

The Violent Truth of Anti-Naxal Operations in South Chhattisgarh *(The case of villages on the border of Sukma and Dantewada)*

A group of human rights activists from all over the country comprising of members of the Coordination of Democratic Rights Organisations (CDRO), Women against Sexual Violence and State Repression (WSS) and an independent citizen, conducted a fact-finding in the South of Chhattisgarh, to look into the veracity of the alarmingly high incidence of encounters and surrenders and human rights violations that have been reported over the past three months (October to December 2015).

As the team reached Chhattisgarh, news of the illegal detention of some villagers and ongoing violence in the village of Kunna, Sukma came to light. To examine the immediate situation, a part of the fact-finding team decided to go there (on January 16th 2016). The team met seven women who had come to the district headquarters for filing a complaint; two of whom were admitted in hospital. The team was able to visit two villages (two hamlets in Kunna and one hamlet in Chotegadam) where security forces and police had come as part of a combing operation from January 11th to 14th 2016. The report, therefore, is not descriptive of the entire area that would have been impacted as part of this same operation.

About the villages

Kunna (Gram Panchayat Kunna, Thana Kuknar, Block Chhindgarh, District Sukma) is one of the relatively bigger villages of this area with a population of 1884 (census 2011) spread, and over a dozen hamlets. Approximately 95% of the population comprises of the Muria Gonds. The village is one of the few in the area which has a school, although it was reported that the teacher comes once in fortnight or so. Electricity was brought into the village about 6 years ago.

Kunna is about 12 – 15 kilometres from the main road and one has to cross three rivers/*nullahs* to reach the village. It is approximately a three hour walk to reach the main road, or else, one must have a good vehicle to reach in the non-monsoon season. There are two defunct urinals constructed here as part of sanitation campaign.

Chotegadam (P.S. Tongpal, Block Katekalyan, District (undivided) Dantewada) is a further two kilometers' walk from Kunna village. The village has electricity poles but electricity has never reached the area. Children go to study to Kunna village. Jogem Pada (in Kunna) has 21 houses.

People survive on subsistence farming, labour at MNREGA sites and several migrate seasonally to Andhra and Telangana to pluck chillies and sometimes even perform other forms of labour when there is no source of income here. They also depend on minor forest produce - tendu patta collection, mahua collection. Livestock is bred at home for own consumption as well as selling in local markets for cock-fights.

January 11 to 14, 2016

As per the dates understood from the discussions with the villagers, the security forces and police arrived in Kunna on January 11th and stayed in the area till January 14th. During these four days, the forces working under the guise of anti-Naxal operations, used practically all tactics possible to tyrannize the villagers. People shared that since 2008, troops have frequented the area regularly, sometimes crossing this village to move further into the mountains. On all of their exploits, villagers are never treated with respect and often, there is some form of physical violence meted out, and almost always some looting and exploitation of property. But this time round, the intensity and scale of looting, physical violence and sexual assault is unprecedented.

After reaching the village on January 11, the forces took over the school premises and stayed three nights. Pushing themselves into people's houses, sexual violence, beating, extortion and dacoity

were part of the modus operandi of the troops. They would eat in the village every day, consuming the livestock and food rations of the villagers, and head out on search operations towards the forested hills during the day.



Brutal force and violence on men, women and children; Death due to injuries

Many people of varying age groups, (12 to 70) have been beaten in Paida Para, Kunna.

- Kartami Gaangi (about 60 years old) has been beaten very badly. Her right hand is probably fractured with swelling in her thigh and injuries in her lower back.
- Hadmi Podyami was sexually taunted and made to do sit-ups. When she started crying, she was beaten badly with thorny branches.
- Podiyami Jogi – was slapped and beaten with lathis on her back and legs.
- Mangli (about 75 years old) was beaten when she refused to part with her livestock
- Korea (a 25 year old woman) was beaten on her back and legs.

On the morning of the second day (i.e. Tuesday, January 12), the village was surrounded from all four sides. Many women and men were still doing their morning chores at the time. Others were still warming themselves around the fire when the torture and bullying began.

Men and women of the village were pushed towards the school grounds. The women who resisted were dragged by their hair and taken there. Here they were again harassed.

In Chotegadam, several men have been beaten.

