

Perception and Presentation

A Telugu Film on Naxalites

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The changes that have occurred in the establishment's picture of Naxalism have run a tortuous course. Each time in the recent past when it thought that a proper way of presenting the Naxalites to the people had been devised it discovered that the reality had moved ahead and the framework had to be re-done. An instance of the latest recasting of the framework is the recently made film People's Encounter.

WHAT the ruling class thinks of a rebellion, what it wants the rebellious classes and the intermediary classes to think it thinks, and what it wants those people themselves to think, are three different though closely interrelated things. Of these, only the last two are visible. They are expressed in the press in cinemas, in literature, in politicians' platitudes and polemics, in academic theories, etc. Intermixed from below with some amount or other of the opinions of the intermediary classes, and affected to one extent or other by the internal contradictions within the establishment. The first of the three—what the ruling class itself thinks of the rebellion—can only be inferred from the last two. Simultaneously one infers also the current state of the relation between the ruling class and the rebellion, that is to say the current state of the class struggle, for it is this that ultimately decides what the ruling class thinks and what it says, and the gap between the two. This is the true leaning¹ of the theories, the polemics, the ideas and the myths propagated through the cinemas, the press, literature, and other 'forms of social consciousness'.

The analysis of thought-structures, of frameworks of cognition, is in fashion these days. The project is inherently epistemological but usually it is the epistemology that is most ambiguous. A socially significant framework of cognition can be made sense of only as the product of a particular tension in the historically evolving totality of social relations; these relations are real and external to the framework, and they determine the various frameworks employed to cognise them. Underlying any act of cognition is the social-historical process (that is simultaneously a product of human practice and—at any given cross-section of time and place—the determinant firstly of objective limitations to the possibilities of human practice and secondly of a

range of frameworks of cognition, a range of structures of social consciousness. It is not that any framework can be chosen by anybody; on the contrary the position that a group or class occupies in the objective historical process and the choice it makes from among the possibilities of practice open to it in the current state of the social struggle play a determining role in this choice. And it is not that any choice is equally valid in the sense of being true to reality or equally honest in the sense of being genuinely believed by its proponents. The fidelity of any ideology to objective truth—its capacity to cognise reality faithfully—and to subjective truth—its concurrence with what the class or group that propounds it really believes to be true—varies, and it can be by and large said that the more a social class or group is on the ascendant, the more that it is able to carry others with it and is courageous in the choice of the possibilities open to it, the more efficacious will be the framework of cognition it 'chooses' and the more honest will be its presentation of its perceptions. Analysis of thought-structures, therefore, cannot end with a clarification of its internal relations nor with a merely formal linking with a mutilated reality that is neither seen as part of a totality nor as part of history nor—most importantly—as a determinant of the cognitive structure but only as an epistemologically unrelated symbolic parallel. The analysis must infer the cognitive structure from the reality that is epistemologically prior to it, though it is perceived and analysed through one cognitive structure or other.

Many objections will be raised to this project. It will be said that such a process of reduction will stumble upon too many irreducibles; but while the difficulty of executing the project in full must be admitted, two things need to be added: one, the very lack of a holistic-historical outlook encourages analysts to discover more irreducibles than are actually there; two, as Lenin said, scientific materialism

