

Are These Anti-Naxal Operations Mr Chidambaram?

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India's security budget grows every year and even the economic crisis does not make any difference to it. The Indian government spends most of its money for the security of its own people. Apart from this, the government also has special budget allocation for dealing with the internal security threat and several state governments also spend the money on security, allocated for the Tribal Sub-plan. Ironically, the government(s) use the money which is supposed to be spent for the welfare and development of Adivasis to kill them instead. The innocent Adivasis are victimized most of the time in the process of dealing with the security threat. The fastest growing state of Chhatisgarh is the living example of it, where the Adivasis have been victimized by the paramilitary forces, local police and Koya Commandos (an armed Tribal police comprising of surrendered Maoists) but instead of taking action against the perpetrators, the state justifies their inhuman acts and shield them.

In a recent incident, during the ongoing special police operations against the Maoists in the region, Chhatisgarh's Koya commandos, the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and CoBRA battalions burnt more than 300 houses and food grains, raped 5 Adivasi women and killed 5 men of Timapuram, Morpalli and Tarmetla villages of Dantewada between March 11 and March 16, 2011 alleging them as the Maoists. The security forces comprising of 200 Koyas, 150 CoBRA and 50 CRPF Jawans carried out intensive operations in the vicinity based on the report of a surrendered Maoist, who claimed the existence of a Maoists' arms factory in Morpalli village. Intelligence inputs had also indicated the presence of 100 Maoists in the vicinity. However, the security forces neither found any arms factory nor Maoists. The police also accepted that the people killed during the operations were not the Maoists but villagers. Indeed, these people who were victimized by the security forces were neither Maoists nor their supporters but they were innocent people living in their ancestors' villages. Can P. Chidambaram, the corporate Home Minister tell us what kinds of anti-naxal operations are these where innocent villagers were killed, women were raped and their houses, clothes and food-grains were burnt by the security forces?

Of course, we need an answer from the Home Ministry as to why the top cops were not held accountable and punished for allowing paramilitary forces and local police to rape the women, kill the villagers and burnt their houses? Why is the Home Ministry silent on the matter? And will the Ministry hear the villagers' cry for justice? According to Madavi Hunge of Morpalli village, her husband Madavi Chulla (30) was sitting in a tamarind tree and plucking tamarind. The force saw him and opened fire. She pleaded them to stop, but instead of hearing her plea, they assaulted her too. Somehow she escaped but her husband was killed and his dead body was left hanging in the tree. Similarly, 45 year old Aimla Gandhi was plucking Tendu leaves on the field when the force reached and accused her of spying for the Maoists. They threw her into the ground, pulled off her clothes and raped her in front of her two daughters. In another case, the force caught 45 year-old Madavi Ganga, his son Bima and his daughter Hurre and took them to the Chintalnar police station. The police put 20 year-old Hurre in a separate cell, stripped and raped her throughout the night. During the anti-naxal operations, the police burnt 37 houses in Morapalli, 50 in Timapuram and 200 houses of Tarmetla village including food-grain, clothes, utensils and money as well. The relevant questions are what will the villagers eat this year? What will they wear? And where do they live? However, the billion dollar question is, do they have citizenship rights in this country?

The crime was perpetrated on them only because they denied shifting to the government run camps near the national highway. According to the police, since the villagers denied shifting to the camps therefore they are no different from the Maoists. The police justify this saying that if they are with the government, they would have shifted to the camps, but they don't listen to us because they are Maoists and their supporters. Is this the justification to perpetrate crimes against the Adivasis and other local people in Chhatisgarh? However, when there was a hue and cry, the Dantewada Collector R. Prasanna announced a probe into the matter and setup a 5 members committee headed by the Tehsildar of Konta. The committee shall submit its report in one month. The collector has also announced Rs. 50,000 as compensation for each house burnt, and will also reimburse villagers for their grain, utensils and other possessions. The questions here are, will justice really be delivered

to the people? Can we expect the committee to bring out the facts without any pressure, manipulation and influence from the government? And why was a high level judicial inquiry not instituted on the case? Is it because the state does not want the truth to come out in the public domain?

The police officers and the top bureaucrats are playing dubious roles in the ongoing brutalities against the Adivasis. The Director General of Police of Chhatisgarh, Vishwa Ranjan denied any police inquiry into the incident saying that since the local police are denying the charges therefore there will be no inquiry. The question is does a criminal accept the charge after committing a crime? The Dantewada superintendent of police, S R P Kalluri even went beyond in shielding his inhuman gunmen by dismissed the allegations as Maoist propaganda. Irony is the district administration was sending rice, pulses, edible oil, clothes and fuel to Tarmetla village and also denied the brutalities. The Bastar Commissioner Shreeniwasulu and Dantawada collector R. Prasanna were prevented by the police to distribute relief materials even after they denied charges of arson, rape and killing. R. Prasanna says that no one has complained to him about the incident, therefore he cannot take any action? Can the villagers dare to file complaints against the security forces that are put in operations by the top cops? The Sub-divisional officer who was taking relief materials had to return as the Koyas, CoBRAs and SPOs attacked the vehicle and severely beat the drivers and food suppliers. Does our democracy have a solution to this? Ironically, the Dantewada superintendent of police, S R P Kalluri blames the Maoists for everything. According to him, the security forces not allowing distribution of the relief materials among the victims of brutalities is also a part of Maoist propaganda.

