Chapter III

Chhattisgarh: A Resource Abundant but Turbulent Land

Introduction:

“Chhattisgarh Nahi Dekha Toh Kya Dekha” (You have not seen anything if not for Chhattisgarh) read many hoardings on the highways in Chhattisgarh. Thick forest on either side of the scarcely populated roads is a common site when travelling in this State. With natural beauty at its best and warmth in the hearts of local tribal people, makes this tag-line hold much relevance. With a long cherished dream and demand of the tribal population of the region, Chhattisgarh was carved out of Madhya Pradesh in November 2000 and gained the status of the 26th state of India. Chhattisgarh is one of the richest states of India in terms of its natural and mineral resources. Large swaths of forests cover the State and provide means of livelihood and subsistence to its inhabitants. Located in the heart of India, Chhattisgarh is home to a large number of nature worshipping tribal population who have always maintained the ecological balance of the region. However, in the contemporary times, Chhattisgarh has become infamous for being a turbulent land. The on-going State- Maoists conflict has become its characterising feature for the State.

The present chapter is an attempt to closely look at Chhattisgarh and highlight the present day situations prevailing in the State. The first section tries to trace the historical trajectory of the State, highlighting how the tribal of this region have always been rebellious and resistant to exploitation of any kind either by the Indian rulers or the Colonial rule. However, exploitation in the region continued post-Independence as well, leading to continued discontentment amongst the tribal population. This time they were mobilised by a new set of rebels called the Maoists who emerged as their protectors and saviours in the region. Taking from here, the second section tries to analyse why and how did the Maoists gained inroads in the Dandakaranya region of central India, which is the present day hotbed of Maoist activities. Although, Dandakaranya covers the states of Maharashtra, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh but Chhattisgarh covers its maximum area and is thus, the most sensitive and turbulent States in terms of conflict in today’s time.
The third section highlights Chhattisgarh as the emerging centre of this on-going State-Maoist conflict, with a special focus on one of its most sensitive district of the State, namely, Dantewada. Dantewada is also a resource abundant land inhabited by one of the poorest and backward people in the State. This section tries to explore the reasons for this ironical situation alongwith highlighting the counter insurgency campaign called the Salwa Judum that was launched in Dantewada bringing the district into limelight. It highlights the political- economy of the Salwa Judum and its aftermath which is worse being felt in the district of Dantewada even today. The section further highlights the role of State in Chhattisgarh in terms its nature and response to the conflict (during the times of Salwa Judum). Lastly this section focuses briefly on the children in Dantewada. Children, being the focus of the present study, their situational analysis in Dantewada is brought out, highlighting how one needs to pay attention to this hitherto ignored population of this conflict hit zone.

1. The Historicity of Chhattisgarh:

Looking back in the ancient times, this region was known as Dakshin Kosala (South Kosala) colony of Kosala Kingdom (It is believed that Lord Rama’s mother Kausalya was from Kosala). The name Chhattisgarh was popularised during the Maratha period and was first used officially in the year 1795. However, there are different versions available in history regarding the origin of the name Chhattisgarh. According to a British Chronicler, J. B. Beglar, the real name is 'Chhattis- ghar' (thirty six houses) and not Chhattisgarh. It is believed that ages ago thirty six families of leather workers’ emigrated southwards from Jarasandha Kingdom and settled here and hence, the name ‘Chattis- ghar’. Another common belief is that Chhattisgarh derives its name from the presence of thirty six forts in the region. Some believe that the name Chhattisgarh has been corrupted from Chedigarh that derives its name from its first dynasty called Chedi (Kalchuri dynasty).

Chhattisgarh holds a prominent position in Hindu mythology as well. It is believed that Lord Ram alongwith his wife Sita and younger brother Laxman stayed in the forests of Chhattisgarh (Dandakaranya) during their vanawaas (exile into the forest). Dandakaranya roughly translates from Sanskrit to ‘The Jungle of Punishment’ (jungle {aranya} and punishment {dand/}). It was home to many deadly creatures, demons and exiled persons. During the period of their exile, Lord Ram, Sita and Laxman had to
cross it too. They faced much resistance from demons. Ravana’s sister Shurpakha tried to woo both, Rama and Laxman in Dandakaranya. Hence, it was in this land of Dandak forest that the foundation of Sita’s abduction and Ramayana was laid.

Many dynasties came and ruled the people of the region, like Kalchuri, Mughals, Chalukya etc. The Marathas and Pindaris are also known to have attacked, ruled and plundered the region. Mostly inhabited by the tribal population, the State of Chhattisgarh has been rebellious and resistant. The tribal have been fighting for their identity, entitlements and rights over forests and other natural resources for a very long time. The revolts by the tribal can be traced back starting from the 18th century and the subsequent years. It would be interesting and important to highlight some of the major tribal revolts of the region.

1.1. Tracing the History of the Rebellious and Resistant State

As stated above, the history of Chhattisgarh has been that of rebellion and resistance. Chhattisgarh has witnessed several uprisings, revolts and rebellions starting from 18th century through the 19th century to a few decades of 20th century. However, it can also be stated that the rebellion continued post-Independence too, in the form of the extremist rebellion carried out by rebels interchangeably called ‘Naxals’, ‘Naxalites’ or ‘Maoists’. The present day rebellion is against the Indian State. However, before venturing into Maoist movement in Chhattisgarh let us have a brief look at the various revolts and rebellions that erupted on the land of Chhattisgarh. Geographically locating these numerous rebellions, it can be stated that they did not concentrate in a specific region. Some had a triggering effect, some were local in nature and others took time to brew. However, one characteristic that cut across all the rebellions is the focus on assertion of traditional inalienable rights of the tribal on the land and natural resources of the region (Bhatt and Bhargava 2006: 21).

The mobilisation of the tribal was mostly around their traditional culture and their way of life. The tribal way of life has always been distinct, in terms of their food, clothing, tradition, customs and cultures etc. hence, they always considered any foreign intrusion as alien in nature. The essence of all the rebellion in the region was resistance against the alien form of governance, administrative system, political and socio-economic order that was mostly imposed by the invaders and then followed by the
independent Indian State as well. Some of the major rebellions are briefly stated as under⁶ (drawn from ibid; Shukla 1992):

- a. Halba Rebellion (1774-79)
- b. Paralkot Rebellion (1825)
- c. Tarapur Rebellion (1842-54)
- d. Maria Rebellion (1842-63)
- e. First Freedom Struggle (1856-57)
- f. Koi Revolt (1859)
- g. Muria Rebellion (1876)
- h. Bhumkal (1910)

a. **Halba Rebellion (1974-79):** Halba rebellion has been one of the most important rebellion in the history of Chhattisgarh. It led to the collapse of Chalukya dynasty which in turn paved the way for the Marathas and then the British into the region. The rebellion was initiated by the Governor of Dongar, Ajmer Singh with an intention to establish Dongar Kingdom. People from Halba tribe and Halba soldiers supported the rebellion. However, the major reason for the rebellion was economic in nature as the region had suffered a long severe famine that had affected mostly the people who had little cultivable land. What further precipitated the rebellion was the constant fear created on the tribal by the Marathas and East India Company. The rebellion was crushed by the army of Bastar that was supported by the Marathas and British. There was massacre of Halba tribesmen and thus, defeat of the Halba army. In 1818 Chhattisgarh came under the British rule. The intrusion of British was resisted strongly by the tribal of Bastar.

b. **Paralkot Rebellion (1825):** The Paralkot rebellion represented the resentment felt by the Abujhmarias (inhabitants of Abujhmad region of Chhattisgarh) against the invasion of foreign rule of the British and Marathas in the region. An Abujhmaria called Gend Singh led the revolt and was widely supported by the Abujhmarias. One of the major aims of the rebellion was to free the people from the clutches of loot, plunder and exploitation. It was believed that the identity of Abujhmarias was being threatened and challenged by the Marathas and British. The rebellion also

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⁶Some information on rebellions and revolts also retrieved from [http://www.mapsofindia.com/chhattisgarh/history.html](http://www.mapsofindia.com/chhattisgarh/history.html)
opposed against the levy imposed on them by the Maratha rulers. This rebellion was to uproot the foreign rule and re-establish the freedom of Bastar.

c. **Tarapur Rebellion (1842-54):** The rebellion of Tarapur was again a rebel against the Anglo-Maratha’s invasion into the local tribal culture and tampering with their traditional social, economic and political organization. It all started against the levying of taxes by the Anglo-Maratha rule. Hitherto, the concept of coercive taxation was alien to the tribal and hence, they resisted. It is believed that a local *Diwan* became the symbol of oppression and had to bear the brunt of the tribal anger.

d. **Maria Rebellion (1842-63):** The Maria rebellion took place in Dantewada in Chhattisgarh and lasted over a span of twenty years. It was a defensive rebellion that the Maria tribal people launched against the Anglo-Maratha rule to preserve their practice of human sacrifice. Although, it is often stated that it was an inhuman rebellion as it stood in support of human sacrifice, but the tribal were fighting to preserve their culture and traditional practices. The Anglo-Marathas had started entering the temples of the tribal, especially the *Danteshwari* temple, which according to the innocent beliefs of the tribal people polluted the sacred atmosphere of the temple. Revolting against the invaders was the last resort at their disposal hence, they revolted.

e. **First Freedom Struggle (1856-57):** The tribal of Bastar rose against the British rule in 1857 in the First War of Independence under the leadership of Dhruvarao who belonged to the Maria tribe called *Dorlaon*. He was well supported by his tribesmen. They carried out their military operations mostly from the hills. One of the most important was the battle of Chintalnaar (now in Dantewada) in 1856. The Maria Chief Dhruvarao alongwith his three thousand followers stood at the narrow and steep hill range. Britishers reported that the Marias offered a most determined resistance and fought with desperation. However, a lot many Marias were sent to prison later, alongwith Dhruvarao who was later killed. Following this, the Gondsalso challenged the British in several battles in 1858. In 1859 a very important rebellion came up in South Bastar.
f. **Koi Revolt (1859):** Koi revolt started in South Bastar where the tribal resisted against the decision of the British to give contracts for cutting forests to the contractors from Hyderabad. This was majorly against the cutting of *Sal* trees. The people from the *Zamindari* who were involved in cutting trees were called Koi, hence the name Koi revolt. The contractors who were allowed to cut trees were exploitative towards the tribal of this region. The locals decided to revolt against the cutting of trees and exploitation by the contractors. It was a very strong revolt where the Kois were always armed and were working with ‘one head cut off for cutting of one tree’. However, the British used coercive methods to suppress the tribal population. The revolt was a loud and clear assertion by the tribal for their forest and inalienable rights over their resources.