unabashedly admits that naive realism is its first cousin. Whatever the analytical difficulties of reducing an ideology to its material base, unless one posits the existence of such an epistemological relation, one will be left with a politically debilitating agnosticism. The nonchalantly truth-neutral, value-neutral way in which the word 'discourse' is being bandied about these days makes it necessary to emphasise this. It will further be asked: when reality is never perceived directly but only through one framework of thought or other, and when all possible frameworks are generated by that reality itself, how does one get hold of a framework that explains every other framework, a framework that will judge the truth, the honesty and the efficacy of every other framework. It is precisely here that the replacement of epistemologically sound notions like practice, ideology, class interest, progress, etc. with the dubious notions brought into being by the latest explorations in Mimamsa Shastra—or perhaps one should call it *māla-Mimamsa Shastra*—should be thoroughly criticised. All frameworks of consciousness are not equally valid, equally honest or equally fruitful. The capacity of a given cognitive structure to reveal the truth depends on which social practice has generated it. The most advanced social practice, that of the historically most dynamic social class or group taking maximum advantage of the possibilities open to it, generates the framework of thought most faithful to contemporary reality, and the framework of expression most faithful to itself. Such a framework can 'see' the reality underlying other cognitive accounts. If it is finally objected that there is no analytical test for determining which is the most advanced social class or group nor which is the best possible choice of the opportunities open to it, and that therefore the philosophical project ceases to be purely analytical and becomes political, then the answer is that that is as it should be. Indeed, unless the philosophical project ceases to be purely analytical and actually becomes political, we cannot rid ourselves of this crippling agnosticism that crops up again and again, in ever new and seemingly radical and intellectually very fashionable forms. Intellectual history, unfortunately, appears to be moving in the opposite direction. From being theorists of a reality that they made no attempt to change, the most fashionable thinkers are turning into theorists of a meaning that knows no criterion of truth and falsity. The meta-theoretic project makes sense only as a critique of theories born of reactionary, conservative or hesitant social practices from the stand-point of the theoretical position of the most advanced social prac-

tice. Otherwise the notion of thought climbing over itself and turning into an abstraction that looks down upon its own concreteness is merely the latest conceit invented by the alienated human intellect.

II

The 'Naxalite menace' has started menacing the framework of understanding popularised by the establishment in Andhra Pradesh. Indeed it is this menace rather than the actual 'menace' that is resulting in frustrated outpourings in the press and elsewhere. Each time in the recent past when they thought they had evolved a proper way of conceptualising and presenting the Naxalites to the people, they have discovered that reality has moved ahead, and they have to re-do their framework. The more the people at large start looking to the Naxalite movement as a possible political alternative the more difficult becomes the task of devising a credible but negative presentation of the 'Naxalite problem'.

The changes that have come about in the establishment's picture of Naxalism have run quite a tortuous course. It should not be thought that the picture has been purposefully created by some Board of Ideological Managers; nor is it true that at each turning point in the political struggle between the revolutionaries and the establishment, a whole paradigm has been discarded and a new one constructed. No such thing has happened. But individual themes have been devised, elaborated and discarded, and at any given point of time what prevails is a not very coherent total picture. What has destroyed the coherence is not the general truth that ideology is rarely consciously crafted, a fact which has never obstructed coherence, but a two-fold change that has gradually crept over the state's politics. One is the degeneration of ruling class politics to a level that is all set to vie with the popular image of Bihar, a fact that destroys the propaganda value of the image of violence commonly used to describe Naxalism; and the second is the recent success of revolutionary politics in catching the imagination of the broad masses as a political alternative, as distinct from a successful strategy of social and economic militancy. There was a time, not long ago, when revolutionary politics appealed only to its immediate social and economic beneficiaries and visionary idealists. It is only recently that in the search for an alternative to the absolutely disgusting level to which ruling class politics is degenerating rapidly, Naxalite politics has started catching the imagination of a large section of the public. The revolutionary groups themselves do not appear to have fully appreciated the significance of this change,

which would require considerable reorientation of their organisational methods, but that is not of much moment right now. The change and the particular tension it generates in the relation between the ruling classes and the people at large—both in their manifestation as toiling and oppressed masses and as political animals—as well as the tensions it generates within various sections of the propertied classes, puts a heavy pressure on the conscious and unconscious creators of ideology, and on the possibility of viable and coherent cognitive frameworks.

