

Bury My Heart in Bastar: Neoliberal Extractivism, the Oppressive State and the Maoist Revolution in India

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Abstract: *Bastar has become the centre of India's war on adivasis; the aboriginal people who make up about eight per cent of India's population. Why India is waging a war in Bastar can only be understood by situating the war in the context of neoliberal extractivism and its relationship with the Indian capitalist class and its state apparatus. Extractivism is an age-old process that the colonial power used for the expropriation and exploitation of marginalised people and their resources. Although extractive methods and dynamics have changed in the neoliberal age, what remain intact are the ruthless plunder, violence, and the enclosure of the commons. Drawing insights from Nandini Sundar's, *The Burning Forest: India's War in Bastar* (2016), this paper critically examines the motives and methods of the Indian state's war on adivasis, alongside the indomitable resistance of adivasi-Maoists.*

Keywords: Adivasis, the Maoist movement, neoliberal extractivism, the Indian state, armed revolution

This is not a cheerful book, but history has a way of intruding upon the present, and perhaps those who read it will have a clearer understanding of what the American Indian is, by knowing what he was ... The Indians knew that life was equated with the earth and its resources, that America was a paradise, and they could not comprehend why the intruders from the East were determined to destroy all that was Indian as well as America itself.

Dec Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (1970)

Introduction

Fifty years ago, on May 25, 1967, an *adivasi*¹ peasant uprising began in Naxalbari – a small village in the Siliguri sub-division of Darjeeling district, West Bengal – hence the name, the Naxalite movement or the Naxalites. To further develop and sustain the momentum of the movement, the communist revolutionaries officially announced a new party, the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) [CPI (ML)], on 22 April 1969 – Lenin's birth anniversary. Based on its characterisation of Indian society as semi-colonial and semi-feudal, the CPI (ML), rather than taking up the insurrectionist path, followed the

Protracted People's War strategy of the Chinese revolution. The CPI (ML) explicitly declared that its objective was to seize political power through an armed agrarian revolution.

As Charu Mazumdar, the founding General Secretary of the CPI (ML), envisioned, the Naxalite movement spread across the country, sustained for fifty years, and sent tremors through the landscape of Indian politics. Despite many setbacks, the movement has spread to 16 out of 29 Indian states. And, it not only influenced the Indian Left (Chibber 2006) but also intimidated the exploitative, oppressive ruling class, who realised that the ultimate threat to their class rule could *only* come from the Naxalites. With this clarity in mind, the Ex-Prime Minister of India, Manmohan Singh, on several occasions publicly announced that the country's biggest internal security threat comes from the Naxalites (Sundar 2016).

Since its inception, however, the Naxalite movement has undergone a great deal of transformation, having been fragmented into several parties based on differences in strategies and tactics in advancing the revolution. (For a detailed account of the history of the movement, see, Roy 1975; Banerjee 1984; Ray 1988; Venugopal 2013). One among such parties, the CPI (Marxist-Leninist) People's War [CPI (ML) PW] in the erstwhile state of Andhra Pradesh has emerged as a major Naxalite party. At the same time, all revolutionary parties have been attempting to overcome their internal differences in the interest of a common goal. As part of those efforts, in August 1998, the CPI (ML) Party Unity, another Maoist party that had very strong presence in Bihar and parts of Madhya Pradesh, merged with the CPI (ML) PW. In September 2004, the Maoist Communist Centre, which had a strong base in Bihar, merged with the PW party. Together they formed a new unified party, the Communist Party of India (Maoist). Further unification of revolutionary parties occurred in May 2014, when the CPI (ML) Naxalbari merged with the CPI (Maoist) – hereafter I refer to all as the Maoists.

Since the Naxalbari "Spring Thunder" in 1967 (Roy 1975), social scientists, journalists, and writers have published numerous articles and books on the dynamics of revolutionary politics in India. In the last decade itself, more than fifty books have appeared (see, Shah and Jain 2017). Among them, Nandini Sundar's, *The Burning Forest: India's War in Bastar* (2016) stands out for its insight into the Maoist movement. Previously, the majority of the books on the movement were journalistic or literary studies. But, Sundar grounds her book in reality, drawing on people's experiences of numerous incidents, personal encounters and observations. She uses socio-historical sources (court orders, police records, government documents, human rights organisations' reports, the Maoist party official documents), combined with ethnographic field research and critical reflections, to provide a compelling and heart-rending narrative of state violence and the dispossession of adivasis in the undivided

Bastar district (which, in 1999, was divided into three districts: Bastar, Dantewada, and Kanker) of the State of Chhattisgarh.

For the past two decades, Sundar has been a witness to the ongoing process of “the annihilation of a people [i.e., adivasis] and their way of life” in Bastar (Sundar 2016, xv). She has informed the world about the harrowing violence inflicted upon adivasis in Bastar by the Indian state and its vigilante groups. She candidly mentions in her “Preface”: “This book is written because, in the absence of justice, at least the truth must be on record” (Sundar 2016, xv). This paper critically examines and analyses some of key issues that Sundar identified in her book placing them in the broader political context of neoliberal globalisation.