g. **Muria Rebellion (1876):** Muria rebellion is considered to be a landmark rebellion in the history of Bastar and India’s struggle for freedom too. In the year 1867, Gopinath Kapardas was appointed as the *Diwan* of the Bastar state. He was infamous for his exploitation of the tribal population. Tribal from not only Bastar but other regions too demanded the King to remove him, but the King did not concede to these demands. The atrocities continued but the tribal had reached their threshold. Finally on March 2, 1876 thousands of raging Muria tribal people enclosed Jagdalpur, the abode of the King. The Muria people besieged the King and blocked all the ways of exit. The King somehow managed to inform the British forces who then came to his rescue and crushed the rebellion. However, the Muria rebellion continued to encourage the tribal of the region to raise the voice against any kind of injustice and exploitation faced by them.

h. **Bhumkal (1910):** The Bhumkal of 1910 was an organised challenge by the hill tribes in Bastar. The foundation of the rebellion was the tribal reaction to the feudal and colonial exploitation of the British and the anxiety of people to maintain their distinct way of life. Sundar (2007: 132) states that the term *bhumkal* was significant for in ‘everyday usage refers to the social solidarity of the members of a clan that binds them to each other and to their specific *bhum* (earth)’. Gunda Dhur, a local adivasis, was the leader of the rebellion. The rebellion started out of a few circumstances that emerged during that time in Bastar. One of the major reasons was the special relationship shared between the King and the local *adivasis*. With
the Britishers coming in there was reduction of Kings and this stirred fear amongst the adivasis. For the adivasis who worshipped the King as an incarnation of God started believing that the occurrence of epidemics and draughts were a result of degradation of the King. Adding on to this was the reservation of large areas as State forest. Demarcation of forests as State’s property made the tribal feel that their inalienable rights over the forest has been usurped, hence, they revolted.

It can be stated that with such a dynamic history, the assimilation of this tradition of protest and rebellion by the tribal is critical in the attempt to study Chhattisgarh and its people and for evolving a vibrant and inclusive Chhattisgarh ethos. Cutting across the history of revolts in Chhattisgarh, it can also be stated that forests have been the centre of political and economic conflict ever since. However, interestingly these revolts also led to emergence of strong tribal identity. However, what further aggravated the rebellion in the region, especially after post- independence was State’s recognition to the social, political and cultural rights of the tribal and recognising the distinctive nature of tribal society but not following it in spirits. No substantial changes were observed after many years of independence too.

Guha (2007) argues that the first two decades after independence went away peacefully because the tribal had a hope that the government would live upto its words and promises of providing equal opportunities of development. These guarantees, as Prasad (2010) states, were ‘not backed by the recognition of their legitimate rights over production and natural resources leading to destruction of the productive base of the tribal economy through the process of intensification of agriculture and industrialisation’. But gradually, the tribal started realizing that the fruits of development were not being evenly distributed and the real gains were going into the pockets of non-tribal, politicians, private contractors and forest officials, and that the brunt of development was being solely faced by them. State enjoyed its monopoly over the forests and natural resources in this region and this led to more and more alienation of the tribal leading to major discontentment against the State.

This discontentment and vacuum created by State monopoly over resources and alienation of the tribal of the region was targeted by the Maoists. It is argued that the Maoists are ‘not outsiders or middle class romanticists of 1960s’ (Navlakha 2009: 23) standing against the might of the State but are insiders who have emerged from within
the tribal society itself. But they are the underclass who has been able to mobilise against the exploitative and repressive policies of the State that led to tribal dispossession and alienation. However, one argues that the these claims about State’s repression are not made in vain as tribal have hitherto been facing exploitation and development led alienation, and instead of making them partner in economic development, the State continued to exploit them further. Amidst all this, the Maoists are continuously engaged in the process of mobilising people and undermining the authority of the Indian State and establishing a parallel form of government here. It is believed that it is due to this reason that a localised uprising in a small village of Naxalbari has now spread its influence in twelve states in India covering around one twenty five districts in the present times (Government of India 2008: 3).

Focussing on the process of underdevelopment in tribal regions, the Maoists have made their strong presence felt in the central Indian tribal belt for over four decades now and continue to get mass support from the tribal population. It is believed that they have enjoyed this mass support out of their contribution towards the protection of poor tribal from exploitation and oppression and hence, ‘people do profess respect for them and they are often considered more trustworthy than representatives of State that was a face of oppression’ (Balagopal 2006a; Gupta 2010).

However, after more than six decades of independence and over four decades of Maoists uprising, the ground reality in the tribal areas has not changed much. State continues to enjoy its monopoly over the resources with big industrial houses coming in as new exploitative actors. The Maoists, on the other hand, are still expanding their areas of operation. As stated above, they now have a stronghold in the tribal belt of India that majorly comes under the Dandakaranya region. The following section attempts to trace the socio-economic and political reasons that led to Maoists gaining inroads into Dandakaranya (which majorly covers the state of present day Chhattisgarh) and exploring the history of how and why the Maoists still continue to have a stronghold in the region.

2. Gaining Inroads in Dandakaranya:

*Dandakaranya (see Appendix I, Map 1)*, as the map depicts, is the thickly forested region of central India with the Abuhamad Hills in the West and Eastern Ghats in the
East. It is considered to be the stronghold of Maoist activities. Dandakaranya spreads to around one lakh square kilometres and incorporates parts of the States of Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. But it is the Chhattisgarh that covers its maximum surface area. Dandakaranya covers the southern districts of Bastar, Dantewada, Narayanpur, Kanker, Bijapur and Sukma in Chhattisgarh. Major rivers like Mahanadi and Godavari and their tributaries make this region highly fertile. Sal forest covers more than half of the stretch. Abujhmad hills are known to be the present day hotbed of Maoist activities. These hills are thickly forested and stretch across forty thousand square kilometres in Chhattisgarh’s remote south. Interestingly, it is often stated that the last revenue mapping of Abujhmad was done more than four hundred years ago, during the Mughal emperor, Akbar (Pandita and Mishra 2010).

It is perceived that the Maoists strategically chose Dandakaranya as their base for it offers a variety of advantages. After facing a setback in Andhra Pradesh, the Maoists wanted to build an army and so needed a base for it. Dandakaranya was to be that base, and so ‘first squads were sent into reconnoitre the area and begin the process of building the guerrilla zone’ (Roy 2010). The densely forested area covers various districts of the above mentioned states making it easier for the Maoists to manoeuvre across the State borders without coming out of the forest. However, the major reason for the expansion of Maoist activities in this region is the rudimentary presence of State in some areas while being completely absent in others. It is in this ‘blank state’ as Mukherjee (2010: 18) calls it, that the ‘Maoists decided to inscribe Charu Mazumdar’s vision that were subscribed to Mao’s vision that in a semi-feudal, semi- colonial condition, a society can be transformed by a protracted, primarily peasant, war to seize state power’ (Outlook 2010).

The reason why the tribal population of this region has been facing development led alienation and marginalisation is also because of the abundant richness it possesses in terms of minerals and natural wealth. The political economy of the region, thus, comes into play. The region is rich in forest and mineral resources but, even after Independence, development activities have, at best, been skeletal or mostly market- oriented and not people- centric. The tribal population living in this region depend on

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7 This argument was also validated by the government officials of district Narayanpur in Chhattisgarh during the pilot study undertaken in May 2012 and later by government officials of Dantewada and Sukma during fieldwork between November 2012 to May 2013.
forest for their livelihood and sustainability. The primary source of income of the inhabitants is by selling the forest produce. But with the market oriented policies coming into play, the inhabitants have been alienated from their own land. Policies introduced by independent Indian State have also been exploitative in nature and have led to more restrictions on the tribal people of this region to use the natural resources.

However, the prevailing scenario at the time was such that on one hand the State managed the conservation part of the forests and on the other it handed over the management of timber to private contractors. This led to emergence of a large number of middlemen who were a link between the contractors and the forest depots. These forest depots not only collected timber but also other forest produce like tendu *patta*. Arguing in this context, Prasad (2010) states that this not only led to a serious impact on the biodiversity of the region, but also affected the tribal accessibility to forests, which by now became highly limited and controlled. As a consequence of this, there was land alienation to the tribal population and they were deprived of forest produce making them dependent on the state welfare.

The situation became worse for the tribal with the introduction of sectoral reforms in the 1980s wherein the private donor agencies were allowed to enter into various sectors of the economy. The forests of central India were no exception and got impacted by these reforms. Under the forest sector reform project, ‘agencies like the Ford Foundation and World Bank argued that the major reason behind institutional failures in management of these regions is the long period of State capitalism and that this had directly led to poverty and degradation of the natural habitat’ (Prasad 2010). So these agencies advocated strongly for withdrawal of State from the forestry sector. This meant privatization of the forests and the markets were hence, opened up for the multinationals and big Indian business firms.

In Chhattisgarh, for example, in order to facilitate the access of these multinationals and traders, the highways were modernized in Bastar (the Southern administrative Division of the State). However, on the other side, the conditions of the roads and public transport in the villages remained the same and therefore the collectors of the forest produce, i.e. the tribal people were denied access to the markets leading to their dependence on small traders and middle men to buy their produce and sell it in the market. These ‘middlemen were hence the only link between the tribal, industrial houses
and local market’ (Prasad 2005 as cited in Prasad 2010). This gradually led to the alienation and livelihood dispossession of the tribal from their own land and resources which in turn led to the growing influence of Maoists in the area who stood up to safeguard the interests of the tribal population from this vicious cycle of exploitation.

