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Reuters Institute Fellowship Paper

University of Oxford

Guns and Protests: Media coverage of the conflicts in the Indian state of Chhattisgarh

By Supriya Sharma

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Executive Summary

India has witnessed high rates of economic growth in recent years and some are heralding it as a future global superpower. But this view glosses over the fact that growth in India exists in tension with equity and social justice, specially in the mineral-rich central and eastern states, where the land of peasant communities including adivasis or indigenous people, is being acquired for mining and energy projects. The resultant tensions in the region are manifested as both armed insurgency and peaceful protests.

This study focuses on the central Indian state of Chhattisgarh, which accounts for nearly one-third of the deaths in the Maoist insurgency over the last decade, and holds nearly one-fifth of India's coal and iron ore reserves. While the common view merges the armed conflict in the state with the resource conflict, this study points out that the geographical areas of the two conflicts do not overlap. The armed conflict grips the south of the state, but the resource conflict is more intense in the northern districts.

Of the two conflicts, which gets more space in the media? The study explores this and related questions through a comprehensive content analysis of more than 500 news stories published in four newspapers - two regional Hindi dailies and two national English-language dailies – in the year 2011. The study finds that the Maoist conflict in the south of Chhattisgarh attracts far greater media attention than the resource conflict in the north of the state; violent events dominate the coverage of the Maoist conflict; and the news reports favour the government.

The results of the content analysis are consistent with the universal fault lines of news as documented by media scholars, that violence has high news value, journalists privilege authority sources and culture, and economics embed the media in existing power structures. But more significantly, the results suggest that by singularly focusing on the Maoist insurgency, the media in India is amplifying it at the expense of other forms of resistance. Even though the coverage of the Maoists might not be positive – as indicated by the bias towards the government in the coverage – the very fact that the armed insurgency is getting space in the media means the Maoists have been able to establish themselves as a powerful actor in the politics of the region. In contrast, peaceful protestors remain largely invisible in the media. It can be argued that when peaceful protestors defending their rights are unable to secure space in the media, not only do they stand weakened, so does democratic politics.

Author's Note: I work for a leading English-language news daily *The Times of India* and cover news from the state of Chhattisgarh. However, this research has been undertaken independently under the aegis of a fellowship. I have not included *The Times of India* in the content analysis because analysing its coverage would pose a *direct* conflict of interest since it would entail analysing my own reportage.

Introduction

A war finds voice

In the morning darkness on 6 April 2010, eighty-three men from India's largest paramilitary force woke up to gunfire from Maoist guerillas deep inside a jungle in central India. Three and a half hours later, only seven of them survived. Seventy-six men had been killed. India's security forces had never lost as many men in a single strike – not even in a conventional border war with its neighbours China or Pakistan.

The next day, *the Times of India*, the largest circulated English-language daily in the country, carried on its front page a strongly worded headline: *'It's war: Naxals butcher 74 in worst blow to security forces'*[1]. The story had no byline. The reason was evident from its dateline: New Delhi/Hyderabad/Bhopal.

The jungle battle had taken place in Dantewada, a district in the central Indian state of Chhattisgarh, more than 1,500 kms away from New Delhi, India's capital, and 850 kms and 500 kms away from Hyderabad and Bhopal, capitals of neighbouring states. *The Times of India* – with 41 localised editions and one of the largest networks of journalists in India – did not have a correspondent within reaching distance of Dantewada because it did not have a single journalist stationed in the state of Chhattisgarh. Another leading English-language newspaper, *The Hindu*, fared only marginally better. It had appointed a Chhattisgarh correspondent four months earlier, after a gap of six years, a period during which 1,595 people were killed in the state and 4,335 people across the country in the Maoist insurgency[2].

The Maoists are communist revolutionaries who see India as a semi-feudal and semi-colonial state and aim to overthrow existing state institutions through a 'protracted people's war'[3]. Their rebellion has waxed and waned for more than four decades, away from the cities, in the poor rural hinterland of central and eastern India, establishing itself most firmly in forested districts like Dantewada, inhabited by adivasis or indigenous people, officially called 'Scheduled Tribes'[4].

In 2004, two large Maoist factions merged under the banner of Communist Party of India (Maoist). A year and half later, India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh called it India's 'single biggest internal security

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[1] "It's War: Naxals Butcher 74 in Worst Blow to Security Forces," *The Times of India,* April 7, 2010.
[2] *Annual Report 2010-11, Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs of India*, 2011.
[3] *Party Programme, the Central Committee of CPI Maoist*, 2004).
[4] Although the term 'tribe' is considered misleading - an artifact of colonial anthropology - it has come to stay as a postcolonial marker of identity in India. The Indian constitution has a schedule or list of more than 600 communities identified as 'tribes' and hence the official term used for them is 'Scheduled Tribes'. However, in both scholarly and common usage, it had been replaced to a large extent by the term 'adivasi', a Hindi word that means 'original dweller' which has a less pejorative connotation. Adivasi is often conflated with 'indigenous people,' but some scholars find this contentious since social history in India is different from Americas and Australia where 'indigenous' groups have much longer histories of residence compared with white settlers. For more on this debate see Daniel K. Roycroft and Sangeeta Dasgupta, "Indigenous Pasts and the Politics of Belonging," and William van Schendel, "The dangers of belonging" in *A Companion to the Anthropology of India*, ed. Isabelle Clark-Deces (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

threat'[5]. In 2009, the central government dispatched additional paramilitary troops to bolster state police in an anti-Maoist offensive known as 'Operation Greenhunt'[6]. Although outnumbered by state troops, the Maoists swooped down in a pre-dawn attack and nearly wiped out a paramilitary company, confirming the classic guerilla advantage in jungle warfare. The Dantewada attack would become a watershed, not just for both sides of the conflict but also for the media. In the days that followed, the isolated jungle spot would be overrun by journalists and photographers. Over the next few months, Dantewada would become a familiar dateline and the coverage of the Maoist conflict would steadily rise in national newspapers[7].

A protest remains voiceless

On the morning of 8 May 2010, three hundred kilometres north of Dantewada, in Raigarh, another district of Chhattisgarh, a few hundred people converged on the edge of a forest, not for a surprise military attack but for a pre-scheduled public meeting. A coal-fired power plant was coming up in the area and the local authorities had organised a public hearing to record people's views on the proposed project.

Once a landscape of sleepy forest hamlets, home to adivasis and other peasant communities, Raigarh is now part of the rush for coal in power-hungry India. Its large coal reserves have made it a magnet for mining and power companies. Under India's laws, industrial and mining projects cannot be set up without prior public consultation with local people[8]. In addition, areas like Raigarh with large adivasi populations are governed under special laws that empower village councils to decide collectively on the use and sale of land. But while India's legal safeguards for adivasi lands are impressive on paper, their implementation on the ground is poor[9]. With the appetite for mineral reserves buried under adivasi lands rising steadily, legal safeguards are being undermined constantly by local bureaucracies often acting under the influence of mining corporations.

The largest company operating in Raigarh, Jindal Steel and Power Limited (JSPL), provides a case in point. JSPL is owned by an influential politician, Naveen Jindal, who combines his entrepreneurial job with that of a member of Indian Parliament. Local residents and activists allege the company routinely violates social and environmental laws[10] but that it gets away with the violations thanks to its combined political and

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[5] "Naxalism Single Biggest Internal Security Challenge: PM," *Press Trust of India*April 13, 2006, 2006.

[6] The press began carrying reports of 'Operation Greenhunt' September 2009 onwards. See for example Vishwa Mohan, "Op Green Hunt Puts Naxals in Retreat Mode," *The Times of India* September 20, 2009.. By November, India's Home minister denied any such operation was underway but did not deny the dispatch of paramilitary companies to Maoist-affected areas. See "'Operation Green Hunt' Invention of Media, Claims Chidamabaram," *The Times of India* November 6, 2009.

[7] A search on the Factiva database showed a rising graph of news stories on the Maoist insurgency in Chhattisgarh in three leading English-language newspapers of India. For graph, see Chapter Two.

[8] The non-profit Centre for Science and Environment has a ready-reckoner on the environmental clearance process in India, which includes mandatory public hearings. See "Environmental Clearance - the Process," Centre for Science and Environment, http://cseindia.org/node/403 (accessed July/17, 2012).

[9] Sanjay Upadhyay, *Tribal Self-Rule Law and Common Property Resources in Scheduled Areas of India - A New Paradigm Shift Or another Ineffective Sop?*,[2004]).

[10] The company started operations in Raigarh in 1996. The protests by local residents started soon after. A hunger strike against the company led to the death of an adivasi woman in 1998. See "Dying for a River," *Down to Earth,* April 30,

financial muscle. The company has denied the allegations.

But in the public hearing on 8 May 2010, amidst swelling crowds of hundreds of villagers, activist Ramesh Agrawal denounced what he called JSPL's latest legal violation: construction at the project site had started before a public hearing could be held and government clearance obtained[11]. Other residents complained of widespread soil and water pollution by the company and about its poor record in paying fair compensation for land and in offering jobs to local youth. The meeting began at 10 a.m and lasted until midnight. It was a tense and dramatic day in Raigarh[12].

But no account of Raigarh's turbulence appeared in the national media, not until a month later when India's environment minister decided to withhold clearance for the project[13]. Environment ministry officials investigating Agrawal's petition found the allegations against the company were true. It was a rare case of local activism triumphing over a powerful corporation[14]. What made it even more striking was that the government had thwarted a company owned by an elected politician from its own party. But a few exceptions aside, the media did not dwell on the company's legal violations, focusing instead on the likely fallout on the company's forthcoming stock market offer.

Mediatized Conflicts

Conflict, a contest, contestation, or dispute between individuals, groups, institutions, or States, in which the parties involved perceive their respective aims to be in contention or incompatible[15].

In journalistic parlance, the term 'conflict' is most commonly used for an outbreak of violence between groups. But social scientists employ it in a broader sense for disputes that could be social, economic, political or cultural, that may or may not manifest in overt violence.

As evident from the two episodes narrated above, the Indian state of Chhattisgarh presents a wide spectrum of conflict. At the one end, Maoist guerillas are fighting government security forces. At the other, communities are using peaceful protest to resist corporate takeover of their lands through peaceful protests. In many media accounts, both the conflicts have merged. The Maoists project themselves, and are presented by many, as the vanguard for poor adivasis outraged at being dispossessed of their land by greedy mining

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1998. The complaints against the company have continued unabated. See Kanchi Kohli, "Expanding Steel Maker Skirting Enviro-Law?" http://www.indiatogether.org/2005/aug/env-jindal.htm (accessed July/17, 2012). Kanchi Kohli, "MoEF Fails to Act Once again," http://www.indiatogether.org/2005/sep/env-moefjpl.htm (accessed July/17, 2012).

[11] Video footage of the public hearing.

[12] Interviews done with local residents in 2010.

[13] Supriya Sharma, "Govt Rejects Congress MP Jindal's Power Project," *The Times of India* June 25, 2010.

[14] The triumph was short lived. The company managed to get clearances a few months later. Ramesh Agrawal was arrested on charges of defamation. Environmental and human rights groups rallied around Agrawal and said he was paying a price for taking on a powerful corporation "Ramesh Pays the Price," Centre for Science and Environment, http://cseindia.org/content/ramesh-pays-price

[15] Gene Sharp, *Sharp's Dictionary of Power and Struggle: Language of Civil Resistance in Conflicts* (New York ; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

corporations aided by a corrupt state[16].

There is indeed a broad overlap in central and eastern India between mineral rich forests – areas of resource conflict – and the growing sphere of Maoist influence – areas of armed conflict. Many correlate the sharpening of violent conflict in this region with the intensification of resource extraction in India's post liberalisation market-driven economy. Chapter One gives an overview of the impact of economic changes in India and their impact on poverty and inequality. Chapter Two traces the history and spread of the Maoist insurgency and looks at some of the key debates surrounding it.

However, as Chapter Two explores, the broad overlap between the resource conflict and the Maoist rebellion in central and eastern India is not fully borne out by ground facts in the state of Chhattisgarh. Not all mineral-rich areas in the state are in the grip of Maoist insurgency, and neither are all Maoists areas mineral bearing. Geographically, Maoist influence and control is largely confined to southern districts like Dantewada while the resource conflict is most intense in northern districts like Raigarh. The southern districts do possess large mineral reserves too but active mining consumes more land and edges out more people in the north. It is in the south where the Maoists have picked up guns; those facing displacement in the north are resisting through peaceful protests and petitions using due process in courts of law.

When I moved to Chhattisgarh in 2010 to report for a national newspaper[17], I was intrigued that the resource conflict in the North had found little representation in the media. Media narratives either ignored it or merged it with the violent resistance of the Maoists. My experiences in the field however, suggested the resistance by protests and petitions occupied a distinct ecology from the resistance by guns[18]. Its invisibility in the news coverage led me to question what makes conflict newsworthy in the mainstream media.

Media scholar Simon Cottle frames the question well: "Why are some conflicts hidden from public view and 'symbolically annihilated' in the media, while others steal the media spotlight and may do so over a considerable period of time?"[19]Arguing that the media have become "a prized arena for the waging of conflict," or that conficts are *mediatized*, Cottle says media coverage has implications for democracy. "It is in and through mediatized conflicts," he says, "the array of views and voices that surround them and the public spaces they manage to secure to define and defend their claims and aims, that the state of democracy in today's societies becomes revealed, and, in important respects, constituted and open to evaluation." In a similar vein, this paper attempts to find out which dimensions of conflict in Chhattisgarh are reported in the

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[16] Arundhati Roy, *Broken Republic: Three Essays* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2011).
[17] I reported for The Times of India from Chhattisgarh from June 2010 onwards.
[18] I take inspiration from anthropologist James Scott, who reminded us that "peasant 'revolutions' are few and far between", and resistance often takes everyday forms like foot-dragging and evasion. I use resistance not in the sense of everyday acts, but I understand resistance as Scott defined it: "(the) constant struggle between the peasantry and those who seek to extract labour, food, taxes, rent and interest from them," and if I may add in the context of my paper, land. James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak [Electronic Resource]: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, ed. American Council of Learned Societies (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).
[19] Simon Cottle, *Mediatized Conflict: Developments in Media and Conflict Studies* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2006).

media and which are not; what explains the patterns of coverage and what does this tell us about Indian democracy.

Chapter Four offers a survey of the Indian news media at the national and regional level, with special reference to Chhattisgarh and its Hindi press. Chapter Five explores some of the theories that underpin the study of media and conflict, particularly those that explain why violence has high news value, what makes journalists privilege authority sources and how culture and economics embed the media in existing power structures. Chapter Six presents a content analysis of conflict coverage in 2011 in four newspapers – two national English-language dailies and two regional Hindi dailies. The key findings are that the Maoist conflict in the south of Chhattisgarh attracts far greater media attention than the resource conflict in the north of the state; violent events dominate the coverage of the Maoist conflict; and the news reports display a strong bias in favour of the government. Chapter Seven tests these results against the professional opinions of journalists from the four newspapers.

The results of the content analysis are consistent with the universal fault lines of news documented by media scholars. But placing the results in the realm of media theory is just one of the aims of the paper. The more important aim is to place them in the context of contemporary India. Riding on an economic boom, the country is being heralded by some as a future global superpower, but this view glosses over the fact that growth in India exists in tension with equity and social justice, especially in less developed states like Chhattisgarh. Such tensions manifest themselves *both* in armed insurgency and peaceful mobilisations. As this paper shows, the media has woken up to the import of the armed insurgency, but it continues to neglect the peaceful protests. Academic studies caution against a simplistic reading of the media's impact, but it can be argued that the media is unlikely to further the cause of democratic politics in states like Chhattisgarh if it continues to ignore the voices of resistance until they speak the language of violence.

Chapter One
India: The Growth Faultlines

Long viewed as a lumbering country condemned to poverty and bound to collapse under the weight of its multiple contradictions, India's image has undergone a dramatic transformation. Its economy is growing fast and, unlike its neighbor and rival China, it is a vibrant democracy. "A country once written off as a basketcase," writes historian Ramachandra Guha, "is now said to be on the verge of becoming a superpower."[20] But while acknowledging India's achievements, Guha also points to its "pervasive faultlines", one of which he identifies as the spread of the Maoist insurgency in the country's centre and the East where adivasis are being dispossessed by mining companies – a process that is becoming more intense as economic growth accelerates.

Growth, Poverty, Inequality

Faced with a balance of payments crisis in 1991, India liberalised its economy, reducing the role of the state and encouraging market forces and the private sector[21]. This has resulted in higher growth rates, increased consumption, an urban middle class whose numbers are growing fast and rising number of dollar billionaires – 48 at the last count[22].

But the impact of economic growth on poverty and inequality is highly controversial. While the standards of living have improved for large sections of India's poor – some economists claim that 200 million people have been lifted out of poverty in the post-reform period[23] - recent research suggests the rate of poverty reduction has remained unaltered[24].

There is broad agreement that income gaps have widened post-liberalisation[25]. The income share of the richest 1% has doubled from 5% to 10% in less than a decade of liberalization[26]. Pro-reform economists see this as "a necessary concomitant – if not an actual contributor – to economic growth."[27] They argue growth has unshackled the entrepreneurial energies of India and the growing income they generate boosts tax

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[20] Ramachandra Guha, "Democratic to a Fault?" *Prospect,* January 25, 2012.

[21] For an authoritative account of India's reforms, see a piece by one of its key architects, Montek S. Ahluwalia, "Economic Reforms in India since 1991: Has Gradualism Worked?" *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 16, no. 3, 67-88.

[22] "Asia's Billionaires," Forbes, http://www.forbes.com/lists/2012/10/asia-billionaires.html

[23] Jagdish Bhagwati, "Indian Reforms - Yesterday and Today, The Hiren Mukherjee Memorial Lecture 2010," http://www.columbia.edu/~jb38/papers/pdf/Lok-Sabha-speech-FINAL-EXPANDED-Deceber-14.pdf

[24] Gaurav Datt et al., "Has India's Economic Growth Become More Pro-Poor in the Wake of Economic Reforms?" *The World Bank Economic Review* 25, no. 2, 157-189.

[25] For a summary of the key studies, see Thomas E Weisskopf, "Why Worry about Inequality in the Booming Indian Economy?" *Economic and Political Weekly,* Vol xlvi, no. 47 (November 19, 2011).

[26] This estimate is based on income tax returns, which are often under-reported in India. Hence, it is likely to be an under-estimate. See Abhijit Banerjee and Thomas Piketty. "Top Indian Incomes, 1922-2000." *The World Bank Economic Review* 19, no. 1 (1-20). Also wealth inequality is wider than income inequality in India.

