

Maoist and Other Armed Conflicts by Anuradha M. Chenoy
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*Amit Ranjan**

One of the biggest threats to the security of South Asian states are the long-standing domestic armed conflicts. Different in names, nature and with demands, they are structurally similar. This book is a brilliant effort by the authors to understand the various ongoing armed conflicts in India.

Being critical to the state-centric or military-centric approach to security, the authors have taken up human security and rights approach to find out the reasons for these conflicts in India. But even when one analyses these conflicts from the state-centric or realist perspectives, one finds that the state is wrong in its use of military methods against its citizens to address the insinuating armed conflicts. Kautilya, one of ancient India's leading statesmen, in his classical work *Arthashastra*, had mentioned that the primary duty of the king is to look after the needs of his subjects. Warning his prince against misrule, he said that dissatisfied subjects are bound to rebel against the sovereign authority. Machiavelli too echoed the same points in his path-breaking work, *The Prince*. Even Hobbes did not hesitate to give the right to his 'contracted subjects' to enter into a contract with the new leviathan, if there is a threat to their lives. Modern realists cannot rule out the question of individual security, which is the basic thing a state must do, in order to emerge as a power and be internally secure in order to face the external challenges.

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Authors have taken up the study of major armed conflicts in India, i.e., in Kashmir, the Northeast (Assam, Meghalya, Manipur, Tripura and Nagaland), Punjab, and the Maoist armed conflict. They have dealt with all these conflicts on a case-by-case basis, detailing why and how the presently active groups started with legal and just demands, but gradually transformed themselves into militant groups. Awakened from their deep slumber, after the militancy problem reached its peak, policymakers responded by formulating and implementing draconian national security laws, such as the Preventive Detention Act (1950), MISA (1971), TADA (1985), AFSPA (1958), and POTA (2002). Out of all these, AFSPA is the longest surviving, intact, and the most draconian act. After the Manorama case (a Manipuri woman was raped and murdered by soldiers of the Assam Rifles) there was a universal outcry against it, which forced the Union Government to set up the Justice Reddy Committee to look into its validity. The Committee, in its report, recommended repealing this act, but it is still operational in many armed conflict affected parts of India. India does not have trained counter-insurgency forces. The Army, during its action in areas of armed conflicts, uses conventional methods and goes for all out attack against everyone, including the innocents, living in those areas.

Committing a strategic mistake, the Indian state has armed the civilians to fight against the local militants in many affected parts. Groups like Salwa Judum, Special Police Officers, S (Surrendered) ULFA, and others are active with the blessings of the Central and State governments. These groups use their powers to exploit and even kill innocents. In its verdict, even the Supreme Court had its reservations against Salwa Judum, which is active in Chhattisgarh, fighting against the Maoists. Sri Lanka had tried out this method, but it backfired by aggravating the degree of social violence.

The authors have, however, not given a clean-chit to the militant groups and also blame them for the continuity of armed conflicts. They feel that once these groups started drawing political and economic benefits out of conflicts, they wanted to carry on and were not interested in any peaceful methods to resolve the impasse. Within the groups, whosoever showed interest in ending the violence through talks, had to face the wrath of the leadership. T. Sakharie was allegedly killed on instructions from Z. Phizo (then head of NNC) because he was ready to make a deal with Pandit Nehru on the Naga issues in the 1950s.¹ Recently, Abdul Ghani Bhatt, former head of the Hurriyat Conference, at a seminar organized

by the JKLF said: 'Lone Sahib, Mirwaiz Mohammad Farooq and Prof. Wani were not killed by the army or the police. They were targeted by our own people...' ² Even the state-level political parties are responsible for the rise of militancy. Many people's representatives, ministers and even chief ministers maintain a symbiotic relation with the banned groups. They provide political and economic support to these groups and, in return, are helped by them to win elections and formation of the government.

Dealing with the political economy of armed conflicts, the authors have exposed the nexus between the business groups and the militants in resource-rich areas. In the Maoist-dominated but mineral-rich areas, corporate houses are being helped by them to carry on with their projects, in return of hefty illegal taxes to these groups who need large amount of money to purchase and maintain arms to fight against the security forces. The authors have found out that one of the main reasons for the rise of militancy in India is that people felt that their resources were being exploited by the federal agencies, which were filling their own coffers at the cost of the development of local people. Often, petty businessmen, illegally and through fraudulent means, get hold of these resources and sell it in the black market for personal profit. In Assam, the petty businessmen blow up the oil pipelines, take out oil, and then blame ULFA or other militant outfits for it. ³ This is the way the political economy of conflicts is working in India.

Continuous violations of basic human rights of the natives by state authorities have alienated and turned many locals to support or at least be sympathetic to militants. Even though the militant groups violate human rights for their own reasons but state atrocities are also clearly visible. Children are used by the militants as messengers and also as fighters. In India, there are institutions like the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and the State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) to look into human rights violations, but unfortunately they have limited powers. They can only ask for a report from the police and give a recommendation; this also happens after the incident has taken place. Journalists raising issues of human rights abuses are being constantly targeted by the security forces and by militants as well. A recent example is the killing of a journalist at point-blank range in Andhra Pradesh by the local police.

The authors write that like everywhere, here too the work is divided on the basis of gender. Women are primarily used by the militant groups for doing daily chores and not as fighters. They do not have any important role in the decision-making process. Even the Maoists, who are the chief

advocates of equality and a classless society, use women for gendered roles. For the security forces, women in these disturbed areas are easily available and accessible sexual objects. Under the gloves of protective acts, the security forces commit several heinous crimes, including rape and murder. Nobody cares enough about such happenings and the uniformed criminals never get punished for their acts.

Indian civil society is clearly divided on the issue of how to resolve these armed conflicts. Right-wing groups, as usual, always support strict action against the militant groups. They demand military action from the state, while the others want to resolve it through dialogue. Contrary to right wing politics, Atal Behari Vajpayee, the only Prime Minister to head a right wing-led coalition government, had invited all the separatist factions of Kashmir for negotiations to resolve the problem. His good initiative was mowed down by his own partymen.

The sympathizers of the poor and the opponents of military tactics have been brutally suppressed, and even imprisoned, on false charges by the state. The recent example is of Dr Binayak Sen, who was imprisoned by the Indian state because of his professional ethics. Media, the fourth pillar of democracy, has kept switching sides at constant intervals according to its own interests.

Concluding their work, the authors place emphasis on the use of political means, instead of military ones, to resolve the ongoing armed conflicts in India.

More than students and scholars, this book is a must for policy-makers, in order to understand the root of the problem and take decisions accordingly and to resolve these decades' old armed conflicts in India.

NOTES

1. Guha, Ramchandra, *India after Gandhi: The History of World's Largest Democracy*, New Delhi: Picador India, 2007.
2. 'Abdul Ghani Bhatt Stands by Anti-separatists Tirade', *The Times of India*, 3 January 2011.
3. Baruah, Sanjib, *Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of Northeast India*, New Delhi. Oxford University Press, 2005.