By now the Maoists had started gaining a stronghold in the region. It was around 1980s only when the People’s War Group (PWG) started gaining inroads into Dandakaranya. Bastar region was most suited for the purpose for its typical geo-political situation and socio-economic conditions and hence, found a prominent place in the Maoist road map (Kujur 2006). There are different numbers given to ascertain the strength of Maoists who first entered Dandakaranya. It is believed that they came in small groups- two squads (Navlakha 2010) and seven squads (Roy 2010). It was not a very difficult task for the Maoists to get entry into this region as there was enough scope for them to strike hard at the vacuum created by underdevelopment, marginalisation and alienation of the local adivasis.

The Maoists initially took up cases of exploitation that included, non-payment of wages, exploitation by forest officials and policemen, teacher absenteeism etc. They further worked towards the issue of remunerative prices for minor forest produce with the local contractors. The focus at that time lay specifically on the tendu patta which was the major source of income for the tribal people. They started taking up particular cases of exploitation like non-payment of wages, demand of bribes by police and forest officials etc. Mukherjee (2010) states that the ‘Maoists secured the confidence and trust of the adivasis of this region and then went about organising themselves in order to fight for the rights of these adivasis, their land, forest produce’. The Maoists were successful in making mass base for themselves wherein they enjoyed massive local support. Between the years of 1983-87, the Maoists started targeting the local agrarian structure and the class conflict that existed within the tribal society. They started targeting the village headmen, the sarpanch. Land distribution was carried out by them at a large scale at that time.

However, this led to creation of friction amongst many factions within the tribal community. Gradually, people organised themselves and resisted the Maoists at a very micro level for e.g. village samiti (village level groups) were created by the local villagers to guard their villages against the Maoists. The dispossession of the village
headmen and land owning individuals and their resentment and resistance against the Maoists was well targeted and strategically manipulated by the State government. It led to the formation of an anti-Maoist movement known as Jan Jagran Abhiyan in the 1990s that began in west Bastar and gradually spread to further South (Sundar 2011). At the same time, on the other hand, villagers were often arrested for harbouring the Maoists (Patel 1986: 18). However, despite of high rewards on individual Maoist leaders, villagers did not speak against the Maoists. People were safeguarding the Maoists. As Sundar (2006a: 14) states, this could also be out of fear of Maoist vengeance but it was undoubtedly out of the support they had from the local villagers.

The Maoists responded strongly to the Jan Jagran Abhiyan and by early 90s re-established their village level organizations (Sundar 2011). In the mid 1990s two mass organizations were formed: the Dandakaranya Adivasi Kisan Mazdoor Sangathana (DAKMS) which was a peasant-workers’ union and the Krantikari Mahila Adivasi Sangathana (KMAS) which was a revolutionary women’s union. Under the aegis of these organisations, the Maoists made a number of demands that would give the tribal a greater control and ownership of their land, water and forest resources. The earliest issues taken up by these organizations primarily focussed on oppression and exploitation by the outsiders, mainly the revenue and forest department officials, police, money lenders and middlemen. They resisted against levying of fines and demanding illegal payments by the forest officials on the collection of forest produce by the local people.

They further mobilised the locals demanding higher rates in non-timber forest products (NFTPs) like tamarind and bamboos, but especially tendu patta. The tendu leaves collection rates were negotiated between the Maoists and the contractors. The sangham member (village level party workers) would speak on behalf of the villagers and even called strikes if their demands for a raised price were not met. Monthly or fortnightly meetings were called by the sangham members to discuss such issues that had a direct impact on the local adivasis. Infact, it is believed that the main reason for the Maoists gaining popularity in Chhattisgarh and other areas have been the protection they provided to the forest dwellers for cultivation of reserved forests, increased rates for tendu collection and for putting an end to the oppressive domination of the headman and patwaris (Balagopal 2006a).
The DAKMS organised a five year long strike during the tendu leaves season and finally in 1999 they were successful in getting Rs. 115 per hundred bundles from that of Rs. 17 in the year 1984 for the tribal who collected these leaves and sold to the contractors. The Maoists demanded that the selling and buying of the produce should be done from a point that was convenient for the tribal collectors of forest produce. Prasad (2010) interestingly analyses how this act of the Maoists did show that they were not against the entry of market and private players in this region, but they identified State as the primary source of exploitation and marginalisation of the tribal of the region and therefore, supporting the market actors would ensure a symbolic absence of State in the region.

However, it is believed that apart for fixing up prices for tendu patta, the major outcome of Maoists presence in this region has been the redistribution of land and grains, reclamation of land from the forests etc. Sundar (2006{a}) states how the Maoists set aside common land to be collectively cultivated by the villagers and a part of the yield were kept aside to be used by the Maoists so that they do not burden the individual households for food etc. Land was given to poor farmers on easy loan terms and sometimes for free too. On the other hand, the KAMS were said to take up issues related to women’s exploitation, bigamy, forced marriages and their involvement in socio-political decision making in the village. Between the time span of 1992 and 2005, the ‘party expanded fairly steadily, carried out distribution of land and other developmental work like that of creating grain banks, build ponds, and other basic medical work in villages’ (Sundar 2011: 59).

However, many scholars and commentators have acknowledged the achievements of the Maoists in the region. Achieving higher agricultural wages, confiscation and redistribution of surplus land, elimination of the stronghold of landlords, moneylenders and contractors, protection of the locals from harassment by the police and forest officials, heightening political consciousness and empowering poor have been acknowledged (Balagopal 2006{b}); Banerjee 1980; Bhatia 2005). Having spent some time with the Maoists, activists and scholars have come up with their descriptions about the positive impact that the Maoists have been able to bring in the region. For e.g. Navlakha (2010) and Roy (2010) have stated separately how Maoists have organised the tribal to construct water harvesting structures, small dams, ponds and encouraged them to learn proper cultivation techniques to yield more produce. Maoists taught the peasants
modern methods of farming and there have been attempts to introduce hybrid seeds, multi-crop and shifting cultivation. They also introduced the bare foot doctors to help the tribal with their medical problems.

The Maoists’ literature has highlighted voluminously about the development work undertaken by them in the area. For e.g. The New People’s Power (NPP 2000) in Dandakaranya had brought out figures of the development activities undertaken by the Maoists, ranging from ‘establishing clinics, schools, village libraries, constructing tanks, distribution of lacs of fish seedlings, planting saplings, setting up of rice mills, cooperative paddy banks and agricultural cooperatives in over two hundred villages’. NPP also highlighted its own analysis of how the tribal of this region have been strategically kept into a state of backwardness and poverty. It states that the tribal in Dandakaranya have faced a three-pronged attack by the ruling class in order to keep them in a perpetual state of poverty and backwardness. First, by keeping them in a state of extreme backwardness and by maintaining a primitive socio-economic system with a very low level of productivity. Second, through ruthless exploitation by landlords, traders, moneylenders and government officials. Third, by the imperialist-comprador bureaucrat capitalist combine, who, in order to rob the region of its rich natural resources, have displaced thousands, polluted rivers, cut their forests and reduced the tribal to a slave-like existence (People’s March 2000). The third point highlighted here throws light on an important phenomenon. The penetration of big capital houses and industries led to an uneven development in the region. State, instead of being the protector of the rights and entitlements of its own people has gone ahead and allowed big multinationals to set up their work in this region, devastating the ecological and economic balance of millions of adivasis.

The commercialisation and corporatization of forest and mineral resources have reduced the indigenous communities’ access to the natural resources. It is hence, believed that control of land by richer non-tribal elements from outside are the significant factors of the unrest (Subramaniam 2010). However, a report on development challenges in extremist areas has also stated how other factors alongwith poverty and alienation have made the condition of these tribal areas more deplorable. Factors like ‘absence of self-governance, forest policy, land related issues, multifaceted forms of exploitation, cultural humiliation and political marginalisation, land alienation, forced evictions from land, displacement, failure to implement protective regulations in
Scheduled Areas, absence of credit mechanism leading to dependence on money lenders and consequent loss of land and often even violence by the State functionaries’ (Government of India 2008: 10) have all added up to the unrest. This political vacuum has provided enough space to the Maoists to extend their influence in the fringes of the forest areas.

However, the Maoists have faced severe criticism too on various fronts. By the year 2001, the PWG had set up the People’s Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA) and they declared the entire tribal forest region constituting of Dandakaranya, extending from Chhattisgarh into Maharashtra, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh as Liberated Guerrilla Zone where the Maoists run a parallel government of their own known as the Janata Sarkar (People’s Government). They totally administer the area under their control. Talking in the context of the forests of Dantewada as liberated zones Balagopal (2006a) states that the Maoists have been successful in creating a liberated zone here but they are now primarily focussing on maintaining their dominance and control in the region. The need to establish and secure their authority, influence and control, they are not only focusing on protecting their armed squads from the security forces of the State but also on securing the obedience of people living in the area. Acquisition of surplus land from large holdings and their redistribution amongst the landless and poor has brought severe criticism to them, especially from the local tribal population (this fact was also categorically highlighted by a large number of people during fieldwork too). This led to creation of a large population unhappy with the Maoists.

With the sangham members taking over the complete charge of the area, the role of sarpanch (headman) is downsized. People are still not allowed to take up employment under any State sponsored scheme like MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act). Construction of roads, tanks etc. under the scheme are not allowed to take off in the area. Hence, in this way people loose limited remunerative opportunities also. Maoists are also severely criticised for blowing up school buildings in the villages. With limited education opportunities available to children in these remote tribal areas, blasting of school buildings leave them with no hope for a better future. On the other hand, the Maoists are mostly criticised for their current modus operandi wherein they have been involved in the brutal killings of informers, security personnel and their family members by them (see Balagopal 2006{b}; Bhatia 2006; Sundar 2006{a}; United Nations General Assembly Security
Critically looking at the development work claimed to have been undertaken by the Maoists, Mukherjee (2010) and Navlakha (2010) have stated that the Maoists ‘could have done better on wages, agriculture, health and educational front’. Although the Maoists have been successful in fixing higher wages for the tribal who collect tendu leaves but by merely surpassing the highly exploitative wages of the state government, the Maoists cannot claim to have qualified and established what they call as an ‘alternative model of development’ wherein development does not alienate but integrates the people. Other scholars have also stated how these achievements brought by the mass organisations of the Maoists also brought along with them high human costs. It has been coupled with increased military involvement by the Maoists themselves and also police repression for the same. (Balagopal 2006b; Bhatia 2006).