[27] As stated by economist Thomas E Weisskopf who counters this view by presenting social, political, economic arguments against income inequality.

revenues, which "can finally be spent on targeted health and education so as to *additionally* improve the well-being of the poor."[28]

But other economists caution that a singular focus on economic growth has induced the government to give widespread concessions to private industry[29] and restrict social sector spending[30]. A sharp decline in government spending on agriculture, in particular, has made the rural poor vulnerable. Income inequality has increased between rural and urban populations; in rural India, farm labour has benefitted the least from economic growth[31] and in urban India, regular workers have prospered more than less educated casual workers[32].

India's economic model, some argue, has created crony capitalism whereby a small, influential group is able to rig policies in its favour at the expense of an impoverished majority[33].

Land acquisition

These debates come together most forcefully in the frictions over the acquisition of farmland for industry. Unlike industrialisation in 19th century Europe, which absorbed peasants as industrial labour, technology-led industrialisation in India offers limited employment potential[34]. In addition, under the prevailing 118-year-old colonial law, the process of land acquisition in India remains opaque, arbitrary and inappropriate to current realities.

To address the rising friction, in 2011, the government drafted a new land acquisition bill[35]. The introductory comments by the rural development minister summed up the government's goals: "Infrastructure across the country must expand rapidly. Industrialisation, especially based on manufacturing, has also to accelerate…Land is an essential requirement for all these processes...In every case, land acquisition must take place in a manner that fully protects the interests of land-owners and also of those whose livelihoods depend on the land being acquired."

However, the difficulties of balancing the imperatives of economic growth and social justice in a sub-continental sized and federally governed country became apparent as contrasting criticisms of the draft

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[28] Bhagwati, *Indian Reforms - Yesterday and Today, Hiren Mukherjee Memorial Lecture 2010*

[29] Journalist P. Sainath provocatively estimated that the concessions amounted to over half a trillion U.S. dollars in the latest annual budget. See P. Sainath, "To Fix BPL, Nix CPL," *The Hindu,* March 26, 2012.

[30] Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen, "Putting Growth in its Place," *Outlook,* November 14, 2011.

[31] Sukhdeo Thorat and Amaresh Dubey. "Has Growth been Socially Inclusive during 1993-94 – 2009-10?" *Economic and Political Weekly,* Vol xlvii, no.10 (March 10, 2012).
Thorat

[32] Sandip Sarkar and Balwant Singh Mehta. "Income Inequality in India: Pre- and Post-Reform Periods." *Economic and Political Weekly,* Vol xlv, no.37 (September 11, 2010).

[33] Indira Hirway, "Inclusive Growth Under a Neo-Liberal Policy Framework," *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol xlviI No 20 (May 19, 2012).

[34] Economic growth in India has been led by the service sector and not by manufacturing.

[35] "Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Bill, 2011," Rural Development Ministry, Government of India, http://rural.nic.in/sites/downloads/general/LS%20Version%20of%20LARR%20%20Bill.pdf

mounted. Industry bodies protested that its provisions would stall investment and hurt growth[36], while peasant organisations alleged the draft is retrograde since it strengthens the government's power to forcibly acquire farmland for companies[37]. State governments objected to the bill on the grounds that it oversteps the powers of the federal government and encroaches on the authority of the states[38].

Initially, the bill fixed minimum compensation of land acquired in rural areas at six times the prevailing market price; subsequently it brought it down to four times the market price. A recent analysis by economist Ram Singh however, raises more fundamental concerns, showing how land markets in India are tied up by obstructive regulations that prevent a fair market price from emerging[39]. Singh says, "The bill leaves open several back doors for the states to favour the powerful and private companies at the expense of the rights of the farmer and the forest dweller."

Democracy, State and Capital

The forest dweller is arguably more vulnerable than the farmer in India's plains. This is because constant and uncertain political negotiation, and not the language of formal citizenship and rights, characterizes the relationship between the vast majority of Indians and the state[40]. Hence, even if the land acquisition law was made more favourable to peasants, farmer groups that are better organized and represented are likely to wrest better terms than marginalised groups like adivasis.

While reporting on land acquisition in north Chhattisgarh, I came across several instances where adivasi peasants were the first to lose their farmland to industry and at rates much lower than those negotiated by other farmers in the same area[41].

These differential impacts are significant since Chhattisgarh is part of the mineral-rich belt of India where the pace of land acquisition has intensified in the post-liberalization economy. In one district of Chhattisgarh alone, more than 30 power plants are seeking to acquire more than 30,000 hectares of land. While India needs to urgently step up power generation to make up for acute shortfalls, the disproportionate ecological burden of producing power falls on communities in coal-bearing states like Chhattisgarh.

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[36] "'Current State of the Indian Economy: Challenges and the Way Ahead' : Statement by Mr. R V Kanoria, President, FICCI," http://www.ficci.com/ficci-press-indian-economy-june4.pdf

[37] "Farmers Flay Union Ministers on Land Bill," *The Hindu* July 10, 2012.

[38] "Madhya Pradesh Objects to Land Acquisition Bill Too," *Business Standard* April 6, 2012.

[39] Ram Singh, "Inefficiency and Abuse of Compulsory Land Acquisition," *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol xlviI No. 19 (May 12, 2012). For distortion in land prices and need for market prices to play role, see Ajay Pandey and Sebastian Morris, "Towards Reform of Land Acquisition Framework in India," *Economic and Political Weekly* 42, no. 22 (, 2083-2090.

[40] Political theorist Partha Chatterjee draws a distinction between western democracies, where 'civil society' or citizens stake legal claims on the state within constitutionally defined rights, and postcolonial societies like India where 'political society', or groups other than middle classes and elites make popular demands which lie outside the realm of justiciable rights. See Partha Chatterjee, *Lineages of Political Society : Studies in Postcolonial Democracy,* New York ; Chichester : Columbia University Press, 2011.

[41] Supriya Sharma, "Tribal Farmers Get Rs 2L, Rich Rs 17L," *The Times of India,* June 25, 2011; Supriya Sharma, "Chhattisgarh Minister's Son Buys Farmland for Videocon," *The Times of India,* June 23, 2011.

Resistance and Violence

Since industrialisation in states like Chhattisgarh impacts some of India's most vulnerable communities, it has become a crucial test for the inclusiveness of Indian democracy. The left, in particular, has debated this subject intensely.

Those on the extreme left, which includes CPI Maoist and other ultra-left groups, see Indian democracy as a sham and are convinced the state is aligned with capital and can only be resisted by violent means. "The question is whether to live a life of slavery and indignity and die of hunger by remaining docile or engage in peaceful protests…or take up arms to completely eradicate the grounds that give birth to all kinds of suppression and oppression," says Ganapathi, the leader of CPI Maoist[42]. To this end, the CPI Maoist has organized a guerilla army to wage an armed struggle against the state.

But others within the democratic left question strategies of systematic violence. Nivedita Menon draws a distinction between 'violence that arises in the course of a movement' – spontaneous violence used for self-defence or an act of desperation by oppressed groups – and 'integration of violence at the heart of an institution or movement' – as adopted by the Maoists[43].

Aditya Nigam argues that the latter form of violence only serves the needs of the capitalistic state, since in areas that come under the sway of Maoists the state can brand all opposition as Maoist.[44] This, in turn, creates more space for the Maoists. The guerillas step up violence, the state responds with violence, and as a result the middle ground for democratic politics is lost.

As an example, Nigam points to the case of Lalgarh. A non-descript adivasi village in the eastern state of West Bengal, Lalgarh came in the national spotlight in 2008 when opposition over a proposed steel factory triggered a complex sequence of events that culminated in the villagers cordoning off 300 square kilometres with the support of Maoists. The media declared it a liberated zone and a paramilitary operation was launched to clear the blockade. For Nigam, Lalgarh epitomised the case of "a popular mass movement handed over to Maoists." He cites the example of Manoj, a 25-year-old man who was a member of the opposition party and had vocally criticised the ruling party, which managed to get him arrested as a Maoist. In prison, he came in contact with Maoist leaders and decided to join the rebels. "They branded us Maoists,"

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[42] Ganapathi. "Open Reply to Independent Citizens' Initiative on Dantewada." *Economic and Political Weekly* (January 6, 2007).

[43] Nivedita Menon, "Radical Resistance and Political Violence Today," *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol xliv No. 50 (December 12, 2009).

[44] Aditya Nigam, "Democracy, State and Capital: The 'Unthought' of 20th Century Marxism," *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol xliv No. 51 (December 19, 2009).

Manoj reasoned, "So we began to think we might as well join the Maoists."

"A now familiar trajectory, then, is of state-corporate appropriation of local resources, popular resistance followed by state repression, and the branding of a mass movement as "Maoist", thus increasing the possibility of its actually coming under the control of the (Maoist) party,"[45] says Menon.

Menon claims that mass movements have been more effective in resisting corporate power. "If the Indian state ever retreats from its policy of facilitating corporate loot of tribal areas and ecologically sustainable development, it will be due to pressure of such mass movements," she says. But the Maoist leader Ganapathi disputes this. "Can you show us one instance from the pages of Indian history where the rights of the adivasis were ensured through non-violent and open means?" he asks[46].

It is beyond the scope of this paper to analyse the record of non-violence social movements in securing adivasi rights in India – except to note the record is a mixed one with spectacular failures and small successes. What is worth emphasizing, however, is that every time the Indian state fails to respond to such non-violent movements, it strengthens the intellectual critique made by the Maoists, if not the rebellion on the ground. The next chapter looks at the spread of the Maoist insurgency in India.

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[45] In contrast, the Maoists with their secretive apparatus only mimic the state, says Nigam, and in countries like China where they have wrested power they have "merely produced more ruthless versions of capitalism."

[46] Ganapathi. "Open Reply to Independent Citizens' Initiative on Dantewada." *Economic and Political Weekly* (January 6, 2007).

Chapter Two
India's Red Corridor

From the foothills on India's border with Nepal, over dry plains and thick forests, sooty mining towns and railway tracks, crisscrossing several eastern states down to the southern state of Andhra Pradesh, runs an insurgency variously called Naxal, Naxalite[47], Maoist, or in the official terminology of the Indian government 'LWE' or left-wing extremism[48].

The media likes to call this swathe of insurgency-affected lands 'the red corridor'. The term might not be entirely accurate since the territories are not seamlessly connected, but it is still effective in evoking both the ideological colour and the bloody nature of the rebellion that sweeps large parts of India's poor eastern states.

While the rebellion is more than four decades old, it has attracted renewed attention in the last few years, partly due to a rise in levels of violence but also because it affects states that together hold the bulk of India's coal and iron ore. For foreign correspondents looking for another side to India's economic rise, it offers the perfect counterpoint - the dark and violent underbelly that threatens India's growth. As Bloomberg reported in 2010, "The nation's mineral wealth and 8.5 percent annual growth are at stake." [49]

From Naxalbari to Dandakaranya

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[47] The terms 'Naxal' and 'Naxalite' emerged out of the peasant uprising in 1967 in Naxalbari village in the eastern state of West Bengal. This uprising is widely seen as the starting point of the current insurgency.

[48] India's Home Ministry constituted a 'Naxal Management Division' in 2006 to "to effectively address the LWE problem in a holistic manner." See http://mha.nic.in/uniquepage.asp?Id_Pk=540 (accessed July/17, 2012).

[49] "India's Maoist Menace," *Bloomberg Markets Magazine,* July, 2010.

In the summer of 1967, peasants in the village of Naxalbari in the hills of West Bengal revolted against landlords, forcibly occupying land, seizing crops and cancelling old debts[50]. The revolt was led by university-educated ideologues of the militant left. Inspired by China's communist leader Mao Tse-tung, they believed transfer of power to the poor and the landless could only take place through armed rebellion[51]. *People's Daily* in China gave them a favourable nod and called Naxalbari the "prelude to a violent revolution by hundreds of millions of people throughout India."[52]

The Naxalite rebellion – as it came to be called - was crushed in Bengal[53] but spread beyond the confines of the state. In the neighbouring state of Bihar, it mobilised disadvantaged lower caste communities on the question of land rights[54]. In the south, it gave fresh impetus to radical students in Telengana, a backward region in Andhra Pradesh with an older history of communist uprisings[55]. The middle class revolutionaries mobilised peasants into armed groups and staged attacks on rich landlords and government targets. Facing pressure from state police, one of the leaders proposed the idea of a 'rear base', an area to recoup, in the forests of Dandakaranya that lay north of Telengana.

The bulk of Dandakaranya overlaps with the Bastar region in Chhattisgarh (then Madhya Pradesh) and the rest spills into the states of Maharashtra and Orissa. Bigger than Belgium, it is an area of neglect, and was even more so in 1980 when the first Maoist squads arrived. Adivasis survived on subsistence agriculture and meagre returns mostly from collecting and selling forest produce like *mahua* flower (used to distill liquor), sal seeds (used in soaps and chocalates) and *tendu* leaves (used to roll country cigarettes). The forest department had intensified colonial era policies of curtailing the local community's access to forests[56]. The area had barely any schools and hospitals, or for that matter police posts, which made the forests a veritable safe haven for guerilla fighters.

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[50] Sumanta Banerjee, *In the Wake of Naxalbari: A History of the Naxalite Movement in India* (Calcutta: Subarnarekha, 1980).

[51] The emergence of the 'Naxalites' in India coincided with ideological ferment in the communist movement internationally which culminated in the Sino-Soviet split. For more details on the ideological and formation of CPI (Marxist-Leninist), India's first extreme-left party committed to armed warfare, see J. Mohan, "Naxalites, the New Left," *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol 5 No. 29 (1119-1122).

[52] Cited in Bhabani Sen Gupta, "A Maoist Line for India," *The China Quarterly* 33 (1968).

[53] For analysis of why the rebellion in Bengal floundered, see Biplab Dasgupta, "Naxalite Armed Struggles and the Annihilation Campaign in Rural Areas," *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol 8 No. 4 (173-188). Sumanta Banerjee, " Annihilation of Class Enemies': CPI(ML) Tactics at Critical Point," *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol 5 No. 35 (1449-1452).

[54] For a recent account of the Naxal mobilisation among Dalits in Bihar, see George J. Kunnath, *Rebels from the Mud Houses : Dalits and the Making of the Maoist Revolution in Bihar* (New Delhi: Bangalore: Social Science Press; Bangalore: Distributed by Orient Blackswan, 2012). Also more sociological analysis from Chitralekha, "'Committed, Opportunists and Drifters': Revisiting the Naxalite Narrative in Jharkhand and Bihar," *CONTRIBUTIONS TO INDIAN SOCIOLOGY* Vol 44, No. 3 (299-329).

[55] India has a long history of peasant uprisings. The first peasant rebellion organised by India's communists took place in Telengana region in the closing years of the British rule. See Mohan Ram, "The Telengana Peasant Armed Struggle, 1946-51," *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol 8, No. 23 (1025-1032). Kathleen Gough, "Peasant Resistance and Revolt in South India," *Pacific Affairs* 41, no. 4 (526-544).

[56] "Bastar: Development and Democracy," *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol 24, no. 40 1989 (2237-2241).

A rare independent account[57] suggests that the Maoists built initial support by acting against exploitative foresters and errant school teachers. But their main intervention was forcing visiting traders to pay the adivasis a better price for the forest produce they purchased from them. Control over the forest economy offered the Maoists a double advantage: it won them support among adivasis and opened up a source of income to fund the movement, as traders could be taxed[58].

Three decades later, the rebels control sizeable pockets of land in Dandakaranya. Sympathetic public intellectuals invited to visit by the Maoists have come back with an image of a well-established political and military network in the area[59]. The political committees start at the level of the village and coalesce into bigger area and zonal formations. Militarily, villagers armed with crude weapons form 'people's militias' that scale up to 'people's guerilla liberation army' of both men and women fighters clad in olive green uniforms and armed with self-loading rifles, automatic guns and mortars often captured from injured or dead policemen in jungle battles, or looted from police armouries.

There are no reliable estimates of current cadre strength. One estimate placed the strength at 10,500 fighters in 2005-06[60]. Membership fees, confiscated 'enemy' income, and levies and taxes are listed as sources of income[61]. The last source is contentious since it brings into question the relationship of Maoists with the economic agents they claim to fight. India's intelligence officers have told journalists that Maoists annually extort 2,000 crore Indian rupees (Rs 20,000,000,000 or approximately US$ 360 million) from private businesses and public development projects[62]. Such reports are impossible to verify independently.

There is a lack of systematic data on the insurgency. While there is extensive literature on the Maoist movement, most of it suffers from the same limitations that German academic Klaus Schlichte identifies in the scholarship on armed groups: "Writings of military and strategic experts tend to sympathise implicitly with state forces, whereas authors who are political activists in their respective home countries…often tend to romanticise armed movements in seemingly exotic surroundings."[63]

The accounts of the Maoist movement by sympathetic intellectuals have sketched an image of a mass movement that enjoys widespread support in its guerilla zones while security experts have emphasised the role of violence in the Maoists' ability to instill fear and maintain control over local populations. Social

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[57] V.P. Patel, 'Tribal Unrest and Adventures of Naxalites', as cited in the 'Afterword' of Nandini Sundar, *Subalterns and Sovereigns: An Anthropological History of Bastar, 1854-2006* (New Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[58] For a detailed exploration of the Maoist political economy in neighbouring Telengana, see B. Suykens, "Diffuse Authority in the Beedi Commodity Chain: Naxalite and State Governance in Tribal Telangana, India," *DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGE* 41, no. 1 (153-178).

[59] Gautam Navlakha, "Days and Nights in the Maoist Heartland," *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol XLV No. 16, 2010. Satanāma, *Jangalnama : Inside the Maoist Guerrilla Zone*, ed. Vishav Bharti (New Delhi, India: Penguin Books India, 2010). Arundhati Roy and Arundhati Roy, *Broken Republic: Three Essays* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2011).

[60] Gautam Navlakha, "Maoists in India," *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol 41 No. 22, 2006 (2186-2189).

[61] Navlakha, *Days and Nights in the Maoist Heartland*

[62] "Extortnomics: Maoists Raise Rs 2000 Crore Every Year," *The Times of India* February 25, 2011.

