

Means and Ends

The question of Violence as a means has always been as fascinating as it has been abhorrent. In today's dominant discourse on civil society, all violence tends to be tarred with the same brush – uncivil.

But violence in the face of injustice cannot be wished away. The question is how to subsume it in a political culture that enables the voice of the tyrannized to be heard, yet does not let it turn renegade.

In our preoccupation with civility, we have turned a deaf ear to tyranny and oppression.

Arun Kumar explores the emergence of violence in Bihar. For him 'Violence, no matter in what name it is courted – tactic, expediency or compulsion – blurs the distinction between emancipatory and retrogressive, the Left and the Right.



'The Ultra Left in Bihar began its career by following the violent path already taken by a number of individuals between 1967 and 1971. It picked up the argument of individualised cases of resistance and turned it into a 'party-line', a generalised political wisdom, into a social good the 'inevitability of violence'.

'Not surprisingly, in the Ultra Left's extreme vision there was little space for self-criticism, doubts, ambivalence and thus for dialogue and

democracy itself. Today the Ultra Left, unable to break the vicious circle of violence, is doomed to follow the politics of marginality’.

In a similar vein, Sumantha Bannerjee points out that the ultra left has fossilised its conception of class enemies, and is missing the main threat from high profile national leaders of the Sangh Parivar. More important is the failure to expand their mass base, giving ground to the communal elements in their own backyard.



Violence and Political Culture: Politics of the Ultra Left in Bihar, Arun Kumar, *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol. 38, Nov 22, 2003.



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Violence and Political Culture Politics of the Ultra Left in Bihar

Arun Kumar

I am more and more convinced that true revolutionaries must perceive the revolution, because of its creative and liberating nature, as an act of love ... What indeed, is the deeper motive which moves individuals to become revolutionaries, but the dehumanisation of people? – Paulo Freire

Violence is taken here as a conscious response to difference in order to eliminate it. In this sense, it is illusory because violence can only eliminate the person who differs but not the difference itself. Ideas, having lives of their own, are replaced by ideas alone; a person subscribing to a particular idea is merely a carrier of that idea.

Violence erodes the space for dialogue and it does so owing to its inextricable link with arbitrariness. In this sense, political violence betrays the same dualism



of 'good' and 'evil' and similar obsession with absolute truth that can be historically associated with religions, ... The revolutionary violence, thus, mirrors the norms of 'divine justice', its radical claims notwithstanding. This deep-seated antagonism to difference does not leave much space for democratic norms and values to grow.

The two following arguments are often applied as 'explanations', and at times, as outright 'justifications' for violence. One is about the inevitability of it; the poor and dalits, the

marginalised and subjugated were not given access to democratic fora to raise their concerns. The need to voice their pain and, more importantly, to be heard, therefore, forced them to speak the language of violence. It is a powerful argument and must be taken seriously. In the face of relentless structural violence, whether or not there was an alternative way to conduct politics of transformation is a question that should be addressed with adequate historical sensitivity.

The other issue pertains to what may be called victim-hood, ‘violence was forced on us’, ‘it is the only way one could survive in the given scenario’, etc.

What is interesting about this argument is that it is professed not just by the protagonists of the Ultra Left, but also by the propertied and the powerful upper castes: ‘we are forced to pick up arms to save our land and dignity from the onslaught of the Naxals’, has been a common refrain of the Ranveer Sena supporters, for instance, and their like in the past. Conceptually, it extends even to the Hindutva ideologues, ... Perpetrators of violence under this scheme claim only to be responding to the violence unleashed by the Other. Likewise, when asked to stop killings, they would invariably maintain: ‘ask them to stop first’.

One of the important philosophical sources of such glorification is religious, *brahmanic*, to be precise. Detachment is the key here; ‘*hinsa*’ committed with ‘*nishkam bhav*’ (detached feeling) for ‘*loksangraha*’ (the general good, welfare of the society) is not *hinsa* at all, announces the Song Celestial, *Srimadbhagavat* Gita. Martyrdom becomes the driving force; no one is a criminal in such endeavours, there are only heroes. Religious sanctions of violence, however, go beyond the vision of *loksangraha*.