The Maoists and the Adivasis

The Maoist movement in Bastar started with the decision of the erstwhile CPI (ML) PW to develop guerrilla zones to expand its activities into other parts of the country. With that vision, the Maoists drafted an historical document, titled “Perspectives for a Guerrilla Zone,” in 1979. Guided by this stance, in 1980, the PW party sent their first six-member squad to undivided Bastar, a region in Central India, at the time about the size of Kerala state. How did the revolutionaries enter into the lives of adivasis and how did they become a “threat” to the state? Sundar (2106) explains that when the Maoists first arrived they took quite some time to understand adivasi lives and culture. The squad members had worked mostly in the feudal conditions of Telangana before entering Bastar. At the outset, they were able to identify a class enemy. And, it was easy to mobilise people along class lines. But, the class structure in adivasi communities is different. The Maoists found it difficult to use tactics of class struggle that had worked elsewhere among the Indian peasantry (Sundar 2016, 53). As Sundar (2016) describes, the squads conducted numerous village meetings and even surveyed villages to better understand the local class structure. In the initial phase, they put a concerted effort into making the existing government work for the adivasis. They mobilised people to fight for the minimum wage. They ordered teachers and healthcare workers, who take salary but never worked in villages, to serve rural people. They challenged forest officers, revenue officers and police who harassed people or demanded bribes. They fought against the corrupt and dysfunctional system. And, they lived up to their principles by demonstrating commitment to the people (Sundar 2016, 54).

Following the great tradition of *Jana Natya Mandali*, a cultural organisation that propagates the Naxalite politics in lay language through songs and stage performances, the squads used songs to educate adivasis about politics and cooperative development, superstitions, alcohol consumption, and gender equality. Songs became an effective tool of political communication for the squads. Sundar (2016, 54) notes that “villagers would joke with the guerrillas, threatening not to feed them till they sang for their supper. Initially, the

revolutionaries asked only for leftovers, but later people themselves decided they deserved fresh cooked food.” As the squads started working with adivasis, their social relationships strengthened. Adivasis started seeing the revolutionaries as part of their social fabric. Adivasis began to approach the Maoists for help with all kinds of problems from land issues to marital disputes.

Rather than working as “Robin Hoods,” the Maoists mobilised and organised adivasis to fight for their own cause. Since 1995, they have been building a new administrative structure consisting of the revolutionary people’s committees (PRSs) or the *Janathana Sarkar* (Peoples’ Government). As a result of this, the old regressive power structures (such as *pargana majhis*, old administrative units) have gradually disappeared. To protect the Janathana Sarkar and advance the revolution, the Maoists strengthened their “three magic weapons”: The party, the army, and the united front (People’s War 2014). In terms of the army, the People’s Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA) was built with a designated task of fighting the state forces. Adivasi women’s recruitment into the Maoist party is important and has been on the rise. They constitute 40 per cent of the PLGA (Myrdal 2012). In addition to fighting forces, the Maoists developed several mass organisations such as the cultural organisation the *Chetna Natya Manch*; the peasants and workers’ wing the *Dandakaranya Adivasi Kisan Mazdoor Sangathan* (DAKMS); and the women’s organisation the *Krantikari Adivasi Mahila Sangathan* (KAMS). With about one hundred thousand active members, KAMS is the biggest, most active, and dynamic women’s organisation in the entire country (Roy 2011).

In addition to building various organisations for adult members, the Maoists have been mobilising adivasis children into the children’s organisation, the *Krantikari Adivasi Bala Sangathan* (KABS). However, children do not participate in combating activities, but work as “messengers” in the Maoist intelligence network at the ground level. Contrary to the bourgeois media uproar, Sundar (2016, 75) observes, “the children take immense pride in their work.” Not surprisingly, adivasis comprise over 90 per cent of the Maoist rank and file in Chhattisgarh. The Maoists now conduct all their party meetings in adivasis’ language, *Gondi*. In this protracted process of revolution, as Sundar (2016) reports, the fine line between the Maoists and adivasis has eventually disappeared. Gautam Navlakha and Aish Gupta (2009, 23) write: “The people [in Bastar] do not perceive a divide between the two. The claimed disconnect between the Maoists and the people is as unreal as the rift between the people and the State (which is carrying out a savage war for ‘development’) is real.” But, not everyone agrees with the notion that all adivasis are Maoists (Shah 2012).