[63] Klaus Schlichte, *In the Shadow of Violence: The Politics of Armed Groups* (Frankfurt; New York: Campus Verlag, 2009).

anthropologist Alpa Shah offers a more nuanced analysis, pointing out that in their guerilla zones, the Maoists have become the state, "but in the same vein of anthropological analysis that highlights the porous boundaries between the state and the people, they are often regarded more like an extended family in the region."[64] Shah's observations come from field work in Jharkhand, a state neighbouring Chhattisgarh, where the Maoist guerillas exercise control in zones similar to the ones in Dandakaranya. Parts of Orissa and West Bengal are also under varying degrees of Maoist control and influence. This brings us to the question of the extent of the insurgency.

Extent and Intent

India's Prime Minister has repeatedly called the Maoist insurgency the country's 'single biggest internal security threat'. And yet there is little agreement over its extent. A government statistic commonly cited is that 225 districts out of the country's 626 districts are affected by the Maoist rebellion. This would add up to 40% of India's territory affecting 400 million of its 1.2 billion people. Security analysts believe this grossly overstates the reach of the rebels since it includes districts that may have witnessed only the odd case of isolated violence[65]. This view is shared by some theorists on the political left who detect a conspiracy by the government to label all opposition to its neo-liberal economic agenda as 'Maoist violence' in order to legitimise repressive policing[66]. An indirect albeit more reliable measure of the extent of the insurgency can be found in the government lists of federal aid – 83 districts receive federal aid for security expenditure and 60 districts get aid for development programs to counter the rebellion[67].

A large number of these districts lie in forest areas that are home to adivasis, India's poorest communities[68] and also its most disenfranchised[69]. The other notable characteristic is that many of these districts have mineral deposits that are being mined, or are on the radar of mining corporations. This has buttressed the case of those who argue the Maoist rebellion is the outcome of India's policies that have dispossessed and

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[64] Alpa Shah, "India Burning: The Maoist Revolution," in *A Companion to the Anthropology of India*, ed. Isabelle Clark-Decès (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

[65] Prem Mahadevan, "The Maoist Insurgency in India: Between Crime and Revolution," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 23, no. 2 (203-220).

[66] Aditya Nigam, "Democracy, State and Capital: The 'Unthought' of 20th Century Marxism," *Economic and Political Weekly* xliv, no. 51 (December 19, 2009).

[67] Of the 60 districts that get development aid under Integrated Action Plan, 48 districts also get grants for security expenditure. See Press Information Bureau, Government of India, "Integrated Action Plan to Develop Tribal and Backward Districts in LWE Areas," Press Information Bureau, Government of India, http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=79472 (accessed July/17, 2012).

[68] Recent poverty estimates show that the adivasis, or scheduled tribes, are the poorest among social groups in India, particularly adivasi groups from central and eastern India. See Durgesh C. Pathak and Srijit Mishra, *Poverty Estimates in India: Old and New Methods, 2004-05* (Mumbai: Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research,[2011]).

[69] India's constitution reserves seats in both the Parliament and state assemblies for two sets of historically disadvantaged social groups - 'Scheduled Castes' or low caste groups and 'Scheduled tribes' or adivasis. While this policy has given dividends in the case of low castes groups who have managed to gain political power in several Indian states, adivasis have not been able to assert themselves electorally. Some believe the failure of democracy to include adivasis has created a space for Maoist revolutionaries in central and eastern India. See Ramachandra Guha, "Adivasis, Naxalites and Indian Democracy," *Economic and Political Weekly* 42, no. 32 (3305-3312). For a closely observed view of the adivasi mistrust of the state, see Alpa Shah, "'Keeping the State Away': Democracy, Politics, and the State in India's Jharkhand," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 13, no. 1 (2007), 129-145.

impoverished adivasis by diverting their land to industrial and mining projects. The view is echoed in government documents, most notably in a report prepared in 2008 by the Planning Commission, India's development planning body[70]. But perhaps its most influential advocate has been novelist-turned-polemicist Arundhati Roy who views the Maoist insurgency as heroic resistance by indigenous people forced to take up arms to save their land and forests from greedy mining corporations aided by corrupt neo-liberal governments[71].

But Roy's merging of Maoist and adivasi resistance is contested by many. One strand of criticism comes from those who argue that the upper-caste, middle-class leaders of the movement are not primarily concerned with adivasi welfare but are instead using adivasis to further their militaristic vision[72]. Another strand of criticism comes from those who object to the essentialising of adivasis as nature-loving communtarians. "The eco-populism of presenting the Maoists as an adivasi movement relegates a class struggle, aimed at forming a united front of class alliances, where distinctions of class or caste should not matter, to a movement of identity politics," writes Alpa Shah in a critique of Roy's essays[73]. Shah's anthropological work in Jharkhand cautions against easy correlations. In the villages she studied, where the Maoists were in the early stages of mobilising support, they first built relationships with rural elites and not adivasis; adivasis themselves had differing attitudes towards the Maoists; and early recruits to the movement were poor youth drawn to the comfortable lifestyles of the rural elites and not necessarily to some idealised romantic notion of indigeneity[74].

The geographical overlap between resource-rich areas and Maoist violence is also subject to varying interpretations. The argument that the Maoist rebellion is fuelled by the 'grievances' of local people edged out by mining is countered by analysts who contend it is Maoist 'greed' that is the driving force, since operating out of cash-rich mining areas allows Maoists to build an 'extortion-centric criminal economy' to fund their operations and expansion[75].

An empirical study at Norway's Peace Research institute, however, found a weak correlation between mining activity and Maoist violence[76]. Studying data from 150 districts in six Indian states, the researchers found that Maoist violence strongly correlates with the presence of poor adivasi and lower-caste communities, validating the long-held view corroborated by other studies as well, that this is a movement of

[70] *Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas,* Planning Commission of India, Government of India, 2008

[71] Roy, *Broken Republic : Three Essays*

[72] Nirmalangshu Mukherji, "Arms Over the People: What have the Maoists Achieved in Dandakaranya?" *Economic and Political Weekly* xlv, no. 25 (June 19, 2010).

[73] Alpa Shah, "Eco-Incarceration? 'Walking with the Comrades' " *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol XLVII, no. No 21 (May 26, 2012).

[74] A. Shah and A. Shah, "Markets of Protection - the 'Terrorist' Maoist Movement and the State in Jharkhand, India," *CRITIQUE OF ANTHROPOLOGY* 26, no. 3 (297-314).

[75] Mahadevan, *The Maoist Insurgency in India: Between Crime and Revolution*, 203-220

[76] Kristian Hoelscher, Jason Miklian and Krishna Chaitanya Vadlamannati, "Hearts and Mines: A District-Level Analysis of the Maoist Conflict in India," *International Area Studies Review* 15, no. 2 (June 01, 2012) 141-160.

the poorest of the poor[77]. The study also found the insurgency had a higher incidence in districts that offered the guerillas operational advantages of forest cover and cross-border mobility. Significantly, the study found only weak correlation of the insurgency with mining activity.

This is significant since it suggests that where resource extraction is radically altering livelihoods and creating social unrest, resistance might not be coming from armed revolutionaries, as many tend to believe, but from other sources of social activism. In the next chapter, my analysis for the state of Chhattisgarh arrives at similar conclusions, challenging common wisdom that connects the Maoist rebellion with the unrest in mining areas.

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[77] Vani K. Borooah, "Deprivation, Violence, and Conflict: An Analysis of Naxalite Activity in the Districts of India," *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* 2, no. 2 (317).

Chapter Three

Chhattisgarh – A State in Conflict

When Chhattisgarh was created out of the large central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh in 2001[78], its first chief minister, Ajit Jogi, was quick to boast of its distinctions. He told *Frontline* magazine, "In terms of resources we have no equals. We have deposits of various kinds of valuable minerals such as coal, iron ore, bauxite, dolomite, limestone, gold and diamond. We have the richest forests in mainland India. Our human resource is plentiful."[79] One-third of the new state's people were adivasis – the largest fraction of indigenous people outside India's North-East. Forests covered 44% of its area – the largest green canopy outside the North-East. And as the chief minister boasted, it had rich mineral reserves – one fifth of India's iron ore and 16% of its coal[80].

But a decade later, what defines Chhattisgarh for the rest of India is not the state's distinct human and natural geography but the Maoist insurgency that grips its south. The business press often frames the insurgency as an impediment to the utilisation of mineral resources for economic growth, while the left-liberal press sees the violence itself as a symptom of economic inequality that accompanies such resource extraction. While both are different contentions, they share the common assumption that geographically, Chhattisgarh's Maoist areas overlap with areas rich in mineral resources. This assumption can be tested using maps that show both the mineral areas and the Maoist areas of the state.
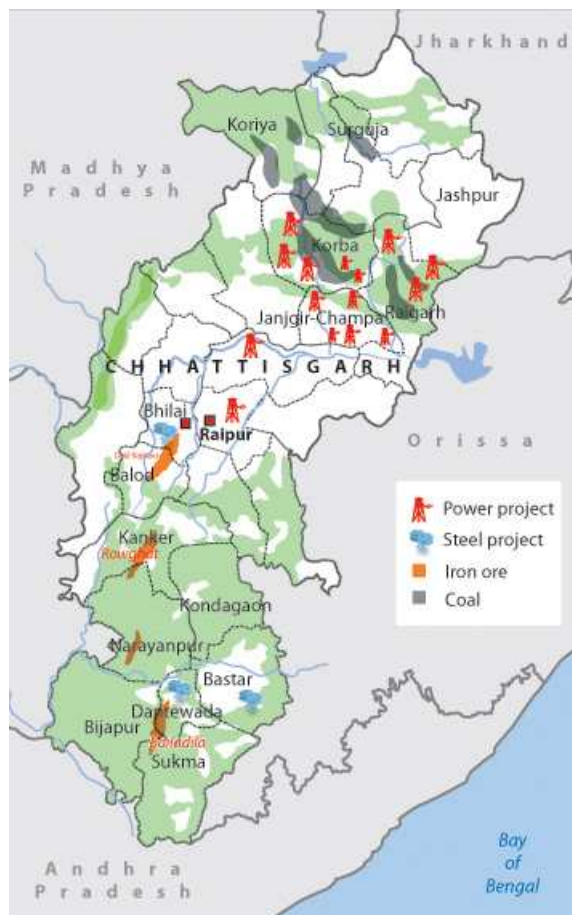
Home to 25.5 million people, Chhattisgarh is often perceived to be a small Indian state but with an area of 135,191 square kilometres[81], it is larger than England. Among 28 Indian states, it is ranked 13th in terms of size, larger than the state of Tamil Nadu. Paddy-growing flatlands lie at its centre, while mineral rich forests and hills spread out in the North and South.

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[78] Unlike many other Indian states which witnessed strong separate statehood movements based on linguistic, ethnic or economic demands, the creation of Chhattisgarh "stemmed more from compulsions of electoral politics." See V. Venkatesan, "Chhattisgarh- Quiet Arrival," *Frontline* 17, no. 17 (Aug 19- Sep 01, 2000).

[79] Kalyan Chaudhari, "A Vision for His State," *Frontline,* Nov. 24 - Dec. 07, 2001.

[80] Directorate of Geology and Mining, Chhattisgarh, http://chhattisgarhmines.gov.in/

[81] For detailed data, see *Chhattisgarh Figures at A Glance,* Census of India Provisional Data,[2011]).

Areas of Resource conflict

Coal in the north

Coal is found in the northern districts of Koriya, Korba and Raigarh, and government companies have been mining it here in small enclaves for several decades[82]. However, these operations could soon be dwarfed by aggressive expansion by the private sector, a result of economic policy changes in India in the mid nineties. Post-liberalisation, government companies lost their monopoly on coal mining and the sector was opened to private companies in a bid to accelerate steel and power production[83]. Under the new policy, private companies could acquire coal mines for nominal charges if they set up steel and power plants[84].

States like Chhattisgarh welcomed the policy and extended multiple concessions to companies. This brought an unprecedented mining and industrial rush to northern Chhattisgarh - by 2010, the state government had signed 115 agreements with private companies for coal-based projects in cement, steel and power sectors[85]. Counting existing and proposed projects, this adds to a staggering 745 projects. *Down to Earth,* India's leading environmental magazine, has called it 'Chhattisgarh's Industrial Jungle'. The magazine estimated that the projects would altogether require 3,000 million cubic metres of water, enough to meet the domestic water needs of 13 times the population of Chhattisgarh. The land area required was estimated at 650 square kilometres, in addition to 750 square kilometres already under mining.

Much of this coal-rich land falls in a thick forest, Hasdeo Arand, which India's environment minister has called 'compact forest block very rich in species diversity…part of unfragmented landscape and important wildlife habitat'[86]. In 2010, the environment ministry sought to protect the forest by labelling it a 'no-go zone' for mining. But coal, power and steel ministries at the centre and governments in the states objected to the embargo. Finally, the Prime Minister's office intervened in favour of opening up the forest for mining, despite several expert committees ruling against it[87]. While India's need for coal is undisputed, experts say the government could plan coal mining more rationally to increase efficiency and minimise ecological damage[88].

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[82] The government company, South Eastern Coalfields Limited, is a subsidiary of Coal India Limited, India's public sector giant. See its website: http://www.secl.gov.in/

[83] For an early market-oriented analysis of the impact of changes in policy on India's mining sector, see Kanhaiya Singh and Kaliappa Kalirajan, *A DECADE OF ECONOMIC REFORMS IN INDIA: THE MINING SECTOR* [2001].

[84] This policy is now at the centre of the latest corruption scandal to hit India. A leaked draft report by India's federal auditor has said that by foregoing competitive tendering for mining licenses the policy resulted in losses of more than $200 billion to the exchequer. Subsequent reports have narrowed the loss estimate to under $35 billion, according to *the Times of India.* India's federal investigative agency has begun a probe in the corruption allegations made by opposition parties.

[85] Sugandh Juneja, "Chhattisgarh's Industrial Jungle," *Down to Earth,* September 1-15, 2010.

[86] Supriya Sharma, "The Woods are Lovely, Dark and Rich," *Times Crest,* October 30, 2010.

[87] "Jairam Loses "no-Go" Battle, Allows Coal Mining in Forested Hasdeo Arand," *The Hindu,* June 24, 2011.

[88] For a wide spectrum of arguments, see Subir Roy, "Let Coal India Face Competition," *Business Standard,* January 18, 2012; Centre for Science and Environment, http://cseindia.org/content/system-green-clearances-not-working-environment-and-people-and-clearances-not-impediment-gro (accessed July 17, 2012); "Coal Versus Forests," Greenpeace India, http://www.greenpeace.org/india/en/What-We-Do/Stop-Climate-Change/Quit-Coal/coal-forests/

It is not just forests that are threatened by coal mining and industry. So are the adivasi communities that depend on it for their survival. And other communities that farm the nearby plains stand to lose their farmland to companies setting up coal-based power plants. Moreover, heavy mechanization in the new coal mines means the industry creates very few new jobs for local populations. This has led to deep unrest in Korba and Raigarh, with both adivasis and other farming communities staging frequent protests against coal and power companies[89].

Iron ore in the south

While coal is concentrated in the North, Chhattisgarh's iron ore deposits lie in the southern districts of Dantewada, Kanker and Durg. Government companies have been mining here in two key locations since the 1960s. Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL) mines ore in Dalli Rajhara in Durg to feed its integrated steel plant in the city of Bhilai. With ore expected to run out soon, SAIL is keen to start mining further south in Rowghat forest in Kanker, which is under Maoist dominance. According to the latest media reports, the government has assured paramilitary cover for the mining operations[90] since the Maoists have said they would oppose any attempts to mine in Rowghat[91].

Even further south, in Dantewada, National Mineral Development Corporation (NMDC), another government company, has been extracting high-grade ore from an ox-shaped hill called Bailadila. Since domestic demand for iron ore was low in pre-liberalisation India, the ore was shipped to Japan[92]. Of the profit generated over decades, very little made its way back to Dantewada and its communities. Severe criticism in recent years has forced the company to increase its expenditure on local community projects, though in 2010 this expenditure still amounted to just 2.36% of its profits[93]. The sharp inequity generated by the Bailadila project is starkly visible at night. Part of the ox-shaped hill, where company officials live in gated colonies, lights up brightly while more than 150 Adivasi villages in the foothills below sleep in darkness, bereft of electricity[94].

The other big company operating in Dantewada is Essar Steel Limited, a private steel manufacturer, which has found a profitable way of sourcing iron ore without mining it. It buys cheap iron-ore fines from NMDC, mixes them with water, and flushes the ore-rich slurry down a 290 km pipeline to Vishakapatnam, on the

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[89] Supriya Sharma, "Farmers Protest Against Land Acquisition in Chhattisgarh, 78 Held," *The Times of India,* January 19, 2011.

[90] "Home Min Okays Paramilitary Forces for SAIL Mine," *Business Standard* (2012). "Steely Presence of Maoists Weakens Bhilai Steel Plant," http://www.rediff.com/business/report/steely-presence-of-maoists-weakens-bhilai-steel-plant/20120705.htm

[91] *Claim of Saving the Bhilai Steel Plant is Nothing but Trickery!*, Statement of CPI Maoist, 2011.

[92] Interestingly, despite rise in domestic demand, NMDC continues to ship ore to Japan and Korea, which has led to controversy in India. Priyadarshi Siddhanta, "NMDC to Continue Iron Ore Exports," *Indian Express,* January 4, 2012.

[93] Supriya Sharma, "Mining Firms Told to Give 26% of Profit Away, but Govt Co Parts with just 0.5%," *The Times of India,* July 28, 2010.

[94] Supriya Sharma, "Industry Meets Insurgency," *The Times of India,* October 11, 2011.
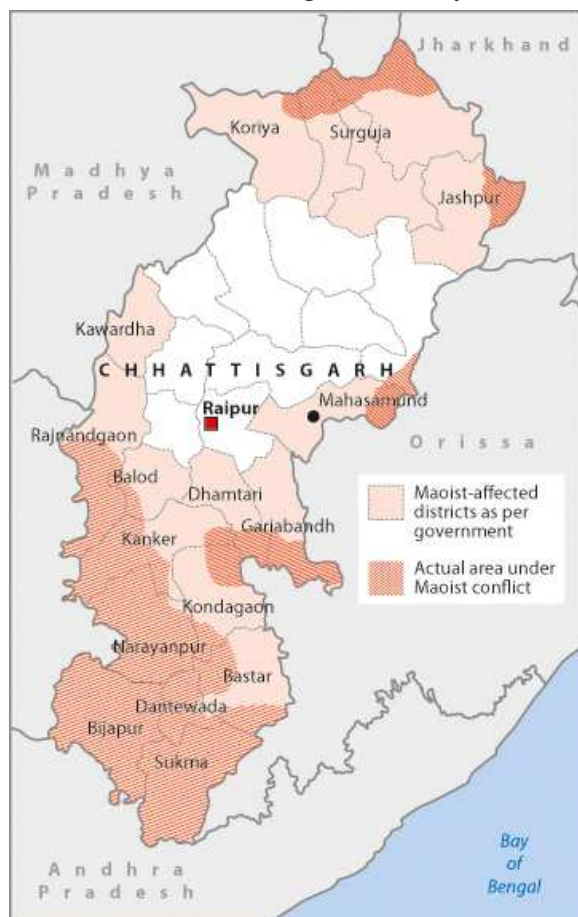
eastern coast of India, where it runs an integrated steel plant[95]. The underground pipeline passes through scores of adivasi villages with no drinking water pipes[96].