There is a recent vantage point from which one can study the outcome of these tensions and pressures. That is a film recently made by Ramoji Rao entitled *People's Encounter*. Ramoji Rao is the most class conscious representative of the dominant section of the provincial elite of Andhra Pradesh, and also a man who has always been conscious of the importance of political and ideological tasks. To give him due credit, he is not guilty of the usual incompetence and inefficiency in the execution of the task he sets himself, a trait that sets him apart in a class that characteristically vulgarises and bungles any task that requires the slightest finesse. What Ramoji Rao and his class really think of the Naxalites and what he wishes to suggest that the people should think of them, are closely interwoven in the themes and images that constitute the film. It is the latter that is explicit and visible, for when a class-conscious elite produces a piece of art or literature what it is telling you is primarily not what it thinks, but rather what it would like you to think, unlike an oppressed class or group, whose art is primarily a statement of its own ideas. To put it differently, the art of an oppressed class is never honest whereas the art of the oppressed is always honest even when it is untrue.

in creating a critical image, there are two possible choices. One is to pick up the deviance and errors of the original and create a summary and pass it off as the image of the original; the second is to ignore the deviance and stick to essentials but give it an interpretation that recommends its rejection. The image of Naxalism created by the Telugu press in which Ramoji Rao's *Eenadu* has generally played a leading role has primarily been of the first type. The acts of arbitrary violence and extortion are totalled up and labelled revolution. But in making this film, which is a more explicitly ideological venture—and also, incidentally, a more directly commercial venture—Ramoji Rao rejects that method and creates an image of the second type. This is one reason why the police was reportedly unhappy with the film, for they would have liked an ex-

posure or the bad side of revolutionary politics rather than the creation of a more complex image which, in their view, gives needless legitimacy to the Naxalites. They cannot, of course, understand that the legitimacy has already arrived, and the film is only being intelligent enough in realising that it has.

The dialogue between violence and non-violence is a central theme of the film. There was a time when this opposition formed the staple of the ruling classes' presentation of the 'Naxalite question'. The dialogue, naturally, used to end in a vindication of non-violence as the path best suited to our culture, to the tenets of humanism, and the only legitimate political choice in a parliamentary democracy. There was undoubtedly a time when this presentation had an element of honesty (which we have earlier distinguished from truth) in the sense that India's ruling classes did believe that they could sort out their internal political problems and deal with the dissatisfaction of the masses through the institutions of democracy without recourse to abnormal quantities of explicit violence. Today its use cannot boast of even that much of honesty.

And yet the dialogue between violence and non-violence continues to haunt the ideologues of the propertied classes. It is principally a measure of the intellectual bankruptcy that the degeneration of their material existence has driven them to, but Ramoji Rao adds two supplementary arguments centred around the problem of violence to salvage something from the demise of non-violence as an ideological weapon. The protagonist of non-violence in the film—and of everything else the director wishes to tell—is a woman doctor by name Jyoti. She is a very human creature in contrast to both the Naxalites and the police. She is charming, has a sense of humour, and expresses many homely-sentiments. It is easy for the viewers to take a liking to her and identify with her. And she is a determined and principled votary of non-violence. She gives up her policeman husband because she cannot accept the taking of human life in the name of 'performance of duty' and she disagrees with her Naxalite brother because she cannot accept the taking of human life in the name of a better future. She represents all the non-violence centred arguments the film-maker uses against Naxalites: the traditional one that it is morally wrong, and the supplementary ones added (though by no means invented) by the film-maker, that violence is unnecessary for achieving justice and that it brings needless repression onto the masses. The first argument was greeted with derision and mirth by viewers in

