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# A relook into the Maoist violence in West Bengal and non-violent movement in Rajasthan: ideology and ground reality

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## Abstract

The Maoist struggle in West Bengal championed the ideology of 'armed struggle against the state and the dominant ruling party' and 'the annihilation of the class enemies.' An important omission in the Maoist agenda lies in its neglect towards the ground realities of development. The Maoists in Bengal have only been using the forest and the rural areas as their suitable hideouts not as grounds for upholding the rights of the forest dependent tribals under the existing governmental programmes. In sum, the Maoist movement in West Bengal which thrives on the ideology of 'class war' and 'class annihilation' seems to fall far short of the ground realities being encountered by the underprivileged classes. The politics of Maoist violence can also be viewed against the non-violent movement of rainwater harvesting led by Rajendra Singh, a Ramon Magsaysay Award winner to gain some insight into the discourses of the Bengal leftists.

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## Introduction

Ground realities most often behave stubbornly to ideologies, whether they are forced on the masses by the State and ruling political parties or inculcated by the anti-establishment political organizations. The raising of slogans and translating them into specific acts (violent or non-violent) reveal the bias and proclivity of both the pro and anti-State actors in a given socio-political field. The spurt of violent political activities and mass agitations in the recent past against the ruling coalition

of left political parties in West Bengal and particularly in the western part of the state, which quickly turned into a Maoist 'struggle of class annihilation' is viewed under the above framework. The question of dealing with Maoism in the context of ground realities arose from the anthropological standpoint of viewing ideologies from an empirical perspective.

Ideology not only moves human actors to commit certain acts but it also involves omissions amongst a number of optional courses of action. This provides the researcher to posit a particular ideology against all kinds of alternative forms of action which may not have been taken up by a group of human beings at a given historical point of time.

The above framework has two advantages. First, ideology not only moves human actors to commit certain acts but it also involves omissions amongst a number of optional courses of action. This provides the researcher to posit a particular ideology against all kinds of alternative forms of action which may not have been taken up by a specific group at a given historical point of time. Second, since ground reality is the raw material on which any ideology has to be tested, one can empirically search for all possible kinds of dimensions of the ground reality itself. These two features of the framework may allow us to reevaluate the Maoist movement in West Bengal. To illustrate our position, two legitimate questions may be raised, which are: (1) what were the issues the Maoists in West Bengal omitted, even when they did not go against classical Maoist thought? (2) What were the broader ground realities which prevailed during the beginning of the Maoist movements in the state?

## Background and literature review

The inspiration to write this article on Maoism in India arose as a reaction to the indifference of the Indian anthropologists to this subject. I admit, there are exceptions, which prove the above generalisation. For example, in recent period a reputed academic journal *Dialectical Anthropology* devoted a special issue entitled 'Windows into a Revolution: Ethnographies of Maoism in South Asia' guest edited by Alpa Shah and Judith Pettigrew got published in 2009. This issue contained a number of articles (not all of them were written by anthropologists) on Maoist activism in Nepal and India. (*Dialectical Anthropology*, Vol.33, Nos.3-4, 2009). At the individual level, the lone exception was the anthropologist, B.K. Roy Burman, who had written extensively on the reasons behind the rise of left extremism in the tribal areas of central India in his long articles in the *Mainstream* (Roy Burman 2009; 2010a and 2010b). But these are exceptions.

The anthropologists and sociologists in India who claimed to go deeper into the social and cultural reality of caste, social stratification and peasant society, were found to be equally uninterested in carrying out research on Maoist activism which had been emerging as one of the most significant challenges to feudal land relations and state sponsored usurpation of natural resources by the corporate in rural India for the last three to four decades. There is a serious dearth of field-level data on the impact of Maoism on the people on the ground. There were, however, a few ethnographic studies on Maoism described in a recent review article (Harriss, 2010:1-27). These studies are of very recent origin and definitely lie outside the purview of the mainstream anthropology in India. For example, Bela Bhatia's ethnographic study of Naxalite movement in Central Bihar, which was the result of the author's PhD thesis at Cambridge University in 2000, is almost unknown to Indian anthropological circles. In this work Bhatia, through her participant observation made a novel attempt to

understand the Naxalite movement from the perspective of the general people. In her words:

*My priority is to develop an understanding of the movement from the perspective of the people who make up its mass base including member, supporters, and activists at the village level. Valuable as they are, most scholarly accounts of the Naxalite movement have neglected this important dimension, i e, the point of view of the participants (Bhatia, 2005:1536-1549).*

The unconcern of the anthropologists to study this anti-state movement on the ground has become more paradoxical by the fact that the foci of Maoist activism are mainly concentrated in regions dominated by populations classified by the state and the anthropologists as 'tribes'. To put the matter more bluntly, anthropologists in India are studying cultures and ideologies of tribes but not Maoism and the tribal populations influenced and/or affected by Maoist activism and ideology. In contrast, consider the studies done by the political scientists and journalists on Maoism/Naxalism in the Indian context. I would give examples from two recent books and two papers written by professionally trained political scientists and journalists, which provided sufficient clues to field anthropologists towards the study of sociocultural contexts and the way Maoist ideology was being pursued in India.

The first is a well documented and interpretative discourse on Maoism. The name of the book is *Maoism in India: Reincarnation of ultra-left wing extremism in the twenty-first century (2010)* by Bidyut Chakrabarty and Rajat Kujur. The authors of this book have discussed Maoism as one of the most creative ideological constructs which took many forms depending on the context but at the same time they also pointed out a very interesting feature of the Maoist movement, which have great anthropological implications. We quote from the concluding chapter of the book:

*... A symbiotic bond between the tribals and the Maoists seems to have evolved to address the genuine socio-economic grievances of those pushed out of their natural habitat because of an anti-people industrial agenda. Maoism is therefore an ideology of hope for those at the lower rung of rural society (Chakrabarty and Kujur, 2010: 202).*

My second example is *The Naxalite Movement: Currents and Crosscurrents* (2010), a book written by Tarun Kumar Banerjee, a faculty at Vidyasagar University. This book is the result of a painstaking archival study, often ignored by the anthropologists while giving primacy to fieldwork. This book contained a plethora of documents and threadbare discussion on the ideological issues raised throughout the course of Naxalite movement in India. Any micro-level field based anthropological study on Maoism in India could easily use this book as a guide map of the ideological constructs which moved individuals and communities into action against the state. It would be interesting to quote from Banerjee to see the resemblance of his conclusion with Chakrabarty and Kujur about the import of left extremist politics for the people of India:

*... at the same time it should not be forgotten that for those who are committed to resolve India's socio-economic maladies by renouncing parliamentarism, the appeal of the naxalite movement like its predecessor Telengana armed struggle, would ever remain a source of inspiration. Herein, lies the historical significance of the naxalite*

*movement (Banerjee, 2010: 482).*

My third instance is a working paper written by Sobhanlal Datta Gupta published by the Department of Political Science at the University of Heidelberg in 2008. In this paper, Datta Gupta critically viewed at the failures of the Indian Communists, particularly the Maoists, to learn lessons from their Nepalese counterpart in tackling the issue of resistance and democracy in the light of the global transformations during the aftermath of violence in Nepal. This paper, like the work of Banerjee, also demonstrated the value of archival work in dealing with contemporary reality in a comparative framework. This interesting paper also contained serious hints for the anthropologists and sociologists in India. We quote Datta Gupta:

*Communism in India continues to be deeply steeped in traditional thinking without any sign of change, although it has come of age after traversing more than eight decades since its foundation in the early 20s in the twentieth century. The traditional strongholds of the Communists in India have over the years given way to forces representing caste, religion and ethnicity. **While the question of why and how it happened certainly demands an explanation,** (bold mine) what is certain is that the leadership of the Communist Parties in India, in comparison with their Nepalese counterpart, seriously lack innovative thinking free from dogmatism and a closed understanding of Marxism. It is on this score that the CPN (M) has not only moved far ahead of the Indian Communists but communism in South Asia is also thereby going to experience a refreshingly new turn in the coming years (Datta Gupta, 2008: 1-13).*

Is there any anthropologist in India who could claim have done comprehensive field studies on the socio-cultural interpretation of the failure of communism in India as hinted in the above sentence?

The hard fact is anthropologists in India, like the Indian Maoists, have not yet shown interest to learn any lesson from these serious researches done by their colleagues in the sister disciplines.

