THE POLITICS OF COUNTERINSURGENCY AND STATEMAKING IN MODERN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

This thesis undertakes a study of the modern state in India in the context of counterinsurgency. Through a combination of ethnographic and historical methods, it explores the processes and practices of state formation and legitimacy-building in an erstwhile Maoist guerrilla zone of the eastern Indian state of West Bengal. The colonial and postcolonial histories of this forested region, known popularly as the Jungle Mahals, are punctuated by moments of violent conflict and regime-change. These moments of rupture have tended to periodically reorder the relationships between the modern state and its ordinary subjects. Accordingly, the thesis reconstructs a trajectory of state-society relations in the Jungle Mahals from the early colonial era, when East India Company officials created a modern state apparatus to deal with rural rebellions, to the present, when the Indian government has pursued a 'development' agenda to wean ordinary people away from Maoist rebels. I show that periods of insurgency and counterinsurgency ought to be recognised as critical junctures in the history of the modern state in frontier regions such as the Jungle Mahals.

The modern state is made and remade in the course of counterinsurgency as both state and rural society are reordered in tandem from above and below. Hence, I make a case for studying the state, understood as both an idea and a set of material practices, from 'within', that is, as emerging through the mediation of actors who represent the state and ordinary villagers in my fieldsites. Furthermore, through an exploration of ordinary villagers' responses to counterinsurgency in the Jungle Mahals, this thesis argues that popular responses to counterinsurgency cannot be explained through the binaries of resistance and complicity. In other words, it is necessary to examine the complex textures of people's lives and subjectivities vis-à-vis the state during and after counterinsurgencies in order to appreciate how statemaking in such circumstances, far from being a top-down imposition on hapless subjects, emerges from below as well.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BDO: Block Development Officer

BJMM: Bharat Jakat Majhi Marwa

BPL: Below Poverty Line

BUPC: Bhumi Ucched Pratirodh Committee

CPI: Communist Party of India

CPM or CPI (M): Communist Party of India (Marxist)

CRPF: Central Reserve Paramilitary Force

DM: District Magistrate

GP: Gram Panchayat

ICDS: Integrated Child Development Services

IRDP: Integrated Rural Development Programme

LF: Left Front

LWE: Left-Wing Extremist

MGNREGS: Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme

MoU: Memorandum of Understanding

MZC: Midnapore Zamindari Company

NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation

NREGA: National Rural Employment Guarantee Act

NRLM: National Rural Livelihoods Mission

OBC: Other Backward Castes

PCAPA: People's Committee against Police Atrocities

PMRDF: Prime Minister's Rural Development Fellow

SC: Scheduled Caste

SEZ: Special Economic Zone

SHG: Self-Help Group

SGSY: Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana

SKJRC: Singur Krishi Jomi Raksha Committee

ST: Scheduled Tribe

SWFA: South West Frontier Agency

TMC: Trinamool Congress

GLOSSARY OF SELECTED TERMS

adivasi: a self-identifying label used by those whom the colonial and postcolonial Indian states terms ‘tribes’, ‘scheduled tribes’, ‘forest dwellers’, and so forth

bargardar: sharecropper

chuar: a term which describes, derogatorily, a bandit, the lowest level position in the zamindari militia

darogah: head of a police station

ghatwal: guardians of passages, also a form of service tenure in the jungle zamindaris

harmad: armed cadres (of the CPM), derived from the Spanish term armada

harmad bahini: armed militia (of the CPM)

hool: rebellion

ijradar: rent-contractor

majhi: village headman of the Santal villages in the Jungle Mahals

mandal: village headman of the Mahato villages in the Jungle Mahals

mandali: a tenurial system in the Jungle Mahals where the zamindar granted tenure to an entire community

muchalaka: written guarantees by zamindars to the Company government

paik: holder of a special service tenure in exchange of provodong police and military service to the zamindar in the Jungle Mahals

panchayat: elected local self-government at the village, block and district levels

raiyat: peasant

sherestidar: record-keepers at local police stations

tahsildar: revenue collector

thana: police station

ulgulan: rebellion

zamindar: landlord, individual paying land revenue to the British government during the colonial period

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Introduction: The Politics of Counterinsurgency and Statemaking in Modern India

> Lalgarh should become a model of resistance for the rest of the country.
>
> Fact-finding report on Lalgarh, Democratic Students Union

> During the time of *'jhamela'* [trouble] there was a lot of inconvenience. We could not travel from the village to Medinipur (district town). Yes, I too, participated in the movement but it is much better now that there is 'shanti' [peace].
>
> Sumita Garai, Lalgarh

When I ventured into the forest villages of Lalgarh and Ramgarh in the Jungle Mahals of West Bengal in the autumn of 2013, it was hard to imagine that these areas had been in the grip of a violent conflict until recently. The villagers, even those who sympathised with the Maoists and participated in agitations against the police, bureaucrats and members of the ruling party, were now seeking benefits from the new state government and the local bureaucracy. The presence of the 'state' in everyday life was not only an accepted reality, but ordinary people were keen to build sustained ties with the state.

Government efforts at re-establishing its legitimacy in this region, I found, were routed through rural development programmes. These programmes targeted poor rural women in order to access every household and negotiate a new peacetime political order at the grassroots. Contrary to my perceptions about these development programs being forced impositions on unwilling subjects, women were actively participating in this developmental regime. Even those women who had supported the Maoists and participated in different forms of radical politics during the period of insurgency from 2008 to 2011, were now enthusiastic supporters of the newly emerging state apparatus. Not only were they regularly attending the meetings called by the block office for women's self-help groups, they were also remaking their lives and livelihoods around the newly emerging state apparatus in the region. How do

we explain this shift in such a short period of time? This thesis attempts to understand this shift, and what it means for our understanding of the relations between state and society in the Jungle Mahals.

1. The Context

In 2006, the then Prime Minister of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh described Naxalism as the single largest security threat to the country since independence.[1] His Home Minister Shivraj Patil tabled a 'status paper on the [N]axal Problem' in the parliament.[2] The paper detailed the government's plan to tackle the Maoists through military measures, who were seen as expanding their influence spatially and growing more violent across the tribal-dominated states in central and eastern India. The Ministry of Home Affairs laid out a plan to modernise police forces in the States and to deploy Central Police Reserve Forces (CRPF) to deal with the Maoists. The Ministry also created a special Left Wing Extremist (LWE) division to coordinate the anti-Maoist operations across different states. Since 2009, through what has popularly come to be known as 'Operation Green Hunt', the central government has been deploying central paramilitary forces in large numbers in the states of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. These states together form what policymakers, journalists and academics call the 'red corridor' of India. Confirmed

[1] Prime Minister's Speech at the Chief Minister's Meet on Naxalism, 13 April 2006. The terms Naxalism and Naxals are used interchangeably with Maoism, and Maoists by the state and the media. Their origin lies in the 1960s movement, inspired by Mao Zedong that sought to challenge the power of the Indian state. The terms are derived from a village called Naxalbari in northern West Bengal where the movement is considered to have originated in the form of a peasant revolt. The Naxalite movement was brutally crushed in the 1970s, but groups based on Maoist ideology operated in the 1980s and 1990s in different states. For instance, a party known as the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) mobilised ex-touchables (Dalits) in the eastern State of Bihar to counter the dominance of upper and middle caste landlords in the 1980s (See Bhatia 2005 and Kunnath 2011). Another party, the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) People's War (PW) was active at mobilising Adivasis in Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, and Maharashtra in the 1980s and 1990s. In 2004, the MCC and PW merged to form the Communist Party of India (Maoist). This party, which has been banned by the Indian government, leads the Maoist movement in India today.

[2] Status paper on the Naxal Problem. The full text of the paper delivered on 13 March 2006 can be found on 'http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/document/papers/06mar13_naxal%20problem%20.htm'

figures are never provided, but according to one estimate, 53,200 paramilitary personnel were stationed in these states by May 2013 (Times of India 2013). According to another estimate by civil rights activist Gautam Navlakha in March 2014, 2,86,200 CRPF personnel along with 100,000 personnel from other central paramilitary forces were involved in the security operations against the Maoists.

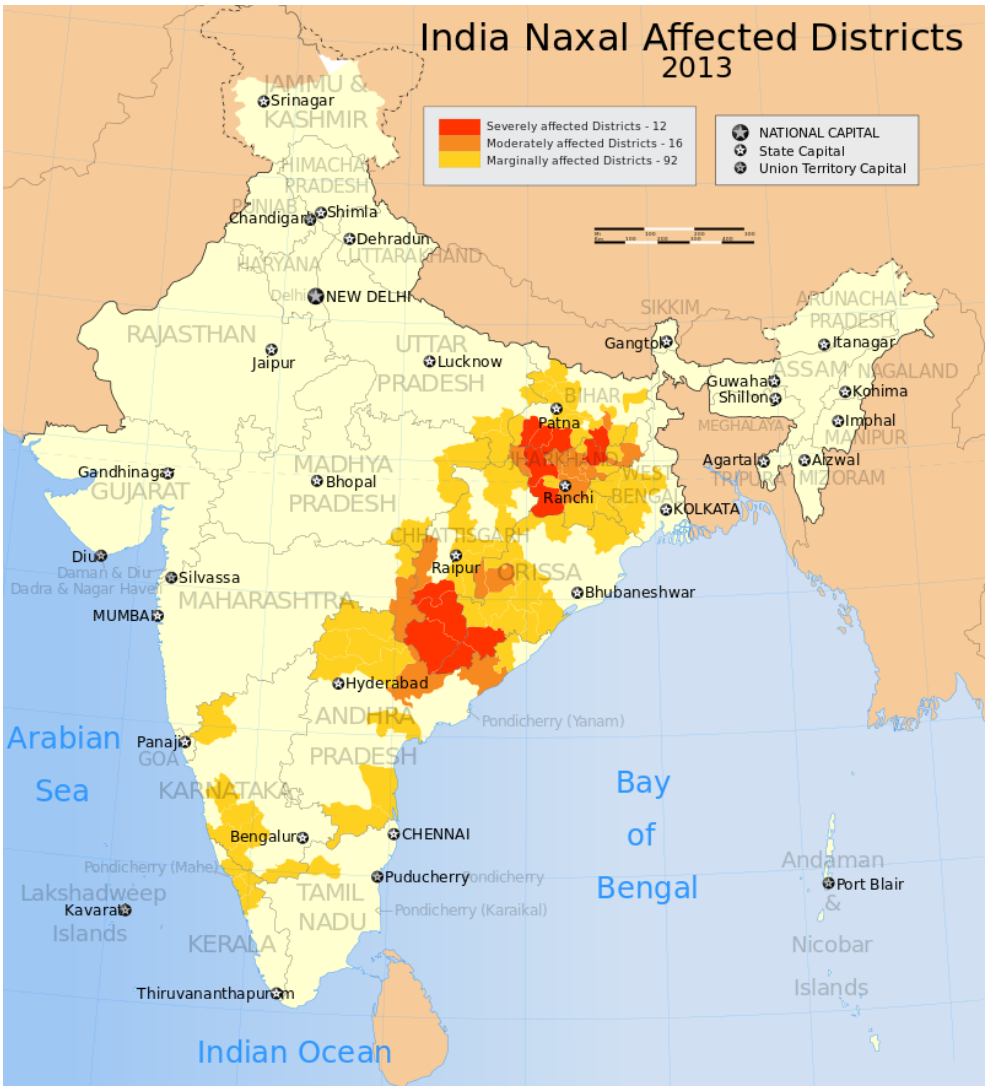


Figure 1. Map of India's 'Red Corridor'. Source: Institute for Conflict Management, SATP, 2013

Security operations against the Maoists were not fully successful in their objectives of eliminating local support for the Maoists and combing out Maoist leaders and guerrillas from the forests of central and eastern India. Moreover, Operation Green Hunt evoked a great deal of controversy. The police and armed forces participating in the operation were accused of committing human rights violations, torturing and killing Adivasis[3], and raping women in the name of fighting the Maoists (Roy 2009; Navlakha 2010; Dungdung 2010; Kumar 2010; Sundar 2010). Furthermore, the CRPF personnel sent to these areas have little idea of the terrain, and themselves became targets of Maoist attacks (Chandra 2013a: 335). Despite these issues, security operations continued.

Over time, however, a shift in the Indian government's response to Maoism occurred, and security operations were supplemented with a development agenda. There was now a two-pronged approach to the so-called problem of left-wing extremism, through a mix of security and development. The inclusion of development as a counterinsurgency measure was based on an understanding that Maoism was not just a law and order problem, but that the underlying cause of popular support for Maoist insurgents was underdevelopment. This turn in the government's approach to the movement was reflected in a report published by the Planning Commission of India.[4] Titled 'Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas' in 2008, this report identified abject poverty and lack of livelihood opportunities as the key drivers of popular support for Maoism. The authors of the report made a case for addressing of the socioeconomic causes of Maoism with sustained administrative developmental action.

[3] Adivasi is a self-identifying label used by those whom the colonial and postcolonial Indian states terms 'tribes', 'scheduled tribes', 'forest dwellers', and so forth.

[4] The Planning Commission of India was set up the Government of India in 1950. Based on the planned economy model, the commission's task was to formulate five-year plans to fulfil India's developmental goals, and set targets for employment, industrial growth, agricultural development etc. In 2015, the government under Narendra Modi abolished the Planning Commission.

The development-centred approach to Maoism was crucial to not only wean people away from the Maoists, but also to rebuild the state's legitimacy in their eyes. Security operations could threaten people into submission but could not win back their trust and loyalty. Security-centred goals such as 'state legitimacy, state survival, and maintaining the stability of the system' were now to be linked with development goals (Basu 2011: 390). The report suggested that the state expand its welfare role and engage in distribution of public goods in various forms. In other words, the relation between the state and disaffected populations was to be mediated through development. This development encompassed programmes to build roads, improve infrastructure facilities, pay special attention to areas classified as 'backward regions', ensure swift and proper implementation of existing welfare schemes, and focus on poverty alleviation by creating new livelihood opportunities. In other words, legitimacy was to be gained by state in its developmental role. The Maoists were supposed to have acquired a foothold in regions where the state was 'absent' and had neglected the poor Dalits and Adivasis. It was believed that the poor in these absent state regions were attracted to the Maoists because they had set up a parallel regime or a counter-state to fulfil the welfare and justice functions of the state.[5] The state apparatus had to be established and was expected to take on a greater welfare-providing role in areas it had neglected so far.

From 2011 onwards, the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), headed then by Dr. Jairam Ramesh, took on a key role in planning and implementing the strategy of what I call 'development as counterinsurgency'. This strategy involved pumping more funds into districts where the Maoist insurgency was active or had recently been contained. The MoRD and the Home ministry jointly planned the development policy for these regions. The focus

[5] The problems with this understanding is that it takes a one-dimensional view of popular support for the Maoists, ignoring other social, cultural, political and intimate reasons through which ordinary men and women join the Maoists. I discuss the criticisms to this approach in greater detail in Chapter 3.

was on increasing the pace of infrastructure-building and implementation of welfare initiatives to show quick results. The government at the centre proposed working closely with the state governments to design and implement rural development programmes. Two specific instances that Ramesh highlights as fairly successful instances of development initiatives in Maoist areas are in the Saranda forests of Jharkhand, and in the former Maoist 'liberated zone' of Lalgarh in West Bengal.[6] Both these regions border each other. Additionally, the 'Andhra model' of addressing Maoism through civil measures in the state of Andhra Pradesh is seen as a successful strategy too, but one where the state government formulated its own counterinsurgency strategy, without much help from the central government (Mazumdar 2013).

This thesis examines the everyday workings of the government's counterinsurgency strategy in a zone of Maoist insurgency. While scholars of policymaking have analysed the Indian state's counterinsurgency response to Maoist violence by combining security and development (Mehrotra 2014; Mazumdar 2013; Basu 2011), there has been no empirical study till date of the ways in which the 'development as counterinsurgency' policy is operationalised at the local level, and the kinds of interactions it produces between state actors and ordinary men and women. To empirically study the relationship between the state, development, and counterinsurgency, I went into the forest villages in Lalgarh and Ramgarh in the West Midnapore district of West Bengal. Lalgarh and Ramgarh are part of a region commonly known as the Jungle Mahals of West Bengal. The Jungle Mahals, literally forest estates, are located in the south-west corner of West Bengal. The name was coined by the British government in 1805 when the forest estates of the districts of Midnapore, Purulia, Bankura, Barddhaman, and Birbhum were put together to create a new district called Jungle Mahals. The district was broken up in 1833 and the Jungle Mahals ceased to be a separate

[6] Personal interview with Jairam Ramesh, 9 January 2015

administrative unit. However, the name survived and has been used to describe areas in the south-west Bengal which are inhabited mostly by Adivasis. The erstwhile Jungle Mahals of present-day districts of West Midnapore, Purulia, and Bankura border the States of Orissa and Jharkhand.[7]



Figure 2. Districts of present-day West Bengal and bordering states (Source: Maps of World website: http://www.mapsofworld.com/india/west-bengal/)

[7] Jharkhand was created as a separate State within the Indian union in 1999, after a long-standing demand for a separate Adivasi state. Adivasi groups in the Jungle Mahals in West Bengal which border Jharkhand also agitated to be a part of Jharkhand but were not included.

The rise of the Maoist movement in the Jungle Mahals put this region on the map of India's 'red corridor'. Additionally, along with the already ascendant Maoists, a locally led Adivasi movement known as the Lalgarh movement, targeted state institutions and the ruling regime of the Communist Party of India (Maoist) too. The period from 2008 onwards saw the Maoists coexisting with and even overlapping with the Lalgarh movement. The leaders of the Lalgarh movement claimed that the State government led by the parliamentary left party, Communist Party of India (Marxist) was allegedly giving a free hand to the police and its armed cadres to pick up and torture Adivasis in the name of arresting Maoists. In November 2008, the police, block administration, and the local CPI (M) cadres were driven out of Lalgarh, and agitators dug up roads leading into the district town of Midnapore. However, within six months, security forces took over Lalgarh, combing out the area to arrest or kill Maoists, and leaders of the movement. The area was secured with a massive security presence. Meanwhile, in the 2011 West Bengal State elections, the Trinamool Congress (TMC) ousted the Left Front government led by the CPM, which had ruled the state for thirty- four years.

The strategy of using development as a counterinsurgency measure began in this context of this regime change. During the time I spent in Lalgarh and Ramgarh in 2013 and 2014, I discovered that the bureaucratic apparatus of the state at the district and block level[8] along with non-governmental organisation (NGO) executives and individuals like the Prime Minister's Rural Development Fellow were the key actors, who were working to regain the trust of ordinary women and men in the state. Along with the central government's policy directives and resources which were specifically directed at 'Maoist-affected districts', the

[8] States in India are divided into divisions known as districts. A district is an administrative unit headquartered at the main district town. The main district town houses the office of the District Magistrate. Districts are divided into subdivisions. The subdivisions are further divided into community development blocks. Community Development Blocks were launched in rural India under India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, in the 1950s to focus on village development. A block is typically made up of 100-200 villages.

state government of West Bengal under TMC's Mamata Banerjee, which came to power after the 2011 Legislative Assembly elections, demonstrated a keenness to push a development agenda in these areas too. 'Development as Counterinsurgency' thus worked through the coalescing of different levels: ministers such as Jairam Ramesh at the national level who framed the policy; the state government's interest; the district, block and village level administration involved in the everyday workings of the policy and programmes.

Across these different levels, development in so-called Maoist affected districts took the form of infrastructure-building, proper implementation of existing welfare schemes, and devising special programmes for these districts. In my fieldsites, following from the MoRD's general directives, there was a major focus on state actors connecting with women via the self-help group (SHG) network. Women were targeted through a programme called Muktidhara, which was essentially designed as a policy measure to transform poor women into small entrepreneurs. Women's SHGs were encouraged to set up micro-enterprises and enhance their livelihood opportunities with subsidised loans from the government. Through a ground-level study of the Muktidhara programme, this thesis studies the micro-politics of 'development as counterinsurgency' in the Jungle Mahals of West Midnapore and the relationships it engenders between women and the state apparatus.

2. Research Questions and the Argument in Brief

The Oxford dictionary defines counterinsurgency as a 'military or political action taken against the activities of guerrillas or revolutionaries'. As a practice of statecraft, counterinsurgency has come to be defined as action against those who use violence and subversion to challenge existing political control. It involves the use of military and civilian means to target the insurgents and those who support them. Counterinsurgency, narrowly

defined, is a top-down imposition of ‘peace’ by the state in question or external actors. In situations where the ‘insurgents’ are ordinary men and women who states seek to win over, ‘heart warfare’ has become a feature of counterinsurgency campaigns, and development increasingly occupies a central position in this warfare (Bhan 2014: 7-17). There is no denying that counterinsurgency campaigns negatively affect citizens in the form of violence and human rights abuses from military and police forces. Yet, as I show, ordinary men and women actively seek to build relationships with the state in the context of ‘development as counterinsurgency’.

The engagement between the state and society, even during insurgency and counterinsurgency, I argue, is not one where a top-down order is imposed upon hapless subjects. Ordinary women and men, instead, perceive periods of insurgency and counterinsurgency as interregna, which present them with an opportunity to participate in the re-ordering of state-society relations and social hierarchies. The state and its subjects are actively engaged in complex processes of social mediations from both above and below. These mediations are based on the current alignment of resources and interests between the state and society. Negotiations between ordinary people and actors who represent the state shape the content of statemaking. Statemaking, that is the processes and practices that constitute the state, I therefore posit, must be studied from ‘within’, rather than just from above or just from below.

To develop this argument, this thesis analyses the structures, actors, and practices of ‘development as counterinsurgency’ in the Jungle Mahals of West Midnapore. I explore the different ways in which the state actors and ordinary women and men engage with each other. Through this exploration, I probe into the wider questions of state formation during and after violent conflict. Additionally, I try to understand the ways in which state-society relations are altered in tandem with the practices of the state in counterinsurgency situations.

As I pieced together the story of statemaking and counterinsurgency in present-day Jungle Mahals, I realised that the region's past too was marked by several periods of violent conflict.[9] The history of violent rebellions can be traced back to late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when the British East India Company entered the region in the late eighteenth century. The Company's military officials became embroiled in the local economies of raid and plunder in which the large landowners of forest estates (*zamindars*) and their peasants (*raiyats*) participated. In early accounts of these officials, the forests of south-west Bengal are described as 'wild' territories with 'savage' and 'unruly' inhabitants, which clashed with their idea of a civilised and ordered agrarian society. Over the next century, the Company's attempts at reordering the local agrarian society to fulfil their own revenue demands disrupted the existing socioeconomic set-up, and led to several rebellions. These rebellions were not necessarily attacks on the colonial state, but were ways in which colonial subjects appropriated and used notions of rights and made claims on the colonial state (Bayly 2006: 25; Chandra 2013a). The colonial state responded to uprisings through military means as well as by devising new forms of rule for these regions. The emergence of a modern state in the Jungle Mahals, was, as I will show in chapter 1, a counterinsurgency response. We also see that, in the aftermath of each rebellion, state-society relations were reorganised and a new phase of statemaking emerged.

Similarly, at several junctures in the postcolonial history of the state in the Jungle Mahals, conflict, statemaking, democratic elections, and changes in relations between local communities went hand in hand. Adivasi assertions for a separate state, violence during

[9] Memories of some such rebellions such as the *Chuar Bidroho* (Chuar Rebellion) of 1799 and the Santal Hool (Santal Rebellion) of 1855 have been interpreted and reinterpreted in different ways over centuries. The postcolonial state has reinterpreted these as anti-colonial and even nationalist uprisings, and the leaders of the rebellions are glorified. For instance, the statues or busts of leaders of the Santal Hool, Sidhu and Kanu, can be found in villages. Even a building in the block office compound of Lalgarh is named after them.

elections, conflicts over control of forest tracts, the altered local power dynamics in the aftermath of land reforms, and the rise of middle peasant groups are some of the changes that occured in the postcolonial phase. The election of a Communist government in West Bengal in the late 1970s ushered in a new phase of statemaking. The Communist Party of India (Marxist), commonly referred to as the CPM, was the party which headed this government. The CPM established a 'party society' (Bhattacharya 2010) in the rural areas and state-society dynamics were organised around the party. In this phase, the dominant political party, the CPM, became central to statemaking. The growth of insurgency in the Jungle Mahals in the late 2000s, I will show in Chapter 3, targeted the CPM.[10] The subsequent ouster of the CPM in the 2011 elections altered the dynamics of the 'party society'.

Violent conflict has been central to statemaking in the Jungle Mahals for centuries. It is for this reason that the present context of my research is not characterised as 'post-conflict'. State-centric perspectives usually exaggerate the level of anarchy, insecurity and chaos during violent interregna (Scott 1994: ix). This exaggerated picture not only justifies military operations, but also helps the state project the aftermath of conflict as a rosy period of peace and development where state legitimacy is not challenged at all. People in my fieldsites often used the phrase *hungama-er pore* (after turmoil) to talk about the present situation. In their 'public transcripts' (Scott 1990), people too mirrored the state view. However, for citizens, instead of merely being a contrast between anarchy and order, the interregnum also meant a renegotiation of authority (Migdal 2001). It would also be analytically and politically wrong to assume that there is a clear line dividing conflict and peace. Latent conflicts and structural violence continue to exist and even inform the present phase of statemaking. People's lives need to be studied in the continuities during and after

[10] The motivations for people's participation in the Maoist movement vary across regions in India. In West Bengal, the primary reason for popular support for Maoists was anger against the Left Front government. Although the party had enjoyed a thirty-four year reign, it became unpopular in the late 2000s.

outright conflict (Shneiderman and Snellinger 2014). Statemaking in the aftermath of conflict might have some particularities, but it may be as routine and banal as in other situations. This thesis attempts to look at what statemaking in the aftermath of conflict might look like.

The state, and the everyday social hierarchies in the Jungle Mahals, as we see them today, have emerged from a long history of claims and contestations. In that context, the two broad questions that structure this thesis are:

(1) What is the contemporary politics of counterinsurgency and statemaking in the erstwhile Maoist zones of India?

(2) How do we understand the present moment within a longer arc of statemaking in the margins of modern India?

To answer these questions together, I build a narrative of statemaking, conflict, counterinsurgency, regime-change, and state-society relations over the last two centuries in the Jungle Mahals of West Bengal in eastern India. The state has transformed in many different ways over time and I am not attempting to draw a teleology between the past and present. Rather, I situate the present in the past in order to sketch a trajectory of statemaking in the Jungle Mahals. I cannot claim to present an extensive history of the state in the region. The purpose of invoking the past is mainly to better understand the nature of the state and state-society relations in the present. Periods of violent conflict and regime change punctuate this trajectory, ordering and reordering the local state as well as social hierarchies. The social mediations between actors who represent the state and those who constitute society, produce what we identify as the ‘state’ at different historical junctures.

I argue that statemaking as a process is characterised by mediations between social forces from above and below, and this argument shapes the story of statemaking that I present in the six chapters of this thesis. I bring together history and ethnography to show how

statemaking has been central to shifts in socio-cultural dynamics in a region constituted as a 'margin' over centuries. The arguments in this thesis build on, and seek to contribute to scholarship on anthropological theories of the state and development, state-society relations, and gender and development.

3. Conceptualising the State

A study of statemaking whether in the margins or in the mainstream, must look at the processes and practices through which the state is constituted. Accordingly, the first step towards understanding the concept of the state is to disaggregate and demystify the concept itself. Disaggregation involves breaking up the entity called the state into its constituent elements. Philip Abrams (1988) refers to the state as a multi-layered entity. Rather than being an entity on its own, Abrams says that the state emerges through political practice. For him, it is both an idea (state-idea) as well as a system (state-system). It starts out as a construct or idea, comes into being through practice, and is then reified into the symbolic 'state'. The state, in this thesis, is not the reified macro-structure but the everyday social and material practices of power that come together for the idea and the system to emerge. Such practices, as well as certain sites and subjectivities are where we can recognise 'state effects' (Mitchell 1991a; also see Trouillot 2001: 126).

Secondly, the co-constitution of state and society is key to my conceptualisation of the state. Timothy Mitchell (1991b) urges us to avoid seeing the state as a unitary actor that exists outside of, or separate from the society in which it embedded. The 'blurred boundaries' between state and society in everyday life ought to lead us to theorize the 'state' as an entity that is discursively constituted by sociocultural and politico-economic realities (Gupta 1995). Akhil Gupta (Ibid: 393) makes the point that '... looking at everyday practices, including practices of representation, and the representations of (state) practice in public culture helps

us arrive at a historically specific and ideologically constructed understanding of "the state".' Chris Fuller and John Harriss (2001:15) also argue that the state-society boundary is 'fluid and negotiable according to social context and position'. However, they nevertheless counter Gupta's (1995) point about the state existing only in discourses. Following Mitchell (1991), they point out that material boundaries such as the wall of a government office do exist, even if they too are blurred and porous (Fuller and Harris 2001: 24). Joel S. Migdal's (2001) state-in-society approach echoes a similar view. Migdal's emphasis is on the processes and practices by which states and societies together create distinct ways of structuring day to day life (ibid: 11). In his view, a definition of the state should be based on the image of the state and the practices of its actors. The image of the state entity is created through two kinds of boundaries: 'the territorial boundaries between the state and other states, and 'the social boundaries between the state-its (public) actors and agencies-and those subject to its rules (private)' (ibid: 17). These boundaries might seem stable, but are constantly neutralized by practices. The routine practices and performances of the different actors who make up the state work to either reinforce the image of the state or weaken it. Demystifying the state, therefore, must involve analysing the state not only in the discursive realm (as Gupta does), but also the material realities of its emergence.

A third related issue is that of spatiality and scale. Ferguson and Gupta (2002) discuss the two concepts of verticality and encompassment as central to understanding the relationship between states, space, and scale. They argue that states themselves produce spatial and scalar hierarchies through bureaucratic practices. Even as state and society mutually constitue each other, states claim to be vertically above society, which is imagined as something on the ground, and encompass different levels, from the family to the nation-

state.[11] Through this 'vertical encompassment', states legitimise themselves vis-à-vis citizen subjects. But Ferguson and Gupta go on to demonstrate that with globalisation, transnational governmentalities have emerged, and these pose a challenge to the vertical spatial legitimacy of states. We can no longer neatly separate the global, national, and local.

Where do we then locate the state? Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta (2006: 27) posit that an ethnography of state and statemaking, should involve analyses of '[t]hinking about how states are culturally constituted, how they are substantiated in people's lives, and about the sociopolitical and everyday consequences of these constructions'. This can be achieved by focussing on the everyday workings and interactions of the bureaucracy, and how the 'people' perceive the state in their day-to-day lives. However, in this whole picture, it would be imprudent to see the state as merely a local actor. Gupta and Sharma go on to point out that while the state does operate within the local structures of power, it is also constituted by its networks with outside actors such as higher-level bureaucracy, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and International Organisations, and by transnational discourses such as development and neoliberalism. So even if one is studying the state locally, one must look at it as an entity that encompasses actors, instititutions, and discourses from the local to the global. We must be attentive to how the state is constituted by several factors like party and non-party politics and economic pressures at the local, national and global levels (Sud 2012: 7). The scale at which the state operates, is thus, an encompassment of different levels in particular ways within a specific context. Scale is a relational concept which is 'socially constructed' (Marston 2000). When applied to the state, the analytic of scale can be defined through: (1) the way in which administrative hierarchies of national,

[11] The difference between scale and level is that scale as an analytic encompasses levels of different kinds (Gibson, Ostrom, and Ahn 2000: 218-219). Within a scale, levels of different kinds are arranged in different hierarchies, whether they are the georgraphical levels of macro, meso, and micro; or the temporal levels of past, present, and future.

state, district, and block come to be related to one another in a given place at a given time; and (2) the converging of the global and local in one site.

Finally, I focus on the state from the vantage point of the zones of interaction between actors who represent the state, and between the state and ordinary women and men. The entity called state, its image and its practices, are produced and reproduced through such interactions. Relationships between the state and ordinary people should not be imagined through the binaries of power and resistance. Rather, the state should be imagined as an 'emergent rationality' growing out of 'the collision between official plans, local politics, and the unruly capacity of the people concerned to respond in their own way to what had been planned for them' (Spencer 2007: 111; cf. Tarlo 2001). The material boundaries separating the state and society also constitute these interactions, and are constituted by them. 'State fetishism' (Taussig 1992) that is the material boundaries of a state are not produced merely through the techniques exercised by state actors, but also by how ordinary people experience this fetish-isation (Krohn-Hansen and Nustad 2005: 15). Such a focus helps us appreciate the processes of statemaking as not just top-down, but bottom-up as well. While governments bureaucracies, and political parties may be a part of the state, one must not assume them to be the state. Corbridge et al (2005) argue that we need to not only see how lower-level government workers, elected representatives and others interpret and put into practice 'technologies of rule' but also how and why these technologies are '…seized upon, understood, reworked and possibly contested by differently placed people within the population of 'the poor'…'. The authority and legitimacy of the imagined entity called the state derives as much from people's image of the state in their lives as from the state's imagination of its vertical encompassment. Similarly, the practices of statemaking are not merely top-down, but emerge from the manner in which the state and its subjects relate to each other.

To sum up, my conceptualisation of the state (1) disaggregates the state and locates its constitution as an idea and system within practices of power (Abrams 1988); (2) recognises the mutual constitution of state and society within the realms of discourse as well as within material realities (Migdal 1991; Gupta 1995; Fuller and Harriss 2001; Harriss-White 2003); (3) emphasises that state formation in its everyday form (Joseph and Nugent 1994) must be studied as connected with macro processes and structures; and (4) focusses on the emergence of the state through mediations between actors and institutions who make up the state, and between the state and 'people'. Ordinary people imagine the state through their encounters with government representatives, local leaders of political parties, bureaucrats, and even NGO workers. The state, thus, is a multi-layered entity which not only shapes, but is also shaped by the society in which it exists.

Accordingly, statemaking can be defined as the combination of actors, processes, practices and discourses through which the state emerges as an idea and as a material reality. I use the term statemaking to refer to a process through which the 'state' emerges and manifests itself in many different ways. It is difficult to define statemaking in one way but what I wish to emphasise is its processual nature whereby mediations occur both from above and below to engender the idea and material existence of an entity called the 'state' at different historical junctures. The process includes a variety of practices from above: building and strengthening of government, bureaucracy and other institutions; using the law and order system as well as violence to quell acts of rebellion and insurrection against state power, forming and maintaining relationships between the 'state' and people through 'techniques' and 'languages' of governance (Hansen and Stepputat 2001: 7-8); and seeking to create legitimacy and asserting authority over the populations. But I show that statemaking is not simply these top-down practices of defining the forms and legitimations of government over time in a given place (Sivaramakrishnan 1999a: 5). From below, statemaking practices could

include voting in elections, participating in, and shaping the course of welfare programmes and policies; imbibing the language of the state in everyday life; and making claims on actors who represent the 'state'. Statemaking, when studied both from above and below, alerts us to how ordinary women and men are not mere passive subjects of the state's top-down practices. Hence, I argue that social forces, and actors interact with each other from above and below within the statemaking process and lend it an open-ended character. This open-endedness implies a kind of indeterminacy over the precise forms that the 'state' may take. It also calls for studying statemaking 'from within' rather than from above or below. Throughout this thesis, I employ the term statemaking to describe this open ended process which is in constant flux.

4. Statemaking and Legitimacy in the Margins

I apply this analytical conceptualisation of the state and statemaking to regions referred to as margins. Margins may lie in certain frontier regions such as forests, deserts, or mountains, which are significantly cut off from the mainstream by virtue of their remoteness. Social scientists have described margins in different ways. William van Schendel (2002) and James Scott (2009), for example, use the term 'Zomia' to talk about the highlands of South-east Asia, which are outside the reach of the modern state. However, as Veena Das and Deborah Poole (2004) have argued, an anthropology of the state in the margins need not be restricted only to geographical frontiers. Margins, as a concept, goes beyond that. Margins of modern states exist in places where the sovereignty of the state is contested. They are 'simultaneously sites where nature can be imagined as wild and uncontrolled and where the state is constantly refounding its modes of order and lawmaking' (Das and Poole 2004: 8, 9). Moreover, far from being spaces where the state is absent, margins are suffused with practices of state formation (Das and Poole 2004, Hansen and Steputtat 2005, 2001). In fact,

practices of statemaking might play a role in marking out regions, spaces, and sites as margins.

My fieldsites in the Jungle Mahals of West Bengal, for example, were first marked as margins of the colonial state because of their geographical location outside the Bengal plains, and due to the extensive forest cover unsuited to settled agriculture. Frequent instances of rebellion and plunder further constituted these forested territories and their inhabitants as 'wild'. Subsequently, the colonial state introduced exceptional forms of administration which led to a further identification of these regions as margins throughout the nineteenth century. Chapter 1 discusses how exceptional forms of rule constituted the Jungle Mahals as margins in a different sense, as 'zones of administrative anomaly' (Sivaramakrishnan 1999a, 1996). Later on, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the administrative exceptionalism in these tracts was undone, but they were still seen as marginal due to their forest cover and because they were inhabited by marginal groups like 'tribes'. Categories like 'tribe' too emerged through interactions between local inhabitants and the state (Taussig 1987; Chandra 2013b; Simpson 2015). The identification of Jungle Mahals as a marginal region continued into the postcolonial period, and was further entrenched with the rise of the Maoist movement and other forms of radical politics in the region. Margins are, thus, made and remade through the processes and practices of statemaking.

The constant 'refounding' of state order and legitimacy that Das and Poole (2004) speak of, is key to my understanding of margins. We must not start with an idea that the state is a fully-developed 'rationalized administrative form of political organization' that is weaker in the margins as compared to the mainstream (Das and Poole 2004: 3). Rather, margins must be seen as sites where the state constantly faces challenges and reinvents itself. They are sites where conflicts and struggle over authority and resources often take place. State legitimacy is challenged and reinforced, and unravelled and remade, through periods of

insurgency and counterinsurgency. The state, in such cases, attempts to 'manage or pacify these populations both through force and a pedagogy of conversion intended to transform unruly subjects into lawful subjects of the state' (Das and Poole 2004: 8). I am interested in looking into what technologies of rule are used to undertake this pedagogy of conversion and achieve so called 'peace'.

The disciplinary power of the state in counterinsurgency situations is manifested not only in the form of violence (security operations), but also through the state's self-defined role as the moderniser of 'backward people' (Scott 1998). Through what Michel Foucault (1991) calls governmentality, state power is exercised through institutions and bodies of knowledge, in different ways such as governing conduct, controlling forms of knowledge, and shaping subjectivities. His concept of biopower (Foucault 1990) is employed by scholars to talk about how the sovereign power of the state is exercised in the bodies of subjects (Chatterjee 1993; Mitchell 1988). Governmentality is thus exercised through biopower to discipline subjects without necessarily using coercion, and by claiming to care about the population's welfare (Foucault 1991:100). In this thesis, I look at the forms of governmentality that define statemaking in the counterinsurgency context, and aim to produce pacified and peaceable subjects through the state's welfare and developmental function. However, I do not define the state only in terms of governmentality, but also through how citizens respond to, and shape these forms of rule. While forms of governmentality do exist, they only impact the practical and everyday forms of statemaking in a rather limited way (Hansen and Steputtat 2001: 36-37). States and citizens appropriate existing technologies of rule in ways that might unsettle these techniques.

As such, margins are the ideal sites to study how states and citizens engage with each other, and to examine the distinct forms of statemaking that emerge from these engagements. Given that state legitimacy is constantly challenged in the margins, the idea of the state has to

be continually produced and reproduced. The instability that defines statemaking in the margins means that state actors require special and exceptional forms of rule to deal with uncertainties. It is in these exceptional circumstances that that processes of statemaking are the most visible (Sivaramkrishnan 1996: 95), both to the historian working in colonial and postcolonial state archives, and to the anthropologist observing the state in these settings. Thus, margins are the perfect vantage point from where to research the interactions between the state and society historically and ethnographically. Anna Tsing (1994: 279) persuasively defines margins as sites where we see the instability of social categories, and as 'zones of unpredictability at the edges of discursive stability, where contradictory discourses overlap, or where discrepant kinds of meaning-making converge'. If we take Tsing's conception of margins, then we must pay attention to the meanings through which the practices and politics of everyday state-society interactions create what we call the 'state'.

The constitution of the state in the margins, after violent conflict, involves rebuilding the legitimacy of actors who represent the state as well as of the state as an idea. I argue, in this thesis, that processes of statemaking from above and below establish, at different points in time, a ruling bargain. This ruling bargain involves meditations between the actors who represent the state, and ordinary people, in the course of state-society interactions. This ruling bargain is at best, tenuous. It is always open to challenge, and people's loyalties are constantly shifting. Additionally, statemaking, or the processes by which the ruling bargain comes about are deeply embedded in society. Existing social hierarchies shape the state as it emerges at different points, while at the same time being shaped by statemaking.

The tenuous ruling bargain between state and society rests on an equally tenuous idea of legitimacy. Legitimacy of the state is an elusive ideal which can never be completely achieved, even as citizens engage with state actors. Consent or acceptance might never be fully realised, and yet citizens interact with states or regimes that run the state at a given time

in many different ways. Lisa Wedeen's work on citizenship under Hafiz al-Asad's regime in Syria is extremely helpful in this context. Wedeen (1999; 1998) shows that citizens under Asad's authoritarian rule accept the conditions of their subjection and do not challenge the power of the regime in overt ways. However, this does not mean that they are consenting or acquiescing. In fact, she argues, that they act publicly 'as if' they are loyal subjects of the leader even as they ridicule him in private. This could be a strategic choice where subjects find ways of negotiating with authority figures without necessarily rising in open rebellion. If one were to interpret this conforming 'as if' by the citizens as a signifier of legitimacy for the regime, then one misses out on the 'ambiguities of domination' (Wedeen 1999). Domination, and even statemaking are ambiguous and open-ended, and provide scope for subjects to interact with structures of power and authority without necessarily fully consenting, conforming or obeying. Even in authoritarian states like dictatorships, there is a possibility for citizens to 'negotiate' (Krohn-Hansen 2005). In their 'public transcripts', citizens might pretend to obey and accept authority, yet make jokes about or express complaints 'off stage' (Scott 1991). Citizens could, therefore, be acting 'as if' they have provided legitimacy to an existing regime, without actually having done so.

This thesis looks at how the state in India seeks to legitimise its authority during counterinsurgency. The actors and institutions that make up the state constructed underdevelopment of a marginal region as the major grievance of the people, and then claimed to respond to this grievance. Further, as chapter 4 of the thesis shows, development enters the policy discourse as a means to secure and maintain peace in the Maoist zones of India. Provision of public goods then becomes the basis of the state's legitimacy. The postcolonial state in India has always tried to build its legitimacy through its developmental role, initially with planning, and then through poverty alleviation schemes. But given the persistence of inequalities and the takeover of resources by a coalition of elites, this

legitimacy has always been ambiguous (Chatterjee 1997). Is the state still able to use development to build legitimacy, however fragile, in post-liberalisation India? To what extent is development or welfare a mediating factor in statemaking and the emergence of ruling bargains in the margins of modern India? The next section explores these questions.

5. Seeking the State from Below

My research shows that the tenuous ruling bargain between the state and ordinary women during counterinsurgency is based on the promise of development. The bureaucracy and government use welfare and empowerment programmes as a means of persuasion to win back loyalties. To an extent, this means of persuasion worked since women were willing to engage with the state. However, as I show later in chapter 6, women's expectations from the state-led programmes was very different from that of the state actors. Even as policymakers expected them to become entrepreneurial, self-helping citizens, women paradoxically identified the emerging state as a new patron in their lives. They made claims on the state to enhance their visibility in village life, and develop new state-supported livelihoods. Women sought close relationships with the state to improve their lives materially, and to challenge existing gender relations in a limited manner. Focussing on this strong desire for the state and development from below, this section explores this set of circumstances within the literature on the post-liberalisation state in India, and recent scholarship that challenges the conceptualisation of development as a violent top-down imposition.

Practices of statemaking in India today need to be contextualised within the post-liberalisation context. Akhil Gupta and K. Sivaramakrishnan (2011) point out that a new

conceptualisation of the state in India after liberalisation is required.[12] The working of the state in India, like many other states in the world, cannot be accommodated within the standard theory of 'neoliberalism', where the state's role is cut down (Harvey 2005). Gupta and Sivaramakrishnan posit that economic reforms in India did not mean a reduction of the state's welfare role. In fact, one could argue that the state's developmental functions in rural India have only expanded in the past three decades. The central focus of these programmes, however, has shifted. For example, Gupta and Sharma (2006) compare two government programmes for women in rural India, one in the 1970s and one in the 2000s, to show how the primary emphasis of welfare programmes has shifted from national development to individual empowerment. There has also been a move away from the state being the provider of basic needs of marginalised populations to being the facilitator in making them self-helping individuals. This shift in the state's role being limited to supporting individual capacities and then stepping back could be placed within the larger 'neoliberal political-economic practice' (Harvey 2005). However, Gupta and Sharma also point out that along with these shifts, there were clear continuities in rural development programmes in pre- and post-liberalisation India, especially in the manner in which they were operationalised and the groups which they targeted. Besides, the introduction of empowerment programmes did not mean the end of existing welfare programmes and one can definitely spot continuities in India's welfare regimes.

Economic liberalisation in India, instead of reducing the degree of state intervention, caused the state to reorganise and enter people's lives in ways that are new and different. The state now takes on a central role in outsourcing its functions to actors who might traditionally not be considered as a part of the state. It has been described as a 'broker' state (Jenkins

[12] Liberalisation in India is considered to have taken place in 1991 when the finance minister Manmohan Singh announced the reform of India's economic policy to make it more 'market-friendly' and open to private and foreign investment. However, Atul Kohli (2006) has argued that the process was already underway in the 1980s.

2011), 'network state' (Nambiar 2014, drawing on Castells 2006) and as a 'pluralised' state (Chandhoke 2005) that only acts as an overseer of 'governance'. The state subcontracting its functions to external actors does not, however, lead to a weaker state but ends up multiplying the sites of state governmentality outside the formal organizations of the state (Rose 1996; Burchell 1996; Sharma and Gupta 2006: 34). For instance, practical functioning of the NGO form too closely related to the logics of states, and NGOs are entrenched within statist developmental regimes (Grewal and Bernal 2014) and often work with and through states (Fernando 2011). National and state governments in India partner with private NGOs, and even set up government-organised NGOs or GONGOs (Sharma 2008). NGOs in India are thus very much entrenched within the state system. The domain of statemaking therefore goes beyond the formal bureaucratic apparatuses. This thesis takes the view that instead of analysing the entry of new actors as a thinning of the state, one should view it as an expansion of the ambit of statemaking itself, where actors other than bureaucrats and elected representatives, such as NGO executives come to represent the state. This point becomes clear in chapter 4 as I delineate the actors who represent the state in the setting of 'development as counterinsurgency'.

The major focus of the expanded domain of statemaking in rural India continues to be development. The targets of this development are the rural poor. The state as a machine for implementing the discourse of 'development', a term which has come to be equated with the reduction of poverty since the 1970s (Ferguson 1990: 15, 62). States target the poor individual who is conceived, in 'classic neoliberal fashion', as a kind of 'micro-enterprise' (Ferguson 2009: 11). In India too, empowering poor individuals by encouraging them to become 'enterprising citizen subjects' has been one of the major goals of the reorganised state (Gooptu 2013; Kapila 2011; Mankekar 2011). Concepts such as 'empowerment', 'freedom', 'participation' and 'decentralisation' (Sharma 2008: xvii) become a part of policy

discourse as well as the rhetoric of political parties. This objective, continues to be complemented by more direct welfare interventions (which some would characterise as pre-liberalisation) such as the provision of hundred days of employment under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, agricultural subsidies, and free mid-day meals at schools. Partha Chatterjee (2008) sees the continuing welfare measures as an attempt to allay the negative impact of primitive accumulation on the rural poor and prevent class wars. The state turning towards development to counter Maoist politics of violent resistance and other kinds of popular radical politics reflects a similar understanding. Moreover, in a state where the promise of development is so intimately tied to seeking votes in periodic elections, it becomes difficult for the state to step away.

The democratic state in India considers itself obliged to its citizens within an ideology of welfare, which has arisen from an emphasis on the developmental state in postcolonial India (Chandhoke 2003: 2958). Provision of the public goods or public services are the sources of the 'limited social contract' and 'precarious intimacies' shared by the state in post-liberalisation and India and its citizens (Bear and Mathur 2015). Despite the entry of newer actors like NGOs, civil society organisations, and the development project experts, there has not really been a challenge to the centrality of the state in India. The state increasingly complements direct welfare schemes with those that emphasise the creation of 'self-helping' subjects who find their own way out of poverty, rather than making claims on the state for employment, welfare, education, housing and food. Yet, as I show, ties between states and citizens are not easily broken. The state may have pluralised or even be subcontracting its welfare functions to other agencies, but it is still very much the main reference point for citizens to make claims (Corbridge et al 2005: 7; Gupta and Sivaramakrishnan 2005; Chandhoke 2005; 2003; Corbridge and Harriss 2000). Agencies like NGOs in many cases, have to work closely with the state's bureaucratic system, and see their main role as helping

ordinary men and women gain access to the state's welfare programmes (see chapters 4, 5, and 6). Even the manner in which these so called non-state agencies function might emulate 'bureaucratic norms' (Mangla 2015). Claims made by citizens on the state are magnified in counterinsurgency situations where the actors representing the state have an interest in appearing to be more responsive to citizens' demands. Development, or the promise of it, is at heart of citizen-state relations in contemporary India, especially in rural India.

6. Towards a Pragmatic Understanding of Development

The situation where citizens seek state-led development from below makes us question some of the existing influential critiques of development. In the sixty or so years that development studies has existed as a discipline, we have moved from purely economistic definitions of development linked to modernisation theory to a broad understanding which includes poverty removal, building human capacity, and empowerment through 'participatory' development. Accordingly, the criticisms directed at development have also shifted. The major criticisms of the economistic definition of development came either from Marxist dependency theory, or were based on the failure of development practices. The criticisms of the new concept of development come primarily from within post-structuralism, which attacks the power-laden discourses and knowledge structures of development. While post-structuralist criticisms are valid in so far as they reveal the unequal power relations inherent in discourses of development, they do not take into account the omnipresence of development and various meanings it has acquired in everyday life in much of the developing world today. In thinking of development today as something that has pervaded social structures everywhere in rural India, and forms the basis of poor people's politics and aspirations for improvement in life, I want to steer away from using the post-structural critiques of development and neoliberalism as a framework.

Post-structuralism is one of the major theoretical frameworks under which an influential critique of development has taken place since the 1990s. Following Foucauldian notions of power and governmentality, scholars devoted attention to development as a discourse and a form of knowledge. They presented a critique of the processes of knowledge through which a Western discourse of development-as-necessary improvement is imposed on the rest of the world. They argue that the hegemony of the development discourse, as it emerged in the post-second world war context, is such that a certain concept of development becomes universally accepted as the desired goal for all nation-states. Post-structuralists challenge the institutions which implement development at the local, national, and international levels for failing to improve the lives of poor and the marginalised. A key example here is James Ferguson's (1990) famous characterisation of development as an 'anti-politics machine' in Lesotho, Africa. Based on his ethnographic study of a Word Bank-supported development project, Ferguson emphasised that that development apparatus not only fails to bring about any real material change in people's lives, but it also increases the coercive power of the state and the bureaucracy. The entrenchment of bureaucratic power through the discourse of development worked to deny politics of any kind to the poor, and the state becomes an 'anti-politics machine'.

Arturo Escobar (1995) similarly spoke of development as a power discourse that needs to be 'unmade'. Escobar speaks of how development discourses shape forms of intervention in the non-western world, and convert political issues related to peasants, women, and the poor into technical ones, which are to be resolved by national and international institutions of development (Agrawal 1996: 467; cf. Escobar 1995). Thus, he supported a move towards 'post-development', the doing away of both the discourses and institutions of development. In these Foucauldian analyses, development is a violent top down imposition on its targeted recipients, and there is no way out of the violence of

development for subjects. Participatory and empowerment-led approaches underscored by recent development models have been termed as 'tyrannical' (Cooke and Kothari 2001). In owing their debt to Foucault, post-structuralist scholars of development characterise development as an overarching meta-narrative which oppresses and exploits. However, they are unable to suggest a way out of the oppressive webs of development discourse and practice, except for a dismantling of systems of knowledge and institutional systems linked to development, such as the state and international development organisations.

This thesis steers away from such poststructuralist approaches to development towards a pragmatic understanding of development as a set of the ideas and techniques that seek to improve the moral and material well-being of subject-citizens. While the post-structuralist critique of development raises important issues about the ill-effects of pushing development on marginal populations, it has many inherent problems. As Arun Agrawal (1996: 472-475) strongly asserts, Ferguson's and Escobar's position is an 'empty critique' which calls for dismantling development but offers no alternative. This position also refuses to look at the different outcomes that development could lead to, and instead takes the flawed nature of development ideas as a pre-determined conclusion. Much like the state, development cannot be treated as a top-down coercion on passive recipients or a source of 'anti-politics'. In fact, development may be strongly desired by those who are deprived of material sustenance (Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal 2003), though this does not necessarily imply that the 'logics of empowerment' follow universal liberal dictates (Sharma 2008) or the wishes of policymakers (Mosse 2005). The 'will to improve' propagated by development discourses is, moreover, closely tied to processes of statemaking, which produce distinctive kinds of subject-citizens with their own political aspirations and techniques within the social field of development (Li 2007).

Following critical engagements with post-structuralist approaches to development, I make three key points about the Indian case. First, as David Ludden (2005; 1992) tells us, development discourse did not emerge in India only in the post second world war context. He posits that a kind of 'development regime' was already in place in colonial India since the early twentieth century. This comprised of the state's administrative apparatus, economic expertise, educational institutions, science, media and technology. Ludden's intervention can be placed within a turn towards studying the colonial histories of development (Zachariah 2005, 1999; Sivaramakrishnan 1999a; Cooper and Packard 1997; Bose 1997). In late colonial India, the British justified their right to rule on the basis of 'development' which allowed them to construct their colonial subjects as racially, politically, socially, and economically backward (Zachariah 2005: 3). Development essentially became a tool of legitimacy for the imperial project in the inter-war period and after (Ibid: 131). Ideas and policies around development in decolonised nation-states drew upon on the colonial regimes of development. For instance, the British promotion of development based on 'communities' in villages was reinterpreted and replicated in the formation of community development blocks across rural India in the postcolonial context (Sinha 2008). Therefore, development did not transfer from the global north to the global south only in the heyday of modernisation theory since the 1950s. It has a longer pathway in the ex-colonial world and that shapes the varieties of development and modernity that exist in these parts of the world.

Second, it is clear that development as an idea and as a practice has permeated the social imagination of all levels of society in India (Agrawal and Sivaramakrishnan 2003). Development has become intrinsically tied to statemaking and democratic process in India. It is not possible to reduce more than fifty years of practices and contestations linked to the developmental state in India to a broad technology of rule (Corbridge et al 2005: 48). Besides, it will not be an exaggeration to say that in much of rural India, it is development

which acts as a mediator between the state and society. It acts as a bargaining factor between political parties and voters. Development even becomes a source of contention between political parties and bureaucrats, who sometimes compete and sometimes collaborate to improve the material lives of their subjects (Witsoe 2012). Development also becomes a way for historically marginalised groups to seek 'dignity' (Roy 2013). Contrary to the expectation of the activist-anthropologist, even the disillusionment with development has not converted Third World subjects into anti-development crusaders. This is not to say that state-led and international organisation-led development interventions do not pose their own problems and do not oppress the subjects of development, but there is nevertheless a situation where the poor and marginalised actively seek development to improve their life chances. More often than not, it is the state, which becomes the object of all such development claims, and is imagined as a provider or a benefactor (Ruud 2014; Ferguson 2013; Mathur 2012; Mains 2012; Nielsen 2011).

Third, development might be a factor around which the poor carry out a politics of claim-making and welfare-seeking. Partha Chatterjee (2011, 2004) has, pointed out that acts like development which are seen as depoliticizing in fact, foster a certain kind rights-demanding politics of the 'political society'.[13] Aradhana Sharma (2008: xxii) too insists that although 'development interventions have the potential to deradicalise empowerment, depoliticize inequality, and reproduce power hierarchies, they also spawn subaltern political activism centred on redistribution'. She argues that the omnipresence of development discourses could foster a politics of citizenship centred on demanding 'resources-as-rights' from government bodies (also see Harriss 2002; Mosse 2001). Even overt forms of resistance to, or repudiation of, state and development, as in the case of Maoists cannot be construed as

[13] Partha Chatterjee (2004) introduces the concept of political society distinguished from elite civil society to talk about poor populations making claims on the state for public goods and welfare.

anti-development. A part of the Maoist agenda is to target the state for not having brought about enough development in certain parts of the country. Evidence shows that Maoists do not block state-led welfare measures like the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (Banerjee and Saha 2010). Thus, the role of development in the political lives of ordinary men and women is much more complex than the post-structuralist critique allows us to appreciate.

Within the anthropology of development, there has been a move from ethnographies highlighting only the problems with development discourse, to a realisation that development encounters are much more multifaceted.[14] This is not to say that development cannot be violent. The idea of development in some state discourses also lead to negative consequences like land alienation, displacements, and uprooting of lives in the name of mining, industrialisation, and infrastructure building. Yet, the idea of improving lives that is linked to development makes it desirable. Recent scholarship urges us to pay attention to the complex ways in which the subjects of development might respond to its discourses and practices (Venkatesan and Yarrow 2012; Mathur 2012; Sharma 2008; Li 2007; Hickey and Mohan 2004; Mosse 2005). Rather than dismissing development only as violent and coercive, we must consider the 'messy actualities' of its everyday workings at the grassroots (Li 2007: 282), and how in fact, there might be a desire for development from below. But a fascination with the post-structuralist critique of development still remains, and a new scepticism of development has come up based on a theory of neoliberalism and its effects.

