

Development Against Violence: Prime Minister's Rural Development Fellowship (PMRDF) in India

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Abstract

This article advances the literature on development vis-à-vis Naxal violence in India by using the Prime Minister's Rural Development Fellowship (PMRDF) as a site of developmental meaning making. In the process, it reappraises the idea of the development state, its relation with violence, and its ways of vernacularizing itself through PMRDF. Drawing from the experience of three PMRD Fellows from West Bengal and interrogating existing scholarship on the subject, we argue that development matters in people's lives and is a bulwark against violence, something which legitimates the development state. We also propose that far from being an arm of the security state as some critiques promote, PMRDF was an interactive space that brought the state and people to conversation and offered development actors who discovered themselves among local people rather than within bureaucracy. What is attempted here is not a broad theory which guides local developmental practices but a grounded approach that can work as a contingent model to understand conflict and development and how they relate to people's place within the state.

Keywords

development state, Naxal violence, local people, contemporary India, developmentisation of security, left-wing extremism

Introduction

From the early days of the development decades after the Second World War, institutional thinking at both global and national levels has promoted a vision of development that can lead to a post-conflict society. This optimism of a development utopia announcing the demise of violence, though a little problematic and even unsustainable in specific contexts, has guided development and donor agencies of

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all hues in pumping more and more aid to conflict areas so as to wean people away from violence. Thus, Rostow's (1960) five-stage development ladder and Fukuyama's (1992) end of history leading to the happy valley of development, though written decades apart, betray the modernist seduction of development as a condition for peace and continue to be backed by institutional practice on the basis of various success stories. The critics of modernist school, however, argue that efforts to administer peace through development are subtle ways of exercising state power and normalizing state's nonrepresentative character (Swaminathan, 2002; Zurcher, 2017). This suspicion traverses the Marxist position of seeing the supposedly capital-driven development state as a marauding Leviathan as well as the post-development circles that promote community empowerment and local development.

So far as Indian state's tryst with Naxalism¹ or left-wing extremism (LWE) is concerned, counterinsurgency measures notwithstanding, development has often been promoted as a pathway to peace. The problem, however, is that when the state sees development as a magic wand, critics of planned development dismiss development as a mere quick fix, something which they believe fails to address substantive issues of distribution. If the state refuses to see Naxals as citizens (thus sanctioning retaliatory violence), the critics refuse to see victims as citizens with aspirations for development. The lack of consensus in the academic sphere vis-à-vis development's relation with violence can be subjected to scrutiny by a grounded and experiential approach that finds a fertile soil for further cultivation in Prime Minister's Rural Development Fellowship (PMRDF). The Fellowship, introduced by the Ministry of Rural Development of the Government of India in 2012, opens up new possibilities to revisit some of the commonly held assumptions on development and violence. Conceived as a game changer, PMRDF recruited highly qualified youth to provide catalytic support for the delivery of development in underdeveloped regions of India affected by Naxal violence.

Though critical literature on PMRDF is very limited, maybe due to its recent introduction and subsequent suspension, the initiative offers an intriguing site for developmental meaning making not just because of its stated objectives but also because of its operationalisation that brings out the nuances of development practice. The Fellowship's unconventional character, not to mention its unintended delivery, brings to the fore the futility of making unproblematic claims about the nature of the state, its strength and weakness in delivering itself through development, and the latter's power over conflict. Offering a grounded approach to understand development's relation with violence in the Indian context, the micro-narrative of this article not only establishes development's appeal in Naxal infested regions but also the way the Fellows discovered themselves as champions of local people and were

seen by the people as such. The questions that guide this article are the following: To what extent the PMRDF offered a novel vision of the development state and how did the Fellows see themselves facilitating the same? This article makes a case for itself by correcting the perception that the PMRDF was a means of state control and was a facet of the security state. By integrating develop-

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Literature Review and Methodology