In 2005, Essar signed an agreement with the state government to set up a steel plant in Chhattisgarh's south. So did Tata Steel, another private sector giant. Both companies were promised access to iron ore reserves in Bailadila. The companies began acquiring land but faced stiff local resistance[97]. They also face legal challenges over access to Bailadila mines. Given the legal and logistical challenges, the status of these projects is unclear.

While both north and south Chhattisgarh are rich in minerals, it is the north which is witnessing greater corporate activity. Many mining and power companies are acquiring adivasi lands here; south Chhattisgarh has fewer projects and most of these appear to be in deep freeze. This is why I categorise north Chhattisgarh as the key area of resource conflict in the state.

Areas of Maoist conflict

In contrast, south Chhattisgarh is the key area of Maoist or armed conflict, as the map shows. The districts that receive federal security assistance against left wing extremism have been marked in pale red. This paints an exaggerated picture of the geographical spread of the Maoist conflict - India's rural development minister has conceded that in some of these districts, conflict only affects a few pockets[98]. His assessment is corroborated by data maintained by the police on district-wise Maoist incidents and fatalities. Based on this data, and on my own experience of travelling and reporting in Chhattisgarh extensively, I have coded areas with existing armed conflict between Maoists and the government forces in a deeper shade of red.

A superimposition of the mineral and industry map on the conflict map belies the image generally projected in media narratives that areas of armed conflict neatly overlap with areas of resource conflict.

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[95] R. Sampath, "Essar's Slurry Pipeline on Stream," *The Hindu,* January 26, 2006.
[96] Sharma, *Industry Meets Insurgency*
[97] Ashly Hinmon, "Forgeries in Steel: We also make Poverty," in *Caterpillar and the Mahua Flower*, ed. Rakesh Kalshain, 2007th ed. (New Delhi: Panos South Asia); Megha Bahree, "India's Dirty War," *Forbes,* May 10, 2010.
[98] "Rural Development Minister Jairam Ramesh Favours Block-Based IAP to Curb Maoists Influence," *The Economic Times,* January 2, 2012.

The northern districts of Korba, Raigarh and Janjgir Champa, which are witnessing the most intense mining and industrial activity, are not affected by the Maoist insurgency, while large expanses under Maoist domination have no mineral reserves. In Maoist areas that have mineral reserves, the resource conflict could be contributing to creating and sustaining conditions for armed conflict. But it is important to note that the resource conflict in north Chhattisgarh is more intense and exists independently of the armed conflict. In these districts, local communities have been organising protests against companies, often aided by activists and environmental groups that petition the law courts – a mix of social protests and legal activism[99].
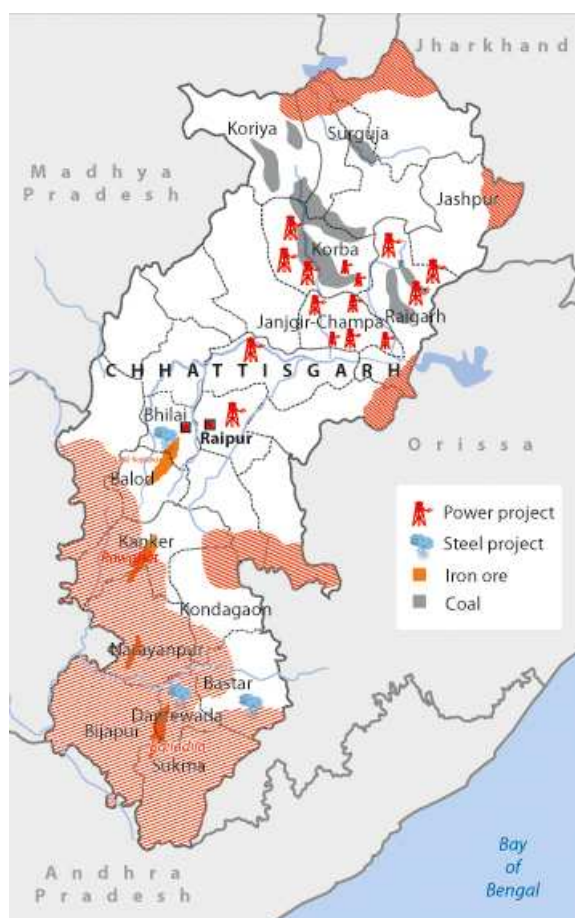
The anatomy of protest

The government has often dismissed the protests against mining and industry as the work of a small group of busybody activists and troublemakers[100], but this does not account for the wide spatial spread of the protests and their localized nature. During my travels in the state, I found the protests showed a more organic pattern: villagers would discover their land was to be acquired for a mining or power project; aggrieved at the imminent loss of livelihood or at the terms of compensation, they first formed village-level associations, under the banner of the *gram sabha* or village council, or if more than one village was affected by the project, as a larger collective encompassing several villages. They held meetings and signed petitions, which they submitted to the local authorities. Often, a copy of such petitions was sent to local newspaper offices – sometimes one landed in my office in the state capital of Raipur. Over time, when their grievances went unheard, the villagers sat on demonstrations and took out protest rallies, which were sometimes forcibly broken – as happened in Akaltara village in Janjgir Champa district in January 2011[101], where farmers were badly bruised by a baton-charge by the police. On rare occasions, the villagers turn militant: in May 2010, when three officials of SKS Ispat and Power, a company setting up a 1200 MW

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[99] Supriya Sharma, "Adivasi Predicament in Chhattisgarh," Vol - XLVII, no. No. 02 (January 14, 2012).

[100] Nick Wertsch, "Democracy as the "Pressure Release Valve", Pulitzer Centre, June 12, 2012

[101] R. Krishna Das, "Chhattisgarh police arrests 75 for protesting against power plant," *Business Standard*, January 19, 2011.

power plant, visited Darramunda village in Raigarh district to negotiate land prices, angry villagers tore their shirts and blackened their faces[102].

Instead of being organized and orchestrated by activists, the protests are highly dispersed, with village-level collectives staging localized protests in relative isolation. So far, such protests have not come together under the banner of a social movement, although there have been some attempts to mobilize the protests on a wider platform by the workers movement 'Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha' (CMM or Chhattisgarh Freedom Movement).

The contribution of activists from environmental non-profit organisations like 'Jan Chetana' or 'Sarthak' lies not so much in mobilising protests but in gathering and interpreting technical data on the projects, which is shared with villagers, and which forms the basis of legal challenges made in law courts against the claims of companies. Also, one of the key members of CMM, Sudha Bharadwaj, is a practicing lawyer who often represents village-collectives in their legal fight against companies.

Often the information gathered by the activists is crucial to journalistic investigation, and especially for the national media which lacks a dense reporting presence in the state. But while the activists' grassroot networks are useful, many village-level protests escape even the radar of activists – a reflection of the chaotic and uncharted spread of industrialization that is spawning myriad conflicts, most of which simply go unreported.

The intense ferment in parts of north Chhattisgarh has not escaped the attention of the Maoists, who have said they would like to extend their footprint to Korba and Raigarh[103]. In 2011, it seemed they had made a beginning, when the police stumbled upon a Maoist campsite in the forests of Raigarh[104]. The camp was busted, but it raised considerable alarm in the government. The Maoists however, acknowledge that they face serious operational difficulties, which inhibit their spread in the northern districts[105].

Rhetoric and Reality

The Maoist movement has positioned itself as a resistance movement against greedy mining companies. However, the rebels face allegations that in areas under their sway they receive funds from the same corporations they publicly denounce. For a long time, rumours have swirled around their relationship with mining companies in Dantewada, in particular with Essar group whose iron ore pipeline passes through areas controlled by them. The company could not have built the pipeline without Maoist approval, the argument went. In 2011, in a cable leaked by Wikileaks, US diplomats reported that Essar officials had told them that

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[102] Sugandh Juneja, "Chhattisgarh's Industrial Jungle," *Down to Earth,* September 1-15, 2010.
[103] Interview with Maoist spokesperson in 2011
[104] Aman Sethi, "Maoists trying to establish Chhattisgarh-Orissa corridor," *The Hindu,* January 29, 2009
[105] Interview with Maoist spokesperson

they regularly pay the Maoists to buy peace[106]. Months later, Dantewada police arrested a contractor allegedly carrying a cash payment from Essar to the Maoists. Both the company and the Maoists issued vehement denials and the police are currently investigating the case[107].

Many argue that the government's deviation from its stated position under India's constitution is far worse. Take for instance, safeguards for Adivasi lands. Under the constitution, areas with a large population of adivasis have been given a measure of self-governance and village councils have been empowered to take collective decisions on the use of land, including on its sale[108]. But in practice, the law remains weak and ambiguous, leaving room for local bureaucracies to intervene on behalf of companies seeking to acquire adivasi land. For instance, the law says adivasi land can be acquired only in 'consultation' with village councils. Taking a restrictive view, bureaucrats have argued that this means councils need to be 'consulted' but that their 'consent' is not mandatory[109].

With the government firmly on the side of industrialisation, there are multiple cases of legal loopholes being employed to aid land acquisition. In Churikala village in Korba district, the village council voted against selling land to a private power company but the district administration stepped in and acquired the land on behalf of the company, invoking legal powers that allow the government to forcibly acquire land 'in the public interest'[110]. The villagers argued in vain that the project served no interest other than the private interest of the company that would sell power for profit.

In another case, when Premnagar village voted against parting with land for an industrial project, overnight the government elevated the village to the status of a town[111]. By doing so, it made its veto redundant since the law that protects adivasi land only extends to village councils.

There is a large urban constituency in Chhattisgarh that favours industrialisation. When Chhattigarh registered 11.4% growth in GDP in 2010 – the highest among Indian states – the government put up billboards to announce and celebrate the achievement. The government has claimed that the revenues from mining and industry would enable it to extend its welfare schemes. But it can be argued that the government consensus in favour of mining and industry comes from more than just an economic vision for the state. Backing corporations brings huge gains to local political elites. This was powerfully illustrated by the case involving Sandeep Kanwar, the son of Chhattisgarh's home minister, who was found using his father's

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[106] "Essar Denies WikiLeaks Report it Paid Maoists," *The Mint,* August 30, 2011.

[107] Aman Sethi, "2 Held for Channelling Funds from Essar to Maoists, Say Chhattisgarh Cops," *The Hindu,* September 11, 2011.

[108] Areas with large adivasi population have been listed in the Fifth Schedule of the Indian constitution. Special laws can be framed for such areas. Accordingly, the law for decentralisation of power to panchayats, or village bodies, was modified in 1996 to empower panchayats in adivasi areas to exercise greater control over government schemes and the use of natural resources including land. The law is called Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act 1996.

[109] Aman Sethi, "Chhattisgarh Coal Blocks a Test Case for Acquiring Tribal Lands," *The Hindu* September 18, 2011.

[110] Supriya Sharma, "Chhattisgarh's Heart of Darkness," *The Times of India* February 7, 2011.

[111] Aman Sethi, "If Villagers Won't Go to Town, Town Will Come to Villagers," *The Hindu* January 17, 2011.

political clout to buy adivasi land illegally in Janjgir-Champa district for a power company in 2011[112]. Kanwar, travelling in a government car, intimidated people into selling their land for cheap. He then sold it to the company for a profit. The arrangement allowed the company to sidestep legal obligations to provide jobs and benefits to the villagers since technically it had purchased the land from Kanwar and not from the villagers.

The state government has also been accused of corruption in the mining sector. In 2010, the courts struck down the grant of mining rights to Pushp Steel and Mines Limited, a little-known firm that was formed overnight in New Delhi with negligible seed capital and no previous mining experience but was still awarded mining rights for a multi-million iron ore mine in Chhattisgarh[113].

Although the government is democratically elected, it is dominated by social groups that have migrated to Chhattisgarh from other parts of India over the last century; older communities like adivasis are poorly represented in the corridors of power[114]. Those who are most affected by the government's policies for the mining and energy sector are often the least able to influence it. Some have argued that adivasi-populated mineral rich areas in India are being milked as 'internal colonies'[115].

If collusion between corporate and political power often dispossesses and impoverishes adivasis in north Chhattisgarh, in the south, a thick blanket of militarization stifles everyday life in districts like Dantewada and Bijapur. Behind heavily barricaded camps strung along the main district roads, wary government soldiers point guns at passing traffic, viewing most adivasis who live in the villages as Maoist suspects[116]. Meanwhile, in the villages they control, Maoist guerillas enforce strict obedience, isolating and executing those they suspect of being spies or dissenters[117]. As violence deepens, the already thin infrastructure of schools, hospitals and basic amenities continues to crumble.

If the insurgents are ruthless in their well-planned violent attacks on government troops, the government's counter-insurgency too has brutal consequences[118]. Particularly controversial was the state's arming of a civil vigilante force called Salwa Judum in 2005. Human right activists and academicians allege it unleashed a reign of terror in the villages[119], inviting Maoist reprisals[120]. The violent clashes consumed hundreds of lives and displaced thousands of families.

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[112] Supriya Sharma, "Chhattisgarh Minister's Son Buys Farmland for Videocon," *The Times of India,* June 23, 2011.
[113] Sharma, Supriya. "Iron Ore Mines Going for Rs 1 Lakh in Chhattisgarh." *The Times of India,* August 2, 2012.
[114] Sharma, Supriya. "Adivasi Predicament in Chhattisgarh." Vol - XLVII, no. No. 02 (January 14, 2012).
[115] In 2009, the press reported that a government committee on 'State Agrarian Relations and the Unfinished Task of Land Reform' had called the takeover of adivasi land in India as the 'biggest land-grab since Columbus.' Although the final version of the committee's report does not contain such a reference, this still led to a great deal of debate over the process of 'internal colonization' in India.
[116] Supriya Sharma, "Jawans Behind 'Enemy' Lines," *The Times of India,* October 10, 2010.
[117] Supriya Sharma, "The Outcastes of a Liberated Zone," *Open Magazine,* May 12, 2012.
[118] Aman Sethi, "The Bloody Crossroads," *The Caravan,* May 1, 2011.
[119] Ramachandra Guha et al., "Salwa Judum: War in the Heart of India: Excerpts from the Report by the Independent Citizens Initiative," *Social Scientist* 34, no. 7/8 Jul. - Aug., 2006, (pp. 47-61).
[120] Nandini Sundar, "Bastar, Maoism and Salwa Judum," *Economic and Political Weekly* 41, no. 29 (3187-3192).

Unfazed by the criticism, the government enlisted many adivasi men who were part of the militia as 'special police officers' or SPOs. Paid less than one-third the salary of a police constable, these SPOs were placed at the frontline of counter-insurgency operations. Activists petitioned the Supreme Court[121], alleging these poorly-trained SPOs were carrying out revenge attacks in the villages. Just as the case entered the final stages of hearing, another brutal episode unfolded in March 2011 when SPOs on an anti-Maoist operation allegedly burnt the homes and granaries of adivasis in three villages and sexually assaulted women[122]. In July 2011, India's Supreme Court ordered a probe into the incident and struck down the appointments of SPOs as unconstitutional, reprimanding the government for using adivasi youth as canon-fodder in the fight against Maoists[123].

In another setback to the Chhattisgarh government in 2011, the Supreme Court gave bail to Dr Binayak Sen, a prominent activist accused by the government of aiding Maoists and convicted by a local court on the rarely-used charge of sedition. Sen's case drew nationwide attention[124] as doctors, academicians, activists, even Nobel laureates rallied for him, accusing the government of targeting him because he had spoken out against human rights abuses by Salwa Judum[125]. The case exposed the weaknesses of the Indian legal system and also opened up a debate on the government's intolerance for dissent and its attempts to muzzle those it saw as 'Maoist sympathisers'. In its order overturning the lower court's refusal of bail to Sen, the Supreme Court observed that having sympathies for Maoists is not the same as sedition[126].

Both the Salwa Judum case and the Sen trial made headlines in 2011. So did the continuing attacks and counter attacks in the Maoist-affected districts. But did the stories of north Chhattisgarh – of adivasis facing dispossession and impoverishment by a collusion of corporate and political elites – find space in the newspapers? Chapter Five presents a content analysis of the coverage in 2011 in four newspapers. But first, a sketch of the media landscape of India and Chhattisgarh in Chapter Four.

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[121] For extracts from the petition by one of the key petitioners, a Delhi-based sociology professor, see Nandini Sundar, "Pleading for Justice," *Seminar* 607 (March, 2010).

[122] Aman Sethi, "Chhattisgarh Villages Torched in Police Rampage," *The Hindu,* March 23, 2011.

[123] "Salwa Judum is Unconstitutional, Says SC," *The Economic Times,* June 6, 2011.

[124] Shoma Chaudhary, "The Doctor, the State, and A Sinister Case," *Tehelka,* February 7, 2008.

[125] Jonathan J. Kennedy et al., "Understanding the Conviction of Binayak Sen: Neocolonialism, Political Violence and the Political Economy of Health in the Central Indian Tribal Belt," *Social Science & Medicine* 72, no. 10 (1639-1642).

[126] V. Venkatesan, "Binayak Sen Gets Bail in Supreme Court," *The Hindu,* April 15, 2011.

Chapter Four

Chhattisgarh – Conflicts in the Press

Newspapers are still going strong in India. Both circulation and revenues are growing. Television is growing even faster. This media boom is attributed to rising literacy and income levels. The broadening of news audiences is seen favorably by some scholars who see this as the 'democratisation' of news, while others are cautious and point towards the attendant trend of 'trivialisation'. This chapter examines these debates in the context of Chhattisgarh.

Indian print bazaar

India has 82,222 registered newspapers[127] with a combined circulation of 107 million. According to an industry report, print revenues grew by 8.3% in 2011-12[128] and readership increased by 1.3% between the closing quarter of 2011 and the first quarter of 2012[129]. However, India's newspaper market is fragmented, reflecting the country's regional and linguistic diversity[130]. Put together, non-Hindi vernacular newspapers account for the highest circulation. Hindi newspapers come second, while English-language newspapers are a distant third[131].