Neoliberalism, like post-structuralism has become a meta-narrative through which anthropologists, political scientists, and development studies scholars analyse the state and development. Since the 1980s and 1990s, states and development regime are said to have

[14] Katy Gardner and David Lewis (2015) point out that multi-sited ethnographies might be a way of understanding the varying encounters with 'development' from a bottom-up perspective.

moved towards neoliberalism. On a macro-economic level, neoliberalism represents an emphasis on free market, competition, privatisation, and a suspicion of the state (Ferguson 2009; Harvey 2005). Neoliberalism is also used to describe the discursive and actual policy practices which serve to achieve these economic goals. In addition to these macro shifts, individuals are encouraged to develop capacities and become neoliberal enterprise subjects. Neoliberalism, therefore, becomes a signifier for anything from accumulation by dispossession and increased privatisation, to states and individuals becoming like enterprises.

However, even scholars who choose to employ the concepts of neoliberal and neoliberalism in their work realise that actual practices of neoliberalism rarely bear any resemblance to the ideological model of neoliberalism (Munster and Strumpell 2014; Gooptu 2013; Peck 2010; Sharma 2008; Ong 2006; Harvey 2005; Brenner and Theodore 2002). Terms such as 'polymorphic' (Brenner and Theodore 2002), 'contradictory' (Peck 2013), and 'exception' (Ong 2006) describe the arbitrary rather than one-dimensional way in which neoliberalism functions across the world. We are urged to recognise the 'processual' nature of neoliberalism, and to use the term 'neoliberalisation' instead (Peck 2010; Peck and Tickell 2002). Jamie Peck (2013) speaks of the co-existence and 'inter-digitisation' of neoliberal features with other forms of social, political, and economic forms of being, and the need to accept the 'context-specificity' of the neoliberalisation process (also see Peck and Theodore 2012). There is also, no top-down entrenchment of neoliberalism, and no one kind of neoliberal subjectivity ever emerges everywhere uniformly. Neoliberalism works differently in different contexts. Far from being a coherent ideology, neoliberalism has taken on different forms in different contexts (Ong 2006) and rarely represents a huge break in the politico-economic trajectories of states. In addition, states are not really shrinking, and are in fact, expanding in certain areas (Wacquant 2009). This is true not only of the non-western world, but also of the western world.

This thesis consciously avoids the tags neoliberal and neoliberalism to explain development as the mediating factor between state and society in a counterinsurgency context. If neoliberalism is so broad so as it can explain everything, then what is so distinctive about it? If we recognise at the outset that states and individuals everywhere are shaped by a combinations of different configurations, of which neoliberalism is just one, why make it into the only overarching paradigm through which we understand the transformations of states and changes in people's lives in the present day? One reason why progressive scholars on the left have chosen to use this category is to bring together the inchoate voices of opposition to the present forms of capitalism (Peck 2013; Jessop 2013; Ferguson 2009). The neoliberal framework might help provide us with a macro picture where global politico-economic changes across the world can be connected with each other and parallels can be drawn. However, as Rajesh Venugopal (2015) points out, the concept of neoliberalism has been stretched to the extent that it has been used in contradictory ways. When it comes to empirically studying relations between states and citizens, a focus on neoliberal process does not contribute much to the analysis.

Scholars have by now established that people's experiences of development are not singular and are better captured by terms like 'regional modernities' (Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal 2003), and 'localised modernities' (Arce and Long 2000).[15] Through such frameworks, while we do take into account global shifts, we can also better appreciate how modernity and development have different trajectories in different contexts. Maxine Molyneux (2008), while writing on the shifts in systems of social welfare policies in Latin America, finds neoliberalism to be too broad a category to evaluate a fragmented and inchoate process shaped by specific historical moments. She argues that analysing the 'New

[15] Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal (2003) choose the term 'regional' to call for a study of the multiple modernities that are produced. They point out that they do so to get away from the tyranny of terms like 'global' and 'local'. Spatially, 'regional' is located in between the global and the local.

Social Policy' in post-reform Latin America as a 'neoliberal turn' might miss the ways in which social policies reflect continuities with earlier policies and institutions, and how they might be informed by specific regional histories. Anthropologists and sociologists have likewise made a case for not using neoliberalism as a shorthand to explain the changing nature of states, re-ordering as well reification of certain power relations, and emerging processes of governance in the developing world (Venkateshan 2015; Ganti 2014; Mains 2012; Ferguson 2009).

Moreover, even as processes categorised as neoliberal have reconfigured states, we have cases like India where the state is actually bigger, and welfarism still informs the state's agenda. Despite the entry of new actors such as NGOS and development agencies into the domain of statemaking, the state continues to be at the centre of citizens' assertions of rights and claims (Chandhoke 2005; 2003). Moreover, the state's partnership with capital makes certain concessions to poor and marginalised citizens via development and welfare programmes (Chatterjee 2008). The size of the bureaucracy has not reduced and the developmental state apparatus mostly remains intact (Jayal 2001). Arguably, a stronger state and a nearly-stable procedural democracy is what encourages this kind of claim-making by subaltern groups in India.[16] Poor and rural groups form a large part of the electorate and political parties cannot alienate them (Gupta and Sivaramkrishnan 2011: 6).

The government and bureaucracy in India has always had a close relationship with capitalists and industrialists from the 1950s itself. Under the first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, capitalists were given special privileges for supporting the state in the planned economy (Chibber 2003; Bardhan 1984). Today, when the government acts on behalf of

[16] India's neighbouring state, Bangladesh, provides a sharp contrast, with a weaker state where NGOs provide welfare services (White 1999, Crow 1990). Even then, as Katy Gardner (2012) and Lamia Karim (2011) have shown, social, religious and cultural mores shape development practices. Zooming in on these dimensions, provides a more rounded analysis of, or the lack of, state-society relations. Calling it neoliberal does not profit analyses of the situation.

private corporates, both Indian and foreign, to acquire land on their behalf or subsides the cost of infrastructure like water and electricity for them, it is not an entirely new situation. In fact, the state in India has always balanced its 'pro-business' (Kohli 2010) tilt with its welfare role. After liberalisation, the state in India is definitely undergoing a process of primitive accumulation and capitalists are a dominant group within the state apparatus. To reverse the effects of these changes and prevent class war, the state expands its welfare programmes (Chatterjee 2008: 61). Recently, governments in India had to renege on its promises to corporates for access to bauxite mines in the state of Orissa, and land for a car factory in West Bengal, due to popular resistance. Capitalism, therefore, does not have a free-way in post-liberalisation India.

Statemaking in post-liberalisation India, especially in terms of the relationship between the state and the poor, has taken on myriad forms and placing it only under the framing of neoliberal governance can be very limiting. My research in an erstwhile zone of insurgency brings these debates into the forefront. Here, one might say that development was employed as an 'anti-politics machine' (Ferguson 1991) to control insurgent subjects, and this development even followed the so-called neoliberal tract of empowerment and entrepreneurship. Yet, the manner in which the subjects of this development agenda responded to these 'development as counterinsurgency' measures, and how the state re-adjusted its programmes did not follow this neoliberal script (see chapter 6). Relationships between states and citizens are much more complex than the meta-narrative of neoliberalism lets us imagine. In that regard, to the extent that neoliberal techniques of development may yield surprisingly positive changes in the material well-being of the poor, we cannot dismiss them altogether on purely ideological grounds (Ferguson 2009; Sharma 2008). As I pointed out, despite their grievances, citizens still seek out the state and state-led development in different ways.

Overall, I want to move away from the post-structural and neoliberalism arguments to examine what statemaking and development look like after violent conflict and regime change. Approaching this issue from a study of statemaking in a time of counterinsurgency, I oppose the simplistic but somewhat commonplace assumption here that development agendas in times of counterinsurgency must necessarily advance a top-down neoliberal economic agenda. Such situations of conflict and its aftermath, are in fact, more open to negotiations over public distribution (Ferguson 2015). I look at state-society relations in this context from the vantage point of women trying to resume lives and return to activities that promote their material well-being as well as of their families, even as they advance their own prospects of unsettling certain gender norms. The state remains central to their imaginings of change in their own lives. Of course, the relationships between state and poor rural women are mediated not only by this desire from below, but also by the practices and processes of statemaking. It is in these mediations that the ideas of state and citizenship are imagined by ordinary women (and men).

7. Gender, Statemaking, and Patronage

This thesis foregrounds transformations in women's lives during and after the Maoist insurgency phase in the Jungle Mahals. Gender thus features as an important analytical category in the analysis of statemaking and counterinsurgency across chapters 3 to 6. As I highlight in chapter 3, from 2008-2011, women participated in radical politics for different reasons, and gender as a category was crucial in re-shaping state-society relations during this period. Subsequently, poor women became targets of the state's development as counterinsurgency strategy. The programme called Muktidhara aimed at transforming poor women them into entrepreneurial empowered subjects. This project could be placed within a 'livelihoods approach' (Scoones 2009), and viewed as part of the Indian government's larger

move towards an empowerment-centric ‘gender and development’ (GAD) policy (Sharma 2008: xvi). Chapters 4 and 5 highlight the gendered nature of these statemaking processes where the state often took on a didactic role and cast women as its pupils. For the state, women’s issues are a major way in which they can justify intervention into rural societies.

Much of the content of women’s development programmes today relates to self-help, participation, and empowerment, but policy frameworks seldom have deep and engaged critiques of everyday gender relations and patriarchal norms. In fact, the manner in which states function could end up reinforcing gender hierarchies, as I highlight in chapter 5. In the existing scholarly literature on women’s rural development programmes, women’s agency in initiatives that seek empowerment is conceptualised as ambiguous, neither fully emancipatory nor fully transformatory, yet useful in a certain sense (e.g., Sharma 2008; Madhok and Rai 2012; Madhok 2013). Similarly, my women interlocutors in Lalgarh and Ramgarh participated in the Muktidhara programme, but were not too keen on becoming empowered subjects as expected of them, yet wanted to challenge existing gender norms in a limited fashion. Moreover, they did not want to be entrepreneurial and self-helping, but wanted to enter into sustained relations with the state apparatus.

I situate the responses of my women interlocutors within the context of poor citizens seeking out the state. They strategically identify the state as a benefactor in their lives. I borrow James Ferguson (2015; 2013) phrase ‘declarations of dependence’ to characterise the relationships between the state and the local populations, particularly women. Ferguson argues that relations of social dependence are at the very foundation of polities and persons in southern Africa. Taking an example from the Ngoni people, he says that hierarchal dependence, was not seen as a problem but as an essential condition for the realisation of full personhood. Of course, these networks of dependence were built within the community. In present-day southern Africa, he points out that the poor, as a strategy, seek to declare

dependence outside the community, on actors with a greater capacity who can provide and protect. They seek to build ties of dependence with actors on whom they can make limited claims on, be it certain individuals, firms, NGOs, political parties or the state (Ferguson 2013: 231). Of course, conceptualising the state-poor relationship in this manner where the poor are actively seeking 'inequality' makes liberals uncomfortable. However, instead of treating subject-citizens *a priori* as abstract liberal individuals committed to autonomy, emancipation, and equality, Ferguson argues, we must pay attention to their agency in making such declarations. Taking my cue from him, I examine strategic 'declarations of dependence' to the state in a context of statemaking and counterinsurgency.

Ferguson's concept reminds one of the vast literature on patron-client relations, and neo-patrimonialism that is often used to explain the failure of states and bureaucracies in Africa. These 'traditional' idioms very much shape the 'modern' state, which of course overlaps with what is traditional (Erdmann and Engel 2006 in Iwilade 2014: 578). While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to engage in a full-fledged discussion of this literature and the complexities of the debate, I point to Christopher Clapham's (1985: 48) definition of neo-patrimonialism:

> a form of organisation in which relationships of a broadly patrimonial type pervade a political and administrative system which is formally constructed on rational-legal lines. Officials hold positions in bureaucratic organisations with powers which are formally defined, but exercise those powers . . . as a form . . . of private property.

This definition as Iwilade (2014: 578-580) writes, fails to take into account how not only bureaucrats at the top (the 'patrons'), but also how 'clients' might wish to be a part of these patron-client relations of dependence. There is, therefore, a bottom-up effort at building and maintaining these relations in order to seek material or other forms of assistance.

In the South Asian context, patronage has recently been revisited to explain the ways in which Indian democracy and politics work. The state and citizens constitute themselves as

legitimate political agents 'within a relationship of intimacy' expressed in idioms of 'moral responsibility, reciprocity, and patronage' (Osella and Osella 2001: 138, 145, 146). These shared idioms make it possible on the one hand, for the developmental state to intervene in people's lives, and in the other hand, gives citizens a moral right to make claims on the local state machinery (Ibid). Kanchan Chandra (2004) came up with a concept of 'patronage democracy' to explain how voters chose parties where elites from their own ethnic background contested elections. She argues that voting on the basis of identity offers the poor the best way to obtain 'desired benefits' (Ibid: 11). Making a much broader argument about patronage, Anastasia Piliavsky (2014) makes a case for thinking of patronage as central to politics in South Asia. Patronage ties, she posits, are not merely imposed by the powerful, even though power hierarchies and inequalities are inherent in a patron-client relation. For the less powerful, seeking to becoming clients is a strategy to make claims from below. In this way, patronage becomes a moral idiom that binds different people occupying different rungs in the social, economic and cultural ladders of society.

The shared moral idiom of patronage in India has taken on different forms from the pre-colonial to the colonial to the postcolonial phases. The kingship and *zamindari* system, whether Maratha rule in the eighteenth century (Guha 2014) or *zamindari* systems in nineteenth and twentieth century Tamil Nadu (Mosse 2001), were organised on structures of loyalty, favours, gifts, and claim-making. In present-day Indian democracy, the pragmatism of voters in the democratic context in election-time as well as non-election time makes them seek patronage and be able to hold their elected representatives morally accountable (Price 2014, Berenschot 2014; Piliavsky 2014; Bjorkman 2014). Citizens are keen to shuffle their patrons every election if s/he does not respond to claims. Patrons enjoy legitimacy in office as long as they are responsive to claims made by their clients. The idiom of patronage plays an important role in electoral democracies. The analytical move that has been recently made in

thinking of 'patronage as politics' urges us not be uncomfortable with hierarchies as a defining feature of life and politics, and not see patronage as a debility or explanation for the failure. Existing hierarchies of caste, religion, class, and gender shape the lines on which patronage develops, and statemaking processes order and reorder these hierarchies. The expressions of the patron-client relations keep shifting. It is important to note, however, that there is nothing 'traditional', 'Indian' or 'South Asian' about the kinds of patronage ties that characterize the everyday workings of modern state and democracy. Patronage relations between states and citizens could be a defining feature of welfare politics as much in the 'West' as in the non-western world. Moreover, the kind of relations between the state and citizens that we are speaking of in the present do not necessarily mirror the traditional 'moral economies' (Scott 1975). As Ferguson (2015: 26, 27) points out, desire for dependence on modern states is not a remnant of an archaic modality of supplication, but an 'up to date' response to the current economic situation and a resurgence of distributive politics.

In the same vein, I view patronage as one kind of social mediation that characterises the relationship between a developmental state and its citizens. Development here becomes the rhetoric and practice through which claims are negotiated, and through which legitimacy is realised. I invoke patronage as a form of 'declarations of dependence' which works as the idiom through which poor rural women interact with the state to seek improvement in their lives. Dependence is being seen increasingly as an important dimension of the politics of development without its older negative connotations (Ferguson 2015, 2013; Bierschenk and de Sardaan 2014; Scherz 2014; Bornstein 2005; Mosse 2005, 2001). It challenges the post-structuralist critique of development as an imposition. In contexts of conflict and counterinsurgency, the 'virtues of dependency' (Gardner 2015) may be particularly striking, where the precarious position of subject-citizens is matched by policymakers' eagerness to wean them away from rebel groups (see, e.g., Autessere 2010, 2014; Bhan 2014; Gerharz

2014). In line with my position on the post-Foucauldian turn in recent studies of development, marked increasingly by a pragmatic attitude towards the politics of the poor, I argue, therefore, that 'declarations of dependence' ought to be critical to our understanding of statemaking and development in former zones of violent conflict.

In this thesis, I frame my women interlocutors' imaginings of the state in their lives through the framework of dependence as a strategy or a pragmatic choice. Notions of patronage and dependence might be tied to women's aspirations for better lives, materially as well as in renegotiating gender norms, which could be realised through greater engagement with the emerging state apparatus. Chapter 6 focusses on the state-seeking behaviour of my women interlocutors as they seek to transcend existing gender hierarchies, while at the same time creating new forms of hierarchy through 'declarations of dependence'. They imagine the state as a patron and make claims on state actors for loans, state-supported employment, and a greater role in the public sphere. This, however, does not mean, that they have completely acquiesced with the state. In this context, I draw attention to the ambiguities of women's self-making, and how their subjectivities cannot be understood through the binary of compliance and resistance.

In addition to being a tool for analysing a desire for state and development from below, patronage as a form of dependence can be used to explain statemaking in and after phases of conflict as a reordering of patronage ties in the Jungle Mahals of West Bengal. Whether the use of violence in rebellions to make the state apparatus more responsive to claims or the ousting of a ruling regime for failing to bring in the promised development, different phases of statemaking can be understood as a reshuffling of patrons and a renegotiation of state-society ties. This is, however not to say that the functioning of the state and its bureaucracies is not fraught with corruption, delayed implementation of development programmes, nepotism and so on. The interesting part of the story, is why, despite these

problems, ordinary women and men continue to seek the state and the development it can bring.

8. Methodology

8.1 Ethnographic Fieldwork

This project began as ethnographic enquiry of women's lives in the Maoist zones of India. I intended to look at women's varying relationships with Maoist insurgents. However, when I ventured into my fieldsites in the West Midnapore district of West Bengal in the autumn of 2013, the Maoists in the area had fled the region, or been arrested or killed due to the ongoing security operations. As the security operations drew to a close, the local state actors, in collaboration with the national and state governments, were renewing efforts to build close relationships with the disaffected population of the forest villages which had been at the forefront of resistance against the state through the Maoist movement as well as the locally-led Lalgarh movement. The major way in which this rebuilding of ties was taking place was through a programme called Muktidhara, which targeted women's self-help groups. I then decided to focus on women's lives in this present context of what I call 'development as counterinsurgency', and use that as a case for a broader study of statemaking and state-society relations in counterinsurgency contexts.

My fieldwork was concentrated in Lalgarh and Ramgarh in the Binpur-1 block of West Midnapore or *Paschim Medinipur* District. According to the 2011 census, the district has a population of 59, 13,457. The forest villages in Lalgarh and Ramgarh are part of the Jhargram sub-division of the of the West Midnapore district. The Jhargram sub-division is made up of the Jungle Mahals of West Midnapore. Most of the blocks in this part are classified as 'Left-Wing Extermist' or LWE blocks by the central government.

Administratively, Lalgarh and Ramgarh are two of the ten *gram panchayat* divisions of Binpur-1 block in West Midnapore distict. The population of Binpur-1 block is 1, 56,153, of which close to 30 per cent are categorised as 'scheduled tribes'. Thirty-seven villages make up the Lalgarh *gram panchayat* while the Ramgarh *gram Panchayat* consists of fifty four villages. *Laal maati* or red soil along with sal forests characterise this region, and rice is the principal crop grown here. One crop of wet paddy a year, the *aman* crop grows here.

Lalgarh, a village as well as the name of the *gram panchayat* it is a part of, houses the block headquarters of the Binpur-1 community development block which became a 'liberated' zone in 2008, when Maoists and local participant of the Lalgarh movement pushed out local state officials as well as police officers. Today, Lalgarh and its neighbouring *gram panchayats* are seen as one of the success stories of the state's two-pronged counterinsurgency strategy of tackling Maoism through security and development. Villages in Lalgarh and the neighbouring Ramgarh gram panchayat were, therefore, ideal sites for me to study the politics of statemaking and counterinsurgency. While I have used the actual names of the district, block and gram panchayats, I have changed the names of villages and all my interlocutors to protect identities.

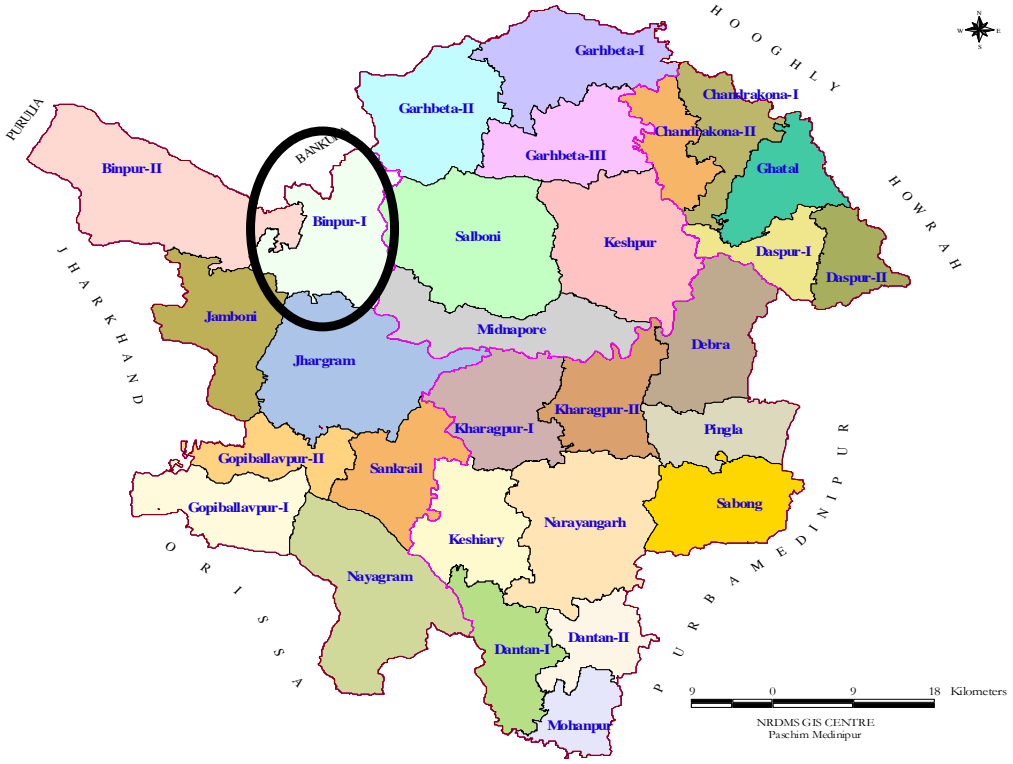


Figure 3. Map of West Midnapore District, with the Binpur-1 block circled, Source: West Midnapore District Magistrate office, 2014

I did ethnographic fieldwork for a total of ten months between August 2013 and January 2015, first for a nine-month stretch from August 2013 to April 2014, and a subsequent follow-up stint of one month in December 2014-January 2015. I conducted semi-structured interviews with women, most of who were a part of self-help groups (SHGs). I interviewed them, and had numerous conversations with them in a range of settings: before and after their meetings with state officials, in their homes, in the village public spaces like schools and panchayat offices, and sometimes in local modes of transport in going from village to village. A major component of my fieldwork was also non-participant observation of the sites where women 'met' and 'saw' the 'state'. As I will describe in chapter 5, these were mainly the meetings and training sessions, as well as public spectacles organised by the

local block office. The meetings and training sessions for women was to educate them in new livelihoods, taking and using loans, and connect them with the key local officials. Often, these meetings would start late because officials would not arrive on time, and this gave me ample opportunity to chat with women about how they imagined not only their relations with the state, but also mundane details of their everyday lives.

The women with whom I interacted were part of self-help groups and participants of the Muktidhara programme. Many of them, who were now enthusiastic about the new development programmes, had participated in, or lent support to the Maoists and the PCAPA. Some of my interlocutors also spoke about family members who had been arrested, or had left their villages to avoid imprisonment. However, this was a hard topic to broach. Given the securitised environment, ordinary people were wary of admitting to their or their family members' involvement in radical politics. Only once I became close to some of my women interloctors, they discussed the time of what they now called *hungama* (turmoil). It was interesting for me to observe how the same women had participated in agitations against the state machinery, but, today, they were the key beneficiaries of the state's 'development as counterinsurgency' measures.

The primary languages in which fieldwork was conducted were Bengali and Hindi. I am a native speaker of Hindi, but learnt Bengali prior to starting fieldwork. Since I was not confident of my Bengali skills, I went along with a translator during my first month. My translator belonged to main district down, Midnapore, and resided just about sixty kilometres from my fieldsites. While she was helpful in asking questions on my behalf, she would often use a very difficult version of the Bengali language. This put of many of my interlocutors at unease. For instance, Santali women, most of whom were first generation Bengali speakers in their families, when unable to understand the question would respond by saying, 'We are stupid (*murkha*), we do not know what you are asking.' After this first one month, I decided

to try on my own. My broken Bengali and the several mistakes I would make when speaking actually worked to bring me closer to my interlocutors. To them, I was the girl from Delhi (*Dilli-r didi*) who was making an effort to learn their language but did not quite know it well. While some laughed at the mistakes I made, others took it upon themselves to help me learn. Either way, my effort at conversing in Bengali allowed me to develop a closer relationship with them. Whenever I was stuck and unable in express myself in Bengali, there was always somebody who knew Hindi and would come to my aid. This was not surprising: West Midnapore district borders the state of Jharkhand, where Hindi is widely spoken is addition to other languages.

Another factor that helped me develop close relationships with women in the field was the fact that I, too, was a woman. The women with whom I interacted regularly started to treat me like a friend with whom they could share details about their families, the problems they encounter in their daily lives, their role in the resistance movement, the self-help groups they ran, and their hopes and aspirations. Of course, I was an outsider in many senses: someone who was not Bengali, belonged to a city, studied in *bilayet* (abroad), someone of a higher class position, and someone they could think of travelling great distances on her own. I recognise that their responses to my questions were framed by my positionality in the field- as a fellow woman, but nevertheless an outsider. As such, I do not wish to claim a priori special access to rural women in my fieldsites as a 'native anthropologist' (Narayan 1993).

For me, the knowledge produced through research is 'within the context of our intersubjectivities and the places we occupy at that moment, physically and spatially as well as socially, politically, and institutionally' (Sultana 2007:382). I do not see myself as a positivist in search of unmediated 'facts' or 'truth', but a practitioner of a reflexive methodology that 'elevates dialogue as its defining principle and intersubjectivity between participant and observer as its premise' (Buroway 1998, 14). I recognise, therefore, that

'[e]thnographic accounts are constructed, and tell particular stories,' depending on the audience (Visvesvaran 1994: 15). Furthermore, ethnographic data cannot be judged on their truthfulness alone: 'rumours, inventions, denials, evasions, and silences' are important in themselves insofar as they point the ethnographer to 'the power relations that shape informants' current lives, the ways in which informants are making sense of the researcher and her activities, and how much informants trust the researcher to bring them no harm' (Fujii 2007: 1). The responses that I received from my interlocutors, therefore, are shaped by the ways in which they perceived me, and the power relations between us.

I also conducted interviews with policy makers and bureaucrats: the block development officer, block supervisor for SHGs, present and ex-district magistrates, other district level bureaucrats in charge of rural development, panchayat office bearers, and ruling party members. I interviewed Dr. Jairam Ramesh, who was the central government minster for rural development when the development as counterinsurgency strategy was planned and implemented. Additionally, I shadowed the Prime Minister's Rural Development Fellow, a position created to assist development in Maoist areas, as he went about his day-to- day work. I also spent some of my days in the field with the local NGO executive as he travelled from village to village in his motorbike, conducting meetings and livelihoods training sessions with women. My fieldwork was supplemented with government reports, policy documents, and statistics, as well as pamphlets and other material produced by the Maoist movement and the Lalgarh movement.

8.2 Historical Research

While trying to understand the social spheres that women occupied in my fieldsites, I started to notice the hierarchies among local communities, and how these affected the politics of statemaking. Lalgarh and Ramgarh were earlier Jungle *zamindaris* (forest estates) headed

by the Sahas Ray family. While no longer large estate owners, the ex-*zamindars* are still the wealthiest families around. Most male members of this family are a part of the Trinamool Congress (TMC), the current ruling party. The dominant groups populating Lalgarh and Ramgarh are Mahatos, Santals, Mahishyas, Lodhas and Bhumijs. Among these, Santals, Bhumijs, and Lodhas have been officially classified as 'tribal' by their inclusion in the Indian government's list of scheduled tribes (ST). Santals and Mahatos are the most important groups at present. Here is a brief introduction to some of the major groups in my fieldsites:

Bhumijs: Bhumijs, according to Herbert Risley (1991 (1915)) are Hinduised Munda aborigines, who worship both Hindu and tribal gods. Surajit Sinha (1974) argues that Bhumijs are one of the original inhabitants of the south-west Bengal area, who carried out the first clearings of the cultivated lands in the forest estates under the leadership of the *zamindars*.

Mahatos: Mahatos, also known as Kudmis, started migrating as cultivators to south-west Bengal in the early colonial period. Over the nineteenth century, they strengthened their position as a sizeable peasant group, distinguishing themselves from the tribal society of Santals and Lodhas, even claiming Kshatriya status within the Hindu caste fold. Land reforms under the Left Front government benefitted them and they became land-owners of the best rice lands. Today, Mahatos occupy most of the government positions at the panchayat and block levels, and are active in local politics. Some groups of Mahatos are claiming 'ST' status.

Santals: Colonial administrators encouraged Santal migration to south-west Bengal in the nineteenth century to clear forests and bring more land under cultivation. Santals were idealised in colonial accounts as ideal tribals, and became targets of interventions for improvement. A large number of Santals took to Christanity, and acquired education in

missionary-run educational institutions. In the postcolonial context, reservations for STs in education and employment helped them. Large numbers of Santals still live in poverty and work as agricultural labourers on Mahato-owned lands.

Lodhas: Lodhas are landless scheduled tribes at the bottom of the economic and socio-cultural hierarchy, and lived historically in the forested peripheries of settled *zamindari* estates. They were classified as a 'criminal tribe' in the colonial period.[17] Many Lodhas today labour on Santal and Mahato-owned fields. They are hardly called upon to participate in state programmes. They are now classified as 'Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs)'.

Mahishyas: Mahishyas are Bengali middle caste Hindus of uncertain origins, who traditionally undertook farming and fishing. According to Risley (1991 (1915): 117-118), Mahishya arose as a separate caste in the nineteenth century claiming to be born through a Kshatriya father and a Vaishya mother. They are a middle peasant group, who are found in greater numbers in East Midnapore district. They are said to be staunch supporters of the Congress-led nationalist movement in Midnapore in the 1940s.

To delve into how these groups came to acquire their present positions in village society, and how statemaking processes over centuries shaped, and were in turn shaped by these socio-cultural hierarchies, I supplemented my fieldwork with archival research. I conducted archival research at the West Bengal State Archives (19th Century Archive, 20th Century Archive, and Intelligence Bureau Archives), and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) Headquarters in Kolkata; the West Midnapore district archives in Midnapore; Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML) and P.C. Joshi Archives in New Delhi; the India Office Records at the British Library, London; and the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

[17] The British government, under the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871, classified many nomadic tribal groups as 'criminal tribe'. This act was denotified after independence in 1952, but many of these groups continue to be stigmatised.

Going back to history is important for three reasons. First, it makes it possible to compare and contrast statemaking in the present with the past. The region's past is punctuated by phases of insurgency and counterinsurgency which represent critical junctures in the history of the state in the margins. While the context in which statemaking has taken place in the past and now are very different and one should be cautious not to establish a teleology between the past and present, looking at the trajectory of the practices of statemaking provides a wider perspective within which to study the state in the Jungle Mahals today. Second, the transformation of socio-economic relations and hierarchies within society during the colonial period are intimately linked with the colonial statemaking. Relations between the different communities today, especially between Santals and Mahatos, as I explore in detail in chapters 2 and 3, have evolved with, and are a result of the different phases of statemaking in colonial and postcolonial times. Third, the colonial state's counterinsurgency apparatus inaugurated ideas of marginal places and tribal people, and these ideas continue to inform postcolonial statemaking in the Jungle Mahals, albeit with shifts over time. The constitution of the Jungle Mahals as margins over centuries has impacted state-society relations over several decades of colonial and postcolonial rule. The Jungle Mahals continue to be made and remade as margins, where the 'civilizing mission' inaugurated by the colonial state now resonates in the postcolonial state's development measures. Finally, situating the present with the past helps highlight the gendered trajectory of statemaking. We can observe a shift from the past where the colonial state postcolonial state negotiated with village headmen, mostly male, to the present where statemaking in a post-insurgency context relies on building relationships with women through development initiatives.

Overall, a study of the state in the present would be incomplete without placing it in the context of the region's history. Following John and Jean Comaroff (1992), I therefore,

undertake a 'historical ethnography' of statemaking and counterinsurgency in the margins of modern India. The state as it exists in the present, and state-society relations today have undergone several transformations over these centuries. Bringing together historical and ethnographic methods, the thesis situates a study of counterinsurgency in present-day Jungle Mahals within the longer history of statemaking in these margins of modern India. I show that the interlocking of counterinsurgency and statemaking at different times in colonial and postcolonial history led to the emergence of distinctive state-society relations that bound rulers and subjects together in layered and contingent ways.

9. Structure of the Thesis

The six chapters of this thesis are divided into two parts, each consisting of three chapters each. Part I provides the historical background to statemaking and counterinsurgency in the present. Beginning from the late eighteenth century when the British East India Company entered the forests of south-west Bengal to the demise of West Bengal's three-decade long elected Communist government amidst the rise and fall of violent insurgency in these forests, this part of the thesis looks at different phases of statemaking until 2011.

Chapter 1 will sketch a historical account of the relationship between counterinsurgent statemaking and rural communities in the Jungle Mahals. Beginning with the origins of East India Company rule to this south-western frontier of Bengal, I examine how the colonial state emerged in the aftermath of local political instability and unrest, as well as the reordering of everyday social relations in this forest region. Zooming in on the

special forms of rule that the East India Company devised for this frontier region, I argue that counterinsurgency was central to the inception of the modern state in the Jungle Mahals.

Chapter 2 looks into the shifts in state-society relations and politics from 1910 to 2008. It starts off by drawing a picture of society in the Jungle Mahals in the late colonial period. The 1920s and 1930s involved land survey and settlements, nationalist campaigns, and the rise of a kind of identity politics, which reorganised the social, economic, and cultural aspects of village society. The postcolonial period since the mid-twentieth century onwards may be seen as another similar phase of state-building following popular unrest, in which Congress nationalists and then communists sought to extend their authority over a region that had hitherto enjoyed special privileges and protections under British colonial rule. Under the Left Front government in West Bengal from 1977 onwards, a 'party society' emerged in which the CPI (M) became a patron of the poor and marginalized in the countryside. I look into the debates about the success and failure of the Left Front's land reforms and development agenda.

Chapter 3 will probe into some of the circumstances that led to popular dissatisfaction with and the decline of the Left Front, and the concomitant rise of Maoism and the Lalgarh movement in the region. It characterises this period as a brief interregnum, or interlude between two phases of postcolonial statemaking, in which pre-existing social relations were renegotiated and local society was subtly reordered. To reconstruct the politics of those turbulent times (*jhamela* or *hungama* in local parlance), I draw on a mix of oral testimonies told to me and written primary sources, e.g., letters, pamphlets, reports, etc, from that period. Reading these diverse sources together, I piece together the various accounts of Maoist politics and an 'Adivasi' resistance movement. This chapter also provides a narrative of how the communist 'party society' was dismantled, and regime change took place in West Bengal after thirty four years.

Part II of the thesis, which draws mostly on my ethnographic work, examines statemaking and counterinsurgency in the present.

Chapter 4 traces the dynamics of statemaking in Lalgarh and Ramgarh after security operations in 2011. It delineates the actors, policies, and practices through which development became a key tool of counterinsurgency following security operations aimed at checking the spread of Maoism in my fieldsites and elsewhere in the 'red corridor'. It also explains how local statemaking practices that I observed during my fieldwork connect with overarching policy agendas of the central and state governments. Finally, I focus on the importance given to poor rural women in strategies of development as counterinsurgency within the context of present-day statemaking in the region.

Chapter 5 describes the sites where the state 'meets' women. I analyse the state's interactions with poor rural women organized in self-help groups in multiple sites as dramas of statemaking. Two kinds of social dramas, in particular, are highlighted here: training sessions for SHG representatives in the block office; and public spectacles in local fairs and on special occasions that enthral citizen-subjects through an exhibition of state authority. Even as these social dramas marry pomp with power, they appeal to the mundane and quotidian in women's lives in order to facilitate the mutual constitution of the everyday state and society.

Chapter 6 will lay out the responses of local women to the different practices present-day statemaking in Lalgarh and Ramgarh. These responses illustrate the different ways in which my women interlocutors imagine the 'state' and the roles it ought to play in their lives. I focus, in particular, on their perceptions of the state after the *hungama*, and what changes it has brought to their personal lives, and their households and villages. I also show that, whereas the state may be invested in notions of empowered self-helping women, especially through loans and entrepreneurial ventures, my interlocutors characterized the state primarily

as a patron that they hoped would deliver its promises to ensure their material well-being. Their hopes for the future, as they saw it, rested on seeking relations of dependence with the new development regime in the region.

Across the two parts of this thesis, common themes, continuities, and shifts which emerge. These themes bind the two parts, which present a trajectory of statemaking from late eighteenth century to the present. The first common theme is counterinsurgency. While Part 1 discusses colonial measures of counterinsurgency in the aftermath of rebellions in the Jungle Mahals of West Bengal, Part II deals with developmental measures of counterinsurgency in the aftermath of the Maoist movement in present-day West Bengal. In both cases, counterinsurgency measures give rise to exceptional forms of rule and administration. From being 'zones of administrative anomaly' (Sivaramakrishnan 1999) in colonial times, the Jungle Mahals are once again characterised by exceptional implementation of development programmes. The second linkage which can be drawn is between the colonial 'civilizing mission' and the post-colonial state's didactic engagements with poor women (chapter 5). The third theme where we can observe a shift is throught the analytic of gender. Based on my evidence, I show how the 'state' has moved from negotiating post-insurgency orders with men to negotiating with women. Of course, as pointed out before, the 'state' has taken on different forms at different times. For instance, unlike the colonial state, the state today is linked to democratic processes and is shaped much more 'from below'. Therefore, while one can point to overlapping themes, any comparisons must be made keeping in mind the differences in the form and nature of the state.

Here, I also want to clarify my approach of studying the 'state from within' and how that differs across the two parts of the thesis. In part II, I ethnographically study the state both from above and from below. Ethnographic research methods enable me to disaggregate the state and follow the practices undertaken by the actors who represent the state in my

fieldsites. At the same time, such a method helps me look at how ordinary women imagine the state and respond to it. Hence, I am able to bring the above and below together in a more apparent way. By contrast, Part I poses somewhat of a challenge in taking the 'from within' approach. This is due to with my reliance mainly on archival and secondary sources. However, I attempt to resolve this issue by reading the archives in a manner that shows statemaking as a coming together of forces from above and below. For instance, in chapter 1, I show, through archival sources, that there was a complex processes of mediation during insurgencies and counterinsurgencies in the early colonial period. Statemaking in these contexts involved military proconsuls and agents of the Governor-General negotiating with village heads and large landowners. While there is no doubt that the colonial state was violent, I attempt to show that it was not merely a top-down imposition, and ordinary's people's engagement did not merely take the form of rebellion against the colonial authorities. Therefore, the state, even in that context was emerging from the coming together of above and below. Likewise, I look at the rise of the Left Front in postcolonial West Bengal not merely as a top-down phenomenon but one where there was mediation between the party and ordinary people. Additionally, in 2011, radical politics from below combined with top-down factors to cause the CPM's influence to wane. Thus, a 'from within' approach helps me steer away from a top-heavy conceptualisation of the state, even when the methods are not ethnographic.

Overall, this thesis seeks to make a case for a new approach to studying the state by: (1) looking at the state in a given region over a longer historical arc; and (2) analysing the state both from above and below. Taken together, the six chapters aim to present a narrative of statemaking and counterinsurgency in the margins of modern India. The Conclusion at the end will sum up the key theoretical contributions of the thesis and explore their significance in a wider context.

Chapter 1: Counterinsurgency and Colonial Statemaking: The Jungle Mahals in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

1. Introduction

In 1760, the East India Company bought the forested area lying to the north and west of Midnapore, later referred to as 'Jungle Mahals', from Mir Qasim, the Nawab of Bengal. During their initial forays into this region, Company officials found these forest tracts to be very different from the plains of Bengal. Edward Baber, the Midnapore collector described the Jungle Mahals in the following manner:

> The western jungle is an extent of country of about 80 miles in length and 60 miles in breadth. On the east it is bounded by Midnapore, on the west by Singhbhoom, on the North by Pachete, and the south by Mayurbhanj. There is very little land cultivated in this whole extent and very disproportionate part of it capable of cultivation. The soil is very rocky, the country is mountainous and overspread with thick woods which render it in many places impassable. It has always been annexed to the province of Midnapore but from its situation was never greatly regarded by the Nabob's government.[1]

Company officials, such as Baber, found these forests not only to be 'wild', but also 'uncivilised'. They were seen as outside the pale of settled agricultural society, which was equated with 'civilisation'. Additionally, as Baber writes, the mountainous and rocky terrain, along with vast stretches of thick forest made it very difficult for the officials to traverse the region to the north and west of Midnapore town. Company officials' challenges were, however, not limited to overcoming the terrain. The incipient colonial state was often rocked by disturbances, and military campaigns alone in these unfamiliar wild tracts were not effective in dealing with the rebellious forest-dwellers. As a result, the Company had to build a system of rule, and design special administrative measures to govern these tracts. The inception of statemaking in this

[1] Walter K. Firminger (ed). 1926. *Bengal District Records: Midnapore,* Calcutta: Catholic Orphan Press, hereafter *BDRM,* v. 4, Edward Baber (Collector Midnapore) to Warren Hastings, (Governor, Fort William), letter no. 163 dated 6 Feb 1773, pp. 106-107.

region, therefore, was a response to the threat of existing and approaching acts of rebellion on the part of the native inhabitants.

This chapter traces a history of statemaking in the Jungle Mahals of West Bengal at the advent of British rule, focusing on the ways in which the Company state[2] sought to manage 'unruly' inhabitants of the wild, forested territories of Bengal. In all parts of India, the colonial administration, from the very beginning, looked to expand their revenue collection through deforestation and sedentarisation of hill and forest-dwelling 'tribes' (Bayly 2006 [1988]: 138-141). For instance, colonial authorities attempted to 'settle' Bhil tribes in central India by trying to wean them away from their hunting-gathering lifestyle. The reordering of forests and villages in this manner led to conflicts between the authorities and local inhabitants. Such situations led to 'pacification wars', and the Company was forced to build an army, and develop new methods of administration to control the 'fractious countryside' (Ibid: 85-86). The major concern for the Company was revenue, and the military was needed to assist in raising revenue as well as guarding the frontiers. Thus, a kind of 'military fiscalism' came to define early colonial state, where military action was the primary mode of rule, headed by soldier-administrators (Peers 2012). However, an exceptional administrative structure came to be established in the course of military campaigns to counter the frequent incidents of rebellion.

Revisiting the colonial state in eighteenth and nineteenth century Jungle Mahals, this chapter argues that counterinsurgency was the principal driver of early colonial statemaking in the forests of south-west Bengal. The inception of the modern state in these marginal tracts was linked to controlling insurgencies, and different forms of rule

[2] I use 'Company state' as a term for the pre-1857 colonial state, which was headed by the British East India Company. The Company state was simultaneously both merchant and ruler. It created monopolies over trade in various goods, including salt, in Bengal, even as it devised means of governing the region. The Company moved from trade to dominion in the years from 1780 to 1820.

were devised to 'pacify' inhabitants. Statemaking here was a dialectical process, tied intimately to the demands of a counterinsurgency campaign and with an eye to prevent future insurgencies. The expansion of the early Company state in areas that constituted its administrative frontiers, including the forests and wastelands of south-west Bengal and the hilly region in the north-east, may be understood as a slow, fragmentary process, by which Company officials had to constantly invent new forms of rule (Cederlöf 2014; Sivaramakrishnan 1999a, 1996). The Company's primary interest was to secure this frontier from Maratha raids and incursions, and military and administrative measures to counter rebellions were initially aimed at doing so.

My argument about the entanglement of counterinsurgency and statemaking proceeds chronologically in four phases. In the first section, I discuss how the process of statemaking in the Jungle Mahals began in the 1760s to the 1780s. I describe the British East India Company's entry into the forests of south-west Bengal in 1765. The Company sought to collect rents from the jungle *zamindars* (landlords), but got embroiled in the local socio-economic structures of the forest villages. The Company's entry set into motion a process where existing land tenure systems and social arrangements were reordered. While some *zamindars* allied with the company, others refused to pay rents. Individuals and groups who were disaffected by these new arrangements organised rebellions or *chuari*[3]. In order to deal with the existing situation, the Company officials set out to understand why the inhabitants of the forests were engaging in acts of raid and plunder. They felt the need to know their subjects better and take measures to address the causes underlying incidents of unrest. Such measures inaugurated the process of statemaking in forest Bengal. In the second

[3] *Chuar* literally means bandit and is a derogatory term. But it came to be used to describe *zamindari* militia and anyone committing acts of raid and plunder. These acts of raiding and plunder were referred to as *chuari*.

section, I discuss the Chuar Rebellion of 1799 and the Company state's response to it. In the aftermath of the Chuar Rebellion, Company officials in charge of governing the forest estates proposed and implemented special administrative measures for the region with the hope of quelling future rebellions. Forest Bengal was excluded from the regulations that governed the plains of Bengal and it became a zone of administrative exception. In the third section, I describe how the exceptional administrative arrangements in the Jungle Mahals were concretised in the wake of the 1832-33 rebellion in the forests of Bengal. In this period, counterinsurgency tactics engendered the institutionalisation of direct rule in the forest provinces of Bengal. Direct rule was characterised by a kind of paternalism where the colonial state took on the role of the protector of local inhabitants and seemingly sought to preserve their socio-economic structures of power. The fourth section looks at colonial rule after the 1830s and discusses how ideas of civilisation and improvement co-evolved with counterinsurgency measures in the Jungle Mahals. While in the eighteenth century, Company officers had described these regions as 'wild' and their inhabitants as 'savage', but the idea of 'tribes' now gave concrete form to the civilising mission which informed statemaking here. Even after direct rule was abolished, the forest regions of Bengal continued to be treated as exceptional places with tribal people, to be civilised through education and Christianity.

The intertwining of counterinsurgency and statemaking over these four phases has a number of important implications that I highlight in this chapter. Firstly, exceptional systems of rule emerged in these forest estates. Since Company officials had to constantly deal with rebellious subjects, they argued in favour of not imposing regulations that governed the rest of Bengal. For example, the Permanent Settlement Act 1793 regulated land revenue systems in all of Bengal except the forest estates in the

south-west. These territories thus became 'zones of anomaly' (Sivaramakrishnan 1996: 104-107) in colonial administration. Building on this concept, I emphasise counterinsurgency as the driving force behind the creation of zones of administrative anomaly. As I will show across the following four sections of this chapter, forms of statemaking in the Jungle Mahals in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were a direct response to threats of insurgency. The modern state, thus emerged in the Jungle Mahals through counterinsurgency.

Secondly, the project of creating zones of administrative anomaly was influenced by ideas that described places as 'wild' and forest-dwelling communities as 'savages'. Colonial ideas of modernity and civilisation influenced processes of statemaking in the forests, marking them as 'frontiers' (Sivaramakrishnan 1996; Skaria 1999) and 'margins' (Chandra 2013a) of the emerging state. The forests of Bengal were not only frontiers in the territorial sense that they formed a buffer zone between British and Maratha territory, but were also considered to be 'uncivilised' places inhabited by 'tribal' people.[4] Rebellions in these regions reinforced existing ideas of 'wildness' and 'savageness'. At the same time, the counterinsurgency response to rebellions produced a new notion of margins by creating regions of administrative exceptionalism. Paternalistic and exceptional administration in these margins could be justified on the grounds that the Company state was 'pacifying' the region and protecting tribal subjects. Even after the forests of south-west Bengal ceased to be zones of administrative anomaly in the latter half of nineteenth century, these ideas of pacification and protection continued to inform colonial statemaking via the mission of 'civilising' tribal subjects. In fact, the 'tribal' world was imagined in colonial

[4] The British government also devised special forms of rule in other 'frontier' areas such as the North-West Frontier Province, and the North-East Frontier Tracts.

officialdom through measures of counterinsurgency (Das Gupta 2011), and in the 'prose of counterinsurgency' (Guha 1984). In sum, discourses of margins, counterinsurgency, and creation of zones of administrative exceptionalism were linked to each other. Ideas related to wildness and tribes, by themselves, would not have created zones of administrative anomaly if not for counterinsurgency being an important justification for statemaking. The modern state, as it emerged in the Jungle Mahals, was a product of counterinsurgency. The company's counterinsurgency strategy, as I will show here, made use of violent as well as non-violent measures of 'pacification'.

Thirdly, the Company state took shape in relation to the society it sought to 'pacify', which too was reordered accordingly. The entry of the Company introduced a new fluidity in social relations: *zamindars* as well as ordinary inhabitants participated in statemaking processes to rework rural hierarchies. We can see the mutual constitution of state and society in alliances between *zamindars* and the Company at different moments, as well as in the petitions of ordinary subjects to the Company state. Although I argue that the incipient colonial state in the 1760s and subsequent statemaking processes were tied to the Company's counterinsurgency response, it was not simply a case of foreign power imposing its will. Furthermore, the Company state did not function as one unit which enjoyed total sovereignty. The colonial state in the Jungle Mahals was made up of civilian and military officials, and statemaking may be seen as a process by which representatives of the Company state, *zamindars*, village heads, and ordinary subjects negotiated and renegotiated power relations and social hierarchies.

2. The Company's Entry into the Jungles and the Chuar Rebellion

In January 1767, the East India Company Government sent a military expedition to the forest tracts to the west of Midnapore to 'subjugate and settle' the jungle *zamindaris* there.[5] The Government in Calcutta instructed John Graham, the first Resident at Midnapore 'to reduce Zemindars to the westward and then demolish their mud forts'.[6] These jungle *zamindars* had not paid any revenue to the Nawab of Bengal since the Maratha raids of 1740-50, and the Company wanted to recover this unpaid revenue as well as establish a system of regular revenue collection. The Company also considered revenue from the jungle *zamindaris* as a way of compensating for the losses in revenue in the Bengal plains, which were caused by droughts and floods (Sivaramakrishnan 1996: 111). The Company saw the jungle *zamindars* as taking advantage of their remote location in the hills and forests to remain outside the Company's rule.[7] Graham appointed Ensign John Fergusson to lead the expedition, urging him to 'proceed against those Zemindars, with a view to reduce them to a proper subjection of our Government on payment of a 'just revenue', and to enforce their obedience to the authority of the Resident of Midnapore'.[8] Therefore, the purpose of the expedition was not only to settle the *zamindaris* as revenue-paying forest estates, but also to ensure that the *zamindars* became deferential subjects of the Company state.

Ferguson first attacked and captured the fort of the Jhargram *zamindar*, and eventually, the *zamindars* of Ramgarh, Lalgarh (Sankakulia), Jambani, and Jatbani (Silda) agreed to sign treaties with the Company.[9] When Ferguson began the process of assessing the jungle estates to determine the revenue that could be expected from them, the refusal of some *zamindars* to negotiate and to pay full revenue settlement to the British indicated to Ferguson

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[5] J.C. Price, *Notes on the History of Midnapore, Volume 1,* 1876, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, p.38
[6] BDRM v.1, Henry Verelst to John Graham, letter no. 60 dated 17 Mar 1766, p. 48.
[7] BDRM v.1, John Graham to John Ferguson, letter no. 109 dated 30 Jan 1767, pp. 82-83.
[8] Ibid
[9] BDRM, v. 1, John Fergusson to John Graham, letter no. 125 dated 14 Feb 1767, pp. 96-97

that the process was not going to be easy.[10] Many *zamindars,* instead of settling their revenue areas, either withdrew to the remote forests, like the raja of Ameynagar, or evaded meeting Fergusson, like the *zamindar* of Chatna. Others like the *zamindar* of Barabhoom maintained silence, while the *zamindar* of Jatbani refused to honour the terms of the treaties signed.[11] Their lack of knowledge about the region and its geography made it harder for Fergusson and his party to negotiate favourable terms with the *zamindars*, and they realised that settlement and revenue collection in this region would require the presence of a permanent military force in the area.[12]

Graham, the Resident at Midnapore, had anticipated this kind of recalcitrance from the *zamindars*. At the start of Fergusson's expedition, he had advised him on how to tackle 'obstinate' *zamindars*:

> [I]t will then remain with you, as well to inflict a punishment for the obstinacy and rebellion of the present incumbents, as to render them incapable of creating further disturbance in the time to come: the former by giving personal property and possessions of such Zemindars and their head people up to plunder; the latter by destroying as much as possible their refuges and strongholds.[13]

However, Graham also understood that violent military intervention could alienate the local population in the Jungle Mahals, a risky proposition in the light of the Maratha presence in neighbouring Orissa and Chotanagpur. He added:

> Unless, however, where your duty requires this tenor of conduct, you will please be particularly watchful that no plunder or ravage is conducted by your men; but that on the contrary the strictest lenity and moderation be observed and every encouragement given to the country people that you imagine can tend to ingratiate their affections towards our Government. [14]

Graham realised that attacking *zamindari property* would be counter-productive to the Company's hope of gaining legitimacy among the *zamindars*. Graham's emphasis on

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[10] BDRM v.1, John Fergusson to John Graham, letter no. 139 dated 6 Mar 1767, pp. 109-111; JC Jha *The Bhumij Revolt (1832-33) (Ganga Narain's Hungama or Turmoil)*, 1967, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, p. 4

[11] BDRM v.1, John Fergusson to John Graham, letter no. 124 dated 14 February 1767, pp.59-60; John Fergusson to John Graham letter no. 158 dated 22 Mar 1767, pp. 124-125; John Graham to John Ferguson, letter no. 134 dated 25 February 1767, p.105.

[12] BDRM v.1, John Fergusson to John Graham, letter no. 150 dated 14 Mar 1767, p. 118

[13] BDRM v.1, John Graham to John Ferguson, letter no. 109 dated 30 Jan 1767, pp. 82-83.

[14] BDRM v.1, John Fergusson to John Graham, letter no. 139 dated 6 Mar 1767, pp. 109-111.

ingratiating the 'affections' of the Company's subjects can be placed within the Company state's larger interest in morally justifying British rule to their Indian subjects (Metcalf 2008: 20). Later, on the advice of Henry Verelst, the Governor-General in Calcutta, Graham asked Fergusson to completely refrain from plundering the property of disobedient *zamindars*, and to exercise restraint in the use of force.[15]

The Company's entry into the forests of Bengal intervened in the existing raid and plunder economy of the region, as well as the social arrangements built around this economy. The jungle *zamindars* employed militia to safeguard their own estates, but also made use of their services to loot the property of other *zamindars*. As Edward Baber, the Collector of Midnapore wrote in 1773,

> These zamindars are mere freebooters who plunder their neighbours and one another and their tenants are banditti whom they chiefly employ in these outrages. These depredations keep the zamindars and their tenants continually in arms for after the harvest is gathered in there is scarcely one of them who does not call his ryots to his standard either to defend his own property or attack his neighbors.[16]

The *zamindari* militia was mostly made up of *paiks* and *ghatwals* (village watchmen), who were referred to as *chuars* in a derogatory manner. *Paiks* held service tenures. They provided military services to the *zamindar* in return for holding land tenures, and paid nominal tributes or quit-rents to the *zamindars*.

While the 'plundering banditti' and their acts of raiding on behalf of their *zamindars* were common in many parts of central and eastern India even before the arrival of the British (Das Gupta 2011: 101), the role of the *zamindari* militia now acquired a new dimension in the process of colonial statemaking. *Zamindars* who opposed the settlement of their estates by the Company employed their *paiks* and

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[15] BDRM v.1, John Graham to Henry Verelst, letter no. 111 dated 1 Feb 1767, p.85**;** John Graham to John Ferguson, letter no. 114 dated 3 February 1767, p. 87

[16] BDRM, v. 4, Edward Baber (Collector Midnapore) to Warren Hastings (Governor, Fort William), letter no. 163 dated 6 Feb 1773, p. 106-107.

chuars to attack the British sepoys and block their path through this forested region.[17] The *zamindars* who had entered into treaties with the Company, supplied their armies to the Company for its action against non-compliant *zamindars*.[18] The local plunder economy thus took on a new significance by the Company's involvement in the region. A civil war of sorts emerged between those *zamindars* who sided with the East India Company, and those who refused to pay them revenue. *Paiks* and other tenure holders too participated in this new raid and plunder economy on behalf of their *zamindars*.

The Company was adversely affected by these competing acts of plunder when *zamindars* and their *paiks*, who were disaffected by the Company's revenue demands, targeted Company officials and sepoys. Attacks by *paiks*, referred to as *chuari*, persisted despite military presence, and impeded the Company's revenue collection in the jungle *zamindaris*. The Company received only a small percentage of their revenue from these sparsely cultivated tracts. During the decade from 1760 to 1770, the western jungles only contributed to 2.5 per cent of the Company's total revenue from Bengal (Sivaramakrishnan 1996: 111). The plundering acts of the *paiks* threatened to disrupt this already insubstantial revenue. In this context, Edward Baber wrote that 'the effects of this feudal anarchy are that the revenue is very precarious - the *zamindars* are refractory and the inhabitants rude and ungovernable'. [19] In Baber's use of words such as 'anarchy', 'refractory' and 'rude', we see that notions of disorder and wildness began to describe both people and places that are deemed to require pacification. This is how, unwittingly, the Company state becomes the

[17] BDRM, v.4, G.D Goodyar to Edward Baber, letter no.14 dated 1771, p. 13
[18] BDRM v. 1, John Fergusson to G. Vansittart, letter no. 221 dated 6 July 1767: In this letter, Fergusson reports to Vansittart how he plans to mobilise *chuars* from across estates to 'reduce' the Gatseela Raja and his *chuars*. He writes, 'I have order'd chewars from Colianpore, Sankacoola and Ramgar as being most to be depended upon, also from Jatbunie and Jambunie, who are enemies to the Gatseela chewars'.
[19] BDRM, v. 4, Edward Baber (Collector Midnapore) to Warren Hastings (Governor, Fort William) letter no. 163 dated 6 Feb 1773, p. 106-107.

de facto sovereign in the region, over and above the *zamindars* and their 'ungovernable' subjects.