Maoist have also been much criticised for their strategy of boycotting elections. They are often blamed for having adopted violent measures against the most undefended and weak links in the electoral system (EPW 2009{b}), these include the government servants who are usually put on election duty, security constables guarding the polling booths, destroying bridges and roads in remote villages- in order to create terror in the minds of the people and prevent them to cast their votes. Bhatia (2006) argues that use of arms result in massive casualties of the poor tribal people and this, ironically, leads to a situation where ‘this movement that promises liberation can actually end up making people less free’. They glorify killings of security forces and with great pride put the list of their annihilation and attacks on police station especially during the retaliation week (Sundar 2006{a}: 3). The *modus operandi* followed by the Maoists of resorting to violence in any circumstance to challenge the State has come under scrutiny. It is believed that the Maoist armed struggle has now reached an advanced stage after the naxalbari phase (Subramaniam 2010: 24) and they have become the biggest adversaries of the Indian state, aided by a collapse of lower-level governance in vast areas of the country.

However, it can be argued that at any given period of time, it is the State that holds the ultimate responsibility of its people. In case of the tribal belt of Dandakaranya, instead of being the harbinger of any kind of meaningful and participatory development,
the Indian State since independence has been basically ‘predatory in the experience of the indigenous people’ (Sagar 2006: 3177). The State has exploited and marginalised the tribal, violated their rights at whim and robbed them not just of resources but of their very human dignity. Earlier it was the colonial State that exploited; today it is the post-colonial State, which in the name of national development and larger public good has pursued almost the same path as was adopted during the colonial period. The development benefits are yet to reach the tribal who are only being alienated in this process. State and its symbols have long been invisible in this region: functional schools, availability and accessibility to basic amenities like health services, police stations, law and order etc. do not exist. Adding on, the symbols of democracy appear to be fading rapidly: village councils are nearly defunct, politicians and administrators are conspicuous by their absence, elections have poor turnouts amid rebel calls for boycotts (Pandita and Mishra 2010: 4).

Amidst this, all that the tribal are left with is to witness and experience violent confrontation in their daily lives. It is they who have been bearing the brunt of not only the exploitative State and its policies, the Maoist reprisal but also the larger conflict. The current prevalent situation in Dandakaranya has brought the tribal life at a stand-still from where there is no further development in their lives, but they have adversely being leading a guarded and restrictive life. Out of all the states that comprise of the Dandakaranya region, Chhattisgarh has often been referred to as the current centre of this conflict. The following section gives a brief overview of Chhattisgarh and how it has emerged as one of the most turbulent states in the present times.

3. Chhattisgarh: The Emerging Epicentre of State- Maoist conflict

Chhattisgarh (see Appendix I, Map 2), was carved out of Madhya Pradesh on 1st November, 2000 and was proclaimed an adivasi homeland. With one-third of tribal population, Chhattisgarh is the state with the largest tribal population after the North East (according to the Census 2011, a total of around thirty one of the population in Chhattisgarh is tribal). There has been a clear acceptance around the socio-cultural distinctiveness of the state of Chhattisgarh. This distinctiveness was however, coupled with relative deprivation and marginalisation. This region and its inhabitants had been suffering a ‘systematic neglect’ from rest of the mother State, Madhya Pradesh (Kumar 2002: 3705). A sense of relative deprivation also prevailed in the region and people felt
that a separate state was an imperative for development to take place in the region. Hence, people of Chhattisgarh looked at the creation of Prithak Chhattisgarh (separate Chhattisgarh) as giving expression to their distinct identity. However, with the carving out of the new state, *adivasis* development was being looked at with great expectations but, the plight of the *adivasis* has not changed much since then and there are a variety of reasons for it.

Chhattisgarh, being a rich State in terms of its forest and natural resources has attracted much attention of the State and private players. It has been observed that after 1990s, and especially after the formation of the new state in the year 2000, there have been concentrated efforts for industrialisation and taking advantage of the rich mineral resource of the region. Mining interests became more prominent behind accentuating conflict and a source of injustice. But what has repeatedly and strikingly come out is the marginalisation of the tribal and their exclusion from the development process. This kind of development can be said to have a ‘neo-liberal character’, as David Harvey points it to be ‘redistributive rather than generative’ (Harvey 2007). This leads to transfer of assets and channel of wealth and income either from the mass of the population towards the upper classes or from vulnerable to richer countries. In the present context, there is massive transfer of wealth (land, forest, mineral and natural resources) from the native tribal to private contractors and big business houses. Roy (2001) has argued that this process has entailed a transfer of productive public assets (includes natural resources like earth, forest, water, air) from the State to private companies. These are ‘the assets that the state holds in trust for the people it represent and to snatch these away and sell them as stock to private companies is a process of barbaric dispossession on a scale that has no parallel in history’. This process of privatization of natural resources such as land, water and forest has made the tribal disposed and vulnerable.

Most of the development projects have come up in the tribal inhabited areas of Chhattisgarh (due to its proximity to vast tracts of land and natural resources) but the concomitant benefits are mostly out of the reach of the locals. Commenting on these development projects, Sundar (2006) states that ‘people who are rooting for these projects most strongly are the non-tribal settled in urban centres like Jagdalpur and Kanker (big towns of Chhattisgarh), traders who had come with little have grown richer on the profits of minor forest produce, illegal tin smelting, illicit felling, etc.’
Amidst this interplay of politics and economics, Chhattisgarh has become infamous for prevalence of violent confrontations between the State and the Maoists followed by massive displacement and vulnerability of its people. The Annual Reports on Internal Security brought out by the Ministry of Home Affairs\textsuperscript{8} has been reporting Chhattisgarh as the most sensitive State in terms of incidences of violence and hence has been referred to as the epicentre of the conflict. As stated earlier in the chapter, since the Maoists started establishing their base in this region, Bastar continued to be their central hub. The Bastar division covers the south of Chhattisgarh and is the hot bed of Maoists activities. During the year 2000, with the newly formed state of Chhattisgarh, Bastar was divided into three revenue districts, namely, Bastar, Dantewada and Kanker. In the year 2007, there was further carving of new districts from these existing ones, namely, Narayanpur from Bastar district and Sukma and Bijapur from Dantewada district. The southern most districts of Dantewada, Narayanpur, Sukma and Bijapur are considered to be the most sensitive in terms of presence of Maoists and incidences of violence. People of these districts have been worst hit by violence and displacement.

These districts were carved out with an intention to develop the region and its people. The attempt to put them under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution has been unsuccessful to a large extent and the tribal population continues to remain in the clutches of backwardness, underdevelopment and marginalisation. As Subramanian (2006: 311) states that the tribal development policies and programmes introduced by the government of India and implemented by the state level bureaucracy have failed to reach their benefits to the tribal people since the funds and benefits are appropriated by non-tribal interests. With this gap between what is to be delivered and what actually is coupled with high levels of exploitation and marginalisation in this resource rich region of Chhattisgarh, the Maoists have been able to enjoy an easy entry and mass support. Dantewada district has been the hub of intertwined effects of State domination, Maoist activities and large scale displacement of tribal people. The following section throws some light on the district of Dantewada.

\textsuperscript{8} Annual Reports on Internal Security can be retrieved from http://www.mha.nic.in/AnnualReports
3.1. ‘Dakshin Bastar’ Dantewada: The Turbulent Land

Dantewada, also known as Dakshin Bastar \(^9\) (South Bastar), is a small district located in the south of Chhattisgarh, sharing its borders with Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Orissa. With a population of around 5,33,638 (according to the Census 2011 \(^10\)), it is the third least populated districts of Chhattisgarh after Narayanpur and Bijapur (these two districts were carved out of Dantewada in the year 2007). Dantewada is a tribal dominated district with around 77% of the total population belonging to the Scheduled Tribe (STs) followed by an approximate of 3% Scheduled Castes (SCs) and rest belonging to the Other Backward Classes (OBCs). The tribes inhabiting the district are mostly Gonds, followed by Halbis in the North, Dhurwa in the East and Dorlas in the South. Dantewada stands low on development indicators like literacy, health, education etc. According to Census 2011, the literacy rate stands at 35.8% as compared to the overall 71% in the State.

Dantewada is an extremely rich district in terms of its abundant natural and mineral resources. In terms of mineral resources, Dantewada continues to be abundant with the world class iron-ore extracted and exported from mines in Bailadila. However, this abundance never converted into the welfare of the local tribal of this region. Located in the south of river Indravati, these mines started functioning from 1968 onwards and were the reason for setting up of the first and only railway line from the port of Vishakhapatnam to Kirandul. It is believed that when the construction work started, some forty families from Kirandul were displaced and currently only 2% of native tribal population inhabits the area (EPW 1989: 2189; PUCL 2006). Owned by the National Mineral Development Corporation (NMDC), Bailadila mines daily produces a total of approximately fifty thousand tonnes of iron ore from five mines. The production is sent to Vishakhapatnam port through connected pipe lines and caters to the national and international markets of Japan, China etc. However, the rivers in this region are left polluted with iron dust, rendering the only source of fresh water and irrigation for local villagers unusable. In an informal discussion with a journalist from Bastar, it was brought out,

\(^9\) Virtually, Dantewada is rightly called Dakshin Bastar or South Bastar as the Bastaria culture is still alive here. Details accessed from http://dantewada.gov.in/profile.html.

\(^10\) http://www.censusindia.gov.in/pga/SearchDetails.aspx?Id=471124
“Bailadila ka kya batayein...Kirandul aur Bacheli ke gaon ki halat kharab hai. Khanij ke lohe se wahan ki nadiyan laal hain.”

(What should I say about Bailadila? Villages from Kirandul and Bacheli are in a bad shape. The rivers are all red due to iron dust).

The mines have provided no employment opportunity to the locals. They have reportedly been given handful of low paying jobs of peons, drivers and cooks. It has severely affected the environment by dumping the ore fines into the rivers Shankini which later joins the river Dankini at Dantewada. Around forty thousand people from fifty one villages are directly affected by it as they are now deprived of drinking rivers water (EPW 1989). Other than iron ore, Dantewada has rich resources of limestone, dolomite, bauxite, manganese, corundum, granite, lepidolite (lithium ore), marble and Sillimanite and tin etc.