Traditionally, as the language of the national government and the elites, English has dominated the national public sphere. In recent years, scholars have argued that the resurgence of Hindi media is challenging this dominance[132]. The two most read papers in India are both Hindi dailies - *Dainik Jagran* and *Dainik Bhaskar* with readership figures of 16.4 million and 14.5 million[133]. Among the top ten newspapers in India, five are Hindi dailies and just one is an English-language newspaper, *The Times of India.*

But large English-language newspapers often have a broader geographical footprint than their Hindi rivals. For instance, *The Times of India* has 41 localized editions for 16 of India's 28 states, compared to *Dainik Jagran* which prints 37 localized editions in just 11 states. English papers generally carry more news from the national capital, New Delhi, and from other states, than do their Hindi counterparts. However, a relatively recent trend in English papers to emphasize more local content at the expense of national and

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[127] "Registrar of Newspapers for India, Government of India," http://rni.nic.in/ (accessed July 17, 2012).

[128] *Hitting the High Notes: FICCI-KPMG Indian Media and Entertainment Industry Report 2011.*

[129] *Indian Readership Survey 2012 Q1 Topline Findings*

[130] India has as many as 29 languages spoken by one million or more. Hindi is spoken by 40.22% of Indians (Census 2001); English remains the most commonly used language for official communication.

[131] The same trend is even more pronounced in TV. The viewership of regional local-language channels grew by 22% between 2006-10 while that of Hindi and English channels declined by 8% and 5% respectively. The growth in local-language regional media mirrors a general trend in India towards decentralisation away from the centre to the states. It is yet to be seen how this trend is impacting the national public sphere.

[132] Ahmed Neyazi Taberez, "Cultural Imperialism Or Vernacular Modernity? Hindi Newspapers in a Globalizing India," *Media, Culture & Society* 32, no. 6 (907-924); Sevanti Ninan, *Headlines from the Heartland : Reinventing the Hindi Public Sphere* (New Delhi: London: Sage Publications, 2007).

[133] *Indian Readership Survey 2012 Q1 Topline Findings*

inter-state news is eroding their traditional claim of being national newspapers. With more pages filled with city news, it is sometimes argued the leading English dailies are becoming 'metropolitan papers'.

Chhattisgarh's media

With a large Hindi-speaking population, Chhattisgarh is part of the expanding empire of the Hindi press. The second largest Hindi newspaper in India, *Dainik Bhaskar,* is the most widely circulated and read paper in the state. It started operations in Raipur in 1993 and has taken a lead over the region's older newspapers, *Deshbandhu* and *Navabharat*, both established in 1959. In less than a decade, Dainik Bhaskar has nearly doubled its circulation. An even more recent entrant in the newspaper market, *Hari Bhoomi*, set up in 2002, has shown even higher growth.

	Jul-Dec 2003	*Jan-Jul 2011*
Dainik Bhaskar	109,332	200,439
Navabharat	177,629	195,973
Haribhoomi	76,484	165,894
	Average monthly circulation of Raipur edition	
	source: Audit Bureau of Circulation	

This phenomenal growth is an outcome of the new statehood granted to Chhattisgarh in 2001, which led to the creation of a state government and legislature and provided a boost to the professional middle class and private industry[134]. But there are significant inter-district differences in newspaper density in Chhattisgarh. The table below shows the three districts at the top and bottom of circulation charts of *Dainik Bhaskar*:

Districts	*Circulation*
Raipur	67,976
Durg	52,909
Bilaspur	30,459
Sarguja	8,139
Koriya	3,894
Dantewada	3,465
Source: Audit Bureau of Circulation , Jan-June 2011	

Raipur, Durg and Bilaspur make up the more prosperous and urbanised districts of the state. In these districts the towns and cities are dominated by communities that migrated to Chhattisgarh from other parts of the Hindi-speaking northern India over the last half-century. Socially and culturally, they are very different from

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[134] Sevanti Ninan, "Statehood: Good for the Media?" *The Hindu,* September 22, 2002.

adivasis, and have come to dominate both the political and economic life of the state. They form the main readership of the Hindi papers.

In contrast, Sarguja, Koriya and Dantewada are forest-dense districts home to adivasi communities who have their own distinct languages. The main adivasi language - Gondi - belongs to the Dravidian language group of southern India, which is entirely distinct from Hindi. With Hindi as the medium for official communication and school education, adivasi youth have developed a familiarity with it, though generally their mastery of the language is insufficient to get employment in the Hindi press. The adivasi languages lack a script and hence, books and newspapers in these languages are missing in Chhattisgarh.

In far-flung adivasi villages, it is more common to find a transistor tuned to BBC radio than a newspaper. A fledgling mobile-based citizen journalism service *CGnet Swara* is attempting to plug the media gap in adivasi areas by making it possible for people to call in with information and reports in their own languages. The recorded audio reports can be heard by calling a mobile number[135]. But popularising the service is a slow process.
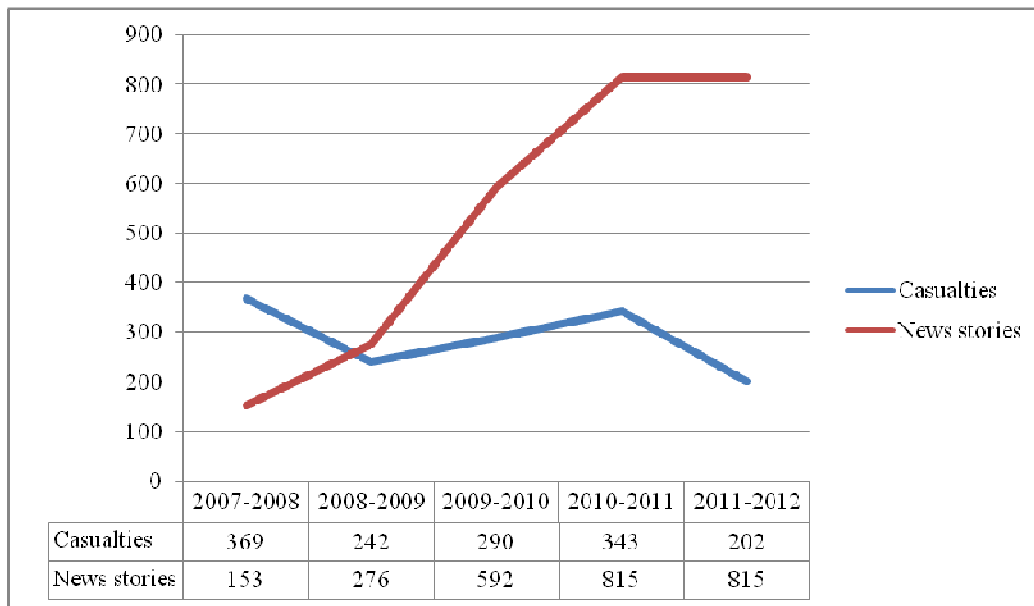
At the other end of the spectrum, the English-language newspapers have a very limited reach in the state – just 20,000 readers of *The Times of India* and 5,000 readers of *The Hindu* – and the status of their correspondents is not dissimilar to that of 'foreign correspondents' in their own country, reporting news from the outback to the metropolis. And the metropolis, it seems, does not care much for the outback, which perhaps explains why several national English dailies have often gone without a correspondent based in the state.

However, the rising violence levels in Chhattisgarh appear to have jolted the national newspapers out of their indifference. As casualties have mounted in the state's Maoist insurgency, so too has the number of news stories in English-language news dailies. The graph below plots the number of insurgency- related casualties in the last five years[136] and the number of news stories in the three leading news dailies – *The Times of India, Hindustan Times* and *The Hindu* – as searched on the database *Factiva*[137].

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[135] Chitrangadha Choudhary, "Urgent Call," *Columbia Journalism Review* (September-October, 2011). For a talk delivered by Cgnet Swara's founder, see *The Democratisation of Media* by Shubhranshu Choudhary, http://www.indiatogether.org/2012/feb/med-democracy.htm
[136] *Annual Report 2010-11, Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs of India*, 2011.
[137] All search results were counted. No manual filtering was done.

	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012
Casualties	369	242	290	343	202
News stories	153	276	592	815	815

As casualties rose, so did the coverage. But the number of news stories rose much more dramatically than the casualties, shooting up three fold in 2008-10. Even when the casualties came down in 2011-12, the number of stories did not decrease. Possible explanations for these trends could lie in the concept of *media hype*, which refers to reinforcing cycles of news that amplify events[138], or *moral panic*, which refers to an exaggerated response or over-reaction in the media to what is seen as a social problem[139].

While newspapers have begun to focus – some would argue excessively - on the Maoist insurgency in Chhattisgarh, posting full-time correspondents in the state, the English-language TV news channels are yet to post correspondents, relying instead on occasional reports from reporters parachuted in.

Media apathy

To academics and observers, the neglect of news from Chhattisgarh – before the Maoist insurgency hit the headlines - is not surprising as it occupies several of the Indian media's traditional blind spots - rural communities, poverty, and far-flung regions. Many believe these blind spots are growing with the emergence of a consumerist middle class that has an increasing appetite for news on lifestyle, film and fashion, which is powerfully reshaping news agendas, even in the serious press. Critics have drawn attention to the growing trend of 'tabloidisation and trivialisation'[140]which media academic Daya Thussu has called 'infotainment'[141].

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[138] P.L.M Vasterman, "Media-hype - Self-reinforcing news waves, journalistic standards and the construction of social problems", European Journal of Communication, Vol 20 Issue 4, (508-530)

[139] A. Hunt, 'Moral panic' and moral language in media, British Journal of Sociology, Vol 48 No 4 (629-648)

[140] The most prominent critic in recent times has been a former judge and current chairman of Press Council of India, Markandey Katju. See "Justice Markandey Katju on the Role of Media in India," *The Hindu*November 5, 2011. Also see Praful Bidwai, "The Growing Crisis of Credibility of the Indian Media," http://www.tni.org/article/growing-crisis-credibility-indian-media

[141] Daya Kishan Thussu, *News as Entertainment: The Rise of Global Infotainment* (Los Angeles, Calif.; London: SAGE, 2007).

In this altered media universe, serious issues are either ignored or transformed into spectacle. The satirical film *Peepli Live* captured this powerfully[142]. In the film, a reporter overhears a debt-ridden farmer speculating whether he should end his life so that his family can gain compensation under a government scheme. With an important election around the corner, the report that appears in the newspaper the next day causes a political controversy and triggers a stampede of TV news crews in the farmer's village. As the race for ratings takes over, his personal tragedy is forgotten.

Much in the same way, national TV channels fly in correspondents when a major crisis erupts in the Maoist-affected states. This form of 'parachute journalism' results in breathless commentary but not much informed examination. Take for instance the Maoist abduction of a senior government officer in 2011 in the remote district of Malkangiri in Orissa. For ten days, this far-flung corner was overrun by news teams. TV journalists became tour guides as they led viewers through unknown jungles and tribal villages[143]. The media focus lasted until the officer was released. As soon as he came home, the TV crews packed up and left, and Malkangiri and its adivasis once again returned to media darkness.

The business of journalism

Indian print media earns 80% of its revenues from advertising; the rest comes from subscriptions and sales[144]. While English newspapers earn a large part of their revenue from brand and product advertising by private companies, especially those selling consumer goods, Hindi newspapers in states like Chhattisgarh depend much more on government advertising. A marketing manager of a leading daily in Chhattisgarh, on the condition of anonymity, provided an estimate for the total print and broadcast advertising market in the state at 800 million rupees (about US$14 million). More than 40% of the advertising spend comes from the state government alone.

In 2011, a regional news channel ETV reported corruption in the state's mining sector, implicating no less than the chief minister[145]. The government, in turn, leaked letters that showed the channel had demanded 'an advertising package' in return for favourable coverage of its welfare schemes. The channel hit back, alleging the government favoured 'friendly' newspapers as it awarded its advertising[146]. The spat illustrated how the regional news media's dependence on government advertising can threaten the independence of journalism in the state and affect news agendas pursued by local newspapers.

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[142] Anusha Rizvi, *Peepli Live*, ed. Aamir Khan Productions, 2010). For a commentary on the film's portrayal of farmer suicides, see Vidyadhar Gadgil, "Celluloid Suicides," *Himal Southasian,* October, 2010.
[143] *Malkangiri: On the Kidnapper's Trail,* directed by Alok Pandey 2011)
[144] *Hitting the High Notes: FICCI-KPMG Indian Media and Entertainment Industry Report 2011*
[145] The channel could not produce documentary evidence to support the story which was based initially on the reported statement of a politician.
[146] Ashutosh Bharadwaj, "'Blackmail' Twist in Raman Singh-Channel War," *Indian Express*December 18, 2011.

Another significant change observed is the increasing corporatisation and consolidation of the ownership of the Indian news media[147]. Industrial houses are buying media companies and media companies are in turn diversifying into other businesses. In Chhattisgarh, leading newspaper groups have major stakes in the mining and power sector. The owners of the third largest paper in Chhattisgarh, *Hari Bhoomi*, run coal-washing companies. And the owners of the largest newspaper, *Dainik Bhaskar*, have recently set up a mining and power company initially called DB power, now renamed Diligent Power[148]. Do these apparent conflicts of interest impact coverage? The next section looks at this more closely.

The case of DB power

On February 3 2011, readers of *Dainik Bhaskar's* Raigarh edition woke up to what was to become a regular stream of news reports on the philanthropic acts of a little-known company, DB Power. They were informed the company had organised a health camp where 81 people were treated for free[149]. Two days later, they were told it was giving free sewing training to young women[150]. On 8 February, DB Power's managers had gone around distributing free blankets, bedsheets and mosquito nets among 50 poor families[151]. On 13 February, the paper reported that DB Power was "eager to fulfill its social responsibility" and had begun doing so even before it had established its project in the district[152]. The headline stated unequivocally: 'DB Power will open the doors to development'. The paper neither informed its readers about the nature of DB Power's project nor that it was owned by DB Corp Limited, the same company that published *Dainik Bhaskar,* the second largest Hindi daily in the country and the largest in the state.

Dainik Bhaskar is part of a media empire that stretches across 13 states, with newspapers in four languages read by 19.2 million people[153]. The promoters of the media conglomerate also own more than 60 companies with interests in manufacturing, real estate, construction, air freight, and textiles[154]. And with DB power, they were entering the mining and power sector.

The company wanted to acquire 693.2 hectares of land in Dharamjaigarh block in Raigarh district to mine coal to produce electricity in a 1320 MW power plant. However, 141 hecatres of the land came within the municipal limits of Dharamjaigarh township. The rest was part of six villages. To mine the coal, the company's own assessment was that more than 500 families would have to be relocated[155]. Not everyone was willing to part with their homes and farmland, and on February 18, *Dainik Bhaskar* reported that the

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[147] Paranjoy Guha-Thakurta and Subi Chaturvedi, "Corporatisation of the Media," *Economic and Political Weekly* XLVII, no. 7 (February 10, 2012).

[148] See the company's website Diligent Power Limited, http://diliigentpower.com/

[149] "DB Power Organises Health Camp in Behrapara Village," *Dainik Bhaskar,* February 3, 2011.

[150] "Women are Becoming Self Reliant," *Dainik Bhaskar,* February 5, 2011.

[151] "DB Power Will Open the Doors to Development," *Dainik Bhaskar,* February 13, 2011.

[152] "DB Power Distributes Blankets and Sheets," *Dainik Bhaskar,* February 8, 2011.

[153] DB Corp Limited, http://investor.bhaskarnet.com/

[154] Aman Sethi and Priscilla Jebraj, "High Court Stays Clearance for DB Power Coal Mine in Chhattisgarh," *The Hindu,* December 11, 2011.

[155] *Executive Summary of Environmental Impact Assessment Plan* M/S D B Power Limited, [2010]

company had submitted in writing to the district collector its assurance that it would spare the residential areas by excluding them from its mining plan. "It must be noted that despite approval from the government to mine coal, the company has taken this decision keeping in mind the interests of the people," the paper wrote[156]. This was factually incorrect since the government approval to start mining was contingent on the grant of environmental clearances which in turn required that a public hearing be held where local people could express their views and concerns about the project. The public hearing was scheduled for February 28.

On February 24, Dainik Bhaskar reported, "The state government is inviting big industrial houses with a concrete plan for speeding up industrial development in the state. This has helped create a climate for industrial progress and investment. But some people are trying to spoil the atmosphere by protesting against this."[157] On February 27, on the eve of the public hearing, *Dainik Bhaskar* returned to the theme of how DB Power was going to contribute to the development of Dharamjaigarh[158] with headlines like 'Black diamond to lend sparkle to Dharamjaigarh's destiny' and 'Villagers come forward to support DB Power'.

But on February 28, at the public hearing, not one of the 438 people who spoke at the meeting spoke in favour of the project[159]. Three English-language national newspapers reported the widespread opposition to the project[160] as well as the surprising fact of Dainik Bhaskar failing to disclose to its readers that DB Power was owned by its parent company. A court petition filed by a local resident of Raigarh, which alleged the company had used "deliberate, illegal and manipulative measures" to influence the hearing's outcome, led to a stay on the project's clearance. As of mid-2012, the legal challenge continues in the court.

Dainik Bhaskar's favourable coverage of mining and power sector extends beyond its own company. On January 15, it reported that the state government would construct six dams on the Mahanadi river to supply water to industry[161]. It said the projects would bring revenue to the government, while also helping farmers by raising the water table of the surrounding areas. Following criticism of the plans in the state assembly, the paper gave prominent front page space to the chief minister defending the diversion of water to industry. The headline said, 'Damming the water would bring development'[162]. The criticisms weren't reported in its pages.

The other leading Hindi daily, *Navabharat,* did give space to criticism of the Mahanadi projects, but only once it had been voiced by the opposition. An opposition MP raised a query in the Parliament about whether such projects required prior environmental clearance[163]. India's federal environment minister replied they

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[156] "Written Assurance to District Administration," *Dainik Bhaskar,* February 18, 2011.
[157] "Those Spoiling Industrial Environment Will be Summoned," *Dainik Bhaskar,* February 24, 2011.
[158] "Black Diamond to Lend Sparkle to Dharamjaigarh's Destiny, Villagers Come Forward to Support DB Power," *Dainik Bhaskar,* February 27, 2011.
[159] Supriya Sharma, "Coal Mine Threatens to Eat Up Town," *The Times of India,* March 2, 2011.
[160] Ejaz Kaiser, "Villagers Protest Land Acquisition," *Hindustan Times,* March 2, 2011, Aman Sethi, "Stiff Resistance to D B Power," *The Hindu* March 1, 2011.
[161] "1467 Crores for Water Supply to Industry," *Dainik Bhaskar,* January 15, 2011.
[162] "Damming the River would Bring Development," *Dainik Bhaskar,* February 25, 2011.
[163] "Mahanadi Barrages Issues Raised," *Navabharat,* March 15, 2011.

did: the dams could not be constructed without an assessment of their impact on the river and the local environment. *Navabharat* reported both news stories based on politicians' quotes, but provided no eyewitness reporting, context or expert analysis.

