

Insurgencies and Development

There were at least 110 known instances of insurgency over a period of 117 years from 1783 to 1900 (Ranjit Guha 1983:13). These adivasi-peasant uprisings protested the taking away from people their means of subsistence by the British commercial expansion of forestry and agriculture. Ranjit Guha studied these uprisings and in 1983, he argued that there were six elementary aspects of insurgency in colonial India—negation, ambiguity, solidarity, transmission, and territoriality.

Between 1900 and 2013, there has been a proliferation of insurgencies protesting against the taking away of means of subsistence and more. The ‘elementary aspects’ need to be examined in the light of over hundred years of the history of insurgency.

Several questions need to be looked at to come to terms with the complex dynamics of insurgency and development?

Against the backdrop of a diversity of insurgencies across India and South Asia this two day seminar focuses on what is commonly known as Maoist Insurgency.

What historical factors have led to the making of the ‘red corridor’? What is the ground situation here? Have the long history of conflicts between economy and ecology transformed the articulations between class differentiation and social structures? What have been the changes in the character of the State, Governance, and civil society? How does this affect the daily lives of people? What goes into the making of an insurgent? What is the history of the social construction of insurgency? What is the design and impact of counter-insurgency development programs? For two hundred years, adivasi forest has been the battleground. The Left, Right, and the Liberals have taken upon themselves to determine what is good for the adivasi? What is the adivasi perspective? Is it necessary for adivasis’ to participate in the violence of either insurgency or of holistic development?

It is being argued today that insurgency is a creation of uneven development (economic, political, social and cultural), increasing disparities and shrinking opportunities. It is therefore possible to diffuse these insurgencies with better governance that ensures development, reduces disparities, and opens up multiple ‘fora’ for opportunities. This understanding is the basis for a new set of counterinsurgency policy interventions.

The Planning Commission set up an Expert Group on “Development Issues to deal with the causes of Discontent, Unrest and Extremism” in May, 2006. Its task was to identify processes and causes contributing to continued tensions and alienation in the areas of unrest and discontent. The hope was that recommendations made this group would if implemented sincerely and promptly, would “douse the spreading bushfire of rural discontent.” In 2011, USAID produced policy on *The Development Response to Violent Extremism and Insurgency*—the first of its kind by USAID. Its purpose was to provide a policy framework that USAID can use to improve the effectiveness of its development tools in responding to violent extremism and insurgency, as well as its capacity to interact constructively with its interagency and other partners in these challenging environments. In August 2013 **Mr. Jairam Ramesh**, Minister of Rural Development and Minister of Drinking water and Sanitation gave a talk on ‘Democracy, Development and Extremism: Meeting the Challenge of 21st century Maosim in India’ at Teen Murti Bhavan.

The subject in for negotiation is insurgency. What is its? Who are insurgents? Where does their violence come from? What are they saying? Are they being listened to? What is our apparatus to listen? Could listening be subjected to the imperialism of categories? What constitutes listening?

To discuss these and other related questions Ranjit Guha’s ‘elementary aspect’ is a good starting point. Are negation, ambiguity, solidarity, transmission, and territoriality truly, elementary aspects of insurgency? Would this not depend on the veracity and appropriateness of the historical-anthropological apparatus deployed by Ranjit Guha. How is this to be determined?

A second starting point could be to decommission the term “insurgency”! This could open up a way of leaning to listen. What could be heard is the angst that has an existence of its own, quiet independent of

an external determination. As the work of Albert Camus-“the Rebel’ and Gandhi’s work “My experiments with truth” show, this angst is an element of the human spirit. What then is the angst of and is it appropriate to label it ‘insurgency’?

A third starting point could be the hypothesis that if the development apparatus has been responsible for the disparities, than can this apparatus rectify this situation in responsible way? This begs the question, is development self-reflexive and self-corrective? Does it have the where-withal to undo the damage it has caused?

There could be several other ways of listening to the angst. The thrust of this discussion is to find a way to come to terms with what goes under the rubric of insurgency.

This special issue hopes to open-up different ways to look at the bearing of insurgency on development or the vice versa.

Social scientists, political activists, government officers (serving and retirees), public intellectuals, artists, media professionals and journalists are invited to bring to this seminar fresh perspectives to long standing questions of social justice as well as new questions that could draw attention to lesser know and neglected aspects of this subject. Send short abstract (250 words) to cnjsid@gmail.com.

Important Dates

Abstract Submission 30th October, 2013
Paper Submission 15th November, 2013
Notification for Accepted Papers 31st December, 2013
Seminar Date 28th and 29th January, 2014

Financial Support

Participants are expected to bear travel cost. The organizers will bear expenses of local hospitality. In select cases, partial/full grants may be extended to one author depending on the availability of funds. In such cases, the participants are advised to apply separately with reasons for seeking grants. However, the final decision will be taken by organizers depending on the merits of seeking grants and on the availability of funds.

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