Modern statemaking processes in forest Bengal began through the Company's attempts to tame wildness and unruliness. These attempts were guided by European ideas of civilised and uncivilised places. Discourses related to promotion of settled agriculture and improving people began to gain prominence (Skaria 2000: 268). Sivaramakrishnan (1996) calls these ideas the 'discourse of frontiers' that characterised colonial descriptions of the forests of south-west Bengal and the inhabitants from the eighteenth century onwards. While the discourse of frontiers already existed, it was applied to forest Bengal in the course of the Company's encounter with local inhabitants. Statemaking here meant the establishment of law and order mechanisms to control 'disturbances' as well as getting to know the inhabitants. During the ongoing incidents of *chuari*, George Vansittart, the Resident at Midnapore, decided to take an expedition into the western jungles of Midnapore in 1769 to better understand the country and the people. His objective was to figure out the ways in which the forests could be kept 'subdued' and the steps which could be taken to improve these tracts. He wrote:

> As the Pergunnas of the Western Junguls belonging to the Midnapore province have been but lately subdued to our Government after a long state of independence and lawlessness, I think it would be very proper that I should take a journey round them in order to inform myself more particularly of their present state, to enquire upon the spot into any complaints which may be made to me, and to establish any regulations which may appear likely to the improvement and welfare of so large and so desolate a tract of country. For these purposes, therefore, I intend setting out on a journey a few days hence. [20]

Company officials like Vansittart now felt the need to learn more about the forest regions and the people who inhabited them. He sought to come up with 'regulations'

[20] BDRM v.2. letter no. 439, from Vansittart to Alexander, p. 130

for the 'improvement' and 'welfare' of the country. Thus, he wanted to build a relationship between the nascent Company state and its subjects to ensure 'peace'.

Vansittart's trip was followed by more 'disturbances' and military action ensued. In December 1769, Vansittart, ordered Captain Forbes and Lieutenant Nun with five Companies of Sepoys and two small field guns, to 'reduce or expel' chuars.[21] Forbes and Nun found it very difficult to negotiate the tough terrain of hills and forests. Several members of their party were killed or wounded (Das 1973: 47-48). In 1771, the resident Baber instructed Lieutenant Goodyear to build police stations in the disturbed parts of the Western Jungle Mahals.[22] Over the 1770s and 1780s, the colonial government had to send out several reinforcements of sepoys in order to deal with chuar disturbances. The disturbances became more violent and widespread in the last decade of the eighteenth century, leading up to what has been known as the Chuar Rebellion of 1799.[23]

The intensification of 'unrest' in the 1790s leading to the Chuar Rebellion of 1799 was closely connected to the Company's alteration of existing social and economic structures in ways that were unfavourable to most of their subjects. One such change was in the *zamindari* policing system. The Company had so far relied on their *zamindar* allies to police the estates. *Zamindars* carried out the policing functions through their militia of *paiks* and *ghatwals*. However, in 1793, in its bid to control incidents of *chuari*, the East India Company established a new policing system, and stripped *zamindars* and *paiks* of their policing powers in the region. Under Regulation XXII of 1793, they set up *thanas* (police stations) in the 'disturbed' territories of the Jungle Mahals, and the Magistrate appointed *darogahs* to head

[21] BDRM v.2, letter no. 143, G.Vansittart to H.Verelst
[22] BDRM v. 4 January 1771, Baber to Goodyar, p.108
[23] J.C. Price, 'The Chuar Rebellion', 1874, reprinted as Appendix I in Binod S. Das, 1984, *Changing Profile of Frontier Bengal 1751-1833*; Also see JC Jha, *The Bhumij Revolt*; BS Das, *Civil Rebellion*; and JC Price, *Chuar Rebellion* for detailed descriptions of the Chuar Rebellion.

these *thanas* (Chatterjee 1980). Since *paikan* tenures relied on the provision of military services, this move directly threatened the livelihoods of the zamindari militia, and disrupted the existing tenurial regime of the jungle *zamindaris*. *Paiks* and *ghatwals* were now placed under the *darogah's* authority, rather than of the *zamindar*. While they had only paid quit-rents to the *zamindars*, they were now expected to pay a higher amount revenue, almost double the quit-rents that they were paying so far. This move upset the paiks, who raided and plundered to protest the abrupt alteration of the 'military-fiscal regime' (Sivaramakrishnan 1996: 120).

The Chuar Rebellion resulted not only from changes in the policing system, but also responded to the provisions of the Permanent Settlement Act of 1793. J.C. Price, a settlement officer of Midnapore and later a colonial historian of the district, wrote the following about Chuar Rebellion:

> It was hardly a matter for surprise or indignation that when the ancient occupants of the land, without having been charged with any crime or misconduct, saw their supposed rights, founded upon a long possession of them, deliberately invaded in order to provide funds of the charges of the police, and at last found themselves either stripped of all their possessions or subjected to new demands of rent, which they were incapable of paying , they should have despaired of obtaining redress by a proper representation of their grievances and have seized the first favourable opportunity that presented itself of taking up arms and of attempting to recover by force what they had thought had been taken from them with injustice, especially when it was considered that they were rude and almost a savage race of men.[24]

The 'new demands of rent' that Price writes about were faced by the *zamindars* in the aftermath of Permanent Settlement. Under this system, landlords had to pay a fixed amount of revenue to the Company every year. Most of the estates were over-assessed in the settlements, and therefore, needed to pay more rent than they could. In the Jungle Mahals, as in other parts of Bengal, this new system created pressure on the landlords to increase cultivated area, and, in turn, altered the existing agrarian hierarchies.

Where *zamindars* could not pay the amount of rent expected from them, the Company sold or auctioned off their estates to outsiders. Very often, these sales sparked

[24] JC Price, 'Chuar Rebellion'

off acts of rebellion by *paiks* and *chuars*, who acted on behalf of their *zamindars*. For instance, when the Pachet estate was sold in 1798 for failure to pay adequate revenue, it caused unrest among the the raiyats there to the extent that the sale had to be cancelled (Dalton 1872: 174). Similar upheaval ensued when the estates of Raipur (in present day Birbhum district) and Bagri (present day Garbeta town in West Midnapore district) were sold to 'outsiders'. The transfer of ownership of the jungle *zamindaris* to outsiders, owing to arrears of revenue became one of the major causes of the 'disturbances' from 1795 to 1800. Outsiders in this context mostly meant 'Bengalis' of a non-Bhumij ethnicity. The *zamindars* and their *paiks* were linked not only through economic relations, but also through ties of kinship and ethnicity. They were mostly all Bhumij. Bhumijs are considered to be the original inhabitants of the forests of south-west Bengal (Sinha 1974). Different *zamindari* families were related to each other through ethnicity and marriage, and *paik sardars* through ethnic ties, and were not too happy about the Company selling off their estates to non-Bhumij owners. New Bengali estate owners and their *raiyats* were, therefore, prime targets of attacks during the Chuar Rebellion.

The *chuars* also attacked outsiders like petty officials connected to the Company's revenue collection system, such as *sheristadars (*record-keepers at local *thanas*), and *tahsildars* (revenue collectors).[25] The targets of the attack reveal how *chuars* were displeased with changes to the previous social, economic and judicial relationships. The Permanent Settlement and Regulation XXVV stripped the *zamindars* of their military and revenue functions, and sought to separate the economic and judicial spheres of control. *Zamindars* controlled the economic function of revenue collection as well as provided policing and judicial functions. However, the setting up

[25] See Das, *Civil Rebellion*; Jha, *Bhumij Revolt*, and Price, 'Chuar Rebellion'

of *thanas* took these functions out of *zamindari* hands, and created a separation between economic and judicial authority. In a nutshell, the Chuar Rebellion targeted individuals and groups who were deemed as threats to the local socio-economic systems of the *zamindar* and *paiks*.

The Chuar Rebellion was a result of *zamindars, paiks, ghatwals*, and *chuars* acting together. *Paiks* and *chuars* committed acts of plunder and violence on behalf of dispossessed rural elites as well as to protest the collapse of earlier socioeconomic hierarchies. Both *zamindars* and *paiks* shared an interest in restoring the older socioeconomic order, and negotiated with the Company state accordingly. Force was employed in such a context as a means to negotiate a more favourable order with the Company. Two examples illustrate these negotiations. Consider Rani Siromani, the *zamind*ar of Karnagarh, who led her *paiks* and *chuars* to commit acts of plunder in the hope of the Company restoring *paikan* tenures and reducing her revenue assessment. She also headed the *chuar* unrest in the hope of retaining the *zamindari* of her estate over competing family members. Similarly, the *paik sardar* of Bagri estate, Govardhan Dighapati, incited the *chuars* of his estate into rebellion because he was ousted from his position as *sardar paik* when the estate was sold. He petitioned the Company state to restore his position, and in return, promised to restore peace.[26] Through these examples, we can conclude that the Chuar Rebellion was not, in other words, a class conflict between tenure holders and their *zamindars*.

The above mentioned examples also show that the Chuar Rebellion was not an attempt to dislodge the Company state, but to bargain with it. Ranabir Samaddar (1999: 147-148) writes about the people of Jungle Mahals clearly remembering the legend of Chuar Rebellion in contemporary times as 'collective pride', although not anti-colonial as such. However, governments today celebrate the rebellion as representing the first inklings of

[26] IOR F/4/70, BC 1580, letter dated 16 Apr 1799, Imhoff to President BOR.

nationalism in the Jungle Mahals. Outside the rail station at Midnapore town today, an art installation stands ‘in memory of the martyrs of the first historical battle of deliverance against the British Rule’. A carved stone slab shows British sepoys on horses being fought by bow and arrow-wielding people in a forested landscape. This memorial was installed few years after the Communist Party of India (Marxist) decided to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the Chuar Rebellion in the Jungle Mahals in 1999, and was inaugurated in 2006 (A. Guha 2011). The slab is placed on top of a marble plinth, which lists the names of key ‘leaders’ of the rebellion. These leaders include Rani Shiromani and Govardhan Dighapati who, as we have seen above, led acts of rebellion in the hope of negotiating their demands with the Company state. But they are memorialised today in stone as leaders of the first struggle against British colonialism in India.



Figure 4: Memorial to the Chuar Rebellion in Midnapore, West Bengal, 2013 (Photo by Arindam Banerjee).

3. The Dialectic of Statemaking and Counterinsurgency: Administrative Measures of 'Pacification'

Company officials had entered the forests of south-west Bengal to satisfy their growing revenue demands in 1767, but became embroiled in local conflicts between rival *zamindars*. Ordinary subjects like *paiks* too were drawn into these disputes, often willingly. The Company's revenue demands were not acceptable to many *zamindars*, who had so far only paid nominal tributes to the Bengal Nawab. With little land under cultivation, *zamindars* and their *raiyats* looked for ways to avoid paying revenue to the Company, and 'raid and plunder' was one way of doing so. Regulations like those abolishing *zamindari* control of policing, and higher revenue demands under Permanent Settlement caused further discontent. *Zamindars* and their subjects participated in rebellions to negotiate the terms of their relationship with the Company state in ways that were unruly and fractious to British eyes.

I am interested in showing how counterinsurgency became the key idiom of statemaking in the backdrop of these rebellions. From the 1760s to the 1780s, the Company state started to take shape in response to incidents of *chuari*. Ideas of 'wildness' and civilisation grew in tandem with Company officials' greater exposure to the region, and rebellions. In their attempt to deal with the constant threat of rebellion, the emerging Company state made military and policing arrangements. However, these measures alone failed to check 'disturbances', which were now spreading to new areas of forest Bengal. In response to the Chuar Rebellion of 1799, Company officials took certain administrative measures in order to contain rebellious subjects, and to prevent further rebellions. This section will discuss the various administrative measures of 'pacification' used by the Company state in the aftermath of the Chuar Rebellion of 1799 in the forests of south-west Bengal. Statemaking in late eighteenth and early

nineteenth century Jungle Mahals took on the form of creating 'zones of anomaly' (Sivaramakrishnan 1996: 99-105) through extraordinary measures of administration. 'Zones of anomaly' were territories where the Permanent Settlement Regulation, which applied to rest of Bengal, was not implemented. These special administrative zones were created primarily to counter and prevent insurgencies in what were seen as unruly tracts.

Administrative measures of counterinsurgency in response to the Chuar Rebellion of 1799 sought to establish 'peace' by undoing some of the Company's existing regulations in the Jungle Mahals. J. Imhoff, the Midnapore collector, called the *darogah* policing system a failure on account of it being unfit for 'savages', and recommended special 'separate regulations for jungle zamindaris and their ryots'.[27] He made three key recommendations to the Board of Revenue: first, *zamindari* policing should be reinstated; secondly, *paikan* lands should be restored at their original quit-rents; and thirdly, he recommended that the lands of jungle *zamindars* should not be sold to outsiders. Imhoff felt that only the returning of *paikan* tenures would prevent the jungles from 'becoming a harbour of robbers and wild beasts'.[28] Note that in Imhoff making his recommendations, and in the Board accepting them, the Company state relied on tropes of the 'savage' jungle inhabitants of the hilly forest tracts, who are completely averse to outsiders, and to new systems of economic and judicial management. Imhoff wanted to reduce the intervention of outsiders as much as possible. Therefore, he suggested putting the jungle *zamindars* in charge of both realising public revenue as well as of policing.

[27] India Office Records, hereafter IOR, P/54/1 BRC, progs. 33, J. Imhoff to President, letter dated 4 Mar 1799
[28] Ibid.

The Board of Revenue [29] took Imhoff's suggestions into account, and ordered the restoration of *paiks'* land tenures in March 1799. The Board opined that,

> The reinstating of the Pykes in the possession of the lands formerly held by them at the quit-rent paid by them is not only best calculated to restore tranquillity to the district, but also that they are in fact the only description of persons who can preserve the public peace in future.[30]

Restoring order was clearly the Board's main motivation for restoring *paikan* tenures. This is very evident in the following assertion made by the Board,

> As the people are extremely wild and to the last degree pertinacious to their customs, sound policy would seem to suggest that an indulgence in those customs is best calculated to preserve the peace of the country and attach them to the English government. [31]

In a bid to preserve 'peace', the colonial state began to make exceptions to its regulations, but these exceptions were made only due to the so-called savagery of the *paiks* and their apparently obstinate adherence to their customs.

Police powers to *zamindars* were restored after extended negotiations between the government and *zamindars*. Imhoff suggested the restoration of the *zamindari* policing system as the system of *thanas* headed by *darogahs* was unsuccessful at controlling unrest. He advised that, 'all the Darogahs and peace officers on part of the Government should be immediately recalled from the jungles, as they are the grand promoters of all the disturbances and disaffection which at present exist among the greater part of the zemindars'.[32] This would not only save the government the trouble of navigating the tough terrain, but also cut down on its expenses. Imhoff summoned some of the jungle *zamindars* to Midnapore. They gave written guarantees (*muchalaka*) and assured him that they would carry out policing responsibilities (Jha 1967: 28). The Board considered Imhoff's proposal in 1800, and agreed to restore *zamindari* policing in some provinces. *Paiks* and *darogahs* were to now share police responsibilities under the *zamindar*. As the Magistrate of Midnapore, Henry Strachey,

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[29] The Board of Revenue was set up by the East India Company in 1786 to manage the Company's revenue and administration work.
[30] IOR P/54/1, progs. 28, Board to Govt, 29 March 1799
[31] Ibid.
[32] IOR F/4/70, BC 1580, J. Imhoff Collector Midnapore to President BOR, letter dated 16 Apr 1799.

played a key role in implementing the restoration of *paikan* lands and *zamindari* policing. He wrote,

> the weakness and inefficiency of the former system of police in the jungles arose ...from the zamindars not possessing power in proportion to the interest they have in the peace of the country, that is to say, generally speaking in proportion to their property.[33]

The early Company state implemented special administrative provisions such as *zamindari* policing after a process of negotiation between the Company officials and the community leaders, in this case, the jungle *zamindars*. The purpose of the negotiation was not to let the jungle estates be outside the Company's purview, but to secure the 'conciliation and cooperation of the jungle tribes through their *zamindars'* (Sivaramkrishnan 1996: 140).

Although it might seem like the Company state was pulling out of the zones they deemed as 'wild' and 'unruly', it was in fact engaging in an exceptional form of rule in the forest estates of south-west Bengal. The formation of Jungle Mahals as a separate district in 1805 suggests that the Company wanted to govern Bengal's forest estates differently from the Bengal plains. The district was formed under Regulation XVII, and included forest estates from the existing districts of Birbhum, Midnapore and Burdwan. *Zamindari* policing was extended to all the estates in the newly formed Jungle Mahal district. The new district would have its own magistrate to overlook the new policing arrangements. The magistrate was to play a direct role in the appointment of *paiks* who would serve under the *zamindars* within their respective estates. *Zamindars* were expected to send any criminals they caught to the nearest police station, or to the magistrate (Jha 1967: 30). The restoration of *zamindari* policing, however, did not necessarily mean a withdrawal of control by the Company state, as the

[33] IOR F/4/98, BC 1987, Henry Strachey, Magistrate Midnapore to Secy GOB Jud and Rev, letter dated 18 July 1800, p. 48; also OIOC MSS EUR F -128/154, Strachey Papers, correspondence of Henry Strachey, p. 31, cited in Sivaramkrishnan 1996, p. 140

civilian magistrate of the district oversaw all policing arrangements. The creation of the Jungle Mahals district was followed by other measures, such as the construction of roads which would make it easier to 'civilise' these areas.[34] Additionally, the Company authorities proposed to restore people's confidence by providing them employment.[35]

In the name of maintaining 'peace' and respecting local custom, the Company state banned outsiders, especially Bengali speculators, from owning land in the jungle estates. Auctions and sales of estates in arrears of revenue to non-local owners were prohibited. However, at the same time, Company officials encouraged migration of new peasant groups from outside to the Jungle Mahals in order to bring more land under cultivation. Expansion of agriculture was part of the Company's larger policy to 'sedentarise' areas and populations deemed to be wild. Two communities which were brought in to the Jungle Mahals from outside for the purpose of cultivation were Santals and Mahatos. These groups started to migrate to the forests of south-west Bengal as tenants around the end of the eighteenth century. Jungle *zamindars*, who were under pressure from the Company to bring more land under agriculture, granted special tenures to these migrant communities to clear forest land and cultivate. Under a system known as *mandali*, the entire community enjoyed collective tenurial rights granted by a *zamindar*, and community leaders or headmen named *manjhis* among the Santals and *mandals* among the Mahatos were responsible for paying rent directly to the *zamindar.* The coming in of these migrant groups gradually changed the social composition of south-west Bengal over the nineteenth century. Today, one mostly sees Santal settlements and Mahato settlements separate from each other, based on where the communities settled when they entered into *mandali* arrangements.

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[34] IOR F/4/97, BC 1986, 'Report of Asst. Magistrate Midnapore,' p. 85.
[35] Progs. Bengal: Judicial (Criminal) dated 14 March 1800, cited in Suchibrata Sen 1984, p. 54

Encouraging migration also served the Company's purpose of 'pacifying' groups like Santals. Most Santals at that time lived in the Palamau and Hazaribagh districts of the Chotanagpur region (present-day Jharkhand). From the late eighteenth century, they began migrating under colonial supervision to the Jungle Mahals in bands. The Company state's role in turning them into cultivators who would eventually become 'peaceful' subjects may be understood through what W.W. Hunter says in the *Annals of Rural Bengal*:

> A large surplus of excellent land still remained, and the Santals, tempted down to the plains by unprecedented wages or easy rents, reclaimed hundreds of rural communes and gave a new land tenure to Beerbhoom. In the northern district of Rajmahal, Santals came gradually further and further down the slopes; and Government wisely won them into peaceful habits, by grants of land, along with 'exemption from the ordinary course of law, and from all taxes' … By these measures did the British Government change invasion into immigration, and utilize a race that had been from time immemorial the terror of the western border of Bengal.[36]

As is clear from Hunter's explanation, making Santals the pioneers of cultivation in forest Bengal was not only a means of increasing the proportion of cultivated land, but also a way of 'civilising' them and making them less insurgency-prone.

The Jungle Mahals became 'zones of anomaly' through these different measures at the end of eighteenth century. Administrative measures such as prohibition of land sales to non-locals were based on the premise that the coming in of 'outsiders' was the cause of all rebellion in the jungle *zamindaris*. While land speculators and land owners from outside were discouraged by the colonial state, the Company encouraged the entry of new cultivating groups because they assisted in clearing of forests. So, it was not as if the jungle estates were completely cut off to outsiders. Moreover, this prohibition on non-local ownership of the forest estates lasted only for a few years. Nonetheless, by drawing this dichotomy between jungle inhabitants and the so-called outsiders in official discourse, the Company state marked out particular zones as special. These

[36] WW Hunter, *Annals of Rural Bengal*, p. 467.

special areas needed exceptional measures of administration. In propagating a discourse of keeping away the so-called outsiders, the Company state projected an impression that they knew best when it came to governing the jungle estates. Therefore, the dynamics of counterinsurgency justified a paternalistic system of governance, which was characterised by special administrative arrangements. This paternalism continued and in 1833, these zones of administrative exception were institutionalised as 'non-regulation' provinces under the South-West Frontier Agency (SWFA). The following section examines the concretisation of the anomalous administrative apparatus in the Jungle Mahals in the first half of nineteenth century in the wake of fresh rebellions.

4. Counterinsurgency as Direct Rule? : Jungle Mahals as a Frontier Agency

The revival of *chuari* during the 'Kol Insurrection' of 1831 and the 'Bhumij Revolt' of 1832-33 put an end to the short-lived peace in the forests of central and eastern India [37]. The outbreak of rebellions in the frontiers of Bengal, first in Chotanagpur and then in the Jungle Mahals, necessitated stronger administrative measures. In December 1833, the Governor-General William Bentinck gave the go-ahead for the formation of the South-West Frontier Agency. Promulgated under Regulation XIII, this Agency would govern the territories of 'Chotanagpore, the Jungle Mahals, and Dhalbhum'. The preamble to the Regulation stated, 'the nature of the disturbances which recently prevailed' and 'the character of the inhabitants' of Chotanagpur 'rendered it expedient to separate these tracts' from the plains of Bengal, and 'to place them under an officer to be denominated Agent to the

[37] Later historians have used these phrases to describe these instances of civil strife. The Bhumij Revolt is also known as Gunga Narain's hungama (turmoil).

Governor-General'.[38] Captain Thomas Wilkinson, who was in-charge of the counterinsurgency operations in Chotanagpur during the Kol Insurrection, was selected as the Political Agent of these territories. Along with William Dent, he had served as the Joint Commissioner of Chotanagpur and Jungle Mahals after the unrest.

Mundas, Oraons and other groups, broadly referred to as Kols or Coles in colonial records participated in the uprising in Chotanagpur and around.[39] The insurrection targeted the Chotanagpur *raja*, judicial officers, and new alien 'lesees' of lands.[40] *Mundas* and *Mankis* (headmen of the Mundas and Kols) attacked those who dispossessed them of their lands, especially the Hindu and Muslim revenue farmers. After controlling the violence to some degree, the Company government decided to look into the causes of the rebellion. Officials in Calcutta thought that it was important for them to understand and address the grievances of the population in order to govern them better. As C.T. Metcalfe and W. Blunt wrote,

> After the object of Military operations had been accomplished by the general submission of the inhabitants, we removed the Officers and Establishments concerned in the management of Chota Nagpore – previously to the insurrection, that no obstacle might exist to as full investigation of any grievances of which they might have been the authors, or to the most complete inquiry practicable into the causes of the insurrection generally: and, as already noticed, Commissioners were then appointed to report on these subjects, and on the system on which it may be most desirable to proceed in regulating the future administration, so as to provide for the permanent continuance of tranquillity, and the removal of any injuries and oppressions of which people may have had just reason to complain.[41]

For the sake of 'permanent tranquillity' and prevention of future insurgencies, the Company state's response moved from merely conducting military operations to an enquiry into the complaints of the Company's subjects in forest Bengal.

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[38] 'Regulation XIII of 1833' in Pandey Ravindar Nath Roy, ed. *Manual of Chotanagpur Tenancy Laws: Containing an Exhaustive Commentaries on Chotanagpur Tenancy Act, 1908 and Other Allied Laws with up-to-Date Rules, Notifications, Etc* (Patna: Rajpal & Company, 2007), 173.
[39] Instances of unrest also took place in Palamau, Ramgurh, Singhbhum, and Burkagarh.
[40] For more details, see JC Jha, *The Kol Insurrection in Chota Nagpur*.
[41] IOR/F/4/1362/54223: from C.T. Metcalfe and W. Blunt, Fort William, letter dated 25 September 1832, Papers regarding the Kol rebellion in Chota Nagpur in 1832 - its suppression by military force, V. 1.

'Disturbances' spread to the areas bordering the Jungle Mahals, such as the districts of Ramgarh and Burdwan, where 'Bengallees and Mahajans' were attacked and their property plundered.[42] A full-fledged insurrection in the Jungle Mahals began with Ganga Narain's hungama in the Barabhum estate (in present day Purulia district). William Dent explained the causes in his report.[43] The unrest began as a family feud where Ganga Narain Singh murdered his relative, Madhub Singh in April 1832. Madhub Singh was the step-brother of the current *raja/zamindar*, and exercised great control over the affairs of the zamindari. He allegedly dispossessed Ganga Narain of the share in the estate that he was entitled to, and that's what incited Ganga Narain to attack and murder him, along with a party of *sardar ghatwals*. Madhub Singh had angered the *ghatwals* by charging excessive rent and extra cess on the tenures held by them. According to Dent, 'Madhub Sing had also contrived his aggressive and unfeeling conduct to render himself almost equally obnoxious to every individual throughout Burrabhoom from his brother the Raja and his family, to the lowest Bhoomij'.[44] Dent reports that almost all Bhumijs, whether 'ghatwals or ryots' had joined Ganga Narain by this time in his plan 'to clear the country of Police Thannahs as far as the great Benares Road'.[45] According to Dent, the majority of the Barabhum inhabitants were Bhumij, 'with a small number of Koormees (Mahatos) and Saontals and other low castes, and a slight sprinkling of Brahmins, Rajputs, Bania Traders and Mohamedans'. He also writes that although Bhumijs claim to be Rajput Hindus, Brahman priests refuse to officiate for them, and although they speak Bengali, they cannot read or write the language.[46]

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[42] IOR/F/4/1363/54226, From H.P. Russell, Magistrate of Ramgurh to W. Braddon, Commission of Circuit for the Division of Burdwan, Fort William Jud. Cons. No. 92, dated 18th April 1832, pp.59-78, Papers regarding the Kol rebellion in Chota Nagpur in 1832 – Jungle Mehals, Vol 4.

[43] IOR/F/4/1501/58886: Papers regarding the disturbances in Chota Nagpur, the Jungle Mahals etc. Vol 2 - report of William Dent, dated 4 Sep 1833, on the Jungle Mahals insurrection, with special reference to Barabhum and Dhalbhum, pp. 4-45 (hereafter *Dent's Report*)

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Bhumijs claimed to be Rajputs like many other groups in central and Eastern India, See Surajit Sinha, 'State Formation and Rajput Myth', 1962.

Unrest spread from Barabhum to other jungle *zamindaris*. Dent writes that after the murder, Ganga Narain and his followers 'attacked the Moonsiff's Cutcherry at Burrabazar and having murdered 3 of the Peons proceeded to plunder the Bazar'.[47] The nature of the disturbances then changed from being a family feud to an 'organized and extensive Choaree System'. [48] The logic of *chuari* was revived, as Ganga Narain and his party plundered other forest estates outside of Burrabhoom. Dent concluded that on some occasions, Ganga Narain and his party were invited by *zamindar's* family members to take care of dissensions within the family. On other occasions, *ghatwals* and *paiks* who were unhappy with their own *zamindars* sought their help and joined them. A series of military operations were undertaken to deal with the situation. H.P. Russell, the magistrate of Jungle Mahals, wrote to the Calcutta authorities to ask if he should pardon the *ghatwals* who surrender voluntarily.[49] The deputy Secretary to the Government told him that they should be granted pardon only if they are willing to detach themselves from Ganga Narain and 'contributing their endeavours for the restoration of tranquillity.'[50] The unrest ended when Ganga Narain was killed in February 1833.

Counterinsurgency now required administrative interventions which would not only restore order and peace, but also connect the colonial state with the inhabitants of the Jungle Mahals. Wilkinson and Dent were appointed as Joint Commissioners, and they wrote reports identifying the causes of the rebellions, and made recommendations. Once the SWFA was formed, the district of Jungle Mahals was dissolved and added to the 'non-regulation' territory under the direct supervision of the Political Agent. Wilkinson as the agent would receive 36,000 rupees per annum. He would be in-charge of the Ramgarh battalion as well

[47] Dent's Report
[48] Dent's Report
[49] IOR F/4/1501//58887- HP Russell, magistrate Zillah jungle mahals to Thomson, Dy. Secy to the Govt., Fort William, dated 14 May 1832.
[50] IOR F/4/1501//58887- Thomson, Dy. Secy to the Govt., Fort William, to HP Russell, magistrate Zillah jungle mahals dated 22 May 1832.

carry out the civilian duties previously discharged by the Judge-Magistrate-Collector. Four assistants were subordinated to Wilkinson's office, two senior assistants and two junior assistants. His residence was moved southwards from Ramgarh so that he could be located in the centre of the areas demarcated as SWFA, and from where he could carry out the superintendence of the Agency.[51]

The Agent had sweeping powers in the SWFA, and he and his assistants took care of all the functions of the Company state in these regions. The state machinery functioned in the following way in these tracts,

> The Agent and Commissioner has the superintendancy of every Department, is Superintendent of Police, and performs all Political and Revenue duties…and all Revenue, Criminal, Civil, and Political business of the South-West Frontier Agency. The Deputy Commissioner takes all Sessions cases and Criminal appeals in the Regulation districts…; all the Civil cases, excepting those involving succession in large Zamindaris, and those between the estates of the Political Agency and the Regulation Districts. The supervision of the jails is with the Agent.[52]

All functions, right from collecting revenue to maintaining law and order rested with the Agent and his deputies. This unique structure characterised the administration of the non-regulation tracts.

One of the major purposes of marking areas as non-regulation was to bring the colonial state closer to its subjects. As Metcalfe and Blunt stated with regard to Wilkinson's appointment as Political Agent,

> We may express our hope that the general result of the arrangements which have been authorized will be in a high degree beneficial by conducing to the more confirmed maintenance of tranquillity, by bringing the European Officers employed nearer to the people, and enabling them to act at once with increased effect and better information, and under the guidance of rules of a Simpler and Partly discretionary character, suited to the peculiar wants and circumstances of the rude countries for which they are framed.[53]

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[51] IOR/F/4/1501/58885, Charles T. Metcalfe and William Blunt to the Honorable Court of Director for Affairs of the Honorable the United Company of Merchants of England trading to the East Indies, letter dated 31 March 1832.

[52] Letter by the Governor-General's agent dated 25 December 1845, in Henry Ricketts, "Papers Relating to the South-West Frontier: Comprising Reports on Purulia or Manbhoom, Chota Nagpore, Sub-Division of Kornda, Hazareebaugh, Sumbhulpore, and South-West Frontier Agency," (Calcutta: Calcutta Gazette Office, 1855)., p.1

[53] IOR/F/4/1501/58885, From C.T. Metcalfe and W. Blunt To the Honorable Court of Director for Affairs of the Honorable the United Company of Merchants of England trading to the East Indies, dated 31st March 1834, Papers regarding the disturbances in Chota Nagpur, the Jungle Mahals and Midnapore - suppression of the

They used the phrase 'rude countries' to describe the tracts that had come under the Agency's rule. Dent, too in his report emphasised these areas as exceptional, with dense forests, hilly country, and a 'turbulent and refractory race' with a 'peculiar temperament'.[54] Wilkinson and Dent in their joint report explained the violence and plundering by Kols through their 'semi barbarous state'.[55] The rationale for paternalistic governance as a measure of counterinsurgency was grounded on the psyche and nature of the inhabitants and the 'wildness' of the places. Based on this logic of civilisation and the need for counterinsurgency, Jungle Mahals and Chotanagpur further became 'zones of anomaly' and came under the complete control of the Political Agent, who worked directly under the Governor-General.

Direct rule was justified by the need to protect the interests of the inhabitants, even though these inhabitants were 'wild'. With the suspension of the ordinary laws and regulations of Bengal, a paternalistic system of government sought to protect the interests of the peasantry without totally dispossessing the *zamindars*, emerged in the Jungle Mahals.[56] While not wanting to alienate the *zamindars*, Wilkinson and Dent nevertheless wanted to protect the *raiyats*. Dent recommended the constant presence of an authority to save *ghatwals* and peasants from the *zamindar's* tyranny:

> The constant residence or the frequent visits of a European Authority to these Mehals would oppose the most effectual check to abuses, such as forced contributions and unjust enhancements of rents and other acts of oppression by the Zemindars and others. [57]

Jungle Mahals insurrection - new administrative arrangements for Chota Nagpur and the Jungle Mahals, etc. Vol 1.

[54] Dent's report

[55] IOR F/4/1502, BC 58891, extract BCJC 3 June 1833, progs 4, letter dated 16 Nov 1832, W. Dent and Capt. Wilkinson Joint Commrs to J. Thomason, Deputy Secy, GOB, pp. 1 -46.

[56] IOR/F/4/1501/58885, Charles T. Metcalfe and William Blunt to the Honorable Court of Director for Affairs of the Honorable the United Company of Merchants of England trading to the East Indies, Papers regarding the disturbances in Chota Nagpur, the Jungle Mahals and Midnapore - suppression of the Jungle Mahals insurrection - new administrative arrangements for Chota Nagpur and the Jungle Mahals, etc. Vol. 1

[57] Dent's Report

The office of the Political Agent of the SWFA was based on exactly this principle of protection. On taking charge as the Political Agent, Wilkinson was expected to use his powers to promote welfare:

> his personal character and his recent experience would seem to render him eminently qualified…he very justly regards it as his…first duty to come into immediate communication with the people, for the purpose of acquiring a knowledge of their real sentiments, and of promoting their welfare.[58]

Thus, promoting the welfare of natives became an important aspect of the Company's strategy to prevent rebellion. Dent even recommended setting up a school for the *zamindars'* children:

> A good School which should furnish the means of obtaining a well-directed education to the children of these Jungle Zemindars would do infinitely more to civilize and improve the people than the best System of Management; the children of the more wealthy may not like to attend, but for them the School in a short time will furnish well qualified instructors.[59]

Dent's recommendation was premised on the belief that an education might make the elites residing in the forests of Bengal into peaceful subjects. His hope was that these educated elites, in turn, would be able to control their tenure-holders.

Like in the aftermath of the Chuar Rebellion, the imperatives of counterinsurgency after the Bhumij Revolt again led to an exceptional system of administration. This system was built on the earlier measures of protecting subjects from 'outside' oppressors and preserving existing socio-economic relations within the forest estates. But this system also added new features such as direct rule by the Governor-General in Calcutta through the Political Agent. The Agent was now in charge of all aspects of rule, and could take particular measures through his assistants. As a centralised figure who reported to higher authorities, he could evolve a special system of rule specific to these non-regulation territories. The Agent and his assistants, wanted to appear as protecting and advancing the interests of local inhabitants, while at

[58] IOR/E/4/745 "Disturbances in Chota Nagpore, Jungle Mehals and Midnapore," Bengal Judicial, Consultations No. 4 of 16th September 1835.
[59] Dent's report

the same time trying to mould them into 'civilised' subjects of the Company state. In this way, a paternalistic form of direct rule evolved in the Jungle Mahals. The next section will discuss how the principle of paternalistic rule continues to define statemaking even after the SWFA and direct rule was abolished in the Jungle Mahals.

5. Counterinsurgency, Paternalism, and Primitivism

When writing the Annals of Rural Bengal in 1868, W.W. Hunter dedicated it to Cecil Beadon, an officer of the Bengal Civil Service. In his dedication, Hunter described him as a 'statesman who, by the development of municipal institutions, by popular education, and by an enlightened respect for native rights, has laboured more than thirty years to call forth that new life and national vigour which are now working among the rural multitudes of Bengal.'[60] Hunter's description of Beadon's work in rural Bengal typifies the role that an ideal colonial officer ought to play that is, to govern, civilise, and protect the native inhabitants. In the nineteenth century, the ideology of protection and civilisation together came to exemplify colonial governance in many regions inhabited by so-called wild savage subjects. In the Jungle Mahals and Chotanagpur, administrative exceptionalism in the aftermath of the insurgencies in the 1830s, set into motion a logic of 'primitivism' (Chandra 2013b). In these non-regulation areas of Bengal, governed by a Political Agent, paternalistic direct rule and the ideology of primitivism went hand-in-hand. Paternalistic rule was justified on the basis of civilising wild people who were prone to causing disturbances, and protecting them from 'outsiders' at the same time. Following from counterinsurgency, 'primitivism', became a feature of colonial statemaking in the frontiers of Bengal. In this section, I discuss the ways in

[60] WW Hunter, *Annals of Rural Bengal*, dedication at the start.

which the direct rule played out in the frontiers of Bengal, and the consequences it had on colonial governance in the future.

The Political Agent of the SWFA, Wilkinson, established special rules of governance for the non-regulation territories under his command. Firstly, like in the aftermath of the Chuar rebellion, he discouraged the sale of estates to outsiders. No sale of land to outsiders would be legal unless previously authorised by the agent or the assistant. Wilkinson was also of the opinion that all efforts should be made to prevent landlords from falling into debt.[61] These situations were seen as the cause of recurrent disturbances and hence, Wilkinson sought to ensure that he took care that such situations did not arise. He also initiated a new system of civil justice in the non-regulation territories, where he emphasised the need to use 'ancient tribal tribunals'[62] and panchayats to deal with civil cases. Unlike the regulation provinces, people would not need to travel to the *cutchery or adalat* (courts) and *vakils* or lawyers would not be permitted. Instead, he proposed a justice system where his assistant on tour would decide pending cases, using a panchayat system. The members of the panchayat would by appointed by the Wilkinson himself or his assistant from among the 'influential and respectable' men from nearby villages.[63] We see that through such measures, he was trying to protect the existing life-worlds of the inhabitants and to build relationships with village heads to ensure they do not encourage or support rebellion in the future.[64]

It must be noted here, that while the Governor-General did approve most of Wilkinson's proposals and a 'Wilkinson system' came into being for governing the insurgency-prone regions of forest Bengal, there were differences of opinion within the

[61] IOR F/4/1502/58892 Rules for civil justice, Enclosure, Wilkinson to Govt., 13 Jan 1834.
[62] JC Jha, The Tribal Revolt of Chotnagpur
[63] Ibid.
[64] In the late nineteenth century, British colonial rule in some parts of India was based on choosing 'natural leaders' form local communities to act as intermediaries of the British government (Frietag 1989).

colonial state. Henry Ricketts, a member of the Board of Revenue, who toured the SWFA territory in the 1850s, was not in favour of non-regulation. He expressed his disapproval,

> Were these zemindars unfortunate victims of adverse circumstances, they might be entitled to sympathy, but as a body they are ignorant, savage, selfish, vicious and corrupt, without one single redeeming virtue. Instead of being in any respect a useful, meritorious body, it would be good for the country, for traders and all classes, but thieves, if all were at once to be dispossessed and replaced by those who would improve. There is but one single reason for maintaining them in possession, and there was never but one reason and that is lest, if dispossessed, they should incite their ignorant ryots and followers to create disturbances even their mischievous rule is preferable to anarchy. If disturbances are not now likely to be the consequence of dispossession, whether from the decrease of their influence or the increased knowledge and independence of the inhabitants, there can be no reason why the claims of creditors should not be satisfied by the sale of estates.[65]

In Ricketts' view, the sale of *zamindars'* estates should not be stopped in the future, and he clearly did not see it worth the colonial state's time to engage in negotiations with *zamindar*s, as Wilkinson had suggested. He saw them as 'savage and ignorant', and was upset when he found that not too many children in the SWFA provinces were attending the schools set up by the government and missionaries. For instance, he writes about the English school in Manbhum (Purulia),

> It is unfortunate that such a prejudice against education should exist on the part of the land-holders, for they possess extensive estates, inhabited by very wild and barbarous people, whose ignorance has, on more than one occasion, caused very embarrassing disturbances and much bloodshed. The spread of cultivation, and intercourse with those who live in more civilised parts, have done some good, and if the Vilage Pradhans, and people of that class, would allow their children to attend the School, the seed of much eventual good might be sown.[66]

Ricketts' solution to the problem, therefore, was the increase of civilisation among 'wild and barbarous' people through the spread of cultivation and education. He wanted to bring the forest inhabitants in contact with more 'civilised' places and people. For Wilkinson, however, the first step towards civilisation was getting to know the inhabitants of the SWFA.

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[65] Henry Ricketts, "Papers Relating to the South-West Frontier: Comprising Reports on Purulia or Manbhoom, Chota Nagpore, Sub-Division of Kornda, Hazareebaugh, Sumbhulpore, and South-West Frontier Agency," (Calcutta: Calcutta Gazette Office, 1855)., p.7

[66] Ibid., p.29

Wilkinson also stressed the need for him and his assistants to know their subjects better. He instructed his assistants to annually tour the divisions under their charge. He asked them to halt at a place for five days and spend time talking to heads of estates and villagers, to help them 'become intimately acquainted' with the area and with 'the condition of its inhabitants'. He asked them to 'talk to them freely and encourage them to speak of the manner in which they had been treated by the Darogah, Moonsif, Peeadas and Chupprassies.' Wilkinson wanted his assistants to find out whether local government officials were harassing people and if so, adequate action against them would ensue. The purpose of assistants' visit was to have 'heart-to-heart' talks which would bring the government closer to the people and prevent 'oppression by petty officials'.[67] Wilkinson's objective was to ensure that the inhabitants are protected from any harassment by officials working for the Company as that could incite more 'disturbances'.

The need to know more about the inhabitants of the Jungle Mahals which began as part of the 'pacification' strategies, later became an important part of colonial rule.[68] From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, colonial anthropology, surveys, and descriptions of 'tribes' acquired a special place in the administration of frontier areas. The exceptionalism of these places was defined through a combination of tribal people and forest landscape (Sivaramakrishnan 1996: 146). By clubbing together these places under the SWFA in 1833, the colonial state recognised its lack of extensive knowledge about these places and the people that inhabit them. After the *Santhal Hool* (uprising) in 1855, the gap in knowledge was felt even more. To fill that gap, colonial officials extensively traversed the countryside and the so-called tribal areas, and gradually a field of colonial anthropology developed (Paidipaty 2009). W.W. Hunter's *Statistical Account of Bengal* and *Annals of Rural Bengal*,

[67] IOR F/4/ 1502/58892 Wilkinson to Nicolson, 7 Jan 1834, para 14
[68] For more on colonialism and knowledge-formation, see Arjun Appadurai, *Number in the Colonial Imagination*; Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge*; Thomas Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*.

Edward Tuite Dalton's *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, H.H. Risley's *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, Francis Bradley-Birt's *The Story of an Indian Upland,* and Edward G. Man's *Sonthalia and the Santhals* are some of the key works that were published in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The discourse of tribalism that came across in these works provided the continued justification of a paternalistic governance in most of the non-regulation tracts.

When Wilkinson's successor, J.R. Ouseley took over as the SWFA agent, he praised Wilkinson for having done the necessary ground work for the colonial state to connect with its subjects. He said, 'Major Wilkinson's arrangements and conciliatory method of ruling them, as enforced by Lieutenant Ticknell, I am convinced, impressed them with favourable opinions in every way.' In the 1840s, he reported to the Governor-General that 'the blessings of our rule are becoming more apparent daily, the plundering habits of the inhabitants checked, and the happiness of living in security appreciated.'[69] According to Ouseley, this was the ideal environment for missionary activity, and their plan of converting all of India could start with 'persons who are unchecked by caste, having no recognised religion whatsoever, eating and drinking whatever is offered from our table'.[70] The spread of Christanity was the next step in the process of colonial statemaking which was geared towards civilising forest dwellers. In the Jungle Mahals, over the years, missionary activity spread widely, especially among Santals. As LSS O'Malley wrote in 1911:

> The number of Christians has been steadily rising in the last 20 years, being 740 in 1881, and 1,545 in 1891, while in 1901 it was 1,974, of whom 1,545 wore natives. The increase in the last decade is to some extent due to the formation of **a** railway settlement at Kharagpur. Outside the Kharagpur thana, the Christian community is chiefly found in thanas Midnapore and Salbani, where an American Baptist Mission works, and Jhargram, where there is a Jesuit Mission. The most important mission is the American Free Baptist Mission, which was established at Midnapore in the year 1863, branch being opened next year at Binpur about 20

[69] Ouselely to T.H. Maddock, 18 November 1840, Letter no.69, In J.R Ouseley. 1847. 'Reports by the agent to the Governor-General of tours made by him through the districts attached to the political agency of the south-west frontier, in 1840, 1844, 1847', pp.1-17

[70] Ibid

> miles from this station. At Midnapore the mission works among Bengalis, and at Binpur among Santals.[71]

With the opening up of these missions, schools for Santal children were set up in various villages across the Jungle Mahals.

In addition to the spread of Christanity, Ouseley and other Agents after him made efforts to promote commerce in the SWFA areas. Oulseley wanted to establish a commercial network of traders based on a system of licenses and permits.[72] British military officers and village heads negotiated trade agreements. Since the land under cultivation in these areas was small, trade in goods such as raw silk, resin, and buffaloes was the main source of revenue. To increase trade, Ouseley encouraged *mahajans* or moneylenders to expand their operations. However, the new moneylending system ran into trouble with Santals who took loans at high rates of interest from the moneylending *mahajans* and ended up losing their land tenures. This was one of the major causes of the Santal *hool* (uprising) that began in 1855. Like the Chuar rebellion, even the Santal *hool* has come to be remembered as an anti-colonial revolt. However, it was a case of an uprising of Santals, who were led by two brothers, Sidhu and Kanu, seeking to avenge injustice meted out to them by corrupt officials in alliance with the *mahajans* (Sen 1984: 112).

The Santal *hool* and the colonial state's response to it must be seen through the lens of colonial paternalism. Since the 1830s, the government had promoted Santal migration to the Damin-i-Koh region of central India in order to bring more land under cultivation. Unlike Bhumijs and Pahariyas[73] who occupied the Rajmahal hills, Santals were hard-working peasants in the eyes of the colonial state. As tenants of the government, Santals were given rent-free tenures for a period of 3-5 years (Sen 1984: 101-106). The colonial government also directly negotiated settlements with Santal headmen, and in the process protected them from

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[71] LSS O'Malley, *Midnapore District Gazetteer*
[72] J.R. Ouseley to Halliday, 16 March 1840, Hazaribagh Collector's Receipt Register Vol. 23 of 1839-40, BSA.
[73] Pahariyas are hill tribes that occupy the Rajmahal hills surrounding the forests of south-west Bengal.

potential domination by directly settling the annual nominal *jumma* rent with Santal headman (*manjhis*). However, the entry of outsiders as *mahajans* upset this protective sphere. Sidhu and Kanu Murmu petitioned the colonial courts against the *mahajans*, and filed complaints with the police, but were disappointed by their inaction.[74] Not only were they unable to gain redress from the colonial law and order machinery, Santals also faced extortion from police offers. These problems were what led to the events of 1855. Supported by other village *manjhis* and Santal peasants, Sidhu and Kanu proceeded to attack sepoys and police officers. Santals from the neighbouring Jungle Mahals also joined in the uprising, but the *hool* was not so widespread there. After the *hool*, a separate district called Santhal Parganas was carved out of the Damin-i-koh region, along with 5,500 square miles taken from Bhagalpur and Birbhum. Santhal Parganas was added to the list of non-regulation territory and special measures were put into place there to protect Santals.

In the years following the Santal *hool*, the administrative exceptionalism of the colonial state took on a more sophisticated form. The SWFA was dissolved in 1854, and in 1874, the non-regulation areas were classified as 'scheduled districts'. In addition to the suspension of civil and criminal regulations which were applied elsewhere, the scheduled districts also had their own tenancy laws to protect 'tribal' tenants. The Chotanagpur Tenancy Act, for instance, was put into place to prevent land alienation from tribal Mundas to non-tribals in Chotanagpur. The estates of Jungle Mahals, however, were gradually excluded from the exceptional administrative arrangements and were not made into scheduled areas. The regulations that applied in rest of the Bengal province came into operation here in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. There was a gradual decline of *zamindari* policing and the *mandali* system. *Mandals,* as explained earlier, had acted as the link between *zamindars* and peasant communities, so peasants did not have to pay rent directly. However, now *zamindars*

[74] E.G. Man, Sonthalia and the Santhals

started to lease out land to outsiders, usually Bengalis or Oriya Brahmins, and in some cases to Europeans like Andrew Yule who headed the Mindapore Zamindari Company (MZC). These leases were known as *ijras*, and under this, the estate would be leased out to them on a permanent basis, displacing the *mandal's* authority over the cultivators.

The *ijra* system led to many social and economic changes. The decline of the *mandali* system meant that cultivators had to pay higher rents individually, and often ended up taking high-interest loans from *mahajans*. They mortgaged their property as security for the loan, and the failure to pay the interest and repay the loans led to a large number of poor cultivators, most of whom were Santals, becoming dispossessed of their lands.[75] As McAlpin pointed out in an unofficial note about the pargana of Binpur,

> The proportion of land cultivated by the Santals in Binpur has decreased from 43 to 36 percent with 20 years, taking into account reclamation; that of aborigines and semi-aborigines from 76 to 66 percent. Whilst that of Dikus, other than sadgopes, has increased from 20 to 30 percent.[76]

In most cases, *zamindars* gained while headmen and villagers were dispossessed of not only their lands, but also their control over forests. The MZC as *ijardar* (leaseholding contractor) for instance, disallowed cultivators from accessing the forests and forest products. In other cases, *zamindars* themselves were in debt and could not save their estates from being sold to outsiders. Several instances of jungle estates that were sold off can be cited. Nayagram became the property of the Nawab of Murshidabad, Narayangarh went to the Lahas of Calcutta, the Jamboni raja lost the rent collecting rights to the Midnapore Zamindary Company, and Jhargram was lost to the Kundud and other unnamed Mandals (Panda 1989: 60). The *zamindar-mandal*-cultivator patronage relationship also gradually eroded, and the socio-economic structures of village society underwent changes. Not only were the headmen reduced to mere tenure holders and rent collectors for the outside owners, their local

[75] See Suchibrata Sen 1984, M.C. McAlpin 1911, Swapan Dasgupta 1985
[76] McAlpin's informal note, cited in Chitta Panda,1989

governance functions were now undermined. By 1910, Kurmi Mahato, Santal, and Bhumij *mandals* were in a minority in contrast to the recent Bengali immigrants (Sivaramkrishnan 1996: 502).

One can surmise that the lack of a direct threat of insurgency in the Jungle Mahals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries led the colonial state to gradually undo the administrative exceptionalism that had come to characterise this region. However, the discourse of tribes, which was an outcome of counterinsurgency, continued to inform colonial statemaking in the forests of Bengal. Even in the twentieth century, surveyors found these to be places which could not fit into standard descriptions. The ideology of primitivism and ideas about tribal places and people are at play even in descriptions of the region in the twentieth century. As a result, the colonial state pushed the civilising mission through Christianity, commerce, and education. Additionally, while the Jungle Mahals ceased to be exceptional regions in an administrative sense, they became anomalous in other ways. Sivaramkrishnan (1999) points out that these forests now became zones of anomaly with regard to the colonial government's' forest conservation policies. What is worth noting in this trajectory of over a hundred years, is that the inception of modern statemaking in the Jungle Mahals, as well as the ordering and re-ordering of state-society relations were a result of the colonial state's measures of counterinsurgency.

6. Conclusion

This chapter described and analysed colonial statemaking in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries through the lens of counterinsurgency. Discussing the colonial state's responses to various moments of rebellion and uprising in the first century of British rule in India, I pointed to the centrality of counterinsurgency to the inception of the modern state in the Jungle Mahals. Processes of statemaking in these marginal tracts, such as creating

administrative 'zones of anomaly', establishing direct rule under the Agent, and attempting to civilise groups identified as 'tribes', were all linked to the Company state's aim of 'pacifying' rebellious subjects.

Modes of statemaking where the Company, along with the use of force, negotiated post-insurgency orders with village elites in the margins, were later replicated outside these frontier tracts as well. Much scholarship on the colonial state in the mid-nineteenth century has drawn attention to the new kinds of arrangements of rule that emerged through mediations between the Raj and landed elites in agrarian communities across India (Bayly 2006; Ludden 1999; Metcalf 1978). The paradigmatic example is of the landlords of Oudh in northern India, who, when dispossessed by the Company's Court of Wards, rallied their peasants to rebel against the Company Raj. Once control transferred from the Company to the Crown, the colonial state gave them the title of *taluqdars* after 1860 in recognition of their travails (Metcalf 1978: xii). As *taluqdars*, these landlords were now rent-receiving intermediaries who held control of several villages. In this way, the colonial state reshaped agrarian society all over India. Anand Yang (1989) coined the term 'limited raj' to explain the collaborative nature of colonial rule in a south Bihar *zamindari* from late eighteenth century onwards. Yang explains that the colonial state collaborated with landed elites to maintain law and order and to fulfil its economic interests. As a result of these alliances, the Company only exercised limited control over agrarian society because it relied heavily on landlords as intermediaries. As C.A. Bayly (2006) has argued, the Raj was a patchwork of alliances between colonial officials and indigenous elites. The Company, and later the Crown, may have had the upper hand in these alliances, but it is difficult to deny that it was through alliances and negotiations that British rule expanded and consolidated.

In frontier areas like the Jungle Mahals, such alliances were key to the creation of administrative 'zones of anomaly' (Sivaramakrishnan 1999a, 1996). Rebellion was a constant

threat and the forms taken by statemaking, I argue, were a response to this threat. The purpose of this chapter was to provide a historical background for an enquiry into the ways in which statemaking and counterinsurgency have been intertwined at different moments in the history of the Jungle Mahals. This history enables us to take a wider view of how the state in the Jungle Mahals was constituted, and how state-society relations have evolved over centuries. The next chapter will look at state-society relations in the Jungle Mahals in the late colonial period, and the postcolonial period.

Chapter 2: State, Society, and Politics in Jungle Mahals c. 1910-2008

1. Introduction

This chapter examines the realignment of rural social hierarchies and statemaking in the Jungle Mahals over the course of colonial and postcolonial statemaking from 1910-2008. The preceding chapter described colonial statemaking in the Jungle Mahals in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and emphasised the interrelationship between the colonial state and counterinsurgency. The interrelationship impacted the social dynamics of the different ethnic groups in the forest villages of the Jungle Mahals. When the British arrived in the Jungle Mahals in late eighteenth century, the *zamindars* and their *raiyats* were mostly Bhumij. *Raiyats* and *zamindars* were connected to each other through *ghatwali* and *paikan* tenures. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, encouraged by the state's enthusiasm to clear forests, new cultivating groups such as Santals and Mahatos migrated to the forest *zamindaris* of the Jungle Mahals. They entered into *mandali* tenures, and settled new villages under their headmen. The village heads not only collected rents from the tenants and handed over to the *zamindar*, but were the authority figures for these village communities. The social make-up of the Jungle Mahals changed considerably during this time. Following the Bhumij Revolt in 1832-33, the Jungle Mahals became non-regulation provinces which were governed by the Political Agent to the Governor General as part of the South-West Frontier Agency. Outsiders such as Bengali land speculators were prohibited from owning any land in the forest estates. The migration of Mahatos and Santals, however continued.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the exceptional administrative apparatus which characterised the colonial state in the Jungle Mahals was gradually undone. The area was brought under the regulations of the Bengal Tenancy Act 1885. The earlier prohibition on outsiders owning lands in the Jungle *zamindaris* was lifted, and Bengali landowners, and

moneylenders, along with European companies like the Midnapore Zamindari Company took control of lands through ownership or long-term lease agreements with zamindars. However, even as the Jungle Mahals ceased to be exceptional zones in the sense of agrarian systems and administrative structures by the end of nineteenth century, they continued to be exceptional in two senses: through a colonial discourse of tribes who had to be 'civilised'; and through the colonial state's emphasis on forest conservation.

Taking the story forward from there, this chapter looks at statemaking in the Jungle Mahals in the late colonial and postcolonial periods. I focus on the manner in which factors like conflict, counterinsurgency, and regime change interacted with each other to rework state-society relations and social hierarchies within village society. I argue that periods of conflict punctuated state-society relations in the region, and statemaking during and after these periods of conflict reordered relationships between local communities. Taking Migdal's (2001) 'state-in-society' approach, this chapter discusses how the 'state' and local society made and remade each other in the forest estates of the Midnapore district during different regimes of authority. The aspects of local society I examine in this chapter are the economic and social arrangements between ethnic groups (Mahatos and Santals) and between agrarian classes (landlords and peasants). I look at how social, cultural and economic hierarchies are established and modified due to practices of statemaking, and the kinds of identity assertions and political practices that this process leads to.

The argument proceeds in two parts. The first section looks at late colonial period (1910-1947). Throughout the 1910s and 1920s, survey and settlement operations demarcated boundaries between fields and forests, and brought about a shift in land ownership and tenure patterns. Settlement operations firmed up the powers vested in the *zamindars*, at the cost of various classes of peasant tenure-holders. Such a situation led to disputes among the different groups, wherein the Congress-led nationalist movement too became involved. The colonial

state established an incomplete order where agitations and movements for assertions of identity continued. The two major peasant groups, Santals and Mahatos, came together to attack *zamindars*, but Mahatos later wanted to identify themselves as the Kshatriya caste with the Hindu fold, thus differentiating themselves from 'tribal' Santals.