During anti-colonial struggles, violence attended a new height as a means to national liberation. Even though it was employed in Freedom movements before him, Frantz Fanon, one of the greatest ideologues of ‘emancipatory violence’ by the oppressed, explains its significance:

The violence which has ruled over the ordering of the colonial world, which has ceaselessly drummed the rhythm for the destruction of native social forms and broken up without reserve the systems of reference of the economy, the

customs of dress and external life, that same violence will be claimed and taken over by the native at the moment when, deciding to embody history in his own person, he surges into the forbidden quarters. ... violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect”.

About the peasants in a colonial predicament, Fanon echoed Mao's views - the starving peasant, outside the class system, is the first among the exploited to discover that only violence pays...

Violence and the Ultra Left

Though the first spark of the Naxalite movement appeared in Musahari village of Muzaffarpur district in 1967, it was in Bhojpur district that the movement cemented itself before spreading throughout central Bihar.

What often does not get highlighted is the fact that the poor and dalits began organising themselves, not all under the banner of Naxalite politics, not on the question of land redistribution or payment of minimum wages, but on the question of 'izzat' (dignity). Once they organised themselves in some form, issues of lands and wages were automatically taken up.

This is an important point in order to understand and analyse the Ultra Left and the nature of their violent politics. Even during the early 1970s, when the official line of 'annihilation of the class enemy' reigned supreme, the 'death punishment' was accorded only to those landlords who were perceived as obstacles to the movement.

From 1967 (Musahari in Muzaffarpur) to 1971 (Ekwari in Bhojpur), 'Naxalbari' was not really an organisation or a party or even a front. It was more like a phrase that caught the imagination of tens of thousands of toiling masses; it became an expression of epochal wrath, yet not articulate, but laden with the destructive strength of a storm. It was sporadic, at times even erratic and extremely violent.

What is today referred to as the Ultra Left had no history of organised non-violent struggle. Individuals had revolted and been killed. It was rendered impossible for the individuals to be non-violent in their protest against a systemic repression ritualised by a centuries-old caste system and protected and patronised by all the three legs of the independent Indian state, the executive, the legislature and the judiciary.

That the **Ultra Left picked up the argument of the ‘inevitability of violence’ involved in individualised cases of resistance and turned it into a party-‘line’**, a generalised social wisdom, is invariably missed by the scholars of the subject. Violence which had emerged as a language of politics for the unorganised dalits and poor, became the politics itself under the organised Ultra Left.

The Ultra Left in Bihar began its career not by preparing and leading a non-violent mass movement but by following the violent path already taken by individual heroes; it embraced this currency of political sentiment and proceeded to articulate people’s anguish and frustration by burning copies of the Indian Constitution, blowing away police stations and shouting slogans like, ‘*varg shatruron ka chhe inch chhota karo*’ (behead the class enemy) in order to realise, ‘*lal kile pe lal nishan*’ (Red flag on the Red Fort).



The period of individual annihilation to ‘liberate and turn feudal zones into Red areas’ was short. After the declaration of the emergency, the state moved in swiftly, to reclaim its monopoly over violence and as a result by 1976, the Naxal movement was virtually crushed. This inspired a rethinking by the Ultra Left about their political line.