Social anthropologist Alpa Shah argues that “the Maoists were far from an Adivasi movement but consisted of leaders, cadres and sympathisers from a range of different castes and classes brought together in a political organisation around class struggle which reflected the transforming history of recruitment”

(Shah 2013, 493). Shah argues that adivasis do not necessarily join the Maoist party with the understanding of its politics, but do so based on their subjective interpersonal relationship between adivasis and the Maoists. From a moral economy perspective (see Scott 1976), Shah argues that the driving force for adivasi to join the Maoists is not the objective conditions of their lives, but the “relations of intimacy” between the Maoists and adivasis through kinship, family relationships, and friendship. Furthermore, she suggests, “the Maoist success in developing relations of intimacy is *simultaneously dependent* on the Indian state’s ideology of domination and exploitation ...” (Shah 2013, 499, emphasis added). Moreover, based on her ethnographic research, she points out that the “relations of enmity” (in a similar way as the relations of intimacy) among families and friends also resurface in the Maoist party. She offers the idea of enmity relations to explain why some adivasis go into and come out of the Maoist party. Paradoxically, she suggests that Hindu right-wing organisations also use the relations of intimacy for mobilisation (Shah 2013, 500). Sundar (2013) disagrees: Kinship and family relationships may explain why some individuals join the Maoists, but not hundreds of villages under the conditions of state terror. She suggests that anthropologists should examine and analyse “how the movement originates, is sustained or dissipates under certain conditions” (Sundar 2013, 365). Moreover, echoing what Mao (1968 [1927]) once famously said, “a revolution is not a dinner party or writing an essay,” Sundar reminds Shah that “the Maoists are not a social club, but a political party” (Sundar 2013, 365) who are fighting the cruel state system.

Critiquing Shah’s extrapolative interpretations and absurd explanations of subjective humanity for the growth and sustenance of the Maoist revolution, Sundar (2013, 362) comments: “...one wonder[s] if Shah has understood anything about Maoist ideology or practice, or even the implications of her own fieldwork.” Of course, there is a component of “humaneness” (Shah 2017) in the movement, but that is not based on subjective or intimate relationships. As Azad, the official spokesperson of the Maoist party until he was killed in a fake encounter in June 2010, once mentioned: “In a class society, where the ruling classes fiercely crush the oppressed at every step, real humanity entails fierce hatred for the oppressors. There can be no love without hate; there is no all-encompassing love” (Azad 2010, 8). Thus, “humaneness” or “relations of intimacy” need to be understood within the framework of class struggle. Attributing the sustenance of the revolutionary armed struggle to relations of intimacy is an empty academic exercise. This kind of facile analysis reminds this writer of a Telugu adage, “plucking feathers from the egg.” Moreover, Shah’s (2017) purported binary construction that the leadership belongs to “upper” castes and the cadre belongs to “lower” castes and adivasi is very shallow.

From a socio-cultural perspective, adivasis still identify as adivasis, but, from a political standpoint, they see themselves as Maoists. With the political orientation of the Maoists, adivasis are in the process of a transformation from a

“class in itself” to a “class for itself” (For a detailed account of this transformation, see, Paani 2015). The social construction of adivasis as “innocent” people and apolitical subjects by some commentators is nothing but a cultural determinist anthropological myth. This is a serious attempt to undermine the political agency of adivasis. Some observers assert that adivasis understand what the revolutionary movement entails and what it would bring to them. However, this consciousness is not uniform among adivasi members of the Maoist party (Paani 2015; Myrdal 2012; Navlakha and Gupta 2009). Allegations of the state, some human rights organisations, and the bourgeois media that the Maoists force “innocent” adivasis into their party are not believable. During a month long field trip in the Maoist stronghold, Paani (2015, 73) asked an adivasi about the allegations of the state: “Did the Maoists force you to join them?” The adivasi responded by questioning: “If they brought me in forcefully, then why would I stay here and talk with you now?”

While expanding their party into new areas in Bastar, the Maoists initiated alternative administrative and development systems through the *Janathana Sarkar* (JS). The JS operates through eight departments or governing systems: Financial, defence, agriculture, judicial, education-culture, health, forest protection, and public relations. For example, the agricultural department focuses on land distribution, cooperative agricultural activities, collective building of ponds, seed and grain banks, biodiversity conservation, and farm credit without interest (Sundar 2016; Paani 2015; Myrdal 2012). All JS departments work in a coordinated manner for effective functioning. From past experience with the revolutionary people’s committees in North Telangana, the Maoist party knows that exclusive focus on welfare activities may lead to economism, which, as Lenin ([1902] 1988) strongly cautioned in *What Is To Be Done*, can pose a grave threat to the revolutionary movement (Paani 2015). Keeping this in view, the Maoist party has been constantly educating JS members to transcend economic motives. Even in the sphere of culture and gender relations, rather than imposing their “modernist” principles on adivasis, the Maoists educate and dialogue with the people to reconsider and disavow some oppressive “traditional” customs and superstitions (Sundar 2016, 81).

Overall, the Maoist movement has transformed the lives of adivasis. Drawing from her 26 years of research experience in the region, Sundar (2016, 86), unequivocally states:

If there is one major change the Maoists have introduced, it is to give people a new confidence. Citizens of the Maoist state now look in the eye and shake hands, compared to the evasive glance with which adivasis traditionally greeted strangers. And it is thanks to the Maoists that the rest of India now knows of the existence and incredible bravery of the people of Bastar.

While acknowledging the enormous contribution of the Maoist movement to adivasis, Sundar also poses critical questions about revolutionary violence. But, it is not difficult for someone like Sundar to find answers for such questions. In

fact, her elaborate account of the repressive nature of the state and its crude methods of terror as presented throughout her book offers some indisputable answers.