cinema halls across the State. Jyoti the wide-eyed doctor gives lectures to the Naxalites about democracy and violence and challenges the Naxalites to give up their path of violence and aspire for power by mobilising mass support and participating in elections. Given the stark reality that elections are not won by mobilising mass support but by mobilising liquor, money and muscle power which is as violent a method as the proverbial 'barrel of the gun', this argument does not carry much conviction with the viewers. The maker of the film is no more convinced—less indeed, for he cannot possibly have any of the doubts that the gullible among the masses may have—but he would like to convince them if at all that is possible. There being not much possibility of that, Ramoji Rao adds to the moral argument the more 'pragmatic' argument embodied in the second: people's problems can be solved by legal and democratic means if only one has the patience to pursue the effort; such patience, indeed, is the price one pays for democracy; and it is only the impatient who take to violence as a quick and easy solution. A situation is introduced to try out this argument. A landlord living in a tribal area, finding that the tribals are resisting his attempts to grab their land, manages to get an eviction order from the government on the ground that the tribals' land is to become part of a tiger sanctuary. When the tribals resist the eviction order and stage a dharna peacefully under the leadership of the good-hearted doctor the police intervene and beat them up mercilessly. The Naxalites then enter the picture, charge at the policemen with dreadful looking automatic weapons, and drive them away. The doctor remonstrates against this violent intervention which would only bring repression upon the tribals. She issues a challenge that she would get the eviction order stayed by legal means and the Naxalites laugh at her. (So, indeed, do the viewers in the hall). She first encounters the hurdle of corrupt ministers and pliant officials. A genuine dilemma is thus introduced which, if unravelled realistically, could have made for a meaningful discussion of at least one important aspect of 'the Naxalite problem'. But the dilemma is resolved most dishonestly. The state's high court, allowing a petition against the eviction filed by the doctor, pronounces that since there is no evidence of the presence of tigers in the area the eviction should be stopped; and it even discharges at one stroke the tribals from the criminal case of trespass and resistance of authority filed against them. This is a dishonestly anti-climactic denouement, for if it had been so easy to move our courts and obtain justice for the poor and the oppressed the question of

political violence would never have arisen except as an abstract debate. Communist revolutionaries may believe that the working masses cannot obtain political power by peaceful means, but the working masses themselves, taken as a whole, are attracted initially to revolutionary violence not for this reason but for the reason that it offers a feasible way of obtaining justice in a society in which none of the legitimate institutions of authority are effective in doing so. Ramoji Rao is close enough to the administration to know that there are literally hundreds of cases of tribals petitioning either the courts or the government about eviction from their land in the name of forest conservancy if not animal sanctuaries; and that very few of these petitions have been settled in favour of the tribals; and further that it is only where the Naxalites have intervened and either organised a tribal protest or threatened the officials that the evictions have stopped, the total quantity of forest land thus being in the 'illegal' enjoyment of the tribals tallying upwards of four hundred thousand acres in the State. And he is also knowledgeable enough about the ways of the world to know that the common experience of persons who are organising the poor and the oppressed through legal and peaceful means is one of tremendous frustration. It is an insult to the intelligence of the people to suggest that they are resorting to violence when a writ petition in the high court would work equally well.

In any case the argument convinces no one. So the film employs as its central theme the third argument centred around the question of violence. This argument is basically no more honest, but that does not matter from the point of view of efficacy since it is not yet totally discredited. It is clever enough to use non-violence, not as an argument on behalf of the system and against the revolutionaries, but on behalf of the people, and *against the establishment as well as the revolutionaries*: 'your violence and their violence is crushing us on both sides'. This argument of 'the common people caught between Naxalite violence and police violence' is a happy solution to the dilemma the Telugu press faced some time ago, of how to stop ignoring the very evident occurrence of 'police excesses' and yet not lend credibility to the politics of Naxalites. It was popularised by Ramoji Rao's own *Eenadu* and picked up gleefully by the rest of the Telugu press. It is this 'encounter' of the people with the corrupt, brutal and immoral establishment on one side and the impatient and cold blooded Naxalites on the other side that gives the film its title. It is only in this form that the argument of non-violence retains any patentability at all.

