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PEACE MARCH AGAINST NAXALISM

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ABSTRACT:

Salwa Judum was a unique tribal-peasant movement that arose against the specific agenda of the Communist Party of India (Maoist) (henceforth Maoists) in its full intensity in 2005 in the sub-region of Bastar (baanstari, a Halbi word meaning the bed of or the land of bamboos) in Chhattisgarh. The movement began in January across different villages of non-Abujh Maad (the unknown hills of Madia/Koya tribes) sub-region that initially galvanised approximately 20,000 tribals. It was spontaneous and non-political (Prasad, 2012, p. 329). It was unique as the movement was against a 'revolutionary' group of Maoists and not against the state or against the zamindari system as most peasant movements in rural India were in the past. Its build-up was the culmination of suppressed anger of the tribals that had developed over decades against the Maoists also called 'Naxalites'. It was a new and different phenomenon.¹

INTRODUCTION:

Since June 2005, the Chhattisgarh government, with the support of the Ministry of Home Affairs, has been conducting counter-insurgency operations against the Naxalites under the guise of a "spontaneous", "autonomous", "peaceful" and "people's movement" in a village called Salwa Judum in Dantewada district of Chhattisgarh.

The district administration claims that upset by the Maoists' call for a strike to collect tendu leaves and opposition to development works such as road construction and grain collection, people from around 200 villages have begun rallying against the Maoists by taking out processions and rallies. In reality, however, Salwa Judum is actively supported by the Chhattisgarh government. Far from conducting a peaceful operation, Salwa Judum "activists"

¹ Himanshu Roy - Interrogating the Maoists and the Indian State: A Study of Salwa Judum in Bastar <https://doi.org/10.1177/0019556117699742>

are armed with guns, lathis, axes, and bows and arrows.

By January 2007, the government had appointed 4,048 "special police officers" (SPOs) under the Chhattisgarh Police Regulations. They were actively involved in Salwa Judum and received military and marksmanship training from the security forces as part of an official plan to create a civilian vigilante organization similar to the Naxalites.

While exact figures are unknown, Salwa Judum has displaced at least 100,000 people over the past two years and completely disrupted the lives of at least 300,000 people in 644 "liberated villages." People have been forcibly removed from their villages and confined to "relief camps" where they face severe shortages of food, water and other basic necessities. The situation of several thousand people forced to migrate to neighboring states and districts is even worse. All villages not included in the camps are considered "Maoist" villages and are deprived of all health, education, and other services, including access to markets. A large number of people have thus been denied their fundamental rights

Naxalite movement

Naxalite is shorthand for Maoist revolutionaries in India. The Naxal movement originated from the village of Naxalbari in West Bengal, where some people have given the general name to several Maoist-oriented militant insurgents and separatist groups that have operated intermittently in India since the mid-1960s. For a wider side, the movement of naxalism or honeycomb is applied to the communist rebellion itself. Understand the origin of the exercise.

In 1967, an armed peasant uprising took place in Naxalbari area of Siliguri district of Darjeeling. The uprising was led by tribals and communist leaders. Its aim was to launch a long-term armed people's war in India, for which Charu Majumdar wrote the eighth historical document. This document laid the foundations of the Naxalite movement in India.

On 22 April 1969, the All India Communist Revolutionary Coordination Committee founded the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) (CPI(ML)). The party was founded by CPI-M radicals like Majumdar and Saroj Dutta. Some groups retained their own identity and remained independent of the CPI(ML). One such organization was named Dakshin Desh after the name of its publication. The organization started printing Dakshin Desh in the Maoist style. A group

of trade union activists also joined the organization.

All the Naxalite groups are from the CPI (ML). Moreover, the new party split after Satynarayan Singh rebelled against the party leadership. Two new factions emerged, one led by Charu Majumdar and the other by Satinarayan Singh. In 1972, radical leader Charu Majumdar died after suffering from multiple illnesses. His death caused the splitting of his party into pro and anti- Majumdar factions. However, the split did not stop there and the pro-Majumdar faction split again in 1972. This time he relied on factions of supporters and opponents of Lam Biao.