Why India is waging a war in Bastar can only be understood by situating the war in the context of the changing dynamics of neoliberal imperialism and its relationship with the Indian capitalist class and its state apparatus. Disappointingly, she does not provide a conceptual framework that evaluates this grounded reality against the larger context of neoliberal globalisation. In what follows, I attempt to place Sundar's rich analytical work within a critical analysis of neoliberalism and anti-systemic movements. Before I move on further, however, it is important to review Marxist understandings of the state and its role in class struggle. The Marxian theory of the state also helps us better understand the character of the Indian state and why the Maoists are so determined to overthrow the bourgeois state.

The Marxian Theory of the State

Marx intended to but never developed a comprehensive theory of the state (Harvey 1978; Miliband 1969; Jessop 1982). His views on the state remain scattered throughout his work. In his early journalistic writings in the 1840s, he only presented a general understanding of the state, reflecting on the Napoleon Bonaparte *coup d'état* and the experiences of the Paris Commune. In 1843, in his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Marx ([1843] 2009) challenged the Hegelian notion of the state as the "realized ethical idea or ethical spirit" (Hegel [1821] 2001, 194). For Hegel, the state is an embodiment of reason and it always strives to transcend subjective self-consciousness and to achieve an objective universal consciousness. Hegel recognises civil society (private material interests including private property) and the state (an abstract, ideal universality) as two separate entities in a modern society. He also acknowledges the continuing estrangement of the individual from the state. However, he believes that the state as an ethical entity rises above civil society and works for the "substantive freedom" of all classes and abolishes the estrangement (Hegel [1821] 2001, 257). He argues that the separation between the state and civil society could be rationally and harmoniously reconciled through the rule of universal bureaucracy and an elected legislative system. For him, the modern state attains the highest moral authority or supreme will to look after all societal affairs without any specific personal or class interests (Femia 1993).

Marx praises Hegel for his recognition of the separation of the state and civil society and the alienation of the individual from the state, but he considers Hegel's solution (i.e., the process of peaceful reconciliation between the state and civil society) deluded (Femia 1993). In his *Critique*, Marx ([1843] 2009) argues that, in reality, the state never works for the universal interests of society, but only the interests of the proprietary class. Furthermore, he argues that the antagonism between the state and civil society could only be resolved in "true

democracy” – what he later called “communism.” For Marx, true democracy is a social formation in which the particular (the concrete, individual) and the universal (an abstract, state) will be united, and thereby the process of estrangement will be eliminated (Marx [1843] 2009).

In his essay, *On the Jewish Question* ([1844] 1975), Marx provided a lucid exposition of his initial theoretical formulation. In that essay, he argues that “political emancipation” (that is, political equality through constitutional democracy) can be achieved within the bourgeois socio-political system. However, although political emancipation is a step forward in the overall historical development of societal progress, it will not allow society to advance toward true democracy. In his later writings [in “*The Class Struggles in France*” ([1850] 2010a) and “*The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*” ([1852] 1972)], Marx made this very clear: Mere political emancipation is not enough to transcend or eliminate the alienation of individual from the state. For example, Louis Bonaparte, who captured state power by *coup d’état*, claimed to represent the peasantry, but, disappointingly, he never stood for their interests (Miliband 1969). Thus, for Marx, the building of a qualitatively new socio-political system is possible only through “human emancipation.” But, as he further insists, it can only be achieved by destroying the bourgeois social order and abolishing private property, and by introducing the principles of social cooperation and true democracy. Marx clearly announced: “All revolutions [in the past] perfected this [state] machine instead of smashing it” (Marx [1852] 1972, 105). He identifies the proletariat as a social transformative agent who could destroy the bourgeois social order through a socialist revolution (Avineri 1964; Jessop 1982).

Further extending the class theory of the state, in the *Communist Manifesto* (1848), Marx and Engels explicitly make it clear the relationship between the state and the bourgeoisie: “The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie” (Marx and Engel [1848] 2008, 36). This view that the modern state is an instrument in the hands of bourgeoisie also appears in Engel’s later works; particularly, and more forcefully, in “*The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*” (Engels [1884] 1988).

In “*The Civil War in France*” ([1871] 2010b), Marx categorically states that the structure and function of the bourgeois state always tries to guarantee a social order that facilitates the reproduction of the capitalist system. In this context, he contends that it is not possible to transform the capitalist state into a progressive one, because it will not compromise on its main purpose, that is, the reproduction and accumulation of capital. Thus, any revolutionary project should aim at smashing the repressive bourgeois state.