But why do Naxalites use violence, and why do the police crush the people violently? This question has to be answered by the *establishment's* presentation of the 'Naxalite problem'. The revolutionaries themselves explain their violence as a necessary means for the overthrow of the armed might of the state of the propertied classes and the establishment of the political rule of the working masses. This, naturally, is never discussed in the *establishment's* presentation, though a person like Ramoji Rao who was once upon a time a fellow-traveller cannot claim to be unfamiliar with it. The police view of revolutionary violence consists of two elements: that it is a species of gangsterism with which some people acquire wealth and power; and that it is a desperate way to political power that parties which are unable to win elections have opted for. These arguments, however much the maker of the film may find them appealing, are not acceptable to the people and therefore they cannot become part of a credible presentation. The argument for revolutionary violence that is most commonly given and widely accepted by the masses is that it is the only feasible way of obtaining justice in a society wherein every institution of democracy has been prostituted to the purposes of the rich and the powerful. This explanation is widely prevalent, and has even been publicised well by the press whose small town reporters, have all got converted to this view much to the annoyance of their editors and proprietors. This view of Naxalite violence frequently results in the bemusement of its converts for a considerable part of Naxalite violence is oriented towards their larger aims and is in no way related to the solution of any immediate problem, but nevertheless it has held its ground and is gaining rapid acceptance. Ramoji Rao takes over this version for his film, but incorporates it as part of the basic theme where the 'people' are pitted against the corrupt and brutal *establishment* as well as the cold-blooded revolutionaries: selfish politicians and corrupt administrators have subverted our democracy, and the Naxalites, a mixture of impatient idealism and cold-blooded calculation, are taking advantage of the resultant crisis to offer quick and ruthless solutions to problems for which the system offers no solution, but in the process they are completing the destruction of the system and paving their way to power with the blood of innocent people. Police violence, in this presentation, becomes a necessary counter to this strategy, for no system can silently allow subversives to take advantage of whatever is rotten within. But the hatred that the people have for the brutalities of the police is such that Ramoji Rao cannot af-

ford to ignore it if his effort is to have credibility, and so the actual depiction of the police is in a terribly uncomplimentary light. Indeed the film shows the police in such a bad light—as a bunch of corrupt, self-serving, bunglers—that the police establishment of the state was reportedly very unhappy with the censors for having allowed the film. However, the common feeling that people have towards the police is such that it is impossible to make a film on political violence that will be credible enough for the people to see it, and will also please the police. In any case this kind of a presentation of what is 'rotten' in the police does not in any way militate against the roje attributed to it in the total political context.

Even within an empirical understanding of the question of political violence as an efficacious way of solving people's problems in a system in which all normal means of justice have been subverted and destroyed, there is third element to the debate that even the most honest presentation of the ruling class will not discuss. It is not merely a question of revolutionary violence vs police violence. To admit the first term into the discussion would be fatal to the kind of presentation that Ramoji Rao makes. And so it is not admitted but instead is subsumed under the confession that the people do have a lot of problems whose solution is being rendered impossible by corrupt and inefficient administrators and degenerate politicians, leading to the search for violent means of solution. That violence—poverty, hunger, destitution, inequality, domination, oppression, unfreedom—is inherent in social structure is not admitted, for that would alter the whole context of the discussion of revolutionary violence. All that is admitted is that while the system may not exactly be a garden of Eden it is basically livable and workable except that unfortunately there has been a growth of corruption, brutality and other undesirable traits lately which needs urgent remedy. Some apples, in other words, have started rotting. In this film, the system is represented by a brutal, oppressive and lecherous landlord living in a tribal area and the forest and police officials who are subservient to him. The landlord has forced a woman to live with him and offer her body to the government servants who are his henchmen. (She finally denounces him in a people's court and gets him shot dead by the Naxalites.) The film makes no effort to hide the ugliness of these rotten apples, a determination that covers a bigger resolve to never admit that what is rotten is more than a few—or many, for that matter—individuals. This deceptively confessional attitude is now quite typical of the public face the ruling class puts on. It is so con-

scious of the need to admit just this much and nothing more that the moment you try to bring in the argument that the structure itself is unjust and iniquitous it bursts out with angry rhetoric about Poland, Roumania and Tiananmen Square.

Naturally, when only this much of rottenness is admitted and the possibility of curing it by means sanctioned by this very structure is asserted, then revolutionary violence starts hanging in the air, bereft of a material basis and a historical justification. It *becomes an autonomous act of political choice made by self-willed individuals, a choice that need not have been made at all, had those individuals not willed it capriciously*. Once the revolution is thus made an act of autonomous choice that need not at all have been made, the suppression of revolutionaries and the people behind them by the state becomes an act of legitimate counter-violence in self-defence. And if the people are harmed in the process, that is extremely reprehensible, but it is very evident who caused the whole thing. It is the determination to save this argument about 'who started it' that leads to such passionate outbursts about what happened in eastern Europe whenever you try to talk about the violence inherent in the structure of our society, a violence that is reproduced and not cured by its institutions.