The pro-Lam Biao faction became known as the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), and the anti-Lam Biao faction later became known as the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation. The movement degenerated into extreme fanaticism as a result of both external repression and the failure to maintain internal unity. In 1975, the Dakshin Desh group was renamed the Maoist Communist Centre.

The Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) People's War, popularly known as the People's War Group (PWG), was founded by Kondapalli Seetharamaiah on April 22, 1980. He sought a more effective structure in attack and followed the principles of Charu Majumdar. PWG has implemented various uprisings and violence for decades.

In 2004, the Indian Communist Party's popular war (popular war) (Marxist War Online (People's War) and India's Maoist Communist Center (MCCI) (MCCI) in India) formed the "Communist Party of India (Mao Zedong)".

This multiple division and constant violence is the greatest threat to our country's internal security. In the eastern states of Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Jharkhand, and West Bengal, groups often describe themselves as Maoists. They have been declared a terrorist organization under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, of 1967.

Causes of Naxalite Movement

Every movement and every violence has a cause because of which it initiates. A few causes for the violent Naxalite movement are as follows:

- Lack of Human Development

- Exploitation and harassment suffered by the tribal population
- Cultural Humiliation
- Poor Health care access
- Slow implementation of land reforms
- Poverty causing low literacy rate The Red Corridor

The Red Corridor refers to the territory occupied by the Left Wing Extremists, that are, the Maoists or the Naxalites. The area is spread over eight or more states. Following is the list of Affected areas divided based on their severity:

The Severely Affected States:

- Chhattisgarh
- Jharkhand
- Odisha
- Bihar

The Partially Affected areas are:

- West Bengal
- Maharashtra
- Andhra Pradesh
- The Slightly Affected areas are:
- Uttar Pradesh
- Madhya Pradesh²

² <https://blog.ipleaders.in/salwa-judum-movement-and-governments-failure/>

Salwa Judum movement



Fig. 1³

Salwa Judum began in 2005 as a government-backed "people's resistance movement" against the Maoists. In the Gondi language of the tribals of Dantewada and Bastar, Salwa Judum means peacemarch. But in effect, it involved authorities arming tribal villagers to fight the Maoists.

It started near Kutru village in Bijapur tehsil of Dantewada, after tribals there protested against Maoist diktats such as ban on collecting tendu leaves (used to make bidis) and participating in elections. The movement later evolved into a counter-insurgency force to bring the area dominated by Maoists back under government control. Salwa Judum is active mainly in the Bastar and Dantewada districts of Chhattisgarh.

In 2008, there were 23 Salwa Judum camps in Bijapur and Dantewada districts, where almost 50,000 tribals from over 600 villages had settled, according to government records. But NGOs claim the number is less than 20,000 now. The Maoists and Salwa Judum have routinely

³ <https://sabrangindia.in/how-salwa-judum-looted-and-killed-villagers-kondasawali-village-chattisgarh/>