Lenin in *The State and Revolution* ([1917] 1943) further extends the Marxist theory of the state. Seeing the state as an organ of class domination and oppression, Lenin cogently declares that any revisionist propaganda for

“peaceful development of democracy” could only yield a “slap in the face of the common opportunist prejudices and philistine illusions...” (Lenin [1917] 1943, 22). Thus, for Lenin, “complete democracy” (similar to what Marx called, “true democracy”) cannot be achieved without resolving class antagonism. He asserts that the gigantic task could only be achieved by a “violent revolution,” not by bourgeois parliamentary politics, because the essence of the latter is “to decide once every few years which member of the ruling class is to repress and oppress the people through parliament” (Lenin [1917] 1943, 40). For Lenin, parliaments in any bourgeois democracy are nothing but “talking shops” with a specific aim of “fooling the ‘common people’” (Lenin [1917] 1943, 40). Following Marx and Engels, Lenin clearly mentions that, without destroying the state machinery, it is *impossible* to build democracy for the people. With this understanding, the Naxalites repudiated the revisionist path of parliamentary politics by claiming that:

Nothing can be more illusory than to think of capturing state power from the bourgeois rulers without smashing their state machine with which they suppress the toiling masses. There is no shortcut to smash this instrument of class rule. The general line of Indian revolutionaries is that of Naxalbari, which is guided by the Thought of Mao Tsetung (Liberation, May 1968. Quoted in Banerjee 1984, 98).

To further enrich the Marxist theory of the state, in the 1960s, Marxists and neo-Marxists debated how the state and the capitalist system are related in any bourgeois society. In that hostile debate, two approaches emerged: the Instrumentalist and the Structuralist approaches. Following classical Marxism, Instrumentalists see the state as “an interconnected network of territorial, institutional, and ideological phenomena” (Barrow 1993, 24) that is maintained, governed, and administered by the state apparatus. In their view, the modern state apparatus consists of many sub-systems: Governmental, administrative, judicial, coercive, and ideological. The capitalist class uses the state apparatus to create favourable conditions (i.e., structural, institutional and legal mechanisms) for the benefit of its own class, and to dominate and oppress subordinate classes (Barrow 1993; Sweezy 1942). When the state is in the hands of the capitalist class, as per Instrumentalists, the state would not have any autonomy, and it cannot act as an effective “neutral” arbiter (Miliband 1969). However, the capitalist class does not necessarily always use force to bring subordinate classes under its domination. Through the state, it can also use economic (for example, limited welfare programmes) as well as ideological (i.e., educational system, religious institutions, the mass media) systems to build public consensus for its domination (Therborn 1980).

In bourgeois democracy, the strategy of consent building and the functioning of the state apparatus (whose various entities appear to be independent; for example, judiciary and education) create a *grand illusion* that the state works as “autonomous” and “neutral” arbiter, defending the interests of all classes within a country’s territory (Harvey 1978). These hegemonic strategies help construct legitimacy for the ruling class in the *state of the capitalists*,

i.e., the state in the hands of the capitalist class. Furthermore, these strategies create a commonsensical notion among the general public that the bourgeoisie way of thinking is normal and a way forward for societal progress. This normalisation process helps support the “legalized violence of the state” (Harvey 1978, 180).

Contrary to Instrumentalists, neo-Marxian Structuralists see separation among various components (such as economic, political and ideological) of the capitalist system. According to them, internal dynamics among these structural components influence the nature of social formation. They see the state as an institution with “relative autonomy” and agency of intervention (Poulantzas 1973). Structuralists argue that it does not matter who takes charge of the state, it always works for the reproduction and accumulation of capital; hence their preoccupation with the *state of capital*.

Major differences between these two approaches have emerged. Based on a deterministic reading of Marx’s base-superstructure analysis of society, Instrumentalists place the state as part of the base (the economic system) and talk about “capital power.” Whereas Structuralists see the state, political systems and ideological mechanisms as part of the superstructure and emphasise “state power.” However, these two approaches are not mutually exclusive, rather they complement each other. But, now, the question remains: do these approaches have any relevance for our understanding of state-society relations in the age of neoliberal globalisation?

Marxist geographer David Harvey sees “neo-liberalism as creative destruction” (Harvey 2006) and a system of “accumulation by dispossession,” which is a new form of primitive accumulation (Harvey 2003; 2006). He emphasises that the mechanisms of the processes of primitive accumulation and accumulation by dispossession are more or less similar. But, in the age of neoliberal globalisation, the old methods of dispossession have been modified, and a few new ones invented in order “to play even stronger role now than in the past” (Harvey 2003, 147). The new mechanisms have been created “in the name of neo-liberal orthodoxy” under the tutelage of international financial institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization (Harvey 2003, 148). Harvey identifies four major mechanisms of accumulation by dispossession: privatisation, financialisation, the management and manipulation of crises, and state redistributions (Harvey 2003, 2006). These new mechanisms have intensified and broadened the scope of the accumulation of capital.

As Marxist historian Ellen Wood argues in the age of neoliberal imperialism, although capital, technology and commodities can flow across space and time without any barriers; they certainly need political “stability” and market “predictability” in the places where they finally reach (Woods 2003, 17). A conceivable apparatus or institution that could effectively provide such an environment is the nation-state. The nation-state provides legal and institutional

frameworks, keeps social order, protects the private property system, manages financial transactions, enters into international agreements and treaties, acts as a financial crisis manager or saviour, and so on (Wood 2003, 17; Harvey 2003; 2006). Therefore, in today's globalised economy, the nation-state is more relevant than ever before to provide all these "daily regularities or the conditions of accumulation that capital needs" (Wood 2003, 20).