The moment revolution is turned into a capricious act, autonomous of historical necessity, it becomes whimsical and arbitrary, romantic and brutal. The romantic and the brutal are the most compelling qualities of the images of revolution this film presents. The large majority of actual 'Naxalites' are quite mundane individuals living underground or above, organising people in villages, mines, colleges, factories and 'bastis', but this film knows nothing of their existence. The 'Naxalites', for this film, are tough young men and women who dwell in permanent isolation on the invisible slopes of the other side of the hill. When the tribals need them they become mysteriously aware of it and come dancing over the hill to the accompaniment of heralding music, dressed in olive green and carrying very terrible looking automatic firearms. They start firing from their weapons without even stopping to take aim, and depart back to the other side of the hill the moment they have killed enough. Now and then they make a short and contemptuous speech in reply to the doctor's voluble hectoring. They are coldly self-assured and confident in contrast with the very warm and human doctor and the bungling policemen who corruption has reduced to a subhuman level. There is a telling scene in the film: a Naxalite is killed by the police in a fake encounter. A bright

policeman, the doctor's former husband in fact, gets the idea that instead of cremating or burying the dead body they should let it lie there and keep watch over it so that when the dead man's comrades come looking for the body they can also be apprehended. The other policemen accept the suggestion/ and they put the corpse up on a tree and stand guard underneath and around the tree. The dead man's comrades, instead of giving up the idea of taking the dead body, as any real life revolutionaries would do, decide to lift the dead body literally over the heads of the policemen and take it away. They build a rope bridge from tree top to tree top, descend on the body from above, tie a rope to it, and take it away dangling at the end of the rope. The point is not whether Ramoji Rao himself is unintelligent enough to believe this to be possible. The point is what makes such a feat part of the image of a Naxalite projected in this presentation of Naxalism by a very class-conscious member of the ruling class. The point is what is the total picture that these images of cold-blooded efficiency, silent brutality and inhuman confidence add up to.

The whimsicality and the arbitrariness of the revolution lies in each act of the process becoming autonomous of the others, rendering the totality of it senseless. This is the way the press in the state has always depicted Naxalite politics, as a series of unconnected, unintelligible, autonomous acts of romantic and brutal cruelty, and this is the impression about Naxalite politics that anyone learning of it through the press is bound to get. When Ramoji Rao was accused of distortion of reality in making this film, he replied very truthfully that anybody who has been reading the papers for the last two years knows that what he has said in the film is nothing but the truth. That is so. The press itself—with a leading role played by the daily of which Raktioji Rao is not only the proprietor but also an almost mythically watchful editor—has invented the presentation of Naxalism as a series of unconnected and autonomous acts, a presentation taken over by the film. At places the fracture becomes so acute that the film merely produces shot after shot of newspaper photographs of burning of buses, blowing up of police jeeps, kidnapping of government officials, killing of police informers and the dynamiting of buildings. It creates a very effective picture of mindless violence that rounds off the argument of autonomy. Naturally then the police must step in. Some—indeed many—of them may be stupid, avaricious, lecherous, brutal, but the task of policing is an essential task. Our society—it suddenly becomes 'our' society to the unguarded viewer—cannot be allowed to

be blown up by this mindless violence. It is here that one suddenly realises that the film's seemingly candid depiction of the police is very deceptive. The image of the police that all of Ramoji Rao's candid depiction adds up to is not one of a brutal instrument of suppression but of an undependable and inefficient guardian of our society. Just as the image of the politician that his equally candid depiction adds up to is not one of a defender and a representative of an oppressive society, but of a weak, incapable, corrupt, venal humbug whom we cannot trust with the task of ruling this country.

