you are from Andhra Pradesh, the scrutiny is more suspicious for Andhra Pradesh is associated with naxalites. Most of the leaders of the Maoist party in Dantewara are from Andhra Pradesh, Warangal or Karimnagar in fact, and naxalism came to Dantewara from there.

The camp at Dornapal is the biggest. At the time of our visit in May 2006 there were, officially, more than 10,000 people residing in the camp. We reached it a little past noon, which was probably siesta time for the Salwa Judum leaders. For unlike the other human rights teams which faced unpleasant obstruction from the Salwa Judum at Dornapal, we could spend a good two hours roaming around the camp, talking freely to the refugees. They were from 46 villages. We talked to people from Kolaiguda, Morupalli, Neelavai, Bodhaguda and Arlampalli. They were

housed at that time in sheds of size 20 x 12 feet which had no side walls, each shed housing between 40 and 80 people of all ages. Recent visitors say that the camps have been replaced by more or less pucca structures. At that time we saw some construction going on. A common sight near all the camps was people bringing timber from the forests, for they were required to undertake the construction of their houses and were permitted to freely cut the trees in the forests for that purpose. That no permission under the Forest Conservation Act was obtained from the Union Government for this may be a very minor irregularity in the saga of illegality that defines Dantewara today.

In theory all these people are supposed to have run into this camp from their forest habitations because of harassment by the Maoists. But everybody who talked to us (quite a few did not) told us unambiguously that they were brought there by the Salwa Judum. Only the people from Neelavai said that they had come here because of fear of the naxalites. The others said that the houses of those who did not come into the camps were set on fire by the Salwa Judum. About Arlampalli we had heard at Sukma that 165 houses in the village had been burnt by the Salwa Judum, the biggest

act of arson in the neighbourhood of Dornapal. This was confirmed by displaced persons of Arlampalli whom we talked to at the Dornapal camp.



Chamri of Belnar at the Nelasnar camp in Bairamgarh block

The arson is not merely an act of vengeance: it is a very practical thing. If you do not come with us, then we will ensure that you cannot live in your habitation, too. Such people have no option except to change their minds and go to the camps, or go beyond the radius of the Salwa Judum's reach and seek shelter within Maoist territory, or if that is not possible for any reason or not to their liking, then simply walk the jungle into Khammam district of Andhra Pradesh. Those who have chosen the

last alternative are not merely those who live near that border. People have trudged more than fifty kilometers in some cases to cross the border, together with children, cattle and material belongings.

At Gollaguppa in Chintoor Mandal of Khammam district, we met Muchika Lakshmi of Etigattu, mother of nine children. Hers was a Gothi Koya landlord family, though she does not know how much land they have. She proudly says they used to reap a paddy crop of 100 bags and above, which in the plains would imply a mere 3 or 4 acre holding. But in the forests of Dantewara it could well mean a holding of size 30 to 50 acres. Her village, she says, was a stronghold of the Maoists. She herself does not think well of them. Though she does not say why, the sizable landholding (as the Maoists appear to see it) could have been the reason. Yet, when the Salwa

Judum, supposedly a patron of the tribal elite, raided Etigattu, neither she nor her husband Deva wanted to go with them to Konta. Why? ‘What will we do in the camp? There will be no land, and nothing to eke out a livelihood from’, she says. The Salwa Judum fellows tied up her husband’s hands behind his back and took him forcibly to the camp at Konta. They burnt down all the sixty houses in the village. Lakshmi, perhaps because she was a ‘landlord’, did not have the option of taking refuge in Maoist territory. She deposited five of her nine children with relatives in other villages, and walked through the forest with the other four to Gollaguppa, which is itself a suspect village, since there is a colony of Gothi Koyas who had earlier migrated into this hamlet from Chattisgarh in search of land and are living in the reserve forests. She and her children would be lucky if they escape forcible deportation by the forest department of Andhra Pradesh, and starvation death, whether they are deported or not.

The hypocrisy of the Chattisgarh Government’s stand that it is housing and feeding targets of Maoist wrath became evident at the camp at Bangapal in Geedam Block. We found a large group of people from Belnar on the other side of the Indravathi river. They were busily building houses for themselves. They said they were Murias (Gothi Koyas), and were once upon a time with the Maoist party but had later surrendered and joined the Salwa Judum. Since north of the Indravathi river is Abujmarh, the sovereign territory of the Maoists, they could no longer live there and had come over to this side. We did not believe them when they added that they were getting no food from the Government but only wages for the work they did. We thought they were complaining about inadequacy of the food. But the District Collector, Dantewara, to whom we communicated their complaint, confirmed its truth. His explanation was that the settlement at Bangapal was not a camp since they were surrendered militants and not ordinary folk driven out of the forests by the Maoists. This is utterly cynical. Being surrendered militants, they had no option but to be with the Government, and would never cross the Indravathi river and go back to Belnar. Hence it was not necessary to feed them. The ordinary folk brought from there by force, on the other hand, have to be fed to keep them with the Government.



An uninhabited village adjacent to the Konta-Dornapal highway.

Another aspect of the political struggle being conducted by the Maoists was in evidence at the camp at Nelasnar in Bairamgarh block. The refugees here are also from Belnar across the river. They belong to the non-tribal community of Kalars, whose traditional occupation is the making of sharab, country liquor. Chamri, a vocal and elderly woman, said that the Maoists had prevented them from brewing liquor, which deprived them of their livelihood. The rest of her complaints are the common ones: the Maoists do not allow employment generating works to be undertaken by

the Government, and they take over the land of big farmers and distribute it to the poor. The tribes of Belnar are with the Maoists whereas the non-tribal Kalars are against them because of the ban on brewing of country liquor. The Salwa Judum appears to have forayed across the river and burnt the houses of the tribes of Belnar to force all the residents of Belnar to shift this side of the river. The tribes moved farther into Maoist territory, of which there is plenty to the north of the Indravathi river, whereas the Kalars found liberation and have come over to the south.

This is one instance we came across where the camp is what the Government says it is: a voluntary refuge for persons targeted, rightly or wrongly, by the Maoists. Chamri's demand is that the Government should build them a colony here (which is under way) and a bridge across the Indravathi river opposite Nelasnar, so that the Kalars can live on this side, brew sharab, and cross over to the other side during the daytime to sell the liquor! One would not normally expect any Government to bridge a river, that too a wide and fast flowing river like the Indravathi, for such a reason, but the one-point agenda of the Chattisgarh Government is such that we would not be

surprised if a bridge is indeed built to spite the Maoists by enabling the Kalars to sell sharab in Maoist territory. Chamri, therefore, may well have her wish!