Adding on to the mineral resources, Dantewada has abundant forest resources too. These include Sal, teak, bamboo and other non-timber products like tendu patta, tamarind, laac, kattha, gum etc. About 65% of the district is covered under the forest area. Therefore, the forest remains an important source of livelihood to the inhabitants. However, the monopolisation of forests by the State, whether in commercial, industrial or environmental interest, has restricted the locals from accessing it. This dilemma was captured by Dr. B. D. Sharma (the then Commissioner for Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes) in the 29th report of the Commissioner. It maintained,

“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. Since the State acquired monopoly rights over the forests...the biggest irony came for 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 market relationships. 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...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”

(Sharma 1990, Report submitted to the President of India on 28th, May, 1990)
Although submitted nearly twenty-four years back, the report still stands true on most of its account. The relationship shared between tribal and nature still continues to be destroyed by the capitalist mode of development adopted by the State. In context of the tribal population of Dantewada specific, it can be stated that despite of being from an extremely rich region, both in terms of minerals and forests, people here continue to live in a state of poverty and backwardness. As stated earlier in the chapter, since the formation of the State, there have been constant efforts towards exploitation of the natural resources. The State government entered into a number of Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs) with industrial houses like Tata, Essar etc. (Sundar 2006{b}; Navlakha and Gupta 2009; Miklian 2009; Navlakha 2010).

Dantewada, a rich region facing the continuous interplay between the political-economy has never got much attention in the national and international media. It was only in the year 2005 that Dantewada hit the headlines and caught nationwide attention. It became infamous and synonym to violent conflict and bloodshed. It made news for an alleged uprising of the local tribal population against the Maoists in the region. The clandestinely State sponsored counter insurgency campaign called the Salwa Judum was highlighted as people’s spontaneous and self-initiated reaction to Maoists. The media also reported on similar lines. However, the political economy of Salwa Judum needs elaboration. Here is a brief look at Salwa Judum campaign.

3.2. Genesis of Salwa Judum:

The word Salwa Judum (SJ) has become an unforgettable phenomenon in the lives of thousands of tribal of this region. Salwa a Gondi word is referred to the water sprinkled on an ailing patient to drive him out of illness, while Judum means a collective hunt. So, literally the word means a purification hunt, while contextually it meant the purification hunt for curing the tribal people from an illness called ‘Maoists’. SJ was a counter-insurgency campaign launched by the State of Chhattisgarh in the year 2005. Mahendra Karma, Member of the Legislative Assembly and the Leader of the Opposition (Indian National Congress) christened this campaign as Salwa Judum. It was a campaign where the state government had set up a vigilante army of the local tribal against the Maoists. In the frontline of the SJ army were the ordinary villagers, the tribal of the region, who were pitted against each other on a scale unparalleled in the history of Indian counterinsurgency (Sundar 2006{a}: 3187). Civil society organisations also reported that
SJ was far from being a spontaneous response to Maoist tyranny by the local populace at large, as the government was making it out to be (Human Rights Watch 2008 {a}, People’s Union for Civil Liberties 2006, Asian Centre for Human Rights 2006, Human Rights Forum 2006).

Interestingly, there has always been an ambiguity about the origin of SJ. However, two major arguments have been highlighted in this regard. First, which is mostly propagated by the State argues that this counter-insurgency campaign started entirely as an anti-Maoist civilian initiative arising out of aversion of people against the Maoists and their violent practices. Secondly, it is argued that this campaign, right from its inception was a part of State’s long term counter-insurgency plan and it is believed that the main aim of this campaign was to clear the villages, kill the Maoist sympathisers and force the villagers to move to state run camps so that the area becomes clear for the security forces to hunt for the Maoists (Sundar 2006a, Balagopal 2006a, Gupta 2010) and further work could be started towards exploiting the natural and mineral resources of the area.

It is also argued that this counter-insurgency campaign was also launched with an aim to benefit the big private corporate houses to come and set up their development projects in this mineral and natural resource rich state (Navlakha 2009; Roy 2009; Ramana 2008; Sen 2006; Sundar 2006a). Some argue that the counter insurgency campaign was an attempt towards ‘counter-class mobilisation’ that included sarapanches (village headmen) who were ‘losing their traditional forms of hierarchical power alongwith the non-tribal immigrants who has vested economic interests in these tribal regions (Gudavarthy 2014: 5).

However, there are umpteen examples to highlight how the tribal people of Dantewada had been forced to vacate their villages so that large tracts of empty spaces could be provided to big corporate houses like Essar, Tata, Jindals etc. to set up their industries and development projects like Steel Plants in Nagarnar, Lohandiguda, Essar pipeline connecting Bailadila and Vishakhapatnam, Bodhghat Hydroelectric project and many other mining projects. Villagers were forced at gunpoint by Salwa Judum to sign over land deeds and were arrested by the CRPF if they refused (Sen 2006).
3.2.1. The Political-Economy of Salwa Judum:

Salwa Judum, as Sundar (2006a) argues, in a covert sense was ‘State’s admission of its failure towards development and equality’. State has been criticised for the use of counter-violence as it put the tribal population back into the vicious circle of conflict and shifted the focus far away from development and governance of backward regions like Dantewada. In such situation, the ultimate sufferers have been the tribal people. By arming one section of the society against another, government has been blamed for legitimising the use of violence as a means of resolving political differences (PUCL 2006: 36).

Due to being highly rich in natural and mineral resources, Dantewada has always caught the attention of industrial house and other private players. However, entry to these areas has not been easy due to constitutional provisions established for the safeguard of the tribal. However, with already volatile situation due to the on-going Maoist presence, the State did exploit this opportunity to strategically clear the areas for the entry of these industries. In this context Balagopal (2006a: 2184) argues that the ‘basic idea was to clear all the habitations in the jungles by displacing and relocating the inhabitants to camps’, which he refers to as colonies. These would be fully administered and controlled by the State and movement of the residents constantly under surveillance and restriction. Sen (2006) on the other hand, referred to SJ as a ‘ground clearing exercise’ of the State government for the purpose of industry and mining. One often confirms this belief because it is no coincidence that two major MoUs were signed by the State government with Tata and Essar group for investing in Steel Plants in Bastar and Dantewada on the same day when SJ was launched, i.e. June 4th 2005\(^{11}\). State strategically dislocated the tribal from their natural abode with the help of the tribal themselves.

\(^{11}\) http://www.thehindu.com/2005/06/05/stories/2005060508411700.htm

\textit{Ground clearing} and setting up of colonies happened at a massive level. There was displacement on large scale to SJ camps that were strategically located on either side of highways in Dantewada. These camps were built on either side of the roads and near the police stations, hence under the absolute control of the State.
Proposal drafted by the Collector’s Office of Dantewada in order to make SJ a success, clearly stated about driving the entire area into clusters and resettling villages next to police stations12.

SJ has also been looked at as a strategic political move by the then ruling government of Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP). Pitching the campaign through a Congress leader made it easier for the campaign to get central funds with Congress government ruling at the centre (Gupta 2010: 13). Karma became the face of the movement and hence, invited animosity not only of the Maoists’ but also amongst a large number of local people too. This came out in the form of his defeat in all elections post SJ, be it Legislative Assembly or Lok Sabha. The Congress base from the State was adversely affected after the campaign. It is stated that ‘BJP strategically made this move to get inroads in the region which was already dominated by the Congress and CPI (Marxist) and by doing so they have destroyed the political process in the region’ (CPI leader Manish Kunjam as cited in ibid). The presence of Right Wing organizations like Rashtriya Swayam sevak Sangh (RSS), Bajrang Dal and Vishwa Hindu Parishad can be clearly seen across the region now. Schools also have got a saffron touch to it functioning, with children in Dantewada ashramshalas being trained in RSS ideology (this phenomenon has been addressed in subsequent chapters here).

Ironically, in the current times, what has come out as a consequence of SJ is the risk and vulnerability surrounding the erstwhile SJ leaders too. Especially after Supreme Court’s decision of declaring Salwa Judum as unconstitutional, its leaders have been at a greater risk of life as they are now the prime targets of the Maoists. As Balagopal (2006a: 2186) states that ‘forgiveness is not a virtue highly prized by the Maoists’, this statements stands validated as most of the Salwa Judum leaders have been killed by the Maoists. During the course of fieldwork, two prominent Salwa Judum leaders were brutally killed. Mahendra Karma, the creator of the campaign was ambushed and then brutally shot dead on 25th May, 2013 along with some senior Congress leaders of Chhattisgarh leading to a loss of a whole generation of leaders from Congress. Chinnaram Gota was another Salwa Judum leader who was killed by the Maoists on 6th

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December, 2012. The handful of the surviving leaders of the campaign are living under the state of constant fear of being attacked.

However, in the midst of all this, it was the local tribal population that was caught midway in the crossfire between the State and the Maoists and find themselves in the midst of a civil war (Guha et.al 2006). This whole campaign created a dilemma amongst the local populace. They had to party either with the Maoists or with Salwa Judum. Resistance of any kind by the villagers got them branded as Maoist and acceptance to participate in the campaign has made them the prime target of the Maoist. As the Maoists have reportedly been following the policy of recruiting one cadre from each family, in numerous cases, members of the same family were seen getting pitted against each other (Gupta 2010). Sundar (2006b: 5) refers to this situation as that of an ‘immoral economy’, wherein ‘to counter- pose the terror and uncertainty created by vigilante counter-insurgency, there was a disruption of face- to face relationship and shared meaning as families were divided and their members were forced to fight on different sides’.\(^\text{13}\)

The employment opportunity created during SJ was highly desirable by local youth, as it constituted one of the only stable jobs in this conflict hit region. However, many joined in due to the ‘attractive images of masculinity and femininity’ offered by becoming an SPO and holding a gun and ‘displaying machismo that emanates from the weapon they wield and enjoy a powerful position amongst their own people’ (Guha 2007; Shah and Pettigrew 2009: 238). Youth and also children were recruited as Special Police Officers (SPOs) for a monthly honorarium of Rs. 1500 and were given weapon training. Recruiting children as Special Police Officers was morally and legally untenable (Human Rights Watch 2008{b}). At the outset, weapons were disbursed only occasionally and their lethality was minimal, usually just bows and arrows. This was also done as there were concerns about conflict escalation and weapons falling into the hands of the Maoists during raids. The original Salwa Judum drafting proposal\(^\text{14}\) itself states:

“While villagers are asking for guns or license to use them, this is not advisable because people could defect to the Maoists side or their weapons could be looted or taken away by a Naxal...In addition, if an armed person then joins the Naxalites, then their strength will increase. Therefore it is not appropriate to accept this demand of the villagers and it is better to distribute traditional weapons” (Pp.13-14)

\(^{13}\)Sundar draws from James Scott (1976). The Moral Economy of Peasant Rebellion and Subsistence in South- East Asia. London: Yale University Press

\(^{14}\) See footnote no. 12 for reference
However, later the SPOs were provided with Self Loading Rifles (SLRs) and .303 rifles. When the SPOs were first recruited in the year 2006, they were believed to ‘assist’ the security forces and also act as informers to the security forces. They carried bows and arrows, *lathis* (sticks), with no uniform and poorly trained, enjoying impunity, they soon became the fighting frontline against the Maoists. As the tribal were already facing marginalisation and alienation in the process of development causing them high level of economic and social insecurities (Action Aid 2008; ACHR 2006; Human Rights Watch 2008 {a}; Mohanty 2006), they became easy targets for recruitment as SPOs. Many joined in to overcome this vicious circle of alienation, poverty and hope of bringing an end to their economic suffering. Especially for children and youth, caught in abysmal poverty, joining SJ in the lure of Rs. 1500 per month was a lucrative option (Human Rights Watch 2008 {b}:6).