- Kosa s/o Ingalu was beaten with the rifle butt.
- Budra s/o Joga was beaten a lot.
- A young boy. Budra s/o Kirma Kowasi, about 15 years old, was beaten on his back and arms.
- Bodha Kosi (about 48 years old) was badly beaten.

A 21 year old boy, Lalu Sodi s/o Sodi Lakkma, resident of Karma Gondi Para (Kunna village) was in the fields where he was beaten up badly. He managed to stumble back home and lay in pain for two days before succumbing to his injuries. His old mother showed the team his voter card and told us how she tried to feed him rice water (*pench*) but he was unable even to take a sip. When she

would touch his body to apply some medicine, he would scream in pain. The body was cremated without any complaint having been filed.



Several other incidents of violence have been reported from Karma Gondi Para, the same para as Sodi. Yoga Sori, s/o Sori Lakka was dragged at a distance and then beaten badly by three members of the security forces. Injuries on his foot were still visible.



Sexual Assault¹

Incidents of sexual violence have been reported from various hamlets, specifically on the first two days of the occupation (by the troops).

Many young women in the age group of 13 to 30 years have been attacked. Women's blouses and *lungis* were pulled and torn apart. Breasts were squeezed and nipples pinched with the assumption that if they were not lactating mothers, they would be Naxalites. When a woman was not lactating, she was taunted saying that they could help her conceive.

About 10 young women have been identified who were sexually assaulted including two who were gang-raped. While sexually tormenting the women, the troops would constantly also hurl allegations of being Naxalites at them.

In Chotekadam village, three young girls were sexually assaulted and threatened with rape. Sonu d/o Kosa (a 14 year old) was disrobed. The child's mother, Bheemi was also beaten. In Kunna, Lakha Buda's young daughter was being pulled when she screamed and managed to save herself.

In some places, they were pushed inside the houses and sexually assaulted. In the school and enroute from the school to the camp, women were encircled in groups by the security forces and molested.

In Tingu's house, his wife's undergarments were burnt and pinned to the wall, and a phone number '9589117299' was written under it, saying they could call for security.

Nandi, daughter of Lakku, a 17 year old recounted that she was badly beaten; her clothes pulled and torn from the back. *"They kept saying that you all feed the Naxalites. They made us sit in a line and kept hitting us with dandas. When I said I don't have a child, they said that come inside, we'll give you a baby. I was very scared that they will do something wrong with me. They dragged us from the school to the place a few kilometers where the vehicles were standing. I was without any clothes, only had a small gamcha left to cover myself. While walking, police and security personnel took turns to touch us – squeezing our breasts, pinching nipples, touching me on my stomach, back, and thighs. They laughed mockingly as they did this."*

Ungi, wife of Bunda, 16-17 years, had a similar experience, *"The troops touched me in a bad way. They pushed me till the school and dragged me inside the room. They tore all my clothes. They said that why are your breasts so small; doesn't your husband squeeze them. Many people (of the security forces) touched my body in a wrong way."*

Reeta w/o Kosa, 17 years old, said *"They pushed me in my house and threw me on the ground. They tore all my clothes. They touched me everywhere. Later they took me to the school ground and there whatever little clothes were left on my body, that also they tore apart. We kept saying that we don't know where the Naxalites are. They kept pushing the girls inside the school. In front of everyone, they touched our bodies in the wrong way. Sexual insults were being hurled from all sides."*



¹ All names in this section of the report have been changed.

When they took us from the school to the camp, we were continuously being pushed to one corner of the road and molested repeatedly. Members of the security forces touched me on my stomach, back, legs, thighs... I was not wearing anything at all, and was feeling very ashamed and upset. I started crying. And they hit me more because I was crying. I was scared that they would kill me and say I was a Naxalite."

Moita w/o Linga recounted that she was disrobed. Her waist-string was pulled and the blouse also torn. Several police officers sat on top of her and "did bad things", she said.

From the women's descriptions of the sexual torture that they were subjected to and phrases like "they sat on top of me", there is a strong sense that some women have been raped, but are afraid to pursue the matter. Two women also did confirm rape to the team.



Arbitrary Detention of people and arrests

In these villages, the time of the attack was such that the men of the village could not run and many were caught, beaten and arrested. These were men and women who were simply going about village routine affairs and there was nothing to allege that they were part of any illegal activity.

On January 12, 29 people from different hamlets of Kunna were taken in to custody. While 10 were arrested from Paida Para and taken to a security forces' camp in Bhusaras, people detained from other paras were probably taken to other camps and/or Kukanar police station.