Muchika Lakshmi at Gollaguppa in Chintoor mandal of Khammam district with 2 of her children

The Abujmarh area to the north of the Indravathi river is such a stronghold of the Maoists that the lives of those who oppose them or are opposed by them are certainly endangered. This has nothing to do with whether the Maoists are in some sense justified in targeting such persons. Such people may well wish to move to the south of the river and seek protection of the Government. Indeed, if we are to go by what we were told by Gopi Ram Gagra, a tribal youth at the camp at Kasoli in Geedam block, all persons, whether tribal or non-tribal, whom the Maoists suspected of having joined the Salwa Judum, were driven away from the north of the river. They are certainly entitled to protection from the Government. The problem comes with an administrative perception that abdicates its responsibility of providing shelter and safety to such people, and instead allows them to arm themselves, become a lawless administration, and wreak vengeance

against their enemies and the sympathisers of their enemies.

Symbolic of this was the sight we saw at Kasoli. A training camp for Special Police Officers (SPOs) was in progress at Kasoli when we reached the place. This SPO is just a lawful sounding name for armed Salwa Judum cadre. The provision in the Police Act which allows citizens to be appointed as SPOs for emergency purposes was never intended for arming a social group to exterminate its enemies, but that is what SPO means in Chattisgarh. We learnt that in Geedam

Block alone there were 300 SPOs as far back as May 2006. The total number in the district was 5000 according to the District Collector. Any Salwa Judum cadre who wants a weapon is given a weapon and called an SPO, and that is that. These SPOs have become a menace to the adivasis who are suspected of being sympathetic to the Maoists. They accompany the paramilitary in their raids on villages, and the paramilitary relies on them for identifying sympathisers who are then picked up, tortured or killed. They man the check posts on the roads and no one can pass unless they allow. They in fact constitute the armed wing of the de facto government in Dantewara: the Salwa Judum. The abdication of administration to the Salwa Judum by the Government of Chattisgarh is complete and the SPOs wield the police powers of that administration. It requires no argument that this is entirely illegal but it is going on publicly for about a year and a half now in the heart of India. Perhaps it shows how brittle is Rule of Law in our country.

There is little wonder that such privatisation of the State's responsibility of administration and policing in favour of an undisciplined private gang should create a stream of refugees. As they are distributed all over Khammam district, we attempted to locate them and talk to them. Locating them turned out to be very difficult, for they do not advertise their presence. They are scared of

two things: that the Salwa Judum would hunt them down, or that the forest or police personnel of Andhra Pradesh would force them to leave their refuge. An incident that happened on the 21st of November this year is telling. The Medicines Sans Frontieres, who have identified the civil war situation in Dantewara as worth their intervention, have been holding medical camps in places where they hope the affected adivasis on either side of the political divide in Dantewara and either side of the Chattisgarh-A.P border will avail the help. One such camp was held at Mallampet in Khammam district on 21st November. They took care to spread the information in the villages of Chattisgarh close to the border. The people of such villages too wished to attend the camp since they had no access to any competent medical facility and were quite desperate for good medical care. From inside the forests they started towards Mallampet. But by the time they reached Poosugudem, the last village in that direction in Chattisgarh, they were told that the police lay in wait for them at Mallampet, and they promptly turned back. The rumour was in fact false, but they did not wait to verify. Such is the fear. It was therefore with great difficulty that we could locate them and talk to them.



Armed Salwa Judum cadre at a training camp for Special Police Officers at Kasoli in Geedam block

At Mallampet in Chintoor Mandal, we met Uyika Lakshmi and Uyika Kanniah, an elderly Koya couple. They originally belonged to Goraka in Konta tahsil. Lakshmi says that after Etigattu and Banda were consigned to fire by Salwa Judum, one day this summer about 10 to 15 armed

persons came to the hamlet. Some of them were in uniform and some in plainclothes. They charged the residents of Goraka with assisting the Maoists, and burnt down all the houses. Lakshmi and Kannaiah were forcibly taken to the Salwa Judum camp at Injaram. Lakshmi, in her innocence, says that after spending a few days in the camp they cleverly managed to convince the camp leader that they would visit their relatives in Khammam district and come back after a while, and by such simple means escaped the Salwa Judum. Her son Bheemaiah gives the actual story. When the Salwa Judum came to their village, he managed to run away across the border to Mallampet. After going there he prevailed upon the M.L.A., Bhadrachalam, who is of the CPI (M), to convince the S.I of Police, Chintoor to help him liberate his elderly parents from the Injaram camp. The policeman went down to Injaram and got them released on his personal assurance that whenever required he would see that they go back to the camp.

As an aside, we met this officer on the 26th November at Mallampet. In the effort to reach Mallampet from where we planned to cross the border into Chattisgarh we spent some time looking for transport at the village of Edugurallapalli. There is a heavily fortified outpost of the Chintoor police station at Edugurallapalli, and the policemen of the outpost observed us. We came back to Mallampet in the afternoon after visiting Poosugudem and Maitha in Chattisgarh, and found the S.I. Chintoor along with about a dozen plainclothes policemen armed with automatic weapons getting down from a bus, which had just come into the village. His suspicion was that we had gone to meet the Maoists in Chattisgarh. In the ensuing conversation, we asked the officer what he thought of the methods being adopted by the Government of Chattisgarh. His comment was that Salwa Judum was a bad thing (inefficient, he adds in explanation of the word bad), that it should be disbanded, development work should be undertaken in the adivasi areas by the Government of Chattisgarh, and combing should be intensified by the police to eliminate the Maoists. The last two, it may be added, constitute the official anti-naxalite policy of the Government of A.P., of which only the combing part really works, and very brutally at that. The reason for giving the view of the S.I of Police, Chintoor is that even within the police establishment, the more professional sorts do not think well of the Salwa Judum. And this must be true of some at least in Chattisgarh too. However, and on the contrary, there is a section within the A.P police too who are looking hungrily at the Salwa Judum experiment and have publicly declared that it is worth replicating in Andhra Pradesh. All this is of relevance in the context of the tacit approval being given by the Government of India to the Salwa Judum. By all accounts, the Government of India, which

has recently expressed the ridiculous opinion that the Maoists are the biggest threat to the internal security of the country, is officially of the view that what is required to tackle Maoism is a combination of the efficient brutality of the Greyhounds of A.P.Police, and the Chattisgarhi innovation in the realm of vigilante viciousness called Salwa Judum.

Madavi Ramu of Gumpelli on the Konta-Gollapalli road is now settled at Alligudem in Chintoor Mandal.