This appears to fit a larger pattern in 2011 where the leading Hindi news dailies would generally challenge the state government's plans and policies in the areas of both resource and armed conflict only if the opposition parties raised questions. Attention was rarely given to opposition from other quarters – farmers, workers, social activists - and independent journalistic investigation not pursued.

As pointed out in the preceding chapter, the protests against mining and industry are highly dispersed and localized. This makes the regional media, with extensive reporting presence and local readership, better-suited to reporting the protests as news events. The national media, on the other hand, lacks the space for hyper-localised news, and is more likely to carry overview pieces that report the protests not as events but as symptoms of underlying tensions over mining and industry.

However, there have been instances when this news hierarchy has been overturned and the national newspapers have reported a single protest event overlooked by the regional Hindi papers. To take one instance, in January 2011, nearly 500 farmers gathered outside the gates of a new power project being built on their farmland in Akaltara village in the district of Janjgir-Champa. The project by KSK Energy Ventures aimed to generate 3600 MW of power, making it one of the largest in India. The company had asked the government to acquire from local farmers a part of its land requirement. Local farmers alleged their land had been cordoned off before the formal acquisition had been made. They complained the rates of compensation being offered to them were extremely low. As they gathered outside the gates to demand better terms for their land, baton-wielding policemen descended on the site. In the baton-charge that followed, many farmers were injured. 78 were arrested and imprisoned. The events of the day found space in the pages of two English-language national newspapers[164], which followed up with detailed investigations into farmer grievances over the next few days. In contrast, the regional-Hindi dailies either overlooked the news or buried it in their inside pages – even though it was highly relevant for their readers.

A new entrant in the state's newspaper market, however, broke this pattern. *Rajasthan Patrika,* the leading newspaper in the northern state of Rajasthan, decided to expand to central India and launched an edition in Chhattisgarh in September 2010. Challenging the established dailies, it adopted an aggressive posture, publishing critical news coverage of the government on its front page – including a report on the baton-charge by police on farmers in Akaltara. In March 2011, villagers accused security forces of burning homes in three villages in Dantewada during the course of an anti-Maoist operation, and killing villagers and

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[164] R. Krishna Das, "Chhattisgarh police arrests 75 for protesting against power plant," *Business Standard*, January 19, 2011. Supriya Sharma, "Farmers protest against land acquisition in Chhattisgarh, 78 held," *The Times of India*, January 19, 2011

molesting women[165]. Apart from *The Hindu*, an English-language newspaper, the story first appeared in *Patrika*[166]. *Navabharat* and *Dainik Bhaskar* did not pick up the story until the opposition raised the incident and the allegations in the state assembly. In July, *The Times of India* reported the case of the Home Minister's son Sandeep Kanwar buying Adivasi land illegally for the benefit of a power company Videocon[167]. *Patrika* picked up the story the next day[168]. The other Hindi dailies ignored the story until the Home Minister came out and denied his involvement in his son's activities[169].

The Hindi dailies have extensive networks of correspondents in the state but the high-profile stories of mining corruption, conflict over industrialization and excesses by the security forces in 2011 were all broken by the English-language dailies and their one-correspondent establishments in the state. The next chapter outlines key theories by media scholars that help explain why this might be so.

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[165] Aman Sethi, "Chhattisgarh Villages Torched in Police Rampage," *The Hindu,* March 23, 2011.
[166] Sevanti Ninan, "Media Matters - A Difficult State," *The Hindu,* April 9, 2011.
[167] Supriya Sharma, "Chhattisgarh Minister's Son Buys Farmland for Videocon," *The Times of India,* June 23, 2011.
[168] "Home Minister's Son Acts as Broker," *Patrika,* June 24, 2011.
[169] "Kanwar Distances Himself from Son," *Navabharat,* July 2, 2011.

Chapter Five

What the Scholars Say

In a study of the coverage of conflict in US media in 2009, Virgil Hawkins found a pattern of 'media selectivity'. Four conflicts - Afghanistan, Iraq, Israel and Palestine, Pakistan - accounted for 72 percent of broadcast time given to conflicts in the television news and 82 per cent of the total conflict coverage in *The New York Times*. In contrast, the deadlier conflicts taking place in Democratic Republic of Congo, Darfur and Sri Lanka got barely any time or space[170].

This 'media selectivity' extends in part to the scholarship on media and conflict. While there is no dearth of research on the subject, the voluminous literature appears to focus on some conflicts more than others. First, there is the definitional problem, alluded to in an earlier chapter, of conflict being largely understood as the outbreak of violence. Media scholars too have tended to favour this definition and hence studies on media coverage of conflict have focused much more on violent conflicts. Second, in the realm of violent conflict, reporting of inter-state wars has been scrutinised more than reporting of insurgencies, rebellion, inter-group riots and civil war. Among inter-state wars, those involving the US either directly - the two Iraq wars - or indirectly - Israel and Palestine - have been focal points of enquiry in recent years.

Take for instance, the Iraq war of 2003. Scholars have documented how the mainstream media uncritically reproduced the views of the Bush administration and did not give much space to dissenting voices[171]. This has led to a renewed theoretical focus on what makes 'professional' media in democratic societies turn into 'national' media in times of war[172]. This literature offers interesting arguments that are relevant not just to situations of war but any conflict between unequal powers.

Power and Contestation

Several theoretical explanations – both structural and cultural - have been advanced for the mainstream media's tendency to propagate the views of the powerful. Early ethnographic studies found that the professional routines of journalists tied them to official sources which are seen as custodians of privileged, credible and hence objective information. The strong bonds with official sources, American sociologist Gaye Tuchman said, make journalists "absorb the worldview of the powerful" and make news "an ally of legitimated institutions"[173].

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[170] V. Hawkins, "Media Selectivity and the Other Side of the CNN Effect: The Consequences of Not Paying Attention to Conflict," *Media, War & Conflict* 4, no. 1 (55-68).

[171] Marda Dunsky, *Pens and Swords: How the American Mainstream Media Report the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008). Deepa Kumar, "Media, War and Propaganda," in *Key Readings in Media Today : Mass Communication in Contexts*, eds. Brooke Erin Duffy and Joseph Turow (New York: London: Routledge, 2009).

[172] R. L. Handley and A. Ismail, "Territory Under Siege: 'their' News, 'our' News and 'Ours both' News of the 2008 Gaza Crisis," *Media, War & Conflict* 3, no. 3 (279-297).

[173] Gaye Tuchman, *Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality* (New York: London: New York: Free Press; London: Collier Macmillan, 1978).

Subsequent work has shown the reliance on official sources has become deeply institutionalised. 'Indexing norms' show the media does not report what the official sources do not tell them[174]. 'Frames', or perceptions of reality, get 'naturalised' to the extent that journalists perpetuate the views of official sources even when they do not speak with them[175]. In the context of Israel-Palestinian conflict, scholars have argued the 'frames' got naturalised so long ago that they are not emanating from official sources but from culture[176].

Social theorist Herbert Gans has drawn attention to the role culture plays in shaping journalism. Journalists share normative values with their audiences and reflect those biases[177]. Todd Gitlin envisioned 'hegemonic boundaries' in which the media operates, shutting out voices outside the social order and taming "the opposition it dare not ignore"[178]. Karim analysed media behaviour in term of discourses[179] - dominant, oppositional, alternative - while Hallin saw it as the three spheres of consensus, legitimate controversy and deviance[180]. The large space occupied by the dominant discourse – which constitutes the sphere of consensus - widens in times of war while the space for alternative discourse - or the sphere of deviance – shrinks further.

Adding to this body of work is the influential thesis of 'manufacturing consent'[181]. Connecting the workings of power, media and the social sphere, Herman and Chomsky have argued that political and economic elites in democratic societies control the media through ownership and advertising and use it as a propaganda tool to influence society - a process they call 'manufacturing consent'.

While recognising the model's strengths, some theorists find its "bleak, unassailable determinants" cannot fully explain the contested and fluid domain of contemporary conflicts[182]. Cottle offers as a counterpoint what he calls the 'political contest model' of Israeli scholar Gadi Wolfsfeld.

Wolfsfeld has argued that the media is not an unbreachable citadel[183]. Challenger groups can find ways of accessing and influencing it. The authorities control over the media is contingent on their control over the public space. As they begin to lose control to challenger groups, the media is able to reflect more diverse opinions. Events in the field - and whether the media can access it - also play a role in determining the

[174] W. L. Bennett, *News: The Politics of Illusion* (Harlow: Longman, 2012).

[175] SC Lewis et al., "What is the War on Terror? Framing Through the Eyes of Journalists," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 86, no. 1 (85-102).

[176] R. L. Handley and A. Ismail, "Territory Under Siege: 'their' News, 'our' News and 'Ours both' News of the 2008 Gaza Crisis," *Media, War & Conflict* 3, no. 3 (279-297).

[177] Herbert J. Gans, *Deciding what's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek and Time* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980).

[178] Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1980).

[179] Karim H. Karim, *Islamic Peril: Media and Global Violence* (Montréal; London: Montréal; Black Rose, 2003).

[180] Daniel C. Hallin, *The "Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

[181] Edward S. Herman, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, ed. Noam Chomsky (London: Bodley Head, 2008).

[182] Simon Cottle, *Mediatized Conflict: Developments in Media and Conflict Studies* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2006).

[183] Gadi Wolfsfeld, *Media and Political Conflict: News from the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

coverage. Wolfseld's arguments open up more space for possibilities and contingencies than other theories on media and conflict. In the context of Chhattisgarh, future research could test whether the news media's coverage of conflict fits the paradigm of 'political contest' or the paradigm of 'manufacturing consent'.

War and Peace

Not only has the mainstream media been criticised for taking sides in war, but they have been also criticised for what Norwegian scholar Johan Galtung has termed 'a perverse fascination with war and violence'[184]. In a study of foreign news in Norwegian newspapers in 1965 with Mari Ruge, he showed that war is inherently newsworthy since it is saturated with 'news values' or attributes of negativity and unexpectedness[185]. As Gitlin famously said, "news involves the novel event, not the underlying, enduring condition; the person, not the group; the visible conflict, not the deep consensus; the fact that "advances the theory" not the one that explains or enlarges it"[186]. This event-orientation translates into coverage that focuses on acts of violence without explaining its causes or consequences, depriving audiences of the social and historical roots of the conflict. Such episodic coverage, as an empirical study of the coverage of Gulf War showed, can prime audiences in favour of military alternatives instead of negotiated ones[187].

Condensing these overlapping critiques, Galtung has memorably compared war journalism with sports journalism in which two sides engage in a zero-sum game and the winner takes all. But what about the history and the aftermath, the human suffering and the solutions, he asked, proposing an alternative framework called 'peace journalism'[188]. If war journalism is violence-oriented and focuses on victory, peace journalism is peace-oriented and looks for solutions. The former gives voice to elites and their propaganda, while the latter gives voice to people and the truth. The former covers events while the latter uncovers the causes and consequences.

In recent years, peace journalism has gained wide currency in media and journalism schools where it has been used to sensitise future journalists to the flaws of traditional war reporting[189]. Scholars have also used it to analyse media coverage of war using war and peace journalism as competing frames[190]. But many have criticised the model. Journalists have argued peace advocacy runs counter to their professional values of objectivity[191]. Others have cautioned that the model underestimates the larger context in which news is

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[184] As cited in Cottle, *Mediatized Conflict : Developments in Media and Conflict Studies*

[185] Johan Galtung et al., "The Structure of Foreign News," *Journal of Peace Research* 2, no. 1 (64-91).

[186] Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching : Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left*

[187] S. Iyengar and A. Simon, "News Coverage of the Gulf Crisis and Public Opinion: A Study of Agenda-Setting, Priming, and Framing," *Communication Research* 20, no. 3 (365-383).

[188] Jake Lynch, *Peace Journalism*, ed. Annabel McGoldrick (Stroud: Hawthorn Press, 2005).

[189] R. Ottosen and R. Ottosen, "The War in Afghanistan and Peace Journalism in Practice," *Media, War & Conflict* 3, no. 3 (, 261-278.

[190] Seow Ting Lee and Crispin C. Maslog, "War Or Peace Journalism? Asian Newspaper Coverage of Conflicts," *Journal of Communication* 55, no. 2 (, 311-329.

[191] David Loyn, "Good Journalism Or Peace Journalism?" *Conflict and Communication Online* 6, no. 2 (2007).

produced[192]. As Cottle says, "Arguably what is needed is a broadening and deepening of war and conflict reporting, not its universal replacement by an idealised view of the world as it should be, not one that is representationally engineered to conform to a particular view of 'peaceful society'"[193].

Despite the criticism, peace journalism offers a useful framework to analyse the coverage of conflict. With reference to Chhattisgarh, future research can use it to find out whether the coverage of the Maoist conflict in the state follows traditional patterns of being episodic, biased towards the government and neglectful of context[194].

The case of Chhattisgarh

As outlined earlier, Chhattisgarh is not just the site of an armed conflict but also one of resource conflict and the two conflicts do not neatly overlap. While the resource conflict might contribute to creating and sustaining conditions for armed conflict in the south of the state, it exists independently of the armed conflict in the northern areas. Hence, using the peace journalism framework for analysing conflict in Chhattisgarh carries the risk of reducing the resource conflict to just an underlying cause for the Maoist conflict – which it is not. It has a separate life with a complex mix of stakeholders – the state, corporations, communities – and diverse impact on society, ecology and the economy[195].

The present study has more modest aims. It asks more fundamental questions: how much space does the resource conflict of Chhattisgarh get in the media and how does it compare with the space given to Maoist conflict? Within the Maoist conflict, which aspects do the media highlight? The next chapter tackles these questions through the tools of content analysis.

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[192] Thomas Hanitzsch and Thomas Hanitzsch, "Journalists as Peacekeeping Force? Peace Journalism and Mass Communication Theory," *Journalism Studies* 5, no. 4 (, 483-495.

[193] Cottle, *Mediatized Conflict : Developments in Media and Conflict Studies*

[194] A recent paper has used the War vs Peace journalism framework to analyse the reportage of Maoist insurgency across states in three national newspapers. See Shriya Mohan, "How does the Indian Media shape public opinion on Left Wing Extremism, Master's Thesis paper at Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore, April 16 2012

[195] Despite many regions in the world experiencing conflict over resources, there are not many studies that look at how the media covers such conflict. The few studies available largely focus on the ecological impact of the mining industry. An analysis of the press coverage of the mining industry in Australia found that the press separately covers the business aspects of the industry and its ecological footprint without connecting the two. See W. Bacon et al., "PLAYING THE MEDIA GAME the Relative (in)Visibility of Coal Industry Interests in Media Reporting of Coal as a Climate Change Issue in Australia," *JOURNALISM STUDIES* 13, no. 2 (, 243-258.. However, there appears to be no examination of media coverage in parts of Africa where resource conflicts co-exist with armed conflicts.

Chapter Six
Analysing Content

This chapter attempts a content analysis of the conflict coverage in both the national English-language press and the regional Hindi press. The main aim is to find out which dimensions of conflict in Chhattisgarh get more media attention. The discussion in the preceding chapters has suggested the following three hypotheses:

1. The Maoist guerillas in south Chhattisgarh use violence to wage war against the state. In contrast, the resource conflict in the north of the state is manifested in terms of largely peaceful mobilisations of local people who hold protests and demonstrations, attend public hearings and petition the authorities and law courts to safeguard their land and livelihoods from public and private corporations. Unlike the Maoist conflict, these protests do not have inherent news values ascribed by scholars to violence. Also, sections of the media have interests in the mining and power sector which makes it unlikely that they would report the protests against industry. Hence, it appears likely that:

   The Maoist conflict is covered more than the resource conflict by both regional Hindi and national English-language newspapers.

2. Insurgencies are a complex mix of military and political mobilisations. As an armed movement being fought in areas of material deprivation and social injustice, the Maoist insurgency is more than just an exchange of hostilities between armed guerillas and state troops. Its impact goes beyond the immediate loss of lives and extends to the long-term social and psychological imprint of violence. But as scholars have documented in other conflicts, the news media focuses on overt acts of violence and produces largely episodic narratives of conflict. This suggests that:

   Within the Maoist conflict, violence and particularly violent events are covered more than any other dimension in both Hindi and English newspapers

3. The news media rely on official sources and take advertising from those in power. This makes them prone to reflecting the views of powerful groups which results in biased coverage. The regional Hindi press depends on government advertising to a far greater extent than the national English press. Hence, the third hypothesis postulates:

   The coverage shows a bias in favour of the government and the bias is greater in the regional Hindi newspapers compared with the national English newspapers

Methodology

Since the regional Hindi press and the national English press have different structures and readership, the study includes both Hindi and English newspapers. Within the category, the leading newspapers in terms of circulation and readership have been selected[196]:

1. *Dainik Bhaskar,* Raipur edition – highest circulated and read news daily in Chhattisgarh
2. *Navabharat*, Raipur edition – second most circulated and third most read news daily in Chhattisgarh
3. *Hindustan Times,* New Delhi edition – second most circulated and read English news daily in India
4. *The Hindu,* New Delhi edition – third most circulated and read English news daily in India

For the sake of comprehensiveness, the study examined all issues of the four newspapers published in 2011. The unit of analysis was news stories. Opinion and commentaries were not included. For the Hindi regional papers, the focus was narrowed to the front page since it features the stories that are considered most important by the editors. In contrast, not enough front-page stories on Chhattisgarh were found in the English newspapers and hence the scope was expanded to include all stories[197]. Physical copies of the Hindi newspapers were scanned in the archives while the English papers were searched using online databases. All stories were perused and keywords were used to identify those that related to conflict:

For Maoist conflict: Maoist, Naxal and Naxalite and their Hindi synonyms *Maowadi, Naxal, Naxali*
For the resource conflict: mineral, mining, coal, iron ore, company, industry, land and their Hindi synonyms, *khanij, khanan, koyla, loha, company, udyog, zameen*.