In Paida Para, several men and women from the village were driven towards the school grounds. People were beaten, dragged and taken there. While the abuse continued in the school premises, five young women and similarly five men were randomly chosen to be taken by the troops. (Their names are being withheld in this public report.) Taken in groups, the women were continuously sexually assaulted and mocked along the way.

During their detention at the camp, the troops present continued to speak to the villagers in a derogatory and threatening manner. The women informed the team that in Bhusaras Camp, Kotwal Bheema from the village Bade Bedma said that "if I had gone to the village, I would have killed you all there. Here in the camp, I wouldn't have had to hear your wailing." While women were molested in various inhumane ways, boys were brutally beaten not only in the village, but *en route* to and at the the camp-site as well.

The following three men were detained from Karma Gondi Para – Irama, Devashram and Soma. They were also beaten up *en route* to and at the thana.

Indications of alleged Naxalite involvement as claimed by the police and security forces were as vague as –

- The lack of a tan on the feet that comes from wearing slippers. This lack, then, was taken to mean that the person wears shoes and is therefore a Maoist. (One of the women, Kartami Kosi,

described that they alleged that she wore shoes and was therefore a Naxal, but she kept saying that she only wears *chappals* and can show them the pair she wears, but they continued to beat her and allege that she was a Naxal.)

- Squeezing breasts to check whether women were lactating or not, assuming that all those who did not have young children were Maoists.. (Podiyami Jogi W/O Ganga, 18, recalled that she had pleaded with the forces, saying, “My small girl needs milk and she is alone and hungry at home, and I have not done anything so please let me go home. They didn’t believe me and started beating me with sticks on my face, waist and legs. After that, the police removed my clothes and started checking whether I was lactating. They made fun of me and I was humiliated. I was crying for my child and I told them that I am lactating, so please let me go. They let me go after that although they continued to hold 10 boys and girls with them.”

The ten detained from Paida Para were also released later the same evening when a man from of Bhusaras village, (the place where the camp was located) said he recognized them and gave his word about them not being involved in any Naxal activity. The three boys of Karma Gondi Para were kept for three days at the Kukanar thana before being let off. All three were made to sign on blank pieces of paper. The others (16 men of other paras) were also eventually released within the next 2-3 days. However, three more persons were taken on the last day (i.e. January 14th) and formally arrested. The only basis of arrest that the forces have against these three is merely that they are residents of this village.

Firing at the dam site

A dam is being constructed near Kunna village. The villagers reported that it was being constructed with NREGA funds with a budget of Rs. 9 lakhs. Villagers from across the gram panchayat had worked on the site. So even though construction had started only from January 1, 2016, quite a bit of work had been managed.

On the second day i.e. January 12th after having stayed a night at the school, the forces started firing around the dam-site. Many villagers (men, women and children) were working at the dam site. Three young boys reported that they could see the forces coming down from the nearby hills and into the fields, but they continued working, thinking that the forces would go about their duty and the villagers could continue with theirs. However, the forces started firing upon these villagers. People then began to run for cover.

When the team visited the village on January 16, the villagers’ implements were also lying scattered on the site. The boys pointed towards a *mahua* tree, behind which two of the security forces had hidden and opened fire upon a man who had gone to urinate in the bushes.

The contract for the dam has been given to a person by the name of Santosh living in Kokenar. While he was not there at the time of this incident, the *munshi* who lives in Kunna village itself, was present at the dam site when the firing started. He too was caught and badly beaten.

Self-inflicted accidental injury of a jawan being shown as Naxalite violence

As part of the same operation, the forces made their way to Chotekadam Village as well, surrounding it from all sides. Although they didn’t stay longer than 2 hours, they managed to leave a behind a trail of pain and havoc here too.

As part of the same operation, the forces made their way to Chotekadam Village as well, surrounding it from all sides. Although they didn’t stay longer than 2 hours, they managed to leave a behind a trail of pain and havoc here too.

When forces entered Kakke Ungi's² house, she was at home with her three children. She was working in one of the rooms when she heard a shot that seemed to have been fired at very close range. Afraid that the shots were aimed at her and her children, she ran out, and saw that three of the jawans had entered the room adjoining hers. They were taking out a wounded jawan. Apparently, because it was dark, he couldn't see clearly and had stumbled in the room and had tripped. The jolt accidentally led to his pulling the trigger on a fully loaded rifle and the bullet went through his own foot.