The Chhatisgarh government has been lying regularly. In October, 2010, the state government had informed the Supreme Court that Salwa Judum no longer exists in Chhatisgarh. However, the reality is completely different. The Salwa Judum has been converted into 'Koya Commando Battalion' and 'Special Police officer' (SPO) and the Indian government bears the expenses under 'Security Related Expenditure' (SRE). In fact, the top cops of Chhatisgarh have deployed the Koya Commandos, SPOs and CoBRAs to cleanse all the villagers who do not follow the order of the government to vacate their villages for the corporate sharks. We must recall that Chidambaram had told us at the beginning of his war against the Maoists that 'you should be either this side or that side'. There is no middle ground in his 'war theory'. Now his top cops are just implementing his war theory. Perhaps, the security forces are taught that 'those who live in the villages are Maoists, or their supporters' therefore they must be cleansed from the vicinity. These Koya commandos and SPOs are also assigned the job to detain those people in the police stations, who attempt to investigate the cases of arson, rape and murder committed by the police.

In these circumstances, the area of major concern is hijacking of the freedom of thought and expression by the state. The freedom of thought and expression no more exists in the state of Chhatisgarh. In fact, no one is allowed to enter into the vicinity saying that those areas are unsafe. According to the Officer-in-charge of Chintagufa police station, there are strict instructions from the Dantewada Superintendent of the Police to not let outsiders to enter into the areas. The media persons are seen as image damagers of the state and so also the human rights activists. Consequently, many journalists, social activists and human rights activists were attacked, tortured and detained in the police stations. However, some daring Journalists and Human Rights Activists got into the vicinity and exposed the brutalities.

However, the media elites are also not different than the top cops of Chhatisgarh. The worst thing is that we have countless news channels running 'breaking news' 24 hours but torching of Adivasis' houses, rape of women and killing by the security forces in Dantawada was not breaking news for them. Similarly, the print media also neglected the brutalities. Is it because the state sponsored crime perpetuated against the Adivasis, whom the Indian state sees as the biggest obstacle for the economic growth, since they don't want to surrender their land to the corporate houses? Would the Media have behaved in the same manner if it would have happened with the other communities? And why those so-called intellectuals Television debates are not taking place on the state sponsored crime against the Adivasis?

On the one hand, the police do not allow the outsiders to roam in Dantewada for the security reasons. Consequently, Swami Agniwesh, Nandini Sunder and others were attacked, detained and tortured. Himanshu Kumar's Ashram was razed and he was thrown out of the state. However, on the other hand the

representatives of the corporate houses i.e. Tata, Essar, Jindal, Bhushan and so on are welcome and are well protected. We have never heard any attack on them by the CoBRAs, Koyas and SPOs. Are they not outsiders? Is there no security threat to them? And why there is security threat only to Journalists, Human Rights Activists and Social Activists? Of course, if you are a representative of the corporate houses including the multinationals then you are not the outsiders in Chhatisgarh. But the meaning of outsiders in Chhatisgarh is, those who expose the state sponsored crimes against the Adivasis, the outsiders are those who raise their voices against the rampant human rights violations and outsiders are those who pen the injustices perpetuated on Adivasis by the law enforcement agencies. In fact, the so-called anti-naxal operations are being carried out to ensure lands for the corporate houses therefore the latter are treated as the insiders.

One more thing is to understand is that if you are a politician or have a political support you can do anything in the Red Corridor. Renowned doctor Binayak Sen is in jail for alleged link with the Maoists. However, according to the government record, a former BJP Minister Satyanand Bhokta of Jharkhand had a clear link with the Maoists when he was a cabinet minister in Jharkhand but no action was taken against him. There are numbers of MPs and MLAs irrespective of political parties who have won the elections with the support of the Maoists have been enjoying the power. In fact, if you are in the power then having link with the Maoists, bagging huge public money, killing the innocent, raping women and grabbing land of the Adivasis are also not enough to be charged under the case of Sedition. However, if you are out of the political power than demanding your rights is also enough to be charged as the Maoists, anti-national and seditious. Are we really living in a democratic country?

Presently, we are witnessing two faces of growth and development. Chhatisgarh is a result of liberalization, privatisation and globalization where one face is depicted as the fastest growing state in India and second, the terrified ugly face consisting of illegal arrest, torture, rape, killing and arson of houses and food grains of the Adivasis by the security forces. However, the government attempts to cover the second face of the state by the first face. Is it the real face of emerging super power, where rights, humanity and conscience do not matter for the majority of the people and what matters is only the rat race of development called “economic growth”? However, people must get the justice. Since there are so many ifs and buts in the brutality of Dantewada therefore only a CBI inquiry will deliver justice to the victims of state sponsored crime against the Adivasis of Dantewada.

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