been claiming excesses by the other party in the camps.⁴

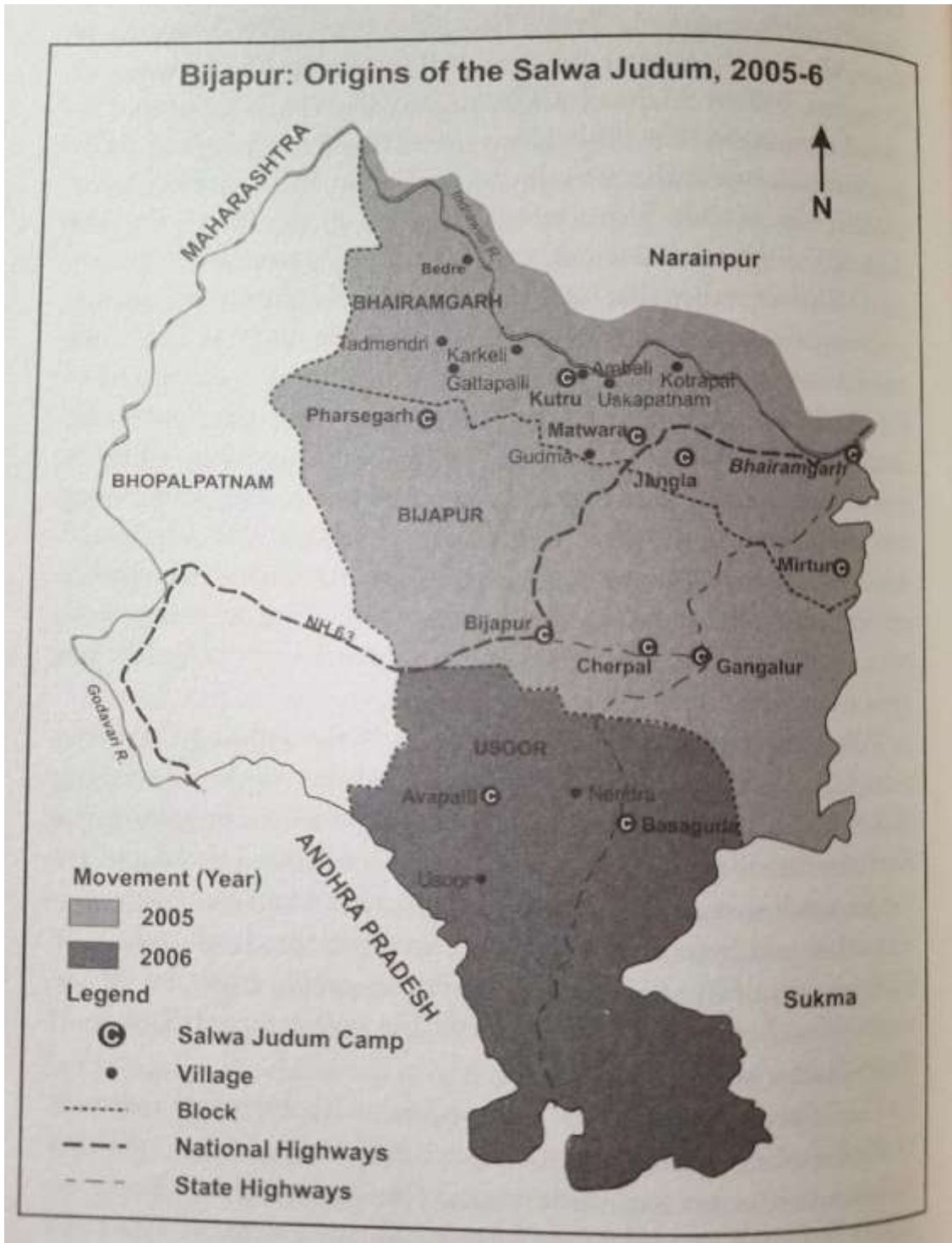


Fig. 2⁵

⁴ <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/photo/salwa-judum-of-chhattisgarh-365831-2011-07-06/4>

⁵ Fig. Sunder Nandini – The Buening Forest, Juggernaut Books, 2016

The Salwa Judum Manifesto

The Collector of Dantewada in 2005, K.R. Pisda, was an Adivasi himself but from another part of Chhattisgarh - a 'promotee', as those who graduate up the ranks are contemptuously called by their peers who come in through direct recruitment. With henna-dyed hair and a soft voice, Pisda was an unlikely planner of such bloodshed. When the All India Fact-finding team met him in November 2005, Pisda was scornful about Mahendra Karma, who was widely considered the leader of the Judum. Pisda said Karma was doing it only for political mileage. Proudly fishing out a blueprint he claimed to have prepared for the Salwa Judum, 14 'Work Proposal for the Jan Jagran Abhiyan'(written in Hindi), Pisda showed how systematically everything had been planned, starting with the appointment of SPOs, the distribution of 'traditional weapons like bows and arrows, axes, hoes, sticks, etc. to villagers', to the evacuation of villages. This document betrays deep envy for Maoist organizational forms:

If we want to destroy the Naxalites totally, we will have to adopt their strategies, or else we will not be successful. However many police forces we get, we will find they are inadequate... For this we too will have to form village defence squads like the Naxalites. For this SPOs and trustworthy people from the village defence committees will have to be given licences and guns. Such a squad of 15-20 armed villagers and 50-60 villagers with bows and arrows should patrol the villages in their areas for three to four months continuously. (Chapter 4, paragraph 18, all translations mine)



Fig. 3 First Salwa Judum rally in Konta, Chhattisgarh⁶

⁶ <https://thewire.in/law/salwa-judum-ii-what-a-disaster-that-will-be>

As for targeting sangham members, the government's justification was that they were the local backbone of the Maoist movement, even though they were clearly unarmed:

A Naxalite is one who wears a uniform, carries weapons, moves with a squad, but their role is at one level that of a director. Their real strength lies in the sangham members in each village and in the villagers themselves... To finish off the Naxalite problem, it is not enough to kill Naxalites - the system they have created in every village must be smashed and destroyed... From one perspective, the sangham member is just an ordinary villager who, like others, does daily labour to feed himself and his family. They have neither a uniform like the Naxalites nor any arms. (Chapter 4, paragraph 13)

The document was surprisingly candid:

Police must now become aggressive. Sometimes, for unknown reasons, some excesses take place during the course of such operations and some innocent persons become victims of this action. The support of higher-ups is necessary through keeping silent on such matters during big operations... When they see Naxalites being killed or running, they will at once come over to the side of the police. Therefore it is essential to link this activity to the others. For this Superintendents of Police must be given targets. (For action, Home Department, SP Bijapur and all Thana Prabharis). (Chapter 4, paragraph 10)

It is essential to curb the enthusiasm of the media. This is not a proposal for a ban on the media, simply for restrictions on it. At the state level, a meeting should be called of all editors and news channels and they must be reminded of their responsibility to the people. (Chapter 4, paragraph 28)

The Collector's 'Work Proposal' was a far more accurate description of what actually happened than the 'self-initiated' people's movement reported in the media.

The Judum Invades New Areas

In early 2006, the movement spread from Bijapur and Bhairamgarh in the west to Usoor and Kontain the south. In Usoor, inmates of the Hirapur camp told me in 2008 they had been brought there directly from a Salwa Judum meeting held in the local market center, Awapalli, on the afternoon of 3 February 2006. At this meeting, led by Mahendra Karma, sangha members of Basaguda, Lingagiri, Dharmapur, and Hirapur surrendered, but no one came from Korsaguda; later, the Judum went to Korsaguda, and other villages, and burnt them. People fled to the forest or to Andhra Pradesh.

In the Konta area further south at the border with Andhra Pradesh, everybody had been dreading the arrival of the Salwa Judum. The words they used described it as a pestilence which swept over people and homes, and over which nobody had any control. In February 2006, Mahendra Karma's men first persuaded some villagers from a roadside village, Dubbatota, to join them. These Dubbatota people in turn caught villagers from neighbouring Misma who had come to the Dornapal Monday market on 20 February and took them to the thana. They were told that unless everyone from Misma came to camp, they would not be released.

Other visitors to the Dornapal haat had similar experiences - of being captured and taken to Kontain trucks and kept for three days till they agreed to bring others. Six or seven trucks of people were brought from Bijapur and there was a big meeting at Konta on 24 and 25 February, attended by Mahendra Karma, the Collector K.R. Pisda, and others. The Judum burnt Birla village during that time. On the following Monday, market day in Dornapal (27 February), another Judum meeting was held, followed by attacks on several villages. A day after this, the Maoists blasted a truck full of Judum processionists returning to Konta, killing 28 people. People were furious not just with the Maoists but also with the Judum for putting them in this situation. One distraught survivor told me in May 2006, 'Judum hame chutiya bana kar le aye' (The Judum fooled us and brought us). Throughout 2006, the Judum burnt hundreds of villages around Konta and forced people into camps in Konta, Errabor, Dornapal, and Injeram. In some cases they lured people by promising rations if they attended the Judum meetings, and then took them into camp. In early 2007, the Judum moved to fresh areas like the Kistaram range on the Andhra Pradesh border. The numbers of refugees on the Andhra Pradesh side ebbed and flowed, depending on the intensity of the attacks in Chhattisgarh. The Andhra Greyhounds and Chhattisgarh paramilitaries and SPOs also conducted combing operations on the Andhra Pradesh side of the border, and repatriated villagers to the Judum camps in Chhattisgarh. The Maoists on their part killed SPOs when they could, including in weekly markets on the Andhra Pradesh side.