In the second section, I point to the shifts in state-society relations in the post-independence period from 1947 onwards. While rest of rural Bengal at the cusp of independence became embroiled in the Communist Party of India-led Tebhaga peasant movement, this form of radical peasant politics did not acquire much importance in forest Bengal in the 1940s. However, Santals and other Adivasi groups joined in a struggle for a separate Adivasi state of Jharkhand. Another important shift was that the postcolonial government in India abolished the *zamindari* system and altered not only land ownership patterns, but also agrarian power in the countryside. In this context, I focus, in particular, on the three decades of Left Front rule in West Bengal, and how rural state-society relations evolved under 'state socialism' (Sivaramakrishnan 1998: 31). The Left Front, led by a parliamentary communist party, the Communist Party of India (Marxist), assumed power a few years after the Naxalite movement that claimed to be an uprising of landless peasants and workers. Once in office, the LF pushed the land reforms agenda. As a result, *zamindars* lost much of their land and power in local society, and Mahatos became more dominant as the rising middle peasantry. At the same time, Mahatos also started to assert their identity as Adivasis and became involved in the Jharkhand movement. The LF institutionalised local organisations like panchayats and emphasised 'development' and poverty alleviation through welfare programmes. Here, I first engage with debates on the success and failure of the LF's rule, and then look at the social reordering of the Jungle Mahals during that phase.

2. Colonial Survey and Settlement, Agrarian Conflicts, and the Remaking of Society, 1910-1947

The dissolution of the South-West Frontier Agency (SWFA), and subsequently, the abolition of *zamindari* policing in 1870 gradually undid the administrative exceptionalism that had previously characterised these forest tracts in the form of direct rule. The Jungle Mahals were also no longer kept outside the agrarian regulations of Bengal. Previously, the revenue settlement under Permanent Settlement Act of 1793 was not applied here to prevent rebellion. But, by the end of the nineteenth century, the Jungle Mahals were eventually brought under the general regulations of land administration of the Bengal province. The Bengal Tenancy Act 1885, through which the colonial state sought to clearly demarcate the rights of *zamindars* and *raiyats* in Bengal, came to govern land rights and agrarian relations in the Jungle Mahals too. To implement the act, the administrators undertook cadastral survey and land settlement operations from 1900-1930 throughout the Bengal province (Sivaramakrishnan 1996: 415). The survey and settlement operations in Midnapore district were conducted from 1911 to 1917 under A.K. Jameson.

The survey and settlement operations in the ex-SWFA territories, of which the Jungle Mahals were part, took place in the aftermath of the Birsaite *ulgulan* (rebellion) of 1899-1900 in Chotanagpur. Birsa Munda, an Adivasi, led a violent uprising to make claims on the colonial state with regard to Adivasi ownership of land and forests. The Chotanagpur Tenancy Act 1909 (CNT) was passed as a result of this *ulgulan*. As a 'pacification' measure, this legislation protected Adivasis from dispossession. Consequently, survey and settlement processes were started after the passage of the CNT act in the Chotanagpur area to determine Adivasi ownership. The forest tracts of Midnapore, which bordered Chotanagpur, also had survey and settlement operations at this time, but there was no legislation to protect 'tribal' interests in the Jungle Mahals of Midnapore.

AK Jameson found it extremely challenging to survey the jungle estates of western Midnapore due to the distinct tenancy arrangements between the jungle *zamindars* and their *raiyats* known as *mandali*. The jungles had for long been illegible spaces in the administrative map of the British government, and continued to be so even as the colonial state dismantled their exceptional system of administration there. For instance, the Revenue Survey of Midnapore district in 1870-75 left out the forest estates of Binpur, Gopiballavpur, and Jhargram. These estates were illegible places which the colonial state had to make more comprehensible. Hence, Jameson was faced with a difficult task of assesing vast amounts of uncultivable wastelands and forests. Further, the existence of *mandali* system had so far made it difficult to clearly classify ownership of cultivated land, forests, and wastelands. Jameson wrote,

> . . . villages had to be formed *de novo*. In determining the area to be included in a village local usage was followed for the most part; in all of them the *mandali* system either still prevailed or had died out comparatively recently…a block of land was let out to a community for the purpose of reclaiming it and bringing it under cultivation . . .The process of reclamation had not gone far enough at the time of the Revenue Survey to make it worthwhile defining isolated villages when the greater part of the area would have had to be classed vaguely as *khas* jungle, but since then the formation of villages has proceeded rapidly and the *khas* jungle areas are now only a small proportion of the whole . . . it was often found that the locally recognised villages were of inconvenient size sometimes too large but more often too small, and in such cases they were either divided or amalgamated (Jameson 1918: 131-32)

Jameson and his team's attempts to delineate village boundaries led to conflicts. As he himself points out,

> The only difficulty that occasionally arose was as to the exact limits of two adjoining villages when some portion was claimed by both and these were dealt with as Boundary Disputes in the ordinary way. In this manner 1608 villages were formed in the four thanas distributed as follows: Binpur 861, Jhargram 271, Gopiballabhpur 463, Naraingarh 13. (ibid.)

Most of the disputes arising from settlements were primarily linked to rights over forest lands. As Jameson acknowledged,

> Disputes as to rights in jungles and trees on tenants' holdings were numerous and except in the extreme east and southeast hotly contested…it must be admitted that no class of disputes excited so deep or such widespread ill feeling between landlord and tenants as these, and it is to be feared that the settlement record is in this respect only the beginning and not the end of strife. (ibid.)

While Jameson's operations sped up the process where land and forest rights were re-ordered, this process, as Sivaramakrishnan (1996: 429) tells us, was in no way a sudden dispossession of tenants by the colonial state.

Disputes were quite common in the changing agrarian situation of the Jungle Mahals since the late nineteenth century. These were mainly connected to the decline of the *mandali* system, and the curtailment of the forest rights of the cultivating groups. The *mandal* (village headman) no longer had the important position of being the link between the zamindar and the cultivators. The entry of *ijradars* (leaseholding sub-contractors) broke down the existing relations of patronage between the *zamindar*, *mandal*, and peasants. Peasants now had to pay rents individually to the *zamindar* or *ijradar*, whereas earlier the rent was collected by the *mandal* and passed on to the *zamindar*. Along with this, rents were hiked up and tenure holders had to pay an additional cess. For example, the Raja of Lalgarh started charging his *raiyats* a cess on their profits, over and above the rent (McAlpin 1909: 52). Peasants borrowed money from *mahajans* (moneylenders) to be able to pay the rents, and ended up being in large debts, and even losing their lands. The *mahajans* either sold off the debtors' land or bought cases against them in the civil courts. The courts, in such cases, passed ex-parte decrees to dispossess the debtors of their lands. Ex-parte decrees meant that the concerned parties were not represented in courts. In Midnapore district, 35 per cent of the decrees against Santal debtors and 46 per cent against Kudmi (Mahato) debtors were ex-parte (Dasgupta 1985: 108). Through such decrees, there was a gradual process whereby lands were transferred from Santal, Kudmi and Bhumij cultivators to outsiders. McAlpin (1909: 20-21) provides many examples of such dispossession. In Rohini estate (Gopiballavpur *thana*), for instance, in 1892, there had been 6 Santal headmen, 23 Mahato headmen, and 10 Bhumij headmen. In 1906, there were only 4

Santal headmen, 17 Mahato headmen, and 4 Bhumij headmen. Basically, in the fourteen years between 1892 and 1906, Santal, Mahato and Bhumij peasants lost close to 580 acres of land in total in this estate. He also writes that in the Lalgarh estate (Binpur *thana*), villages were 'practically all broken' due to the decline of the *mandali* system. In the Silda Pargana in Binpur, only 38 villages out of the 918 were now held by Santal *mandals*, compared to the 304 they held earlier.

The transfer of lands to outsiders was also accompanied by a curtailment of forest rights of the Mahatos and Santals. *Ijradars* such as the Watson Company, later known as the Midnapore Zamindari Company (MZC), as well as *zamindars* prohibited *raiyats* of the estate from collecting wood from the forests. When *zamindars* permitted tenants to collect wood, they would charge a tax, in cash as well as in kind (mostly paddy), which was hiked very often. The entry of railways into the Jungle Mahals further restricted cultivators' rights over the forests (Dasgupta 1985: 113). Timber from these forests was now a greatly prized commodity. MZC and timber merchants purchased and leased out vast forest tracts to be able to collect and sell timber. As *zamindars* started to lease out forest lands to these companies, the earlier arrangements between them and *mandals* over the use of forests began to break down. *Zamindars* now charged higher taxes to allow the collection of forest goods. The deposition given by someone called Bhim Mahato of Jambani in a case over the right to use forest products from jungles provides an insight into the changing tax structures:

> Of the five jungles in disputes I know those of Bakra, Sonamukhi and Behra. I bring firewood from those jungles. During Purna Chandra's time I was paying 8 annas [1 anna=1/6 of a rupee], then Rupees 1.80, and then during the time of Iswar Chandra I was paying Rupees 3/- for 48 cart loads of wood. I am a Mandal. By paying that amount prajas of my village and myself would be getting firewood… This year I went to the jungles of Bakra, Sonamukhi and Behra during Chaitra-Baisakh with my munish. I found the jungles half empty. I do not know who had cut and carted away the wood.[1]

[1] Village Crime Notebook, Jambani, cited in Ranabir Samaddar 1996: 80. The names that Bhim Mahato mentions here are of *zamindars*.

Bhim Mahato's deposition shows that over time, there was a sharp increase in the amount of tax charged by the *zamindar* for the same amount of wood collected. In addition to the rising tax, tenants sometimes found that there was no wood left for them to collect, as the *ijradar* companies and *zamindars* took most of it,

Clashes often arose when tenants tried to fell trees and collect wood from the forests. Samaddar (1995: 170-177) provides us with examples of these disputes in the estate of Jambani, many of which resulted in court cases. He shows that most of the cases filed in the courts of law by the MZC against the peasants were conflicts over forest rights. Disputes of this nature had been going on for some time now, but during and after the settlement operations, conflicts among *zamindars, raiyats*, colonial officers, and village headmen intensified. In the twentieth century, *zamindars* in the Jungle Mahals acquired complete control over the forests, and poor cultivators lost their rights over these forests. Throughout the 1800s, the forests of the Jungle Mahals and Chotanagpur had been maintained as private forests, even as forests in other parts of the Bengal province were brought under direct state control. As I explained in chapter 1, the necessities of counterinsurgency had marked the Jungle Mahals and Chotanagpur as anomalous zones, where general regulations on land did not apply. The paternalistic administration that characterised these regions prevented the state takeover of these forests. Fields and forests existed in a continuum, and *zamindars, mandals*, and cultivators had their own agreements through which they accessed the forest and wood from there. However, from the 1860s onwards, these private forests and the question of whether they should be brought under state control or not, became a subject of debate and deliberation among the different branches of the colonial state, as well as the inhabitants of the Jungle Mahals and Chotanagpur. Sivaramkrishnan (1996: 467) points out that 'an alliance between zamindars, influential raiyats, missionaries and

paternalistic district officers thwarted the formal takeover of private forests in southwest Bengal - comprising the Jungle Mahals and what later became the Chotanagpur division of Bihar'. But from 1885 onwards, after the passage of the Bengal Tenancy Act, jungle *zamindars* and the MZC started slowly taking over private forests. Land settlements in the twentieth century drew clear boundaries between fields and forests, and made *zamindars* the sole owners of the forests.[2]

Overall, we see that the decline of the tenures like *mandali* and *ghatwali*, and the firming of exclusive *zamindari* control over forests brought about shifts in inter-community relations in the Jungle Mahals, and slowly altered the socio-economic structures of the forest estates. In the nineteenth century, forests were mainly seen as wastelands and were given out by *zamindars* as part of *mandali* tenures to Santal and Mahato cultivators. By the 1900, however, forests came to be considered as a resource, and a source of profit. While *zamindars* had earlier allied with rural elites and 'principle raiyats' to prevent the state takeover of forests, they now took over complete control over those forests (Sivaramkrishnan 1996: 428). As a result, tensions arose between *zamindars*, and their *raiyats*. Mahato cultivators who had recently become prosperous began to disobey the *zamindars*, as did the poorer Santal cultivators whose rights to the forests were taken away. In most cases, Mahatos led 'acts of disobedience', and they expressed dissent through illegally feeling trees in the forests. Collecting wood, or attacking *zamindar's* men and officials from the *ijradar* company, MZC (Samaddar 1995: 175). Entries from Village Crime notebooks show this:

> 1920. Santhals and Mahatos have ganged up to fell trees illegally. One year of rigorous imprisonment.
>
> 1924. Clash between the zamindar's men and the Mahatos, jail, punishment, sentence.[3]

[2] I rely on Sivaramakrishnan 1996, chapters 8-9, for my discussion on forests and forest rights in south-west Bengal

[3] Village Crime Notebooks, Jambani, Midnapore District, cited in Samaddar

Zamindars and their cultivators, who were previously tied together in material, social, and economic relations were now opposed to each in other in a struggle over land and forests, which took the form of plunder and in some cases, became linked to Congress-led nationalist movement.

In the 1920s, there were several instances of looting fish ponds and local markets, and cutting sal trees in *zamindar*-owned forests. In January 1918, eleven *haats* (village markets) were looted in in the forest thanas of Midnapore district. There were reports of *haat* looting in January and February 1922 as well. The Additional District Magistrate of Midnapore, L. Birly, wrote in a letter that,

> …disturbances have recently been created by Santhals at *haats* in Binpur thana, and on 26th January the Dahijuri *haat* was looted by about a 1000 people...it appears that the crowd included Mahatas (Kudmis) and Santhals, that they destroyed a Pachwai shop, shouted 'Gandhi Maharaj ki jai', made inquiries for foreign cloth, but took all kinds of cloth indiscriminately, and prohibited the export of paddy.[4]

The incidents of looting took place during the non-cooperation movement. The non-cooperation movement was initiated by Mahatma Gandhi, and supported by the Indian National Congress. He exhorted Indians to picket shops selling British goods. The use of the phrase 'Gandhi Maharaj ki jai' (Hail Gandhi the king), and the attempt to loot foreign-made cloth in the above mentioned incidents makes it seem like they were linked to the Congress-led nationalist non-cooperation movement. Birly wrote,

> It appears that what has happened is that non-cooperators, taking advantage of the occasion of these annual assemblages of large crowds of Santhals here, incited them to continue them and to commit excesses.[5]

However, while Birly clearly identified the role of Congress volunteers in inciting Santals, he also goes on to explain the disturbances through the role of the administration and the MZC:

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[4] West Bengal State Archive (WBSA), F. no. 87/22, SI No. 3, Santhals of Jhargram and non-cooperation, Letter no. 1320, 28 January 1922, From L. Birley to The Commissioner of Burdwan division.
[5] Ibid

> It is probable also that the non-cooperators, taking advantage of my failure to effect a settlement between the Midnapore Zamindari Company and their tenants about wood for houses and agricultural purposes to incite Santhals to excesses. [6]

According to Birly, the MZC take-over of forests, and the consequent inability of Santals to collect wood from the forests might be a possible cause of 'disturbances'. In April 1923, Santal tenants from Jamboni, Silda, Binpur, and Dhalbum thanas looted fish-ponds, and cut sal trees from forests.[7] These fish-ponds and forests looted were specifically those under the private control of the *zamindars* or companies like MZC.

The looting incidents of the 1920s have come to be represented in many different ways. In the colonial records, these incidents were treated as protests against the curtailment of tribal rights over land and forests. As Sivaramkrishnan (1996: 478) points out, 'the district officers, steeped in the administrative traditions of exceptionalism that had developed around the governance of the jungle mahals, were quick to identify the 'disturbances' as peculiar to the tribal peasantry and their attachment to forest rights. Part of the problem seemed to lie in these aborigines being insufficiently imbued with respect for private property.' We see that the colonial administration's explanation of the events relied not only on the breakdown of traditional structures of society, but also on the inherently rebellious nature of tribes.

Based on colonial records, historians have subsequently identified these events as linked to a subaltern consciousness, describing them as 'Adivasi politics' (Dasgupta 1985), 'subaltern militancy' (Sarkar 1984), and 'forest satyagraha' or forest civil disobedience (Majumdar 2009). Swapan Dasgputa (1985: 117, 123-127) argues that the initiative came from within the Adivasi community, and events such a *haat*-looting must be treated as arising from a 'pre-existing domain of subaltern politics'. Adivasis

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[6] Ibid.

[7] Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML), Bengal Home (Political) Papers, 1900-1925, F. 181/1-23 Con., no. 154C dated 9 May 1923, Hubert Graham DC Midnapore to Commissioner Burdwan, pp. 117-23, cited in Sivaramkrishnan 1996

fought against 'dikus' or outsiders like the colonial state, MZC, Bengali landlords, and mahajans to avenge the loss of not only their land but also their 'izzat' or honour. Santals formed a broad alliance with other subaltern classes such as low-caste Hindus, Muslims and Lodhas. Dasgupta (1985: 123) recognises that the Congress had an ambiguous role to play. In some instances, Congress leaders gave Adivasis the 'confidence' to 'confront' the MZC.[8] However, the Congress had no direct role in the incidents that took place after 1922, once the non-cooperation movement was over. This time, the Adivasis looted on not just MZC property, but also the property of *zamindars*. Thus, according to Dasgupta, ultimately it was pure subaltern 'consciousness' that propelled the incidents of loot and plunder.

Sumit Sarkar (1984: 303, 305, 307) too explains the occurrence of Santal unrest in the aftermath of the non-cooperation movement through: (1) an encroachment on traditional Santal rights to forests; and (2) the breakdown of traditional village structures. However, he adds that the 'breakdown' had been going on for a long time, and peasants were being dispossessed for decades. The specific timing of unrest could thus have something to do with the presence of the Congress and other mediating actors in the forests of Midnapore. Sarkar points to how the reason behind the unrest could be rumours: about the breakdown of all existing authority and hopes for the emergence of a Gandhi raj. He makes a case for 'relative autonomy' of the subaltern domain where subaltern and elite worlds might interact in complex ways. Sarkar's analysis, while going beyond Dasgupta's, still imagines the subaltern world as a distinct self-contained sphere, which only occasionally interacts with outside forces, and still manages to maintain relative autonomy in its political actions.

[8] After 1921, the Indian National Congress also got involved in the Jungle Mahals, and there is good evidence that the violence of 1923 was fomented by local Congress leaders and district commanders like Sarcowpati Roy. See Dasgupta 1985.

In trying to imagine an autonomous subaltern sphere and subaltern consciousness as resisting outsider authority, historians like Dasgupta and Sarkar overlook the ways in which multiple spheres of power and authority coalesced. Firstly, they completely ignore the complexity of changing intra-society relations in Jungle Mahals. Ranabir Samaddar's (1996) work on the unrest in the Jambani estate of the Jungle Mahals shows that shifting relations between *zamindars* and different classes of peasants were much more crucial to the events of unrest. The presence of the Congress might have had a limited influence at a given point, but it certainly cannot explain all instances of protest. Moreover, the Congress was much more interested in building alliances with *zamindars*, and it was not keen on leading a mass movement of Adivasis in the Bengal countryside. B.N Sasmol, who headed the local Congress committee in Midnapore was reluctant to support Santal agitation against nationalist *zamindars* (Chakrabarty 1997: 91-93). The Congress was willing to mobilise Santals only against European leaseholders of land. While the Congress lent support to peasant action against the MZC, which was a 'foreign' company, it continued to build alliances with *zamindars*. These alliances were strengthened by the 1930s, and we see zamindars lending support to the Congress-led nationalist movement in the 1940s.

Secondly, Dasgupta attributes participation in incidents of looting and plundering only to the poor dispossessed Santal, even though Mahatos, Kamars, Bagdis and other groups participated actively. Dasgupta's idealisation of the Santal as the quintessential subaltern follows from the colonial archive which mostly speaks of the incidents in terms of 'Santal unrest', 'Santal protest', 'Santals looting', and 'Santal mobilisation' (Samaddar 1998: 143) [9]. Samaddar shows us that rich Mahato peasants not only participated in, but also led most instances of looting. A section of Mahatos, who had acquired land and prospered, were now

[9] Peddie, Gurusaday, cited in Samaddar, pp. 135-137.

in competition with *zamindars*. For instance, in Jamboni, feuds developed between Mahato 'men of substance' and the *zamindar* over 'lordship over the Santhals, Mundas, and Bhumijs' (Samaddar 1998: 141-142). For Samaddar, shifts in socio-economic hierarchies was the major cause of unrest, but was not adequately acknowledged. At this stage, Santals and Mahatos shared a good relationship and participated together in the acts of plunder. From the 1930s, this relationship began to change and a both groups became divided. Thus, it is important to consider the dynamics of interaction between different communities. The interactions were constantly changing in the context of colonial statemaking, and various kinds of political movements, as I will explain later.

Thirdly, intra-*zamindar* rivalry and feuds within *zamindari* families also led to disturbances on some occasions. In the Dhalbhum and Jamboni estates acts of looting fish tanks and felling trees on zamindari property were instigated by a man called Pratap Dhal. He lost out in a succession dispute to his cousin Jagdish Dhabaldeb of Jamboni. Subsequently, Pratap Dhal and his supporters incited *raiyats* to plunder Jagdish Dhaldeb's forests and property.[10] Hence, treating these acts as merely arising from the subaltern world is problematic. Elites, whether those from the extended family of the *zamindars* or rich Mahato peasants, played an important role too. Arguments about breakdown, as Sivaramakrishnan (1996: 480) points out, can hold partially only when the connections between subaltern militancy, elite and state power are examined.

I argue that events of 'unrest' in the 1920s must be seen in relation to processes of statemaking in the Jungle Mahals, and as linked to the remaking of state-society relations. The survey and settlement operations, and the gradual undoing of the kind of paternalism that had characterised the colonial state over the past century had a clear

[10] NMML Bengal Home (Political) Papers, 1900-1925, F. 181/1-23 Con., no. 154C dated 9 May 1923, Hubert Graham DC Midnapore to Commissioner Burdwan, pp. 128-31; no. 31T dated 28 Apr 1923, DC Singhbhum
to Commr Chotanagpur, p. 141-43., cited in Sivaramkrishnan, p. 478

role to play. While it is difficult to pinpoint the exact reasons and motivations, we need to bring practices of statemaking into the equation when discussing 'unrest' in the Jungle Mahals in the 1920s. Following the Survey and Settlement operations, relations between the *zamindars*, the tenants and the colonial law and order machinery were reorganised (Samaddar 1998: 66). The patronage ties that had bound *raiyat*s to *zamindars* had broken, and the direct forms of protection that the colonial state provided no longer existed. Shifts in patronage ties had taken place gradually, but were manifested in the form of looting and plundering only when land rights and forest rights of the *raiyats* were formally taken away, in the aftermath of the colonial state's exercise of creating legible units of administration and revenue. However, the target of the attacks were never colonial state officials like revenue collectors, as had been in the 1830s. The targets were MZC officials, *zamindars* and other rich peasants. In addition to causing 'disturbances', *raiyats* who were denied access to land and forests continued to petition the colonial courts of law.

Since the colonial state was not the direct target of these attacks, the Congress, therefore, played only a small role as a mediator and agitator of Adivasi forest rights for a limited amount of time. By the 1930s, the Congress adopted an agenda that primarily served *zamindari* interests (Sivaramkrishnan 1996: 480). Moreover, the Jungle Mahals and Adivasi interests were not a long-term priority for the Congress. The events in 1921 was the first instance of Congress mobilisation in the Jungle Mahals where the leader Satcowripati Roy sent Shailjananda Sen to involve tribals in the non-cooperation movement (Chatterjee 2002: 100). While some Santals and Mahatos did join the Congress and went along with its agenda of targeting the MZC, the Congress did not consider Adivasis as long-term allies. 'Unrest' in the Jungle Mahals never really became a part of the nationalist movement or the peasants' movement in Bengal. The

region continued to be on the margins of not only colonial statemaking, but also of mainstream nationalist political activity in Bengal.

The colonial state did not want to completely alienate cultivating groups in a manner that would create conditions of insurgency. As a concession, the 1885 Bengal Tenancy Act provided occupancy rights to tenants over land that they had cultivated for more than twelve years (Sivaramakrishnan 1996: 481-482). In Chotanagpur, they went a step further. The Chotanagpur Tenancy Act (CNT) of 1909 act further formalised tenancy protection by recognising the special tenures held by Munda Adivasis, and preventing the alienation of 'tribal' lands. Unlike Chotanagpur, there was no special legislation to protect 'tribal' land alienation. Jungle Mahals underwent a process where fields and forests were separated with negative consequences for the tenants. In the aftermath of the settlement operations, rural elites negotiated with the colonial state to strengthen their control over land and forests, and petty cultivators lost out. When faced with unrest, the colonial officials in charge responded with despatching additional police forces. But, like before, the counterinsurgency measures also included non-military measures and negotiations. Peddie, the Additional District Magistrate of Midnapore, thought that it was important to consult with village *mandals* and other influential *raiyats* to determine the cause of grievances.[11] Similarly, Gurusaday Dutt, the District Magistrate of Bankura proposed 'pacifying' the agitators by vesting them with administrative authority at the village level.[12] Samaddar (1998: 143-144) concludes from Peddie and Dutt's accounts that they viewed the disturbances as arising from a violation of the peasants' customary rights, and wanted to address the situation by a mix of law and order measures as well as by curbing the powers of *zamindars*. However, in their eyes, only Santals were agitating, and hence their response was shaped by an intention to protect them. These

[11] Peddie's tour diary, cited in Samaddar 1999, 136-140
[12] Gurusaday Dutt despatches, cited in Samaddar 1999, 141-143

counterinsurgency measures curbed instances of looting, and established an insufficient order.

However, relationships between Santals and Kudmi (Mahatos) were no longer what they were in the pre-settlement period. Both groups had migrated to the western parts of Midnapore as cultivators and clearers of forests over the nineteenth century. They settled through *mandali* tenures whereby village heads (Mahatos in the case of Kudmis and Manjhis in the case of Santals) formed the link between the ordinary *raiyats* and the jungle *zamindars*. As discussed above, Mahatos and Santals participated together in unrest during the 1920s when *zamindars* and *ijradars* like the MZC wrested control of forest tracts. However, the unity between Santals and Mahatos started to break around this time. Mahatos, many of whom had become rich peasants, and others who were educated, wanted to become Vaishnavite Hindus[13] and sought to take on Kshatriya[14] status (Sinha 1962; Mahato 2000). Thus, they entered the politics of 'rank ascription' and got involved in Hindu nationalist politics, trying to distinguish themselves from the Santals (Samaddar 1998: 150).

By the 1931 census, Mahatos were disassociating from their identity as 'tribals' (Sivaramakrishnan 1996: 582). The claim to Kshatriyahood was made through their involvement in the All India Kudmi Kshatriya Mahasabha[15], and in Congress-led nationalist agitations. Some Mahatos, including women, also participated in the Congress-led nationalist movements in the 1920s and 1930s (Samaddar 1998: 151). To attain a higher ritual status within the Hindu fold, Mahatos shunned rituals that

[13] Vaishnavism is a branch of Hinduism which focusses upon the worship of Vishnu.
[14] Surajit Sinha (1962) has made argument about the link between state formation and 'rajputisation' among the Bhumijs in Barrabhum estate. Rajputs are the traditional Kshatriya or warrior castes in north-western India. Sinha shows that in central and eastern India, certain tribal groups were keen to take on that identity in order to claim a higher ritual status in the Hindu caste fold.
[15] The All India Kudmi-Kshatriya Mahasabha was formed in 1894. In nineteen conferences between 1894 and 1931, Kudmi-Mahatos of Chotanagpur and Bihar identified themselves with the Kurmis in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. They even claimed to be descendants of the Maratha warrior, Chhatrapati Shivaji.

involved dancing, and imposed veils for women. Women therefore became markers of a higher status. Claims to a higher status by Mahato groups, separated them from the Santals to some extent. In some instances, even Santal elites were seeking to attain a higher ritual status by giving up 'dirty' habits like alcohol consumption, keeping of pigs and fowl, and changing clothing practices (Samaddar 1998: 161, T. Sarkar 1985: 154). Santals had also taken more willingly to Christianity, and gained access to missionary educational institutions. However, in the 1940s, Santals became involved in the agitations for a pan-Indian demand for a separate Adivasi state, which premised on the return to a 'tribal' identity. There was a conscious attempt to shun any Hindu rituals and practices. Mahatos and Santals, therefore, were asserting different kinds of identities.

In sum, two kinds of transformations were simultaneously taking place in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Jungle Mahals. One, the reordering of communities and their relationships with each other within village society; and two, the renegotiation of state-society relations. Statemaking processes in early twentieth century affected the social and economic structure of life in the jungle *zamindaris*. Mahato, Santal and Bhumij *raiyats*, who were tied through relations of patronage to the rajas or *zamindars*. The changing relations upset the *raiyats* and they participated in acts of plunder and unrest. These groups also had to renegotiate relations with the colonial state, which was no longer the paternalistic patron as it was in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, despite the presence of some officers and missionaries who sought to protect the forest rights of the so-called indigenous communities. Statemaking practices also led to a reinvention of community identities, and relations between different communities. As Santals took to Christanity and also asserted their tribal identity more forcefully, and prosperous Mahatos claimed Hindu Kshatriya status, the

gulf between the two communities widened. Both communities related to the colonial state machinery in different ways. Relationships between communities were thus shaped by the shifting relationships between the state and society. These relations were further altered in the postcolonial period, as I discuss in the next section.

3. The Postcolonial Developmental State and Left Front Government, 1947-2008

'Democracy' and 'development' came to define nation-building and state-building since 1950 (Sivaramakrishnan 1998: 1). Agrarian social change in the forest villages of Midnapore from 1947 onwards needs to be studied in the context of the wider political changes occurring in India and the state of West Bengal. However, it is important to remember that this region of south-west Bengal, like other tribal-dominated parts of India, was on the margins of the postcolonial development state. This produced a specific kind of 'regional culture' intertwined with the experience of 'regional underdevelopment' in late twentieth-century Jungle Mahals (Sivaramakrishnan 1996: 534). The variety of actors: Adivasi and non-Adivasi, new migrants and those already residing in the regions, landless poor and middle peasantry, had different kinds of experiences in the context of state-led development and the reordering of rural society that from the colonial state's policies. Some of the changes I discuss here are the rise of Jharkhand politics that asserted a pan-Adivasi identity, state takeover of forests, groups like Mahatos moving between declarations of higher ritual status and claims to being Adivasi, and the decline of traditional elites and the rise of new groups in tandem with the Left Front's land reforms and development policies. In charting out the course of these transformations, I take seriously, the caveat expressed by Sivaramakrishnan (1996: 534) that 'agrarian change in these jungly parts of Midnapore, however, defies neat categorisation in terms of a linear movement along a tribe-caste continuum of sanskritisation'. Hence, change cannot be mapped only in terms of so-called

tribes trying to become ‘castes’ in the Hindu hierarchy. He further suggests that it would be too simplistic to portray tribes as losing out to outsiders. Instead, we need to study the complexities of the changing interactions between different groups along with processes of statemaking that engender these changes.

This section will first discuss postcolonial statemaking in the state of West Bengal, zooming in on the Left Front regime, and the debates surrounding the success and failure of their controversial land reforms agenda. Within that broader context, I will go on to look at the changes in state-society relations and reordering of socio-economic relations that took place in the Jungle Mahals of Midnapore from 1947 to 2008. I mainly focus on the ways in which statemaking and rural agrarian society interacted with each other during this phase, and how the different social groups constructed their identities and political practices in this context.

3.1 Land Reforms, Panchayats and Rural Development

In 1946-47, the Communist Party of India (CPI) formed Kisan Sabhas (peasant committees) across rural Bengal to lead sharecropping peasants into revolt against their sharecroppers or *jotedars*. *Jotedars* were rich farmers who held lands on lease from zamindars and cultivated them through the labour of sharecroppers known as *bhagchasees* or *bargardars*. The sharecroppers, in return for cultivating the land, had to provide two-thirds of the produce to the *jotedar*. The major demand of the Tebhaga agitation was to reduce this share to one-thirds of the produce. Additionally, the movement also represented a challenge to the growing power of the *jotedars* in the agrarian structures of the villages. The rise of *jotedars* or rich peasants is considered by many as a reason for the decline of the *zamindars* in twentieth century Bengal (Ray and

Ray 2008, Panda 1997).[16] The Tebhaga movement targeted *jotedars* along with *zamindars* as exploiters of the poor peasantry. The jungle *zamindaris* of western Midnapore, however, did not have a Tebhaga movement. The agrarian dynamics there were quite different. *Mandali* settlements did not work like the *jotedari* system. Additionally, as explained in the preceding section, the jungle *zamindars* grew more powerful in the aftermath of the settlement operations and as the authority of the *mandals* in village life declined. The CPI, therefore, did not make any inroads into these forest estates at this point and the call for Tebhaga did not result in any political action there.

In many other parts of rural West Bengal, the Kisan Sabhas played a pivotal role in the second Tebhaga uprising in 1948-49 (Bandyopadhyay 2006). After a brief period where the CPI had co-operated with the Congress during the partition in 1947, there was a realisation within the party that their support to the Congress was impeding the revolution and the hopes for setting up a 'progressive people's government'.[17] While the West Bengal state government banned the CPI and conducted witch hunts against CPI members in Calcutta, the Kisan Sabhas attempted to revive the Tebhaga movement in the countryside (Ibid: 9). Middle class left intellectuals saw this as an opportunity to de-class and lead a violent agrarian revolution among the peasants by educating and mobilising them (Ibid: 5, Dasgupta 2005, 2003). The upsurge this time focussed on issues beyond the share of produce given to *jotedars*. The demands were now much broader and violent agitations were led to seek the abolition of zamindari and grant land to the tiller (Bandyopadhyay 2006: 9). The new demands during second Tebhaga widened the scope of the movement both area-wise as well as in terms of participation.

[16] Sugata Bose critiques the Jotedar thesis. See *Agrarian Bengal: Economy, Social Structure and Politics*, 1986.
[17] WBSA, 'Draft Annual Administrative Report 1948 – Section VII', IB Records, S.No. 205/1928, F.No.32/28 (1949).

Agitations spread to several districts in West Bengal. In Bankura, the CPI actively mobilised Santals, lower-caste peasants, and women.[18] However, by 1951-52, the CPI became a parliamentary party. Giving up on its violent role, the party, with leaders like Jyoti Basu and Muzaffar Alam at the helm, sought to become a viable alternative to the Congress-led state government in West Bengal. The party's election manifesto focussed on abolition of *zamindari* and redistribution of land, full employment, living wages and social security for the workers on the other (Bandyopadhyay 2006: 15).

The first postcolonial Indian government at the Centre led by the Congress rhetorically emphasised the abolition of *zamindari* and placing land ceilings.[19] The Indian constitution that came into force in 1950 gave State governments the power to implement land and tenancy reforms. This worked well for the Congress government in New Delhi, which did not have to take a strong leadership role in seeing that land reforms are actually implemented. The Congress governments at the central and state levels adopted only a 'half-hearted confrontational' attitude towards the *zamindars* (Kohli 1987: 71). Land reforms in India can be broadly classified into four types: (1) tenancy reforms, which include attempts to register tenants, as well as to transfer ownership to tenants; (2) attempts to abolish intermediaries, who collected rent from tenants on behalf on the *zamindars* during the colonial period; (3) implementation of ceilings on land ownership and redistribution of landholdings in excess of ceilings to the landless; (4) merging of disparate landholdings (Besley and Burgess 2000: 392). Since land is a 'state subject', legislations in all these four areas were framed by state governments and the implementation was left to the local level bureaucracy. These

[18] WBSA, IB Records, S. No.171/26, F.No.35/26 Short note on communist activities and outrages in the district of Bankura', IB Records, (Bankura), K.W..
[19] Land ceilings place a specified upper limit on ownership.

legislations had several loopholes which made it possible for *zamindars* and other large land owners to get away easily.

By the late 1960s, the Congress gave up even the half-hearted support it had for land reforms and openly advocated agricultural capitalism (Kohli 1987: 72). The Congress under Indira Gandhi spearheaded the Green Revolution, which emphasised mechanisation of agricultural production. This switch benefitted farmers who owned substantial plots of land. A new class of rich middle farmers or 'bullock capitalists' (Rudolph and Rudolph 1987) emerged and the land reform agenda was largely forgotten. Congress's Green Revolution was supplemented with the populist campaign of poverty removal, 'Garibi Hatao'. The forest villages of western Midnapore were left out of the Green Revolution and became regions of underdevelopment (Sivaramakrishnan 1996: 535).

In West Bengal, the Congress-led state government passed two legislations related to land reforms: West Bengal Estates Acquisition Act in 1953, followed by the Land Reforms Act, 1955. However, despite legislations, there was no widespread redistribution of land to poor farmers. Landlords found ways to get around these laws and no real redistribution of land to poor peasants took place. Moreover, the Congress was reluctant to go against the interests of *zamindars*, who formed an important support group for them. In 1967, the Congress was ousted out of power and a coalition called the United Front came to power. The CPI and its breakaway party were part of this coalition. In 1964, the CPI had split on questions of ideology and a new breakaway party called the Communist Party of India (Marxist), popularly referred to as the CPM, was created. Ruling between 1967 and 1971, the United Front government placed land reforms high on its agenda and took possession of 4,50,000 acres of land that was considered as illegal holdings by landlords. A law passed in 1971 outlined measures to

transfer the lands in excess of the ceilings held by the government to the *bargardars*, raised the sharecropper's share in the produce, and made sharecropping hereditary.

The late 1960s and early 1970s were also a time when rural West Bengal was gripped by the Naxalite movement. Radical sections of the CPM who were against the party's participation in parliamentary elections broke away to lead landless peasants into a violent revolution.[20] Starting from Naxalbari in North Bengal and then spreading to other districts, the Naxalite movement launched an assault on landlords and *jotedars*. The movement was active in parts of Midnapore district too, and the forests of the Jungle Mahals became a place of hiding for the guerrillas. Santals participated in large numbers and engaged in violent action against *zamindars* (Duyker 1987). The Congress state government, which succeeded the United Front, repressed the movement through police action and the use of central paramilitary forces. The aftermath of Naxalism in West Bengal and general disaffection with the Congress after the emergency of 1975-77 brought about another change in government. In the 1977 state election, the Left Front (LF), a coalition of several leftist parties, with CPM as the leading party, was voted into office.

Immediately after coming to power, the LF government sought to accelerate the implementation of land reforms. Only a very small fraction of the lands that had been confiscated before were actually redistributed. The LF started a campaign to take over lands hoarded by *zamindars* and rich peasants, and transfer them to tenants. Administrators at the state, district, and village levels were given the task of locating excess land and redistributing it to the rightful owners, 'the tenant cultivators'. The LF basically implemented already existing land reform legislations with some modifications. Legislative measures had existed on paper but had not been

[20] For more on the Naxalite movement, see Sumanta Banerjee, 1980 and Rabindra Ray, 1988.

operationalised. According to Atul Kohli (1987: 99-100), the LF brought in the 'political will' to implement land reforms. It also launched a drive called Operation Barga to record the rights of bargardars or sharecroppers. Under this operation, 1.2 million sharecroppers were registered by 1982.

In a document commemorating 30 years of LF rule, the CPM claims that 'West Bengal today has the most egalitarian land ownership pattern in the entire country' (CPI(M) 2007). The document lists three initiatives taken as land reforms: '(i) effective imposition of land ceiling and vesting of ceiling surplus land (ii) redistribution of vested land among the landless cultivators and (iii) securing of tenancy rights of sharecroppers (*bargadars*) through a system of universal registration of tenant cultivators (Operation Barga).' They also quote figures to show how West Bengal is way ahead of India in this regard. For instance, it is stated that 84 percent of the agricultural land is now owned by small and marginal farmers[21], as compared to the all-India figure of 43 percent. The CPM also claimed that more than 50 percent of the beneficiaries of land redistribution were Dalits and Adivasis. The CPM painted a picture whereby land reforms changed rural agrarian society to make it more equal.

Along with land reforms, the LF also revitalised village-level institutions of self-government, the panchayats. In 1978, panchayat elections took place in west Bengal after a gap of fifteen years, and were held regularly every five years since then. The panchayat system is divided into three tiers: zilla parishad at the district level headed by the *sabhapati* (chaiperson); panchayat samiti at the block level headed by the Block Development Officer (BDO); and gram panchayat (GP) headed by *pradhans* and *up-pradhans*. For the CPM-led LF, the strengthening of the panchayat system was crucial

[21] Small farmers are those who own plots of land between 2.5 and 5 acres. Marginal farmers are the ones who own less than 2.5 acres of land.

to the implementation of land reforms. The panchayats were elected periodically and these elections became fierce political contests. For the CPM, it was essential to have its members take control of the panchayat institutions in order for land reforms to be operationalised without a complete reliance on the local bureaucracy. Studies have shown the great level of involvement of party officials in the day to day work of panchayat bodies, from holding meetings with *pradhans* to overseeing development projects (Kohli 1987: 114; Echeverri-Ghent 1993: 152).

Panchayats became important support institutions for the implementation of central-government funded rural development programs from the 1980s onwards. The Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP)[22], a central government programme to address poverty through self-help and self-employment, was routed through panchayats in West Bengal. The CPM and the panchayats played an enthusiastic role in setting up self-help groups under this programme, particularly for women. Similarly, the CPM played a supervisory role in the National Rural Employment Programme (NREP), and Food for Work Programme (FWP). Funds were allotted to the panchayats, who had to make plans for spending that amount. The LF also viewed the panchayats as means to enhance the power and visibility of women, SCs and STs at the village level by instituting reservations for member positions as well as *sabhapati* and *pradhan* positions.

Land reforms, panchayats, and rural development became the major rallying points for the LF to sustain its legitimacy as a pro-poor government and continue to be in power for an uninterrupted stretch of thirty-four years. While the 1970s in the rest of India were characterised by the failure of land reforms and the increasing gap between

[22] The Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) began in 1978. It stressed self-employment for agricultural labourers and small farmers. In studies conducted by the Government of India in the 1980s, the IRDP was deemed a failure as it could not benefit the poorest of the poor. It was replaced by the Swarnajayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojana (Golden Jubilee Rural Self-Employment Scheme) in 1999.

the rich and poor in the countryside, West Bengal under the LF was an exception to this scenario. The CPM after it came to power in 1977 shifted from a 'revolutionary to a reformist orientation' and took on a 'democratic-socialist tilt' (Kohli 1987: 98-100). This reformist stance was partly the party's choice, and partly a result of external forces such as the State government's relaations with the government at the centre (Basu 1992: 28). The 'reformist' LF complemented the developmental bureaucracy with its own party apparatus at the local levels to supervise and implement land reforms as well as rural development initiatives (Samaddar 2013; Bhattacharya 2009; 1993). The party became omnipresent in social, economic, and political life of villages. While the steps they took won them popular support to the extent of winning elections at the state and panchayat levels, the success or failure of LF's land reforms and poverty alleviation efforts is a topic of much political and academic debate.

Scholarship on the success or failure of the LF-led reforms in West Bengal has taken different directions. One set of scholars have posited that the LF's land reforms have been a considerable success, and had a positive impact on rural poverty alleviation. In Atul Kohli's (1987) view, West Bengal represents a success story of redistributive reforms relative to other states in India. He credits the 'CPM regime' for this success despite its several shortcomings and failures. Kohli's framework is built around the CPM's utilisation of its 'political organisation' to improve the living conditions of the rural poor (ibid: 117). He studied the implementation of three major programmes: tenancy reforms, credit programmes for small farmers and sharecroppers, and employment and wage schemes for landless labourers. Kohli (ibid: 143; Kohli 1983: 805) argues that the success of West Bengal's attack on rural poverty is due to four factors: (1) a strong and unified leadership; (2) disciplined organisational arrangements of the CPM; (3) co-existence of centralised and decentralised decision-

making; and (4) flexible ideology of reform which is reconciled to the constraints of a 'democratic-capitalist' framework. In this way, he builds a theory of regime types, where a left-of-centre government, with a strong leadership can address rural poverty better than others.

G.K Lieten (1996a; 1996b; 1992) suggests that the land reforms have significantly benefitted small peasants and landless agricultural labourers. He posits that land reforms halted the process of de-peasantisation. Based on government statistics, he shows that not only did tenurial security increase (hence no depeasantisation), there was also a process of re-peasantisation from 1981-1991 whereby land was transferred to landless agricultural labourers (Lieten 1996a). Lieten crafts his argument based on his study of two districts in West Bengal, Bardhhaman (Burdwan) and Midnapore. He believes that reforms significantly modified relations of production, and the revival of panchayats helped the reconstitution of existing political structures which assisted the poor in accessing welfare benefits (Lieten 1996b: 220). Using National Sample Survey data, Lieten points to the reduction of the population below the poverty line, from 52.5 per cent in 1978 to 27.6 per cent in 1988 (1996a: 117). Additionally, reforms boosted West Bengal's agrarian economy. Lieten (1996a: 116) shows that during the 1980s, food grain production in West Bengal increased at an annual rate of growth of around 6.5 per cent compared to the national average growth rate of 2.7 per cent. John Harriss (1993) counters Lieten's explanation behind the increase in agricultural productivity. In his view, the growth cannot be attributed to the LF's land reform programme, but should be seen as a consequence of price incentives and improved irrigation technology. While Harriss agrees with Lieten and Kohli about the positive impact of political changes, he does not see them as causally linked to the improved agrarian situation in West Bengal.

As opposed to these sanguine viewpoints, Ross Mallick (1993) presents a sharp critique of the CPM and its reforms agenda. He argues that that the LF only built upon measures initiated by previous governments, and the legislative framework for these reforms was already in place. The beneficiaries of LF rule were basically the 'rural landed middle classes, lower-level government employees and the capitalist class' (ibid: 5). Small and landless tenants did not gain, and only tenants with substantial holdings benefitted. Mallick also points to how 'a lot of legitimate sharecroppers were not recorded and Left Front supporters were recorded in their place' (ibid: 55). The LF built its major support base among middle and rich peasants and sharecroppers, something which the CPM itself admitted to (ibid: 41; 117). Poorer sharecroppers, who owned little or no land and were more dependent upon landlords, were reluctant to register as bargardars for the fear of eviction and being unable to borrow money during times of need (ibid: 53). Organisations responsible for implementing land reforms and development programmes such as Kisan Sabhas and panchayats were controlled by the middle peasantry (ibid: 59). Furthermore, the poor could only access IRDP welfare through panchayats, which were heavily dominated by the CPM, and party membership was thus a necessary requisite to access welfare benefits (Ibid: 95). Panchayats were primarily dominated by the emerging elite that is the middle strata of village society, whose interests did not coincide with the poor and landless peasantry (Echeverri-Gent 1993; Mallick 1993: 142).

The question which then arises is: how did the CPM manage to stay in power for over three decades? One answer to this puzzle lies in the 'politics of middleness' whereby the LF government was able to build support among a broad class alliance among different interest groups (Bhattacharya 1999: 281, 292). Through 'complex manoeuvres, calculated shifts and poignant rhetoric', the LF government even as it claimed to help the dispossessed, it brought together different groups, from agricultural labourers to middle peasants. The LF's long term

electoral standing is also linked to its rural popularity mediated through decentralised panchayats (Bhattacharya 2011: 227; Mallick 1993: 149). The CPM built its rural networks of patronage with different groups through panchayats. Apart from breaking the dominance of *zamindars* and offering security to sharecroppers by registering them, the CPM strengthened the local panchayat system to reduce the sharecroppers' reliance on the local elite and the lower bureaucracy. Panchayats, along with Kisan Sabhas became the rallying point for CPM dominance in rural West Bengal. Panchayat elections were fiercely competitive because the CPM's authority and patronage structures were routed through these institutions of local governance (Echeverri-Gent 1993: 159).

In addition to the CPM's encouragement to panchayats, the party's support was also built upon its willingness to get involved in everyday village life. Mukulika Banerjee (2010) speaks of the role of the 'Comrade', the local party worker in every village who sustained the political, social and welfare activities of the CPM. S/he was the 'crucial go-between' who linked the party and voters (ibid: 30). The LF's continued success at elections, she argues, could be attributed to the efforts of its 'Comrades' all across West Bengal, who played a 'mediatory role' between elected representatives and voters in rural society (ibid: 22-23). The party also played a crucial role in schools, sports and religious organisations, and even the family. For instance, school teachers in most village schools were CPM members or sympathisers, and many of them became *pradhans* of gram panchayats. These institutions together formed, what Dwaipayan Bhattacharya (2011; 2010; 2009) calls the 'party society' where the CPM as a party mediated between the government and local village society. To build the concept of 'party society', Bhattacharya draws on and extends Partha Chatterjee's (2004, 2011) well-known idea of 'political society'. Chatterjee constructs the political society in opposition to civil society. According to him, civil society, in most of the postcolonial world, perpetuates an elitist regime of rights, where the poor and marginalised are excluded.

Political society comprises of these excluded groups, who make claims on the state and civil society. They form empirical associations or communities to mediate with the government, and to seek the support of civil society (Chatterjee 2011: 15). They express their claims in moral terms, where governments are held under 'generally recognised obligations' to respond. Political parties need to fulfil these claims and negotiate with political society to be able to seek their support. The CPM in West Bengal, due its well-defined organisational set-up, was able to play this part of negotiating with the political society on an everyday basis, and hence sustain electoral victories. In Bhattacharya's (2011: 230; 2010: 52-53) view, the political society argument holds for claim-making by the marginalised in urban and peri-urban West Bengal, but does not help in understanding social transformations in rural West Bengal.

Bhattacharya, therefore, introduces 'party society' as a concept to analyse everyday politics in rural West Bengal, where the social, political, cultural and even familial landscape is dominated by political parties. Although there are many parties in competition with each other, the rural landscape does not have civil society organisations as in the urban. Hence, the politics of claim-making by the poor and marginalised takes on different forms. It is in this context that we need to understand the CPM's entrenchment in all aspects of rural life. The concept of party society is particularly useful in understanding the LF rule as a distinct political phase in rural West Bengal. The roots of party society lay in the mobilisation by left leaders who came to the village from the outside to organise peasant movements (Bhattacharya 2011: 232-234). Once the CPM built a mass base, it became an important force in the village. The party's machinery took on a central role in the social and political life of villages, overshadowing roles played by religious and caste organisations, social welfare and sports organisations, and the rural propertied class. In this context, when we conceptualise the state, we need to see the party as an important component of the state. The linkage between

the dominant party, and other actors who represent the state (such as the bureaucracy, government and elected representatives) needs to be specially highlighted.

The party and the state were closely linked to each other. The CPM built networks of patronage where the party took on the role of the rural poor's patron and helped them access government institutions and resources. Arild Ruud (2014: 210) describes it as the 'party-state' where welfare programmes could not be implemented without the CPM's role. While poor peasants and labourers did not necessarily gain ownership of land from land reforms which profited middle peasants much more, what they gained was access to institutions like the panchayats in the party society set up. This access was critical in their continued support for the CPM in election after election. One explanation for this is that the conservative nature of land reforms made the poorest of the poor more vulnerable and more dependent on the party which was seemingly more pro-poor in comparison to the Congress (Herring 1997: 683). For sharecroppers who had gained from Operation Barga, it was in their interest to keep the CPM in power in order to retain their tenure security. Even when land reforms did not benefit poor peasants economically, the CPM opened up arenas for political participation for them (Ruud 1994: 374). Although the middle peasants took on leadership positions in the party society, the poor built alliances of patronage with these leaders and the party. These were relationships built upon reciprocity, and party leaders who became patrons had to fulfil their role-obligations towards the poor peasants. The CPM's political authority was dependent upon these ties of dependence and reciprocity (Ruud 1994: 359, 379). Hitherto marginalised groups like women, Scheduled Castes (SCs), and Scheduled Tribes (STs) could have a greater say in the village public sphere (Ruud 1994; Dasgupta 2009; Bhattacharya 2011).

The CPM's power in the village and its electoral success was thus linked to the building of a broad based coalition of middle and rich peasant groups as well as the poor and

marginalised. The party's capacity to allow changes at the local level helped it serve incompatible interests and the CPM machinery was entrenched in most aspects of village life in rural West Bengal (Dasgupta 2009). Despite the LF's not-so exceptional record in terms of development indicators, the CPM was able to open up a field of 'political transactions' for most villagers to negotiate matters of local interest and that was the major reason for its popularity (Chatterjee 1997: 160-161).

Over time, however, a combination of factors caused the CPM to loosen its grip over the varied interest groups in the West Bengal countryside.[23] Once the CPM became comfortable with being frequently re-elected to the panchayat and state legislative assembly, it slackened its efforts towards land reforms (Mookherjee and Bardhan 2003: 32). The dominance of middle peasantry and landowning elite in the panchayats stalled radical reform. Panchayats became fiefdoms of the emerging elites, lost their radical edge, and became the bureaucratic arm of the LF government (Bhattacharya 1994). Only those who had links with the party were able to gain from the rural development programmes, and this encouraged clientelism (Chatterjee 2009: 44). It has often been argued that CPM's organisational interests started to displace its commitment to reforms (Mallick 1993; Dasgupta 1984).

This displacement was also a result of the general push towards liberalisation in the rest of India, where State governments had to play an active role in attracting private and foreign investment to the state. Since the mid-1990s, the LF gradually began to liberalise its land policy and actively sought private investment. The LF at this time mooted the loosening of some provisions of the West Bengal Land Reforms Act, 1955. These were provisions which required the land above ceiling to be vested with the state (Sud 2014). The politburo of

[23] The only other state apart from West Bengal where a communist government has held power was Kerala, and Kerala is considered to have a better track record at land reforms and in terms of other development indicators in comparison. Manali Desai (2001) identifies the varied histories of left party formation as the reason and argues that the communist party in Kerala was more a 'grassroots'-based party in comparison to the one in West Bengal, which was dominated by the *bhadralok,* which is formed mostly of Hindu middle and upper-classes.

the CPM rejected these changes as anti-farmer and the Act was not altered. However, the government did take on a 'business-friendly' role and since 1994, acquired land in various parts of the State for investment purposes (ibid). The LF inherited negative growth rate and a stagnant economy in 1977, and hence had to contain much of worker militancy in the West Bengal in order to encourage investment and industrial growth (Basu 1993). In the aftermath of economic liberalisation in 1991, the onus of attracting investment came to rest on individual states. In this context, the LF took on a pro-business stance without completely altering the land reform provisions (Sud 2014). However, from 2006 onwards, this stance of acquiring land for private firms and businesses led to resistance movements against the CPM-led LF. These protests, as I discuss in chapter 3, not only broke down the ties of party society that the CPM had cultivated over the years, but also cost the LF electorally.

3.2 The Communist State and Village Society in the Jungle Mahals

Only about 6.7 per cent of the land under cultivation in the forest villages of the Jungle Mahals was under sharecropping arrangements. The CPI therefore hardly ventured into these areas during the Tebhaga agitations of 1946-1948, which focussed mainly on the sharecroppers getting a greater share in the produce. While the movement was very strong in the eastern parts of Midnapore such as Tamluk, Chandrakona and Garbeta, it did not spread to western Midnapore. Adivasis, who make up a substantial part of the population in the areas to the west of Midnapore town, were not an important constituency for the CPI at that point, and Tebhaga was not a major mode of activism in the forests. The CPI did mobilise Santal Adivasis in other parts of Bengal (Panjabi 2010; Bandyopadhyay 2006), but the call for Tebhaga did not make much sense in the agrarian structures that existed in the Jungle Mahals of western Midnapore.

One major way in which postcolonial nationalism came to define state-society relations in the Jungle Mahals was through the state takeover of *zamindari* forests. After the 1920s, a clear demarcation of forests and fields had resulted in jungle *zamindars* gaining full control and becoming managers of the forests (Sivaramakrishnan 1999b: 79-83). As part of a nationwide effort to take over private forests and centralise control over forest resources, the Indian state sought to acquire forests of the Jungle Mahals of Midnapore. The land reform legislations of the 1950s also aided in this process. However, *zamindars* resisted this transfer and land takeover was not complete even into the 1970s (Sivaramakrishnan 1999b: 89). In 1974, the Forest Department introduced Joint Forest Management (JFM) which was based on a logic of participation by forest communities to protect forests.[24] JFM became a manifestation of 'development discourse' in the otherwise underdeveloped regions of forest Bengal in the 1980s and 1990s (Sivaramkrishnan 1996). Attempts by the forest department to take over *zamindari* forests in the Jungle Mahals went along with 'agricultural expansion fostered by land reforms to squeeze poor and marginal farmers off waste lands which became vested revenue lands subject to distribution, or forest lands targeted for protection and plantation' (Sivaramakrishnan 1999b: 89). The Mahato middle peasantry became dominant as holders of revenue lands, and groups like landless Adivasi Lodhas who completely depended on these forests and waste lands lost out.

Alongside these changes related to forestry, 'Adivasi' became a political identity. In the 1940s, Santals of the Jungle Mahals became a part of a larger all-India demand for a separate Adivasi state of Jharkhand. Santals in western Midnapore rallied behind this pan-India movement. The Santals of the Jhargram estate, for instance, petitioned the divisional commissioner of Midnapore in late 1947 for a separate province of Jharkhand. [25] Santals in

[24] For details on how the JFM programme unfolded in Midnapore district, see K. Sivaramakrishnan 1999b, 1996.
[25] WBSA IB S.no 19, F. no 32/28, West Bengal Police Abstracts (WBPA) Midnapore, 20 December 1947

Binpur, who were led by a certain Bhuban Murmu conducted meetings to express their support for Jaipal Singh[26], the leader of the Jharkhand movement. They submitted a 'memorandum to the authorities threatening direct action' if the state of Jharkhand comprising the Chotanagpur region and the Jungle Mahals was not formed within two months.[27] Santal leaders also linked the demand for a separate state to a politics of distancing themselves from Hinduism. Santals had enthusiastically taken to Christianity, which played a major role in a strong assertion of their Adivasi identity (Singh 1983; Orans 1959).[28] The movement was coordinated by the Jaipal Singh-led Adivasi Mahasabha that had centres in Bihar, Orissa, and West Bengal. The West Bengal centre was located in the village of Bhimpur, in western Midnapore, and was an important centre of American Baptist missionaries since the nineteenth century.[29] Christian and non-Christian Santals both participated in this politics in western Midnapore. Adivasi Mahasabha candidates fought elections but did not make any electoral gains (Bhowmick 1982: 56-58). In 1957, the state unit of the Jharkhand Party was set up.