The stories were read carefully and only those that primarily related with conflict in Chhattisgarh were included. The total sample of stories was 540 (n=540).

Hypothesis Testing

1. The Maoist conflict is covered more than the resource conflict in both regional Hindi and national English newspapers

This hypothesis was tested by counting and comparing the number of stories relating to both the conflicts. Stories which reported both the Maoist and Resource conflict were counted under both headings and listed separately as well in the third column.

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[196] The Times of India, the largest English daily, has been excluded since I reported for the paper from Chhattisgarh in 2011.
[197] While the difference in data-sets reduces comparability of results between the English and Hindi newspapers, an exercise of random sampling over four weeks in 2012 showed the difference is not very substantial.

	Maoist conflict		Resource Conflict		Maoist and Resource conflict		Total stories
Dainik Bhaskar	154	93%	11	7%	6	4%	165
Navabharat	166	94%	11	6%	5	3%	177
Hindustan Times	69	93%	5	7%	0	0%	74
The Hindu	109	88%	15	12%	6	5%	124
All four newspapers	498	92%	42	8%	17	3%	540

Table 1.a Maoist conflict versus Resource conflict

Stories on the Maoist conflict constitute 92% of all stories on conflict in the four newspapers in 2011. Only eight percent of stories relate with resource conflict. Of this eight percent, 3% of the stories intersect with the Maoist conflict, which means only 5% of stories report *just* the resource conflict. This supports the hypothesis that the Maoist conflict is covered more than the resource conflict in both regional Hindi and national English newspapers.

2. Within the Maoist conflict, violence and particularly violent events are covered more than any other dimension of the conflict in both Hindi and English newspapers

To test this hypothesis, all stories on the Maoist conflict were classified by subject. The detailed table of results is available in Appendix 1 with an explanation of subject categories. The results have been condensed for the purpose of analysis in Table 2.a which shows the top five subjects in the coverage:

	Navabharat		Dainik Bhaskar		HT		The Hindu		All four	
Violent events	105	63%	67	44%	23	33%	34	31%	229	46%
Security related issues	31	19%	37	24%	9	13%	13	12%	90	18%
Salwa Judum and SPOs	2	1%	8	5%	8	12%	19	17%	37	7%
'Maoist sympathisers'	9	5%	18	12%	19	28%	30	28%	76	15%
Development and peace	13	8%	14	9%	7	10%	5	5%	39	8%
Total stories	166		154		69		109		498	100%

Table 2.a Dimensions of Maoist conflict

Violent events account for 46% of the coverage given to the Maoist conflict in all four newspapers. In every newspaper, they form the largest single subject category. In addition, another 18% of stories in all four newspapers relate with security issues. Taken together, this adds up to 64% or nearly two-thirds of all stories that pertain to the violent dimensions of the conflict, providing support for the hypothesis that coverage of the Maoist conflict is focused on violence and in particular violent events.

3. The conflict coverage shows a bias in favour of the government and the bias is greater in the Hindi regional press

To test bias, the study checked sources and labels used by the newspapers. Bias can be inferred from who gets space in the media. Table 3.a shows the main five identified sources used by the newspapers in conflict coverage in 2011[198]:

	Dainik Bhaskar		Navabharat		Hindustan Times		The Hindu		All four newspapers	
Security forces	56	46%	67	46%	39	29%	56	24%	218	34%
Government	43	35%	48	33%	43	30%	46	19%	180	28%
Rival political parties /Activists	11	9%	20	13%	27	20%	55	23%	113	17%
Maoists	4	3%	2	1%	4	3%	21	9%	31	5%
Villagers/Victims	0	0%	4	2%	6	4%	23	10%	34	5%
Total	122		145		140		237		644	

Table 3.a   Indentified sources in the coverage

The primary identified sources[199] of the newspapers are members of security forces and representatives of the government. Together, such official sources account for 62% of the sources in all four newspapers. Other oppositional sources like rival political parties and social activists form 17% of the sources while Maoists account for just 5% of the sources. This indicates a strong bias in favour of the government. Since official sources account for a larger percentage in Hindi newspapers (79% and 81%) than English newspapers (59% and 43%), the indicated bias is stronger in the Hindi press. *The Hindu* appears to be an exception to the hypothesis since it has diversified sources that indicate more balanced coverage.

As another test of bias, the study looked at 'labels' or terms used to describe both sides of the conflict and their actions. English papers stuck to neutral terms like Maoists, Naxals, guerillas, and rebels for the insurgents and terms like policemen, paramilitary men, troops, and jawan for the security forces. The Hindi papers also used neutral terms except when describing dead policemen and Maoists, as shown in Table 3.b:

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[198] A more detailed table of sources is available in Appendix 2.
[199] Identified sources include those that have or have not have been named but have been clearly identified. For instance, if a story does not name an individual policeman but says 'the police has said', the source has been counted under 'members of security forces'. The low count of identified sources in the Hindi papers is partly because the papers had several stories with no explicit sources. The report would say 'it has been said' without specifying who said it.

	Navabharat		Dainik Bhaskar		Total	
Stories on policemen killed	26		22		48	
Martyred	18	70%	15	68%	33	69%
Killed	8	30%	7	32%	15	31%
Stories on Maoists killed	14		8		22	
Collapsed in a heap	5	35%	4	50%	9	41%
Killed	9	65%	4	50%	13	59%

Table 3.b Labels for deaths

In 69% of reports on policemen killed by Maoists, the Hindi papers used the term *'shahid/shahid hue'*, or 'martyr/martyred' for dead policemen. Similarly, in 41% of stories on Maoists killed by the police, the papers used the term *'dher hue'* or 'collapsed in a heap' for dead Maoists. The use of valourising language for one side of the conflict and dehumanising language[200] for the other side shows bias on coverage. Excerpts of news reports are available in Appendix 3.

To conclude, there is evidence in support for the hypothesis that the coverage shows a bias in favour of the government and the bias is stronger in the Hindi regional press compared with the English national press. However, *The Hindu* is an exception to the hypothesis since it has diversified sources.

Conclusions

1. All newspapers covered the Maoist conflict significantly more than the resource conflict
2. The regional Hindi newspapers covered the violent dimensions of the Maoist conflict more than the national English newspapers
3. The regional Hindi newspapers showed a greater bias in favour of the government compared with the national English newspapers

Additional Observations

There are significant differences between the results for the national English language newspapers and the regional Hindi newspapers. As seen in Table 2.a, which gives a break-up of the subjects covered under the Maoist conflict, Hindi newspapers have given less space to controversial subjects that were likely to embarrass the state government. Take for instance, the coverage of the Salwa Judum case that culminated in the Supreme Court striking down Chhattisgarh government's policy of deploying Adivasi men as special police officers (SPOs) in anti-Maoist operations. The Hindi papers gave the verdict negligible coverage (1% and 5%) compared with the English papers (12%, 17%).

Similarly, a sharp difference can be observed in the amount of coverage given to cases of activists accused

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[200] For a view of the multiple ways in which language can be dehumanizing, see E. Steuter and D. Wills, "'the Vermin have Struck again': Dehumanizing the Enemy in Post 9/11 Media Representations," *Media, War & Conflict* 3, no. 2 (152-167).

by the state government of supporting or sympathising with Maoists. The main story featured in this category was the high-profile case of civil liberties activist Dr Binayak Sen whose conviction on charges of sedition provoked outrage in cities around the country but found less visible support in Chhattisgarh. The Supreme Court granted him bail, which was seen as a setback to the Chhattisgarh government. The English national press gave the issue greater space (28% in both newspapers) than the Hindi regional press (5% and 12%).

In the context of the current discussion, it might also be pertinent to point out that the case of Binayak Sen was a cause célèbre *specific* to 2011. In the absence of a similar high-profile case, the coverage in the English press might be more heavily tilted towards violence and security-related issues than it was in 2011.

Here, it must be stressed that the Hindi papers have a stronger bias not because they are published in Hindi but because they are regional papers. This becomes evident in the coverage of the Binayak Sen case. Reports filed by *Navabharat's* reporting team in Chhattisgarh consistently reflected the state government's position and described Sen as a man 'accused of aiding naxals'. However, reports published in the same newspaper but sourced from news agencies in New Delhi refer to him as 'human rights activist' and offer a more balanced account of the case. This indicates that the key factor for determining extent of bias in the newspapers is location. A newspaper published in Chhattisgarh is more likely to be favourable towards the state government.

Finally, the study is limited to just four newspapers over a one-year period, and hence the results are indicative and not conclusive. For more conclusive results, an analysis over a longer time period is needed. It is likely that the English newspapers would show greater variation over time than Hindi papers since they mostly rely on one correspondent for stories from Chhattisgarh. The replacement or absence of the correspondent could affect the coverage greatly. In contrast, the Hindi newspapers produce news in a more institutionalised way with a large body of Chhattisgarh-based journalists and hence there might be less variation over time in their coverage patterns.

In the next chapter, the results of the study are tested against the professional opinions of journalists at the four newspapers.

Chapter Six
What the journalists say

With low internet penetration, the reach and influence of social media is limited in India and journalists are still the gatekeepers of news. The gatekeepers, in turn, work within the limits of their professional routines, organisational culture, environment and ideology[201]. The section below attempts to contextualise the findings of the content analysis by drawing on interviews with reporters and editors at the four newspapers that are part of the study.

Focus on violence

What media scholars document as the 'newsworthiness' of violence comes as reflexive thinking to most journalists. "From the very beginning, we have been taught in journalism that violence has high news value," says Shyam Betal[202], the editor in chief of *Navabharat*, who has three decades of experience in Hindi press in north India. He connects news value with 'readers' interest'. "When they wake up in the morning, the readers want to know about all the disruptions that may have taken place in the day before which might affect their lives today," he says.

Journalists at the English newspapers too invoke reader's interest to explain why violence dominates the coverage from Chhattisgarh, but the arguments they make are different. "Over the last two decades, the urban-rural divide in India has widened. Residents from metropolitan cities are alienated from the larger country. So as an editor you find yourself asking subconsciously - will the reader care (for news from Chhattisgarh)?" says Rajesh Mahapatra, deputy executive editor at *Hindustan Times*[203]. Mahapatra, who has worked at the international news agency *Associated Press*, feels this is not unlike the narrow lens used by the international media to report India before the recent economic boom. "India did not matter on the world stage and so for the international media then, the preoccupation was Kashmir," he says. "Even if two people died in Kashmir, it would be news." In the same way, states like Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Orissa have remained peripheral to the national arena, he argues, and so "the only time they feature in the news is in relation with natural calamities or Naxal attacks."

Event-orientation

Scholars have been concerned with how event-oriented or episodic coverage of conflict can often distort readers' understanding of conflict, depriving them of a larger context, and making violence seem "innate and

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[201] Pamela J. Shoemaker, *Mediating the Message: Theories of Influences on Mass Media Content*, ed. Stephen D. Reese (White Plains, N.Y: Longman, 1996).
[202] Interview in June 2012
[203] Interview in July 2012

unavoidable"[204] or "an unstoppable case of mindless 'tribal' bloodletting"[205]. But this view does not take into account the way journalists understand news - they see events as the *mainstay* of news. "It is our job is to keep our readers informed of daily events," says Rajeev Singh, the editor of *Dainik Bhaskar*[206]. "As long as there will be violent incidents, the coverage will be *'ghatnatmak'* or episodic."

In a provocative argument, Michael Schudson, communications professor at the Columbia School of Journalism, says that the event-orientation of journalism might not be an altogether bad thing. "A preoccupation with unpredictable events keeps something uncontrollable at the forefront of journalism," he says[207]. According to him, events allow journalists to break free of established narratives fed by official sources.

In a slightly different vein, Aman Sethi, who covered Chhattisgarh for *The Hindu*, alludes to the power of events. "A violent event has a way of freeing itself from context. When the Maoists blow up a bus, or policemen rape a young tribal woman, the event creates its own context independent of prior history," he says[208]. Both the Maoists and policemen try to justify their violent acts by fitting it into a larger picture, but for victims "the loss is immediate; the sorrow is real, visceral and liberated from larger political context."

To extrapolate from Sethi's argument: if a violent event is narrated from the perspective of victims, it has the potential to disrupt the rhetoric surrounding long-running conflicts and to put the human costs of violence in the foreground. But in the case of Chhattisgarh, the event-focused coverage rarely gives voice to victims, ruling out such possibilities.

While journalists defend the coverage of events, they agree there is a need for reportage that goes *beyond* events. "My editor and I made a conscious decision to explore other angles of conflict," says Aman Sethi. "I did trend/analysis stories that looked at the fatality patterns of conflict, Maoist technology, weaponry and intelligence networks, which tried to give a more 'process based' perspective on the conflict." But such stories require more time and effort, he adds. It helped that his paper, *The Hindu*, has a tradition of supporting longer and in-depth writing. Ejaz Kaiser, who reports for *The Hindustan Times*, says space constraints in his paper make it harder to do analysis pieces[209]. *Dainik Bhaskar*'s Rajeev Singh says his paper falls back on opinion pieces by experts to give more depth to their coverage but accepts such pieces are few and far between.

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[204] Wilson López López et al., "Culture of Peace and Mass Media," *European Psychologist* 12, no. 2 (147-155).
[205] V. Hawkins and V. Hawkins, "Media Selectivity and the Other Side of the CNN Effect: The Consequences of Not Paying Attention to Conflict," *Media, War & Conflict* 4, no. 1 (55-68).
[206] Interview in June 2012
[207] Michael Schudson, *Why Democracies Need an Unlovable Press* (Cambridge: Malden: Polity, 2008).
[208] Interview in June 2012
[209] Interview in June 2012

Bias in the coverage

Studies that examine bias in the coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict in the western press have pointed out the practical impediments that western journalists face in balancing sources: while the Israelis have readily accessible spokespersons, the Palestinians lack the same communication abilities or even the willingness to engage journalists[210]. Border closures and travel restrictions make it more difficult to get a view from Palestine.

Journalists in Chhattisgarh fall back on similar arguments to explain the imbalance in sources. "It is a professional compulsion," says Shyam Betal of *Navabharat*. "Often the police are the only available source since the whereabouts of Maoists are not known. They do not give out phone numbers on which they can be called." Ejaz Kaiser of *The Hindustan Times* agrees. "Barring a few reporters who know the back-channels, the others cannot contact the rebels and are dependent on statements they release," he says.

Aman Sethi of *The Hindu*, the only paper that frequently carried information sourced from the Maoists however, claims the Maoists are not as hard to contact as they are made out to be. "If you report out of Chhattisgarh long enough, the Maoists will contact you," he says. This raises the question why do the Maoists not contact the Hindi newspapers?

Maoists have often complained to activists that the media in Chhattisgarh is prejudiced against them[211]. Correspondents, in turn, allege that police intimidation and lack of support from their editors and owners constrains them from representing the Maoist view[212]. Particularly ominous, say journalists, is the Chhattisgarh Public Security Act, which outlaws any transmission or circulation of Maoist materials. There have been a few instances of reporters arrested or threatened with arrest under the law[213]. But such intimidation is not the only reason why the Hindi press has a pronounced bias in favour of the government, reflected not just in the way it blanks out the Maoist view but also in its use of emotive language.

"When the majority of the reading public sees the Maoists as villains, it is hard for a newspaper to not reflect that," says Shyam Betal of *Navabharat*. "After all, journalists are part of larger society." Rajeev Singh of *Dainik Bhaskar* is even less apologetic. "We have taken a stand. We are against Maoist violence. Why not be transparent about it?" he says. Asked why the Hindi papers used more emotive language compared with the English papers, he said, "They bring out papers in New Delhi. We bring out papers living in the midst of violence. The violence impacts our lives and the state's economy. We cannot be neutral about it."

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[210] A. Deprez and K. Raeymaeckers, "Bias in the News? The Representation of Palestinians and Israelis in the Coverage of the First and Second Intifada," *International Communication Gazette* 72, no. 1 (91-109).

[211] Sarva Dharam Sansad, People's Union for Civil Liberties and People's Union for Democratic Rights, Delhi, *Of Human Bondage: An Account of Hostage Taking in Bastar* [2011]

[212] Interviews with informants who did not want to be identified. Also see Chitrangadha Choudhary, "Urgent Call," *Columbia Journalism Review* (September-October, 2011), Sevanti Ninan, "Media Matters - A Difficult State," *The Hindu,* April 9, 2011.,

[213] "Chhattisgarh - Repression on the Freedom of the Press," Asian Centre for Human Rights, http://achrweb.org/reports/india/AR07/chhattisgarh.htm#_Toc166927777

While the bias is more pronounced in Hindi papers, it also exists in the English-language papers. Sethi points out that the Indian media has traditionally supported the government over insurgents, whether in the separatist movements in Kashmir and the North-East, or now the Maoist insurgency. "According to our press, people are fundamentally pro-state," he says, "and agitate when they do not get enough of the state in the form of schools, hand pumps, electricity, and rations. But what if people are just sick of the state and agitate because they see it in its raw and primordial form - that is, an armed, resource hungry collective run by elites?"

Lack of coverage of resource conflict

The resource conflict sweeping large parts of Chhattisgarh barely finds any space in the newspapers. What explains the near-blanking out of the resource conflict, especially in the Hindi papers? Could it be explained by Herman and Chomsky's 'manufacturing consent' thesis that argues political and economic elites use advertising muscle to control the media? The editors of the Hindi newspapers declined comment. *Dainik Bhaskar*'s editor did not respond to questions on whether the newspaper group's interests in the mining and power sectors posed a conflict of interest.

But journalists in various Hindi publications confirmed, on the condition of anonymity, that mining and industry are 'no-go areas' for them, especially if the reports show the companies in adverse light. "The management will not allow it," says one Hindi journalist. "If the owners are not into mining directly, they have friends who are industrialists." Journalists say the commercial pressures on the papers are intense and they risk losing both government and corporate advertising if they report the protests against industry.

Compared to the Hindi regional media, the national English newspapers are relatively insulated from such pressures, which may explain why *The Hindu* has twice as many stories on the resource conflict than *Navabharat*. But such stories are still few in number. "I believe the resource conflict is as important (as the Maoist conflict) and should definitely be given more attention by the press," says Aman Sethi of *The Hindu*. "But it is hard to cover both the conflicts. The sources are different, the distances are vast." This produces real dilemmas for correspondents who must choose between covering an armed insurgency claiming hundreds of lives in the south and a slower, less dramatic but intensely disruptive resource conflict in the north.