On the Bijapur side too, the Judum and police raids continued between 2005 and 2008. The same villages were attacked repeatedly in an effort to smoke out the remaining villagers to camp. Different gangs of SPOs might visit the same village. In 2008, I visited Pulam in Bijapur. Huge trees had been felled to block the road. However, given how often the police had been coming, this hardly seemed to have been very effective. When we reached Pulam, the villagers ran away when they saw us, and then sent one small boy to scout. Slowly they came, carrying

bows and arrows (it was June so they could have legitimately been hunting), and one man had a belt to carry cartridges. We met a youth, evidently a sangha member, who maintained a diary on the basis of which information was passed on to the dalam:

September 2005: 2 men were killed in the village; 13 July 2006: 4 people were killed while working in their fields, including two women, one of whom was pregnant; 2, 9, and 26 December 2006: Police and SJ came to Pulam and looted on their way to other villages; June and 8, 23, 25 July 2007: Police from different thanas visited repeatedly; on two occasions they looted goats and hens; 20 August 2007: SJ came and took away people, they kept one of them, Hemla Santu, and released the rest; 27 August 2007: Police came and took 4 more people; they were beaten and freed. They burnt 70 houses; 24

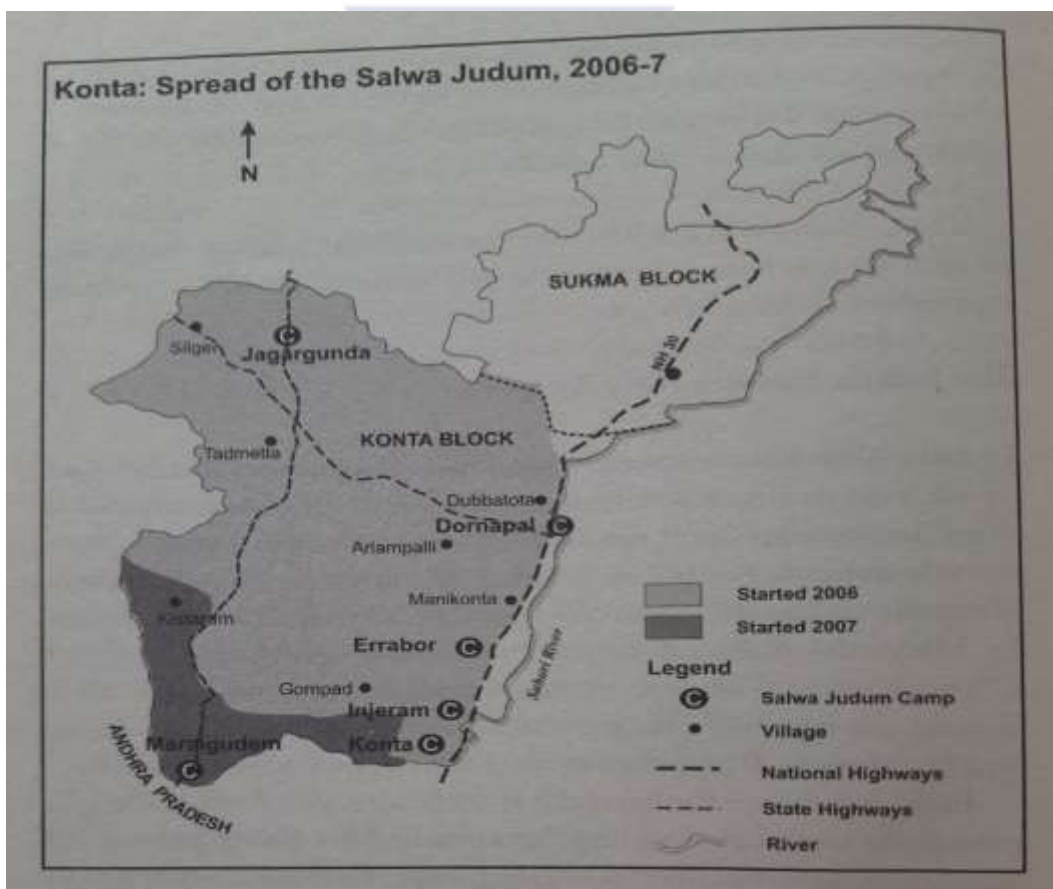


Fig.4⁷.

September 2007: The Bhairamgarh Salwa Judum came and took 15 goats, 1 hen; December 2007: 9 people were killed in the village. Hearing firing at Tokadi, 3 km away, all the villagers gathered in one place; but the force came from an unexpected direction and shot at them. The

⁷ Sunder Nandini – The Buening Forest, Juggernaut Books, 2016

police version is that the villagers gathered for a meeting with the Maoists. A couple of days later, the police came and fired again, but everyone ran away.

As of January 2007, a government memo notes, 644 out of 1153 villages had 'joined Judum' in 6 out of the 11 blocks of the Dantewada district. Forty-seven meetings and 139 padyatras had been held; 2008 sangha members had surrendered; there were 47,238 people in 20 camps; 4048 SPOs had been appointed. Rs 11.17 crore had been spent on the relief camps from 2005 to 2007.¹⁵