In this global politico-economic context, imperial forces use economic as well as extra-economic power (i.e. military power) to indirectly govern the new avenues of investment and dispossession through a comprador bourgeois class and a subordinate state system (Harvey 2003, 139; 2006). For example, the subordinate state system in the global South, which is semi-colonial or neo-colonial, facilitates the extraction of cheap human and extra-human resources in favour of global monopoly capital. In this process, the state acts as an interventionist, mostly using brutal force to grab resources if there is any resistance from the people. As well, it provides a conducive regulatory regime by removing all legal and institutional hurdles (Kumbamu 2010). Scholars call resource extraction in the age of neoliberalism (or in some contexts post-neoliberalism), by different names: "Extractivist imperialism" (Veltmeyer 2016, 2016a; Petras and Veltmeyer 2014), "neoliberal extractivism" (Fast 2014), and "neo-extractivism" (Acosta 2013; Burchardt and Dietz 2014; North and Grinspun 2014). In each conceptualisation, the state plays an active role in creating conditions for the endless accumulation of capital in which exclusion (or dispossession) and extraction operate dialectically. As Fast (2014, 34) argues, "exclusion must often precede extraction." This is exactly what has been happening in India, and in Bastar in particular. For the Indian state, resource extraction is the main goal in Bastar. To achieve that, the state is dispossessing adivasis from their environment.

Extractive Capital and the Oppressive State

Like any other adivasi areas in the country, the Indian state neglected Bastar in terms of infrastructure development, health, education, and basic welfare programmes (Sundar 2016). Not surprisingly, neither the British colonial administration nor the Indian government ever developed proper topographic maps of the region. Nevertheless, the Indian state and transnational corporations (TNCs) identified abundant mineral reserves in Bastar. The mineral reserves include: coal, iron ore, bauxite, platinum, corundum, dolomite, limestone, diamonds, and manganese. In addition, Bastar has a variety of timber and non-timber forest products (NTFP) such as tamarind, Mahua flowers and seeds, sal seeds, and gum. Natural resources contribute about 10 per cent of Net State Domestic Product in Chhattisgarh (See, Lahiri-Dutt 2016; Nagaraj and Motiram 2017). To tap into this mineral wealth, the transnationals, as well as big Indian corporations have signed hundreds of Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with the government of Chhattisgarh. Between 2000

and 2011, the Government signed 121 MoUs with a projected investment of \$31.9 billion (Grover 2017). To execute these MoUs and extract resources, the state has been attempting to remove the adivasis from their land. But, adivasis are not alone; the Maoists are with them. Moreover, adivasis are ready to resist the “MoUists” with a revived spirit of the 1910 *Bhumkal* (meaning, earthquake) rebellion against the colonial British rule (Roy 2011). In the context of today’s corporate land grabbing, adivasi and the Maoists rally under their slogan “*Jal, jangal, jameen*” (adivasi rights over water, forest, and land), *izzat* (self-respect) and *adhikar* (political power) (Roy 2011, Paani 2015).

To clampdown on the adivasi-supported Maoist movement, the state is using various notorious counter-revolutionary strategies practiced earlier, such as the creation of “New Villages” and “Strategic Hamlets” in Malaysia and Vietnam, to eliminate the communists. The main idea behind these strategies is to evict people from their land, natural environment and social fabric, and relocate them to a new locality where they find themselves as strangers. Through this process of alienation, the state wanted to control the people and undermine their support to the revolutionaries. Metaphorically speaking, this is nothing but a strategy of “separating the ‘fish’ from the ‘sea’ in which they ‘swam’” (Weil 2011, 6).

Sundar (2016, 17) draws parallels between imperial “strategic hamletting” in Vietnam and Malaysia and “the mass burning and grouping of villages” in Bastar. The state first implemented this strategy in 1990-91, creating and acting through a vigilante group called, *Jan Jagran Abhiyan* (JJA). The name suggests that the aim of this group is to raise people’s awareness. In contrast, the JJA forced people to rally against the Maoists, killed many adivasis who they suspected as supporters of the Maoists, raped women, and burned their houses. Although the infamous Congress leader, Mahendra Karma, led the JJA, in its initial phase Hindu fundamentalist organisations and the Communist Party of India (CPI) also lent support to such atrocities. The state gave complete support, financially and otherwise to the wanton destruction of adivasi lives.

In 2005, the JJA changed its name to become, *Salwa Judum* (which means, in Gondi, “Purification Hunt”). The main aim of this group has been to dismantle the base of the Maoists, the *sanghams* (local organisations). They forced adivasis to join the Salwa Judum, and killed whoever resisted. The Salwa Judum continued its rampage, looting adivasi houses, burning villages, and raping women. Whereas the JJA destroyed only targeted houses in a village, the Salwa Judum burnt down the entire intended village. To aid the Salwa Judum “hunting,” the state deployed paramilitary forces, border security forces, and local police forces to intensify its attack on the Maoists. Fearing brutalities, many adivasis fled to the neighbouring states of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. Others are forced to live in the “relief” camps that are nothing but concentration camps. Brutal tortures and inhuman conditions have become part of everyday camp life. Raping women and keeping them as sex slaves became