The fourth illustration comes from the long report published in three parts in *Economic and Political Weekly* in 2008 by a courageous young journalist Srinivasan Ramani, who travelled through the plains, hills and jungles of Nepal for two weeks during the period of political turmoil in the country. Srinivasan's team surveyed to understand the socio-economic and cultural context behind the success of the Nepalese variety of Maoism might be viewed by the hardcore anthropologists as exploratory and journalistic, but how many of the trained anthropologists in India had done this kind of survey in the Maoist controlled areas of the country? Incidentally, Srinivasan himself was doing his Ph.D in International Relations at the Jawaharlal Nehru University. The field encounters of Srinivasan on the recent Nepalese variety of communism qua Maoism provided empirical support to the succinct observations made by Datta Gupta on the success of CPN (M). In the words of Srinivasan:

*The 15-day sojourn which ended on May 13, we were witness to history in the making in Nepal. Our meetings with farmers, labourers, guerrillas, industrialists, journalists, politicians, and representatives of the civil society were richly rewarding. Nepal's transformation into a republic had been facilitated by the coming together of*

*progressives, democrats and communists and because of the peoples' overwhelming support for such a culmination. It was the collective effort of the long suppressed citizenry that brought the monarchy down (Ramani, 2008: 25-28).*

The four examples cited above not only revealed the virtual absence of anthropologists and sociologists in India in the study of left extremist politics but they also showed the possibilities of carrying out research on this burning problem of the country by the field based social scientists in future.

The Maoist movement of the recent past in West Bengal which arose as an aftermath of the peasant resistances against large scale land acquisitions in different parts of the state, (particularly in Singur and Nandigram) however, sparked off in its forest covered regions. The Maoist movement in West Bengal was spearheaded not against the acquisition of fertile agricultural land by the Left Front Government nor did the Maoists ever proposed any alternative pro-peasant rehabilitation package for the displaced small farmers, sharecroppers, agricultural labourers and other underprivileged classes of the rural society who were encountering the onslaught of globalization and the new economic order.

The Maoist violence in West Bengal began against police atrocity and the corrupt members of the local self-governments in the rural areas. On the other hand, the Maoist activists right within the epicenter of the movement zones never took up the causes of the most underprivileged section of the rural area--- the Lodha and Sabar tribal groups who were being recently designated as the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG) by the Government of India.

## The genesis of violence

Basically, all forms of communist ideologies (Maoism included) justified *violence against the State* (my italics) and this originated from the basic tenets of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism (Finlay, 2006:1-38). The communists whether they were in power or in the opposition harped on overthrowing the bourgeoisie by the proletariat. Real development of human society, according to all brands of communist ideologies, must undergo the ordeal of radical transformation of the polity from one stage to another by some kind of forceful means. The communists, whether honest or deceitful, never believed in changing the world around them by conscious and peaceful participation of a large number of poor people working around a development agenda; those who attempted to achieve it were viewed by the communists as 'idealists', 'reactionaries', 'friends of the bourgeoisie' and finally 'enemies of the working class' who should be removed by force and/or violence. One may recall here Marx's famous statement: 'Force is the midwife of every old society pregnant with a new one' (*Genesis of the Industrial Capitalist, Chapter Thirty-One, Capital Vol.1, 1887*). Compare it with Mao-Ze-dong's more popular aphorism: 'Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun' ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political\\_power\\_grows\\_out\\_of\\_the\\_barrel\\_of\\_a\\_gun](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_power_grows_out_of_the_barrel_of_a_gun) accessed on 14.09.2023). It is true that the difference in the philosophical depth of these two statements is great but the justification of violence in bringing about social transformation both by the theoretical guru and one of its most successful practioners was strikingly similar. One may recall here Lenin's view on the application of violence towards the achievement of a socialist revolution. For Lenin, a peaceful capture of the state seemed to be impossible even in bourgeois democracies (Singh, 2843-2856). Among the

Indian communist parties the CPI (M) while criticising the Maoist violence did not rule out the possibilities of 'extra parliamentary forms of struggle' which was a category wide enough to include armed forms of struggle, depending on the nature of the contingencies (Apoorvanand, 2010).