The woman pointed that the jawan was injured on his leg, near his ankle. He came out screaming in pain. Some of the villagers rushed to give him water.

The team members saw the narrow patch between the door (from where he had probed inside the house and rushed out) and the aangan which still has his drops of blood. A piece of cloth hanging nearby was used to wipe his blood. This also has his blood stains.



The injured man was taken out of the house on a khat. The bike of a villager named Bhima Raj was taken, and two jawans sitting astride the wounded man rushed him out of the hamlet. Bhima Raj has still not got his bike back. He had bought this second-hand. Fearing for his own security, he has not gone to the camp where his bike is standing.

Constable Injured In Encounter With Naxals In Chhattisgarh

RAIPUR: A police constable was today injured in a gun-battle with Naxals in the dense forests of Chhattisgarh's Sukma district.

The skirmish took place in the forests under Tongpal police station limits when a joint team of state District Reserve Group (DRG) and Special Task Force (STF) was carrying out an anti-Maoist operation in the region, Sukma Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP) Santosh Singh said.

While the security forces were cordoning off a forest axis at Kunna, a group of armed Naxals opened fire on them following which a gun-battle broke out between the two sides, he said.

However, after a brief exchange of fire, the ultras fled into the core forests, he said.

"A constable of DRG sustained bullet injuries in his leg in the incident," the ASP said.

Reinforcement was rushed to the spot and the injured personnel were taken to Jagdalpur district headquarters for treatment, he said.

Source: Business Standard

[Press Trust of India](#) | Raipur | January 12, 2016

² Name has been changed

Loot and Plunder in the villages

Paida Para in Kunna has suffered acute losses. Other hamlets and villages have also lost most of their precious resources. The troops were clearly on a rampage – entering homes by force, breaking locks and doors, and pillaging whatever they got their hands on.

A distinct feature of the violence meted out was the bestiality with which forces have snatched and beaten senior citizens of the village. People continue to be in pain and are filled with anguish, unable to take on the challenges of the everyday. Old people had visible signs of depression.



Chickens and pigeons have been completely finished in the village and as one villager quite aptly said “there is not a feather left in the village”.

Some individual losses that could be noted down (but these are only a small fraction of the reality) by the team are –

In Kunna,

- A silver necklace and jewelry was stolen from Jogi, a 70 year old woman.
- Rice, pulses and other rations were taken from Marakka Pdiyami’s house.
- Barsi Irme’s chickens were stolen along with rations.
- Kose – 5 kg. rice, one oil can and one kg. potatoes
- Mobile worth Rs. 6500 and Rs. 500 cash were taken from Undaveti’s house
- 5 chickens were stolen from Mangli’s house
- Koyami Dhule lost Rs. 2500 cash, 10 chickens and rations.
- Rs. 1140 was taken from one man’s house.
- Podiyami Jogi - jewelry (earrings and necklace), 2500 rupees and 10 chickens



The village (Chotekadam) has the similar pattern of loot and assault as Kunna. Some specific information that could be taken was –

- Loot of livestock - pigeons, hens, cocks and goats
- Locks of houses broken
- Documents as caste certificate, voter card were taken from Kosa s/o Kosa’s house. Other than his mark-sheet, he has lost all his documents.
- Materials in the house, as wire and bulb and implements to cut mutton have also been stolen by the forces.
- Bheema’s bike has not been returned.

An atmosphere of fear and intimidation was unnecessarily created in the villages. A ball was taken

from one boy's schoolbag and shown around as a bomb alleging that the village houses Naxals. A rocket launcher was also used in Paidā Para; it fell on a villager's cow and killed it. Threats of burning down homes were issued.

Identity of the Perpetrators

"It was like a bazaar-full of troops." Not able to give exact numbers, the team was informed that troops were everywhere in the village, probably around 500-600. They were squatting in each corner. They comprised of the local Gondi speaking SPOs from the DRG, members of the CRPF (described by the pattern on the uniform) and police. Several had covered their faces with a black cloth, making it impossible to identify them. However, villagers recognized a few surrendered Naxals – Budhru, Kiran and Kamlesh.

Interim Report drafted by Women against Sexual Violence and State Repression (wssnet.org)
The team visited the village on January 16th 2016 along with CDRO members.
For information, contact againstsexualviolence@gmail.com