This article revolves around key concerns relating to development practice vis-à-vis violence in the context of rural India and is scaffolded by relevant literature. There is near unanimity that violence

and development are intertwined and that violence has been the most serious obstacle to development (Hettne, 2010; Howard et al., 2007), guiding governments to work towards human freedom and well-being (Sen, 1999). As per the report of the Secretary to the United Nations General Assembly, development, security, and human rights must go hand in hand (in Tschirgi, 2005, p. 3) and that achieving the Millennium Development Goals depends on “international efforts to end violent conflict, instability and terrorism” (Sachs, 2005, p. 9). Convinced that development is key to defang Naxal violence, the Indian state’s multipronged response to LWE has been a combination of counterinsurgency measures as well as an infusion of development funds (Sarmah, 2016). For the Naxals, however, development runs counter to revolutionary consciousness, the reason why they oppose development work believing that the government will win over the local people (Kujur, 2006).

The Naxal response to the development reveals specific schemes’ implications for the Naxals’ interest rather than people’s (Eynde et al., 2015; Ray & Esteban, 2017). If some scholars believe schemes like the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) reduce Naxal influence (Dasgupta et al., 2017; Fetzer, 2019), others see it boosting Naxal power (Khanna & Zimmermann, 2014). Advocating development’s efficacy in combating LWE, the Indian government works closely with state governments leading to the retreat of the Naxals in many areas (Sahoo, 2019). A PMRD Fellow working in an LWE district in West Bengal believes that infrastructural development has brought about a qualitative change in people’s lives and has restored normalcy (Ghosh, 2013). Though the literature cited above has sufficient grounding in the social reality of Naxal infested areas, there are some critics like Basu (2011), Sareen (2016), and Kamra (2018) who reverse the pyramid and see development as a mechanism for consolidating state power. This in a way trivialises the consensus in policy circles about development–security relation and that security is as much about citizens as it is about the state (Hettne, 2010, p. 31).

This article makes its case through sustained engagement with three PMRD Fellows stationed in one of the LWE districts of West Bengal and brings their insights into the debates highlighted earlier. To avoid one-dimensionality and overdependence on the Fellows, a district collector (with whom the Fellows worked) and a few beneficiaries are brought into the discussion. We anonymise the Fellows and refer to them as Fellow A, Fellow B, and Fellow C to protect their identities; the same reason explains our not identifying the district collector, the beneficiaries, and the district where the Fellows worked. It may be added that since its launch in 2012, the said district hosted three Fellows and we could engage with all of them. It was heartening to see their self-doubt, restraint, long pauses, and exclamations rather than platitudes that sound too verbose to be reflective of lived reality. Unlike the previous works on PMRDF (as in Kamra, 2018), the Fellows in our research are not rendered silent; effort is made to make them speak about what constituted their moral universe vis-à-vis their responsibilities. That is to say, they retain their agency and remain speaking subjects in this article.

Using both structured and unstructured interviews on top of open-ended discussions with the Fellows, vetting their experiences with the collector and some beneficiaries, and later engaging with secondary material, this article’s modest objectives are tested to offer an experiential understanding of development/violence and state/people dyads. We read PMRDF as a loaded register of interconnected issues such as development–violence relationship, the contradictions in the idea of development as security, and the state’s power/vulnerability not just among the local people but also among the Fellows themselves. The first section highlights the conception and delivery of PMRDF, the second takes PMRDF beyond the security framework, and the third captures the ways of the state in reaching out to the people as the Fellows saw them. The conclusion summarises the arguments.

The Road to PMRDF

When, in 2009, the Prime Minister of India Manmohan Singh called Maoist insurgency the greatest internal security challenge, he was articulating his lack of options as well as the resolve to deal with the threat. Development and governance measures were introduced (Sahoo, 2019, p. 26) with the hope that local people will understand the benefits of development and the Naxals will be robbed of their support base. Integrated Action Plan (IAP) was such a measure that allocated extra resources and fast-tracked development projects in LWE areas. In 2006, the Planning Commission of India had commissioned a study to understand the impact of development on LWE. The resulting report identified the weakening resolve of the Indian state in addressing inequality and implementing land reform and saw these issues as the unfinished agenda of governance. With a touch of self-reflexivity bordering on

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rationalisation of violence, the report indicted the Indian state for failing to arrest the alienation of its people—"poverty, deprivation, oppression, and neglect in large parts of the country" (Planning Commission, 2008, p. 3), everything that pointed

towards the absence of development. The PMRDF was conceived as a facilitating mechanism for efficient delivery of development in IAP districts.