Another important characteristic feature of communist ideology was revealed through its *culture of protest*. The communists gave primacy to protest and rebellion before taking up or giving any thought to plan their future development agenda. Take for example, the demand for giving land to the poor through land reforms in West Bengal. When the communists were not in power they undertook forcible capture of land from the big landlords to distribute the same to the landless and after coming to power they used the state machinery to expedite the process without giving an iota of importance toward the formation of farmer's cooperatives and ecologically sustainable mode of agricultural growth, which if previously planned would have been more congruent with their socialistic ideals. Instead of doing that they simply sabotaged their own creation by inviting big capital to build industries on fertile land, parts of which belonged to land reform beneficiaries, like the bargadars (Guha, 2006).

The story is similar about the present day Maoists of Bengal who began through violence but has not yet placed their programme of development in detail before the public if they ever come to power. The Maoists in Bengal have protested against land acquisition but have failed to chalk-out any clear-cut rehabilitation law or policy before the public. General public, even the educated laypersons do not know what would be a Maoist land acquisition and rehabilitation policy, if they ever share power with their political allies in the state. So, if one goes by these three parameters, viz. *violence against the state, giving primacy to protest and lack of concrete development programme*, then all brands of communist parties seem to belong to the same genus in politics. Notably enough, Trinamul Congress, which does not believe in communist ideology, is also showing the last two features of the communists in a very prominent manner.

## The success of a non-violent movement: a counterpoint

Any approach to development of the people through a slow and non-violent path by raising their consciousness through constructive work stands in direct contrast to Marxist or Maoist notions of class struggle.

A recent non-violent experiment towards development which has achieved remarkable success is described in this article as a counterpoint to the violent Maoist movement of West Bengal. The specific locale for this experiment lies in Thanagazi area of the Alwar district of Rajasthan and the organization which was instrumental in this experiment is Tarun Bharat Sangha (TBS) and person who led the movement is Rajendra Singh (popularly known as the 'Waterman of India') who had won the Ramon Magsaysay Award in 2001. 'Rajendra' is different from any Sadhu or Baba who has importance in the arena of development for the rural poor. The Magsaysay Award was bestowed upon Rajendra Singh for community leadership in involving people in the construction and revival of traditional small rainwater harvesting structures (locally known as *Johads*) and various poverty alleviation programmes through non-violent means. No wonder that Marxists and Maoists belonging to all shades and colours have ignored the Herculean work of Tarun Bharat Sangha and Rajendra Singh. Here is the story with some factual materials taken from the accounts of two noted scientists of India, R N Athavale

and G D Agarwal.

R N Athavale is a noted Geophysicist and Emeritus Scientist with the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research. He is a pioneer on the study of water harvesting structures with over forty years' of research experience in the field.

G D Agarwal is a retired professor and former head of the Civil Engineering Department of the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur.

Both Athavale and Agarwal visited Alwar area where the TBS has built Water Harvesting Structures (WHS) and studied them in detail considering the geological and engineering aspects of the water harvesting structures constructed by the TBS. It is interesting to note Athavale's account

Alwar, a district of Rajasthan state is located approximately 175 km South West of Delhi. The total area of the District is 8380 sq km and the population in 1991 was 2.3 million. Most of the population lives in valleys...and is dependent on agriculture. The annual rainfall is 600mm and of this about 80% is received during the four monsoon months of June to September... Water scarcity was at the root of all social and economic ills. The area was once thickly covered with forest and vegetation but extensive deforestation since 1890 had led to soil erosion, increase in runoff and lowering of the groundwater table. Only 10% of the total agricultural land had supplemental irrigation. Many farms were left fallow, with the male members of the families migrating to cities for employment. The wells went dry in summer and women used to trek several kilometres every day to collect a pot of drinking water(Athvale, 2003).

Athavale then depicted how Rajendra Singh and his Tarun Bharat Sangha intervened in this grim scenario of rural poverty and environmental degradation and transformed the whole state of affairs. In his words

Volunteers of Tarun Bharat Sangha (Young India Forum), led by the secretary Mr Rajendra Singh, came to this region in 1985 for rural development work and interestingly, the villagers initially suspected them as terrorists in disguise! Singh and his collaborators first began to work for spreading education and health consciousness among the villagers but gradually realized that without programmes of economic development the literacy and health programmes could not be implemented. Discussions with the villagers convinced them that one crucial aspect of their work would have to be water harvesting. They became aware of the traditional practice of construction of *johads*. *Johads* are micro-percolation tanks, which collect the seasonal runoff water and let it percolate underground. They may be constructed by building a barrier across an ephemeral stream or by excavation of a pond at a natural depression. Villagers had given up the construction of *johads*... the practice of construction of *johads* was revived by the TBS volunteers. The work was carried out by common participation of the villagers at all levels. They were involved in preparing a map, designing the structure, determining the storage capacity and financing up to 70% of the total cost through local material and free labor. The entire work was planned and executed in each village by the *gram sabha*, a voluntarily elected body having a few women members. The *gram sabha* is different from the *gram panchayat*. The womenfolk also contributed at all stages of this activity in some cases even taking the initiative.