The SJ activists undertook violent attacks, looting, destruction, intimidation, rape, and killing on an unprecedented scale. There were high incidence of violent confrontations between the Maoist and the security forces deployed by the State during this counter insurgency campaign. The battalions of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) were joined in by an India Reserve Battalion (IRB) from Nagaland as well. Balagopal (2008: 12) described SJ as a ‘lynch-mob than as a movement’ wherein the SJ activists mobbed and raided homes and killed the fellow villagers brutally. He states that during the times of SJ the mob raided villages, forced people to join it on pain of death or burning of their dwellings. There were abuse of all kinds on a massive scale by the SPOs and security forces and similar retaliation by the Maoists leading to forced displacement to the neighbouring states like Andhra Pradesh. Hundreds of villages were evacuated and thousands of people were forcefully displaced to Salwa Judum camps (Sundar 2006a; Guha et.al 2006; Guha 2007; ACHR 2006; Human Rights Watch 2008 {a}).

The Salwa Judum was clearly promoted and funded by government, yet it is not officially listed anywhere, nor is there transparency on how much of the state's budget was set aside for the campaign. The unofficial status of Salwa Judum allowed the government to refuse to accept accountability for its actions on the ground. Conversely, SJ activists were granted impunity to operate outside the law of the land and anyone would be described as a *naxalite* and killed, with assurance of full state protection (Guha et. al. 2006: 49; Sundar 2006a: 3188).
However, the role of State in aiding and abetting the vigilante group was challenged in the Court of Law in the year 2007 by human rights activists and by other civil society organisation. It was only after two Writ Petitions\(^{15}\) filed in the Supreme Court of India against the State of Chhattisgarh that appropriate actions were taken against this counter insurgency campaign. The petitioner made an attempt to bring out the prevailing reality of SJ and SPOs and mentioned in detail of the violent activities undertaken during SJ and how the State has been complicit with it. The Supreme Court of India ordered the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to carry out an investigation in response to the petitions.

The NHRC team, comprising of only police personnel (see NHRC report: Appendix I, p.112)\(^{16}\), looked at this counter insurgency campaign through the lens of law and order. Balagopal (2008) argues that these officers forever looked at these armed insurgencies as ‘ideal tool: a vigilante group of tribal communities that can be passed off as a people’s uprising and conveniently endowed with the impunity required to do the State’s dirty work’. However, in the year 2011, the Supreme Court of India held SJ unconstitutional and ordered for the disarmament and discontinuation of SPOs in combat operations\(^{17}\). However, this made the SPOs more vulnerable now as with the closing of the campaign, they became the prime targets of the Maoists.

In September 2011, the Chhattisgarh State passed the Chhattisgarh Auxiliary Armed Police Force Ordinance (CAAPFO) Act 2011 and regularized the SPOs in the State Police Force as Sahayak Arakshak (Assistant Constable). Newspapers and national magazines at that time carried reports that CAAPFO aimed at slightly improving their employment conditions, benefits and training. Under the new act, all members were required to have cleared at least the fifth standard and those SPOs with no education had to receive the required years of schooling. The monthly payment also went up to Rs. 7,000 (presently Rs. 6500 is being paid, as reported by the SPOs during fieldwork). They


\(^{16}\)The NHRC Report can be retrieved from http://ryanoprohba.typepad.com/NHRC_REPORT_ON_SALWA_JUDUM_AUGUST_2008.pdf

\(^{17}\)The Supreme Court judgement on Salwa Judum and SPOs can be accessed from http://supremecourtofindia.nic.in/outtoday/wc25007.pdf
were to receive an extended training of six months instead of just sixty days and their families would be entitled to Rs. 5 lakh as compensation in case of death and a family member would get a government job (Loksatya 2011, Khaskhabar 2011, Dasgupta 2011, Indian Express: Agencies 2011, Sethi 2011, Sharma 2011{a}). Although, the Supreme Court of India held the recruitment of SPOs as unconstitutional and banned it, but the reign of terror of the SPOs’ has continued unabated by regularising them under CAAPFO.

This Act also faced criticism and the State Government was accused of not addressing the actual concern of the judgement. The judgement was against the use of untrained youth for counter-insurgency operations as unconstitutional in principle, as violating their own right to life and that of others. So, by deploying them again as Sahayak Arakshak the government has continued to endanger their lives while playing divide and rule. Till date, the risk and vulnerability that these tribal youth face is not addressed at any front. They seemed to be caught in this vicious cycle of violence now as they continue to serve the State at the risk of their lives.

As stated earlier, Salwa Judum and displacement of people to camps went hand in hand. A minimum of five investigation teams confirmed that during the year 2005 to 2006, nearly forty six thousand people living in camps strung along main road, the majority came to pre-empt attacks or were forcibly brought in by Salwa Judum activists and security forces (Sundar 2006: 3187; Guha et. al. 2006, 2007; ACHR 2006; Human Rights Watch 2008a).

Currently, the aftermath of Salwa Judum can be worst felt in Bastar Division comprising of districts of Dantewada, Sukma and Bijapur. The highways of South Bastar continue to be the home for those who came from interiors of the forests. No statistics are provided by the State on the status of displacement in the region. However, PUCL came up with its data stating that ‘around one lakh people are displaced in addition to three lakhs affected by Naxal/Salwa Judum violence, with six forty four officially ‘liberated' Salwa Judum villages18, liberated here means emptied’. Villages in Salwa Judum-controlled areas that refuse to cooperate were deemed ‘Maoist’ villages, and were then attacked (PUCL 2006).

18 Campaign for Peace and Justice in Chhattisgarh.\text{http://cpjc.wordpress.com/peoples-convention_on_salwa-judumpress-release/}
Large swaths of land are still abandoned in Dantewada. On the highways, there is omnipresence of security forces. Camps can be seen on either side of the roads with thousands of people living at the disposal of the State for basic amenities like shelter, ration, education and health. Despite Salwa Judum being declared unconstitutional, the camps continue to exist. A large number of displaced people live here with having reached no point of return. The inhabitants are living with little access to food, water, shelter, and the means to a livelihood (ACHR 2006). They look more like army bases with wire fencing all around and check-posts guarded by security personnel.

With the presence of these camps located at the peripheries of villages, the weekly haats (weekly markets) that were once the only source of economic transactions and social interactions, have either ceased to function or have become minimal. Tribal living on the other side of Indravati river (considered to be the Maoist dominated areas) are completely cut off and are not able to visit these weekly markets. Haats are under constant surveillance by the security forces and also by the Maoists. Villagers from Maoist dominant areas are looked at with suspicion and those who have joined in as SPOs are often targeted by the Maoists during these haats. This has led to an economic blockade in the region with the tribal getting no market for their demands and supply.

3.3. ‘State’ in Chhattisgarh:

It is well established that the State has been overlooking tribal people’s development and survival needs and has focused on the market forces exploiting the region’s abundant resources. However, one argues that the idea of State is constructed based on the positioning of different actors in a society. In this context, Gupta (1995: 229) argues that, for example for the bureaucrats, ‘State is constructed through government orders, reports, tours etc. and for the citizens, it is through newspapers’ or while encountering government agencies at a micro level. For the people in Chhattisgarh, State is an entity that they encounter through its manifestations mostly in the form of omnipresent security force personnel, some erstwhile Salwa Judum leaders (who continue to be some of the most influential individuals inside the erstwhile Salwa Judum camps today), forest officials and some block level government officials etc.
In conflict hit zones like Dantewada for example, it is the security forces that are largely perceived as the most powerful symbol of State. In fact security forces are considered to be the manifestation of State. Although projected as the saviour and protectors of tribal people, the security forces are often reported of acting ruthlessly with the tribal population. People, in villages and now in Salwa Judum camps, are under the constant vigilant eyes of the security forces and therefore, people here live in a state of fear on a daily basis. However, interestingly, as part of their socialising strategy, the security forces are often seen distributing gifts to the locals. Senior officials distribute blankets, sarees etc. in order to break the ice between the locals and the ‘outsiders’ (people often refer to the security force personnel as ‘baahar ka mann’ i.e. people from outside). In similar context, Sundar (2012: 718) interestingly states how local villagers often laugh while they describe how the CRPF men carry sarees in one hand and guns and sticks on the other to beat women into accepting the gifts.

On the other hand, with regions like Abujhmad and Dandakaranya that have had minimal or no presence of State (see Pandita and Mishra 2010; Sagar 2006), and also the present day remote villages in districts of Sukma, Dantewada (e.g. Jagargunda, Tadmetla etc.) people construct the idea of State as that practising exploitation and marginalisation and not being all-inclusive in its approach towards their development. People’s encounter with State here has also been through the non-development and underdevelopment, experienced by them and the failure of government benefits to reach them.

