

**Book Review: “Maoists and Other Armed Conflicts”, Anuradha M.Chenoy and Kamal A.Mitra Chenoy, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2010.**

*Dipti Tamang*

*Abstract: This book gives a very well documented and a different insight of the idea of conflicts, militarisation and security issues. It seeks to move away from the homogenised, mainstream idea of nation and to look at the different aspects of nation building that has resulted in the different parts of the country actually being in a perpetual state of conflict. It looks at the multi-dimensional aspect of conflict and the state's approach to dealing with these aspects. The broad conclusion remains that democratic decentralisation and democratisation of the security approach is the only political solution to addressing and resolving these conflicts.*

**Conflict, human security, democratic decentralisation, militarisation, state**

After sixty five years of Independence, democracy in the Indian context stands at the crossroads. As one of the largest standing democratic country in the South Asian region, India has a lot to uphold in the name of democratic values and principles. The question to be asked is where does India stand today in terms of upholding these values and principles? Has there been a practical implementation of these principles that has been enshrined in the Indian constitution? This book is an attempt to answer such crucial questions by taking up the internal conflicts in various parts of the country that is a stark reality confronting the Indian state.

This book seeks to offer a different perspective on the armed conflicts beginning by redefining the concept itself which is very different from the state's version. Such an attempt helps to analyse and view the areas afflicted by such conflicts in a different light. It brings into focus the loopholes of the mainstream version which has a uniform homogenous definition and likewise a uniform approach to resolve these conflicts. The major limitation of such an approach is that it fails to take into account the socio-political, cultural, economic and historical aspects of the conflict. This as such results in a limited, biased discourse which has limited solutions likewise thereby resulting in no concrete solutions. The authors discuss in detail the need to move away from the mainstream, security centric discourse toward a more

broadened democratised human security approach to find genuine political solutions to the conflicts affecting various parts of the country.

The book is divided into eight chapters with each chapter focusing on every aspect of armed conflicts. The authors, based on rigorous, dedicated fieldworks and concrete theoretical groundings, have as mentioned before sought to redefine the nature, problems and the possible solutions to resolve these conflicts. They have taken up the Kashmir issue, North Eastern grievances, the class based struggle of the Naxalite movement and even the Khalistan movement in places. A detailed description of these various conflicts brings to the forefront the difference in the nature of the conflict in the first place. Such an attempt breaks the homogenous definition of the same as put forward by the state.

In doing so, the reader gets an insight into the other side of the story which paints a different picture altogether. The authors stress upon the need to focus on the context in which these conflicts have emerged and the reason for the conflicts to have come up in the first place. The book also looks at the various models of conflicts and their relevance in terms of defining and finding solutions to the same. Having cited the existing models, they conclude that there remains a degree of limitations in all the existing models because they fail to provide a holistic approach. In doing so they seek to compartmentalise the whole issue and provide solutions in the same fashion which would provide limited solutions. All the mainstream models work within the framework of security approaches which defines conflicts in terms of threat to national security and therefore legitimises the use of force by the state to curb such threats which further prolongs the conflicts. The authors conclude that it is only when genuine political solutions are sought and the security approach is redefined to include concepts of human security that such solutions can be found.

The other chapters provide a detailed overview of the conflicts in the regions mentioned above. This provides the reader with a clear insight on the difference of these different conflicts, their bases, their purpose and objectives and most importantly the nature of these conflicts. Such an insight makes one realise that there cannot be one straight jacket approach to solving these conflicts and more so the limitation of the use of force to curb the demands of the various movements. The nature of the uprising in the North East is completely different from the one in Chattisgarh or in Punjab or in the areas of J&K. The state in trying to resolve these conflicts by using force has further worsened the situation.

The state's measures to resolve the conflicts have been within the framework of national security approach as has been mentioned before. Such an approach prioritises the use of force which is apparent in the case of the North East and Kashmir which has been placed under the Armed Forces Special Protection Act (AFSPA) which gives unlimited powers to the security personnel. Such acts have resulted in gross violation of human rights in places under the AFSPA. Despite numerous protests and appeals from various section of the society the state has shown no measures to repeal such draconian laws which has legitimised use of force by the state under the pretext of threat to national security and resulted in gross violations of basic human rights at every level.

The chapter on state responses discusses in details the procedures adopted by the state to deal with the conflicts. These measures are the counterinsurgency methods, National Security acts like the Preventive Detention Act, Maintenance of Internal Security Act, TADA, AFSPA, crackdowns, encounters, enforced disappearances, special police officers, and forces like the Salwa Judum in Chattisgarh which is backed by the state and mindlessly uses force to curb any form of resistance. Peace talks have often resulted in ceasefires but remains a very long and arduous process and non-inclusive. As a result concrete results are not achieved and the human rights commissions remain very ineffective due to lack of funds and resources. Such atrocities have further resulted in worsening the condition of the common masses in areas affected by conflicts as has been described in detail in the chapters that follows.