But what were the effects of the construction of the *johads*? Athavale continued the narrative in a factual manner

Construction of a few *johads* in some villages led to a remarkable rise in the local water table and as a result the movement spread over the region. At the end of 1997, about 3000 water harvesting structures (WHS) were constructed in about 650 villages in the region. The construction of *johads* was accompanied by other activities such as farm and contour bunding, construction of antcuts, check dams etc. and afforestation. The net result was soil and water conservation worked out on a watershed scale. This had a *synergistic* effect in raising the water table by several meters. The farmers started getting more yields because of the availability of supplemental irrigation and could grow two crops in a year in place of one. More land was brought under cultivation, more fodder was available and milk production increased. The drinking water wells became perennial and the womenfolk were saved the daily chore of fetching water from distant locations. Migration of males to cities for labor stopped and there was a reverse flow of income to the villages. The per capita income has also gone up. The additional money is being used for essential but till now unaffordable items such as clothes, education and house repair.”(Ibid)

The most thrilling effect of rainwater harvesting in the Alwar district of Rajasthan was that the five ephemeral streams of the area, which flowed only during the monsoon months, became perennial. The five streams are Arvari, Ruparel, Sarasa, Bhagani-Tildeh and Jahajwali.

Athavale visited the Alwar area in December 1998 to study the work of TBS and Rajendra Singh sought a scientific explanation of the phenomena of the rivers becoming perennial. Athavale’s explanation was that the hilly terrain and the precipitation pattern were conducive to quick runoff of a large percentage of the rainfall and although the water harvesting structures has not been able to substantially reduce the runoff but has been able to regulate it. The additional recharge caused by various WHS has raised the water table. The crystal clear appearance and tranquil flow during December were sufficient to indicate that it was the ground-water, gently oozing from the riverbed, which had made the river perennial.

G D Agarwal carried out a more technical evaluation of the various WHS from the engineering point of view. He studied 166 WHS from 36 villages. They had a storage capacity ranging from 500 - 2000 m<sup>3</sup>/hectare. Athavale says that Agarwal found 36% of the structures had the right capacity although no prior calculations were done. Around 13% had the higher capacity than required while 22% had lower capacity. The small capacity is not a disadvantage as such structures were constructed in a series. The best aspect of these structures is that all of them have withstood the vagaries of monsoon for over a decade. Similar structures, constructed by the government departments, are more expensive and less durable. The statistics given by Agarwal are really amazing since the villagers and TBS volunteers did not have engineering expertise and the work was carried out based on traditional knowledge, experience and “gut” feeling. Agarwal found that the average cost of these constructions was Rs 1.00 to Rs 2.00/cubic metre of storage, which was much less than Govt. costs and an investment of Rs 100/- in WHS gave an additional income of Rs 400 per year to the village community in terms of increased yield of farm produce and fodder. (Ibid)

## Violent state versus non-violent movement

The construction of *johads* by TBS in Alwar raised an important issue regarding the ownership and management of

natural water by the state and the civil society. The Waterman's non-violent movement to catch rainwater was not an easygoing and smooth affair. On June 20, 2001, the TBS secretary received a notice from the Rajasthan Irrigation Department saying that the earthen groundwater recharge structure, which it had helped to build in the village Lava Ka Baas, was both technically unsafe and illegal. TBS was given 15 days to remove the structure, failing which action would be taken under the Rajasthan Irrigation and Drainage Act, 1954.

The structure in question is a small earthen embankment over a narrow; almost triangular gorge, in *anullah*. The total length is only about 225 metres and the average height is 15.5 metres. It is built on the community grazing lands of the village. The village has only one hand pump for its entire human and animal population and they have invested Rs 3 lakh of their own meagre savings in building the structure. The rest of the funds - Rs 5 lakh - came from an industrialist in Churu district who gave the money in memory of his mother. The work began in March 2001 and was completed by Mid-June.