Further State’s role in situation of conflict like in Chhattisgarh also gets highlighted through its efforts to containing conflict. Arguing in the context of State’s response to conflict and its political misuse of power Kothari (2008: 116) states that the governments often resort to ‘law and order’ approach to deal with issues that are primarily social in nature. In doing so, large armed forces are maintained that ‘no longer aim at the enemy, but rather citizens who are found engaging in movements of protest, struggles for civil liberties or in dissent against the system which they consider to be undemocratic and lacking in accountability’. In such situations, violence begins to take roots in the society and becomes endemic when it pierces through the social-cultural terrain. This ultimately takes the form of institutionalised violence.
The state in Chhattisgarh can be said to be exhibiting continuous legitimization of its repressive actions in the name of security, law and order and larger public good. Situations of exception are no more exceptional here because the sovereign state is seen exercising power by resorting to violent measures. As argued by Agamben (Agamben 1998: 15 as cited in Levine and Newman 2006: 24), that ‘the state of exception is a hidden secret of sovereignty wherein by rule of law and principle, the sovereign can stand both inside and outside the law simultaneously’. Schmitt (as cited in Agamben 2005: 1) also defines this sovereign as the one who decides on this state of exception. Sovereignty is referred to as ‘the point of indistinction between violence and law, the threshold in which violence passes over into law, and law passes over into violence and is suspended through the act of unilateral decision (Agamben 1998). The State’s response to the conflict, especially during the times of Salwa Judum emphasises on this further.

3.3.1. State Response to the conflict:

The State in Chhattisgarh has primarily been criticised for its response to conflict that has directly affected the tribal population of the region. Some of the measures adopted by the State in response to the conflict are listed below and they highlight the undemocratic character of the State and the monopoly it enjoys over violence against its own people in this region.

a. The Counter-Insurgency Method: In the past, the Indian State had responded to the Maoist violence in Andhra Pradesh, too, wherein in 1990 the State government of Andhra set up a special police force called the Greyhounds to eliminate the Maoists. They were well trained in guerrilla warfare and lived and operated like the Maoists themselves. However, the villagers and local people were not co-opted in the counterinsurgency operation like they were in Chhattisgarh during SJ. The preceding section has thrown light on this campaign. Regardless of the fact about the emergence of SJ and what sparked off the initial fire in the State, what remains established is that the authorship of the campaign was with the State and it was State’s monopoly over the campaign that forced a number of tribal to act according to its whims and fancies.

Here one relaises the importance of what Hobbes’ argues in Leviathan, that there is a distinction between author and actor (as cited in Sundar 2006b). Author owns the words and actions of the actor, and the actor only represents the author. In situations
where the authority is evident, it is the author and not the actor on whom the covenant obliges. In context of SJ it is the State who created the campaign and has resorted to violent measures not only to supress the Maoists and serve the interest of big corporate houses but also to escape from its own responsibility. The actors who became the face of the campaign, i.e. the tribal population, have been the ultimate victims whose lives have become extremely uncertain and vulnerable.

What has emerged peculiar in Dantewada is the undemocratic and immoral practice adopted by the State, enjoying its monopoly over violence and definition of legality. The state in Chhattisgarh aptly exhibits the traits of what Agamben (see 2005) calls the ‘state of exception’ where the rule of law is being transcended by the State in the name of security, maintenance of law and order and for the larger public good. State is marked by force of law, law is suspended yet enforced, the options of those at the receiving end of the enforcement get progressively reduced to ‘civil war and revolutionary violence’ (ibid: 59 as cited in Sundar 2006b). In such situations, claiming rights and entitlements become irrelevant as it is against a legitimate State. In Chhattisgarh such exceptional situations of insecurity are created, thus allowing the State to enjoy its unchallenged control over law and people. State in Chhattisgarh, had hitherto been exhibiting its exploitative traits and has failed to sincerely uphold the law of the land and went ahead to actively promote disorder and lawlessness.

SJ can be compared to other counter insurgencies across the globe, like the ones in Vietnam, Guatemala, El Salvador, Philippines etc. The strategy adopted by the State has been the same across from recruiting and organising civilian army to combat the insurgents and kill their collaborators, burning of villages, forced relocation- initially into displacement camps and then into permanent fenced camps or strategic hamlets making the rebels lose their support system, followed by creation of self- defence committees of villagers that are claimed to be completely voluntary in nature but in reality are under absolute State control. The counter insurgency strategy adopted by the Chhattisgarh State directly affected the local tribal population. Those displaced by Salwa Judum have not been able to go back to their villages even after the banning of the campaign. Their lands have remained uncultivated; huts must have become a bundle of mud and livestock left astray. These tribal, who are known to be close to nature and free- spirited beings are forced to stay in confined camps administered by the State and
guarded by armed men at all times. No employment opportunities, education and health facilities are available at the disposal of these displaced.

b. **Strategic Hamletting:** The State of Chhattisgarh also adopted the tactic of strategic hamletting under SJ. The tactic involved isolating the rural population from contact and influence of the Maoists. This was done by forceful displacement of people from their homes in villages and relocating them in State run displacement camps. This led to cutting of the supply lines for the Maoists making it feasible for the security forces to launch fresh attacks. In Chhattisgarh, those who continued to stay back were branded as Maoist supporters and hence, the targets of the security forces. Currently, even after the banning of SJ, the ‘strategic hamlets’ (SJ camps in the present context) continue to exist. There are thousands of people who continue to live within these camps with meagre infrastructural facilities. The villages of their descent are lying vacant, serving an invitation to industrial investment. On the other hand, people in these hamlets are leading a life full of restriction and complete State control.

c. **Encounters and Fake Detentions:** Encounters and fake detentions are commonly reported by the media from zones of armed conflict. With no exception, even in Chhattisgarh encounters and detentions are often heard of. Fake encounters have been reported from the region on the grounds of a suspicion and people are taken into detention on charges of being a threat to the State, etc. It is stated that during Salwa Judum ordinary villagers were killed and passed off as ‘Naxalite commanders’ (Kumar 2009: 8). Around thirty encounters were reported between 2009-13 in Chhattisgarh19. Civil Society activists have been raising their concern over the issue of fake encounters and detentions by the security forces but only a few get reported.20

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d. **Mechanism of Fear:** When one talks about the State response to a conflict, one also tends to look at the visible responses like the ones mentioned above. One particular aspect that often goes unnoticed is the mechanism of fear used by the State. The element of fear that is created by the State in the form of encounters, detentions, forceful displacement and omnipresent security forces around creates deep sense of fear in the minds of people. Sim and Tombs (2008) argue in this regard that the ‘State has the capability to mobilise fear inside and outside places of detention, police stations etc. in order to discipline, regulate, oppress and in some cases destroy those at the centre of the state’s punitive gaze’. Often deaths take place in police custody but no security personnel is found guilty or is convicted. In situations of armed conflict, there are numerous cases of torture, missing people and many becoming victims in the hands of the security forces. Chenoy and Chenoy (2010) have argued in this context that although during the times of armed conflict, the State has mechanisms to curb insurgencies but it does not have mechanisms to distinguish between insurgents and ordinary people, leading to civilians facing the wrath of the State. The mechanism of fear is resorted to in situations of armed conflict. It can be argued that ‘fear thrives on ambiguity, disorder and uncertainty as much as it does on life and death and threats of physical violence’ (Shah and Pettigrew 2009: 243). Drawing from his work in Nepal, Lecomte-Tilouine (2004) has stated that ‘paralysing fright is just as extreme in areas where almost no actual physical violence has taken place than in localities where brutal killings have occurred’. The presence of security personnel at all times, without the actual presence of violence, generates the fear of unknown in the minds of people. The effects of such fear affect the social life of people where an atmosphere of mistrust, uncertain allegiances and suspicion is created.

e. **Muting the Civil Society and Media:** State’s suppression is not a new phenomenon in zones of conflict. However, not many such incidents come out into the public purview. In the context of this conflict, the role of the State has emerged as that of an exploiter and suppressor of tribal population. There has been State’s suppression of the members of the civil society who have been voicing their concerns over such exploitative practices of the State. Tracing the history of State suppression, Sundar (2006a) quotes one such example of State’s extreme character against those who rose against its capitalist mode of development in Chhattisgarh. In 1992, the *Bharat Jan Andolan* had demanded for proper rehabilitation and share for tribal who were to be displaced by the steel plant at Maolibhata village, its leader and former collector of
Bastar, the 65 years old B. D. Sharma, was pulled off the pillion of a scooter by the BJP activists, stripped and paraded through the streets of Jagdalpur with a garland of shoes around his neck.21

In another such example, Navlakha and Gupta (2009) stated how a local organisation had organised a large rally-cum-public-meeting of tribal peasants with the aim to highlight how for decades in the name of ‘development’, the State in Bastar has been treating the Bastaris as less than human and is now busy promoting rapacious capitalism. Ironically, no national media covered the event where a memorandum was handed over to the Governor highlighting various development projects, including that of Tatas, Jindal, Essar and Mittal that were directly affecting the livelihood and socio-economic security of the local people of the region.

Many civil society activists have been arbitrarily arrested, tortured, or ill-treated, and then forced to face politically motivated charges ranging from murder to conspiracy and sedition (Human Rights Watch 2012). To state a few, in January 2008, Himanshu Kumar’s ashram in Dantewada was brought down by a bulldozer on the claims of ‘encroaching upon government land without permission’.22 The ashram had supposedly being working for decades to bring education and health care services at the doorstep of the tribal but was demolished and brought down ruthlessly, on the grounds of being a Maoist supporting organisation. Similarly, Dr. Binayak Sen, a medical practitioner and member of People’s Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) was arrested on sedition charges. Photo journalist, filmmaker and human rights defender Ajay T.G. was also arrested under the Chhattisgarh State Public Security Act 2005.