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Gumpelli was not attacked by the Salwa Judum, but after neighbouring villages like Goraka and Banda were attacked and burnt, he decided to run away. He had 40 acres of land on which he grew til and rain-fed paddy, producing the princely output of three quintals per acre. He was afraid that he would be forcibly taken to the Konta camp. His elderly mother and young brother stayed back. But they are not living in the village. They are living in the hills near the village and go down once in a while to clandestinely cultivate their lands. While Ramu left his land, his mother, his brother and all his household goods behind, he took his six bullocks with him to Alligudem. The reason? If the cattle are left behind the jawans of the Nagaland battalion would kill and eat them, he says. The totally undisciplined conduct of the Nagaland battalion in this regard was commented upon by many of our interlocutors. In popular perception in Dantewara, the Nagaland jawans are voracious flesh-eating monsters. Neither cattle nor goats nor fowl are safe when they are around. This image is no doubt ugly and often does take a racist form of expression but they and their bosses alone are to blame for this.

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The Violence

The violence that has accompanied this forced resettlement has been terrible, and so has been the Maoist retaliation. But it is very difficult to document it. There is reliable information only about the killings committed by the Maoists, and very little about the violence of the Salwa Judum and the paramilitary forces. The administration in Chattisgarh maintains a meticulous count of the number of persons killed by the Maoists but none by those on its side. The District Collector, Dantewada said that from June 2005 to middle of May 2006, the Maoists had killed 228 civilians including 12 SPOs, and 25 police and paramilitary personnel, which add up to 253. This includes the killing of three SPOs in a massive attack on the camp at Injaram on the night of 12th May, the day our team crossed Injaram towards Dornapal. We learnt of it the day after at the district headquarters. Subsequently the violence has been somewhat muted but a major incident happened on the night of 16th July when the Maoists attacked the Errabore camp in large numbers, burnt houses and killed altogether 33, including old men and children. As of today, the number killed by the Maoists in this war which began in June 2005 would probably come to 300.

While the Maoists did kill even before June 2005, by all accounts the rate of killing was nowhere near this. But then there was little organised opposition to them in that phase. In each

area one hears of 'two or three incidents of killing per year'. From the year 2003, when the CRPF entered Dantewara, the killings on both sides appear to have increased, and after June 2005, with the Salwa Judum, the strife has taken very bloody form. The present killing by the Maoists is by and large in retaliation to the killings by the Salwa Judum and the Nagaland battalion, and often as brutal as theirs. They are not merely shooting but hacking, slitting throats, etc, as the Salwa Judum has

From the year 2003, when the CRPF entered Dantewara, the killings on both sides appear to have increased, and after June 2005, with the Salwa Judum, the strife has taken very bloody form.

done. The massacre of 26 persons at Darbhaguda on 28 February, 15 at Manikonta on 29 April and 33 at Errabore on 16/17 July - all of them in Konta tahsil - are instances of cold blooded and brutal killing by them.

The Salwa Judum and the Nagaland battalion have taken a large number of lives in the course of clearing the forest hamlets by force. The exact number of hamlets burnt is not known, as indeed the exact extent of any of the crimes committed by the Salwa Judum-paramilitary combine is not known. The Maoists have circulated a list which is reproduced in the report titled War in the heart of India: An enquiry into the ground situation in Dantewara district, Chattisgarh, published by the Independent Citizens' Initiative, dated 20th July 2006. This list puts the number of hamlets burnt at 91, and the number of houses burnt at 1857. However, the list cannot be complete because it does not, for instance, include Gaganpalli in Konta tahsil whose burnt remains we saw and photographed. It also does not include Banda in the same tahsil. While we interviewed a family of the victims at Gaganpalli, we did not meet any one from Banda. However, we met Uyika Lakshmi and Uyika Kannaiah of the neighbouring hamlet Goraka that was burnt down by the Salwa Judum, and is named in the list prepared by the Maoists. Uyika Lakshmi in turn told us that Banda too had been burnt by the Salwa Judum. Chintaguppa is another village, which does not find mention in the list. But the houses of some in this village who refused to join Salwa Judum were burnt, including that of the sarpanch Podiyam Panda of the CPI. This fact we learnt from the CPI spokespersons at Sukma. The number 91 is therefore an understatement of the number of hamlets burnt by the Salwa Judum. So is the number 1857 of the number of houses burnt.



A view of the Errabore camp after the July 17 Maoist attack

The burning of houses has been accompanied by looting or burning household goods and taking away or slaughtering of cattle. At Gaganpalli, or rather the remnants of Gaganpalli, we found a family, Madakam Doola, his wife Muthi and son. They said that the village was attacked by the Salwa Judum together with the police in April 2006 and all were asked to come over to the camp at Errabore. As the people refused, about one hundred out of the three hundred houses in the hamlet were set on fire. Clothes and grain got burnt along with the houses, and fowl and cattle were driven away by the raiders. The brutality did not have the desired effect in full. Only a few went to Errabore. The majority went into the forests. Fortunately no one died. This family too had gone away, but they came that evening to look for their goat, which was missing.

This would, with variations, be the story of most of the burnt villages. A good account of what happened in three villages (Kotrupal, Munder & Mankeli), in Bijapur police district where arson,

loot and murder took place will be found in the report *When the State makes War on its own People: A Report on the violation of rights in the Salwa Judum campaign in Dantewara, Chattisgarh, April 2006*, published by five civil rights organisations, PUDR (Delhi), APDR (West Bengal), PUCL Jharkhand, PUCL Chattisgarh and IAPL.

In general, a number of killings took place in the course of these acts of arson and looting. And further killing took place in the course of combing operations in the forests by the Nagaland battalion. The exact number is however not known. The Maoists have circulated a list of 116 persons killed by the Salwa Judum and the paramilitary between June 2005 and March 2006, which is reproduced in the report *War in the Heart of India*. For some reason, the list does not include any victim from Konta tahsil. For that reason alone it can be said to be incomplete. The same list is found in a booklet in Hindi published by the Solidarity Committee for Victims of Salwa Judum on 1st June 2006, but a leaflet issued in the name of that Struggle Committee, which is included in the same booklet, puts the number of those killed at '250 plus'. And a Telugu language leaflet issued by the DAKMS in the same month puts the figure at 200. Evidently, the Maoists too do not have the exact figure, let alone an exhaustive list of names of the victims. However, in the law of the land as we know it, the responsibility of keeping a record of all unnatural deaths is upon the administration, which is bound to investigate them. There is no sign of that in Dantewara.

Indeed, the way these killings are dealt with attests to the complete abdication of lawful administrative responsibilities. In justification of the killing there is the fig leaf of exchange of fire in the course of combing operations. But there is no excuse for not recording each killing as an incident of unnatural death, if not offence of culpable homicide, and not getting an inquest and autopsy done. Indeed, these killings are not treated as an offence at all. A CRPF jawan from the Gollapalli camp whom we spoke to at some length at Maraigudem on the border of Dantewara and Khammam districts, expressed surprise when we suggested that it is as much his duty to prevent the Salwa Judum's violence as that of the Maoists. In his innocence he blurted out that as the Salwa Judum was doing 'good work', there could be no question of arresting or obstructing them.