"Ideally, Chhattisgarh could do with two reporters - one handling the resource conflict and the other handling the Maoist conflict," says Sethi. The irony however, as Sethi himself points out, is that currently (mid-2012), *The Hindu* does not have even a reporter based in the state. After completing a two-year stint in Chhattisgarh, Sethi moved back to New Delhi in early 2012 and his paper has not sent a replacement.

"It is tough to find good reporting talent for places like Chhattisgarh," says Rajesh Mahapatra, deputy

executive editor at *Hindustan Times*. "In *Associated Press*, if you lived in difficult regions, you earned a hardship allowance. And when you completed the stint, you were often promoted. But in India, we do not reward such journalism." He says journalists hired fresh out of college by *Hindustan Times* are paid 3.5 lakhs (Rs 350,000 or US\$ 6,300) a year for a position in New Delhi and just 2.6 lakhs (Rs 260,000 or US\$ 4,500) a year for a position in Jharkhand.

Sethi also offers similar arguments. "There are very few Chhattisgarhiyas, Oriyas and Jharkhandis who have the English skills and want to become relatively underpaid journalists," he says. "The well educated elite are usually part of the 'system' and first generation English speakers come from families who have made huge sacrifices to educate their children. They have massive responsibilities and liabilities and need to get secure, well paying jobs. The only places with an 'English-speaking elite surplus' are Metros and journalists from Metros are unwilling to live in Raipur, Ranchi, Keonjhar or Kalahandi."

"You could hire a local who is a good reporter but lacks English language skills. But this requires both effort and area expertise," says Mahapatra. According to him, editors in English newspapers lack expertise to even locate and hire local talent in states like Chhattisgarh. "The editorial collective's understanding of the country falls drastically short," he says, suggesting that editors in English newspapers mirror the ignorance of their readers. As media theorists would say, they are part of society – in this case metropolitan affluent society which is not much interested in how the rest of India lives – or dies.

Between a constrained and partisan regional press and an uninterested and ignorant national press, the coverage of conflict in Chhattisgarh remains patchy and skewed.

Chapter Eight
Democracy and Dissent

The media is often the 'central battleground' for social movements[214]. While movements are often concerned about the adverse affects of negative media coverage, scholars contend that any coverage is better than no coverage. For instance, a study of the media coverage of the Landless Farmworkers Movement in Brazil (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra or MST), which has demanded more equitable land distribution, found that the movement benefitted from media coverage, even if the coverage was often hostile[215]. Extending the argument further, it can be argued that when movements do not get space in the media their ability to make their claims in the public arena stands diminished.

The key finding of this study is that the armed insurgency of the Maoists in the South of Chhattisgarh gets more media attention than the non-violent protests against mining and industry in the North of the state. By singularly focusing on the Maoist insurgency, the media amplifies it at the expense of other forms of resistance in the state, thus misrepresenting the ferment in Chhattisgarh – and arguably even distracting from its underlying causes. Even though the coverage of the Maoists might not be positive – as indicated by the bias towards the government in the coverage – the very fact that the insurgency is getting space in the media means the Maoists have been able to establish themselves as a powerful actor in the politics of the region.

This explains why a raft of new legislations is being seen as the outcome of the Maoist insurgency – even though the Maoists do not seek to influence policy but instead seek to overthrow the state. Such legislation includes the Land Acquisition Bill, and also the Mining Bill, which aims to make it mandatory for mining companies to share 26% of their profits with local communities. While to the affected populations any correction – spawned by pressure created by the Maoist insurgency – is welcome, it is hard to ignore the humanitarian costs of lives lost and communities torn apart.

Also, more intangibly, change brought about in this manner weakens faith in democracy. As noted earlier, every time the Indian state fails to respond to non-violent movements, it strengthens the intellectual critique made by the Maoists, if not their rebellion on the ground. Among other things, the responsiveness of the state to a social movement is linked to the perceptions of the movement's power, which is often gauged through its representation in the media. When peaceful protestors defending their rights are unable to secure space in the media, not only do they stand weakened, but also democratic politics.

The Future
While presenting a normative critique of the media, it is useful to keep in mind that the media cannot be isolated from the "force field of politics and culture, much less disembedded from the economic structures

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[214] William A. Gamson, *The Strategy of Social Protest* (Belmont, Calif : Wadsworth Pub, 1990).
[215] John L. Hammond, "The MST and the Media: Competing Images of the Brazilian Landless Farmworkers' Movement," *Latin American Politics and Society,* 46, no. 4 (Winter, 2004), pp. 61-90.

and logics that drive its performance," in the words of media academic Simon Cottle[216].

As this study notes, one reason why the regional press does not cover the resource conflict in depth appears to be because its advertisers may have a vested interest in suppressing such stories. But as the local economy grows and the advertising pie enlarges, competition among newspapers may increase. And increased competition could force them to turn more objective. Certainly, such a phenomenon was witnessed in the American press at the turn of 19th century where "the growing advertising prize for winning a large readership eventually induced the newspapers to compete intensely for readers. Accordingly, the papers sought reputations for accuracy...by committing against related pro-advertiser biases and by attempting to demonstrate their objectivity."[217]

This process may have already begun in Chhattisgarh. Requesting anonymity, a senior editor of *Dainik Bhaskar*, the leading Hindi daily, said that the aggressive, critical reporting by *Patrika*, the new entrant in the market, had made it difficult for other newspapers to ignore news that was unfavourable to the state government. Doing so would risk losing readers to their aggressive rival[218].

If commercial competition may turn out to be the driver of change in the regional press, then a more nuanced blend of culture and commerce could be the reason why the resource conflict continues to get column space in the English press. Observers of Indian politics have drawn attention to how the social-democratic paradigm, which was the hallmark of India under its first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, may have weakened but has not withered away. Despite neo-liberal economic reforms, a strong constituency exists within influential elites, which has pushed for social safety nets. The urban middle class may have moved towards consumerism, but sections of it retain an engagement with concerns over equity and social justice[219]. As long as a part of its readership is social-democratic in its political outlook, the English-language metropolitan press would remain alive to the ferment in rural and adivasi India.

Finally, it is worth reflecting on the contradiction highlighted by Michael Schudson in his book *Why Democracies need an Unlovable Press*. "The standard sociological analysis of news places it in so airless a box that exceptional journalistic forays are not readily explained," he says[220]. But these forays happen, driven by events, or journalistic curiosity and skepticism, and therein lies, to borrow another of his phrases, "the recurring anarchic potential" of journalism.

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[216] Simon Cottle, *Mediatized Conflict : Developments in Media and Conflict Studies* (Maidenhead: Maidenhead : Open University Press, 2006).

[217] Matthew Ellman and Fabrizio Germano, "What do the Papers Sell? A Model of Advertising and Media Bias*," *The Economic Journal* 119, no. 537 (2009), 680-704. doi:10.1111/j.1468-0297.2009.02218.x.

[218] Further analysis of the impact of *Patrika* is limited by the unavailability of readership figures for the paper. It is also important to note that studies have found that when a monopoly advertiser is able to withdraw its advertising entirely, it can limit the newspaper's ability to report in an unbiased way. *Patrika* faced rough weather with Chhattisgarh government but the Indian Newspaper Society intervened in its favour. "INS Flays Move to Suppress Patrika in Chhattisgarh," http://www.exchange4media.com/44819_ins-flays-move-to-suppress-patrika-in-chhattisgarh.html

[219] For an analysis of the response of the middle class to adivasi issues and Maoist insurgency, see Radha D'Souza, "Sandwich Theory and Operation Green Hunt," *Monthly Review,* December 17, 2009

[220] Michael Schudson, *Why Democracies Need an Unlovable Press* (Cambridge : Malden: Polity, 2008).

Acknowledgements

Appendix 1

Stories categorised by subject

	Navabharat	Dainik Bhaskar	Hindustan Times	The Hindu
Violent acts by Maoists				
Killing/harming policemen	26	22	11	8
Killing/harming civilians	8	3	2	3
Abducting police and civilians	14	12	5	3
Attacks, blockades, damage to property	25	8	1	4
Sub total	73	45	19	18
Violent acts by Police				
Killing/harming Maoists	14	8	1	2
Killing/harming civilians	14	10	3	14
Attacks on Maoist camps	4	4		
Sub total	32	22	4	16
Security related issues				
Arrests and surrenders	7	8	3	1
Army training	8	10	1	4
Police preparedness/ strategies	15	14	5	6
Maoist organization	1	5		2
Sub total	31	37	9	13
Salwa Judum and SPOs	2	8	8	19
'Maoist sympathisers'				
Binayak Sen	7	10	15	22
Soni Sori and Lingaram		3	4	8
Other activists	2	5		
Sub total	9	18	19	30
Development and peace				
Development issues	6	7	5	4
Peace talks	4	3	2	1
Other policy	4	4		
Sub total	13	14	7	5
Mining firms and Maoists	5	8		6
Other	1	2	3	2
Total stories on Maoist conflict	166	154	69	109

Subject categories explained

Violent Acts: Acts that lead to or aim to cause death or grievous hurt. The categorisation is based on how the press reported the incidents and not on actual events which are often disputed. Also it is based on the final outcomes and not on who initiated the fighting. For instance, when the Maoists are reported to have opened fire on security forces, if the action resulted in the killing of Maoists, then it has been categorised under 'Violent Acts by police'. If the police claim to have killed Maoists, the act is categorised as 'police kills Maoists'. But if the claim is contested by villagers/activists, it is categorised as 'police kill civilians'. The study does not enter into normative debates over legitimacy of violence as claimed by the state as the defender of public order or by the rebel as a righteous struggle against injustice.

Security related issues: Any story that pertains to security or military-oriented efforts by the state and the Maoists. This includes arrests of Maoists by the police, the internal apparatus of the Maoists, discussion on police strategies, police infrastructure, and debates over the entry of the army.

Salwa Judum and SPOs: Salwa Judum is a civil vigilante movement which clashed with the Maoists in Dantewada and Bijapur districts of Chhattisgarh in the years 2005-07. Activists accused it of unleashing indiscriminate violence against civilians. The escalating violence in the region led to the exodus of thousands of people from hundreds of villages. Subsequently, the state police enrolled a majority of Adivasi fighters of Salwa Judum as SPOs or Special Police Officers and deployed them in anti-Maoist operations for less than one-third the salary of a police constable. In 2011, the Supreme Court held the appointment of SPOs as unconstitutional, chastising the state for employing Adivasi men as cheap canon-fodder in the fight against Maoists.

'Maoist sympathisers': Those accused by the state of supporting the Maoists. This includes the case of Dr Binayak Sen, the civil liberties activist who was convicted by a lower court in Raipur in 2010 for sedition but released on bail by the Supreme Court in April 2011. Also included in this category are Lingaram Kopodi and Soni Sori who were arrested for acting as conduits for payment of extortion money by Essar Limited to Maoists. Lingaram is a young journalist while his aunt Soni Sori is a government school teacher.

Development and Peace: Stories on existing or proposed government schemes and development initiatives in Maoist areas. Stories featuring discussion on peace talks.

Mining and Maoists: This category was dominated by the case of Essar Steel Limited, which is being investigated by the police for allegedly transferring funds to Maoists.

Others: Other aspects of the Maoist conflict. For instance, election boycott announced by Maoists.

Note: Stories often feature more than one issue and carry mixed messages. In such instances, the study took the issue that the headline and the first paragraph focused on as the main one. However, dilemmas remained in stories that were written in a feature style. In such instances, the categorisation involved a subjective decision based on what appeared to be the main thrust of the story.

Appendix 2

Sources used in conflict coverage

	Navabharat		*Dainik Bhaskar*		*Hindustan Times*		*The Hindu*		*All four*	
Security forces	67	46%	56	46%	39	29%	56	24%	218	34%
Government	48	33%	43	35%	43	30%	46	19%	180	28%
Maoists	2	1%	4	3%	4	3%	21	9%	31	5%
Activists	5	3%	7	6%	22	16%	46	19%	80	12%
Opposition parties	15	10%	4	3%	5	4%	9	4%	33	5%
Court	2	1%	5	4%	13	9%	21	9%	41	6%
Villagers	2	1%	0	0%	3	2%	14	6%	19	3%
Victims	2	1%	1	0.50%	3	2%	9	4%	15	2%
Experts	1	0.50%	1	0.50%	7	5%	6	3%	15	2%
Companies	1	0.50%	1	0.50%	1	1%	9	4%	12	2%
Total	145		122		140		237		644	

Newspaper Excerpts

Hindi news articles translated in English

Dainik Bhaskar, September 22, 2011

In assessment meeting of Naxal operations, chief minister turns aggressive

Enter the jungle and kill the Naxals

Bhaskar News, Raipur: After the rains are over, the police action against Maoists will turn very aggressive. The chief minister Raman Singh has instructed the police and paramilitary forces to step up the slowed down operation against the Maoists. On Wednesday, in a meeting to assess the work of the police, he said the force should enter the jungle and wipe out the Maoists.

Navabharat, September 14, 2011

Naxalism is dangerous

PM and HM state in meeting with officials from Naxal affected districts

Delhi bureau: The workshop of district officials from 60 Naxal-affected districts that receive funds under IAP discussed how rural development could be used as a weapon to face the Naxals. Speaking on the occasion, the prime minister said the problem couldn't be resolved unless corruption in rural schemes is brought down to zero levels. The home minister said naxalism is more dangerous than terrorism and suggested that the states also fulfill their responsibilities (in tackling it).

Navabharat, August 12, 2011

Extermination of Naxals is the only way

During discussion on Naxalism, Raman Singh says it is not possible to go back now

Delhi bureau: Chief minister Raman Singh pulled up Naxals and intellectuals who support them and announced, "I will fulfill my responsibility for the protection of democracy. No one can deter me. We need to be prepared for a long fight. No room for frustration. I am burning all bridges to go back. The only way is forward - to victory. The only way is to wipe out the Naxals."

Dainik Bhaskar, June 27, 2011

Red Violence:

Five jawans martyred, eight naxals collapse

Bhaskar news, Kanker/Jagdalpur: In two separate incidents in Kanker and jagdalpur, 5 jawans of CRPF and BSF were martyred and seven were reportedly injured. 100 kms away from Kanker district headquarters in Koylibera police station area near Sulangi village in late night encounter on Sunday, two jawans of BSF were martyred. Three were injured in the one hour-long encounter. The security forces claim to have killed 8 Naxals. One body has been recovered.

Navabharat, June 22, 2011

10 jawans martyred

Naxals blow up anti-landmine vehicle on Gatam Bridge near Katekalyan

Dantewada bureau: During the jan-pituri week, on Thursday night, the Naxals displayed their dangerous intent and blew up an anti-landmine vehicle passing through Dantewada-Katekalyan road.

Dainik Bhaskar, June 17, 2011

Bold intent: The army in Bastar warns Naxals

Even a scratch will lead to extermination

Rajesh Joshi /Raipur: The army, which has come to train in Bastar, has said that if it is attacked then those attacking it will be wiped out. Sources in the army's Chhattisgarh-Orissa area headquarters have said that the army's response will be quicker and more devastating than the police and CRPF.

English news articles

The Hindu

Binayak's bail plea dismissed

AMAN SETHI

BILASPUR, February 11, 2011

The Chhattisgarh High Court on Thursday dismissed an application of rights activist and paediatrician Dr. Binayak Sen seeking bail and suspension of life term awarded to him. But the court will continue to hear his appeal against the life sentence handed down by a Raipur Additional District and Sessions Court.

The court also dismissed a similar application of co-accused Kolkata businessman Pijush Guha.

On December 24 last, the Raipur court convicted Dr. Sen, Guha, and alleged Maoist ideologue Narayan Sanyal of conspiring to commit sedition and sentenced them to life imprisonment.

Dr. Sen was arrested in May 2007 on the suspicion that he served as a courier for Sanyal.

3 security men killed in Maoist encounter

AMAN SETHI

RAIPUR, March 15, 2011

A police constable and two Adivasi special police officers (SPO) were killed when a large contingent of security personnel was ambushed by armed cadres of the Communist Party of India (Maoist) in Chhattisgarh's Dantewada district. Director-General of Police Vishwa Ranjan said the three troopers were seriously injured and were evacuated by helicopter to Jagdalpur. "We have detected blood spots in 35 different places [near the ambush site], but we cannot confirm how many Maoists were killed in the encounter," Mr. Ranjan said. Though the police are yet to recover any weapons or bodies of slain Maoists, an intelligence report claims that three Maoists, including one woman, were killed in the encounter.

Chhattisgarh villages torched in police rampage

AMAN SETHI

Three women assaulted, three men killed, hundreds rendered homeless in course of five-day operation

TARMETLA, March 23, 2011

The operation began in the early hours of March 11 when about 350 heavily armed troopers marched into the forests of Dantewada. They returned to their barracks five days later, with three villages aflame, about 300 homes and granaries incinerated, three villagers and three security personnel dead, and three women sexually assaulted, the victims and several eyewitnesses told *The Hindu*.

Hindustan Times

Supreme Court to hear Sen's bail petition today

11 April 2011

New Delhi, April 11 -- The Supreme Court will on Monday hear the bail plea of civil rights activist Binayak Sen, who has been sentenced to life imprisonment on charges of sedition and links with Naxalites. Sen, 61, has challenged the order of the Chhattisgarh high court, which had rejected his bail plea on February 10.

Thrice in three days: Reds kill three troops in Chhattisgarh

11 June 2011

Ejaz Kaiser

Raipur, June 11 -- For the third time in three days, Maoists targeted security personnel in Chhattisgarh, killing three Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) troops in Dantewada, south Bastar. In an email to HT, a local CPI(Maoist) spokesperson said the attacks were to counter the "repressive policies" of the state and a part of their Janpituri Saptah (people's revolution week)' in Bastar from June 5-11.

Five Naxals arrested in Chhattisgarh

16 October 2011

Ejaz Kaiser

RAIPUR, Oct. 16 -- Five Naxals, two of whom carrying reward on their heads, were arrested in Narayanpur district of Chhattisgarh, police said on Saturday. Police superintendent Mayank Srivastava a team patrolling in the forest near Guttapal village first noticed the movement of some Naxals.

'Civil war-like situation in 3 Chhattisgarh villages'

30 April 2011

Hindustan Times

New Delhi, April 30 -- An undeclared civil war-like situation prevails in three villages of Chhattisgarh's Dantewada district where hundreds of Koya commandos (local armed militia) and anti-Naxalite Special Forces allegedly burnt houses, grain reserves and moveable properties of tribal people on March 11, a Supreme Court panel has said.

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