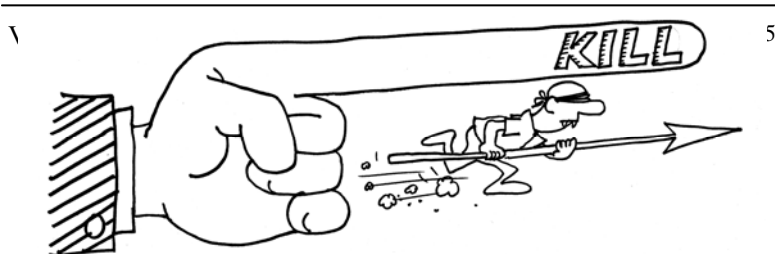
Doubts had begun to creep into many of the factions of the Left. Some seriously began to question the wisdom of leaving out the legislative front altogether. The need for an open mass movement was registered. A number of groups got together in April 1982 to start what came to be known as the Indian People's Front. They decided to show allegiance to the Indian Constitution and its parliamentary process of governance, they abandoned the earlier policy of individual annihilation, violence was downplayed, armed squads of professional 'revolutionaries' were announced to be disbanded. Instead, the focus shifted towards 'arming the masses', as they were the ones with direct stakes in the Revolution.

This could have turned into a historical moment in the annals of the Left movement in Bihar, but it was not to be. Armed squads were continued secretly, violence had now openly become a question of 'tactic' that demanded the rhetoric of disbanding armed squads of 'professional revolutionaries' and, instead, a move to 'arm the masses' themselves.

The wisdom of creating a mass movement while continuing to court violence has proved to be rather politically naive. The IPF experiment was given up also because the leadership sensed that it had little control over the masses as compared to the control over cadres. Dualism in political philosophy and dishonesty in political ethics ensured that the call for an open peaceful mass movement was merely an eyewash and not a clean, genuine political departure from history. With such intellectual and theoretical laziness, with such distrust in the democratisation of politics, with such strong addiction to marginality, they failed to realise that a Manichaeian violence, based on the supposed primeval conflict between light and darkness also presupposes Satan as co-eternal with god.

Violence and Political Culture

Following his faith in anarchism and violence, Bakunin, like Kropotkin and Rudolph Rocker later, had made a candid confession, "it is necessary to abolish completely, in principle and in practice, everything that might be called



political power, for so long as political power exists, there will always be rulers and the ruled, masters and slaves, exploiters and the exploited”.

Influenced by the great ideals of the French Revolution, their conviction in Socialism and Liberalism led them to argue for the liquidation of the state, unlike the communist revolutionaries who wanted the state to be under the dictatorship of the proletariat. The Anarchists had set themselves clearly against any form of political power. The Ultra Left in Bihar has pursued violence to create a particular political order. Predilection for destruction, violence and spontaneity is where the similarity between the two ends.

The commonsensical adage that violence begets violence has come to haunt the political culture of Bihar. Violence has become the reason of the time, as it were. Open democratic political discussion and education of the masses have never really been a strong point of the Left. Ambivalence, difference of opinions, and openness to new ideas are routinely discouraged and this has a theoretical basis in their reluctance to address the question of violence philosophically.

It is not a coincidence that many sections of the Ultra Left today are at sea as to what programme to follow, not only to further the struggle for redistributive justice, but also to keep their cadres together.

The line between a criminal and a militant leftist has begun to disappear. Now we have more extortionists and kidnapers than ever before, many of them masquerading as agents of social change.



To conclude, the vicious circle of violence and destruction has become like an addiction to a drug, we think it is needed for our survival, but which actually slowly but surely kills us.

How else can we explain the Ultra Left's refusal to learn from the phenomenon of '*niji senas*' (private armies)? Many explain the rise and growth of caste-based *senas* as a response of the landed gentry to the violence unleashed by the Naxals in the 1970s. This line of thinking had primarily begun as a propaganda by the landed elite, but over the years after tireless repetition, it has turned into a political wisdom, thanks to the English-speaking intelligentsia.

The truth is that when the Naxals pursued the politics of individual annihilation almost throughout the 1970s, there were no private armies. The Indian state could deploy all its might- legislative, administrative, judicial, and, of course, military- to effectively deal with Naxal violence; its rural allies had a Constitutional cover to thwart class struggles. Since the moment the Ultra Left gave the call for mass mobilisation, we could see caste-based *senas* mushrooming at regular intervals.