The practice, as the District Collector of Dantewara admitted to us, is that after opening fire and causing injury the Salwa Judum-paramilitary combine simply turns its back and comes away.

The responsibility of keeping a record of all unnatural deaths is upon the administration, which is bound to investigate them. But there is no sign of that in Dantewara.

They do not even bother to ascertain whether the fire has injured any one. Much less do they bother to see whether they have killed any one. This means among other things that there is no count of how many have been killed by the State's agencies in the war the Chattisgarh government is fighting against the Maoists. If that number is of the same order as the killings committed by the Maoists, as the Maoists' estimate of casualties on their side indicate, the death toll in the

Dantewara war would come to about 600 in the last year and a half. And barring the 25 paramilitary men and a lesser number of Maoist leaders from Andhra Pradesh, all the other victims are local adivasis, whether they belong to the Sangham or the Salwa Judum. Whatever the fault of the Maoists, this decimation of the adivasis of Dantewara is the direct consequence of the Chattisgarh government's policy of encouraging fratricidal killing of adivasis to clear the jungles of support for the Maoists.

There is in circulation a list prepared by the Maoists of women victims of Salwa Judum-paramilitary combine: 21 killed, 34 raped/molested in the course of combing operations, 3 missing, 29 raped/molested in the camps and police stations. Many reports have cited this list. However, this list is unlikely to be any more comprehensive than the others. It is in fact likely to be even less so than the others, because ascertaining complaints of sexual assault is in any case more difficult than ascertaining complaints of murder or arson.

Observers going to Dantewara from outside have on many occasions been subjected to violent obstruction at the hands of the Salwa Judum.

But local journalists have fared worse. The story of Kamlesh Paikra, journalist based at Bijapur, has been referred to in both *War in the Heart of India* and *When the State makes War on its own People*. A tribal himself, he came across as a sharp and vocal person when we met him at Dantewara in May. He says that in the beginning he was under the impression that the Salwa Judum was a popular reaction against the Maoists (which is significant, since it implies that to a sensitive local mind the possibility of popular disaffection with the Maoists was not an unthinkable matter). But his journalists' instincts disabused him. When he tried



An adivasi family whose home at Gaganpalli was burnt by the Salwa Judum

to find out who was this Sodi Deva in whose name the Press statements of the Salwa Judum were released, he found that there was no person by that name. He found further that the material, such as posters and pamphlets, utilised by the Salwa Judum was printed and supplied by the police. He observed that the people who went to attend the Salwa Judum meetings looted and burnt houses and hamlets on the way. His journalist-activism in connection with arson and looting in Mankheli landed him in serious trouble with the Salwa Judum. He reported the incident in the newspaper he works for, and accompanied the CPI team which toured the area in November 2005. Later, he accompanied a PUCL team but was stopped by the police. When he was arguing with the Sub-Divisional Magistrate at Bijapur about this obstruction, an armed Salwa Judum gang came there and threatened him in the presence of that officer. His brother Tarakeshwar Singh who is Head Master at Cherpal was arrested and charged with being in league with the Maoists. The permit for

the Fair Price Shop run by Kamlesh was not renewed. And not only Kamlesh, but all who were friendly with him were threatened.

Kamlesh Paikra is not the only journalist to be harassed by the administration and the Salwa Judum. At Konta, Sanjay Reddy who reported for Nav Bharath and Sheikh Anwar Khan who reported for Dandakaranya were called into the camp at Konta and beaten up by the Salwa Judum for allegedly reporting favourably about the Maoists. The two have left the profession out of fear.

The latest news to come out of Dantewara reflects all the ingredients of the story we have told so far. Bhoopalpatnam, close to the banks of the Indravathi, is not far to the west of Bijapur, but for about one year after the birth of the Salwa Judum, Bhoopalpatnam Block was spared its activity. But some of the villagers of Bhoopalpatnam Block apprehended that the Salwa Judum might sooner or later try to enter their area, and a group of sarpanches of the Block mobilised and tried to go to Raipur on 22nd June this year to plead with the State Government to keep Salwa Judum out of Bhoopalpatnam.

Considering that Salwa Judum is supposed to be a spontaneous people's movement, it may seem odd that these people should ask the Government to keep it out of their area, but it has been evident to every one in Dantewara that Salwa Judum is very much an official 'movement'. However, on the way to Raipur they were stopped, locked up and beaten up by the Salwa Judum. They were sent back with the threat of worse to follow if they made a second attempt. But on the occasion of the visit of the President of India to Raipur on 7th November, they did make the attempt, choosing a circuitous route to reach the State's capital. There were forty of them. They were unable to meet the President, and had to content themselves with a Press conference.

The Salwa Judum leaders were not amused. On 15th November they scoured the forests for the guilty forty, and being unable to find them, they caught hold of a journalist by name Afzal Khan who reports for Hind Satt from Bhoopalpatnam, and accused him of having helped the sarpanches to go to Raipur. Afzal denied it, and was warned not to repeat such deeds and sent away. A few days later some SPOs again accosted him, again made the same allegation, and took him into a room and thrashed him. They beat up a lot of people and looted villages in the process of hunting for the guilty forty.

Afzal has two fractured fingers to show for the beating he received. He is afraid to lodge an FIR and afraid to continue reporting from Bhoopalpatnam. He has shifted to Jagdalpur.

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In Conclusion

We end where we began. The decision-makers of India's internal security establishment are known to be of the view that the Salwa Judum is a great innovation, signifying as it does, the uprising of the people, in particular the adivasis, against the Maoists. We have sufficiently indicated that this description of the Salwa Judum is a plain lie. It is the realisation of a very ugly strategy, namely to mobilise the local opponents of Maoism, give them weapons and encouragement to commit unchecked violence against sympathisers and supporters of Maoism, with the full help of the police and paramilitary. As the Maoists are



An adivasi family at the Dornapal camp

heavily armed and do not hesitate to counter-attack with equal brutality, this has led to a war within the adivasi society of Dantewara. The exact figure of the casualties in this war is not known because of the Chattisgarh government's unpardonable attitude of simply ignoring the killing its agents commit, but it would appear to be about 600 in the last year and a half, about 95% of them local adivasis.

But the assistance given by the Government of Chattisgarh to the Salwa Judum does not stop here. All development and welfare activity in Dantewara has for its point of reference the 17 Salwa Judum camps. Only those who are in these camps are citizens, so far as the administration is concerned. All the funds allotted to the district under various heads, are spent only for the

residents of these camps. This is not due to any oversight. It is deliberate and is intended to send a plain message to those who have not come into the camps, that if they persist with their obduracy, they will be left out of all the benefits of governance. The Chief Minister of the State has more than once said that ‘those who are in the camps are with the Government, and those who are in the forests are with the Maoists’.