The Jharkhand movement witnessed a revival in the late 1960s, when the membership of the West Bengal Jharkhand Party[30] increased to 60,000 and included Santals, Mahatos, and even non-Adivasis (Bhowmick 1982: 57). At this time, the movement also drew some Kudmi Mahatos, and brought together Santals and Mahatos. Unity between the two communities

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[26] Jaipal Singh was a Munda Adivasi who was educated at Oxford, and became the leader for the demand for a separate state for Adivasis within India.

[27] WBSA IB S.no 19, F. no 32/28, WBPA 'Secret', Midnapore, 4 October 1947.

[28] WBSA IB F. no. 32/28, Annual Administration Report 1948, F.no. 32/28: The Report states that agitations among Santals and other 'aboriginals' in Midnapore, Bankura and other districts for an 'Adibasisthan' (Adivasi homeland) were 'believed to be instigated by the Christian missionaries'.

[29] Bhimpur is located on the road between Midnapur town and the Binpur-1 block headquarters at Lalgarh. The earliest school for Santals was set up there by American Baptist missionaries in the late 19th century. In 1947/8, the State government, concerned with the rise of Jharkhand politics, sought to crackdown on missionary activities there. The authorities feared that that a certain American missionary, August A. Berg, who was working amongst Santals and Mahatos and also controlled the Board of Education could further incite Adivasis into pressing demands for a separate Adivasi state (WBSA IB, 'Aboriginal Movements', F. no. 35/36 Part IX, S.no 44, no. 58-48).
After being the centre of Jharkhand politics in Western Midnapore for years, Bhimpur is also the centre of the Mahato movement for seeking Scheduled Tribe (ST) status today.

[30] Jharkhand Party was founded in 1949. It was started as Adivasi Mahasabha in 1938 by Jaipal Singh.

began with their participation in the 1942 Satyagraha movement under the Congress, and now they came together in the form of demands for an Adivasi province within India (Samaddar 1999: 151). Under the umbrella for Jharkhand politics, leaders from both groups built a shared socio-cultural identity for the Santals and Mahatos, using rites, rituals, and songs to build a shared politics of culture (ibid: 239-242). Along with Jharkhand politics, there were movements for tribal cultural revivalism which focussed on practices like worshipping the sacred grove that united Santals, Mahatos, and Bhumijs (Sivaramakrishnan 1996: 595).

Mahato involvement in the Jharkhand cause represented a shift from their claims to Kshatriyahood. Mahatos were split between two factions: those who claimed Kshtariya status and those who identified as Adivasis. In the 1970s, the Mahato faction that identified itself as *mulnivasi* or indigenous became more dominant (Sivaramakrishnan 1996: 582-583). The claim to Kshatriyahood, which was pushed forth by elite Mahatos did not always have takers, as not all Mahatos took to their exhortation to adopt markers of higher ritual status such as wearing sacred thread or giving up the eating of fowl (Das Gupta 1962). Mahatos, even when they owned substantial land, identified themselves as 'agriculturalists' and were unwilling to give up working on their farms. This did not tie very well with the demands for Kshatriyahood, as only Shudras (lower-castes) are supposed to touch the plough. Additionally, by the 1970s, there emerged a generational divide whereby the the Mahato youth were more drawn towards supporting claims of being *mulnivasi* (indigenous) or Adivasi, and used Jharkhand politics as a means to assert these claims (Mahato 2000: 185-186). Over time, Mahatos have centred this politics of claims to indigenity on attaining Scheduled Tribe (ST) status, as they have seen Santals and other tribal groups gain from reservations for STs in government employment and education. It is important to note how both kinds of claims, whether of a higher ritual status (Sinha 1962) or of being Adivasi

(Chandra 2013a) are asserted in relation to statemaking practices, both colonial and postcolonial.

This politics of identity coincided with the on-going agrarian transitions at this time. With LF's land reforms, the power and authority of the jungle *zamindars* declined. Not only did they lose much of their landholdings, but were no longer the centre of power and authority in the villages. For instance, in Lalgarh estate, part of Binpur-1 block, the Sahas Ray family of the *raja/zamindar* became politically irrelevant. They had rallied behind the Congress party, and some family members had also been active Congress members. The CPM-led reforms, weakening of the Congress, and the rise of Jharkhand politics caused a re-aligment of social hierarchies in the forest regions of Midnapore district. As peasants who owned land, Mahatos gained from the LF-led land reforms and became the dominant middle peasant group. They took control of the best wet-rice fields. Mahatos were also able to corner important positions in the panchayats, and improve their financial situation to invest in their children's education. Landless and poor Santals did not benefit. This is not to say that there were no poor landless Mahatos, or that there were no land-owning Santals. The worst-off were groups like the Lodhas, who not only were marginalised from state-led development, but also by Santals and Mahatos. Lodhas are landless scheduled tribes at the bottom of the economic and socio-cultural hierarchy, and lived historically in the forested peripheries of settled *zamindari* estates. Over time, Mahatos gained political patronage and development benefits in the CPM's 'party society', and Santals benefitted from reservations.

The support of Santals and Mahato groups for Jharkhand politics waned, and the movement itself was now characterised by feuds and infighting. In 1973, the West Bengal JKP split into three factions as disputes arose over the issue of language: dispute between

Christian and non-Christian Santals over using Ol-chiki[31] or roman script for the Santali language; Mahatos demanding the recognition of their language, Kudmali; and the exclusion of other Adivasi groups like Mundas and Lodhas. Jharkhand Parties also lost popular support as they increasingly became dominated by traditional elites of the Santals and Mahatos. By 1978, the movement was declining in West Bengal, but picking up pace in Bihar after the formation of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM)[32] there (Panchabhai 1982: 45-47). One major reason for the decline of this politics in West Bengal was that CPM was seen as the pro-poor party that was helping Adivasis through symbolic moves like recognising Santali as an official language, institutionalising reservations for them in panchayat bodies, initiating welfare programmes like food for work, and building schools (Bhowmick 1982: 64). The CPM was also a party which was more open to groups aspiring to higher class status in village society (Ruud 1994: 377-378).

The CPM's popularity was built as much on the aspirations of middle peasant groups like Mahatos, as on institutions of decentralisation. But when the CPM party organisation became increasingly centralised and dominated by a handful of party cadres, people in the Jungle Mahals gradually looked to other parties to represent in the panchayat bodies. In this context, Jharkhand factions became important once again in forest Midnapore in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Sivaramakrishnan 1996; Echeverri-Gent 1993). Jharkhand parties contested and won elections at the local panchayat level in parts of western Midnapore, while the CPM mostly retained control of the Member of Parliament (MP) and Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) seats. For instance, the panchayat samiti at Binpur-1 block, where I did my fieldwork, the JKP exercised control over the panchayat posts over the 1990s and 2000s. CPM's hold over local institutions of government, therefore, weakened to some

[31] Ol-chiki is a script for the Santali language. It was invented by Raghunath Murmu in early twentieth century. Before this, missionaries developed a system of writing Santali in the Latin script.
[32] Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (Jharkhand Liberation Front) is a political party formed by Shibu Soren in 1972, to fight for a separate state of Jharkhand. The state was created in 2000.

extent. Where the JKP was not able to secure electoral victories, it played the role of a strong opposition to the CPM.

When the state of Jharkhand was formed in 1999, it only included the Adivasi-dominated parts of Bihar. The Jungle Mahals of West Bengal were not included (Choksi 2014). The number of Jharkhand parties, however, continued to grow along with Adivasi politics (Ibid). In 2001, the district of Midnapore was split in two districts. The blocks to the west of Midnapore town, which included the Adivasi-dominated parts of the district, became West Midnapore or Paschim Medinipur, a new district within the state of West Bengal. This district comprised of mainly the forest sub-divisions of the erstwhile united district. In the late 2000s, Jharkhand politics became intertwined with the Lalgarh movement, where Mahatos built an alliance with the Santals to lead a 'tribal' people's movement, and also participated in the Maoist movement.

4. Conclusion

This chapter presented an account of state-society relations in the Jungle Mahals of Midnapore from 1910 to 2008. It makes two key points. Firstly, using Migdal's state-in-society approach, it showed how state and society remade each other. Secondly, I highlighted how conflict has been the defining feature of statemaking in the Jungle Mahals, and how conflict reorders social hierarchies and relations between social groups. In section 2, I focused on how the colonial survey and settlement process disrupted the relations of patronage that had tied landlords and their tenants over the nineteenth century. As a result of land settlement, *zamindars* took control over much of the fields and forests. At the same time, a new class of rich peasantry, mostly Mahato, along with Santal Adivasis challenged *zamindari* power by plundering *zamindari* property. Tenants of the European-owned *zamindari* companies also channelled their disaffection through the Congress-led nationalist

movement. The Congress, however, was only interested in targeting European leaseholders and not the native landlords. Overall, this section looked at how the colonial state's practices and local responses to them altered village hierarchies as well as relations between the state and society.

In Section 3, I examined the postcolonial developmental state through the lens of agrarian land reforms, and how these reforms reordered rural society. I revisited debates on land reforms in West Bengal, which is often considered as one of the rare success stories of land reform. I linked these debates to an analysis of the Left Front government in the State. Placing my fieldsites within the wider context of West Bengal, I looked at the shifts in the societal set-up. Large landowners lost much of their land and power, and the emergent middle peasantry, comprising mostly of Mahato cultivators, gained in this process. Further, I looked at Adivasi movements for a separate state of Jharkhand in this period and how Santals and Mahatos came together on this question. After claiming a higher status within the Hindu caste fold in the 1930s and 1940s, Mahatos began claiming the status of scheduled tribes (STs) from the 1960s onwards. I see these claims to an Adivasi identity as tied to the manner in which statemaking processes work in different ways across historical periods. This section also examined the manner in which the Left Front government led by the CPM entrenched itself in everyday village life. The next chapter looks at the decline of the Left Front, radical politics, and statemaking in the Jungle Mahals.

Chapter 3: Radical Politics, Regime Change, and the Changing 'Party Society'

> We were forced into taking up arms by the administration. When we had guns pointing at us, one can't expect us to respond with flower petals. Violence was started by CPM. We took up arms to counter this. Many of them are educated unemployed youths. Family members of CPM have got jobs that were meant for them.
>
> Comrade Bikash, CPI (Maoist) zonal commander for West Midnapore, Purulia and Bankura, 2009

> Wherever there is exploitation and neglect there will be protest. When protest erupts the rulers start to threaten and begin severe repression. But whenever there is repression people's resistance grows even stronger. And in the face of people's resistance the ruler-exploiters break down to pieces. This is what the history tells us.
>
> Letter by the People's Committee against Police Atrocities (PCAPA) to the 'People', 2010

1. Introduction

The *hungama*[1] in Lalgarh from 2008 onwards became a turning point in the region's political history, where the CPM-led state government was directly challenged through resistance movements and violent protests. The series of events which took place in Lalgarh and the rest of the Jungle Mahals from 2008-2011 were hailed by some intellectuals as an 'Adivasi' or tribal uprising. The Maoist vanguard leaders, local leaders of the PCAPA, and even ordinary men and women sometimes likened the events to 'tribal' uprisings in the colonial period. The CPM was ultimately ousted from power in the state-level and panchayat-level elections. In this chapter, I look into some of the circumstances that led to popular dissatisfaction with the Left Front (LF) in West Bengal, and examine the concomitant rise of Maoism and the Lalgarh movement in the Jungle Mahal region. I characterise this period as a brief interregnum or interlude, between two phases of postcolonial statemaking, in which pre-existing social relations were renegotiated and local society was subtly reordered.

[1] *Hungama*, in local parlance, is a term used to describe upheaval or uprising. Some of my interlocutors also used the term '*jhamela*' (turmoil), to describe the period as one of inconvenience.

My argument revolves around the changing 'party society' (Bhattacharya 2011, 2010, 2009), where the CPM's hold over rural politics declined. The major opposition party, the Trinamool Congress (TMC) used the circumstances to their advantage and became the leading party in the State. Through a series of resistance movements, violent clashes, and democratic elections, a new 'ruling bargain' was established in the aftermath of the 2011 elections in West Bengal. Disaffection with the incumbent CPM regime grew due to many reasons, the most important being its inability to deliver on promises of welfare. The reordering of political power through movement politics, violence, and democratic elections also opened up avenues for the reworking of social hierarchies as well. In the three decades of LF rule, the CPM and its allies had established closed connections with the everyday social and cultural spheres in rural West Bengal. Village-level power structures and the disbursement of welfare politics depended a great deal on the relationships between the ruling party and individuals belonging to different communities. These were reworked in the shifts that took place in the 2008-2011 period and after regime change.

In the 'party society', the dominant political party was central to the processes of statemaking. Institutions and actors that make up the state revolved around the CPM, and it's defeat unsettled the existing 'party society'. It remains to be seen whether the TMC similarly builds its own 'party society' in rural West Bengal. Within this context, I examine the making of the new ruling bargain and the re-making of socio-political order in the Jungle Mahals of West Midnapore. The relation between the state and democracy is crucial to the reworking of ruling bargains in postcolonial India. This chapter forms a link between: (1) the previous two chapters that trace a longer history of counterinsurgency and state-society relations in this region, and (2) my ethnography of statemaking in present counterinsurgency context of the Jungle Mahals in the next three chapters. The turn of events in Lalgarh and beyond from 2008 onwards impacted statemaking not only by bringing in a new party in power, but also

reordering local power relations. The next section of this chapter looks at some of the causes of the LF's decline in West Bengal. Section 3 delves into the details of the '*hungama*' or uprising in Lalgarh and the Jungle Mahals. Section 4 follows this up with an analysis of the shifting tribe, caste and gender dynamics during the interregnum or the phase of radical politics. Taken together, these sections provide a narrative of the breakdown of the LF's 'party society' and the conditions which made a regime change to the TMC possible.

2. Decline of Left Front's dominance

The CPM's dominance in rural West Bengal began to unravel by the late 2000s. As discussed in the previous chapter, it was in the rural areas that the CPM had managed to build a strong base and garner electoral support. Disaffection with the ruling CPM-led Left Front regime was manifested in different protest movements from 2007 onwards, and in election results. There was a gradual breakdown of the 'party society' and ruptures developed in the LF's hold over rural society (Bhattacharya 2011; 2010). The LF, after assuming power in 1977, initially garnered popularity through its land reform measures where the concentration of land in the hands of a few *zamindars* was challenged, land was redistributed to peasants, the process of de-peasantisation was kept in check to an extent, and sharecroppers were officially registered. In addition to land reforms, the LF institutionalised elected local institutions of governance, the panchayats. Development programmes and land redistribution measures were routed through the panchayats, the rationale being that the poor and marginalised will not need to depend on the local elite to seek welfare (Bhattacharya 2010: 51). There are debates about whether the land reforms and decentralisation measures were successful (Mookherjee and Bardhan 2003; Lieten (1996a; 1996b; 1992; Kohli 1987; Mallick 1993; Dasgupta 1984), but these factors did provide the initial spur to the CPM's popularity and its emergence as a party for the poor. This was especially so in the aftermath of the

Naxalite movement where peasants were mobilised to resist the power of the *zamindars* and sharecroppers sought to assert their rights. The roots of party society lay in these mobilisations where Dalits, Adivasis, minorities and other marginalised groups participated.

The ability of the CPM to mobilise on the basis of land reforms waned over time, but the LF was able to maintain its hold over rural society. Bhattacharya (2010: 51-52) believes that the party stayed in power due to its extensive rural networks and a well-knit organisational structure, which was in stark contrast to the divided opposition. He also adds that the opposition parties, mainly the Congress and after it split, also the Trinamool Congress, were recognised in public memory as allies of the landlords who had dominated in the time before the LF government. Also, ordinary people needed to rely on the party to maintain good relations with panchayats, and receive development benefits, so it made sense to continue supporting it. The 'party society' was also strengthened through the emergence of close-knit ties between the CPM and marginalised groups like Dalits, Muslims, and landless agricultural labourers.

From 2007 onwards, the LF government faced a 'crisis' (Chatterjee 2009). After a decisive victory in the 2006 state elections, the LF began to face electoral losses in local-level elections (panchayats in the rural areas and municipal bodies in the urban areas) from 2008 onwards when it lost control of half the panchayats in the state. The government was faced by resistance movements in Nandigram, Singur and Lalgarh, and in the 2011 elections, the LF was voted out of power in the state elections. This was followed by a massive defeat in the 2013 Panchayat elections across West Bengal. Electoral defeats signalled a loss of legitimacy for the LF and its major party, the CPM. The party was no longer the chief mediator between the government and society. Scholars have identified many different reasons for this shift. Firstly, used to frequent re-election, the CPM had acquired a degree of complacency and no longer pursued land reforms and decentralisation actively (Mookherjee and Bardhan 2003:

32). Secondly, panchayats and local party units came to be dominated by newly emerging local elites who had benefitted from land reforms. Panchayat leaders often came from among the party cadres and assisted only those who were close to the party (Chatterjee 2008). The party controlled not only the welfare programmes and who could or could not be a beneficiary, but also access to government employment. Control of this kind made these resources accessible only to party supporters. Thirdly, rural incomes from agricultural activity were declining, and agricultural subsidies were being cut down. In such a scenario, new demands for education, healthcare, food, livelihood-support, state-provided wages, and development programmes arose in the countryside. The LF failed to adequately respond to these demands and claims, even when it made promises (Bhattacharya 2010: 52). Finally, the LF's push towards liberalisation and seeking private investment is considered to have displaced its commitment to the poor and marginalised.

Commentators also identify the LF's pro-business shift as one of the major reasons for the decline in the popularity of the CPM and the LF government (Das 2013; Bhattacharya 2011, 2010). The LF's openness to private capital and investment was interpreted as an abandonment of its pro-poor bent, and a move towards the economic right. Even though the LF's shift to a more pro-market and pro-industrialisation agenda was more cautious in comparison to other Indian states such as Gujarat (Sud 2014), it nevertheless exposed the contractions in the LF's and CPM's position on economic transitions (Das 2013). Given its indebtedness and a climate of 'competitive federalism' in India (Bhattacharya 2010: 59), the Left Front government had to open up the state to private investment. The process of government partnership with businesses and multi-national corporations had already begun in the 1990s, but this process was further accelerate after 2000. Attempts at land acquisition to set up industrial units and special economic zones (SEZs) led to protests and agitations across rural West Bengal.

Bhattacharya (2010: 52, 53) comments that the LF took its 2006 election win as mandate for its tilt towards industrialisation, and put the rural small-peasant economy under threat by starting to acquire, sometimes forcibly, fertile tracts of land to set up industrial plants and special economic. This alienated many rural supporters, and the LF was now seen as a promoter of corporate interests. Small land-owners and sharecroppers, who constituted a large part of the LF's support base, were most directly affected by the LF government's drive for land acquisition. They saw this shift in the government's policy as a betrayal of their interests. Village committees were set up to resist the government, particularly in areas where the government had initiated a drive to acquire land. The *Bhumi Ucched Pratirodh Committee* (BUPC) (Committee against Land Acquisition) in Nandigram, and *Singur Krishi Jomi Raksha Committee* (SKJRC) (The Committee to Save the Farmland of Singur) are two key examples. The LF's popularity dipped further when party cadres employed violent means to repress resistance politics led by these committees. Civil society activists and intellectuals in Kolkata and other parts of the country argued that these were mass struggles against neoliberalism and capitalism and joined in to support these struggles.

The LF government suppressed these resistance movements through violent measures. This further contributed to their unpopularity and loss of legitimacy. Bhattacharya (2010: 57) points out that the government used the state machinery to 'manage an increasingly defiant population' since it was no longer able to negotiate with them or deliver on the promise of 'development.' As the CPM-led government began to use force, it went from being what Bhattacharya calls a 'party of hegemony' to a 'party of violation'. As a hegemonic force, the CPM built a consensus around itself as a legitimate force around which the 'party society' in rural West Bengal was centred. Now, the party's use of force dismantled the consensus as well as the structures of the rural party society. It is not as if violence or the threat of violence was absent in the earlier period. Even if the state machinery of violence was not used,

political mediators at the local level, which included the cadres of the CPM, used the threat of violence as a strategy to build consensus and maintain peace (Chatterjee 2010: 45). Clashes between workers of different parties during elections were pretty common in the LF era. However, the violence now took on the form of the oppressive government versus the poor. In this backdrop, the resistance movements and the violent response to it created a situation where LF's dominance spiralled down within the course of a few years.

In Singur, in the Hooghly district, in 2006, the LF put forth an intent to acquire 997 acres of land for business giant Tata's small-car factory to build Tata Nano, the smallest and cheapest car ever with a promised price of Rupees 1,00,000. The process of acquiring lands and estimating compensation began in mid-2006. Protests against acquisition took place from the start and escalated as the LF went ahead with acquiring land. The opposition parties, particularly the Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress (TMC) capitalised on this situation. Banerjee supported the SKJRC and used Singur as an opportunity to project the LF government as ostensibly brutal and anti-people. Mamata Banerjee took an active role in organising different local groups in the movement against land acquisition. She went on a twenty-five day hunger strike to protest the forcible acquisition of land from unwilling farmers. Sporadic acts of protest and LF's violent retaliation took place until 2008, after which Tata Motors withdrew the project from West Bengal and moved it to Gujarat.

Similarly, in Nandigram, East Midnapore district, the LF had to deal with protest over its decision to set up a chemical plant in a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) for the Indonesian company Salim group. In early 2007, the government began acquiring land for this purpose. Most of the 10,000 acres that the LF sought to acquire was cultivable land. Villagers against the land acquisition drive as soon as it was announced. They attacked the panchayat office and organised demonstrations. The government sent in the police who used tear gas and *lathis* (batons) against the villagers. The BUPC was later formed to coordinate the efforts of

all the groups protesting land acquisition, and led the resistance movement from the front. The CPM's and LF's responded to these events by using force to crush dissent, beating up agitators and allegedly using sexual violence against village women. Fourteen people were killed in the clashes. Once again, the TMC was actively involved in the resistance movement. By March 2007, the CPM was forced to scrap the land acquisition drive in Nandigram and announced that the SEZ will be moved out of Nandigram. Many of the participants of the movement in Nandigram were ex-CPM members and supporters, who later joined the TMC (McConnochie 2012).

The LF's apparent disregard for farmers and the violent repression of the resistance movements drew the ire of civil society activists and intellectuals across West Bengal, and in other parts of India. A variety of groups, individuals and organisations lent support to the cause. They organised rallies and marches in the capital city of Kolkata, and formed teams to visit the affected areas and conduct fact-finding missions. To them, Singur and Nandigram became epitomes of mass peasant resistance against a form of neoliberal capitalism, where the state violently dispossesses the rural poor in order to aid private businesses (Perspectives 2008; Patkar et al 2007; People's Tribunal on Nandigram 2007; S.Sarkar et al 2007). The People's Tribunal Report (2007) voiced concern about the manner in which district administration, police, and local CPM members had engaged in brutal violence. Prominent public intellectuals, academicians, film-makers, and writers of West Bengal registered their protest against the LF, some expressing shock at how a communist government could trample upon people's rights.[2]

Civil society activists and human rights groups portrayed the resistance movements in Singur and Nandigram as grassroots peasant uprisings challenging neoliberalism. They found

[2] Among those who protested were historians Sumit Sarkar, Tanika Sarkar, Amit Bhattacharya, and Sumanta Banerjee, author Nabarun Bhattacharya, and economist Amit Bhaduri.

these to be ‘genuine peasant movements’ which the TMC was trying to overtake for their own political benefit (Sarkar et al 2007). While civil society activism was crucial in documenting the crimes that occurred and helped draw widespread attention to the events in Singur and Nandigram, it often explained local resistance in terms of opposition to neoliberal development model. However, this perspective ignores the other factors, which were to do with the CPM’s ‘party society’ and local politics that were behind these protests. In Nandigram, for instance, Adam McConnochie (2012) has argued that the resistance movement was entrenched in local politics and a growing opposition to the CPM, and there was little consciousness among the villagers that it was a movement against neoliberal policies. In Singur too, the disputes in some cases were about the amount of compensation and forcible takeover of land, rather than a general protest against so-called neoliberalism. One reason why many former supporters turned against the party was possibly a breach of the ‘clientelist relationship between the party and the electorate’ (Bardhan et al 2009) and a breakdown of the LF’s political patronage (Nielsen 2016) which was based on recurring welfare benefits. Narratives of the CPM’s betrayal were commonly expressed by participants of these resistance movements. The CPM thus could no longer be seen as the ideal mediator of the ‘party society’, and resistance committees and opposition parties like the TMC took on that role.

While the movements were represented as those of poor peasants, a closer look reveals more complex internal dynamics. In Singur, those who were actively involved were middle-caste small land-owners (Nielsen 2016). Landless agricultural labourers had no land to lose and land acquisition did not affect them directly. But they joined the movement as they were tied to these landowners for work and wages. The leadership positions in the movement were all taken up by the landowners or *chasis*. In Nandigram too, those at the forefront of the movement were middle-peasants who had previously been CPM supporters

(McConnochie 2012: 49). Politics around land, and opposition to the CPM not only transformed political equations between parties, but also opened up local class and caste hierarchies to renegotiation, while at the same time reinforcing existing hierarchies. Accounts of 'political society' (Chatterjee 2011, 2004) and 'party society' (Bhattacharya 2010, 2011), while extremely useful theoretical tools to understand West Bengal, gloss over the importance of class, caste, tribe and gender in everyday politics. Internal power relations within such movements need to be taken into account to appreciate their role in socio-political transformations or in the buttressing of the prevailing power relations (Nielsen 2016).

In sum, several factors came together to weaken LF's electoral dominance as well as its control over rural society. The immediate cause was linked to the government's new liberalisation policy and land acquisition drives, as demonstrated in the Singur and Nandigram examples. This sparked off rounds of state-sponsored violence and further affected the already declining legitimacy of the CPM and the LF. Opposition parties, relegated to the back foot during CPM's three decades of rule, now found a chance to improve their fortunes. The hegemony of the 'party society' where the CPM and its allies dominated all spheres of village life in West Bengal was now broken. Disaffection with the government was evident in the election results from 2008 onwards. In 2008, a resistance movement also erupted in the Jungle Mahals of West Bengal, starting with Lalgarh in the West Midnapore district. The rise of this movement overlapped with the already ascendant Maoists in the region. Within this wider context of the LF's decline and regime change in the state of West Bengal, the rest of this chapter will explore the relationship between radical politics, social hierarchies, and the reworking of party society in the Jungle Mahals of West Midnapore.

3. The 'Hungama' in Lalgarh

In West Midnapore district, the LF government's efforts at land acquisition for corporates was the starting point for a wider struggle against the CPM. Unlike Singur and Nandigram, agitations here did not revolve around land expropriation. In 2007, the Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya was in talks with steel giant, Jindal, to set up a steel and power plant in Salboni town of West Midnapore district (about 10 kilometres from my fieldsites in Lalgarh). In November 2008, when Bhattacharya visited the proposed plant site to lay the foundation stone, his convoy was targeted in a land mine blast. The West Bengal branch of the CPI (Maoist) took responsibility for the blast. This branch was headed by Mallojula Koteswar Rao, or Kishenji, a Maoist leader belonging to Telengana, who came into the Jungle Mahal districts of West Bengal around the year 2000 to strengthen the Maoist movement in these Adivasi areas. Following the attack, the Lalgarh police carried our several operations in villages around Lalgarh and Ramgarh, and arrested Adivasis on alleged charges of being Maoists or Maoist sympathisers. Many of these Adivasis claimed to have been arrested without warrants and were tortured by the police, which was given a free hand by the CPI (M). To protest this situation, locals formed the People's Committee against Police Atrocities (PCAPA). The PCAPA was led by Chhatradhar Mahato, a Kudmi Mahato who emphasised it as an Adivasi movement where Mahatos, Santals, and other Adivasis came together to resist the CPM and police's violations of the human rights in Lalgarh and around. In November 2008, the police, block administration and the local CPI (M) cadres were driven out of Lalgarh, and agitators dug up roads leading into the district town of Midnapore. It was the first instance of the local bureaucratic machinery completely being driven out. Agitations also spread to the other Jungle Mahal districts of Bankura and Purulia.

There are contested accounts of the nature of these agitations and protest movements, and overlapping versions of events as different parties interpreted them. In Japanese

filmmaker Akira Kurosawa's film *Rashomon*, four characters present competing narratives of a samurai's death based on their perceptions and self-interest. Following from Kurosawa, anthropologists have called it the 'Rashomon effect' (Heider 1988). I employ this concept here to discuss the events in the time of flux in Lalgarh and beyond. Questions of who participated and why, whether the Maoists and PCAPA were working together or not, and whether the opposition party, the TMC, was colluding with protestors and Maoist guerrillas, are essentially contested matters. Instead of trying to construct a 'correct' or near-truth narrative, I present different sides of the story as I accessed through media reports, materials originating from the movements, and through the accounts of my interlocutors.

Political parties held each other responsible for the situation. The police and the CPM were the target of both the Maoists as well as the protests and agitations under the banner of the PCAPA-led Lalgarh movement. The PCAPA and its leaders claimed that theirs was a 'democratic people's movement' against a state that repressed its own people (PCAPA 2010). The CPM, as well as the security apparatus of the Indian state looked at the PCAPA as a 'front organisation' of the Maoists (Mittal 2009). They also created a distinction between Adivasis who were innocent and only caught in the crossfire between the Maoists and the state, and those who participated in any kind of radical politics. The latter were always dubbed as Maoists (Giri 2009). The PCAPA vehemently denied this charge as they projected themselves as peaceful movement of Adivasis. PCAPA leaders and members were however arrested on charges of being Maoists and were forced to go underground, and later began their own people's militia, called Sidhu-Kanu[3] Militia (Sanhati 2013). From the CPM's perspective, the Maoists and PCAPA were working together along with the opposition parties (CPM 2009). The CPM alleged that the PCAPA's leader Chhatradhar Mahato was backed by

[3] Sidhu and Kanu were two brothers who led the Santal Hool (Santal Rebellion) in 1855-56. PCAPA's people's militia was named after them. There was a lot of invocation of past 'tribal' rebellions both by the PCAPA and Maoists.

the Trinamool Congress (TMC) and was a Maoist. The Maoists, who had been trying to expand their influence among Adivasis in the Jungle Mahals since late 1990s, expressed support for the PCAPA (CPI (Maoist) 2009). For the TMC, the main opposition party to the CPM in the state, this was an opportunity to assert that the CPM was anti-people and had not done anything to address underdevelopment in Adivasi-dominated Jungle Mahals. The TMC supremo, Mamata Banerjee, at that time, travelled often to the Jungle Mahals and expressed her support for the Adivasi people's movement. The CPM alleges that Banerjee also clandestinely supported the Maoists. She had opposed the joint security operations between the central and State government launched in 2009 in the Jungle Mahals (Mittal 2011) However, once she became the chief minister in 2011, she continued with the security operations against the Maoists, did not release PCAPA leader Chhatradhar Mahato from prison, and is alleged to have a hand in the police 'encounter' where the CPI (Maoist) West Bengal commander Kishenji was killed. After assuming power in 2011, Mamata Banerjee started peace talks with Maoists in the Jungle Mahals and appointed civil society activists as interlocutors for the talks. These talks, however, broke down after Kishenji was killed.[4]

Public intellectuals and activists in Kolkata and Delhi had hailed the Lalgarh movement as an independent Adivasi movement and a 'spontaneous mass uprising' (Ray 2008), which was hijacked by the Maoists. They also pointed to how Maoist takeover crushed the movement which was peacefully agitating against the Left Front government (S. Sarkar and T. Sarkar 2009). These intellectuals raised their voice against human rights violations on Adivais being carried out by the Indian state in the name of dealing with Maoism. Intellectuals and activists also articulated concern over how much of the mainstream media erroneously reported all incidents of protest as Maoist (Sarathi Ray 2008). They expressed an

[4] It is alleged that Mamata Banerjee used the peace talks as a ploy to gather intelligence on the whereabouts of key Maoists leaders, to eliminate or arrest them later.

apprehension towards the violent activities of the CPI (Maoist), which in their view harmed 'the process of mass-upsurge in West Bengal, and, in particular, the peoples' glorious movement in Lalgarh' (Devi et al 2009). They saw the Maoist label as a taint which discredited, what in their imagination was an independent mass movement by Adivasis. However, intellectuals like Amit Bhattacharya (2009) criticised such positions which only saw non-violent resistance as legitimate. He commented that Maoists have had a mass base since the 1980s, and are one part of this larger struggle. According to him, it is problematic to separate Adivasi struggles into Maoist and non-Maoist, and then condemn the former.

My interlocutors in the villages of Lalgarh and Ramgarh, presented different accounts of that time. In my first few meetings with them, most people were not very willing to talk about the period of *jhamela* (turmoil). The securitised environment where they could be arrested for having participated or sympathised with the movement deterred them. Most of the key leaders of both the PCAPA and the Maoist movement were either in prison or had fled the villages due to the fear of arrest. Over time, however, I encountered different ways in which people described the movements and their roles therein. In most cases, people who were now beneficiaries of the new development programmes, had earlier lent support to participated in PCAPA-led agitations and Maoist politics. Ambamoni Mandi, a Santal woman without clearly differentiating between the Maoists and the PCAPA, said that the *andolan* (movement) and the '*bon-party*' (forest party)[5] were leading our *juddho* (fight). When I asked her what the '*juddho*' was about, she pointed to the everyday harassment of ordinary people by the CPM cadres. 'It was difficult for poor Adivasis like us. They could take us to jail for no reason. So I went to the andolan', she told me.

[5] A common phrase used to refer to the Maoist party.

Sanjana, a Self-Help Group (SHG) group leader, expressed a similar sentiment. She said, 'The CPM had its *harmads* (armed cadres)[6]. They made our life very difficult. Hence we participated in the andolan against them.' To counter the PCAPA and Maoists and to take over the 'liberated' areas, the CPM formed a militia known as *Harmad Bahini* in West Midnapore. Even as the top CPM leadership in Kolkata denied the existence of the *Harmad Bahini* (Armed Group), this militia was led by local CPM office bearers and soldiers included not only local CPM members but also members from CPM strongholds in the neighbouring East Midnapore district (Mazumdar and Irani 2010). As Sanjana told me, 'The *harmads* would come and camp in our villages. They would come to our doorstep, and ask us to send one man from each household to help them. They would also ask households to give them 3-4 kilos of rice…sometimes even asking us to cook for them. If someone would refuse any of their demands, they would be beaten up with sticks or threatened with guns.' Sanjana told me about two men who were murdered by *harmads* in her village. Such an atmosphere of fear led her to support the '*andolan*'. 'I went to the meetings which were organised at night…Others from the village would go too,' she recounted. I asked her if her support for the *andolan* was guided by her opposition to the CPM. 'Yes. In the last few years, this party became violent and did not care about the people, so we had to fight them.' she answered. However, when I asked her if the CPM had always been a problem, she replied, 'It is not as if I always opposed them. I used to vote for them. But later they only became interested in violence, not the poor (*daridra manush*).'

Sanjana's account of her support for the agitations was linked to her disenchantment with the CPM as a party. Her words could very much be understood with the breakdown of CPM's 'party society', which was the result of the violation of the shared moral economy

[6] The term *harmad* is said to have been derived from the Spanish and Portugese word armada, which when used as an adjective means armed.

between the party and its governed. She told me that she has now shifted her allegiances to the TMC. Like Sanjana, several other men and women who I interacted with also pointed out that the local support for Maoists and PCAPA leaders was due to the CPM's high-handedness in recent years. Som Mahato, a driver, recounted how the local CPM members along with their *harmads* attacked anyone who they suspected to be in the *andolan* or helping the Maoists. 'The car I own became like an ambulance. There were so many attacks that we had to constantly take people to the hospital near Goaltore,' he said. Som said, 'I could not even believe that the CPM could do something like this…using guns on ordinary people.' Even Som's narrative points to a distrust of the CPM that came after they failed to honour the 'party society' relationships.

Some of my interlocutors, however, wanted to completely distance themselves from the Maoists and the PCAPA. They talked about the *jhamela* as a time of inconvenience where they could not leave their homes and buses to the district town of Midnapore would not ply. Arpita Ray, who belongs to the well-off local zamindari family said, 'It was all a fight between the Maoists who came from the outside and the CPM party members. Only *bekaar chele* (unemployed young men) joined the Maoists.' I then asked her if she had heard about the local women who participated in PCAPA led rallies in large numbers and she replied, 'I do not know (*Aami jaani na*). We were not able to get out of our houses at that time so I have no such information. Anyway, now the government has changed so there is no use talking about all this.' Arpita's family members are TMC office bearers, and she described the 2008-2011 phase as one where outsiders came in to disrupt the everyday calm of their lives. She gave a very evasive answer to my question about women's participation. This may have to do with the way in which village elites like her thought of radical groups like the PCAPA and the Maoists.

Though there were different accounts of what happened, it is clear that popular support for the Maoists as well as the PCAPA-led *andolan* was a result of disaffection with the ruling political party, the CPM. In this sense, reasons for popular support of Maoist insurgency in West Bengal are distinct from the reasons for its popular support in the neighbouring states of Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, and Orrisa (see Kunnath 2011, Shah 2013a, Chandra 2013a, Chitralekha 2012). While there may be overlapping motivations and causes for the rise of Maoism across these states, in the Jungle Mahals of West Bengal, ordinary men and women supported the Maoist cause with a very specific agenda of targeting the ruling political dispensation. Subsequently, the 2011 elections provided an opportunity for ordinary men and women to oust the CPM-led Left Front from power through democratic means.

The phase characterised by the *andolan* and Maoist insurgency was thus, an interregnum through which regime change took place in West Bengal. The anti-incumbency factor against the CPM played out across the state in the 2011 state elections, and in pockets such as Lalgarh, voters now expressed their protest against the CPM by casting their votes against them. This included the supporters and participants of the movement as well those men and women who did not participate. The TMC, as the major opposition party, gained from this wave of anti-incumbency and anti-CPM protests. I look at this period of interregnum not only as a precursor to the counterinsurgency context that I studied during my fieldwork, but also to discuss the use of development rhetoric by the groups involved, to explain the social composition of the *andolan*, and to explore the shifts in state-society relations.

Here, I want to emphasise the importance of 'development' as an idea in the regime change from the CPM to the TMC. For the TMC, the rhetoric of development was a key factor to win votes and gain popular support. During the *andolan* as well as after it took office, the TMC has made the claim that the CPM either made no efforts at development in

tribal-dominated regions like the Jungle Mahals or that none of their efforts worked. 'Underdevelopment' of Adivasi-dominated regions was also a mobilising tool for radical politics in the region. Prior to the PCAPA which came up in response to atrocities against Adivasis, Maoists mobilised participants, supporters and sympathisers around the idea of the LF government's neglect of Adivasis. The CPM was accused by Maoist leaders of ignoring Adivasi welfare. The Maoists and the PCAPA also used the idea of underdevelopment to delegitimise institutions like the panchayats, which the LF dominated. The PCAPA claimed to start counter welfare mechanisms in response to the failure of the LF government to do so, such as the setting up of health centres, building roads, providing drinking water, and making provisions for irrigation through dams and water reservoirs (Sanhati 2013: 55-56; Mittal 2010). While my interlocutors in Lalgarh and Ramgarh, for instance Sanjana Garai above, did criticise the CPM for employing threat and violence in its final years of rule, and for selectively providing development benefits only to their members and supporters, they did not think that the LF government had done nothing at all.

The CPM, which claimed much of its legitimacy from land reforms and development programmes in the rural areas, had also instituted special developmental programmes for the 'ST' population. In Midnapore district, for example, state programmes like the integrated Tribal Development Project, the Jawahar Rojgar Yojana, ICDS, and literacy programmes focussed on Adivasis. In tribal areas, rice was supplied at Rs.2 a kilogram, and tribal women were sewing garments which were being sold in Howrah (Chatterjee 1997: 159). The party claims that 'Dalits and Adivasis were major beneficiaries of land reforms' as they gained from land redistribution and a large number of *bargardars* from these communities were registered (CPM 2002). In addition, Part IIA of the West Bengal Land Reforms Act dealt with the restoration of tribal lands alienated from them (Ray et al 1982). However, despite its policies on paper, the CPM was accused by Maoists of not taking any steps towards

development for Adivasis. The CPM countered the Maoist 'falsehood' that there was no visible development in the Jungle Mahals for 34 years until the Maoists set up development work in Binpur-1 block since 2008 (Bhuian 2010). The CPM claimed that they had done more for Adivasi welfare than any other state government.[7] They felt that in fact, it was the Maoists who had hindered the development works that were already going on by attacking 'government property'. The CPM also pointed to how the PCAPA's 13-point agenda did not include development. 'Development' thus went from being the source of contention between political parties and groups at this stage to becoming a source of legitimacy under the TMC. In the next chapter, I will discuss the use of 'development' as a counterinsurgency measure and as a means to win the trust of ordinary men and women.

4. The Internal Dynamics of a 'People's Movement'

The social dynamics of the Lalgarh movement led by the PCAPA and Maoist politics need closer scrutiny in order to understand the identities that came to be foregrounded in the course of radical political mobilisation. It is equally important to consider how the radical politics phase opened up social hierarchies to renegotiation, and subtle shifts occurred in agrarian power structures in the forests of south-west Bengal. This section highlights some instances of how identities of 'tribe' and gender became salient in popular participation in the Lalgarh movement and the Maoist movement. It also points to the alterations in social hierarchies that came about with regime change.

[7] Meghnad Bhuian, 'Development at Junglemahal: Reality vs Falsehood', Left Front Government in West Bengal blog. 16 June 2010, http://leftgovtwb.blogspot.co.uk/2010/06/development-at-junglemahal-reality-vs.html.

4.1 Mahatos and Santals: The Politics over 'Adivasi-ness'

Taking on leadership positions in the Lalgarh movement and the Maoist movement presented an opportunity for some Mahatos to assert their Adivasi-ness. Chhatradhar Mahato, who led the PCAPA and was practically its only spokesperson described it as an Adivasi-*mulvasi* [8] front led by him. The organisation was built as an Adivasi front where Santals and Mahatos came together, but were led by a Mahato. In this way, Mahatos found another avenue to emphasise their claim to Adivasi status. However, in most of the media accounts of the events of 2009 and 2010 and even in writings of intellectuals and human rights activists, it was mainly Santal participation that was highlighted. Maoist documents too referred to the events as a Santal uprising, where 'non-Adivasis' like Mahatos also participated (CPI (Maoist) 2009). Santals were characterised as the quintessential resisting tribal, armed with bows and arrows. The PCAPA too invoked past Santal rebellions such as the Santal Hool of 1855 to establish a continuity of resistance by the Adivasis:

> 155 years have gone by after the Santhal rebellion…British colonisers are gone, giving place to the Congress rulers…In the lives of our Santhal, Kurmi, Ho, Munda, Bhumij and other Adivasis practically no change has come. The struggle that we waged in 1855 for our right to jal-jangal-jamin still goes on even today, in 2010. (Sanhati 2013: 63)

In doing so, PCAPA leaders were not only drawing parallels between the colonial and postcolonial state as oppressors of Adivasis, but claiming a longer legacy of resistance.

Mahatos and Santals were not behind one organisation or another as a whole community. Various members of these communities aligned with different groups that were formed in the course of the movement. For example, generation was a factor that divided the Santal community. A Santal organisation called Bharat Jakat Majhi Marwa (BJMM), an organisation of Santal 'elders', was initially involved in the agitations, but had differences with the Maoists and the PCAPA. Many Santal villagers who joined the PCAPA claimed that

[8] *Mulvasi* or *mulnivasi* refers to aborigines or indigenous people.

the BJMM was a regressive body of Santal community elders, who turned their backs on the people's movement and made a pact with the authorities (Swami 2009). As a result, they became a target of PCAPA attacks. Here, we see an inter-generational difference where the younger Santals participated in radical politics of the PCAPA and the Maoists to challenge existing structures of authority, while the 'elders' were more reluctant to do so.

What is important to note is that despite claims of a pan-Adivasi unity, the structure of the PCAPA mirrored the hierarchies prevalent at the village level, where Mahatos and some Santal elites were at a higher position in comparison to most Santals and Lodhas. While Mahatos earlier identified as *mulnivasi* through Jharkhand politics, now they were doing so through the PCAPA. The PCAPA leadership was dominated mainly by elites among Mahatos and Santals, who completely ignored the more 'backward' tribal groups like Lodhas. Mahato leaders of the movement presented themselves as Adivasi victims of the CPM's oppression and underdevelopment. For instance, leaders of the PCAPA claimed that the CPM was denying them access to healthcare. For instance, as a letter by the PCAPA mentions,

> 17 July- The joint force entered the village of Gosaibandh in large numbers and without any reason, brutally beat up up the villagers. Almost twelve people were hurt. They were taken to government hospitals in Jhargram. The police and the CPM leaders forced the doctors and the nurses to send the injured without offering any treatment. The reason cited was even more atrocious there will not be any treatment for Adivasi Mahatos! The Kurmi Mahatos are a community widely present in the Jangal Mahal of West Bengal and adjoining Jharkhand. Although not officially classified as a Scheduled Tribe, they are to all intents and purposes an Adivasi community, and took a leading role in the Lalgarh struggle. Various attempts were made by the erstwhile CPI (M) government, and still being made by the TMC-led government to drive a wedge between the Mahatos and the Santhals, who are the predominant scheduled tribe in the area]. (Sanhati 2013: 118)

We see here that Mahatos are identifying themselves as Adivasis who were deprived of basic resources by the government. This expression of their marginalisation was extremely important for Mahatos in order to claim not participation and leadership of the movement, but also identify as Adivasis.[9]

[9] The internal class, caste, and tribe dynamics of such resistance movements often go unnoticed when media, activists, and even scholars identify them as mass movements of the poor. In Lalgarh, a disaggregation of the so-

Mahato politics of 'Adivasi-ness' was not limited to only the Lalgarh movement, or in joining the Maoists. 'Not all Mahatos are Maoists', claimed Jiban Mahato, the West Midnapore president of the Adivasi Kudmi Samaj, an organisation that is campaigning for ST status for Kudmi (Mahatos) across Jharkhand, West Bengal and Odisha. His family runs a stationary shop from the front room of their concrete house, which lies on the metalled road connecting Midnapore town with Lalgarh. In his mid-twenties now, he told me he had completed his schooling in Midnapore town and his college education from Goaltore[10]. Jiban stated, 'Ever since the *andolan* (movement), everyone claims that all Mahatos are Maoists. Yes, a Mahato led the *andolan*, but it is wrong to say all Mahatos are Maoists.' Jiban did not make a distinction between Maoists and the PCAPA. In our conversation, he stressed again and again that Mahatos are poor and backward. 'Since 1931, when we were removed from the ST list, governments have paid no attention to our *unnayan* (development), and we have remained backward (*pichhda).* Our campaign is to get that ST status back*'*. Even though there are Mahatos who live in poverty, Mahatos, in general, are by no means as backward or marginal as Jiban suggested. Identifying as Adivasis through the movement and through the Adivasi Kudmi Samaj is a political strategy for middle peasant groups like Mahatos, who had gained from land reforms, and now wished to also seek benefits from reservations. While Kudmi Mahatos are now listed under 'category A' of the Other Backward Classes (OBCs), which too means that they are eligible for certain benefits and reservations, organisations like

called mass movement of poor Adivasis reveals the ways in which Mahatos, not all of whom were poor, participated in the PCAPA, and in the process strengthened their self-identification as Adivasis. Similarly, in the context of West Bengal, a fascinating study of class and caste within the Singur movement of 2006 has been done by Kenneth Bo Nielsen (2016). This movement which resisted the LF governments' attempts at acquiring agricultural land for a car factory in the Hooghly district is often described as a movement of poor and the landless. Nielsen, based on his ethnography of the movement, argues that the movement was led, not by poor farmers, but by *chasis* (land-owning cultivating caste) of the Mahishya caste, who could be described as middle peasants. It was the *chasis* who faced the major threat from the government's plan to take over land. The *khetmajur* (landless labourers) did not have any land to lose, and only participated in the movement because of their patronage ties to the *chasis*, on whose fields they laboured. Hence, the Singur movement cannot be described as a mass movement of the poor.

[10] Goaltore is a small town in the West Midnapore district.

Adivasi Kudmi Samaj do not identify with the OBC label. They assert themselves to be indigenous people, while ignoring the fact that their ancestors, had indeed, migrated to south-west Bengal only in the nineteenth century.

Despite Jiban and other activists claiming Adivasi status for Mahatos, most of my Mahato interlocutors clearly identified the Santals, who they called 'STs', as different from them. Contrary to the PCAPA leaders' assertion of Mahato-Santal unity, Jiban was clear that not only are Mahatos and Santals dissimilar, Mahatos were also much more Adivasi than Santals. 'Santals were Adivasis but they became Christians. Christanity and ST status has given them many benefits'. He meant that, by embracing Christanity, Santals had lost their right to be called Adivasis while nature-worshipping Mahatos were not being recognised as a scheduled tribe today. Jiban tried to convince me in many different ways that Mahatos were animists and nature-worshippers. He insisted that I accompany him on his motorbike to the edge of the village. There he showed me the idol of what he referred to as their *goram* (deity). It was a red terracotta figure of an elephant resting on top of a stone, under a grove of shady trees, which was the *jaherthan* (sacred grove). While we stood there, Jiban claimed, 'We worship nature. As you can see, our *goram* is an animal. Unlike the Bengali Hindus, we do not pollute the environment on account of religious festivals like Durga Puja. Mahatos therefore are true Adivasis'. Jiban attempted to distinguish Mahatos both from Bengali Hindus and from Santals.

Santals have gained from both Christian missionary activity, and reservations in government employment, higher education, and in local institutions of governance for STs. This is true especially in Jiban's village Bhimpur, where most Santals took on to Christianity after American Baptists set up a church and educational institutions from 1874 onwards. These missionary institutions helped almost two-thirds of Santals in the village to acquire education and gain non-agricultural and non-forest livelihoods. Jiban, even as he

distinguished between Mahatos and Santals in his village on the basis of Christianity, wanted Mahatos to be able to have ST status and the reservation benefits which come along with it. He also told me that one of their demands is the state recognition of Kurmali, the language of Kudmi Mahatos, just like the Santali language has been recognised and is taught in schools and colleges. Jiban felt, 'If we had been kept in the ST list, we would have been much more prosperous. Today, most of us, including myself, do not even know our own language. Had the governments of the day encouraged our language, this would not have been the case.' In talking about the removal of Mahatos from the ST list in 1931, Jiban does not mention that this was indeed the result of a campaign by some rich Mahatos who sought Kshatriya status. Over the years, many Mahatos have adopted Vaishnavite Hindu practices and invite Brahmins to preside over some of their rituals, though they also sacrifice goats and fowl at religious ceremonies (Sivaramakrishnan 1996: 662). Even Jiban, after all his assertions of Adivasi-ness, and emphasising difference from the Bengali Hindus, also claimed a certain kind of caste ritual purity. He told me to not believe those who say that Mahatos are beef-eaters.[11] 'We have never eaten beef', he said forcefully. Mahato politics is, therefore, torn between claiming ST status and solidarity with Santals on the one hand, and on the other hand, adopting selected Hindu practices to claim a higher status to go with their rise as middle peasants. Overall, we see that Mahato politics of Adivasi assertion, whether expressed through participation in the PCAPA, or through Jiban's activism in the Adibasi Kudmi Samaj, is important to understand the changing state-society relations in the Jungle Mahals of Midnapore.

The Jharkhand movement was another factor connected to Adivasi politics that played a key role in the turn of events in the Jungle Mahals in 2009-2010. The PCAPA's formation

[11] Upper-caste and middle-caste Hindus are believed to not consume beef. Lower-castes, Dalits and Adivasis consume beef.

and rise should be seen as closely linked to a history of Jharkhand politics in the region (Choksi 2014). Mahato and Santal participation in politics especially that which stresses an Adivasi identity, has historically been routed in Jharkhand politics, as discussed in section 2 above. Some of the important PCAPA leaders, such as Asit Mahato, had previously been involved with the Jharkhand Party (Mittal 2010). Jharkhand factions controlled many of the local panchayat seats in the Jungle Mahals. In the 2008 elections, two factions of Jharkhand parties together won the Panchayat Samiti elections at Binpur-1 block, headquartered at Lalgarh. The CPM won seats in some of the gram panchayats in Lalgarh. Jharkhand factions were often at loggerheads with the CPM administration, which often punished the panchayats represented by Jharkhand parties by denying resources, such as not electrifying villages that consistently elected Jharkhand parties over the CPM in local panchayat elections (Choksi 2014). The CPM saw Jharkhand factions and TMC as allies who came together against the CPM in panchayat-level elections (Bhuian 2010). While they had differences, the PCAPA and Jharkhand factions worked together to expand popular resistance against the CPM. However, the CPM ignored demands for autonomy coming out of Jharkhand politics. Even TMC leader Mamata Banerjee ignored this politics when she became the Chief Minister, and identified underdevelopment as the only reason for the agitations and violence in the Jungle Mahals.

4.2 Shifting Power, Panchayats, and *Zamindars*

With regime change at the state level in 2011, the power dynamics in rural West Bengal slowly began to shift too. The 2013 Panchayat elections were held after the phase of violence and TMC victory in the 2011 State elections. There were many instances of violent clashes between TMC and CPM supporters during these elections. The LF was so badly weakened that it could not even prop up candidates in many blocks which had earlier been

their strongholds (Rana 2013). As a result, the TMC managed to take over most of the seats which were erstwhile LF strongholds in districts across the state. In the Jungle Mahal blocks of West Midnapore, while the LF was able to put up candidates in many seats, it suffered a heavy defeat. In Binpur-1 block where I conducted my fieldwork, we see that the TMC went from holding no seats in 2008 to winning 26 seats in 2013, and opening its tally. The West Bengal State Election Commission data for Binpur-1 block-level election (Panchayat Samiti) shows that out of a total of 25 seats, the TMC won 22 seats, the CPM won 2 seats, and only one independent candidate won. The LF lost all previously held seats here in an election which saw a huge voter turnout of around 80 per cent.

Alongside the electoral loss in the Panchayat Samiti elections, the CPM's presence in everyday life of my fieldsites was reduced to almost nothing. The party was inactive in the day to day political life. I made repeated visits to their local office in Lalgarh and never found any leaders or members present in the office, and the gates were usually locked. On two occasions when the office gates were open, I encountered a teenage boy. He was the only person present in that building. When I asked him if anybody ever comes to this office, he said that he had only been asked to take care of the place and knew nothing else. The TMC office in Lalgarh presented a contrasting picture. Villagers queued outside TMC office located just a short walk away from the block office, to discuss their problems with party leaders. They approached the local TMC chairperson in Lalgarh and the eldest party member, Bono Behari Ray.

'Bono Babu', as he is known locally, declared that his importance in local village politics had been re-established after many years. He told me, 'I was in the Congress earlier. They did try to work for the development (*unnayan*) of the people of this area. But once the CPM came to power, the only tasks their cadres engaged in were threat and intimidation'. Bono Babu emphasised that only after the TMC has come to power, the region is improving.

'As you know, most people in the Jungle Mahals are Adivasis. We are doing a lot for their welfare', he added. Many other members of Bono Babu's extended family were TMC members too. After three decades, the family members of Jungle *zamindars* exercised some power at the village level once again, by virtue of being members of the ruling party. The jungle *zamindari* families had ceased to hold much importance in everyday life due to the CPM's anti-*zamindar* stance and focus on land reforms. The *zamindars'* membership of the TMC now brought them back into dominance. However, their dominance in the present was not due to their landholdings, but by being mediators in the provision of public goods.

For the time being, the TMC has replaced the CPM in the 'party society', and the social, cultural, and political life of the villages now revolves around local TMC leaders. Earlier, it was alleged that only those who had close ties with the CPM had gained access to development schemes, the same was being said about the TMC now. A lot of CPM supporters, as well as ordinary men and women shifted their allegiances to the TMC. Those who were involved in Maoism and the PCAPA also did the same to usher in 'change', or to simply avoid prosecution. The high-handedness shown by the CPM in the last few years convinced voters to bring in the opposition to power. There was a sense among my interlocutors that they were giving a chance to the TMC and will see how it goes. As a shopkeeper said to me, 'We could not have let the CPM come back. Now the TMC is here, they have said big things…let's see.' There was a general feeling that more people will be able to access development benefits now that the CPM is no longer in power. Some, however complained that the TMC was no different. Bina Das, a woman looking for work under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) said, 'All parties are the same. If you are with them, you get *sau-diner kaaj* (100 days work), but if you are not, they give you nothing.' Nevertheless, for ordinary men and women, a reconfiguration of the party society represented an opportunity to remake their relations with the local institutions and actors of

the state. It remains to be seen whether a new 'party society' is now in the making, with TMC at the helm of affairs.

4.3 Women and the *Hungama*

In the photographs that appeared across the media, in pamphlets, and in other material emerging from the movement, women were very visible as protestors. They were shown attending meetings, being part of protest demonstrations and marches, and carrying *lathis*. In media and activist reports, the major reason for women's participation was anger against the police, the CPM, and the *harmads*. This anger was a result of the manner in which women were treated during village raids and search operations to look for Maoists. Many women alleged that policemen brutally tortured and raped Adivasi women on several occasions. Women thus joined in the struggle against the violence perpetrated by the CPM's armed cadres. A women's wing of the PCAPA called Nari Ijjat Bachao Committee (NIBC) (Committee for the Protection of Women's Dignity). This committee largely focussed on saving women's honour from the police and security forces who were allegedly molesting and raping Adivasi women during raids and searches in the villages. PCAPA's leaders claimed that women formed this Committee without any support from the PCAPA (Sanhati 2013: 117).

NIBC emphasised that women were playing an equal role in the struggle and there were several women who had been martyred in the long history of struggle in the Jungle Mahals. A pamphlet taken out by them in 2011 claims that for women[12], this was a fight for several causes: 'police boycott, building peace, movements for development, protests against social differences and inequalities, and fight for equal rights for women'. NIBC extended the

[12] I thank Sangita Saha for assistance with translating this pamphlet from Bengali to English.

specific local causes taken up by the PCAPA and Maoists into a wider struggle for women's rights and places it within a longer history of mass struggle in the Jungle Mahals:

> For ages the mass at Jungle Mahal, specifically the women in the region, have fought for their respect, their dignity, their development and security and for peace- this determination has not changed.