routine practices. Sundar (2016, 124) quotes a fact-finding report in which an adivasi woman describes what the Salwa Judum and security forces said to her after a gang-rape: “You are a Naxalite and we have taught you a lesson today.” Women were raped irrespective of their age. Wives raped in front of their husbands, mothers raped in front of their children, and children raped in front of their parents. With impunity, the so-called relief camps have in effect been turned into brutal death camps and “rape centers” (People’s March 2007). Sundar (2016, 125) writes: “Fortunately, adivasi society, unlike the rest of ‘civilized’ India, does not stigmatize women who have been raped, and many have subsequently got married.” While the state mercenaries are scorching everything that adivasis own, Hindu fundamentalist organisations such as the Gayatri Parivar and Christian organisations have been trying to influence and convert them into their respective religions.

In addition to promoting the criminal gang, the Salwa Judum, the state also created an auxiliary force called the Special Police Officers (SPO) recruiting local adivasi and non-adivasi youth, as well as former Maoists into the SPO force. There are no set criteria (including minimum age, education, or training requirement) to be a SPO, only willingness to assist paramilitary forces as well as the Salwa Judum in their counter-revolutionary activities (Asian Center for Human Rights 2013). The state government pays their salaries, but never makes them accountable for their heinous crimes. As Sundar (2016, 197) points out, wherever SPOs and the Salwa Judum go to adivasi villages, they do not come back without burning houses, raping and/or killing women. This notoriety has become normalised in Bastar. There is no punishment and no one is made accountable for these crimes. To deter this unconstitutional system, civil rights activists and scholars, including Sundar, approached the Supreme Court in 2007. In 2011, in its judgment, the Supreme Court’s bench consisting of Justice B. Sudershan Reddy and Justice Surinder Singh Nijjar (recalling Joseph Conrad’s “*Heart of Darkness*,” which offers a scathing critique of colonialism in Africa) stated:

Through the course of these proceedings, as a hazy picture of events and circumstances in some districts of Chhattisgarh emerged, we could not but arrive at the conclusion that the respondents were seeking to put us on a course of constitutional actions whereby we would also have to exclaim, at the end of it all: ‘the horror, the horror.’ (The Supreme Court of India. *Nandini Sundar and Others Vs. State of Chhattisgarh*, Writ Petition (Civil) No 250 of 2017, 4)

In their judgment, the Supreme Court ordered the Government of Chhattisgarh to disband the SPO force and cease all support to other anti-constitutional activities aimed at destroying the Maoist movement. But, as Sundar (2016) describes, within a month, instead of implementing the court order, the Government passed the Chhattisgarh Auxiliary Armed Police Force Ordinance, and regularised SPOs by changing their name and weapon status. Moreover, the government equipped them with more sophisticated weapons, and even increased their salaries. Again in 2013, the government changed the name of the

force to the District Reserve Guard. Whatever the avatar of the beast, it is still doing the same thing in the same old cruel way. All these undeterred criminal activities clearly demonstrate that there is no constitutional punitive system in place. The state legalised terror took reign over Chhattisgarh.

In addition to these auxiliary forces, the Indian state, in 2009, launched a nation-wide coordinated attack on the Maoists, “Operation Green Hunt” using the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), the Border Security Forces (BSF), the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), and specialised police forces such as Greyhounds, along with the local police. The main goal of this operation is to hunt, kill, and enclose the land. While implementing the third phase of Operation Green Hunt, in 2017, the Indian government also announced a low intensity warfare (LIW) strategy, abbreviated as SAMADHAN: **S**mart leadership, **A**ggressive strategy, **M**otivation and training, **A**ctionable intelligence, **D**ashboard based key performance indicators, **H**arnessing technology, **A**ction plan for each theatre, and **N**o access to financing. In addition to all these efforts, the Indian state also brought in new draconian laws to terrorise Maoist sympathisers, journalists, civil rights activists, researchers, and the general public. While aggressively moving forward on the military front, the state is not delivering basic welfare programmes. As Sundar (2016) explains, prisons are overcrowding mostly with adivasis under trial. School buildings are being occupied by paramilitary and auxiliary police forces. Healthcare facilities are nowhere in sight. Other state welfare programmes are implemented to the bare minimum extent.

Exposing the large-scale blatant atrocities of the state, Sundar also criticises the Maoists for their violent actions. Placing the state and the Maoists on the same plane, she (Sundar 2016, 288) argues:

One might well turn around and note that what the adivasis of Bastar had received for their armed struggle was permanent occupation by CRPF camps, and thousands of deaths, rapes and arrests. On the other hand, it is true that had they not resisted, the area would have been occupied by mines, steel plants and dams at a faster rate. Either way, it is a question of the pace and intensity with which occupation takes place, not whether it will happen.