Every bit of this is illegal and inhuman. And in the last year and a half, the people of Dantewara have suffered terribly under this strategy. There can be no hesitation in calling for an end to be put to the Salwa Judum. However, today’s reality is that if Salwa Judum is disarmed and wound up, those who are with it will be exposed to retaliation by the Maoists. The demand to disarm and disband the Salwa Judum must therefore go with a demand that the Maoists promise that there will be no wrecking of vengeance.

But there is a more immediate reason for demanding complete cessation of violence by all sides. This is the need to create conditions for all the displaced adivasis to get back to their hamlets and live as they did in the past. It cannot be said too often or too forcefully that the tragedy of Chattisgarh is a tragedy of massive and forced displacement of adivasis: displacement into the roadside camps, displacement into Khammam district of Andhra Pradesh and displacement into the interiors of the jungles of Dantewara. The lowest estimate of the displaced would be about 70,000, and a possible maximum would be about 1,00,000. Those driven into the camps are getting some food from the Government. Those in Khammam are suffering the worst in this regard. Many of them are starving. Those displaced into the forests lived for a season on the grain left behind by those who have gone to the camps, but now onwards they will have to live on what they can cultivate clandestinely in their own lands or the lands abandoned by the camp-dwellers, while playing hide and seek with the Salwa Judum and the police/paramilitary forces.

Forest produce that always provided substantial livelihood to them is now completely out of the reach of those in the camps, and to a large extent of those who have migrated to Khammam. Those living precariously in the forests of Dantewara do have access to it, but they have no place to sell it. The weekly hats or markets of Dantewara have been abandoned. Markets are places where information is gathered, where secret rendezvous can be arranged, where agitations can start, where food supplies can be renewed - both sides to the war have reason to want them closed. And both have been blamed for having them closed. While initially we were of the impression

While initially we were of the impression that both are equally responsible, at the end we feel that the police/Salwa Judum combine is more to blame in this regard than the Maoists.

that both are equally responsible, at the end we feel that the police/Salwa Judum combine is more to blame in this regard than the Maoists. At any rate, an important economic resource is lost by the adivasis, and those of Konta tahsil at least have been looking towards the markets of Khammam district as an alternative. Edugurallapalli is an accessible market, in a manner of speaking, and they are going there, but in fear of attack by the Salwa Judum men who are known to have come

in vans and forcibly taken away the immigrants. And it is needless to add that education and health needs of the refugees - excepting the camp dwellers - are seriously affected, which can have very serious long-term ill effects. Above all there is fear: the fear writ large on every face, a traumatic fear that has rendered them dumb.

To enable these thousands to go back to their hamlets and live as before without any fear is the first and foremost task today. The Government of Chattisgarh and their agent, the Salwa Judum, clearly do not accept this. They are building pucca colonies at the camps and expect the colonies to house the displaced adivasis until the Maoists are driven out of the forests. Quite apart from the unacceptability of any such tactics, no one can predict when, if at all, the Maoists will be driven out of the forests. The Maoists, for their part, would want the displaced persons to go back to the forest habitations, but that does not necessarily mean that they are willing to cooperate in creating the conditions that will ensure that. For it means accepting a ceasefire for an indefinite period, in particular abjuring revenge for an indefinite period.

We are of the view that concerned people of Chattisgarh and elsewhere must put pressure on both the Maoists and the Chattisgarh government to accept a ceasefire. The Chattisgarh government must disband the Salwa Judum, forever and not just for the duration of the ceasefire.

These steps will set the stage for the return of all the displaced to their original habitations. It will be said that this will only bring the situation to the pre-Salwa Judum stage. It will, but we do hope that both sides have sufficiently learnt lessons from the interregnum. The Government of Chattisgarh, we hope, has learnt that it will not do to abuse the Maoists for its own lapses. It should really start governing the Scheduled areas, and in the manner the Constitution envisaged. And in general honour the Rule of Law and the political rights of the people. The Maoists, we presume, have learnt that popular support cannot be taken for granted, and that they do not cease to be accountable to the public merely because they speak the language of revolution. That is at the root of the crisis they have brought upon themselves, and even if they will not admit it in public, we presume they have enough sense to realise the fact.

We conclude the report with the hope that the concerned people of Chattisgarh will rise to the occasion and build pressure on all concerned to reverse the displacement and deprivation that is now the lot of thousands upon thousands of adivasis of Dantewara.

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Appendix-I

Letter sent by Human Rights Forum to all civil and democratic rights organisations in the country.

Dear friends,

You are aware of the incident in Chattisgarh where the CPI (Maoist) killed a large number of Scheduled Tribes on 19th June. If any one else had killed adivasis on that scale, there would have been a furore in the country. The total silence that has followed these killings is therefore a matter of concern.

We propose that we visit the place as a fact-finding committee to know the facts. We are aware that there are differences in the matter of criticising revolutionary parties for their acts of violence. HRF believes that arbitrary or otherwise unjustifiable acts of even political movements generally considered popular or democratic should be publicly criticised by organisations such as ours. Others may differ, but there should be no objection to finding the facts. What we will do later can be decided in due course. It should not matter if all of us do not come to the same conclusion either on the facts of the matter or on what should be done after the fact-finding. We think however that we cannot simply ignore the killings.

Since there has already been some delay in the matter, we suggest 16-17 July as the dates for the fact-finding. The place of the killings is Matwada in Bijapur district, and the number killed has been variously reported as twenty-two, fifteen, thirteen etc. Bijapur is on the road from Chandrapur (Maharashtra) to Jagdalpur (Chattisgarh) via Balharpur (Balharshah for the Railways), Sironcha & Bhoopalpatnam. It is (or at least was) quite a good road. Both Chandrapur and Balharshah are on the trunk route from Delhi to Chennai, and from the other end, Jagdalpur is connected by a good road to Raipur, which is on the Howrah-Mumbai line.

Yours truly

Sd/-

29th June 2005

Appendix-II

HUMAN RIGHTS FORUM (HRF) & ORGANISATION FOR PROTECTION OF DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS (OPDR)

Joint Press Release

An eight-member team of the Human Rights Forum (HRF) and Organisation for Protection of Democratic Rights (OPDR) visited Bijapur police district of Dantewada district of Chattisgarh as a Fact Finding Committee on 16-17 July. The visit was undertaken in the context of the widespread reporting in the Press that the CPI (Maoist) has been killing a number of adivasis in the area because they have organised themselves in the Jan Jagran Abhiyan and are opposing the dicta of the Maoists. In particular there was news of a massacre of 13 adivasis on 19th June 2005* at the village of Kotrapal which perturbed us and compelled us to constitute the Fact Finding Committee.