The pamphlet even names women who were involved in the movement for Indian independence such as Matangini Hazra and Pritilata as inspiring figures for women's struggle in the present.

Women participated in demonstrations and rallies, especially to oppose the *harmads*. They organised *gheraos* of police stations where hundreds of women would surround the police station complex from all sides to put pressure on the police to listen to their demands. In one such incident of *gherao* in 2010, the police opened fire on the women. Women organising against the physical abuse and sexual violence of the police forces became a feature of the *hungama* in Lalgarh. In a village called Sonamukhi in the Lalgarh gram panchayat, the police allegedly committed mass rapes. Women who were affected started to move towards the PCAPA and later got together to start the NIBC. The PCAPA also declared that it had brought in equality through a 'practice of people's democracy' (Sanhati 2010). Each village had its own '*gram* (village) committee' composed of ten members. The PCAPA made it mandatory for five members out of the ten to be women. In the 13-point charter that the PCAPA drew up with also included a demand that the policemen responsible for atrocities on women should apologise by holding their ears and crawling on the ground.

Both the PCAPA and the NIBC glorified the participation of women, especially Adivasi women, in the movement. Some women from the region also took on important positions within the Maoist leadership but these were exceptions. For example, a woman named Suchitra Mahato became a prominent Maoist guerrilla and close aide of Kishenji. In

2012, she made headlines when she surrendered in front of TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee. However, we see that women's participation, while it brought women into the sphere of radical politics, and helped them organise themselves as women, did not quite challenge gender roles. The PCAPA and NIBC used patriarchal tropes of women's honour and protection, and women often came into the struggle as wives and mothers of martyrs (Nari Ijjat Bachao 2011). Also, the women who were the leaders in the NIBC were mostly Mahatos (Sanhati 2013: 400-401).

Over the course of my fieldwork, I met several women who had participated at different points in the movement in different ways. In my conversations with them, they revealed the reasons and extent of their participation. None of them took on leadership roles. They belonged to different social groups- Santals, Mahatos, Mahishya, and some groups categorised as Scheduled Caste and OBC. One such conversation I discuss here took place in the village Paharpelia[13], where in 2011, the CPM's *harmads* were allegedly involved in firing at and killing nine villagers who refused to join the CPM's arms training camp. One afternoon, Garima Garai invited me and four other women, Sangita Mondol, Phulmoni Garai, Pushpa Samanta, and Anjali Mahato[14], for tea to her house. We started our conversation about the different ways in which women were looking to expand their livelihoods through SHGs. I had met these women on several occasions in their houses and in the block office at meetings. Anjali spoke about how despite having an SHG since 2005, there was no connection between their group and the block office. Phulmoni remarked, 'Only recently we have started going to the block office regularly. Earlier we did not have the *obhigyota* (experience) that we could get so much out of making a *dal* (SHG)'. The LF government had encouraged the creation of SHGs in association with public-sector rural development banks

[13] Name of the village changed for anonymity.
[14] All names have been changed to protect my interlocutor's identities.

and tribal cooperatives. Women pointed to how most SHGs only existed in name. 'Before the *andolan*, things were different', she added.

At that point, our conversation veered towards discussing the *andolan*. Sangita said, 'Since you have not seen it, you will not understand how bad the situation was. There was a lot of fear around here (*prochondo bhoy*). We were scared of going out of our houses'. I asked them if they were scared of the Maoists. To that Pushpa responded, 'No…the police…the *harmads* (CPM's armed militia). The police would come search our houses looking for *Maovadis* (Maoists) and take away innocent boys (*chele)*. The police and *harmads* were with each other.' At this point, as Garima came in with cups of black tea, she said, 'The worst were the *harmads*, they were taking away boys as young as 21-22 years to their jungle camp to train them in handling guns.' Phulmoni added to Garima's remark, 'That is when women got together and decided to start a women's protest.' Sangita jumped in, 'Our boys were being taken away, they could be arrested, or beaten up for refusing to join the *harmads*. They were forced to use guns; the boys would get so scared even looking at the *ostra* (weapons).' Garima then said, 'It was too dangerous for the men and boys to be seen outside. So, it was up to women. We started going to meetings at night…the leaders would conduct them at 1 am, 2 am… we decided that if we were to save our sons, we have to do something.' The manner in which these women spoke about their participation in the *andolan* or about going to Maoist meetings at night suggests that their 'participation' was a response to the CPM *harmads'* and police's coercive tactics.

They felt that given the circumstances, only women's collective action could have addressed the situation. Pushpa started explaining to me the circumstances under which the infamous *hatyakaand* (murder scandal) took place. She pointed out, 'The *harmads* fired with guns to break women's unity (*meye-der obhijog*). They realised that women were stopping them for taking away boys.' During this firing incident, the *harmads* killed almost a dozen

people for their refusal to take up arms on their behalf. I asked Pushpa if she sees women's participation as effective. Garima answered this question by saying, 'There was no other option. Women had to step in. Later, the government changed and *harmads* had to leave. That helped, but we [women] also prevented some incidents.' When I asked them what incident, all of them exchanged smiles. Phulmoni narrated the incident for me,

> One day the police and *harmads* came to the village to catch hold of this one boy, who they had wrongly denounced as Maoist. We all knew that he was innocent. People like us attended the Maoist nightly meeting, but he had never gone even to such a meeting ever in his life. As they were taking him away, lots of women came out, *bou* (wives) from every household came out (*protyek barir-r meye*), and we all got together and surrounded the policemen (*gherao*). They were forced to leave without that boy. If we had not saved them form the police, they would have killed him and done what not. *Sobai geche* (everyone went) and helped that boy.

The other women nodded as Phulmoni spoke. They did think of their role in the *andolan* as successful, in so far as they dealt with the immediate threat facing them. Their *protibadh* (resistance) was mainly to protect themselves and their children.

When Phulmoni finished explaining what happened, Anjali said, 'We were forced to cook for *harmads*, send them rice, and send our boys to work for them. Our husbands told us that women have to resist. So we did. And now the CPM and their *harmads* are gone'. Since Anjali had talked of how some husbands encouraged their wives to protest and resist, I was curious to know what men thought of women's role in radical politics. Phulmoni answered saying, 'They were scared for us, but what could they do. What we did was important.' Pushpa stepped in to add, 'Only a few men were angry, like my *dada* (brother). He had worked for the CPM for many years and went to join the *harmad* camp. My *boudi* (sister-in-law) told him not to go but he did not listen. Once when he saw me protesting near the *harmad* camp, he asked me to stop all this. He said that women should not be doing all this. Of course, I did not listen to him.'

I then asked them about their present relationship with the CPM. Garima laughed and said, '*Ekhane CPM thakbe na* (CPM is no longer here). We are all Trinamool now…a

member from my SHG also fought elections as a Trinamool candidate. Under the quota, it is a seat reserved for women.' Reservations for women in panchayat bodies, along with SCs and STs were introduced by the Left Front. The women with whom I chatted over tea now voted for the TMC and some had even enrolled as party members. 'A lot has changed now with the government change. Did you see we have a *pucca raasta* (metalled road) '?, Anjali asked me. Immediately, Garima answered back, 'The road was there earlier also.' Everyone started laughing. Garima added, 'Yes, things have changed. But Trinamool says that CPM did nothing. That is not true. They did a lot of work (*onek kaaj koreche*). But later, they 'played politics' (*rajniti khelechhe*). We did not expect them to do what they did. We were surprised that they used weapons (*ostro*) on us.' Like other narratives I had heard in the course of my fieldwork, Garima's story, too, was pointing to a kind of betrayal by the CPM wherein the party violated the terms of relationship between the government and the citizens. As a result, the CPM's 'party society' broke down, and people shifted their loyalties.

Women in the Jungle Mahals participated in the *andolon* to protest against and resist the CPM, *harmads*, and the police. After the violent phase ended, a change of regime provided women an opportunity to bargain with the state machinery. However, they were also cautious to think that all is well now. As Garima perceptively pointed out, 'That time the CPM did such things for politics, maybe even the TMC will do the same. Let us wait and watch if *poriborton* (change) actually comes.' Resistance politics, for my women interlocutors, was ultimately about negotiating better state-society relations. As the new government began to target women through strategies of development as counterinsurgency, new spaces opened up for women. They realised that they could benefit through their SHGs. I explore the relationship between women, counterinsurgency, and the state in greater detail in the remainder of this thesis.

5. Conclusion

This chapter began by looking at the decline of the Left Front after thirty four years of rule in West Bengal, and the factors that led to this decline. I examined different aspects of Maoist and other forms of radical politics in my fieldsites in the period from 2008 onwards. I pointed at how the Adivasi identity became a rallying point for the resistance movement in the Jungle Mahals, focussing on how communities like the Mahatos and Santals participated in radical politics, and how this politics shaped relationships amongst these communities. I argue here that the events in the Jungle Mahals from 2008 to 2011 resulted in the breakdown of the LF's party society and set-up a new ruling bargain with the TMC at the helm of affairs. The bargain emerged through a period of conflict and started the process of subtly altering state-society relations. I emphasized that the chief reason for popular support for Maoist insurgency in West Bengal was disaffection with Left Front rule. Of course, democratic procedures played a key role, enabling ordinary men and women to vote out the CPM. Additionally, the appeal of the Lalgarh movement, apart from its anti-CPM stance, was linked to demands related to welfare and development, and making claims on political parties. The 'conflictual' interregnum, as the next chapter will explore, was followed by a 'development as counterinsurgency' strategy for the state to ensure that the root causes of violence are addressed through development.

Chapter 4: 'Development as Counterinsurgency': The Policies and Actors

1. Introduction

Within six months of Lalgarh becoming a 'liberated zone', the West Bengal police and central paramilitary forces claimed to have re-captured it. The district of West Midnapore was now under the home ministry's Operation Green Hunt. Clashes between the security forces and Maoists, however, continued. In late 2011, after the state and central governments claimed to have secured peace, development entered the picture as a strategy to win back the loyalties of ordinary women and men. What I call the 'development as counterinsurgency' strategy in Lalgarh was conceived and operationalised by a coalescing of the central and state government efforts, and the bureaucracy at the district and block levels. The government at the centre acted on the 2008 Planning Commission report that identified underdevelopment as the root cause of why Adivasis and Dalits participated in the Maoist movement. The newly-elected Trinamool Congress government in West Bengal, keen to discredit the CPM's regime and entrench its legitimacy, pushed for a development agenda as well. The new regime projected a picture in which the erstwhile government led by the CPI (M) had neglected these areas and the TMC was now stepping in to correct that by working towards the welfare of the Adivasis in the Jungle Mahals. Extra funds were earmarked for rural development programmes and infrastructure building. The development as counterinsurgency policy primarily emphasised poor women's empowerment, which, in rural West Bengal as elsewhere, had to be mobilised through self-help groups (SHGs) under the new anti-poverty regime in post-liberalisation India. This chapter will present an account of the processes of statemaking in Lalgarh and Ramgarh as part of the 'development as counterinsurgency' strategy. I show how policy framed at the centre unfolds here, linking women and their

livelihoods to the new order. I discuss the policy process involved in shaping the strategy, and the key actors involved in operationalising it.

2. The Government's Two-Pronged Approach to Maoism

Security operations remain at the heart of the Indian government's response to Maoism across the red corridor. However, the Indian government increasingly realised that security alone is not enough to tackle the problem. This is not to say that security forces were called back. If anything, more and more central paramilitary companies were being dispatched for Maoist-affected districts each year. The story of counterinsurgency cannot be narrated without taking into account state-led violence, which targeted marginalised groups in the name of dealing with the Maoist insurgency. In West Bengal, the local police forces as well as the central paramilitary forces employed violence to comb out the area of suspected Maoists, and arrested several people. The newly formed TMC government in West Bengal set up peace talks with the state-level Maoist committee, but police forces killed the Maoist leader Kishenji in a so-called encounter. 'Development as counterinsurgency' strategy is put into place in the aftermath of this violence.

Both the central and state governments now tried to project that they were pursuing a more holistic two-pronged approach to the problem, through a combination of security and development. The nexus between security and development to address violent conflict has now become commonplace, not only in international aid and governance, but in national policymaking as well. Maria Stern and Joakim Öjendal (2010) point out that this mutually reinforcing nexus could take on several forms within different discourses. For instance, there could be an intermingling of security and development strategies in policymaking to deal with existing insurgencies and other armed conflicts. On the other hand, the focus on

development could be to ensure that the underlying causes of conflict are dealt with. One form the security-development nexus takes is that of 'human security', a concept endorsed by the United Nations.[1] Chenoy and Chenoy (2010) proposed of 'human security' in place of state security by as the solution to Maoist and other armed conflicts in India. Santosh Mehrotra (2014), who was part of the planning commission's expert group, recommended 'human development' as the way forward to securing peace in the 'Maoist-affected' areas. Further, Mona Bhan (2014) shows how the 'liberal counterinsurgency doctrine' in Kargil (Jammu and Kashmir) became a way for the state to win the 'hearts and minds' of people.[2] In 2013, the Home Ministry also put out a similar proposal 'Winning Hearts and Minds' for the Maoist-affected areas. Security forces were asked to project a 'human face' and undertake civic activities.[3] Nandini Sundar (2012) posits that in such strategies, the state makes emotional appeals of citizenship to deny the actuality of counterinsurgency. This strategy of 'heart warfare, healing, and compassion', coupled with 'development and social welfare', Bhan argues, is used by states in war-torn regions to remake their authority and legitimacy. The government of India similarly has tried to employ development against insurgencies in north-east India (Baruah 2009). Development becomes an all-encompassing term used by state and military officials not only to show a 'will to improve' but to also to contain any challenges to the existing socio-economic and political order (Bhan 2014: 16; Li 2007: 8).

The Indian government started seriously pursuing development as a counterinsurgency measure against the Maoists after a report published by the Planning

[1] Human Security as a concept places security of individual human beings over national security. The United Nations in 1994 outlined seven interconnected aspects of human security: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political.

[2] The phrase 'winning hearts and minds' (WHAM) was introduced by the British general Richard Templer in Malaya during the emergency from 1948-1960. He argued that it was not enough simply to isolate villagers from insurgents (communists in this case) but also take steps to improve their economic and living conditions, so that they have a reason to support the government rather than the insurgents.

[3] 'In Naxal areas, security forces will now reach out to individuals', *The Hindu*, 26 August 2013: http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/in-naxal-areas-security-forces-will-now-reach-out-to-individuals/article5059388.ece)

Commission in 2008 with the title, 'Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas'. The Planning Commission had set up an expert group of 17 members on 'Development Issues to deal with the causes of Discontent, Unrest and Extremism'. This group consisted of researchers, human rights activists, ex-bureaucrats, journalists and academics. The principal authors of the report were Bela Bhatia[4], a researcher who has researched on Naxalism in Bihar and the late K. Balagopal[5], a lawyer and human rights activist. The ninety-page long report sought to understand why Dalits, Adivasis, and women support left-wing extremism and concluded that underdevelopment lay at the heart of popular grievances against the state in the so-called Red Corridor of eastern-central India. The report blamed the extractive development paradigm of the Indian state for lacking sensitivity to the needs and aspirations of 'marginal' communities in these insurgent zones.

In other words, the Maoist 'problem' was described as not merely a law and order issue, as the state had seen it so far, but also a severe socioeconomic problem. Abject poverty and lack of livelihood opportunities were seen as key drivers of Maoism. The report made a case for a systematic addressing of the socioeconomic causes of Maoism with a sustained administrative developmental action. The report suggested the adoption of a 'multi-dimensional strategy for governance', with 'elements of protection, development, participation, effective administration, accountability, inclusive politics and a paradigm shift in the approach to violence' (Government of India 2008: 23). Above all, the report exhorted the Indian state to remain committed to the democratic principles and rights enshrined in the Indian Constitution, which it was legally obliged to uphold.

[4] Bela Bhatia is an independent researcher and writer and regularly writes articles in academic and non-academic publications on human rights, people's movements and democracy in rural India. Her PhD dissertation dealt with Naxalism in Bihar in the 1980s.

[5] K.Balagopal was a mathematician, lawyer and human rights activists who wrote extensively on caste, class, human rights, and Maoism in Andhra Pradesh. He passed away in 2009. His writings were published in a volume called 'Ear to the Ground' in 2010.

This approach to the Maoist issue attracted criticisms, firstly, from scholars who have studied the conflict ethnographically close to the ground. While underdevelopment might be one of the reasons why some Adivasis support or join the Maoists, seeing it as the sole reason papers over the complexities of this conflict. Alpa Shah (2013a), based on her fieldwork in Jharkhand, challenges theories of grievance that are often deployed to explain participation in social movements, insurgencies, and revolutionary upheavals. Grievance-centred explanations systematically overestimate the extent of popular support for the Maoists in India. Grievances arising out of material deprivation in contemporary India are far greater than the extent of support for the Maoists. Moreover, geographies of poverty do not map neatly onto the Red Corridor, where Maoist activities have been largely concentrated. Shah suggests that ordinary people join Maoist ranks mainly due to relations of intimacy, whether fictive or real ties of kinship, rather than grievances. In a similar vein, Chitralekha's (2012) in-depth sociological study of participation in Maoism as well as Hindutva shows that the reasons for joining either movement is far more mundane than many think. The ambitions of rural youth and the complexities of their self-making processes in India today are, she found, far more promising explanations of why some at the bottom of rural hierarchies join the Maoists. Uday Chandra (2013a) goes further to locate participation in and opposition to Maoists within conflicts within Adivasi communities in rural Jharkhand. Whereas older and better-off members of these village communities are vehemently opposed to the Maoists, youth, especially from the middle strata of the same villages, have been particularly active in various Maoist outfits. Likewise, in Bihar, George Kunnath (2012) has shown that Dalit participation in the Naxalite movement in the 1980s arose out of tensions between dominant and subordinated castes in a highly unequal agrarian social structure. As I show in this thesis, in West Bengal, popular support for Maoists in the late 2000s was linked to a disenchantment with the ruling Left-Front coalition. In other words, even if we concede that poverty might

sometimes be one among the many factors behind a person's decision to join the Maoist movement, it should be clear that a fairly small proportion of the poor in India become Maoists; in fact, when they do so, they are likely to have other compelling reasons. The Planning Commission report's sole emphasis on state failure to deliver welfare in 'extremist-affected areas' as the underlying cause of Maoism thus obfuscates rather than elucidates the manner in which the insurgency came to be embedded in the fabric of society itself.

The Planning Commission report of 2008 invited a second set of criticisms for its implicit assumption that there could be no politics beyond the realm of the liberal-democratic welfare state in India today. Saroj Giri (2009), for instance, argued that, by defining the Maoist 'problem' in socioeconomic or developmental terms, the Planning Commission and the authors of the 2008 report from the ranks of the 'dissident left' took a liberal middle ground that is sympathetic to Adivasis yet treats the state as their ultimate saviour. Giri is not convinced that popular support for a radical political movement can be reduced to their material conditions or 'underdevelopment'. Not only is such an explanation reductionist, stripping ordinary people of any political motivations, he says, but it also proposes a fictional narrative by which it can be argued conveniently that the developmental state's neglect of certain regions has led to mass support for the Maoists and a return to public goods provision would remedy the present situation. On a related note, Alpa Shah (2013b: 96) critiques the role played by civil liberties activists, some of whom co-authored the 2008 report, who approach Maoism as merely a 'problem' caused by the non-extension of liberal citizenship to the margins of the postcolonial Indian state. Shah explains that the language of constitutional rights and liberties limits the political imaginaries of these civil society activists to the postcolonial state as it presently exists. A close reading of the recommendations of the Planning Commission report support Shah's argument: passing protective legislations to protect Adivasis, Dalits, minorities, and women from human rights violations; making

cooperative banking structures accessible to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes; undertaking intensive implementation of National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA)[6] in these areas; implementing the Forest Rights Act[7]; undertaking land reforms; and extending the Panchayat Raj system of self-government to these areas. The report was too sanguine about the ability of a democratic and welfare state to resolve the threat of Maoism.

Criticisms such as these continued to exist but the 2008 report and the inadequacy of security operations to deal with the Maoist challenge gradually brought about a turn in the government's thinking in New Delhi. Supplementing its security operations with development, the central government announced new programmes. In 2010, the government approved the Integrated Action Plan (IAP). Districts where 20 per cent of the total number of police stations in the district saw incidents of Maoist violence were brought under the plan. Initially, 60 Maoist affected districts were given a total of ₹250 million every year for government programmes like the NREGA and midday meal scheme.[8] In 2013, the plan was extended to include 88 districts with a fund of ₹300 million per district per year. The programme is planned and monitored by the Planning Commission. The funds are directly provided to the District Magistrate who is supposed to use them for infrastructure projects such as construction of school and college buildings, roads, panchayat buildings, health centres, and toilets; and provision of irrigation, and drinking water facilities. The funds also have to be used to provide new livelihood opportunities and skill development training. The

[6] The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005 (NREGA), also known as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, and abbreviated to MGNREGA, guarantees a right to work in rural areas by providing at least hundred days of guaranteed wage employment in year to every household whose adult members can volunteer to do manual labour on the government's infrastructure-building projects.
[7] Forest Rights Act**:** The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, is a key piece of forest legislation passed on 18 December 2006. The law concerns the rights of forest-dwelling communities to land and other resources, which were denied to them under colonial forest laws.
[8] The Mid Day Meal Scheme is a programme to provide free lunches to children in government-run schools.

districts where IAP is implemented have come to be known as IAP districts or LWE (Left-Wing Extremist) districts in administrative parlance, and new schemes launched in these districts use funds from the IAP.[9]

The Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) is the most pro-active ministry in promoting so-called development in the Maoist-affected areas. The driving force behind making development central in the government agenda was Jairam Ramesh, who headed the ministry from 2011-2014 under the United Progressive Alliance government. At a speech on Maoism he delivered in 2011[10], he lauded the 2008 report for the '…sheer comprehensiveness and depth of analysis and for showing a practical way ahead.' Ramesh stressed that '…para-military and police action cannot and should not be the driving force. The driving force has necessarily to be development and addressing the daily concerns of the people, of people who have every reason to feel alienated.' He detailed how he had been involved in tackling Naxalism through development for many years:

> First, since 2004 when I became a Member of Parliament from Andhra Pradesh, I have used my MPLADS funds mostly in Adilabad, Warangal and Khammam—three Naxal-affected districts--to strengthen women's self-help group organisations and reduce the trust deficit between tribal communities and the civil administration. Second, between June 2009 and July 2011 as minister in charge of environment and forests it fell on me to bring about changes in forest policy and administration since this has been identified as a key factor in dealing with the issue of Naxal violence. Third, since July 2011 as minister in charge of rural development covering key programmes like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), watershed management, drinking water supply, housing, social assistance and modernisation of land records, an opportunity has been afforded to me to address the development deficit in the Naxal-affected areas that the 17-member Planning Commission expert group so tellingly identified.

During his tenure as the Minister for Rural Development, he made efforts to ensure that building of village roads and provision of rural employment under MGNREGA was prioritised in the LWE areas. He spoke of how his first success story was the development

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[9] The new National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government which came to power in New Delhi in May 2014 plans to change the agency implementing IAP. Since the NDA is now looking to close down the Planning Commission, Home Minister Rajnath Singh is considering that the Home Ministry take charge of the IAP. See http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2014-09-09/news/53731080_1_scheme-home-ministry-integrated-action-plan

[10] The speech can be found on the website of the Press Information Bureau of India. http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=76575

plan for the Maoist affected Saranda forests in Jharkhand.[11] Ramesh initiated some special measures for Maoist-affected districts. In 2012, he started a programme called the Prime Minister's Rural Development Fellows Scheme, inspired from the White House Fellows programme[12] in the United States. In its third year now and taking new fellows each year, the objective of the programme, as stated, is to bring in 'exceptionally bright and motivated young professionals with leadership potential to work towards betterment of marginalized groups' in Maoist-affected areas[13]. The MoRD also signed a Memorandum of Understanding with ASAAN[14], an NGO which is funded by the Ford Foundation and Gates Foundation to collaborate with the ministry on the implementation of the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) in Maoist-affected areas. Loan subsidies for women SHGs, and a skills training programmes for youth in LWE districts were also announced. I will discuss these initiatives in detail in the next section.

My fieldsites in the forest villages of Lalgarh and Ramgarh in the West Midnapore district of West Bengal were brought under the IAP in the second phase when the plan was extended to more districts. During my fieldwork in 2013 and 2014, although the CRPF was still stationed in and around the villages, though there was no violence at this point. The new West Bengal state government took great pride in completely sanitising the area of Maoists and other insurgents, and claimed that it was now responding to the development needs of the districts in the state where such insurgencies had taken place. The government made the exaggerated claim that the lack of development, the underlying cause of insurgency, was due to the thirty-four years of the erstwhile Left Front government. Jairam Ramesh told me, how

[11] Personal Interview with Jairam Ramesh, New Delhi, 9 January 2015
[12] The White House Fellows program in the United States of America was established in 1964. The program aims to give fellows a feel of the day to day working of the Federal government in the country.
[13] For more details, see PMRDF webite. http://pmrdfs.tiss.edu/index.php
[14] Name of the NGO has been changed

the development strategy to counter Maoism in Lalgarh could not have been possible had the chief minister Mamata Banerjee not been so enthusiastic about it. [15]

Relying on the IAP funds from the central government and support from the West Bengal state government, the district administration put into place several schemes: providing housing for adivasis residing in forest villages, building Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) centres, setting up tube wells for irrigation, constructing toilets, building new schools, colleges and hostels, and setting up centres for skills training. Apart from this, special efforts were made in West Bengal to recruit youth from the Jungle Mahals into the West Bengal Police as home guards and junior-level constables. The government called this 'counter-propaganda' to wean local populations away from the Maoists.[16] The state government, in line with the central government's emphasis on SHGs, also put into place a plan to revive existing Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and to create new ones. Women's SHGs became one of the important ways in which the state attempted to entrench itself again in the everyday lives of the people.

3. Targeting Women through Development

On a sunny December morning, a room called the 'multipurpose' meeting room in the southeast corner of the Block Development Office compound of the Binpur-1 block at Lalgarh[17] was filled with a hundred women. These women were members of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) from villages of Lalgarh and Ramgarh gram panchayats.[18] Sitting on brown

[15] Personal Interview with Jairam Ramesh, New Delhi, 9 January 2015
[16] See West Bengal Police website, http://policewb.gov.in/wbp/special_recruitment/bnk.php
[17] Binpur-1 block is part of the West Midnapore district of West Bengal. The block is headquartered at Lalgarh. The administrative division of Binpur-1 block comprises of 10 gram panchayats: Andharia, Baita, Belatikri, Binpur, Dahijuri, Dharampur, Lalgarh, Nepura, Ramgarh and Sijua. A gram panchayat is an administrative division and typically comprises of 12-15 villages
[18] A typical SHG consists of 8-10 women from the same village who pool in their saving every month. Members can then take loans out of this consolidated amount for their different needs: a wedding in the family, financing

plastic chairs, they were waiting for the 'meeting' to begin. As the block development officer (BDO) walked in with Probir, the Prime Minister's Rural Development Fellow for West Midnapore district, the women stood up to greet them. The men were joined by Arunabh, the area executive for ASAAN, the NGO working on livelihoods projects in the area. Only when the men took their seats on a raised platform did the women sit down. Sarbani Mahato, the block supervisor for self-help groups (SHGs) then called out the names of each of the fifty SHG groups on her list to mark attendance.[19] Each SHG was represented at the meeting by two members of each group, one of who was the *'dalnetri'* or group leader'. The BDO then took the microphone and announced that the women had been called because their SHGs had been selected to be a part of the '*Muktidhara Prakalpa*' (Source of Freedom Project). He then passed over the microphone to Probir. One by one, he called out the names of the groups and women, who came forward, looking anxious and nervous. They handed out their SHG *khaatas* (record books) for examination. Probir asked me to sit next to him and explained that a raised seat would help me observe the proceedings in the room much better. Arunabh told me that the purpose of this meeting was to examine whether the women had duly maintained SHG record books. Each SHG is required to maintain four *khaatas*: Meetings Resolutions Book, Savings Book, Cash Book and Loans Register. These are standardised books that are provided to the SHG by the block office when the SHG is registered. Groups are expected to meet weekly or fortnightly with all their members present. The proceeding of each meeting and the signatures of members present are to be recorded in the Meetings Resolution book. They are also required to maintain their cash accounts properly. If these women had not done so, they ran the risk of being excluded from the benefits of the Muktidhara project.

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cultivation or running a small business. Members conduct weekly meetings among themselves to decide on the allocation of funds. Most of the existing SHGs in these areas were formed under different state schemes.

[19] All names have been changed to protect the identity of my interlocutors.

The first phase of the Muktidhara pilot project in the West Midnapore district was being launched by the district administration in two blocks, and Binpur-1 was one of them. Muktidhara was inspired by a poverty reduction programme, Rajiv Gandhi Mahila Vikas Pariyojana (Rajiv Gandhi Women's Development Scheme) targeted at women's self-help groups in thirty-three districts of the state of Uttar Pradesh.[20] This programme had also been replicated in the Purulia district of West Bengal in 2013. Muktidhara aims to financially empower existing women SHGs through a 'cash-credit linkage'.[21] Selected SHG groups (fifty in total from Lalgarh and Ramgarh gram panchayats) will be given loans up to ₹ 100,000 at a subsidized interest rate, to create and support livelihood options and self-employment for women. The SHGs for the scheme were selected through a process of 'grading' where the SHGs were given points on different attributes: regularity of meetings, the level of participation of members in the meeting, amount of savings, maintenance of record books, and if members had received skill and financial training. It was also essential for all group members to be below the poverty line (BPL) and should not have been previously covered by any financial assistance. The project is supported by the West Bengal State government's Department of SHG and Self-Employment in collaboration with institutions such as National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD).[22] In the longer term, the district administration planned to converge Muktidhara with other central government schemes such

[20] 'Rajiv Gandhi Mahila Vikas Pariyojana (RGMVP) is a rights-based organisation working for poverty reduction, women's empowerment and rural development in Uttar Pradesh… RGMVP organises poor rural women into community organisations in the form of Self-Help Groups (SHGs), each with ten to twenty women. SHGs are social platforms to access rights and entitlements, and address issues of financial inclusion, livelihood, healthcare, education, and the environment'. (RGMVP website)

[21] Cash-credit linkage is a term used in policy documents to refer to the state intervention to bring SHGs with cash savings in contact with the credit banking system.

[22] National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) is a public sector development bank in India headquartered in Mumbai. The bank came into existence in 1982 and is India's public sector bank for. agricultural credit

as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, Integrated Child Development Services and the Mid-Day Meal Programme.[23]

The Muktidhara project had several stated objectives.[24] Probir explained that the project aimed to convince banks to grant loans to SHGs, and to and to set up infrastructural and institutional support for women to pursue new livelihoods. He pointed out that there was a need to establish channels for women to be able to sell what they produce and get the right price for their products, both locally as well at the district and state levels. They were trying to promote those livelihoods which are best suited to the 'socioeconomic environment of the district' (Muktidhara guidelines 2013). Goat and poultry rearing, vegetable cultivation, rice cultivation through improved techniques, and sal leaf[25] plate-making were encouraged. Another goal was to formally organise SHGs into clusters and sub-clusters. Sub-clusters bring together members of different SHGs from villages within a gram panchayat, and a cluster is organised SHGs within a block. These platforms are supposed to provide an environment where SHG women can discuss issues that they might be facing, help each other with problems, socialise with each other and collaborate to organise joint events.

The emphasis on SHGs to overcome poverty and underdevelopment is not, of course, specific to my fieldsites in West Midnapore. Since the mid-1990s, SHGs have become the cornerstone of anti-poverty policy across India, and this focus on SHGs has been converged with the policy focus on women's empowerment (Fernandez 2008; Pattenden 2010; Sud 2013 and 2003). The attention is on creating self-helping subjects, especially women, who will

[23] ICDS was launched in 1975 and is a scheme to address children's malnutrition in children under the age of six, and deal with health problems affecting children and their mothers. ICDS centres are known as *Aanganwadi* centres and women from the villages are selected and trained to run them. See Akhil Gupta 1995, and Gupta and Sharma 2006.

[24] My source for these are conversations with Probir, and the Muktidhara policy guidelines document that he shared with me.

[25] Sal tree is a tree native of the Indian subcontinent. It is a source of hardwood timer. Dry sal leaves are used to make plates.

overcome poverty by becoming entrepreneurial subjects through self-help groups and microcredit. Microcredit operationalised through self-help groups (SHGs) is posed as the solution to poverty 'through entrepreneurship, not state hand-outs' (Sud 2012). Self-Help and Microcredit were first promoted in India under the Integrated Rural Development Program (IRDP), launched in 1979. Under the IRDP, the central government initiated subsidiary schemes such as Training Rural Youth for Self-Employment (TRYSEM) and Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) programme in 1982. DWCRA, among other things, focussed on providing subsidies and making microfinance available to rural poor women for income generating activities. In 1999, the IRDP was merged with the Ministry of Rural Development's new programme, the Swarnajayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojana (Golden Jubilee Village Self-Employment Scheme, SGSY). The Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) recognised that SGSY was plagued by many problems: 'vast regional variations in mobilization of rural poor; insufficient capacity building of beneficiaries; insufficient investments for building community institutions; and weak linkages with banks leading to low credit mobilization and low repeat financing.' (MoRD 2010). The government felt the need to reorganize the programme.

In 2011, SGSY was restructured as 'Aajeevika (Livelihood): the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM)' based on a public-private partnership model. NRLM is today the largest state-run microcredit programme with a budget of $ 5.1 billion and is supported by World Bank with a credit of $ 1 Billion. It set out with an agenda to cover all 70 million rural poor households, across 600 districts, and 600,000 villages in the country and support them for livelihoods collectives in a period of eight to ten years. The intention is to make the rural poor either self-employed or employable by providing them with capacities and skills to manage livelihoods and become credit-worthy. Like SGSY, NRLM's focuses a great deal on SHGs, which are referred to as 'institutions of the poor' by the MoRD. One of the key

objectives is to bring one member from each identified rural poor household, preferably a woman, into the SHG network. NRLM programme concentrates on the marginalized sections of society. Accordingly, SCs and STs comprise 50 percent and women are supposed to make up 40 percent of the total beneficiaries from the programme. The Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) presents NRLM as a 'mission' under which state governments have the flexibility to design their anti-poverty and livelihood programmes using the funds provided to them. States are encouraged to build partnerships with Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), which are often referred to as Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), for implementation of NRLM.[26] The state, in its restructured role, has been increasingly keen to partner with external institutions in implementing its welfare function.

In West Bengal, the Left Front government had claimed to actively promote women's SHGs as a means of providing welfare to poor women, in villages as well as in urban municipalities. Under what the Left Front called 'the SHG movement', SHGs in the rural areas were organised by the West Bengal Ministry of Rural Development and Panchayats under the SGSY scheme. NABARD was also actively involved in organising and setting up of groups. In a report on completion of its thirty years in power, the CPI(M) emphasised that 'the total number of SHGs in West Bengal reached 3.8 lakhs in 2005-06, involving nearly 3.8 million persons, 90 per cent of whom are women' (CPI (M) 2007). In 2006, this government even created a dedicated department called Department of Self-Help Groups and Self-Employment for West Bengal. This department liaises with financial bodies such as public-sector banks to link SHGs to the banking system, and provides skill-development training to women who form these SHGs. The department set up a section for SHGs in each district, and a supervisor for SHGs for appointed for each block. The supervisor forms the everyday link

[26] See 2011 MoRD Press Release on NRLM, 1 June 2011, http://www.pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=72428

between the state and SHGs. In West Midnapore district, the 2011-12 District Annual Report states that there are 28,000 SGSY groups and 20,000 NABARD groups in the district. Some Santal women also indicated that their SHGs were formed under the Large-sized Adivasi Multipurpose Cooperative Societies (LAMPS).[27] The new government under Mamata Banerjee has made announcements offering financial subsidies and lower-interest loans to SHGs. Banerjee criticised the erstwhile Left Front government for 'failing to improve' the SHGs' condition[28]. She started a programme called 'Anandodhara' (Source of Joy) under the NRLM to mobilise credit for SHGs in the state, and provide forums to assist SHGs in marketing their produce. She tried to project that this increased attention to SHGs was due to this change in government.

In Lalgarh and Ramgarh, statemaking in the context of 'development as counterinsurgency' had some special features which mark it out as exceptional. While the promotion of women's empowerment through SHGs is a key feature of state intervention in most parts of rural India, the administration here was projecting it as a special case of development efforts since the 'change'. It could be a programme in any part of rural India but there are definitely certain particularities. First, the selection of Binpur-1 for the first phase of this project was to do with it being a 'Left Wing Extremist (LWE block)'. LWE districts across the country receive additional funding directly from the central government to aid them in 'development'. The guidelines of the Muktidhara programme state that the aim is to achieve a 'dedicated administrative and monitoring structure, sustainable funding, financial and social empowerment of women in LWE affected areas and adequate support systems to the financial institutions are the few salient features of the project'.

[27] LAMPS are cooperative societies working for welfare of Adivasis
[28] See 'Self-help group sops with an eye on rural polls', *The Telegraph*, 22 January 2011, http://www.telegraphindia.com/1120122/jsp/bengal/story_15037420.jsp#.VBh6HvldV8E

Second, the lower interest rate for loans taken by women SHGs is offered only in the LWE districts. In 2013, the then Minister of Rural Development, Jairam Ramesh announced cheaper loans for women SHGs in the Maoist-affected districts.[29] Selected Women SHGs can get loans at the rate of 7% per annum up to an aggregated loan amount of ₹ 300,000 and those who repay loans in time will get additional interest subvention of 3% reducing the effective rate of interest to 4% per annum. The cost of sub-venting the interests on these loans would be covered by the central government.[30] Muktidhara in West Midnapore district is planned on that basis. NABARD provides grant support to NGOs (₹ 10,000/- per SHG) who are willing to take on the responsibility of providing skills training and capacity building programmes to women's SHGs in these LWE districts. Similarly, a separate skills training programme for youth, especially young women, was also in the offing. The MoRD had selected West Midnapore district, and was willing to finance three-fourths of the cost for this programme.[31]

Third, there was an emphasis on bringing in development as swiftly as possible, even by circumventing the usual routes taken by development schemes. The Muktidhara programme is linked to the Ministry of Rural Development's Integrated Action Plan (IAP) to 'develop tribal and backward districts' in LWE areas. The Integrated Action Plan provides additional financial assistance directly from the central government to the district administration of Maoist-affected districts. It is aimed at quick resolution of problems concerning healthcare, drinking water, education, employment, and roads, as well as ensuring that the existing state schemes for rural areas are properly implemented in these districts. The direct transfer of funds from the centre to the districts is aimed at quick results for the

[29] See: 'Women's SHGs will get cheaper loans At 7% under NRLM', *Hindu Business Line*, 3 Feb 2014, http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/policy/women-shgs-will-get-cheaper-loans-at-7-under-nrlm/article5649308.ece

[30] Letter from Jairam Ramesh to Mamata Banerjee, 7 May 2013, Jairam Ramesh's private papers, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML).

[31] Letter from Jairam Ramesh to Mamata Banerjee, 10 June 2013, Jairam Ramesh's private papers, NMML

administration to build state legitimacy. As the District Magistrate (DM) of West Midnapore said to me, 'We can bring in development much faster because we can bypass democracy.' Puzzled by his remark, I asked him to clarify. He then remarked, 'You see most rural development programmes are routed through panchayats, NREGA for example. But now, schemes like Muktidhara do not need to be implemented through panchayats, so there are no problems.' What he meant by the 'bypassing of democracy' was that political parties which often dominate panchayats will not interfere in the programme. He felt that this was a significant shift, and gave bureaucrats much more leeway.[32]

Finally, the presence of actors who are outside the traditional domain of the state bureaucracy, such as the Prime Minister's Rural Development Fellow (PMRDF) and the AASAN executive, was due to the district being an LWE district. They were operating the scheme in this block along with the lower level state functionaries and this was a particularity of the state apparatus in the counterinsurgency context here. The presence of these actors expanded the domain of statemaking. In the following section, I sketch out the profiles of the key actors who represented the state in my fieldsites.

4. Key Actors in 'Development as Counterinsurgency'

'Women's development' by mobilising the SHG network was one of the ways in which the state was building close ties with people. Under the special fund for Maoist-affected blocks, infrastructure buildings projects were undertaken but the Muktidhara programme meant building close contact with the people, in this case, women. Looking at

[32] While the technocratic implementation of the post-insurgency development programmes was much faster because they were not routed through panchayats, this did not mean that 'democracy' did not matter in the larger scheme of things. The TMC supremo and elected chief minister, Mamata Banerjee, had a role in making sure that the implementation of development programmes is not delayed. She came to power through elections. Ordinary men and women felt that new development programmes for them were a result of them democratically ousting the Left Front and voting in a new government.

who was operating this programme at gives an idea of the key actors of the state in the 'development as counterinsurgency' context. The block office was at the centre of the operations, and constantly needed to liaise with the district magistrate's office. The Prime Minister's Rural Development Fellow, Probir, was the link connecting these two offices in the case of Muktidhara implementation. To study the state ethnographically, Akhil Gupta (1995) argues, one must start with studying the everyday interactions between lower-level functionaries and the people. Doing this helps in disaggregating the state and recognising that people experience the state through discrete individuals rather than imagining it as a unified entity. In rural India, the state is represented by different kinds of actors: block officials, panchayat members, healthcare workers, members of the party in power, school teachers, and increasingly even NGO workers. Of course, as Gupta also argues, the image of the state is not just confined to the local level practices. He points out that the state is founded by an 'intersection of local, regional, national, and transnational phenomena', the image of the state is constructed in public culture, and the actors who represent the state for villagers, must be seen as trans-local entities (Gupta 1995: 392). In this section, I introduce the key individuals that the women encountered as the state: the BDO, Sarbani Mahato, Resource Persons (RPs), Probir and Arunabh.

One might ask here: what was the role of the ruling party, the TMC? At the time of my fieldwork, the TMC had been in power for over two years, and local party leaders in Lalgarh were trying to become as involved as possible in every sphere of village life. They kept in constant touch with the block offices to ensure that 'development' work was being carried out. Ordinary men and women often went to the party office, located five hundred metres away from the block office, to seek help with administrative work: filling of official forms, preparing petitions to seek benefits under development programmes, and making pleas to 'get work done'. Local party leaders advised and assisted them if they could. Apart from this

spatial proximity, the TMC was also interested in appearing to be visibly connected to development programmes. As I will show in Chapter 5, the the government minister inaugurating the Muktidhara programme and extolling the party's successes at the launch event was an instance of the party wanting to be seen as the initiator of transformations in Lalgarh. The chief minister, Mamata Banerjee made frequent visits to assess the implementation of development programmes. Additionally, ordinary people linked the initiation of the Muktidhara programme to a change in government. In sum, the party was important to people's imagination of the state, but they also knew that they could vote it out of power if it did not deliver. The party was connected, both symbolically and administratively, to the actors who I introduce below, and was, thus, a crucial part of the architecture of the state.

The BDO

The Block Development Officer or the BDO is seen as the highest authority that villagers can approach in the rural parts of India. The block is an administrative division comprising of 8-10 gram panchayats, each of which encompasses several villages. S/he is in charge of the implementation of development programmes in the block. The BDO coordinates on these with the District Rural Development Authority (DRDA), NABARD and the district magistrate. The present BDO of Binpur-1, Benoy Roy, has been the BDO since 2011. He is drawn from the West Bengal state civil services pool and took over after the conflict was over. The BDO was a short, middle-aged, soft-spoken man and did not talk too much. His room was on the first floor of the block office. It was a large room. The BDO sat on his desk. Facing his chair were about twenty plastic chairs. The room was often used for meetings with the block office staff, and to receive district-level bureaucrats. He spent a lot of his time preparing for the visits of the PMRDF, NABARD officials and other district-level

officials. He had to arrange for them to be taken around villages, order food for them and bring together people for the meetings they wanted to conduct. He usually delegated these tasks to others working under him. When I started fieldwork, I went and introduced myself to the BDO. He was enthusiastic that I was conducting research in the area but refused to talk much and repeatedly turned down my requests to interview him. Other than that, he was very helpful and on one occasion, even offered that I take his chauffeur-driven car to travel to one distant village. He introduced me to Sarbani Mahato, who handled the SHG related work in the block office.

The Supervisor

The SHG-related work for the block was handled by Sarbani Mahato. Sarbani's position was the Block Supervisor for SHG and Self-Employment (SHG and SE) for the block. A separate department for SHG and SE was created in West Bengal in 2006, and this department appoints a supervisor for each block. She was in her mid-twenties and a graduate in Bengali literature. After I told her I was pursuing a PhD, she told me that she too was applying for a PhD in a state university in Midnapore, the district town. Her office computer had several excel lists of registered SHGs in the block. As she transferred these documents to my flash drive, she told me how her computer literacy helped her get the job. She told me that she never goes to the 'field' and manages the work in the block office. Whenever a new SHG was started, women had come to her and register it. Sarbani was aware of her superior position over the SHG women. I never saw her talking to the women casually. Her tone while interacting with them was always stern and business-like. The women addressed her as 'madam'. At the Muktidhara meetings, she entered the room when the women had already gathered and marked their attendance. From time to time, asked them to not talk amongst themselves and maintain silence in the meeting. Every time Probir fixed a meeting, he sent a

letter addressed to the BDO, and then made a phone call to inform Sarbani. It was her job to get all the women together, sometimes even at a day's notice. She was able to do that through her network of Resource Person or RPs.

Resource Persons (RPs)

In 2011, women and men drawn from village communities were appointed as local resource persons (two for each gram panchayat) to serve as the link between the block office and the SHG women. Usually women who had prior experience running an SHG are chosen for this role. Many state-led programmes are run with the help of village-level workers (VLW) whose task is to disseminate information among people and assist them. The RPs for SHGs are a kind of VLW. The RPs are supposed to be hand-on advisors for the women: to help them manage records, do the paperwork, and help with their banking tasks. For many women, RPs are indispensable to running an SHG. Asha Garai of Radha SHG told me, 'We had no clue about how to do things. Our RP didi helps us. From her, we have slowly learnt what to do.' Asha's RP Shoma Mahato told me she used to run her own SHG and that experience helped her become an RP. She encourages women to form groups and assists them in carrying out the required formalities. Shoma had a notebook with the names and phone numbers of all SHG women in the areas assigned to her. Sarbani relied on RPs like Shoma to reach the women. She would call the RPs, who in turn called the women to inform them about meetings. However, RPs are underpaid (they are only paid about £8 a month) and therefore have little motivation to do anything beyond the basic tasks. Meena Mahato, one of the RPs for Lalgarh gram panchayat said, 'I just feel like leaving this job. Madam (referring to Sarbani) calls us to the block office all the time. What I am paid is not even enough to pay for my transport costs to and from the block office. But since she summons me, I have to go. With Muktidhara, my work has increased. I get paid much less than even the minimum daily

wage given under the employment guarantee act.' I asked her what makes her do the job then. She answered, 'It's a government job after all. Being associated with the block office has its benefits. And I can't deny that it feels good to say I have a job. Else I would just be sitting at home'. The lack of adequate financial remuneration led to a situation where some tasks that RPs were expected to do were not being done. For instance, Auyona Mahato of the Ma Saraswati SHG said, 'The RP should visit us regularly and conduct sub-cluster meetings[33]. But he does nothing at all.'

The Prime Minister's Rural Development Fellow (PMRDF)

Probir was just back from a full day 'field-visit' to several villages in Lalgarh and Ramgarh. We sat in his office cabin at the District Collectorate of West Midnapore. He turned on his desktop computer and started to type out a letter to the director of the District Rural Development Cell asking him to attend a meeting with SHG women at the Lalgarh block office next week. I asked him about his field-visit. He said, 'I was happy to see so many women doing well. They are trying to build livelihoods by farming vegetables, learning new techniques of rice cultivation and some have even built effective vermicomposting pits. It feels really good that they have left behind the violent past and are moving forward. That's why I am working so hard to get them the loans.' As he was coordinating the Muktidhara programme in Binpur-1 block, Probir had several letters to type to officials, make phone calls to arrange meetings and draft the programme's guidelines. He was then called over to the district magistrate's (DM) office for a meeting. In the meantime, I sat in his office reading some of the official materials he had given me. The planning and execution for Muktidhara in Binpur-1 block was one of his major projects, which is how I came into close contact with

[33] A Cluster Level Federation is a network of several SHGs at the block level and a structure or body evolved by SHGs themselves consisting of representatives from all member SHGs. A sub-cluster is a similar network at the gram panchayat level.

him. The other major project he undertook was the setting up of a tribal girls' football team in Sankrail block by setting-up the infrastructure required to train them, ensuring adequate nutrition, and providing training to the girls. This team was to compete at the State and national levels. Other than these, Probir spent most of his days travelling to different parts of the district, speaking to people and reporting these conversations to the DM. He coordinated with various district and block level bureaucrats to ensure that the state development schemes were implemented properly.

Although he was very involved in the work of the district administration, Probir was not a central or State civil servant. His official position was of the Prime Minister's Rural Development Fellow (PMRDF) for West Midnapore District. As part of its 'development as counterinsurgency' plans, the Ministry of Rural Development had the launched the Prime Minister's Rural Development Fellows Scheme in 2011. It was the brainchild of Jairam Ramesh, the then Minister for Rural Development, who wanted to provide support to the district magistrates dealing with Maoists. Fellows are expected to be the bridge between the administration and the people, and to help to address the problem of underdevelopment in Maoist areas. Their main tasks are to,

> [e]stablish or strengthen systems by exploring alternative ways of delivering services to reach the most deprived communities…complemented by a set of supportive actions such as building the capacity of district and block officials; triggering district-wide social mobilization processes particularly among the youth; achieve a ground swell of support and build strong relationships with the Panchayats [village assemblies][34].

The first batch of these fellows, 156 in total, was placed for three years in the seventy-eight Maoist-affected districts. Probir belongs to that batch. In 2013, the programme was extended to include the states of north-east India. The call for applications in 2014 is now also looking for fellows for the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The continuation of the programme and its

[34] Ministry of Rural Development, 'Prime Minister's Rural Development Fellows Scheme', http://pmrdfs.tiss.edu/mission.php

extension beyond the Maoist areas to other zones of insurgency in the country shows that policymakers have found it an effective counterinsurgency measure.

The PMRDF selection and training process is carried out by the Ministry of Rural Development in association with the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai.[35] If the numbers provided by the MoRD are believed, the number of applications they received for the first batch was 8560, out of which only 156 were finally selected. After their selection into the programme the fellows have to attend an orientation programme for four weeks, followed by a month of 'field immersion in IAP districts'. After their training is complete, fellows are placed across different states. They get a stipend of ₹ 75000 a month, which is comparable to a decent salary in the private sector in India today. They are supposed to 'work closely with District Magistrates of backward and remote districts in improving programme delivery and interface with marginalized sections, aiming to reduce the developmental and governance deficits'.[36] The fellows come from varied educational and professional backgrounds, and are mostly graduates in the sciences and social sciences in their mid- to late twenties. A master's degree in any discipline is the pre-requisite for making an application. Work experience is preferred and young professionals working in the corporate sector, media, NGOs are widely recruited, as are those with MBA degrees and PhDs. One among the several listed roles of the fellows in the profile book (Government of India 2012) is to 'facilitate capacity building in Self-Help Groups (SHGs), and in institutions of local democracy, like panchayats.'[37] Probir's focus on SHGs was also linked to this guideline.

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[35] TISS is privately-owned higher education institution which began as a school of social work in 1936. TISS now offers masters, MPhil and PhD degrees in disciplines such as development studies, psychology, media studies, and gender studies.

[36] For more details, see PMRDF website: http://pmrdfs.tiss.edu/index.php

[37] Role of Fellows (Profile book 2012- http://rural.nic.in/sites/downloads/PMRDFS/Profile_Book_English.pdf): The Fellows work under the supervision of the District Collector. They perform mainly the following functions:
a) Work with institutions of the poor to build their capacity and help them access their rights and entitlements.
b) Facilitate capacity building in Self-Help Groups (SHGs), and in institutions of local democracy, like panchayats.

They are seen as key partners in the 'development' of Maoist-affected districts and are expected to reach out ordinary people in these districts, something that high-level bureaucrats do not usually do.

Probir was truly the kind of 'motivated' professional that fitted the ideal profile of a PMRDF. He took his job seriously and worked very hard. The DM often relied on his advice. Probir had studied literature for his undergraduate degree in Kolkata, followed by a master's in media studies at TISS. He had worked as a reporter in the Kolkata branch of one of the leading daily newspapers of the country. He often discussed his future plans with me. After finishing the fellowship, he wanted to apply for public policy courses in the United Kingdom. People at the block office knew him as the 'PMRDF', and women in Lalgarh referred to him as 'Probir babu'. They knew him as someone who visited their villages in a white ambassador car, and spoke at the Muktidhathra meetings. These meetings were always organised by him. He set the timings and instructed the BDO to bring women together at that time. At the meetings, he would usually come along with the District Rural Development Officer or with bank managers of state-owned banks who were brought in to provide those loans. Almost like a teacher, he would spend time explaining to women things like what the scheme means, how they can get a loan and what livelihood options they could pursue. He would also make them stand up and talk about their SHGs, their livelihoods and what they intend to do with the loan. The women weren't very keen to stand up and talk in front of everyone. He kept

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c) Conduct socio-economic analysis of the local areas at Block level and contribute to ascertaining the felt needs of the people.
d) Help the district administration in local area planning.
e) Assist in better implementation of poverty alleviation programmes, particularly Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, National Rural Livelihoods Mission, National Rural Drinking Water Programme, Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan, Integrated Watershed Management Programme, National Social Assistance Programme, Integrated Action Plan, Integrated Child Development Services, National Rural Health Mission, Sarvashiksha Abhiyan, Rashtriya Madhyamik Siksha Abhiyan.
f) Undertake action-research to discover more appropriate ways
of programme delivery by the district administration
g) Design and implement innovative projects.
h) Provide feedback on rural development initiatives.

persisting and would tell me, ‘I really hope I can break the ice. Unless women speak up, I won’t know what they want. These meeting are a public forum for them to speak up and they should make use of the opportunity.’ Most of the women who attended these meetings, with a few exceptions were hesitant to speak up in case they said something wrong. They perceived him to be among the high-ranking bureaucrats and were nervous while interacting with him. They were, however, extremely comfortable in interacting with Arunabh.

The NGO executive

Unlike Probir, Arunabh, the project executive for the NGO ASAAN lives and works from the so-called ‘field’. He travels from village to village on his motorbike, assisting women with running their SHGs, and is much more in contact with them compared to Probir or the BDO. He also lives in an ASAAN-provided house in Ramgarh and therefore understands the day-to-day workings of village society much better. Arunabh carries out different tasks: he visits SHG groups in the villages, organises meetings to discuss the issues women are facing in running their SHGs, helps them with maintaining SHG records, trains them in high-yielding methods of rice cultivation, and even prepares them to speak up in front of the state officials. The women had a friendly relationship with him and called him ‘Arunabh da’. Da is the short for ‘dada’, an expression used to address someone as elder brother. They would call on his mobile phone whenever they needed to ask something. They would teasingly ask him how he manages to eat, given that he was living away from his mother. Arunabh often organised meetings for the different SHGs in the gram panchayat to come together and discuss their problems. The format of these meetings was very different from the meetings held at the block office. Arunabh would bring the women together and announce the purpose of the meeting. Women would sit on the floor of the venue, forming a circle. He usually appointed one of the women as a ‘*sabhanetri*’ (leader of the meeting) and

then she would conduct the proceedings. He would just sit in one corner and observe. He only intervened in case the discussion was not going anywhere. He told me, 'it is important to have a participatory format. Since they sit in a circle, there is no hierarchy. Unlike the meetings organised by state officials, women feel much more confident to speak up here.'

ASAAN began work in West Midnapore district in 2009 and in Binpur-1 block in 2012. ASAAN is an NGO that works with rural communities in different parts of India to support them in overcoming poverty. It works with the goal of providing skills and capabilities to the poor to help them earn a livelihood. In its organizational objectives, ASAAN claims to work for 'gender equality' and regards SHGs as the vehicle to promote poor women's empowerment. In Binpur-1 block, ASAAN's major work was to provide livelihoods support to women's SHGs. State-NGO partnerships have been one of the major reasons behind the expansion of the 'SHG phenomenon' in rural India (Kalpana 2008). ASAAN is also the Indian government's partner NGO in combating Maoism through development. The central government in 2013 signed a Memorandum of Understanding with ASAAN for it 'to serve as a resource and support organisation for the Rs 4000 crore National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), with a special focus on Naxal-affected districts'[38]. Accordingly, ASAAN was working on a project to converge two state anti-poverty programmes, MGNREGA and NRLM in West Midnapore district. Arunabh' immediate boss, Ramakanta, who worked from the district headquarters in Midnapore constantly co-ordinates with the District Magistrate and Probir. The state as we see was relying on partnering with private actors to bring about development in Maoist-affected districts.

[38] See 'Rural Development Ministry partners with NGO for NRLM', Girija Sivakumar, *The Hindu*, 7 August 2013, http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/rural-development-ministry-partners-with-ngo-for-nrlm/article4996617.ece

The BDO and Probir relied on Arunabh to bring together women for Muktidhara meetings and other SHG-related events. At the *Krishi Mela* (agricultural fair) organised by the block office and NABARD, he helped some women put together a stall on SHGs and their agricultural activities. He also helped some women prepare a short skit on women's experiences with family when they run SHGs. This was staged at the *mela*. Arunabh was also asked to provide accounts training to the SHG women who had been selected for the Muktidhara programme[39]. Often, during such SHG meetings, Probir and the district level state officials who accompanied him could not get their points across to the women. The major reason was that they spoke a more difficult kind of Bengali language. They would then ask Arunabh to relay what they were trying to say. Since he spoke slowly and used simpler words, women would mostly get the point.