To achieve this certain things are quite consciously left out of this film that purports to discuss the 'Naxalite problem' frankly. The most striking omission is the very methodical brutality with which the state has met the revolutionary challenge. The Indravelli tribal massacre was a conscious attack on a peaceful gathering aimed at stemming the rapid spread of revolutionary organisation among the very militant Gonds who are the biggest tribe of south-central India. In this film it becomes a routine police firing on a mob following a fatal attack on a policeman by a tribal girl who has been raped by him. The police department, for all that it has its share of corrupt, bungling, cowardly officers, is by no means the ludicrous force the film makes it out to be. Both its regular force and its special wings—the nameless numberless gangsters armed with anonymity and unbridled powers to kill and maim—are very efficient in their ruthlessness, and its intelligence wing possesses quite a lot of intelligence. That the police has not been able nevertheless to solve the 'Naxalite problem' is besides the point. No police force anywhere in the world has solved any such 'problem' of political rebellion. It can only suppress more or less brutally, more or less intelligently and more or less temporarily, and the Andhra police has been no less efficacious than any police force anywhere. And the same is true of the political leaders whose failure to solve the problem is no proof of their lack of determination and intent, but only of the impossibility of the task.

But to admit this would be to admit that the state is inherently a repressive apparatus, and to bring the discussion perilously close to the forbidden threshold of the notion of a violent and oppressive social structure guarded by a violent state apparatus. It would then remove the image of fractured acts of brutality attributed to the incidents of incendiary protest indulged in by the People's War group. It would reveal that for a period of nearly two decades a regime of unquestioned police brutality prevailed, about which the press rarely wrote, 'public opi-

nion' scarcely bothered, the courts and their *habeas corpus* jurisdiction were impotent, and the political government was unfazed notwithstanding sizeable democratic protest. It would reveal that Ramoji Rao and his ilk would never have felt it necessary to break the long silence and talk to the people about the 'Naxalite problem' through their papers and their films if the Naxalites had not discovered at least a temporary if rather doubtful way of unsettling through acts of arson, detonation and abduction the complacent *establishment* which had thought that a few more guns to commit a few more encounters and a few more ingenious methods of torture would see the end of the 'problem'. And it would then go on the focus attention on certain very basic facts which Ramoji Rao's films and the *establishment's* polemics in general steadfastly refuse to acknowledge. I am not referring to abstract things like the historical necessity of revolutions but to much more concrete things: that if today, over large parts of the state, the poor and the wretched are walking with head held high, that is because of the Naxalites; that in spite of the most brutal suppression the 'Naxalite problem' has spread from the remote corner of Srikakulam to each of the 23 districts of the state, not excluding Hyderabad city where the landgrabbers and political warlords no longer feel very safe; that there would have been no integrated Tribal Development Agencies, no Tribal Co-operative Corporations, no Remote Area Development Programmes, none of the tremendous exposure that has become customary of the corruption of government servants and the inefficacy of courts, nor the repeated talk of implementing land reforms that has become fashionable once again, but for the Naxalites; that it is the 'Naxalite menace' that has generated a whole new culture of people protesting against and agitating about every act and incident of injustice, people collaring errant government officials and elected representatives, and those lordly creatures coming to regard themselves answerable to the masses.

A presentation that refuses to acknowledge so much of the problem cannot resolve it with any credence. Jyoti the doctor sits in a hunger protest on behalf of the 'people', demanding that both the parties—the Naxalites and the government—give an assurance that they will abjure their respective paths of violent protest and violent suppression. Since the demand does not address the real problem of either party, she cannot possibly succeed. The 'people' in the film are shown to side with her but the people in the cinema hall are evidently very impatient with this artificial presentation of the problem of political violence. To give him due

credit Ramoji Rao does not attempt an artificial denouement to match it. Neither side accepts the hand of non-violence held out by the doctor, but in an evidently symbolic last scene, the toddler born to the tribal girl raped by a policeman comes forward and holds the dying doctor's hand. Since the burden of proof or disproof is thus pushed on to the future, any reaction to it can be dismissed as prejudice, and therefore it is best to leave it unstated.

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