

PRIDE! IZZAT! INQUILAB!

a response to
the state-sponsored paranoia of
Urban Naxalism
in INDIA

translating

L A L S I N G H D I L

A V T A R S I N G H S A N D H U "P A S H"

3 p o e m s

3 p o e m s

aditya
bahl

STATEMENT

Over the past few days, a brutal crackdown has been unleashed by the Indian nation-state. Several left and left intellectuals, human rights activists, adivasi activists and the Dalit Ambedkarites have been identified by the state as either “urban naxals,” “half-maoists,” or as maoists in general. Deemed by the state to be an urgent threat to the security of the nation, they have been promptly arrested. Particularly alarming is the spectral synchronicity with which this brutal crackdown has unfolded in places as diverse as Faridabad, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Goa, Ranchi and Delhi. A midnight hearing in the court, the police presenting arrest documents in an inaccessible language, a residence raided at the daybreak, offices raided in the activists’ absence, and so on. But one must always remember that neither the alarming ferocity of the violence which the Indian nation-state has unleashed nor its unprecedentedness are a departure from the apparently democratic workings of the Indian parliament. Even a most cursory peek into the everyday lives of the Dalits, the Kashmiris, the tribal peoples and the Muslims shall confirm that there is nothing exceptional about this violence. For those members of the civil society who need constant reminding, I must repeat— “The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule” (Walter Benjamin).

Over the course of the past few months, the Indian nation-state has taken to indiscriminately identifying as “urban naxal” any and every Dalit, tribal and leftist intellectual and political activist who has protested the state-assisted primitive accumulation in tribal regions, the ongoing lynchings of the Dalits and Muslims and the forced occupation of Kashmir. The Indian intelligentsia has responded to this state-sponsored paranoia of urban naxalism precisely by affirming themselves as urban naxals. Twitter, the veritable seismograph of a gestating movement in such circumstances, has already witnessed the nascent beginnings of the trend #MeTooUrbanNaxal. At first, this gesture of solidarity seems to be truly a dialectical rejoinder to the state. And yet, one cannot help but wonder what is the concrete content of this much-affirmed gesture. One finds it particularly vexing that very few intellectuals affirming themselves as urban naxals have dared to actually engage with the different

praxes of a Mao-inspired naxalite politics, let alone propose an overhaul of its many limits, most of which are rooted in naxalism's failure to adequately account for the separation of the political from the economic under capitalism. Instead of responding to the urgent need to radically rethink the questions of political organizing for our conjuncture, the #MeTooUrbanNaxal has become an occasion for the activists to affirm, rather drearily, their "right to dissent." Perhaps, until recently, such politics of the rights could still have been deemed a strategic agitational importance. But in light of the brutal violence which the autocratic Modi government has relentlessly unleashed, whether by way of undertaking juridical-legal actions or by fostering a fascist reserve army of rightwing Hindu militants, the politics of the rights appears to have been rendered increasingly unviable.

In order to engage with and resist this state-sponsored paranoia of urban naxalism from the rather modest vantage which my isolated and distant situation affords me, I decided to return to the revolutionary poetries and poetics of two Punjabi Naxal poets, Lal Singh Dil and Avtar Singh Sandhu "Pash." Whatever meager "translations," "recreations," "writing-throughs" this return has yielded, I dedicate them to the indefatigable spirits and bodies of those countless and nameless Dalits, tribal peoples and Kashmiris who, for decades now, have been oppressed and exploited in the name of progress by the nexus of Indian nation-state and capital.

the unemployed

to loiter
hiding the tattered sleeves of the shirt.
to practice the skill
of walking in broken juttis.
to learn to use
the tongue to sift
from spit
the word love.
to smile
while hiding under the eyelids
the specter of a funeral
cart stuck in mud.
but you, the one beside me,
no abstraction can conceal
you
from me
a body made of glass
i can clearly see the blood
which circulates inside you

freely: the length of
a durée without
a narrative
i can see it clearly
because we have met so often
in third class compartments
footloose, flowing together
into the chai-dhabas and
the shop of the kabaadi.
when the karamcharis of
the employment office
have scattered my papers
across the grilles
and into the wind
then, left stranded, i too
have gathered them.