The area in question is topographically close to A.P but very difficult of access, since communications to Chattisgarh from the South and the West are poorly developed. From A.P one has to cross the Pranahita and Indravathi rivers, both of which remain unbridged on this stretch. For this reason the team could not spend as much time as it hoped to in the area. However, the team visited the townships of Bhoopalpatnam and Bijapur, two affected villages, namely Kutru and Jangla, and spoke to a number of people, both tribal and non-tribal, including the tribal upa-sarpanch of Kutru, the Station House Officer, Kutru, and leaders of the anti-Maoist Jan Jagran Abhiyan stationed at Bairamgarh, who were on a visit to Jangla when the team went to that village. While the team could not meet the leaders of the CPI (Maoist) or the activists of their Sanghams in the villages, we had the benefit of perusing the full text of a note issued by them in the name of 'Sadhana' explaining their side of the story. We also spoke in detail on phone to the S.P of Bijapur police district.

This is a very brief report of the Fact Finding Committee.

Background

The CPI (Maoist) has been active in the old Bastar district (now divided into three districts, namely Kanker, Bastar and Dantewara) for at least 25 years. This is a thickly forested area populated mainly by Gond tribes. It is widely acknowledged that the Maoists have an extensive support base among the tribal people and that the tribals have benefited in many ways from the activity of the Maoists.

However, from June 2005 anti-Maoist activity in the name of Jan Jagran Abhiyan has emerged in the villages, especially in the Bijapur police district of Dantewara district. The Jan Jagran Abhiyan is not an organisation but a movement. It appears to be concentrated in the roadside

villages and is supported by the political parties, especially the Congress party, which has the maximum number of MLAs in the three districts. It consists of not only adivasis but also non-tribals of the roadside villages. The Press has reported that in the Jan Jagran meetings, opposition has been expressed to various policies of the Maoists, namely (1) the ban on collection of tendu leaf in the summer months of this year, (2) the ban on the weekly shanties in the tribal areas, and (3) obstruction to laying of roads, etc.

It has been reported that the Maoists have reacted with intolerance to the Jan Jagran meetings and have assaulted and killed a number of persons, mostly adivasis, for participating in the meetings.

The Killings

We must first say that the news of the killings is true but exaggerated, in some cases highly exaggerated. In particular the news of the massacre of 19th June at Kotrapal in which 13 adivasis are said to have been killed by the Maoists is not true. While the Press has reported a large number of killings off and on, the Jan Jagran Abhiyan leaders whom we met on 16th July at Jangla told us that from the beginning of June 2005 till that date, 7 persons had been killed by the Maoists.

Very briefly, what is happening is that the Maoists are kidnapping a number of people whom they perceive as being active in the Jan Jagran Abhiyan. Every such kidnap is immediately reported as a killing. But while sometimes the abducted person is killed by the Maoists, often he is beaten and released. To take the case of the Kotrapal incident, it is true that on 19th June a gathering of the Jan Jagran at the village was attacked by the armed squads of the Maoists armed with fire-arms and their adivasi supporters armed with bows and arrows. The Jan Jagran people counter-attacked with bows and arrows and escaped. There was a stampede as they turned and ran away. Two adivasis died in this attack. Later, the Maoists abducted 10 persons from the villages of Kotrapal, Bardela and Matwada. This abduction was reported as massacre but nine of them were severely beaten and released while the tenth, a non-tribal by name Bhuvaneshwar Singh Thakur of Jangla who was kidnapped from Kotrapal, was killed. Even the police acknowledge that the 'Kotrapal massacre' is no more than this, but it is they who spread the wrong story in the first place and they have made no effort to correct it.

The Press reports have also not spoken of the retaliation that happened later, wherein the police and Jan Jagran Abhiyan activists attacked Kotrapal the next day and set on fire the houses of four sympathisers of the Maoists and a lot of grain. Such counter-attacks by a combination of Jan Jagran and the police have taken place on more than one occasion. For instance, when the Maoists attacked a public meeting of the Jan Jagran at Kotrapal on 1st July and broke up the meeting, the police who were guarding the meeting along with the Jan Jagran organisers set on fire a number of houses and shot dead two adivasi supporters of the Maoists. This incident was denied by the S.P when we spoke to him but the Jan Jagran people themselves admitted this incident when we spoke to them at the village of Jangla. In conclusion, in the Maoist-Jan Jagran conflict the police are not neutral. They are working hand in glove with the Jan Jagran Abhiyan

and there have been killings and violence by both sides. However, we think there is no doubt that most of the killings are committed by the Maoists.

The Issues

The note released by the Maoists indicates that they see the Jan Jagran Abhiyan as a conspiracy of Congress leaders and non-tribal vested interests with whom the tribal elite is colluding. This is a simplistic picture. From what we could gather, a large number of ordinary adivasis are also participating in the Jan Jagran meetings. The Maoists are reacting with an intolerance that is no different from the intolerance of the State. If they do not learn to distinguish between the opposition of ordinary adivasis to some of their policies and methods of functioning and the opposition of vested interests, whether tribal elite or non-tribal, they will do a lot of harm to the very adivasis who are their social base.

Regarding the three issues listed above, the explanation given by the Maoists is not very convincing.

- 1) In the matter of the allegation that they are opposing the construction of roads, they say in the same breath that they are not opposed to the laying of roads, and that they will oppose the laying of roads if that is for the benefit of multinational and imperialist capital. In an area that is already poor in communications, forcible opposition to the laying of roads can hinder the development of the ordinary people's lives too, and not merely the spread of capitalist interests.
- 2) Regarding the allegation that the Maoists have banned the collection of tendu leaf, the brief facts are as follows. Collection of tendu leaf for contractors is the main source of cash income for adivasis and other poor in forest areas. The increase in the wage for collection of tendu leaf achieved with the help of the Maoists is one of the main benefits the adivasis have got from the Maoist movement. The wage reached the level of Rs 85/- per bundle last year in Chattisgarh. This year, however, the Chattisgarh Government discontinued the practice of giving the collection of tendu leaf on contract and put it in the hands of a Cooperative Society, and reduced the wage to Rs 45/-. This strategy, meant to hit at the Maoists, is most reprehensible, since it cuts the income of the adivasis from tendu leaf collection by about half. It is understandable that the Maoists wanted the tribals to protest against this, but the allegation is that they forced them to go on a total strike against their wish. It appears that this is a major cause of dissatisfaction among the adivasis. The Maoists have denied this and said that it is the Government that is refusing to receive the tendu leaf even where the adivasis have agreed to collect it at the reduced rate. It is difficult to see why the Government would do so. On the other hand, all the people we talked to said that it is this dictum of the Maoists that is the main cause for support to the Jan Jagran Abhiyan this summer.
- 3) Regarding the ban on shanties, while on the one hand we were told that the Maoists have directed that shanties should not be held because the police are using the occasion to gather information and to buy provisions for their patrol parties, the Maoists in their note say that it is

the police who are obstructing the shanties by insisting that tribals should not attend the shanties with their traditional bows and arrows. The true situation is far from clear, though there may be truth in both allegations. What is certain is that in many of the roadside villages shanties are not being held, which is causing immense hardship to the people.