It has been rightly put by the authors that such measure taken by state results in the alienation of the masses that remain trapped between the insurgents on one hand and the state on the other. Lack of political will on the part of the state to work for providing even basic amenities further intensifies this sense of alienation which has its own repercussions. It is the common people who have to face the brunt of such high levels of militarisation, prolonged conflicts at every level. These areas remain affected by problems of high levels of illiteracy, underemployment etc. despite having very rich resources at their disposal. Extraction of such resources remains a topmost agenda of the state and various corporate houses which have full support by the state as well. The government support to these houses in the name of promoting development has resulted in massive displacement of the various tribal groups in these regions. Likewise, any funds coming in the form of various schemes are amassed by those in power which includes the local administrators, the politicians and the leaders of various insurgent groups as well who have a stake in prolonging the conflict as well.

As has been mentioned before, the common people remain trapped between the agenda of the state on one hand and the insurgents on the other. In the absence of concrete alternatives, they are left with none neither at the hands of the state nor the insurgent groups. However, since the state shows little sympathy to those trapped between such discourses, it becomes easy for them to join or be sympathetic to the cause the movements seek to achieve. The sense of alienation inculcated and strengthened by the state provides fertile grounds for the insurgent groups to mobilise and build up their mass base. This aspect of alienation has been described in great detail in the chapter on militarisation, human rights and alienation.

Men and women are both affected but at different levels by these conflicts. The reinforcement of masculine values at times of conflict remains out of the discourse on armed conflicts. The chapter on Gender and armed conflict seeks to address this issue and also to look into the engagement of women with such conflicts. The authors very clearly conceptualises the masculine ideology which is reinforced by the state in the name of the nation. Likewise, the data reveals how the armed groups reinforce existing gender stereotypes as well wherein women are seen inferior to men. This attitude fails to give credit to women who have played active roles which may vary from an activist, peace campaigner, cadre, comrade or armed rebel in these areas of armed conflicts. As a result women's potentials and contributions remain overlooked by both the state and the insurgents. Likewise, the sexual assaults and increased levels of violence against women especially at times of conflict as a result of reasserting masculine values have been out of the discourse on conflicts by the mainstream studies on armed conflicts.

The last chapter on civil society interventions highlights the role played by the various civil society groups engaged in bringing about peace and finding genuine political solutions to the various grievances of the people of these regions. The authors argue that the civil society group in India remains fragmented and weak nevertheless their importance cannot be overlooked. The greatest success of these organisations remains its autonomy from the state and the armed forces. The interventions by such groups cannot be discounted and can genuinely act as a bridge between the people and the state. However the success of such measures also largely depends on the political will and commitment of the state to address such grievances.

In conclusion, the authors have put forward the limitations of the democratic structures and the skewed measures of development. Instead of holistically addressing the conflicts the state

has resorted to the use of force and strengthening the control of the state. This further has resulted in the alienation and a sense of deep frustration, anger, humiliation, hurt and betrayal by the Indian state. There needs to be a political will on the part of the state to address these grievances holistically in the absence of which there will be no end to these conflicts. The government stands way behind in terms of providing basic amenities like education, health, employment etc. In terms of human rights, the state has a very sad record of observing these rights with the state showing no resolve of repealing the draconian laws like the AFSPA, PDA etc.

The state has sought to work within the framework of the mainstream approach and define security in terms of the national security approach. Such an approach results in the state treating these conflicts as a threat to national security. As a result of which the use of force is legitimised and approaches like encounters, arrests on the basis of suspicion is used. In such cases, many innocents have been arrested, tortured and disappeared as is the case in Kashmir. Likewise, families are harassed, publicly humiliated and women face sexual abuse, harassment at the hands of the security personnel. Rape and sexual violence against women is a stark reality in the conflict affected areas. This approach as such further distances the people and fuels the sense of betrayal and frustration. It is only when their grievances are genuinely addressed that there can be real long term success in ending these conflicts.

The state seeks to find a solution by portraying a homogenous picture of the nation and terming any dissent as “anti-national” and thereby using force to curb such dissent. Instead the state has to incorporate and accommodate such dissent. For this the state will have to work for decentralisation of the democratic process, initiate peace talks and show commitment and the political will to work with local actors, civil society groups to strengthen the peace talks and find concrete, political solutions. Demilitarisation is the utmost necessity without which the efforts would be futile. It is only when there is a deconstruction of this homogenous image to address the voices of dissent that Indian democracy will be a success.