faith

just as everything is
of the soil
CORN, SUGAR, IRON & GUNPOWDER
so is everything
of the peoples
THE MOVEMENT, THE MOVEMENT, THE MOVEMENT
PRIDE, IZZAT & INQUILAB
yesterday, while raising & making
louder the slogans of
the revolutionary waves
a comrade whose face
resembles that of christ's
was bound in chains
"the tempestuous ferment of the agitation":
HISTORY
REPEATS
ITSELF
even after they broke his bone
after bone
his spirit

like that of Lenin's
did not break.

the hot blood boils for vengeance.
every one who, treading
on paths beneath
the sprawling mango trees, has
trampled underfoot
the countless bodies
of half-ripe mangoes.
now, the guerrillas pass by
indifferently marching.
gunpowder is sunk in those bellies
which had always nourished
on our blood
hot cartridges are shot
through those hands which were used
to hang that christ-like comrade
upside down from the gallows
the slogans which get raised
in bengal, assam & nagaland
are now raised in chamkaur
so that everyone may know
that everything is of the peoples
THE MOVEMENT, THE MOVEMENT, THE MOVEMENT
PRIDE, IZZAT & INQUILAB

atom

is the fear of the atoms
that of those small
guns some people carry in their pockets?
vietnam knows
the power of the atoms
look,
the nation-states
which have cropped up
across from us,
they are all abloom
the giant foreign tractors have
uprooted the homes of the workers
today, even they know
that politics is not the power
of the guns you can carry around in your pockets
it is that thing which is
now getting sifted
for exchange
in the market chowks

P A S H

bharat

bharat—
the greatest word which can honor me
wherever it gets used
meaninglessness sets in
absence is its object
the subject of the passions
this word stirs are those
sons of the fields
who still measure time
using the shadows of trees
nothing troubles them
except the belly
 except nothing
so when hunger sets in
they can even chew their own raw limbs
to them, life's law
while the meanings of death are
mukti: pure means
 to cure
 absence
whenever anyone talks about the communal
unity of the entire Indian nation-state

i feel like flipping his topi up in the air,
then telling him
that the meanings of bharat
are not contingent upon any outsider enemy
but are ledgered in the fields
where the grain grows
where the commons are
stolen . . .

iron

you people ride in a car made of iron.
i possess a gun made of iron.
i have consumed iron.
you people only discourse about iron.
when the iron melts,
the steam does not rise.

the discourse

lies: it is when
the steam rises
out of the hearts of those
who lift the furnace
that the iron melts.

molten iron can be
moulded into any shape and size.
the destiny of a nation lies
moulded in the furnace—
this my gun,
the safes of your banks,
the machines you use to upturn mountains,
all are made of iron.
from the city to the hinterland, every difference
from the sister to the whore, every touch
from the bill to the law, every passage
from the masters to the slaves, every relation
from lothu nizam to inquilab, every history

from the jungles, the basements and the jhuggies to interrogation, every event,
all are made of iron.

the iron has waited for a long time

 a time

 longer than the reign

 of any working day

so that the poors who must depend

on the iron may, by consuming

strips of iron-pills, refrain

from committing suicide

so that the wives of those workers

whose bodies were orphaned

by machinery and their organs

ejected to the trembling

sound of a longing become iron, may

not become free

to sell what they own: their body

politic

: their body

: the use-value of their clothings

to those heirs who sit

on chairs made of iron

in the end the iron has had to take

the form of pistols, rifles and bombs

blinded by the luster of the iron's iron-being

you people might mistake

my gun for your car

your sister for your wife

the nightfall for the daybreak

but the unbreaking gaze of my iron eye

can tell the difference between

my comrade and my enemy

because i have consumed iron

you people only discourse about iron.

time's not a dog

if not *frontier* then read *tribune*
if not *calcutta* then talk about *dhaka*
fetch the clippings from
organizer and *punjab kesari*
and tell me
where are these eagles flying to?
who has died?
time's not a dog
which can be chained & dragged to where you wish
you tell us
mao says this, mao says that
i say
who is mao to say anything?
the Word can't be held
mortgage
time itself speaks
the moments are not speechless

you sit in rambel
or drink a cup of tea from a streetside stall
speak
truth or lie—
it doesn't matter
your silent corpse would be no more
primordial for the sound of an incoming
foot

.....

& o rulers
ask your police & tell me
is it I who am imprisoned
behind these bars
or this policeman
who is standing across?
the truth's not a whore of All India Radio
time's not a dog