The maximum damage took place between 2005 and 2007: the police claimed that the Maoists killed 412 people, including police personnel, during this period. However, these numbers are suspect and include many killed by the security forces. For litigation, we compiled a list of some 3000 homes burnt, and 537 civilian victims of the Judum and security forces, which is itself an underestimate.

The illegality of Salwa Judum – analyzing the Supreme Court judgment

Social anthropologist Prof. Nandini Sundar and others filed a writ petition with the Supreme Court, which was decided on July 5, 2011, by Justice B. Sudershan Reddy and Justice S S Najar. The ruling strongly indicted state officials, who were found to have violated constitutional principles by arming youth who had only completed the fifth grade and empowering them with police powers. The Supreme Court in *Nandini Sundar & Ors. v. State of Chhattisgarh* (2011) stated that Salwa Judum is illegal. Let us analyze what the case was about.

Issues

- The major issue, in this case, was to examine the constitutional validity of the Chhattisgarh Government's recruitment of tribal people as special police officers (SPOs).
- Another important issue raised in this case was to analyze the constitutional validity of the Chhattisgarh Police Act, 2007.

Laws involved

- Section 17 of Indian Police Act, 1861 – District Magistrate has the authority to appoint the SPOs.
- Section 18 of the Indian Police Act, 1861 – SPOs draw their power, duties, and accountabilities from this statute.

- Chhattisgarh Police Act, 2007– SPOs were appointed under this Act.
- Article 21 of the Constitution of India– Violation of human rights as many innocent people lost their lives.⁸
- A Supreme Court bench, comprising Justice B. Sudershan Reddy (left) and Justice S. S. Nijjar, directed the Centre to stop giving financial support for recruitment of "semi-literate tribals" and pit them against Maoists⁹

Conclusion

To conclude, the state must begin to fight against the conflict legally, reduce collateral damage, improve the management of the security forces and refrain from any abuse of human rights. It would be preferable for the security forces to begin to defend civilians living in the conflict zone instead of simply fighting Maoists on a large scale.

There is a need to challenge the Naxalite movement politically, which offers better alternatives to the Maoist approach and new perspectives. The state must start addressing the basic needs of the poor and assume its primary responsibility of providing human development to these deprived communities.

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