Observations, Suggestions And Demands

1. The Maoists are periodically killing people in the Bijapur forests of Chattisgarh, and the majority of the victims are adivasis. But the numbers reported are exaggerated. Every incident of abduction and assault is being reported as a killing, thereby giving an exaggerated and terrifying picture. In particular the widely publicised Kotrapal massacre never happened. The local police are mainly responsible for this. They should stop this practice and adopt a more responsible attitude. Killings and arson by the police and the Jan Jagran are not being reported at all.
2. The Maoists are reacting to all opposition to their policies and actions with an unjustifiable intolerance. They should make a distinction between the dissatisfaction of ordinary adivasis, and the politics of vested interests, whether of the tribal elite or non-tribals. In particular, they should see that when opposition to them is being organised as a mass movement, opposing mass mobilisation with mass mobilisation armed with bows, arrows and other weapons can lead to the death of innocents. The police should stop abetting one violent group against the other in the name of maintaining order.
3. The Maoists should not use methods of intimidation to force the ordinary adivasis to abide by their political dicta. The Government of Chattisgarh too should not hit at the basic livelihood rights of the adivasis, as in the tendu leaf matter, to disable the Maoists.
4. The methods of violence and counter-violence being used by the two sides has already led to a terror-ridden situation in the area, which is to the detriment of the human rights of the ordinary people. Both sides should realise this and check themselves. With the heavy deployment of paramilitary forces by the Chattisgarh Government and the evident determination of the Maoists to face force with force matters are likely to become worse. We request all Rights organisations in the country to respond to the situation in the manner they deem fit to protect the right to life of the ordinary people.

(C.Bhaskar Rao) (K.Balagopal)

Gen. Secretary, OPDR Gen. Secretary, HRF

Hyderabad, 3rd August 2005.

Appendix-III

Representation submitted by the CPI seeking enquiry at the highest level into atrocities and killings being committed by the anti-naxalite movement called Salwa Judum and police in many villages of Bijapur tehsil of Dakshin Bastar, Dantewada district

Dated: 16-11-2005

To,

The Prime Minister

Sir,

It is represented that the contention being put forward by the State's Chief Minister Dr Raman Singh that the Jan Jagran Movement called Salwa Judum going on in Bijapur tahsil of Dantewada district from June 2005 is a peaceful, non-political movement in which 10,000 rural adivasis are voluntarily participating and that it is a tribal revolt that will put an end to naxalite extremism, is far from the truth.

The truth is that some adivasi youth who have been living for years in villages affected by naxalite and police activity have taken up their traditional weapons and bows and arrows with the idea of resisting the situation and opposed the naxalites. At this juncture, the legislator from Dantewada and leader of Opposition in State Assembly Mahendra Karma has encouraged them and sought to bring them within an organisation to which he has given the name Salwa Judum.

Actually, on two occasions in the past this man has unsuccessfully taken part in anti-naxalite Jan Jagran movement. This time the State government is giving all types of security to those who are participating in Salwa Judum and also giving publicity and police security and bearing all the expenses for the expansion of this movement. The funds allotted for various welfare measures in Bastar are being utilised mostly for this purpose. Insofar as Bijapur tahsil is concerned, the implementation of all other programmes has come to a halt. According to one estimate, nearly Rs 48 crore is being spent on the Salwa Judum and the police force utilised for its protection.

The Chief Minister and the leader of the Opposition have recently visited New Delhi and met the Central Home Minister and requested him that the Centre must allot funds adequately and send sufficient police force for strengthening Salwa Judum and putting an end to the roots of naxalism with their help. And on this, the Centre has given its assurance. However, neither the State government nor the Centre has taken the trouble to find out the truth about Salwa Judum and what effect it could have on the lives of the tribal villagers. The fact is that the CPI has, from the beginning raised questions about the usefulness of Salwa Judum and also expressed doubts about the alleged apolitical nature of the movement and the whole-hearted participation of the adivasis. Many Congress and BJP leaders of the State among whom are to be counted former Chief Minister and present MLA Ajit Jogi, MLA Nanda Kumar Sai, former Central minister Arvind Netam and the office-bearers of the Congress party of Konta and Bijapur in Dantewada district itself, have openly opposed the present form of Salwa Judum.

When the Dantewada district president of CPI made the allegation that brutal atrocities are being perpetuated on unarmed rural adivasis by the police with the assistance of the Salwa Judum and that in the process many adivasis have died, the district SP has tried to push the blame for these incidents on the naxalites. In this manner, ignoring the views of many peoples' representatives, the State government has almost made the Salwa Judum movement in its present form a government programme. The people are not joining Salwa Judum on their own but only because they are caught between the pressure of the naxalites on one side and police repression on the other. Adivasi youth are being given training as special police officers and weapons are being put in their hands with which they are expected to confront the naxalite squads. In this process, in each village a civil war like situation will be created and in the last few months with encounters between the police and the naxalites in Bijapur tehsil, more than a 100 unarmed adivasis have died. In fact, in the process of the events narrated above, the extraordinary powers given to the Scheduled area of Bastar under the Vth Schedule of the Constitution and the special rights given in the Panchayat Raj Act of 1996 to the Gram Sabha and panchayats have been set at naught.

It is the view of the CPI that the armed struggle introduced by the naxalite extremists (presently called CPI Maoist), the obstruction caused by them to the development works in the area and the killing of police, people's representatives and unarmed adivasis, has resulted in the peaceful development works in the area coming to a halt. This obstruction has to be overcome. However, the State cannot be given the license to cause danger to unarmed villagers in the naxalite-affected villages in the name of putting an end to the naxalites. That is what is happening at present. In fact, the CPI feels it is essential to inform you about the barbaric atrocities, the inhuman repression and the many instances of killing taking place in South Bastar in particular Bijapur tahsil upon the villagers by the police force in the name of Salwa Judum. Upon the directions of AB Bardhan, CPI general secretary, Chittaranjan Bakshi, has taken a fact-finding team on 9th and 10th November, 2005 to many villages of Bijapur tehsil and in the process stopped villagers leaving their villages for fear of naxalite repression for the reason that they are part of Salwa Judum. And also we enquired at various camps. Many journalists were also part of the tour along with the fact-finding committee. The details of the findings and the explanation of the fact-finding committee are given below:

In the block office of Bairamgarh, a Salwa Judum camp was being run. As of now, about 2000 villagers are in the camp. They are leading a most inhuman life. In the Bairamgarh camp, under a tent of 5x16 metres, 107 people of village Salda have been living for the past three months. All of them live eat and sleep there. This kind of arrangement has been made for all the people. These people have come after their village has been burnt. Their cows, bullocks, pigs and poultry have all been looted. Their paddy crop has been laid to waste. The duty of the police has ended with gathering all these people at the camp.