Women really seemed to rely on help from him to manage the day-to-day work of their SHGs. As Sumana Mahato said, 'only once Arunabh da started to visit us, we have been able to learn new things and run the SHG well'. Sumana told me that she was the first in her village to learn SRI method of rice cultivation and then taught the others[40]. She said, 'only once Arunabh da started to visit us, we have been able to learn new things and run the SHG well. I have to say that if we are able to do well, it is only because of him. Like Sumana, most SHG women who belonged to villages within Ramgarh turned not to their RPs but to Arunabh. His presence in the villages however created suspicions among some men. Often, one or two would come and stand outside the meetings conducted by Arunabh. Some would just come to see what he and the women discuss, and some others just wanted to keep a check on what their wives were doing. Arunabh narrated an incident to me where he was summoned

[39] Arunabh worked only with SHGs that were under the Ramgarh Gram Panchayat, but in this case women from the Lalgarh Gram Panchayat were also present.

[40] System of Rice Intensification (SRI) is a method aimed at increasing the yield of rice produced in cultivation. It is a low water and labour intensive method that uses younger seedlings singly spaced and typically hand weeded with special tools. It was developed in 1983 by the French Jesuit Father Henri de Laulanié in Madagascar.

by a few elderly man and asked whether he is spreading Maoist propaganda. Although Arunabh worked independently with SHG women, block and district level state officials relied on his support quite often.

5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the ways in which the Indian state frames policies for zones of insurgency and ex-insurgency, using development as a counterinsurgency measure. In Lalgarh and Ramgarh in the Jungle Mahals of West Bengal, the need to buttress the gains made by the success of security operations was felt and that is where development entered the picture. I analysed how policy made in New Delhi with the help of the civil society and academics unfolded in my fieldsites, and how women are made targets of this policy. By profiling the key actors involved in statemaking, I sketched the ways in which the 'development as counterinsurgency' policy was operationalised. The elements of statemaking in these areas might not be very different from statemaking in other parts of rural India, but there were clearly certain particularities of statemaking in this context. Special development programmes were specially designed for LWE districts, and extra funding earmarked for such programmes was directly made available to the district and block administration. I also emphasised the involvement of actors such as the PMRDF and NGO executives, who are not part of the traditional bureaucratic set-up of the state but are crucial to this period of statemaking in my fieldsites.

On the one hand, the 'development as counterinsurgency' strategy for LWE zones drew upon existing rural development policies and programmes, and on the other hand, the government made certain exceptions with regard to the content and implementation of these policies. Although it would be going too far to make a strict comparison and claim that my

fieldsites became an administrative ‘zone of anomaly’ (Sivaramakrishnan 1999a, 1996) once again as in the early colonial period, it is important to recognise that ‘development as counterinsurgency’ strategy did have certain peculiar features in comparison to rural development programmes elsewhere in India. There was a greater availability of finances, more power was placed in the hands of the district and block administration, new kinds of actors were introduced, and special rural development programmes for so-called left-wing extremist (LWE) districts were devised. These exceptional arrangements can lead us to thinking of Lalgarh and Ramgarh as administrative ‘zones of anomaly’ all over again in a counterinsurgency situation, as discussed with regard to the colonial state in chapter 1. However, statemaking today occurs in a very different manner compared to the colonial period, and this comparison does not seek to draw a teleology between two different historical moments. What must be highlighted is that in both periods, insurgencies led to exceptional forms of statemaking. The next chapter explores the sites in Lalgarh and Ramgarh where women and the state interact with each other.

Chapter 5: The Dramas of Statemaking: The Everyday, the Didactic, and the Spectacular

1. Introduction

The cast of characters that constitute the state came together to set up training sessions for SHG women under the Muktidhara programme and to put up public events in which women could participate. The stated purpose was to transform poor women into self-helping entrepreneurs. While Muktidhara brought women and the actors of the state into close contact with each other, the project of creating self-reliant women subjects, as I shall show, did not quite work out as planned. In this chapter, I raise two questions. Firstly, to what extent do societal relations shape statemaking in the Jungle Mahals? Secondly, how do the gendered dynamics of society shape women's encounters with the state? To answer these questions together, I draw here on Joel Migdal's (2001) state-in-society approach, which alerts us to the processes and practices by which states and societies together create distinct ways of structuring day to day life. In a similar vein, I argue that statemaking processes are embedded in local village society to the extent that they shore up existing rural hierarchies and give rise to new gendered relationships of patronage. These statemaking processes should be seen from 'within' because they are also shaped in critical ways by social dynamics in the region, including by poor women's interactions with state actors.

I further conceptualise statemaking in Lalgarh and Ramgarh as a set of performative practices within a wider dramaturgical repertoire in society at large. Statemaking in the context of 'development as counterinsurgency' generates multiple sites in which social dramas play out, sometimes spectacularly, sometimes mundanely, with the key actors' performances, nonetheless, reflecting both cohesion and conflict within a given sociocultural context. The constitution of the state may thus be studied through everyday bureaucratic

practices (Mitchell 1999; Gupta and Sharma 2006; Sharma 2008; Gupta 1995) as well as the public spectacles it performs for citizen-subjects in a particular setting. In this way, the everyday and not-so everyday interactions that are staged between the 'state' and its citizen-subjects take on a definite form, whose grammar and syntax become available for analysis and critique. The idioms of statemaking, bureaucratic practices and spectacles, ought to be seen as 'on-stage acts' in which representatives of both 'state' and 'society' perform 'public transcripts' (Scott 1990). Power and authority must be staged in order to create an impression of the state as omnipotent and omnipresent.

I look at the everyday and not so everyday practices of statemaking in present-day Lalgarh. In section 2, I introduce the social hierarchies in my fieldsites, and how statemaking is embedded in those hierarchies. In section 3, I describe the everyday interactions between state officials and SHG women through meetings and training sessions. In Section 4, I analyse the pomp and power of the spectacles of statemaking.

2. The State in Society: Social Hierarchies, Gender, and Statemaking

Hierarchies based on notions of caste/tribe, class, and gender overlap with the processes and practices of statemaking in the Jungle Mahals. Social hierarchies are mirrored in the composition and practices of the state, even as they are reworked in the processes of statemaking. I focus here on how local hierarchies between the two dominant groups, Mahatos and Santals, play out in the domain of statemaking. I also look at the interactions between the *zamindars* and rest of the society, and how they might shape interactions between women's self-help groups, and in sites like the block office. Lastly, I explore the ways in which statemaking processes and practices are gendered.

The interactions between the two main groups, Mahatos and Santals are governed by strict notions of hierarchy and deference, though they share some cultural-religious practices and often profess unity today. On my first visit, Arunabh, the NGO executive explained to me, 'Most villages are divided into *paras* (hamlets). The *neech para* (lower hamlet) is where the Santal Adivasis live, while Mahatos and others live in what is called the *ucch para* (upper hamlet). Santals cannot construct houses or enter the upper hamlet. Mahatos usually own the best paddy fields for wet rice cultivation. Some Santals own land but most of them either work as sharecroppers in fields owned by Mahatos or rely on forest-based livelihoods and animal husbandry'. This reality is far from the claims that some Mahatos are making today about their backwardness. Despite claiming Kshatriya status in the early twentieth century (see chapters 2 and 3), Mahatos today wish to be identified as a scheduled tribe (ST) and as a *mulnivasi* group. Santal-Mahato unity and this redefinition of Mahato identity as Adivasis go back to the regional autonomy movement for a tribal state of Jharkhand (Singh and Mahato 1982; Dasgupta 1962). As discussed in chapter 3, even the Lalgarh movement of 2008 came to be presented by Mahatos as a movement of Adivasis, with Santals and Mahatos being equally involved. In the present day, the Mahato demand for scheduled tribe (ST) status has much to do with the material benefits it brings. Santals have benefited from government reservation of jobs and educational opportunities, and, now, Mahatos are looking for the same, albeit to bolster their status within regional hierarchies and maintain their dominance therein. The Mahatos' politics here are akin to the Gaddis' and Gujjars' demand for inclusion in the official schedule of 'tribes' in spite of them being dominant castes in rural north India (Kapila 2008; Mayaram 2014). Similarly, in northern West Bengal, Gorkhas are petitioning the government to be included in the ST list (Middleton 2015; 2013). Mahatos thus move uneasily between asserting a higher ritual status in the caste hierarchy, and claiming 'tribal' status in the governmental realm.

Lalgarh and Ramgarh, as discussed earlier, were jungle *zamindaris* or forest landed estates in the past. The social power wielded by ex-jungle *zamindars*, the Sahas Rays, was negatively affected by the *zamindari* abolition in postcolonial India and land reforms in West Bengal in the late seventies. Politically, they have represented the Congress party locally since the days of the nationalist movement in Midnapore district. The coming to power of the Left Front government led by the CPI (M) in 1977 diminished their authority further. After a faction of the Congress in West Bengal broke away to form the Trinamool Congress (TMC) in 1998 under the leadership of Mamata Banerjee, the Rays moved to the TMC. The Left Front's defeat in 2011 after thirty-four years of rule brought the TMC to power in West Bengal. Today, as local TMC leaders, these ex-*zamindars* again exercise considerable power and influence in everyday society. Seemingly, village hierarchies that existed prior to the lengthy period of Left Front rule are now resurfacing today.

The composition of SHGs reflects the economic and social hierarchies. A typical SHG is made up of 8-12 women, and in most cases, the women are of similar social backgrounds. For instance, there are groups with all Santal women, and groups with all Mahato women. Women from different economic backgrounds did come together in an SHG, but that is more due to the need to be eligible for government benefits.[1] Contracts for construction work under NREGA or to cook mid-day meals are only provided to groups where eighty percent of the members are below the poverty line. One instance here is of the Durgashree SHG headed by Simanti Ray. Simanti's husband is a local TMC office-bearer, who works closely with Bono Babu. Her marital family of ex-*zamindars* lives in a three-storied concrete building. They are considerably wealthier than anyone else in the village, and own land, a temple devoted to goddess kali, and a large pond. She told me that her group gets contracts to build roads. 'Eight of my group members are BPL which is how we got the

[1] Contracts for construction work under NREGA or to cook mid-day meals in government run-schools.

contract. I make my group members do the work', she explained. It is a case of richer and socially more powerful women taking other women under their wing and acting like their patrons. Therefore, economic differences between SHG members affect the internal dynamics of SHGs today, and in turn influences statemaking processes.

The development efforts today focus on women through SHGs, and the social hierarchies seep into that process. Even when poor and wealthier women come together in an SHG, almost no SHG is composed of both Santal and non-Santal women. Among the fifty groups selected for Muktidhara, there are eleven groups which comprise of only Santals. None of the other thirty groups had any Santals. The Muktidhara training sessions, as well as meetings organised by the NGO executive Arunabh were spaces where Santal and non-Santal women came together. In these, the differences became quite apparent. I once attended a meeting of SHGs from Ramgarh, organised by Arunabh in a school building. At the end of the meeting, a Santal woman whose house was opposite the school prepared tea for everyone. The Mahato women present there said they needed to leave and left without having the tea. Likewise, after a day-long training session at the block office, when all the women were served lunch, I saw the Santal and non-Santal women sitting apart from each other. At these meetings, Santal women did not speak much. I later learned that only a few Santal women could understand and speak Bengali. None of the other women, of course, knew Santali. After one of the meetings in the block office, Sanchali, a Mahato woman, pointed out the group of Santal women to me and said, 'These STs are strange'. When I did not respond, she said to me, 'Look, you are not Bengali, but you have managed to pick up the language only after staying here for a few weeks. These STs haven't learnt Bengali in so many years!' It was interesting how she used the abbreviation ST which stands for Scheduled Tribes, the official governmental term or groups previously described as 'tribal'. Others disagreed with Sanchali, but adopted a paternalistic attitude towards the Santals. Arpita Ray, the local TMC

chairperson Bono Babu's daughter-in-law, who is also part of an SHG said, 'It feels good to see that, because of these SHG meetings, some Santal women are now learning Bengali and progressing in life'. It is worth noting here, however, that Santal women did not occupy local positions of authority within the SHG structure. The block supervisor for SHGs, Sarbani, is a Mahato, and so are three out of the five RPs of Lalgarh and Ramgarh. Some Mahato SHG women were very articulate and were able to learn the tricks of negotiating with state officials quicker. So they were the ones who were called upon to speak on behalf of all SHG women when senior bureaucrats like the District Magistrate, or politicians came visiting. The everyday relations and hierarchies between Santals and non-Santals such as Mahatos, therefore, shape the nature of statemaking.

Statemaking through Muktidhara brought women together on the basis of their poverty, taking 'poor women' as the category for selection. For the Muktidhara programme, the district and block administration selected fifty SHGs in which all members were below the poverty line (BPL). They also ensured that some SHGs with poor SC and ST women were adequately represented. The women used the language of the state and spoke of themselves as BPL because they knew that it came attached with clear monetary benefits. It is important to point out here that very often, academics follow policymakers in using the 'poor' and 'poverty' as unproblematic categories. But the construction of the 'poor' as the object of social policy masks social differences in particular locations and the workings of local power relations that impinge upon everyday processes of statemaking. As such, while women were collectively identified as 'the poor' and they tended to identify themselves as being 'BPL' in front of outsiders, their interactions with each other at Muktidhara training sessions were always moulded by the very real cleavages and antagonisms that mattered locally. Furthermore, Muktidhara is a scheme only for women-only SHGs, so abstract notions of the 'poor' mask how men's and women's 'poverty' might be constructed differently in the

realm of policymaking. Consequently, anti-poverty interventions for women are invariably channelled through microfinance and empowerment, whereas, for men, the emphasis is on creating employment and providing them with better agricultural technologies. Statemaking practices that emerge from the differential construction of women and men in policymaking makes it important for us to study statemaking as gendered.

To argue that statemaking here is a gendered process, I borrow from feminist scholars who have theorised the state as a masculinist entity (Brown 1995) that differentiates in the policy realm between men and women (Sunder Rajan 2003). In my fieldsites, Muktidhara, as a state-led programme for women to overcome poverty through self-help, looks to engender a certain kind of female subject: a productive and 'empowered working' woman. The Muktidhara programme can be placed within the larger shift in Indian development policymaking where the state engages with women through the agenda of 'empowerment', (Sharma 2008). Instead of doling out material benefits, anti-poverty policy and interventions now look to produce self-helping citizens. Sharma (2008) locates the origins of 'empowerment' in the 'neoliberal' turn where states are keen to downsize their welfare functions, and in the efforts of the international development community to appear more self-conscious (Ibid: 18). Sharma draws attention to the World Bank's GAD or 'gender and development' focus where women's empowerment is imagined as a stepping stone not just to gender equality, but also to economic growth. Barbara Cruikshank (1999; 1996: 234-235) argues that empowerment becomes a key technology of governance where citizens are expected to voluntarily self-regulate. An empowerment-based programme such as Muktidhara for women in the counterinsurgency context of Lalgarh, works with some of the premises highlighted by both Sharma and Cruikshank. In this context, I look at the gendered nature of statemaking in the 'development as counterinsurgency' context.

Although gender coexists with other hierarchies in the everyday state and society, it acquires a distinctive salience in the way statemaking unfolds in present-day Lalgarh and Ramgarh. The key characters of statemaking together act as a benevolent paternal force interested in empowering its women, who have been disempowered by society. 'Empowerment does not just mean financial empowerment. Our goal through this project is to make women into confident individuals', said Kanu Ghosh, the District Rural Development officer while we ate lunch together in the block office after a Muktidhara training session. Ghosh worked closely with Probir, the Prime Minsiter's Rural Development Fellow in conducting the training sessions. Sarbani had arranged for this meal for visiting officials from a small restaurant adjacent to the block office. Ghosh asked her, 'Did the SHG women cook this food?' When Sarbani answered in the negative, he said, 'Why don't you get the women to cook the food? When I went for one such session in Jhargram, it was the SHG women that had cooked for us. It was wonderful. You should make these women cook. That is something they know very well'. Sarbani just nodded. Ghosh then turned towards me and explained: 'You see, the problem is that these women do not want to get empowered. They make no effort to get out of their oppressive situation in the home and family. We try our best and set up meetings and training sessions, but they don't speak up there when they are asked to'. On the one hand, Ghosh spoke of the need for women to take their lives in their own hands and get 'empowered', and on the other hand, he expected the women to perform their traditional gendered roles such as cooking even when they came out of their houses. This is only one example but it alerts us to taking gender as an analytic seriously.

In sum, statemaking is embedded in the societal fabric of the forest villages of Lalgarh and Ramgarh. Social hierarchies and gender relations penetrate into the everyday and not so everyday processes of statemaking. The salience of gender in the interactions between

women and the state officials will be examined in greater detail in the next two sections through an ethnographic exploration of the performances of statemaking.

3. The State as Teacher: Didactic Performances of Power

> Going to the SHG meetings reminds me of my childhood (*chotobela*) when I used to go to school.
>
> Parvati Mahato

Probir, the PMRDF, in collaboration with the block office regularly organised what were referred to as 'meetings' and 'trainings' (that is how everyone in my field site spoke of training sessions) in the run up to the launch of Muktidhara and the handing out of loans. Probir drew up the schedule and was present in all the sessions. Some others who accompanied him for different meetings were the District Rural Development Officer, Industrial Rural Development Officer, National Bank for Agricultural and Rural Development (NABARD) officials, and District level officers and managers of the public sector banks. Arunabh was asked to come and help the officials in all the sessions. It was a set-up where state officials, all of who were men, would come to explain things to women, and to tell them what they should do in order to become 'empowered women'. The purpose of the sessions was to teach women a gamut of things: how to run an SHG well; how to plan the group's livelihood activities; how to take a bank loan and repay it; how to use the loan money to set up a small business. I therefore conceptualise this as 'didactic' statemaking, where the didacticism had much to do with the fact that the subjects of development here were women. Officials considered women as willing students who could be 'taught', and subsequently moulded into empowered subjects within the larger goal of 'development'.

In this section, I ethnographically show the everyday working of this gendered didactic state, and look at didacticism as a performance of power. Drawing on Norman Long

(1992), Aradhana Sharma (2008: 98-99) shows how development generates 'dramas' in everyday life, and these can be studied to understand the internal workings of power. She posits that 'that performance is a productive way to examine what constitutes the social world of development, how it works, and how different actors negotiate and transform this world'. Further, she adds Judith Butler's (1990) idea of performativity to the drama metaphor to argue that actors do not enter the development stage as already formed subjects but are produced as subjects in and through development discourses. Following Sharma, I analyse the interactions between women and state officials as dramas of development. The dramas of the didactic state here provide a snapshot into the practices of statemaking in Lalgarh.

The state's didacticism could be observed in many different ways. The physical setting was akin to a classroom. The sessions usually took place in the 'multipurpose' meeting rooms in the block office. At the head of the room was a raised concrete platform where a long table, and chairs were kept for the officials to sit on. SHG *didis* (sisters, as women are commonly addressed in West Bengal) sat on plastic chairs facing them. When a large number of *didis* were present, the chairs would be replaced by canvas sheets on the floor to enable more women to sit in the same amount of space. In any case, the officials were always seated higher than the local women and instructed them from above. The *didis* were also expected to arrive before the officials. Though they were never explicitly told to do so, Sarbani Mahato, the SHG supervisor, would ensure this by giving them an earlier meeting time. For instance, if the session started at 11.30 am, they would be asked to come around 10 am. The extra time came in handy to interact and socialise with women from other SHGs, but it was also the cause of much frustration. Sometimes, they had to stand outside the meeting hall for one hour, the only other option being sitting on the floor. Once, when I was waiting with the assembled women, Pallabi Das told me: 'Sarbani madam always does this to us! She calls us at a certain time and the meeting begins one or two hours later. They think

we are free to come and spend the whole day here'. Jyoti Garai, who was standing next to her said, 'We have a lot of work at home and in the fields. They should tell us the right time (*theek shomoy*) and not make us wait like this'. However, from Sarbani's point of view, it ensured that women had already taken their places before the officials arrived. She could then take 'attendance'.

In a typical classroom in an Indian school, the teacher starts the day by calling out the names of all students and marking present or absent next to their names. When their names are called out, students shout out 'present' if there. If not, their classmates say 'absent' after a short silence. In a similar fashion, Sarbani marked attendance to ensure that representatives from all groups were present. Sarbani was 'madam' to the Resource Persons (RPs) as well as the SHG women. She, however, was not the teacher here. Her job here was only to ensure that the men coming from outside could conduct their sessions properly. As soon as the officials walked in, the *didis* would stand up to greet them. They only sat down once the officials took their seats and asked them to sit down. During the meeting, when the officials spoke or asked a certain SHG representative to come forward and talk to them, the rest of the women would start talking among themselves. On those occasions, Probir, the PMRDF would stop and say politely, 'Please don't talk'. Within five minutes, the women would start to talk again and Sarbani would step in and scream '*Aaste*! (Be Quiet)'. The RPs would get up and swing into action. They played the role of 'class monitors' in Indian parlance. Class monitors are students selected by teachers in order to keep a check on their own classmates. The monitors here had to help Sarbani in maintaining order within the SHG classroom. Once there was sufficient silence, the proceedings could begin.

A usual meeting began with Probir laying down information about Muktidhara: why they were being given loans, loan amount, the interest rates payable, and the repayment conditions. This information was repeated pretty much in every session despite the same

women attending. The officials even asked the SHG *didis* to repeat some of this information after them in chorus, to make sure the *didis* remembered it. After this, the officials preferred to call SHG representatives one by one to the table where they were seated. They started with inspecting the SHG *khaatas* or record books by state officials, just like teachers examining students' notebooks. At the time when SHGs are formed, Sarbani provides these record books to women. There are four standardised *khaatas* that each group has to maintain: Meeting Resolutions Book, Savings Book, Cash Book and Loans Register. In the meetings resolution book, members are expected to record the attendance and minutes of each group meeting. Meetings are typically held weekly or fortnightly. In the Savings Book, members keep an account of their monthly savings. The Cash Book showed withdrawals out of and repayments into the SHG savings. The Loans Register recorded the details of the loans taken by members from the SHG's savings pool, as well as loans taken by the group from banks. The reliance on the written record of SHG meetings and finances renders these record books important objects that symbolize SHG members' relationship to the regional/local statemaking process. The officials looking at the *khaatas* get a basic idea about the functioning of the SHG.[2] Often, women find themselves being judged on the basis of these *khaatas*. At the first Muktidhara meeting, Probir opened one group's meeting *khaata* and showed it to me. He asked the woman standing there sternly, 'Who maintains the *khaata*?' She answers, 'I do'. Probir did not say anything to her but turned towards me and told me in English that there was a problem with that *khaata.* It seemed to him that a man had been filling in the record books and signing there on behalf of all the women members since all the signatures were in the exact same handwriting. To avoid such situations, Arunabh and the RPs devote approximately five hours per week helping women with their *khaatas*. Not all

[2] Akhil Gupta (2012: 263-264) writes about how registers of different kinds related to welfare programmes became devices for 'self-monitoring', which were at the same time used to record the effectiveness of welfare measures as well as to enable surveillance and control of the population.

women are, however, literate enough to maintain these books. For instance, Sumana Mahato, an SHG group member from a Ramgarh village told me, 'I am the only one in the group who can read and write, so all the records are maintained by me. The other members have only just learnt how to write their names'. After examining the *khaatas*, the officials began asking questions.

Most of the time at the meetings was spent in one on one questioning, where the officials also offered advice to the *didis*. Consider this conversation between the officials and Minati Mahato, an SHG member from the Ramgarh area:

> State Bank of India manager, Ramgarh: What will you do with the loan?
>
> Minati Mahato: Some members of my SHG own some land. We will use the money to farm vegetables on that land.
>
> SBI Bank manager, Ramgarh: Don't you already do that? Also, is that land in your name or in your husband's name?
>
> Minati Mahato (after a long pause): Yes, the land is always in men's name.
>
> Kanu Ghosh, District Development Officer: The purpose of an SHG is to make you do something on your own. That is what we are teaching you here. You should not rely on your husband's land. Do something beyond your family's regular livelihood.
>
> Probir: Your group should think of buying goats with the loan money. You can start by selling milk and later, meat. We have told you multiple times to come up with a plan. Everyone does a little bit of farming. You have to have a proper plan of what work you will do.

Minati nodded and came back to her place. Questioning of this kind reminded me of an examination. *Didis* were nervous and told me that they found it extremely difficult to come with answers to questions thrown at them. On some occasions, women were also asked to stand up and speak about their SHG experiences to everyone assembled in the room. Over time, women sought the help of their RPs and Arunabh to prepare answers and mini-speeches before the meetings. Take the example of Sumana Mahato, who I had referred to above. She took Arunabh's help in preparing her answers. So when she was questioned about what her SHG would do with the loan money, she answered, 'We cultivate rice and will continue to do the same'. When the officials pointed out that paddy cultivation is her livelihood anyway, she answered back saying, 'Yes, but we have recently started using SRI method of rice

cultivation. It is new and much more profitable. We can invest the loan money there'. The officials seemed satisfied with her answer.

The state's didacticism had clear problems. Firstly, the top-down nature of the training sessions intimidated the SHG women and made them uncomfortable and wary of these sessions. Upon being questioned repeatedly, they were often simply too scared to say anything susbtantive. Eventually, they started preparing what James Scott (1990) calls 'public transcripts' to provide predetermined, even coached, answers. Secondly, the government officials or babus who came from big cities and towns, spoke a more refined and formal form of Bengali, which the women invariably found rather difficult to follow. The babus would occasionally use English words too, and these were entirely incomprehensible to the assembled women. Kanu Ghosh, for instance, said one day to the women, '*Aapni* sincerely training attend *korben*' (Please attend the training sessions sincerely). The women did not quite understand English words such as 'sincerely' and 'attend' which he used along with Bengali. On such occasions, the officials had to involve Arunabh to get their point across to the SHG *didis*, especially regarding technical matters such as SHG records. Arunabh, too, wasn't a local person but spoke slowly and used simple Bengali to ensure the women understood what he was saying. Thirdly, women could not get around certain requirements. Take the instance where they were also given individual forms to fill in the details of their household income and the livelihoods they pursued. None of them, I found, could fill these without taking help from their RPs and Arunabh. Arunabh pointed to me that these women and their families did not calculate their family income, so they couldn't quite understand these forms. I saw some women simply copying what others wrote. The system was built in such a way that women relied on RPs and, wherever he worked, the ASAAN executive Arunabh.

Arunabh perceived tensions in his role as a coach to women for the government events and as an employee of an NGO invested in livelihood-promotion across India. Arunabh and I talked over tea after a training session. He said,

> We work closely with the district and block administration. When I am called, I go to the meetings and do what I am asked to. I also need to be there for some of the women I work with. But the whole approach to these trainings isn't right. The officials just want to rush with things and put down these interactions as achievements on paper. It takes time to make women understand things and for them to start thinking on their own. Coming over a few times in the week and asking them questions as if it were an examination does not help.

I had observed that the format of the meetings organised by him is different and asked him about those. When I asked him, he explained, 'I conduct the meetings in a roundtable format. All the women sit together in a circle on the ground. Not like here. I only say a few things and then let them discuss on their own. It is more participatory and they learn much more'. While Arunabh's methods sometimes encouraged the *didis* to take the lead, they still relied on his advice. Moreover, his role was limited to providing them with livelihoods training. Unlike the state officials, he could not provide loans or contracts to the women, but a significant part of his work was to prepare women to get state benefits, and he becomes an important part of the drama of didactic statemaking.

Didactic statemaking in Lalgarh should be seen as a performance of governmentality where state officials build relationships with SHG women by playing the role of teachers and advisors. I look at this didacticism as gendered, where statemaking reflects a kind of benevolent patriarchy. The hierarchy between male officials and female 'students' was evident in the interactions at the Muktidhara meetings and training sessions. The officials who came to these meetings regularly to 'train' the women expressed their desire to empower these women and make them capable enough to earn their own livelihood. In a counterinsurgency zone, didacticism becomes a means for the 'state' to become visible and tell people that they are doing something for them. Even though the set-up of the meetings and training sessions was hierarchical and patriarchal, for the SHG women under the

Muktidhara programme, these became key settings in which these women encountered the state and each other in novel ways on a regular basis. Women from different communities came together here, and the social divides between them became apparent. The meetings represented in many ways, the coming together of state and society. They were supplemented by spectacles where SHG women were called upon to participate, as I describe in the next section.

4. Spectacles of Authority: Performances of State Power and Citizenship

Everyday performances of pomp and power in Lalgarh lay at the heart of efforts to showcase the authority of the state and to legitimise itself in local village society. From organising agricultural fairs to grand launches of new micro-credit schemes, the local block administration, supported by its supra-local allies in the district and the state capital of Kolkata, remained alert to the power of spectacles in legitimizing sovereignty in the eyes of citizen-subjects. In a counterinsurgency context, in which performances of power are designed to assert authority as much as seek legitimacy, spectacles became even more important. In this section, I describe three instances of spectacles put together by the state: the launch of the Muktidhara programme, *krishi mela* or agricultural fair, and the Voter's Day event, and look at the ways in which women are mobilised for these. The launch of the Muktidhara programme was a festive event of pomp and show at the block office, where the West Bengal minister for SHGs was invited to officially launch the programme. The *krishi mela* or the agricultural fair was a two-day event for knowledge-sharing and agriculture, as well as a space for social interactions and cultural performances. For the Voter's Day, the block office brought people together in the name of democracy, but had them compete with each other.

4.1 The Launch Event of the Muktidhara programme

As I alighted the public bus in front of the BDO office in Lalgarh, I was struck by the festive look which the place had acquired overnight. The gates were decorated with strings of fresh marigold flowers. A colourful cloth banner put up at the entrance announced the launch of the Muktidhara programme. A big pandal, that is a makeshift covered structure held together by bamboo sticks and colourful fabric, had been erected in the Block Development Office compound in Lalgarh and it covered most of the empty space of the compound. A full size temporary stage had been set up on one side of the pandal. On the other end of the pandal, there were clay figures of women holding pens and papers in their hands. This was meant to represent the SHG women. There were over five hundred chairs inside the pandal. *Rabindrasangeet*[3] was streaming out of the large speakers. The BDO and his assistants were running around making sure everything was in place. They had to ensure there were enough chairs on the stage, whether the sound system was working, whether the stage had been decorated with flowers, and whether drinking water had been arranged for the guests.

A big spectacle of this kind required a great deal of planning and preparation. Two days ago, when I had come to the block office to meet the BDO, he had told me that he was extremely busy with the preparations and had no time to speak to me. Probir, the PMRDF and the District Development Officer were sitting in his office and discussing the launch event. The BDO asked his assistant to order box refreshments for all the SHG women and to arrange a sit-down lunch for all the invited guests. He then turned to Probir and said that they really did not have budget for big events like these. Probir assured him that he would be reimbursed for all the arrangements from the funds earmarked for SHG training sessions. The BDO did not look convinced. He and his assistant exchanged looks of uncertainty but knew they could

[3] Bengali songs composed by Rabindranath Tagore.

not say anything more. I left the BDO's office with Probir and as we were going down the stairs, he said, 'I hate this attitude. Why are they only concerned about getting the money?' I was not sure how to respond but at that very moment, Sarbani came into the room and asked him if she needed to do anything. We went into her office and sat down. Probir told her to start maintaining separate files for each of the SHGs selected for the Muktidhara programme. For the launch event, he instructed her to keep ready the sanction loan letters and certificates for each group. These were to be handed out to the groups on the launch event.

On the day of the event, the SHG women were slowly arriving at the venue. They were dressed in their best sarees and some of them had even adorned their hair with flowers. Coming to meet the 'state' or *sarkar* was an important event in their lives and they wanted to be well-dressed. The *didis* always wore their best clothes even when they came for meetings at the block office and this event was bigger than any of those. The pomp and show of this event was much more than anything that had taken place at the block office in the time I spent there. There was still an hour to go for the event to begin. They always wore their best clothes even when they came for meetings at the block office and this event was bigger than any of those. A group of Santal women walked in. They were all wearing similar white sarees with red borders. Rita Mahato, who was dressed in that kind of saree as well came up to me and said, 'This is a saree we wear on special and auspicious occasions. Sourav Da called me last night and asked me to wear it. He even asked me to inform other women in my village but my mobile phone ran out of credit.' The *dalnetris* (group leaders) of each SHG sat on the left side of the stage, separate from the other group members. Sarbani ensured that all *dalnetris* were present and took her seat in the front row. I saw Sumana Mahato going past and waved at her. She came to me and told me that she was very nervous. She is one among the three *dalnetris* who had been chosen to make speeches at the launch event. Sumana's nervousness stemmed from the fact that she had never spoken before so many people earlier,

and she worried that Arunabh would be disappointed in her if she did not do it well. She went up to Arunabh who was standing in the other corner and asked him to help her rehearse the speech once again.

In the meantime, the BDO came and asked everyone to take their seat. He then went to his office to signal the guests to come in. Probir went up the stage and took his place on the podium. He was hosting for the event. The minister for SHGs, Samrat Mahato, and others walked in to the music of music of beating drums and cymbals booming from the giant speakers. All the women stood up. Probir announced each of the guests' name and asked everyone to take their seats. In his opening remarks, he emphasised the symbolism of holding this event in Lalgarh today, and how that demonstrated the change from violence to development. The District Magistrate took over to say that the main aim is to make the people '*swanirbhar*' (self-reliant). The Minister for SHGs announced that Muktidhara was the dream project of Mamata Banerjee's government and very soon there will be *unnayan* (development) in the district. He extolled the greatness of the chief minister and explained that the present government's focus on *ma, maati, manush*[4] motivates the Muktidhara programme. His speech had a lot of political rhetoric and completely ignored the techno-bureaucratic efforts that had gone into planning the programme.[5] Pranab Sengupta, who was representing West Bengal government's Society for Self-Employment of Unemployed Youth, tried to catch the attention of women in the audience by declaring that the *mukti* (freedom) in Muktidhara stands for freedom from poverty. He spoke of how the newness in this programme is not the subsidised loans, but the sustained contact that the state will maintain with SHG groups. He spoke of the greatness of Mohammed Yunus, the initiator of micro-

[4] 'Ma, Maati, Manush' translates as mother, motherland, and humans. Coined by Mamata Banerjee, this slogan has been used by the Trinamool Congress during their political and election campaigns since 2009.
[5] The ruling party was attempting hard to take credit for the efforts towards 'development'. There was a relationship between the bureaucracy, local TMC members, and TMC leaders elected as local representatives. The TMC had not yet created a 'party society' akin to the CPM where the party had taken over the functioning of the block office and panchayats. However, the TMC did aspire to that.

credit in Bangladesh, and then went to speak about the American recession and unemployment. The SHG women seemed quite bored, and the speeches did not interest them. Some women even started dozing off. They were woken up by Probir's announcement calling the minister to light a lamp to formally launch the programme.

Now, it was the turn of the SHG women to come on stage. After the lamp lighting, the SHG group leaders were called one by one and handed certificates by the minister. This is a common practice in school and college functions where they invite guests to hand over prizes to students on their achievements over the academic year. As each of the SHG woman collected their certificates, they touched the feet of the minister, and some of the other guests standing next to him. After this certificate distribution, it was the SHG women's turn to speak on stage. Rina Mandal, one of the SHG didis went up and expressed her gratitude to 'Mamata didi'[6]. Her speech was cut short by the minister expressing his wish to leave the stage. Other guests followed him down the stage. Two other women who had prepared speeches, including Sumana Mahato, were not given the chance to go up and speak. Sumana had been practicing with Arunabh's help for the last two days. When I spoke to Sumana after the event, she said, 'I worked hard on my speech. I hope I will get an opportunity in the future.' A group of SHG women who had prepared a folk dance performance also did not get the chance to perform. They collected their boxed refreshments while the guests were taken inside for a full meal of rice, vegetable curries, meats and sweets.

Everyone talked of how successful the event was, and no one seemed to feel that women were deprived of their chance to be in the spotlight at this spectacle. More than the other two spectacles I will describe, it was the Muktidhara launch event through which the present state government of West Bengal and its representatives at the event claimed

[6] Didi is a common way to address women in West Bengal. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is addressed by people as Mamata Didi.

emphatically that ‘change’ had come to Lalgarh. Going by the rhetoric of the speeches in the event, it was not only the change from conflict to peace, but the change from the previous government’s inaction to them doing everything for people’s welfare. Pomp and show was employed to make that proclamation as grand as possible, and characters performed public roles in the drama of statemaking. The minister for SHGs performed the role of a generous benefactor on behalf of the State government. SHG women performed the role of clients through acts such as touching the minister’s feet. The large gathering of women in the place which was the starting point of the Lalgarh movement and the centre of Maoist Movement in West Bengal was a statement that the people had been won over. That it was done through a programme targeted at women shows the gendered nature of the state’s interventions.

4.2 *Krishi Mela* or Agricultural Fair

The large grounds of the Ramakrishna High School in Lalgarh, a five-minute walk from the block office, had been taken over for the fair. Children who studied at the Ramakrishna School were given holidays on these two days. The atmosphere was festive with decorated stalls and colourful paper flags. The fresh neon yellow paint of the school building added to that air of festivity. The two-day mela took place just a week after the harvest festival of *Makar Sakranti*, so in a way it was an extension of festivities for the villagers. There were stalls on one side of the ground and a makeshift full size stage on the other side. The middle of the ground had been left empty for villagers to congregate, who came all dressed up to walk around or socialise with people they knew. The *Krishi Mela* is organised for the villagers to showcase their skills at farming and animal husbandry, and inform people about new techniques of farming. The fruits and vegetables cultivated by some farmers were on display. Unusually large cauliflowers, pumpkins, radishes, brinjals, and cabbages had been put here. The farmer of the largest-sized vegetable was to be awarded a

prize. Goats and chickens were being sold. One prize-winning hen known for laying a record number of eggs was on sale for 20,000 rupees (approximately £200). The large vegetables and the hen were drawing crowds. Companies selling tractors and other mechanised farming equipment had put up stalls as well. Men and women walked around looking at the stalls.

The activities at the fair went beyond just agriculture to acquaint the villagers with government-run programmes. The pomp and elaborateness of the fair made it easier for the block administration to catch the attention of the people of the block. Spectacles, since they bring people together, are a good opportunity for spreading information on the programmes. For instance, the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) or *Aanganwadi* had a stall. Two women Aanganwadi workers sat at the stall and provided information about the programme to anyone who came and asked. Similarly, the Education Department of the state government had a stall, where they were creating awareness about the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (programme for universalizing elementary education) where the government of India provides free school education to children until the age of fourteen. Additionally, the West Bengal Police and the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) had put up stalls too, seeking to recruit young men in their ranks. As mentioned in the previous chapter, employing young men in the State police and paramilitary forces was emphasised by the present state government as a means of dealing with unemployment in the Jungle Mahals. Unemployment is considered one of the socio-economic causes underlying Adivasi participation in Maoism.

One entire corner was devoted to the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), under which the government of India provides hundred days of wage employment in a financial year to adult members of every poor household. A large NREGA poster with Mamata Banerjee's face and the slogan 'If I work for 100 days, my life will improve.' had been put up. There were painted clay figures of men and women with dark skin, showing them to be 'tribal'. The figures were working on a construction site. Construction work for

government infrastructural projects such as road building and excavating *pukurs* (ponds) are some of the employment opportunities for hundred-days work under NREGA. The women clay figures were dressed in colourful sarees, complete with the marks of married women, red *teep* (dot) on their foreheads and *sindoor* (vermillion) in their hair parting. The figures were even wearing *shankha* and *pola* (red and white) bangles that married women in Bengal wear. The female figures held baskets on their heads while the male figures were doing the actual ploughing work with spades. Even the clay figure representation of a construction site made the gendered division of labour very apparent. These same female figures had been put up at the Muktidhara launch event. The difference there was that they held pens and papers in their hands, not baskets.

The SHGs stall at the fair had a banner identifying it as 'Swanirbhar Goshti'. Now this literally does mean Self-Help group, but I was puzzled by the word 'goshti' used for group. So far, the women and the officials had been using the more colloquial '*dal*' for group. When I asked Sarbani, she said that in the official usage, *sadhu bhasha* (sanskritised version) of Bengali is used. Certain groups had been asked to take turns handling the stall. Sarbani would come by every now and then to ensure everything was running smoothly. Several posters adorned this stall. Most of them were printed by the block office using pictures from SHG meetings. One that particularly caught my attention showed SHG women keeping accounts using calculators. The Bengali slogan on the poster was '*Jaante chai. Seekhte chai. Swanirbhar Dal banate chai*'. It can be translated as: 'We want to know. We want to learn. We want to form self-help groups.' A handwritten poster explaining the different levels of SHG organisation: group, sub-cluster and cluster was pinned up too. The highlight of the SHG stall were coloured printed posters, which aimed at educating people about the SRI method of rice cultivation. The poster included a photograph of Sumana Mahto, who we met earlier in this chapter, standing in her paddy field. She and her group are seen as successful

SRI cultivators, and were present at the stall to provide information about the SRI method to anyone who wanted to know. Sumana did not seem pleased with the way her picture had come out. 'It is not a nice picture. I told Arunabh da not to put it here. All the people are looking at it', she said. The set-up of the SHG stall was like a school exhibition where students showcase their science models to visitors, informing them about the work they have done.

The fair was also a cultural space. The large stage on one side of the ground was set for performances. Almost hundred chairs were placed for the audience in front of the stage. During the day, children from different schools in Lalgarh participated in dancing, singing and debating competitions. These were organised by the block office and winners were awarded certificates and trophies. In the evenings, this stage became the setting for folk dance performances. On the second day of the fair, SHG women staged a play. Two days ago, I had seen Arunabh helping women from Sarna village in Ramgarh rehearse for this play. They had a written script and were learning up the dialogues. He said that though he helped them script the play, based on women discussing their experiences with him. Women performing in the play were Santal, but performed in Bengali.

The play showed how women stepping out of their homes to participate in self-help groups upset gender hierarchies in their villages. In the first act of the play, three women sat at the centre of the stage. They wore shirts over their sarees to show that they were playing male roles. These men were sitting together and drinking. The first man shouted in a drunken tone, 'My wife keeps going to meetings along with other women. I do not like this at all! Not at all'. The second man added, 'You are right. Meetings here, meeting there. There seems to be no end.' The third man declared, 'When I go home today, if I don't find my wife at home, then you see what I will do. I will hit the bitch (*saali*) so badly that she will have bruises all over her body.' In the next scene, we see this third man entering his house with a drunken

walk. He asks his daughter where her mother was. ‘She has gone for a meeting,’ the daughter answers. Just then, his wife enters the house. He holds her by her hair and hits across her face. The man’s mother asks, ‘why are you hitting her’? He answers, ‘She has left me with no choice. I have told her several times to not go for such meetings and to leave the group. I don’t like all this.’ His wife then gives him a long answer,

> I have done nothing wrong. In fact, it will benefit us all. The population is increasing rapidly, but the amount of land is not. We have to look for new kinds of livelihoods. That is what we do in our SHG. We are planting vegetables and that will give us profits in the future. You work for someone, and sometimes, they do not give you your salary on time. At least I am taking my livelihood in my own hands.

The man is then shown realising his mistake. He apologises to his wife. In the next scene, she is shown talking to other women of her group and they are discussing the need to take a loan. The RP joins them and tells them how they can do so. The play ends there.

The audience for this play at the *krishi mela* were mostly women. Some of the SHG women said afterwards that the depictions closely followed what actually happens in their daily lives. They realised the problem of having to seek their husband’s permission in order to engage in SHG work, but had made peace with the situation where their husbands and elders understood and let them go out. Once back home, they had to do all the housework and even work on the farms. ‘We have to promise our family that doing SHG work will not come in the way of our duty as wives and mothers’, said Pushpamoni Hembrom, one of the actors in the play. While there is a situation where women are coming out into the public sphere and taking over spaces outside the household, there is only a limited reordering of gender relations. The splendour of the *krishi mela* drew crowds and made it an ideal platform to disseminate information about government schemes and enforce state legitimacy. Similarly, it was also a good place to stage ‘development dramas’ (Da Costa 2010) of the kind which the SHG women did. The fair brought together social and cultural elements of village life together with statemaking.

4.3 Voter's Day

The Voter's Day event may be seen as a drama around the elusive idea of citizenship. The right to vote provided to all citizens in India above the age of eighteen is undoubtedly a key element of citizenship. The Government of India has now declared 25 January every year as the National Voter's Day. Events encouraging new voters to register are organised throughout the country on this day. The Binpur-1 block office (headquartered at Lalgarh), too, was abuzz with activity. 'We were asked to organise some entertaining activities for the people today,' said the BDO. He was standing with a group of young men dressed in t-shirts and shorts who were being handed out paper hats with the words 'National Voter's Day' printed on them in Bengali. These men were participating in an eight kilometre 'run for democracy'. The run was to start from Kantapahari, a village lying on the road connecting Lalgarh and Ramgarh villages, and finish outside the block office in Lalgarh. Kantapahari is a village that made headlines in 2008 when two men were arrested there on the charge of being Maoists and orchestrating the landmine blast on then Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee. A minibus transported the participants to the starting point of the race in Kantapahari. The BDO's jeep and a small ambulance were to drive alongside the men. The BDO asked me to come along with him in his jeep. Just as I was about to board the jeep, Sarbani called out to me and said, 'The women's event is here. You cannot go! You have to come with me.' I did as instructed.

Around 11 am, while the men were still running the marathon, SHG women from the nearby villages started arriving in the block office after the men had left. Unlike the men, the women were not asked to run a marathon for democracy. A clear gendered division on what men and women could be asked to do as entertaining activities on voter's day was apparent. Sporting activities were not planned for women. They were simply asked to gather in a hall in the block office. The block office did not mobilise common women for Voter's Day, but only

SHG women who lived close to the block office. A table with thirty candles had been laid out. Sarbani took down the names of the women who had come and handed them badges with National Voter's day' printed on them in Bengali. When all the women had gathered, Sarbani asked them to stand up. Then, one of the BDO's assistant asked them to repeat the following pledge after him in Bengali:

> We the people of India, having abiding faith in democracy, hereby pledge to uphold the democratic traditions of our country and the dignity of free, fair and peaceful elections, and to vote in every election fearlessly and without being influenced by considerations of religion, race, caste, community, language or any inducement.

This text had also been displayed both in English and Bengali on a large banner on the front of the BDO's jeep. Women repeated this pledge, and then, sat down. Sarbani told them that they were participating in a competition in which each of them had to light as many candles as possible with a single matchstick. The woman who lights the most candles would be declared the winner. The prize was a shiny new steel lunch box, which Sarbani requested me to hand out to the winner at the end.

The competition began. The first participant to come forward was Arpita Ray, who was the daughter-in-law of Bono Behari Ray, who we had met earlier in this chapter. She came forward with much enthusiasm, and was cheered on by her group members. She lit ten candles with one match. Women started clapping. Other participants came one by one and tried their luck too. One Santal woman, Rimpa Mandi was sitting quietly in a corner. When her turn came, she came and managed to light seventeen candles. Everyone, including me, was shocked. None of the women cheered for her. Only when Sarbani declared her the winner, everyone applauded. Social hierarchies manifested themselves in how the competition took place. There was an interesting dynamic in how women in the audience responded to Arpita and the Rimpa differently. The emphasis on a physical skill, and ability to endure the match flame when it was touching the skin, made the better-off women less able to compete with the Santals. At the end of the competition, Sarbani handed out snacks

and sweets in boxes to all the *didis* present. Except the pledge, there was absolutely no talk about voting or elections even though the purpose was to create awareness among the voters. The National Voter's Day was a platform where the block office brought together some men and women for entertaining activities. Through the dramas of games and competitions, the block office hoped to create cohesion, yet contradictions were visible.

Pomp and power reinforce each other to create spectacles of statemaking in Lalgarh, which served two purposes. Firstly, spectacles supplemented the everyday engagements of the 'didactic state 'with SHG women. In some ways, it was an extension of the classroom-like meetings and trainings for the SHG women. Secondly, these events became the means for the state actors to assert authority, become visible, and seek legitimacy based on their 'development' initiatives. The rhetoric of change played a major role in seeking legitimacy. However, in this effort to bring people together, social cleavages often became visible, not just between the state actors and SHG women, but also between the women themselves. The embeddedness of state and society, therefore, is visible not only in everyday acts of statemaking, but in the spectacles and shows of statemaking as well.

5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I looked at how states and societies constitute each other and in the process, shape the processes of everyday statemaking as well as the spectacles of the state. Social hierarchies in the local village society of Lalgarh and Ramgarh are shored up in the practices of statemaking to (1) rework existing societal relations, and (2) engender new gendered forms of state-people interactions. Using the metaphor of drama, I explored two forms that this statemaking takes in Lalgarh today. First, I discussed how the 'state' takes on the role of a teacher in meetings and training sessions for SHG women, and SHG women

play the role of students in the theatre of didactic statemaking. The encounters between the state and women are produced by, and in turn produce, the prevailing social and gender hierarchies. Second, I analysed statemaking through pomp and show as performances of state power and legitimacy. I described three instances of spectacles put together by the state: the launch of the Muktidhara programme, *krishi mela* or agricultural fair, and the Voter's Day event, and looked at the ways in which women were mobilised for these. In sum, I made a case for studying statemaking both through the banal bureaucratic interactions between the state and citizens, as well as through the public spectacles. In the next chapter, I look at how women responded to the different idioms of statemaking in Lalgarh.

Chapter 6: Seeking out the State: Women and Social Transformations

1. Introduction

While the dramas of statemaking became settings where women came and performed public transcripts of being good citizen-subjects, women imagined the state in different ways in the context of their everyday lives. For my women interlocutors, the 'state' is represented by different actors at different levels: the block level bureaucrats and officials, Probir the Prime Minister's Rural Development Fellow (PMRDF), Arunabh the NGO worker, the state government led by the ruling party, Trinamool Congress (TMC), and self-governing *panchayats. Sarkar*, a term that refers to someone in a position of authority, was often used by women. Their definition of *Sarkar* was fuzzy and ambiguous, and the word was employed to speak of all or any of these different actors. In this chapter, focussing on the lived experiences of my women interlocutors in the setting of counterinsurgency and statemaking in Lalgarh and Ramgarh, I analyse women's perceptions of the state, what meanings they make of statemaking processes, and how they rebuild their lives around these processes. Exploring how the public and private lives of these women changed in the backdrop of this new phase of statemaking, I argue that women's hopes for transformation rested on being able to build sustained ties with the emerging state apparatus. The state was at the centre of their aspirations for material improvements in their lives, as well as to carve a presence for themselves in public life.

The responses of my women interlocutors should be understood within the scholarship that argues that the state continues to play a central role in ordinary people's lives in post-liberalisation India (Corbridge et al 2005: 7; Gupta and Sivaramakrishnan 2005; Chandhoke 2005; 2003). Such state-seeking behaviour could be seen as a strategic or a pragmatic move where the poor make claims on state actors for 'development'. I invoke here James

Ferguson's (2013) call to take seriously, the 'declarations of dependence', made by the poor on more powerful actors such as the state, NGOs, political parties, firms, or individuals. Development through public goods and welfare schemes is desired from below, and my interlocutors sought out the state as the provider of this form of development. In line with the recent moves towards looking at marginalised groups' diverse experiences of development rather than merely oppressive (Ferguson 2015; Jakimow 2014; Roy 2013; Mosse 2005; Sivaramkrishnan and Agrawal 2003), I look at how development became a mediating factor between the state and poor women.

The Muktidhara programme for women's self-help groups was based on the idea of women's empowerment by making them into entrepreneurs through subsidised loans. But the policymakers' rhetoric of making women into autonomous subjects does not quite translate into practice. Bureaucrats and other officials treat women like unknowing children who need to be educated. For example, as I discussed in chapter 5, there is a sense in which women members of SHGs are treated as pupils in the classroom by the 'didactic state'. There is a contradiction, therefore, in the state actors' characterisation of its subjects. Moreover, as I show in this chapter, the women who are the targets of this policy do not see themselves as 'empowered' agents that policymakers would like them to be; nor do they actively take up new livelihoods that might be regarded as 'entrepreneurial' ventures. Instead, they cast the 'state' as a new patron in their lives, and identify the counterinsurgency period as a new political era where they made 'declarations of dependence' on actors who personified the state.

For my women interlocutors, economic and social transformation in their lives depended upon sustained relationships with the state. To gain access to state resources, and subtly rework gender relations in society, they sought to build close ties with actors representing the state at the block level. We could interpret it as a strategy or as a practical

move in the given circumstances of counterinsurgency. Self-help groups provide marginalised poor women with an opportunity to build patron-client relations to access economic resources offered by the state or an external development agency (Mosse 2001: 164; 2005: 120-122). Women also made 'declarations of dependence' on state actors to unsettle gender norms, albeit in limited ways. Women's encounters with state's development apparatus leads to the production of different kinds of subjectivities. These encounters become ways for women to be a part of the statemaking processes, and even renegotiate personal relationships (Jakimow 2014: 9). Women sought patronage from below to improve their lives, even if marginally.

Patronage connects the poor with more powerful actors in the state and in development agencies who can assist them in improving their lives, and hence the poor seek patronage from below politics to seek material gains (Mosse 2005, 2001; Osella and Osella 2001). They idealise the state as a 'benevolent state' and employ a 'supplicant modality' to be able to make claims on the state for welfare benefits (Ruud 2014: 205). The patronage relationship between the state and the poor is different from the traditional patron-client relationships or forms of patrimonialism. Since the state emerges from a ruling bargain that keeps changing, a constant renegotiation of this relationship is possible and subjects can discard unresponsive patrons. In my fieldsites, patrons were reshuffled in the course of radical political action, and/or by voting against the ruling party. The seeking out of the state by the poor, does not, however, mean that the legitimacy of the state is fully realised in a counterinsurgency context. Even as they perform the roles of deferent pupils or supplicant subjects in the social dramas of statemaking, they might be acting 'as if' (Wedeen 1998) they legitimise the newly emerging state apparatus, without completely consenting. In other words, even when making 'declarations of dependence' and seeking patronage ties, women might not necessarily be acquiescing to the new order, or actually becoming suppliant

subjects. Neither do they resist the state. Their interactions with state, therefore, need to be analysed in between the binaries of complicity and resistance. Additionally, we need to move beyond the critique of 'development' as an oppressive imposition and take note of the complex subjectivities emerging from encounters with state-led development.

This chapter builds a narrative of women's lives in the context of 'development as counterinsurgency' in Lalgarh and Ramgarh. Section 2 shows how statemaking in the aftermath of security operations provides a setting for poor women to seek out the state and renegotiate state-society relations. Section 3 discusses the example of sal leaf, a forest commodity that women use to make plates and bowls, and brings out the ways in which this activity of plate-making ties together women, block officials and the NGO executive. Section 4 looks at the kinds of transformations that take place in the lives of two women through processes of statemaking, and how women place the newly emerging state apparatus at the centre of their hopes for transforming their lives.

2. Recasting the 'State' as Patron

> If the *andolon* (movement) had not been taken place, the poriborton (change) we see today would not have happened.
>
> Arpita Ray

Conflicts transform everyday social networks (Wood 2008; Das 2007). After a period of violent conflict, some of these transformations may be reversed, while some continue to persist. Additionally, after a periods of conflict, relations between state and society are reordered, and the role of the state is reimagined. In Lalgarh and Ramgarh, the local bureaucracy and ruling party worked to re-establish the legitimacy of the state by trying to perform their welfare and development role after the end of military operations. In Lalgarh

and Ramgarh, the local bureaucracy and the state government worked to re-establish legitimacy through its welfare and development roles after the end of military operations. They attempted to build relationships with the local population, especially women, through developmental schemes, and by performing public spectacles. For women, the present period, much like the duration of the *jhamela* or turmoil, presented an opportunity to renegotiate their relationships with the government and local bureaucracy. Since the multiple actors that constitute the 'state' offered avenues or channels for the women of Lalgarh to access them, women responded readily to these offers. However, there was a difference in how women and representatives of the state understood development. Whereas the block officials, the PMRDF and the NGO executive were invested in notions of empowered self-helping women, especially through loans and entrepreneurial ventures, I show in this chapter that my interlocutors looked at the state primarily as a benefactor or a patron that they hoped would deliver its promises to ensure their material well-being on a sustained basis and provide them with opportunities to transform their lives.

The change from the Left front government to the Trinamool Congress (TMC) government in the aftermath of Lalgarh movement and the Maoist agitation also facilitated a renegotiation of relations between the local state apparatus and ordinary men and women. Durga, an SHG group leader, 'Yes, we used to go to their (Maoists') meetings... The CPM *harmads* were harassing us… they would come to pick up our sons to work for them, and demand food. Women did not participate in armed conflict but went for protests and meetings. Then, we voted the CPM out of power, first from the state government and then from the panchayat. Things may change now. The block office and the new TMC government is trying to help Self-Help Groups (SHGs).' It seemed that Durga was repeating the flawed TMC claim that places like Lalgarh were completely underdeveloped until they came to power. So I asked her if the CPM did nothing during their tenure. She responded by

saying, ‘Of course the CPM government did their job. But their politics changed.’ While the CPM was opposed during the movement, and people did not vote it to power again, my women interlocutors did not want to appear disloyal or discredit what it had done in the earlier years. Women’ perception of political parties, therefore, shifted with who was seemingly offering more or better welfare at a given time. Mina Mahato put it in a very interesting way, ‘Ever since the TMC has come to power, a lot of work is definitely being done. But this enthusiasm they are showing will soon go away and they will start to take us voters for granted too. The ideal situation would be if a different party wins in every election, whether it is at the state government level or the panchayat level. If a party does not do anything for us, we should vote them out of power.’ One can see how electoral processes become ways in which governments who stopped delivering could be punished.

In West Bengal, what has been described as the CPM’s ‘party society’ (Bhattacharya 2010; 2009) functioned with networks of patronage, where the party acted as a mediator between state and society. But in the churning of state-society relations in the development as counterinsurgency scenario in Lalgarh and Ramgarh, there arose the prospect of making new ‘declarations of dependence’. The ‘party society’, according to Bhattacharya functioned through the ‘reciprocity between the panchayat, the political parties and the population at large’ (Bhattacharya 2009: 45). As I discussed in chapters 2 and 3, the village panchayat, became the crucial institution for the CPM to maintain its hold over village society, and it did so through land reforms, challenging the authority of landed elites, and the disbursement of welfare benefits. The existing party society was unsettled by the Lalgarh movement, Maoist presence, and the violence led by the CPM armed cadres in my fieldsites.