The Rajasthan state irrigation department conducted a technical study on the rainwater harvesting structure and in its report detailed the technical and legal problems with the structure. The report said that the structure would violate the 1910 agreement between Alwar and Bharatpur districts because in the agreement it was resolved that the monsoon water of the river should be divided on a 45: 55 percent ratio between Alwar and Bharatpur. Moreover, since the villagers did not seek permission from the department before the construction of the dam they have violated the state irrigation Act (Wastelands News Vol.XVII, No.I, August-October 2001).

On July 1, 2001, the district administration decided to take action by breaking down the structure with the help of the police force. The TBS volunteers were also ready to sacrifice their lives to protect the small dam. The key opposition leader and former Chief Minister of the State Bhairon Singh Shekhawat condemned the villagers' effort towards the construction of the dam. But at this time the Delhi based NGO Center for Science and Environment (CSE) led by the late Anil Agarwal and Sunita Narain appealed to the then Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot to stop the district administration from demolishing the structure. The Chief Minister ordered the district administration not to break the structure but to direct the villagers to deepen the existing spillway of the structure to drain out the water. Meanwhile, the CSE formed a citizens' committee consisting of five eminent persons of the country to enquire into the matter through field visit and meetings with the villagers and the district administrative officials. The group composed of the following members:

- Dr M S Swaminathan, Agricultural Scientist.
- Dr N C Saxena, Secretary Planning Commission, Govt. of India.
- Dr M C Chaturvedi, former founder head of the Dept. of Civil Engineering, IIT, Kanpur and Professor Applied Mechanics Dept. IIT-Delhi.
- Dr G Mohan Gopal, Director, National Law School of India, Bangalore.
- Mr Om Thanvi, editor *Janasatta*, New Delhi. The work of the group was coordinated by CSE.

The report entitled "Technical, Legal and Administrative Issues Concerning the *Johad* in Lava Ka Baas" was published by CSE in July 2001.

In the lengthy report the experts observed that the notice served on TBS by the district administration has been prepared without looking into the technical and legal points. Among others citizens' group raised two crucial points, which is reproduced below in their words:

- i. A *johad* is not a large dam as conventionally understood. It is a very small structure, which has developed evolutionally for the storage of water by the people using locally available materials. So the notice served on TBS is legally deficient because the Irrigation and Drainage Act, 1954 explicitly states that it does not apply to minor irrigation structures. The worst it can do is to reduce the monsoon flow by a very slight amount but at the same time it would also increase the dry season flows in the river because of increased groundwater recharge.
- ii. Secondly, the district authorities could not produce a copy of the 1910 Bharatpur-Alwar agreement on which they had relied in issuing the notice to TBS. The only relevant document that could be produced by them was a barely legible copy of an apportionment award by a colonial official at the turn of the century which said that the waters of the Ruparel river be divided on a 55-45 basis between Bharatpur and Alwar districts. There was no provision in the award, which could desist Alwar to build a *johad* in the catchment area of the *johad*.

The citizens' report strongly recommended the construction of the *johad* at Lava ka Baas for its immense beneficial impacts on the economy and ecology of the upstream and downstream villages (Swaminathan, et.al. 2001).

The then Chief Minister of Rajasthan assured the Citizens' Committee members that he would carefully consider the recommendations of the committee. The *johad* at Lava Ka Baas was not broken and it still exists.