The 48 youth of Kotrapal who surrendered themselves have also been housed at the Bairamgarh camp. On October 30, 2005 they were brought from their villages and made to surrender in the presence of Mahendra Karma. The government has assured that naxalites who surrender will be rehabilitated. They have not received any economic support but arrangement has been made to provide them with work. They were making constructions to live in the camp. The timber and

other material necessary for this had to be brought by them from the forest. Upon questioning they said they were never naxalites at all and that they were brought to the camp by force and the drama of surrender was enacted. According to the statement issued by Mahendra Karma about 900 such young naxalites have surrendered till now. When we spoke to the persons staying in the camps and asked them what they wanted, they said they wanted to go back to their own villages but the police will not permit them.

Mr Aitu of village Padum which is 7 km from Bairamgarh says there were more than 200 houses in the village and all of them are in the camp. In the beginning he was given the material to cook food but now that has stopped. The people of Bairamgarh said the responsibility of works such as laying roads has now been taken away from the village panchayat and put in the hands of the government. According to them, all the road works are incomplete. Sukku of Kotrapal who was at the camp in the village of Matwada said that the police came to his village in the month of June and killed 7 persons. Now the police are preventing them from going back to their village saying if they do so the naxalites will kill them. People of this camp are not getting any assistance from the government. They are eating the grain brought by them from the village. There are 100 persons in this camp. The youth go back to the village during daytime and bring back whatever grain they find, whether it is fully ripe or not.

When the CPI fact-finding team reached the village of Mankeli located in the thick jungle, they found that the village has 40 houses. The people whom the team met said that when the force of Salwa Judum came to the village, the CRPF men set fire to the majority of houses. The wife of an adivasi Masa Muriam said a separate hut constructed for the pigs was destroyed and set on fire and the pigs caught and taken away. The other villagers also said that the Salwa Judum fellows looted mahua flowers, goats, pigs and poultry from each house. One of the houses belongs to Lachu. His wife Sukli Kosa said that she was told: 'you people are giving shelter to the naxalites and so nothing will be sold to you in the bazaar.' Her son Tamlu was arrested many months ago by the police, taken to Bairamgarh and she does not know of his whereabouts thereafter. In the same village, the anganwadi building was also set on fire. The people said that the tamarind, mahua and other material stored there were looted. And when we asked, one person said it was the Salwa Judum people who had set them on fire.

In Lohagaon village also, two persons were killed on November 10, 2005. The people from villages to the West of Bailadila mine hills spoke about the loss suffered in their villages. People of Mandbedi said that about a month ago, CRPF men raided a village along with 50 Salwa Judum persons. They stole about 40 kilo of rice from Nanu's house and whoever laid his hands on a pig or a goat or a hen took it away. There are 36 houses in the village Kamad. Salwa Judum persons along with the police came to the village and set four houses on fire. And from the various houses, they took 20 hens, 20 kilo of rice and one pig and cooked and ate it there itself. Out of fear, the villagers ran into the forest. And while leaving, the Salwa Judum fellows set fire to 2.25 quintals of kosra and 40 kilos of grain. In the village Hiril near Kawad, the Salwa Judum fellows committed the maximum atrocities. They set fire to each of the houses and also indulged in killing. We were told this by one Lakshma of Kawad village. The villagers of Gurji said that on September 30, 2005, Salwa Judum fellows came from the side of Bambalur village and killed 6 pigs and 6

hen and ate them there itself. They also took away 30 vessels. They cut down a lemon tree and another tree and broke a bicycle. They took away grain and mahua flowers from each house. About 60 to 70 villagers ran away out of fear and the raiders took away about Rs 10,000 also. People of village Mullur said that in the month of October about 1,000 Salwa Judum fellows along with CRPF men came and took hold of 17 men in the village and beat them severely, took them away and made them part of Salwa Judum. The CRPF caught hold of a man Utsa Sonnu, son of Aithu, cut his throat and threw the body in the street. This is a village of 50 houses. These looters took away the poultry and other animals from the village too.

Palnar is a village of 30 houses where people had hidden the grain. The Salwa Judum fellows set fire to the place where the grain was hidden. This happened in early September 2005. They broke all the vessels and threw them away. They caught hold of 30 persons and one of them by name Sukh Ram, son of Bodi was killed. The village Pidia has 450 houses. It is one of the biggest villages in the area. In this village, the CRPF men along with Salwa Judum came and set fire to 30 houses. A person by name Santu, son of Haitu was killed by the CRPF. Here the looters took away two pigs, 200 poultry and about Rs 10,000. They cooked and ate there itself. The house of the person who was killed and five quintals of grain was burnt. They took away three men along with them

Mr Bhasa of Amdry told the fact-finding team that the Salwa Judum fellows started from Kawadgaon and came to Amdry. They did not burn anything in this village but they took away the poultry and goats. The neighbouring village of Tamady is an old village of 2000 houses. When the Salwa Judum and CRPF men came to that village, they burnt six houses.

From the information given above, it is clear that this is being done only to create enmity between the villagers living in Bijapur tehsil and the naxalites living in the nearby jungles. As these villages are located at some distance from each other, the villagers are helpless in organising themselves to resist these atrocities. This process has been going on since June. The only source of income for these villagers is cultivation or gathering minor forest produce and this entire work is now put an end to. The adivasis are in terrible misery now. This year in the interior villages of Bijapur tahsil, the output of grain has been very meager. The alternatives such as food-for-work, employment guarantee etc is entirely absent in these interior villages.

Our appeal to the Prime Minister is that full protection may be given to the unfortunate tribal residents of the forest villages of Dakshin Bastar from the terror of naxalites and the police repression and the acts of the State government. For this reason, the Centre should constitute a high-level enquiry committee and have the matter enquired in detail. The request of the Chattisgarh State Committee of CPI is that in order to fight naxalism in Bastar, it is necessary to quickly improve the economic and social conditions of the most backward Scheduled Tribe people living in this area and work be provided to the unemployed youth on a war footing. Along with that, in order to liberate the area from naxalite extremists, serious peace talks must be initiated with the CPI Maoist leaders which desire has been expressed by his Excellency the Governor.

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Death, Displacement & Deprivation

The War In Dantewara: A Report



Armed adivasi youth at a Salwa Judum training camp