Why? Because the state and its social base can deal with a violent polity, but it cannot live with a non-violent mass movement that seeks to alter the status quo. Then the state and its lackeys need anti-Constitutional measures, like, *niji senas*, to crush a mass movement which they openly cannot, as long as they commit themselves, even perfunctorily, to the Constitution.

The Ultra Left refuses to learn that it is not their violence but non-violent mass mobilisation that the state and its allies are afraid of. It fails to see that it is ultimately in the interest of the state that every mass movement turns violent and thus loses its legitimacy to grow.

It does so because it has become a hapless captive of violence, addicted to marginality, as it were. It is only logical that the Ultra Left would spare none, not even their fellow comrades if the latter happened to hold a different opinion or stake a counter-claim over 'their territory', their 'sphere of influence'.

Faced with a powerful and ruthless opposition, armed with the rationality of distributive justice, preoccupied with altering the modes of material production, protagonists of the Left find little time to engage with issues like political culture, ethics, or, morality, let alone politics of spiritual transcendence.

“Justice must be obtained, by any means, here and now”; they often appear in a tearing hurry.

In debates about ethics of struggle or ascertaining propriety of means to avail an end, the revolutionary protagonist often takes the reins with a numbing arrogance. In this regard, **the tenacity of violence is unfailing. It might be embraced as an instrument, but violence has a tendency to substitute politics with itself.** ▶

Naxalites: Time for Introspection

Sumanta Banerjee

By their impetuous acts, they have acquired the reputation of choosing the wrong targets – and missing the real ones. In the present situation in India, who should be their main targets?

Regional satraps like Chandrababu Naidu, Buddhadeb Bhattacharya of West Bengal and Baburam Marandi, ex-chief minister of Jharkhand (all the three have been named by the PWG as targets in the hit-list it has announced through its web site on October 4).

Or the more dangerous, high-profile national leaders of the *Sangh parivar* who are allowed by an indulgent central government to run free in their predatory expeditions that rip apart the Indian poor along communal lines?

When will the leaders of the PWG, MCC and other similar groups realise that it is these elements who pose the real threat to them, since they are steadily hollowing out the potential mass base of these very Naxalite groups? They have already sneaked their way into the tribal base of the Naxalites in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand.

If the leaders of the Naxalite groups ponder over these questions, they will realise that they have been reduced to an insignificant force in the Indian political scenario and lack any decisive power to change the balance of forces in favour of any revolutionary transformation of our society.

They are paying the price for having been obsessed all these years with underground activities and neglecting the task of politicising the wider public sphere of civil society which had been usurped by the Hindu communal forces by whipping up a religious frenzy.

During the last decade of the rise of Hindu communal forces, when these Naxalite groups failed to actively resist the Hindu communal death squads, many among the Muslim victims increasingly gravitated towards Islamic religious terrorist groups. They found that these groups were providing them with the only avenue for protesting – and retaliating. Yet should not the Naxalite groups have been their natural allies? Instead of being allowed to drift into religious terrorism, these Muslim protesters could have been drawn into a secular militant movement led by the PWG, MCC and other Naxalite groups

against the Sangh parivar, as well as their Islamic counterparts, in various parts of India.

This failure to expand their mass base through such actions has condemned the various Naxalite groups to remain confined to isolated pockets in Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Chhattisgarh and Bihar.

The BJP has been able during the same period to spread its tentacles to the south, in traditionally non-communal states like Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala, to the interior villages of a Left-Front ruled West Bengal (from where the VHP recruits 'Ram-bhakts' for its Ayodhya campaign) and even to the tribal areas of the north-east.

Instead of indulging in peevish acts of revenge on a few ministers and politicians, it is about time that the leaders of the various Naxalite factions put their heads together to work out a far-reaching plan of action that would mobilise their followers and rally the people to wage war against the fanatical Hindu fundamentalist forces.

It is these elements who are their 'class enemies' and who today pose the main threat, not only to their politics, but also to the liberal and democratic values nursed by sections of the Indian bourgeoisie, among whom they can find allies who can be brought together in a united front. ►