## The discourse of the Bengal leftists

It is still difficult to reverse the famous statement of Gokhale, who said, 'What Bengal thinks today, India will think tomorrow' since it has become a proverb, a cultural idiom, on its own right. Moreover, the image of Rajasthan in the Bengali mind derives from 'Sonar Kella' and 'Rup Kanwar' or at best Todd's Rajasthan. As of today, there is no discussion or assessment of pioneering works of TBS on water harvesting in the literature produced by Bengali intellectuals in the recent period. The recently published anthology (*Jaler Nana Katha*, 2005) on water by Paschim Banga Vigyan Mancha is a case in point. It contains an article on the utility of rainwater harvesting. The article described the different methods of rainwater harvesting with diagrams. There is no mention of any effort of rainwater harvesting in India or in West Bengal. Another Bengali book (*Bhumi Jal*) written by a noted radical Bengali intellectual Jaya Mitra described in a popular language the stories of rainwater harvesting almost all over India. But it also does not mention the remarkable achievements made by TBS in Alwar although it described *johads* and similar structures in different regions of India. In another small book (*Jal: Proti Photaya Munapha*, 2004) written by a journalist of *Ganasakti*, the CPI(M) daily organ, one finds a detailed description of recent struggles of people against water privatization in Bolivia- the book is dedicated to the 'People of Bolivia'—The book in its chapter on the water crisis in India contains a table showing the eight drought prone provinces of India, which lists Rajasthan having 31 districts out of 32 as being affected by severe water scarcity. There is not a single sentence in the whole book on the remarkable struggle of the people of Alwar to reestablish community rights

over water resources led by the TBS. The same is true of the recent Pamphlet on the problem of food security and water written by Probodh Panda, a CPI MP from West Midnapore. In the pamphlet (*The Problem of Food Security & Water*) the MP, who is also a member of the Parliamentary Committee on water, described how the corporate sector is hijacking nature's most valuable resource in various ways and he ended his article with a clarion call for struggle by the toiling masses to ensure food security and access to drinking water. Suffice it to say that Mr Panda's pamphlet also does not provide any instance from Alwar where the non-violent fight for water by the people has set an example. The absence of Rajendra Singh and his marvelous work in organizing the villagers at the grass roots toward water self-sufficiency in the Leftist intellectual and political circles are quite conspicuous. The reason probably lies in Rajendra's commitment to Gandhism. The post-Independence little Gandhi is still a marginal figure or nobody in Leftist narrative.

Rainwater harvesting efforts have, however begun in West Bengal and it is still a donor driven government agenda executed from the top, not from the bottom. Recently, with huge funding from the Central Government under the Rastriya Sam Vikas Yojna (RSVY) Scheme, rainwater harvesting tanks are being excavated in the drought prone districts of West Bengal. This writer has some personal field level experience of observing some of those recently excavated tanks in the Binpur-II block (once a stronghold of the Maoists) of the erstwhile Jhargram Sub-division in Paschim Medinipur district. It is tempting to narrate the experience of two such recently excavated rainwater harvesting tanks in a mouza village named Sankhabhanga about 20kms from Belpahari block Headquarters on the way towards the Dhalbhumgarh district of the Jharkhand state.

Both these rainwater harvesting tanks are being dug at a high elevation and there is hardly any water in those tanks. About five lakh rupees have been spent under the RSVY Scheme to dig up the 50 ft X 30ft X 12ft tanks at Sankhabhanga which is inhabited by poor Santal, Munda and a few Lodha families for their

economic upliftment. The villagers got daily wages in the excavation work and now some of the relatively better off families are now thinking of growing fish in the tank if water level increases in the tank. But since the tanks are excavated on a high elevation there is hardly any chance that the tanks would be able to retain rainwater. After enquiry with the engineers of the concerned department of the district on the choice of the site for these tanks it was learnt that under RSVY scheme it is mandatory to excavate such tanks on land voluntarily donated by scheduled tribe or scheduled caste families to ensure better participation by the villagers (Guha, 2006). The engineers frankly admitted that usually one donates the worst type of land for tanks, which would be used for communal purposes in future and add with it the fact that quality of land normally possessed by the ST and SC families are far inferior than those owned by the higher castes in the villages. Moreover, the engineers admitted "We had to excavate those tanks within the 2004-2005 financial year"! Thanks to the participatory approach in rainwater harvesting innovated by the Central Government and their timely application by the CPM-led WB State government. Will the communists and the Maoists after being rejected by the people of Bengal learn any lesson from Rajendra Singh and his non-violent struggle for the development of the rural proletariat through rainwater harvesting vis-a-vis community participation?

## Conclusion

The Marxist and the Maoist ideology of violent 'class war' and 'class struggle' leading to the annihilation of class enemies diverted the focus of development while the non-violent path of development can also lead to participation of people in the utilization of natural resources and sustainable development. The deep rooted justification of violence in the Marxist/Maoist ideology missed the potential of participatory development exemplified through the contrasting cases of failed Maoist violence in West Bengal and the successful rainwater harvesting in Rajasthan led by a non-violent movement.

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