In the present phase, the block office, working under the district administration, became a much more important institution in comparison to the panchayat for distributing and coordinating the special welfare measures for the Maoist and ex-Maoist areas. Hence,

new spaces for negotiating relations with the state apparatus emerged. As I pointed out in chapter 4, the District Magistrate (DM) of West Midnapore thought that the development programmes for the Left-Wing Extremist (LWE) districts were now much more efficient as the bureaucrats could 'bypass'panchayats and party politics, which was not the case before. While the DM might believe that the block and district level bureaucracies work independently of social hierarchies and party politics, that is hardly the case. After winning the Legislative Assembly elections in 2011, the Trinamool Congress also won most of the panchayat seats in the Jungle Mahals in 2013, and has attempted to increase its influence in village politics. Of course, it meant that women whose families were TMC members and supporters started getting more contracts, just like CPM supporters had in the past. However, the realignment of the ruling bargain now meant that the local population in general was able build fresh ties with institutions such as the block office and the panchayat, and local ruling party leaders. The liminal moment of regime change opened up previous political ties to renegotiation.

SHGs became the means through which my women interlocutors sought to cultivate close ties with the block office, panchayats, the PMRDF and the NGO executive. As I pointed out in the previous chapters, the existing SHG network was a convenient way for the state to start rebuilding relationships with the local communities. For women in rural West Bengal, SHGs were important 'associative spaces' (Bhattacharya 2009: 63), and they imagined the different state actors working with their SHGs as patrons, who could help them attain a better life. These included the state government, panchayats, the block-level officials, the PMRDF and other district-level officials, and NGO workers. The TMC had come to power on the promise of providing 'development' and most women translated development as material improvement in their lives. New programmes like Muktidhara now connected SHG women to the block office in a way that was not possible before. Earlier, the only way

for SHGs was to bargain with the panchayat for contracts for different welfare programmes. SHGs who built close relationships with the panchayat *pradhan* (head) and other members of the gram panchayat, or had political contacts were able to score contracts to undertake wage labour under Mahatma Gandhi Rural National Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), cook meals for schoolchildren under the mid-day meal scheme, and become community health workers under the Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) programme.

Women emphasised their poverty and identity as poor women to make claims on the state. As Asha Garai explained, '*Daridra meye toh asahya* (Poor women are helpless). We don't own cultivable land, and as a woman, I cannot go out and work on others' land. Despite their poverty, Asha and her family did not think it right for her to go out and seek employment. Asha lived in the Dhulia village, near the headquarters of the Ramgarh gram Panchayat, with her husband, mother-in-law, and two children. They grew vegetables in the land surrounding their house and this wasn't enough to make ends meet. She told me, 'The *Maovadi* (Maoists) claimed they will lead the cause of the poor… [long pause]…no change took place'. When I asked her if she sees any way to improve their position, she answered, 'people advised me that if you want the panchayat or the block office to help you, start a *dal* (group)'. In the present situation, only if the block office people [*block officer-er lokera*] help us, we can do something'.

'Help' or assistance from the 'state' was often sought in different forms, but most women expected it through welfare and poverty alleviation programmes, since direct cash transfers weren't an option. Asha added, '*Unnayan* [an ambiguous term meaning both social progress and individual mobility] is in the *sarkar's hand*'. However, when I asked her what *unnayan* means to her, she said that all she wanted is that her SHG receives the loan that had been promised by the block office under the Muktidhara programme. According to her, 'Once we get the loan, we all [group members] will divide it amongst ourselves. With my

share, my family will be able to expand the *sobji chas* (vegetable cultivation) we already carry out.' Asha's only interest was in seeking state support in trying to address her family's poverty situation, not to set up a collective enterprise with other women from the group. While she did not want to do the block office's bidding, the block office was central to her aspirations of material improvement. Asha's claims should be seen in the context of 'development as counterinsurgency', where the block office in alliance with the district administration and the NGO ASAAN was paying special attention to poor women in the name of 'empowering' them.

Women sought close ties with actors outside the block office too. The SHG women in Ramgarh, who were supported by the NGO ASAAN, relied on Arunabh to help them with the day to day functioning of the SHGs. While Arunabh emphasised to me that his job only entailed helping women become self-sufficient through adequate training for a short period of time, the women looked up to him for much more than that. He was someone who would not just teach them new farming techniques, but also help them in dealing with the block officials and other actors like Probir the PMRDF and district-level functionaries. Most women from ASAAN-supported SHGs told me that their lives and the way their SHGs functioned had changed for the better since Arunabh began to regularly visit their villages. According to Soma Mandi, a Santal woman, Arunabh's presence has meant that they now have regular meetings within their SHG. Their SHG existed only in name since 2007. She said, 'only because Arunabh da makes us do work (*kaaj koraay*), our lives are slowly changing'. The phrase *kaaj koraay* (makes us work) shows their reliance on Arunabh. Soma attributed the success of her SHG as well as the increase in her confidence to Arunabh, 'As long as Arunabh Da helps us, we can work well. He trained me in SRI method of rice cultivation and our SHG is reaping benefits from that. He even helps me prepare what I should say in front of the block officials.' Women's ties with Arunabh were not economic, or dependent upon

receiving welfare benefits. However, his role in assisting women in seeking benefits from the ultimate patron, the state, was critical.

Apart from welfare benefits, sustained ties with the state were also crucial for women to be able to imagine lives outside the household. The meetings and training sessions organised to bring together women from different SHGs, whether by the block office or Arunabh, became opportunities for women to take a break from household work and socialise with other women. 'My life was all about cooking at home and looking after my children. Through these different events, I come out of the house and it feels so good (*bhalo lagche*). I hope these continue forever because *sarkari kaaj* (government work) is a good excuse to leave the house,' said Sangita Chalok. The fact that it is *sarkari kaaj* makes it possible for women to seek their family members' permission to step out. Of course, that does not always guarantee that women will be able to leave the house whenever they want, but becomes one of the reasons they can do so.

'Meeting the 'state' becomes one of the ways in which women are able to step out of their households. Once at a training session organised by Arunabh that I attended, a man suddenly walked in, stood at a corner and made gestures towards one women, who was his wife. She stood up, leaving the circle that the women were sitting around and approached him. He signalled her to step out of the room. I followed them on the pretext of going out for a drink of water. The man scolded her for coming to the meeting when they had distant relatives visiting their house. She said, 'I told you it's my work'. He screamed back saying, 'your work is in the house. Come with me now'. The woman did not counter him but told him that she will be back as soon the meeting ends. The husband was now furious, but before he could say anything, she added, 'This is *sarkari work* and I might get the loan. But if you don't let me learn the ways to talk to the block officials, how will manage the loan?' The man did not look too happy but turned around and started walking away. This episode

demonstrated to me how the statemaking processes open up a limited number of spaces where women can negotiate with their families using the pretext of *sarkari kaaj*.

However, despite their enthusiasm about engaging with state actors, women did have many complaints against the BDO office and panchayat representatives for not being responsive enough. Prerona Das, who came to Muktidhara meetings because it would help her build relationships with block officials which she could later use to seek welfare benefits. She told me that she had been looking for a position within the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) [1] for three years now. She had appeared for the exam thrice but complained that she was not taken in despite her Scheduled Caste (SC) status. Reservations are made for lower castes categorised as 'scheduled castes' in government employment as well as in some welfare programmes. Prerona had imagined that having an SC certificate will be enough to get her a position within the ICDS but that did not happen. Prerona protested further, '*madhyabitta* (middle-class) women who have political connections get all the government contracts and appointments. So it is clear that no matter which party is in power, the poor don't benefit. Change does not mean much for us. Even with Muktidhara, who knows whether loans will be given out or not.'

Prerona's statements signal towards how the 'blurred boundaries' (Gupta 1995) between state and society operate, and those who are more powerful in the societal ladder end up appropriating the resources of the state. There could be different explanations for this. One, it could be a reference to upper-caste households like the Rays. One woman from the Ray household, Simanti Ray, who was mentioned in chapter 5, was able to score government contracts for her SHG by virtue of her husband being a local office-bearer of the ruling TMC. Two, so called 'middle-class women' who have had better educational opportunities

[1] The ICDS scheme was launched by the Indian government in 1975 to support early childhood development, by focussing on nutrition, health and education. Rural women work as healthcare volunteers, as mid-wives for instance, as part of this programme and selection involves an examination. Akhil Gupta has studied this programme and its implementation in northern India. See Gupta 1995, 2012 and Gupta and Sharma 2006.

sometimes do better in these recruitment examinations. Rina Deb Singh narrated a similar experience of not being able to get government employment. She told me, 'I have undergone government-certified nursing training. But it has been impossible to get a government job. My mother-in-law and others in my village told me to become part of an SHG instead. They seem to think that this will enable me to get some help from the government'.

SHGs were seen as the next best alternative as the means to secure welfare benefits by women, but even that did not seem adequate for some. For instance, Simanti Ray, despite managing the NREGA contract, felt that it was difficult for them to handle the work given. 'We secured a contract for building a road. Some of my group members do the work, but we also need to hire the additional labour of men. The panchayat office pays us our due only months later. In the meantime, all the wage payments go from our SHG account and that hinders any other work we might have undertaken as a group'. SHG women on mid-day meal contracts had problems too. At the high school in Lalgarh, while cooking a large pot of *khichuri* as the mid-day meal for school students, Kalpana Chalok and her group members complained to me, 'We earn very little money. Each member only ends up with 100 rupees a month (roughly £ 1). That does not give us enough money. Moreover, the amount that is allocated for the rice and vegetables to cook the mid-day meal falls short, so we have to often chip in our own funds'. In the course of our conversation, the RP Mina Mahato joined us and said to Kalpana, 'Such complaints will always be there. Be happy that you have the contract'. To that, Kalpana said, 'Why should we not complain? Ever since the *jhamela* has ended, the *sarkar* is always claiming that they are doing a lot for us. If they are making such announcements, then they should at least play their role well'. In the present scenario, when the governments and the block-level bureaucracy relied on a rhetoric of improving people's lives to rebuild their legitimacy, the level of people's expectations increased.

Failure of the local authorities to adequately address demands and expectations, however, did not stop women from seeking out the state, but gave rise to more claims. Despite their misgivings, most women I interviewed wanted to maintain existing ties with the block office and Arunabh, and wanted to also build new relations with them and newer actors like Probir. The churning of state-society relations during and after the interregnum was an opportunity, and women identified their future life trajectories vis-a-vis the new round of statemaking in the region. Their hopes and aspirations linked with the change that associating with the state could bring. Women's ability to come out of the house to take on new roles, and improve their material conditions was premised on sustained ties with various state actors. I understand women's 'declarations of dependence' as the defining feature of statemaking processes in the current counterinsurgency scenario. In the next section, I sketch a detailed case study of Lalgarh's women making claims on the block office and the PMRDF, who were then compelled to respond to those claims.

3. Sal-*patta* Business Centre

In the winter of December 2014, I walked with ten women to Chotosole village in Ramgarh. We stopped as we reached a construction site. Some SHG *didis* from Chotosole joined us too. Ten minutes after we reached there, Probir (the PMRDF) and Sarbani (the block's SHG supervisor) arrived in a white ambassador car. The *didis* brought plastic chairs for Probir and Sarbani to sit on, while they squatted on the ground. This deference, which is a common occurrence when block or district officials visited villages, intimated a kind of hierarchy whereby the officials had to always be seated above them. Block office meetings also reinforced this arrangement by always seating the officials higher than the women. The one-storied building being constructed in Chotosole was meant to be a 'business centre' with machines for stitching and pressing sal (shorea robusta) leaves into plates and bowls. Probir

told me that they had ordered nine stitching machines and six pressing machines. Nine SHGs from nearby villages will have access to these machines. While we sat there, he discussed a number of things with women, from whether the centre should have windows to what kind of sharing arrangement different SHGs can work out in order to use the machines. SHG women from Chotosole and nearby villages could use this centre which the block office was setting up. These women would be provided skills training in the block office where they will be taught how to use these machines. The building costs and the cost of the machines were met by the IAP's special grant called Backward Regions Grant (BRG) of approximately one million rupees. Probir emphasised to me how the funding for the centre was possible only because the block was classified as both 'backward' and 'Left-Wing Extremist' (LWE). 'I had to put in much effort to convince the district magistrate to sanction the BRG funds sanctioned for this project', he commented.

Earlier in the year, as the Muktidhara programme was being planned, different potential livelihood options for women were discussed at the block office meetings. Women who sold handmade sal leaf plates had pointed out that they needed stitching machines if they were to take this up as their major source of livelihood with their SHGs. The government officials who were present at the meetings had repeatedly told women that they should consider purchasing their own machines with their Muktidhara loan money. After all, as self-helping entrepreneurs, these women were expected to make business plans. However, ten months had gone by, and very few SHGs in Ramgarh had actually received the loans promised to them. According to Probir, he had tried his best to convince the bank officials to release the loans as soon as possible, but the state-owned bank SBI had not complied. Muktidhara implementation had involved Probir and other district-level bureaucrats convincing state-owned banks to provide loans to SHG groups. As Probir disclosed, they had agreed reluctantly after checking the account books (*khaatas*) of the SHGS selected under

that programme. The Ramgarh bank, however, was now delaying the loans. In the meantime, Basanti Mahato had approached Sarbani with a request. She asked the block office to buy machines on their behalf. While Sarbani told her to wait for the loan, Probir took Basanti's request seriously, and started to think of ways he could meet this demand. He explained to me, 'I realised that there were unused funds from the district Integrated Action Plan (IAP) funds, and this project could well be justified as infrastructure building'. According to Basanti, 'unless the block office supports us, we will not be able to do what we want. Since we do not own land, we rely on these other forms of livelihood like *sal patta*'. Basanti also told me that Arunabh had assisted her in preparing the business plan on the basis of which Probir agreed to look into her demand.

Basanti Mahato resided in a predominantly Santal village. Although she is a Mahato, her family does not own any land. Basanti's husband is a tailor, and she hoped that the SHG could bring in additional earnings. Her SHG was one of the few which had a mix of Mahato and Santal women. At one of the meetings, I heard her telling the officials that they come together as 'people residing near the jungle' (*jungle lokera*) in their group. I had first met her at a meeting organised by Arunabh, where she was the meeting chair (*sabhanetri).* She had studied up to class 10 and gotten married after that, at the age of eighteen. At this meeting, she moderated the discussion among the women, most of who were Santal. She urged them to speak in Bengali, not Santali, so that there could be a common language. She told me, after the meeting, how she earlier did not understand how SHGs worked but slowly, with the help of Arunabh, came to understand the benefits of saving collectively. 'Not only does it give us a pool of savings to draw from, we also have the chance to seek help from the block office', she said. SHGs therefore become the means for women to become a part of the statemaking processes. Being part of an SHG had put her in touch first with Arunabh, and subsequently with Sarbani and other block-level officials. 'We all decided that some work related to sal

patta would be best for us, since we all live close to the forest, and regularly go to collect the leaves. But without the machines, it wasn't very profitable work', she said.

Sal leaf collection and plate making are gendered activities, with women doing all the work from collection to stitching the plates and drying them. Sal leaves are an important forest resource for the region's economy, especially for women. Most women who reside in villages in close proximity to the forests collect these leaves from the sal trees. Sal is a deciduous tree that sheds its leaves once every year. It has been a commercially valuable source of timber. Until the late nineteenth century, the *zamindars* had superior claims over the land, including the sal forests in the Jungle Mahals of Midnapore, and they used their rights to trade in timber and other products from these forests (Sivaramakrishnan 1996: 234). Under the Indian Forest Acts of 1878 and 1927, the colonial government sought to regulate the movement of forest produce and levied taxes on forest goods. Under the new Forest Rights Act 2006, local communities have a right to use and/or collect minor forest produce, and sal leaves fall in that category. Middle-aged sal leaves are considered ideal for the purpose of making plates and bowls. Young leaves are too tender, and older leaves too hard and thick. April to December is the best time to collect the leaves. Women pluck the leaves from the lower branches and carry them home. They stitch the leaves into round plates using blunt and thin bamboo sticks. These stitched leaf plates are then kept out to dry. Local dealers buy the plates from women each week and transport it through trucks to nearby district towns and to the state capital of Kolkata. These disposable plates and bowls are used to serve food on special occasions, and street food vendors use them to sell food in.

While poor Santal women residing near forests were the ones who usually took up sal *patta* related work, some women from relatively well-to-do households also toyed with it as a business idea. During my first visit to Lalgarh in fall of 2013, Arpita Ray (introduced in the previous chapter, daughter-in-law of the senior TMC leader Bono Behari Ray) told me that

she had attended training for stitching sal plates in the block office. When I asked her if she collects sal leaves, she answered in the negative, and said,

> The block office people provided us with training and told us that we could start a business and open a 'godown' for sal plates. Collecting and stitching some plates is a different thing, but taking a loan and setting up a business in a place like Lalgarh is very difficult. As women, it is doubly hard for us. We did start an arrangement where we contracted some women to collect leaves for our SHG, and we hand-stitched them. However, when it came to selling, we faced a real problem. The *thekedar* (middleman) collecting the plates would come on some days but not turn up at other times. He would expect us to load the bundles onto the truck. That wasn't possible for us. We are women, not men. And we are daughter-in-laws of our respective households. How can we be expected to do tasks like these?

We see that women from better-off households did not want to undertake the labour involved in collecting and picking the leaves, and hence, contracted the work out to other women. She also emphasised that, as women, they were limited in terms of the work they could handle. Similar complaints about not being able to carry bundles of plates and so on were never expressed by poorer women who saw it as a necessary livelihood activity. Arpita and other members of her SHG ultimately gave up the idea of buying a machine and setting up their own plate stitching centre. I then asked her if her SHG took up any other work. She answered:

> No. We told the BDO to install a machine in the BDO office itself, where we can just go stitch plates, and be paid wages. That way, we will not need to take loans…we will not have to worry about selling the plates…For women, such an arrangement will be ideal. Loans and businesses are not something women can manage.

Arpita expected the block office to be an employer, and not merely a loan provider. She felt that unless that happened, women would not really make any *unnati* (progress).

Arpita never got what she wanted, but a 'business centre' for plate stitching machines was now coming up in Ramgarh. As we sat outside the under construction building, Probir and the women discussed how making plates as an SHG and through the machines would mean more earnings. The SHG *didis* gathered there told me that currently if they manage to hand-stitch 8,000 plates in a week, it fetches them somewhere between Rs. 800 and 900 (roughly £8-9), at the rate of ₹100-150 (£10-15) per 1000 plates. Probir told them that the

market rate for 1,000 machine-stitched sal plates is between ₹400-500 (£4-5), almost four times the price that hand-stitched plates fetch. If ten SHG members divide the work amongst themselves, say five women collect the leaves, and the other five take turns to work at the machines, they can together produce more number of plates per week with less effort. So if a group produces 10,000 plates a week collectively, they can earn ₹40,000 (roughly £400) in all, where each member's share will be ₹4000 (£40). If they make more than 10.000 plates per week, they can earn even more. The women gathered there seemed very excited at this prospect. They started to talk to each other and began making plans regarding the potential earnings with their SHG members. Amba Hansda said to me, 'Yes, my SHG has still not got a loan under Muktidhara. But this is definitely better than receiving a loan. It would have been much harder to set up machines on our own.' The declaring of dependence in this case is not directly transactional, as the state does not give out cash handouts. However, for women, making claims on the block office was crucial to secure some basic resources to enhance their livelihoods.

The BDO and Probir, who were involved in setting up the 'business centre' also spoke about their role in responding to women's demands and buying these machines for them. 'People expect us to do things for them. I feel happy that I am able to do something for these women which will benefit them,' the BDO said to me once he arrived. Probir added, 'It is an excellent business plan. Women will have this income as their 'own' income, without putting in any investment at all. We must think of implementing this model in other parts of the district too.' The monetary resources required to accomplish this end came from the special fund for LWE-affected districts. Probir, who was not the usual bureaucrat, undertook the planning required to set up the centre. His presence in the district was due to it being an ex-Maoist district. As I have shown before, certain features of statemaking were peculiar to Lalgarh and Ramgarh because these gram panchayats were in an 'LWE' zone. The need for

the state to legitimise itself led its constituent actors to play the role of good patrons who fulfilled public expectations and took steps to improve people's lives.

The sal *patta* case study represents one example of how 'declarations of dependence' guided statemaking processes. While the district and block officials expressed a keenness to see local women become self-helping actors, and the government and bureaucracy sought to limit their role to facilitating subsidised loans, this was not enough for the women. In the view of most of my women interlocutors, if there had to be a sufficient improvement in their material conditions via new livelihood options, officials needed to play a much greater role. Moreover, women felt that their ties to the block officials should be constant, not temporary or fluctuating. They imagined the state as an ensemble of institutions with the resources and ability to support them through developmental programmes. Instead of starting their own businesses as SHGs, women wanted to be employed by the state in some capacity. Even when they wanted to have jointly-owned and managed SHG businesses, for example, of sal *patta* plates, they preferred the state to make basic investments in machinery and other marketing networks. The new state government's rhetoric of change (*poriborton*) and working for the benefit of ordinary people gave women a stronger basis for making their demands. For the BDO and PMRDF, responding to demands in this set-up became a necessary part of their duties. They tried to do what they could, but invariably fell short of popular expectations.

My argument about women using 'declarations of dependence' to seek state-led development challenges the simplistic but often held view that development is an imposition on marginalised groups. In line with scholarship which emphasises the desire for the state and development, I show how the counterinsurgency context came to represent a phase where poor women had an opportunity to re-negotiate their relationships with state actors. In the present phase of development as counterinsurgency, governments and bureaucrats made an

extra effort to bring in development. The interventions were framed as programmes aimed at making women into entrepreneurial self-helping agents. The targets of these policies, poor women in rural India, do not, in fact, aspire to be autonomous and entrepreneurial in a way that prevents them from forging sustained relations with the state and making claims on it. The portraits of two of my women interlocutors that I present in the next section illustrate how individuals link their life-chances to having continued interactions with the state.

4. Transforming Lives through Self Help Groups?: Portraits of Two Women

In this section, I present portraits of two of my women interlocutors. They belong to different social groups, both in terms of caste and class. As a result, their expectations from the SHGs vary. Sumana Mahato comes from a land-owning Mahato family and Saguni Murmu belongs to a landless Santal family. Their socio-economic backgrounds determine their expectations from state actors. The difference in their education levels, economic situation, and societal position determined what they hoped to achieve through their ties of dependence. For instance, money is not a big concern for Sumana. What matters to her is coming out of the household and being seen as a confident leader of SHG women. Saguni's concerns, on the other hand, had to do more with earning money to help her family meet their financial needs. While both of them want to build sustained relations with the block office and with Arunabh, they seek different ends. I focus below on how they think about transformation in their own lives as tied to the emerging state apparatus in the counterinsurgency context.

Sumana Mahato

Sumana Mahato believes that she is gaining much from the ongoing phase of statemaking. In her own words, 'If I had not been called for meetings at the block office, I would have just sat at home.' I met Sumana for the first time at the agricultural fair (*krishi mela*) in Lalgarh. Women from her SHG, along with two others were managing the SHG group stall there. After our brief conversation at the *mela*, she invited me over to her house. Sumana's village, Dalna, is a part of the Ramgarh gram panchayat. She lived in the upper hamlet (*ucch para*) of the village in a concrete one-storied house with her mother-in law, husband, son and daughter. In Dalna, as in many other villages, Mahatos lived in the *ucch para* whereas Santals resided in a separate hamlet. While preparing a cup of tea for me, she told me how it was rare for her to be home these days. Her time was mostly spent in the fields, in the block office or at ASAAN training sessions. Sumana told me that her SHG was formed ten years ago, 'I didn't know much then, but in the last one year, I have realised the advantage of being part of an SHG. It has completely altered my life'. When I asked her what was it that had changed so much in the past one year. Sumana answered,

> It was with the coming of Arunabh Da. Ever since he came, I have learnt a lot. At first, he started training us on maintaining SHG accounts. Then we started trainings on the SRI method of rice cultivation. You know, Lipika Di, people would say all sorts of things. Some people in my family would tell me not to go to these kinds of training sessions. My husband's brother would say 'we have been farming for years, how this outsider can teach us anything about it'. My family members asked me to stop going to the sessions. I asked them to give me some time, and see if our lives change. Then, thanks to the SRI cultivation, the rice crop was much better than ever before, so my family members realised that they should not stop me.

One can see how Sumana attributes much of the 'change' in her life to the arrival of an ASAAN professional. 'I got to learn a lot from Arunabh Da: handling bank accounts, maintaining SHG record books, raising issues at meetings, coordinating the SHG work. Slowly I started gaining confidence,' she said.

The fact that Sumana was more educated than other group members made her take on the role of a leader within her SHG. She told me, 'We started collecting money but the other

women were clueless. I started to coordinate the loans others would take from our common pool. I never took any money from there because I never needed it. ' Apart from being more educated, Sumana also belonged to a relatively better off family. While they weren't very wealthy, they owned land, and earned good returns from their rice crop. 'I feel that the SHG could not have functioned without me. All the other members were illiterate (*teep)*'.[2] Sumana continued, 'It took a lot of effort for me to teach them even to sign their own names…two-three months… can you imagine? Now they all can sign their own names on the SHG record-books and they feel happy about it,' she said proudly, just as a teacher would feel about her students. It is interesting to note how she builds a picture where the women of her group are dependent on her. We see that there are different levels of dependence in operation brought in through statemaking practices. Sumana explained to me, 'I too depend on Arunabh Da and the BDO office, and these women depend on me. I help them because I feel compassion (*daya*) for them. These women have hardly stepped out of their villages, so I have to bring them for meetings to the panchayat and block offices.' She joked, 'They follow me everywhere, even when I go to the toilet!' She felt that they would be lost without her, and did not mind helping them in whatever way she could. Sumana's characterisation of her friends as getting lost without her tells us about their dependence on her. There were, indeed, many layers of dependence.

Sumana's life had not always been like this. She was married off by her parents at the age of fourteen. She had studied till class 8 before marriage and completed the last two years of her school education after marriage by studying at home. Sumana described her experience in the following way: 'After marriage, my life changed a lot. It felt like I was imprisoned inside the house (*Biyer pore amaar jiban anek bodle che. Ghor-er modde bondh hoye chilo*

[2] In her reference, it pointed to those who could not sign their own names but used a thumb-print instead. A common Hindi word, *angootha chaap*, is often used in such contexts in north India.

moto din)'. Sumana stopped speaking for some time, but then said smilingly, 'Ever since I have the SHG, I am breathing fresh air all the time (*dal hoye ekhon puro hawa khachi)'.* Sumana's words conveyed what she imagined as a certain kind of freedom in her life. She went on to say, 'Because of SHGs, I go wherever I want and tell my family members that I have to go because this is my responsibility (*daitava*)…they sometimes tell me that I have taken up too much responsibility, but I say that this what gives me a lot of happiness (*beshi khushi*)…the meetings and 'trainings' are organised by Arunabh Da or the block office, I tell them that if I don't go, there will be a problem'. Sumana linked this sense of responsibility with her growing importance outside the household. Like Sumana, SHG-related events organised by ASAAN or the block office were a way for women to leave their homes and step into the public sphere. Sumana used it as a means to negotiate her few hours of '*hawa* (fresh air*)*'. She conceded that had it not been an official reason, it would not have been so easy to get out of the house every day.

Sumana claimed that she had been able to learn a lot in life thanks to the NGO ASAAN and the interest taken by the block administration in SHGs. 'You won't believe it but till a couple of years back, I did not even know what the BDO is. Today, I come go to the BDO office regularly and everyone here knows me (*shobhai chene*). I feel very important. I cannot tell you how good all this feels,' she conveyed to me. In contrast to a situation where women seldom have interactions outside of the household and the family, Sumana was meeting block and panchayat officials and other women on a daily basis, in and around her village, as well as at the block office. In the way that she spoke, I gathered that this was a major change in her life and she was able to do things she had not done before. For instance, she talked about a trip she undertook:

> Some of us were taken by the block office to Bankura (neighbouring district) district to see the mango orchards that two women's SHGs had started. At first, we were not sure if we will be able to go. You might find it funny since you have travelled all this way on your own, but for

> women who had not even been outside their villages, it is a big deal… For me, it was a very big thing.

Sumana was very glad that such opportunities presented themselves and that she could restructure her life around them. Corbridge et al (2005) pointed out that women in rural India hardly 'meet the state' at places such as the block office, and these spaces are mostly dominated by men. But, we see in my fieldsites and in Sumana's case that women were now frequently present in these spaces.

Not only were women now more visible in the block office, they were also looking for means to gain recognition. Sumana thought she could do so by giving the right answers to questions posed by officials and volunteering whenever a women asked to give a speech at a public event. She told me that she often asked Arunabh to coach her on how to interact with officials. 'Speaking at the block office meeting, when they ask you a hundred questions, is very difficult. Arunabh da always tells me what to say and what not to say'. As mentioned in chapter 5, Sumana was one of the select few who gave a speech at the Muktidhara launch event. She had prepared the speech with Arunabh's help, but could not eventually speak because the organisers ran out of time and the minister for SHGs and others on stage were keen to leave. One afternoon, as I walked with Arunabh in the village, he stopped when he saw Sumana and asked her if she had prepared her speech for next day's field visit. I asked him to give me more details about this 'field visit', and he told me that by Probir and some district officials planned to come and see paddy fields cultivated using SRI techniques. Women involved in farming were expected to explain to them how they used the SRI techniques. Sumana and Arunabh then sat down to prepare. Arunabh jotted down a couple of sentences, which Sumana read out aloud. She changed a few words in some places, and then asked Arunabh if she sounded fine. After their last round of rehearsal, she looked at me and said, 'Had he not been here, I would not have been able to prepare such a good speech.'

While Sumana's relationship with Arunabh had surely helped her access the public sphere, she felt that the block office could do more to help them for this change in her life to be permanent. She explained: 'If I am to continue get out of the house every day, I would expect to be paid something. The block office should employ those like me, and pay us a wage. I now have enough experience now to help other women run SHGs or train them in SRI cultivation'. Sumana's words bring forth a need for continued dependence on the 'state', symbolised here by the block office. I asked her if she was interested in getting employed as, say, a Resource Person (RP). She shook her head. 'The RPs do not get paid enough and don't carry out their tasks well. All I am trying to say is that SHG women should get different types of work at the block office. That is the only way they will come out of their houses and make progress (*unnati*).' She continued, 'Even when the block officials took us to visit the mango orchards in Bankura, I saw that women were able to do everything because the *sarkar* provided them with land, machines, and training. Their block office even helps them sell the mangoes that are produced.' Sumana wished to emphasise the necessity of a sustained relationship between women such as herself and the local incarnation of the state in order for them to acquire a place in the public sphere as well as to gain financial independence.

Women's presence in the public realm was connected to the reworking of gender relations they carried out in the private sphere. Close ties with Arunabh and block officials played a crucial role in women's negotiations with their families. For instance, Sumana's family did not stop her from going out because it was *sarkari* work. However, in many cases, women's steeping out of the household created tensions and conflicts within households. Sumana discussed the problems faced by women in the private realm as they strove to leave their homes to take on their new public roles. She spoke of a situation in which one of her SHG members left the group because her family did not like her going out to work and for meetings. Sumana also told me, 'Villagers say a lot of things about me as well behind my

back. They say that she leaves her husband's home (*kutumb bari*), ignoring her responsibilities of looking after her children and parents in-law. What is it that she get out of it?' She added, 'They even comment on how I walk confidently and have become too self-centred… On Arunabh da's advice I told everyone that I have a paid job at the block office, but they still make such comments.' The gendered aspects of the 'declarations of dependence' become clear in this case, because the small number of women who are able to come out of their houses do so by building relationships in their immediate context with actors and institutions that represent the state. These women not only seek material benefits from this unequal relationship, but also a change in their everyday well-being that does not, above all, confine them to the drudgery of domestic responsibilities.

In 2014, when I returned to Lalgarh and Ramgarh after a gap of seven months and met Sumana again, she told me how she was on her way to becoming a 'CSP' or a Community Service Provider. The block office and ASAAN had decided to set up these CSP positions where two women were appointed from each gram panchayat to help other women in their day-to-day SHG work. They were supposed to be more hands-on than the Resource Persons (RPs). As CSP, Sumana was involved in the setting up of a sub-cluster in the Ramgarh gram panchayat where twelve SHGs came together to discuss common issues and agendas. Soon, she would begin training women from other SHGs in SRI cultivation techniques. 'Arunabh da taught me the method. Now I will train other women on his behalf because he cannot travel everywhere and train so many women'. I asked her if being a CSP would entitle her to some remuneration from the block office, she looked upset. She said: 'That would have been the ideal situation (*adarsha abastha*). But, no, they have said that the SHGs with which I work will contribute to a pool of money, from which CSPs will be paid. I don't think we will be paid, but let's see.' Other than this, she expressed happiness at the fact

that she could tell her family and other villagers how she had been deemed important enough to be appointed as a community leader.

Along with the transformations that were taking place in her own life, Sumana also sought to change her family's mindset. She had sent her eight-year old son to live in her parents' house because she did not have the time to look after him anymore. Her fourteen-year old daughter, she said, was old enough to take care of the house as well as her parents-in-law. Sumana told me how she has had to fight with her husband not to marry off their daughter until she was at least eighteen years old. 'She is studying in class 10 as of now. I want her to study in a college. I know how frustrating it is to get married at a young age, and now, I even realise that women can do many different things outside the house.' Sumana pays for her daughter's schooling. She told me, 'since we have our pool of savings in the SHG, we take out loans to fund our children's education, especially that of our daughters because, sometimes, families are not keen to spend on them. I see this as the biggest advantage of being in SHGs for women'. Therefore, apart from getting out of their houses, SHGs also permitted women to have a greater say in educating their daughters and ensuring they lead lives which are different from their mothers. There clearly are some changes in women's capacity to act in their own lives and beyond, but these changes relied on women's continued relations with the NGO executive and the block officials. Moreover, even as Sumana strove for change in some aspects of her existence, much else remained unchanged, including how gender roles were imagined. For example, when Sumana told me that her daughter cooks for everyone in her absence from the house, I asked her if her son would do the same when he grew slightly older. She laughed out aloud and said, 'Boys don't do this kind of work. Why would I expect him to learn this?'

Through Sumana's story, we see one example of how women are responding to the recent phase of statemaking in Lalgarh and Ramgarh. Her story is not, of course, every

woman's story. Firstly, only few women who can take out the time from their housework and/or livelihood activities are able to take on these leadership roles. Secondly, although all women may wish to forge close ties with the block office, they lack the required educational qualifications or the family support to take on these roles. Sumana herself told me that she was able to become a CSP only because she had a document that certified that she had studied up to class 10. Thirdly, her husband's family owns land, and owing to her adoption of the SRI method of rice cultivation, they have been able to produce more rice and earn more. One wonders if Sumana would have been so actively involved in the SHG-related activites in the village and the block office, had these factors not existed. Sumana has been able to bring certain changes to her life, but she is also clear about her continued reliance on both Arunabh and the block office in order to continue on her current life trajectory. Her aspirations for transforming her life and circumstances, as well as in her self-making as an SHG leader, is closely linked to her 'declarations of dependence'.

Saguni Murmu

I met Saguni during my initial days of fieldwork. The Ramgarh RP had promised to take me to what she called a few 'Santal villages' in Ramgarh where women were running SHGs. In some villages, Santals resided in a separate hamlet, but some villages close to the forests only had a Santal population. Saguni's house was made of thick mud walls and had a thatched roof. On one corner, I saw a pile of sal plates, hand stitched with twigs and left out to dry. As she noticed me looking at them, she said, 'I stitched these just two days back. We do this as something that helps in earning extra income'. Saguni lived with her husband and three children aged six, four and one. Saguni joined an SHG started by a neighbour a year and a half ago. 'The group leader (*dalnetri*), Saguni's neighbour brought together twelve *Santal* women. I was unsure whether to join the *dal* but she convinced me by saying that it

will help us save money', she said. One reason why the neighbour specifically approached Saguni was because she needed someone who could speak Bengali and communicate with block and panchayat officials whenever needed.

Saguni was a first generation Bengali speaker. Her parents, she told me, could not speak Bengali at all. Since she attended school till class 4, Saguni learnt to converse in the language. 'At the block office, no one speaks Santali. It is hard for women like us. At the meeting, they ask many questions…very difficult ones. I feel like a *murkha* (stupid person)', she told me. Even though she was the only one in her SHG who could converse in Bengali, she felt very uneasy at the meetings. As I pointed out in the previous chapter, the Muktidhara meetings at the block office tended to be like an oral examination where officials interrogated women. Most women found it a challenging process, and were often very nervous as officials called them to the front. For women like Saguni, who were not very confident with their Bengali language skills, walking up to these officials was a scarier prospect. However, she realised that she had to face up to these fears and gain confidence in order for her to have a chance at improving her family's economic condition. In her own words, 'I feel scared, but what can I do. We need help'.

At the ASAAN meetings, Arunabh often discussed with women, the ways in which they could respond to the questions asked at the block office meetings. To prepare them, he insisted that the Santal women present at his meetings do not talk only among themselves in Santali but participate in the discussion which was carried out in Bengali. Most other women at these meetings were Mahato, and he encouraged them to speak to the Santal women. Saguni told me, 'Arunabh da says that we will speak better Bengali if we practice at these meetings. I think I will then be able to ask them [the block officials] for help…loan…or maybe *kaaj* (employment)'.

Saguni and her husband, Marang Murmu, both worked for a wage in the farm of the more well-to do Santal family in the village. Her husband also sought employment under NREGA in the lean season. They recently acquired a BPL card, and she felt that the BPL card would help them procure cheaper rice, oil and kerosene through the Public Distribution System (PDS) as well as make it easier for her husband to get the *sau din-er kaaj* (100 days' work under the NREGS). However, she sighed and explained, 'Getting anything done at the panchayat is difficult. Even for any kind of SHG work, we don't go to the panchayat office. We all [her group members] thought since that the *pradhan* seat has been reserved for a woman, she will be more responsive and help us. But she is only there as a *putul* (puppet) and does what the men of her family tell her to'. Saguni's lament is an oft-heard story from rural India. Under the 73rd and 74th Amendment acts, women and SC and ST groups were provided reservations in the local self-governing panchayat bodies. However, in many instances, powerful men prop up their female relatives as candidates while they run the show from behind the scenes.

At a Muktidhara session that Probir had organised at the Ramgarh gram panchayat office, the *pradhan*, Krishna Mahato, a woman in her late thirties arrived but did not say a word during the meeting. Later, when I was talking to Krishna, she spoke about how she did not understand how government programmes worked but clarified that she wanted to learn. I noticed her walking into her office where three men sat with files asking her to sign. She put her signatures there without even looking at the files. Saguni had initially thought of the *pradhan* as a potential patron, but soon realised that she is not someone who could be relied upon. Instead, Saguni tried to build ties with the block officials, and with Arunabh. A number of women who lived in the Ramgarh gram panchayat had the same problem. At one of the ASAAN meetings, where Arunabh asked women to come up with agendas they think are relevant to them, Saguni raised this issue related to the Pradhan. Other women at the meeting

joined in to complain. Together, they started making fun of her and concluded that it would be useless to expect any help from her.

The block office at this point, in comparison, could be imagined as a potential benefactor by women by virtue of their responsiveness. Saguni told me that, although they had registered their SHGs at the block office, they had no connections with block officials until they were called to participate in the Muktidhara meeting. 'They asked us to bring our record books. We did not know what would happen since we never held regular meetings', she confessed and then said, 'My *dalnetri's* sister who resides in the neighbouring village told her we should have at least one meeting a week. The problem is that most of us work during the busy season and have to look after the household too, so people don't turn up for meetings.' When I went back in December 2014, the Muktidhara loans had not come through. Saguni told me, 'we tried to ensure that our record-books were okay and asked the RP to help us, but don't know what went wrong…I don't understand (*aami bujhlam na)*. The *babu* who had come to the meeting to ask us questions insisted that we take up animal rearing (*pashu palan*)…goats (*chagol*)… I had refused saying it is not possible for us to do. Do you think that is why they are not giving us the loans?' Without answering her question, I asked her why she thought her SHG could not rear goats and sell milk and meat. She responded by saying, 'It is not so easy. Why should we use up our savings or loans to buy goats? It will be a lot of extra effort. If the block office buys the goats, that would be ideal. In that case, we can rear them and earn through them'. Again, we see that women prefer it if the block office acts as an employer for them, or puts in the investment for their small businesses, as it was doing in Chotosole.

Saguni had heard about the sal *patta* stitching machine centre that the block office was setting up for SHGs in Chotosole. She said, 'I hope they provide us with machines too. Then we can expand our *sal patta* work and earn through that. Obviously without the [BDO]

sahib's help, we cannot do anything, but I don't know how to ask for that help…I will ask Arunabh da what to do.' After making this note in her head, she said to me, 'Since the past six months, we are holding meetings more regularly. Arunabh da has started working with us. With him, you cannot make excuses. All members arrive at the meeting on the date and time that he decides. As long as we continue to work with him, we will be fine. We learn from him how to speak to block officials, and to tell them what we want'. As with Sumana, Saguni expressed a great deal of confidence in Arunabh. He not only made sure that her group met regularly, but also aided them in seeking assistance from the block office.

Like in Sumana's case, the block office and Arunabh were like patrons without whom Saguni could not imagine change in her life. However, unlike Sumana, Saguni did not seek to become a leader for other SHG women nor did she see her visits to the block office as a way of leaving her household. Saguni worked outside anyway so getting out of the house was not the major incentive for her. But she needed support from Arunabh and the block office to improve her financial condition and become more aware of how to negotiate with state officials. Saguni's 'declarations of dependence' were primarily linked to her hope for a better financial situation for herself and her family. She did not speak about wanting to change her position in the household. Apart from working on fields as a wage labourer, she carried out most household tasks on her own, such as cooking and caring for children. She told me that unlike other women's husbands, her husband did not express objections when she went for ASAAN or block office meetings. Hence, there might be different situations in which women belonging to different sections of society might find themselves in, but it is clear that all of them sought sustained relationships with actors such as the block officials, Arunabh and sometimes, Probir. Their 'declarations of dependence' might be a strategy, or a pragmatic response to the present situation. The state apparatus was central to how they imagined change in their lives, economic or otherwise.

5. Conclusion

This chapter showcased the responses of my women interlocutors to the state in the context of 'development as counterinsurgency'. I discussed how poor women looked to build sustained relations with the block officials, the PMRDF, and the NGO executive. The idea of the state and the actors who personified the state were at the centre of their hopes for material improvement. They made strategic or pragmatic 'declarations of dependence' on state actors to seek state resources, and to slightly reorder existing social hierarchies. Women were not interested in becoming the empowered agents that policymakers expected them to be. Rather, they imagined the state as a patron, and made claims on state actors to develop new state-supported livelihoods and enhance their visibility in public life. Through the sal-*patta* machines case study, I demonstrated how women make such claims, and how state actors have to respond to these in order to seek legitimacy in the counterinsurgency situation. The portraits of two my interlocutors, Sumana Mahato and Saguni Murmu, showed how women from different sections of the society imagine the role of the state in their lives. Based on these responses, I argue that women rested their hopes for improvement in their lives, materially and otherwise, on sustained relations with the state-led development apparatus. They did not wish away the state or resist its development programmes, but relied on ties with it to improve their financial position, as well as to challenge some gender hierarchies. Women made strategic 'declarations of dependence' on state actors, and manoeuvred the terrain of statemaking in complex ways in the course of their everyday lives. We cannot, therefore, analyse their responses either as complicity with the state apparatus or resistance against it. The subjectivities of my women interlocutors lay somewhere in between acquiescence and resistance.

Conclusion

This thesis has explored the relationship between statemaking and counterinsurgency in the margins of modern India. Starting with the puzzle of why ordinary people who rebel against the state also seek out the state in their everyday lives, I examined the politics of statemaking in erstwhile Maoist guerrilla zones in the Jungle Mahals of West Bengal. I situated the contemporary politics of 'development as counterinsurgency' within a longer history of insurgency, counterinsurgency, and state-society relations in these marginal tracts. Combining ethnographic and historical methods, this study makes two key arguments about the trajectory of statemaking in the Jungle Mahals. First, periods of insurgency and counterinsurgency are central to the emergence of the state in the margins at different junctures in the colonial and postcolonial eras. Counterinsurgency campaigns simultaneously define the state as well as its margins. Second, popular responses to counterinsurgency cannot be categorised simply as resistance or complicity. Periods of counterinsurgency present opportunities for the reordering of state-society relations from both above and below.

The state itself, as recent scholarship in anthropology and political science has demonstrated, is not a reified object, but an idea and a lived material reality that comes into being through a set of political practices. It emerges from the coalescing of different actors, structures, and levels in any given context. The ideational and material dimensions of the state are, moreover, constituted in the dialogue with the society in which they take shape. I have attempted, in this thesis, to disaggregate the state, and to show the ways in which ordinary people imagine and engage with it. Accordingly, I define statemaking vis-a-vis a process of social mediation between the state and its subjects, and argue that it should be studied from 'within' rather than in a top-down or bottom-up manner. At any given time, statemaking is characterised by a tenuous ruling bargain between the state and society. Insurgency and, then, counterinsurgency open up this ruling bargain to renegotiation.

In support of this argument, the six chapters of this doctoral thesis presented a narrative of shifting state-society relations in the Jungle Mahals of West Bengal from late eighteenth century to the present. Periods of conflict and counterinsurgency punctuated these relations at different junctures. Chapter 1 discussed the inception of the colonial state in the Jungle Mahals under the British East India Company in late eighteenth century. I argued that the modern state in these margins was established through counterinsurgency. The discourses and practices of colonial statemaking emerged in negotiations with local rural elites, the jungle *zamindars*, and set up an exceptional system of administration in order to 'pacify' those who had participated directly or indirectly in rebellions previously. Over the course of the nineteenth century, social groups like the Mahatos and Santals were encouraged to settle in the forests of south-west Bengal, and these groups became key players in the region's history later. Chapter 2 looked at the intermeshing of rural socio-economic hierarchies with the state in the late colonial and postcolonial periods. I looked at various factors that altered state-society relations as well as local hierarchies: violent resistance movements, nationalist politics, land reforms, and, eventually, the rise of parliamentary communism under the Left Front government in West Bengal. Chapter 3 focused on the declining influence of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and its 'party society' after having led the Left Front for thirty-four years. This chapter outlined the local reasons for popular disaffection with the Left Front and the concomitant rise of the Maoist movement alongside an Adivasi politics of resistance.

Chapter 4 studied statemaking in the aftermath of security operations against the Maoists and showed how and why 'development' programmes targeting rural women became a key counterinsurgency strategy in the Jungle Mahals. I disaggregated the state that pursued this strategy of 'development as counterinsurgency', identifying the range of social actors who constituted the state in this period. Chapter 5 follows by exploring a series of 'social

dramas' of everyday statemaking during counterinsurgency. Drawing attention to the sites where rural women and the state interacted, I showed how gender, caste/tribe, and class framed these interactions. Chapter 6 looked at how women themselves became key actors in this new phase of statemaking. They did not intend to become the entrepreneurial self-helping subjects that the state wanted them to be, but they nonetheless imagined the state as a benevolent patron. They wanted to build sustained relationships with newly emerging state structures in the aftermath of counterinsurgency operations in order to materially improve their lives and subtly rework existing gender norms.

My evidence does not permit me to characterise ordinary people's responses to modern statemaking through the simplistic binary of resistance or complicity. Their engagements with the state were, and continue to be far more complex and multifaceted. For example, early colonial subjects in the Jungle Mahals resorted to acts of violent rebellions not to defend older moral economies or oppose the Company state, but to renegotiate local agrarian hierarchies and their relationship to the new state structures. Likewise, in the postcolonial period, ordinary men and women in Jungle Mahals viewed bureaucrats and ruling party leaders as patrons, with whom they wanted to establish sustained relations through strategic 'declarations of dependence'. The state as an idea and an ensemble of everyday practices remained central to their desire for material improvement as well as their quest to reorder existing social hierarchies. Even radical politics directed against the state, whether through Maoism or the Lalgarh movement, revealed itself to be another kind of claim-making by different social groups. Democratic elections carried out in the aftermath of the conflict brought about a regime change, and for the poor, a change in patrons.

However, even as the state occupied a significant position in people's lives, we can infer neither consent nor the grant of legitimacy in visible acts of compliance. Beneath these acts of compliance lies a range of private motivations and interests that not necessarily

coincide with the state's agenda for change. The conjunctures and disjunctures that characterise the statemaking process from within, therefore, produce a textured space of negotiation between the state and its subjects today. Ordinary people's active participation in state-led development programmes also ought to be understood in these pragmatic terms. In contemporary practices of counterinsurgency in the Maoist and ex-Maoist zones of India, where discourses of 'development' mediate the reordering of state-society relations, the politics of the poor cannot be categorised simply as complicity in the making and implementation of state policies. Once underdevelopment was identified as a cause for rebellion, the central government identified 'development' as an antidote to Maoist politics by targeting the material grievances of marginal populations in the so-called Red Corridor.

Rural women, in particular, came to be targeted through the new counterinsurgency policy emanating from Delhi. Through women, the state sought to reach every household in its quest of re-establishing its authority and legitimacy in these conflict zones. The post-liberalisation state in India, of course, draws more generally on discourses of rural women's empowerment under the gender and development (GAD) policy agenda to legitimise its social interventions in the countryside. While these government programmes for rural development might not produce women's empowerment in the state's terms, and actual practices of statemaking might even reinforce existing gender inequalities, the growing body of work on gender and development in India tells us that these programmes nonetheless produce unintended consequences which alter women's lives. In my study, poor women construed the willingness of the state to engage with them as an opportunity to demand public goods, and to craft new political selves in the rural public sphere. They sought sustained relations with the state as a patron in their quest to improve their lives materially, and to challenge local gender hierarchies, albeit in a limited way. Accordingly, I make the case for moving beyond post-structuralist critiques of development as 'anti-politics' and against using

'neoliberalism' as a shorthand to describe engagement between state-directed development and the subjects of development.

The gender dimension of changing state-society relations is crucial to my argument in his thesis. Within a longer historical arc of modern statemaking in the Jungle Mahals, we can observe a shift from the colonial state negotiating with village headmen and large landowners, mostly male, after incidents of rebellion to the postcolonial state today mediating a new peacetime order with rural women, including those from the bottom of village society in the Jungle Mahals. Of course, it is true that this long-term shift in state-society relations does not mean that the state is now geared principally towards addressing gender inequality. Feminist scholars, after all, have long argued that states are gendered, and represent a masculinist discourse of patriarchal power. However, we must pay close attention to the varied forms of self-making by women within the gendered spaces in which they engage with the state. A growing body of scholarship today challenges the liberal feminist assumption that all women seek liberation from all forms of patriarchal oppression (Mahmood 2005). As we saw in the case of the women in Lalgarh and Ramgarh, they may, in fact, want to craft new hierarchical relationships in order to transform their lives. This paradox is telling because it points us to the ambiguities of self-making processes among development subjects within the crucible of modern statemaking. Far from being top-down impositions on marginal social groups, statemaking and development may offer spaces of engagement and self-making in which the gendered subjects of development may strive for better material lives.

None of the above suggests that states cannot or do not use violence against their subjects to coerce them into submission. In a counterinsurgency context, violence is usually the first step to 'pacify' those who resist state authority. Colonial authorities, for instance, employed the army to quell rebellion regularly. Exceptional administrative measures complemented military action, but did not replace it. Similarly, in the present Indian

government's two-pronged strategy of countering Maoism through security and development, 'peace' through military means preceded 'development' as counterinsurgency measure. The violence of the state is also manifested in structural forms: widespread corruption, new forms of inequality through state structures, extra-legal violence, and the failure of welfare programmes. Yet the physical and structural violence of the state coexists with efforts by marginalised groups to seek out the state in order to fulfil their aspirations for a better life. Under such circumstances, the politics of the rural poor lies somewhere between the consent that states often assume and the resistance that academics frequently impute to them. In sum, unpacking the politics of counterinsurgency in modern India can help us understand how state violence and development may complement each other in the margins of the state. Periods of insurgency and counterinsurgency may, in other words, establish the conditions in which a new political order is negotiated from both above and below.

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In the preceding chapters, I have contributed to scholarship on the state in India and beyond through a close study of the historical relationship between the politics of counterinsurgency and statemaking in the Jungle Mahals of West Bengal. My argument about statemaking as a coalescing of actors, practices, and processes both from above and below can enable us understand how states are constituted and reconstituted in different places and times. I also made a case for studying state-society relations over a longer historical arc. Bringing together history and ethnography, I drew attention to how social mediations between the state and ordinary people characterise statemaking at different historical junctures, and argued that these interactions should be theorised in between the binary of resistance and acquiescence. However, from the narrative that I have presented, a further set of questions arise in relation to the present conjuncture of state and democracy in contemporary India.

First, in the context of the Maoist movement and state-led counterinsurgency, there is a need to go beyond the Jungle Mahals and explore questions of why ordinary people seek and sometimes even support a state that is violent and oppressive. As I write this conclusion, police attacks on Adivasis in the state of Chhattisgarh are on the rise once again. Recently, Adivasi activist Soni Sori was attacked by the police and legal activists supporting Adivasis were targeted. Over the last year, Operation Green Hunt has intensified, albeit in a new garb, and there have been reports regarding the regrouping of Salwa Judum, a government-sponsored anti-Maoist militia outlawed by the Supreme Court of India. The state government in Chhattisgarh has been headed by Raman Singh of the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for the past thirteen years. Atrocities on Adivasis have continued under this government, yet it has been re-elected three times. Singh is popularly known as *chawal wale baba* (rice god) due to his policy of supplying rice at Re. 1 per kg to below poverty line households. This scheme could be a reason for his government's re-election. The writings of Peggy Froerer (2007) and Tariq Thachil (2011) have shown that Hindu right-wing organisations linked to the BJP such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangha (RSS) and Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram have entrenched themselves among the Adivasis of Chhattisgarh through local welfare services, especially education and health. Does the state's virtual monopoly over public goods ensure state-seeking behaviour among the poor and marginalized even when they encounter its violence and oppression routinely? This is an important question from the point of view of studying state-society relations in contexts of counterinsurgency. In a situation where the threat of state-led violence is ever-present, is voting for a government that promises welfare an exercise of agency within democratic politics or a compromise in the face of adversity?

Second, the relationship between gender and democratic processes in India deserves much more attention than it has received so far. My female interlocutors in the Jungle Mahals

spoke of elections as ways in which they could vote out parties that had turned unresponsive. They spoke proudly of ousting the Left Front government through their participation in radical political movements as well as through voting in elections. Like insurgent movements, elections too might offer brief liminal moments where political power can be renegotiated. Political parties, too, have gradually begun to consider women as an important electorate to focus on. In the 2015 Bihar state elections, some analysts have attributed the current chief minister Nitish Kumar's victory to an unprecedented turnout by women voters. These women are considered to have casted their vote in favour of Kumar's attention to women's issues during his previous tenure as chief minister. He was favoured by women for starting a scheme to provide free bicycles to girls attending high school, and ensuring greater safety for women. On assuming power, Kumar promptly responded to women's demands for reservations in government employment, and banning of alcohol in the state of Bihar. Similarly, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in the capital city of New Delhi courted women as a separate electorate by raising issues of sexual violence and women's security in public spaces. Analysts have called termed these developments as the rise of a 'women's vote bank'.[1] But we must be careful not to pass quick judgements on the rise of women as a separate vote bank as necessarily posing a major challenge to existing gender inequalities. We must ask the question: Are women playing a greater role than before in a changing democratic polity, and if so, how do we best understand this role? Similarly, in what ways is democracy in contemporary India gendered in terms of its everyday practices and institutional dynamics?

Third, while this project specifically zoomed in on women's relationships with the state in a counterinsurgency context in the margins of modern India, further research is

[1] Sagarika Ghose 'Bihar elections: The rise of women as a vote bank'. *The Economic Times*, 9 November 2915, http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2015-11-09/news/68134198_1_4-women-more-women-nitish-kumar

needed to explore the various ways in which women and the state interact in different kinds of settings. For instance, one needs to ask: Do development programmes elicit similar responses in other parts of rural India? Do women all across rural India seek out the state in the same way as my interlocutors in West Bengal's Jungle Mahals? Drawing comparisons between a zone of ex-insurgency and a zone without any recent history of overt conflict might be profitable to the extent that it can enable one to observe the broad trends regarding gender, development, and statemaking in the countryside. Furthermore, if as I argued in this thesis, 'development' binds women and the state in rural India, what is it that brings them together in urban India? Are the connections between gender and ideas like citizenship and welfare different in metropolitan cities of post-liberalisation India? These questions, which remain unanswered in this thesis, will inform the future direction of my academic work.

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Overall, this project emphasises the processual nature of modern states. Statemaking is a process that produces the constellation of social forces that we call the 'state' at different temporal moments. By highlighting the open-endedness of this social process, I suggest that the 'state' is never fully formed, and hence, we must not reify it. This conception of the state runs counter to more static notions that inform debates about the 'bourgeois-landlord state', the 'developmental state' or the 'neoliberal state' in modern India. The state in India is multifaceted, constituted through myriad discourses and practices that are power-laden. As an object of study, 'it' is constantly shifting, assuming different forms in a variety of contexts as newer and older elements fuse together in ways that ensure both continuity and rupture in each moment.

Binding these disparate elements together are the forms of social mediation from above and below that lie at the heart of modern statemaking. Mediation is, in other words, a

kind of social glue that conjoins the everyday practices of power with those of the subjects of state power. Even in a counterinsurgency context, the state and its subjects cannot be assumed to share a straightforwardly antagonistic relationship. While 'legitimacy' may not adequately describe this relationship because consent by subjects is only assumed or imputed, there is little doubt that the state is deeply desired because it is not only the source of public goods, but also the basis of political authority, even in the remotest places where the state is often taken to be absent. The 'state' or *sarkar* is imagined here as a benefactor or a benevolent patron, who possesses the resources to offer 'development' or improvement not just in basic material terms, but also in terms of the promise to renegotiate existing hierarchies in society. Even when the state is denied legitimacy by its subjects, it may thus be desired, and an array of everyday mediations undergird what we mundanely call 'state-society relations'.

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