Sundar (2016, 290) further goes on to say: “The choices we are offered instead are the impossible dream of armed revolution or the soul-numbing acceptance of armed repression.” This “neutral” position of equating state violence with revolutionary violence is not new. For instance, human rights activist Balagopal spoke and wrote about this aspect on numerous occasions (see, for example, Balagopal 2006). But, the question that still remains is how to change the violent nature of the state and the exploitative and extractive nature of capital, which have been trying to alienate (if not annihilate) adivasi from their *jal, jangal and jameen*. On the question of the violence of the Maoists, Azad (2010, 6), categorically states:

The violence of the Maoists, which is preceded and provoked by the violence of the oppressors, is not really the main issue; justice is. If Naxalite violence is to be discussed, it should be in the context of violence pervading every aspect of our system. If not seen in this framework, one falls prey to the abstract bourgeois concept that ‘violence breeds violence,’ without understanding the structural causes of violence”.

Sundar criticises the Maoists’ election boycott tactic, which she thinks, sometimes “appears opportunistic” (Sundar 2016, 242). She finds that the Maoists are “unable to appreciate even the symbolic importance of elections as a moment of mobilization for popular demands or for the expression of popular anger, leave alone the necessity of working both inside and outside elected bodies” (Sundar 2016, 240). Again, this is not a new proposition put forward by Indian intellectuals (See, for example, Banerjee 2009). In response to these appeals or criticisms, the Maoists have clarified many times their longstanding position on parliamentary democracy and electoral politics. The Maoist spokesperson, Azad, clearly elucidates: “The parliament is no democratic institution (as in countries that have been through a democratic revolution – a bourgeois democracy) but has been instituted on the existing highly autocratic state and semi-feudal structures as a ruse to dupe the masses” (Azad 2010, 2). He further clarifies that their party, in the context of the “futility of the very system of parliamentary democracy and the drama of elections” use the tactic of election boycott “to enhance the awareness of the people regarding the futility and irrelevance of elections to their lives and in solving their basic problem” (Azad 2010, 46).

After presenting the chronicle of state violence in Bastar, Sundar (2016) does not want to end her book with a gloomy picture. Thus, in the book’s epilogue, she paints a dreamy image of a new Bastar, in which “a new constitution gave all people the right to decide how they wanted their resources to be used” (Sundar 2016, 349). But, the question that still remains unanswered is: How does this “impossible” dream come true without overthrowing the existing oppressive state?

Conclusion

In the context of Bastar, a political-economic concept that offers us appropriate analytical tools to fathom the underlying factors of the war is *neoliberal extractivism*. Extractivism is an age-old process that the colonial power used for the expropriation and exploitation of marginalised people and their resources. However, this process of extractivism has various manifestations across (geopolitical as well as social) space and time. Although extractive methods and dynamics have changed in the neoliberal age (Acosta 2013), what remain intact are the ruthless plunder, violence, and the enclosure of the commons. Without having the benefit of this broader perspective, Sundar’s emphasis on inhuman methods of state violence may generate some sympathy for adivasis from liberal advocates, but it does not provide a comprehensive understanding of why India is waging a war in Bastar.

In the age of neoliberalism, the state has been rolling back from its responsibility on the public welfare front, but, at the same time, it has been aggressively moving forward to protect the interests of the capitalist class. In essence, the state's role has reduced to, what Louis Althusser alluded, a "permanent watchman, night and day" to see that "class struggle – that is, exploitation – is *not abolished, but, rather, preserved, mainlined, and reinforced*, for the benefit, naturally, of the dominant class" (Althusser 2006, 125, emphasis original). In other words, the bourgeois state uses all of its "legitimised" mechanisms to provide feasible conditions for capital to grow, reproduce, and accumulate further. In this "parliamentary form of robbery," as Marx (1990, 885) has said in his discussion about the enclosure of the commons, "the history of their [the dispossessed] expropriation is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire" (Marx 1990, 875).

To conclude, in Bastar, when adivasis attempt to claim ownership over their *jal, jangal, jameen*; the state deploys terror forces to dispossess them from their territory. When adivasis resist extractive capital, they are branded "extremists." When adivasis exhibit strong resilience, they are tortured more. When adivasi women stand for *izzat, adhikar*, and gender equality, they are raped and killed. When civil rights activists support adivasis, their voice is brutally stifled. In these inhuman conditions, as Sundar (2016, xv) laments, "it requires superhuman effort for them to merely survive." These horrors remind us of Native Americans' predicament as described in Dee Brown's *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (1970). However, adivasis in Bastar are still standing tall on their hills, as if echoing the chant of the Sioux (native Americans of the Black Hills in South Dakota, who fought against U.S. expansionism and extractivism):

The Black Hills is my land and I love it
And whoever interferes
Will hear this gun. (Gilbert 1968, 43. quoted in Brown 2009, 316)

Unlike Native Americans, however, adivasis in Bastar are with the Maoists, who are armed with Marxism, Leninism, and Maoism. And they became a major force in the Indian revolution. Thus, rather than being bogged down in a quagmire of pessimism, it is important to live with a hope that "the impossible will take a little while," (Loeb 2004) but one day, it will become a reality.

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Notes

¹ *Adivasis* are commonly/officially recognised as the tribal people or the first dwellers of India, although they use their own vernacular terms such as Gond, Koya to identify themselves.

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