Especially during the times of SJ, the local journalists were also reportedly threatened, arrested, assaulted and harassed by both Maoists and SJ cadres for reporting truth over skewed versions of the attacks (Miklian 2009: 454). Kamlesh Paikra, Afzal Khan, Sanjay Reddy, N.R.K Pille are to name a few local journalists who were attacked and intimidated for exposing State-sponsored violence.23 These facts were also validated

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21 Article in Down to Earth, Accessed from http://www.downtoearth.org.in/node/30425
http://www.indiaenvironmentportal.org.in/content/19368/naked-truths/
22 Dispute case number Sl.No. 1828/07 dated 21/01/08
http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-opinion/chhattisgarh-has-lost-the-plot/article1257104.ece
http://www.downtoearth.org.in/node/8863
by the journalists interacted with during the course of fieldwork in the region. Although media is considered to be the fourth pillar of democracy, but it is often seen being muted and also manipulated by the State. One completely agrees with what Hall (et. al. 1978) states that ‘the media is structurally poised to reproduce the State’s viewpoint, despite its self-definition being independent and objective’.

Gathering from the State’s response to the on-going conflict, it can be stated that State has resorted to undemocratic means to curb the situation. It has used its might against its own people. It would not be an exaggeration to state that the democratic spaces in Chhattisgarh have shrunk. Right to freedom, dissent and speech, equal rights, access to basic necessities such as food and clothing, and the right to movement without fear etc. are being challenged everyday (Mohanty 2006: 3168). Legal Acts like the Chhattisgarh Public Security Act (CSPSA), 2006 and the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), 2004 have played a significant role in the Chhattisgarh (CDRO 2012). ‘The CSPSA goes beyond even the UAPA in widening the scope of what can be deemed by the representatives of the State to constitute unlawful activity’ (EPW 2009[a]: 2), hence, clearly bringing out the State of exception where ‘lawlessness is legalized’ (Humphreys 2006).

Interestingly, what stands peculiar here, is State’s non-recognition and non-acknowledgement of its own failure in providing bare minimum developmental benefits to the tribal population. There has been and continues to be a conspicuous absence of the State to understand the actual ground realities and problems faced by the tribal of the region and why have the Maoists been able to establish their roots deep in the region. The Work Proposal of District Dantewada refers to the tribal people as ‘uneducated, living in extreme economic conditions, having no contact with outside world and thus, being misled by the Maoists’ (P. 3)24 Ironically, it states that it is the lack of exposure to the outside world and not underdevelopment and marginalisation that has led to the Maoists penetration in the region. The only solution to succeed the Maoists, according to the proposal, is to get people in touch with the outside world (p. 3 of the document). On the other hand, it needs to be stated that the penetration by the Maoists is also


24 Refer to footnote no. 12 for reference
undemocratic in its practice and the Maoists are criticised for the radical change in their practices once their bases were established, especially in Dandakaranya. They have been working towards maintaining their political supremacy and liberating the zones from State’s administration and setting up their own form of alternate government.

However, in this backdrop, with both the State and the Maoists facing criticism, with debates and discourses centring on the actors of the conflict, the tribal population continues to be ignored. In the midst of this, one tends to ignore children as a category. Hence, an effort is being made here to bring forth the situation of children who are growing in this conflict situation in Chhattisgarh, with a special focus on district of Dantewada.

3.4. Children of Dantewada: A brief Situational Analysis

Children in Dantewada are living amidst conflict for decades now. However, since the launch of SJ, the situation has intensified manifold for these children who are silently bearing the brunt of it. All aspects of their life, socio-economic and cultural, have been directly affected by the conflict. However, they are seldom being accorded a public voice. As (2005: 12) points at a notion that is quite prevalent across nations that children in conflict situations are ‘seen and not heard’, illustrates the disregard that adult society has for children. Children in Chhattisgarh too are being looked at with the same notion and are considered to be the passive recipient of adults’ understanding of conflict rather than the agents in their own lives.

In Dantewada, children have been the soft targets of for recruitment not only by the Maoists but also by the State who has been able to make these children active participants in the conflict in various capacities, thus, becoming a stakeholder in the conflict. As highlighted above, recruitment of children and youth has happened on both sides (Human Rights Watch 2008{b}). On one hand, Maoists recruit children not only to create a newer generation of rebels but also because they firmly believe that children should be aware of their dignity, rights and entitlement and should liberate themselves from exploitation. Maoists are seen following the words of Charu Mazumdar in its true spirit.
He stated,

“We must lay special stress on our work among women and children. Our attitude to the children should be such as to help them realize their dignity. We must educate them in Mao Tse-Tung Thought”

(Mazumdar 1970: 68)

Teachers are reportedly forced to teach about the movement and highlight State’s exploitative nature. Owing to this glorification of the movement and instigated feeling to join the cadre, children have often reportedly dropped out of school. Children have now grown into formidable militia and Guerrilla forces (Mukherjee: 2010). On the other hand, the State in Chhattisgarh has also ben infamous for having recruited children as Special Police Officers (SPOs) during SJ (ACHR 2006; Human Rights Watch 2008; Sundar 2006a). Children have been reported to get driven away with temptation of assured income, food, clothes, peer-company and the ability to roam the forests with a rifle slung on shoulders and to control people with their power (EPW 1971; Guha 2006; Mukherjee 2010: 20; Shah and Pettigrew 2009).

Another important aspect of this conflict that has severely affected children is the conflict induced displacement on a massive scale. Children in Dantewada were worst affected after the dramatic escalation of the conflict since mid-2005 that caused massive displacement. It also resulted in the destruction of dozens of schools, and severely impacted children’s access to education (Human Rights Watch 2008: 4). With already limited number of schools in the remote areas of Dantewada also being destroyed by the on-going conflict, people were left with limited options of either dropping out their children from schools or sending them to distant ashramshalas or makeshift schools set up by the government in and around the bigger villages and towns. However, a large number of ashramshalas are also defunct or are blown up by the Maoists on the grounds of being potential hideouts and base camps for the security forces (Charu 2008; Human Rights Watch 2008: 4; Sharma 2011b). This has led to lower levels of

25 During pilot study and fieldwork, interaction with the teachers from ashramshalas in Dantewada, Sukma and Narayanpur brought out that while serving in the interior villages, they have often been forced by the Maoists to talk about how State is nothing but an instrument of exploitation in the hands of landlords, politicians, forest officials and is catering to the needs of a specific class and that children have to take up arms and only then they can liberate themselves

26 The idea of establishing ashramshalas in the tribal regions was brought out in the National Policy for Education, 1986. Under this, a large number of residential schools were set up in remote tribal regions to facilitate education for tribal children. See http://www.ncert.nic.in/oth_anoun/npe86.pdf p10
literacy in the area and non-availability of education has acted as a hindrance in the development of children of this region.

As a response to this problem of school buildings becoming base camps for security forces and target of attacks by the Maoists, the government has set up a large number of ‘portable cabins’ (commonly known as porta cabins) used as ashramshalas for the tribal children. These are bamboo set ups and are very easily erected and dismantled as well, hence, not targeted by the Maoists or by the security forces. However, the porta cabin ashramshalas are located at distant villages and towns and so, children from remote areas walk for days to reach them. Many of these ashramshalas are located in or around the SJ camps run by the government making it vulnerable to attacks by the Maoists. Life of children in camps is very different from that led by them back in their villages. With limited area to move around and highly restricted life, these tribal children feel a sense of confinement too.

However, there is no denial of the fact that children in ashramshala are leading a relatively disciplined life too, wherein their food, clothing, basic necessities are also looked after by the State along with other educational facilities. They are bound by a routine and hence, are not left with much free time to pay attention and discuss the ongoing conflict. However, the larger reality of conflict remains unchanged even in the ashramshala or camp, where now children experience the conflict in its varied manifestations.

**Conclusion:**

Therefore, *summing up* one can categorically state that both the Maoists and the State have been at logger heads for a very long time now and the repercussion of this conflict is primarily being faced by the tribal of this region. As Shneiderman (2009) argues that ‘the concept of democracy seemed to have delivered little in areas of State-Maoist conflict’. There has been a growing sense of frustration with the lack of delivery of benefits and exclusion of the tribal people from the benefits of democracy. The movement against the State repression created the social condition that led to the development of specific political consciousness on which the Maoists later built their movement and enjoyed mass support. Similarly, the State too resorted to violence to coerce the Maoists. These efforts of maintaining supremacy by both State and Maoists and resorting to coercion and elimination of opposition is what Prasad (2010) calls the
‘first condition for creation of political vacuum that has made violent confrontations almost inevitable’. Amidst this, the use of tribal population for individual interests is done from both sides, the State and the Maoists.

Another crucial factor leading to prevalence of continued violence is the influx of industrial capital as a result of policies of the State. On one hand, the Maoists have exhibited resistance to this penetration by big industrial houses but on the other, they have been dependent on these industrial houses for their survival in terms of monetary funding. This can be looked at as one of the main reasons for the Maoists not being able to create a creditable opposition to these neo-liberal market forces who are exploiting the tribal of the region for whom the Maoists have been claiming to fight for.

It is thus, believed that State must look at the issues of life and livelihood of the tribal of this region with more sensitivity and give top-most priority to their socio-economic, political structures, their culture and their survival, which has been at stake for decades. Amidst these violent confrontations, resulting from the politics of interests, the ultimate sufferers have been the tribal population. Maoists must also rethink their politics if they are committed to the welfare and betterment of the tribal in genuine sense. If the Maoists do not recognise this urgent revival of their politics as a priority then the tribal of this region will continue to be victimised and marginalised by the State and its exploitative measure that it often adopts in the name of tribal development.

In context of children in Chhattisgarh, they are experiencing the on-going conflict in many ways, exposure to chronic incidence of violence, killings, forced recruitment, separation from family, lack of availability of resources for their overall development, displacement caused due to Salwa Judum and its after effects coupled with constant feeling of fear and insecurity. Children growing here have never known any other life; they have grown up in the midst of this armed conflict. Many have experienced their world suddenly turning upside down with attacks either by Maoists or by the security forces, forcing them to take refuge in camps or neighbouring states and often separated from their families. Many children have been killed, disabled, orphaned and displaced (NCPCR 2010; Human Rights Watch 2008b). A large number of children still continue to suffer from malnutrition, lack of clean water, sanitation and medical care. Children’s exposure to the conflict is leading to their subjective appraisal of the causes and meanings of it. A countless number of children are growing up deprived of their material
and emotional needs, including structures that give meaning to their social life like family, peers, community etc. All this experiences in their everyday life is shaping their understanding of this conflict and influencing their everyday living experiences.