Development can be both preventive and reactive, the former creating conditions so that radicalisation can be preempted and the latter weaning people away from violence. It is with the objective of bringing infrastructure development to the LWE belt, attention was given to the expansion of rural telecommunication, extension of electrification, and construction of all-weather roads. The response of the Naxal cadre to these projects is varied (Eynde et al., 2015, pp. 4–8). They see mobile coverage as a state tool that helps security forces track them and so target telecommunication towers to disrupt coordination among security agencies. However, they usually do not see electrification as a threat, though in some places, the Naxals prevent electricity from reaching villages under their control anticipating that it will make people aspire for development benefits. In terms of road construction, the Naxals fear that roads will help security forces get easy access to areas under their control but camouflage that fear by harping on the issue of contractors using high-end machinery instead of local labour. In this connection, Kujur (2006) argues that it is not development per se but development without people's participation that is the problem, though the problem could often be the false promises by successive governments and their inability to deliver (p. 557).

Though people's alienation from development create fertile ground for Naxal activities, the Naxals operate out of these interior areas not to bring alternative development based on participation but to create a parallel administration predicated on violence. Their power of selling the idea of a Maoist utopia through revolution is based on a technic of consensus managed through both promises and threats and sustained through extortion that is worse than state apathy and indifference. Ray & Esteban (2017, p. 265) highlight the economic motifs behind any kind of violence, meaning the war itself is not to secure benefit for the people but to create conditions where violence ensures economic benefit for the Naxals. The refusal to see this motif (as we see in many scholars) obscures our understanding and "prevents us from seeing a deeper common thread that, by creating and fostering such attitudes, there are gains to be made" (Ray & Esteban, 2017, p. 266). Though Naxals never admit that they are against development work, the fact that they extort money from the contractors suggests a willingness to allow infrastructure development in return for other benefits (Eynde et al., 2015, p. 12).

What is required for making development matter is efficient delivery and better implementation of various schemes, something that justifies PMRDF. To place it in perspective, there are

about 86 backward districts, mostly in Central and Eastern India, with a poverty ratio of more than 50% and a high proportion of marginalised communities. These districts were brought under IAP in 2010 so as to provide them with additional central assistance of 250 million rupees during 2010–2011 and 300 million rupees during 2011–2012 per block. To facilitate implementation, it was agreed to form a committee consisting of the District Collector, the Superintendent of Police, and the District Forest Officer. The Collector was the most important node in that network to whom the PMRD Fellows were to report. This committee (but effectively the Collector) had the responsibility to spend the IAP grant on development schemes in respective blocks as per felt needs such as school buildings, health centres, drinking water supply, village roads, and so on. The PMRDF was conceived to facilitate result-oriented completion of various projects in IAP districts across the states (Government of India, 2014, p. 5).

It is common knowledge that developmental bureaucracy in rural India is often mired in corruption, inefficiency, and even politicking that have created a climate of mistrust between the development state and its beneficiaries.

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The PMRDF was intended to shake the bureaucracy, cut red tape, and facilitate development schemes so as to create an idea of a caring state. The program sought out highly motivated and qualified Fellows with professional degrees in an effort to

revolutionise development delivered through a hands-on approach. The Fellows were selected through an entrance test followed by personal interview and were assigned to specific IAP districts. In this endeavour, the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) was roped in as the knowledge partner to provide required training. Fellow A is a graduate in engineering and has a postgraduate degree in rural development, Fellow B is a science graduate with postgraduate Diploma in Rural Development, and Fellow C is an engineering graduate with work experience in core industrial sector. Fellows A and B were Bengali speaking whereas Fellow C was non-Bengali and came from the northwestern part of India. These backgrounds did play some role in the way the Fellows were perceived and also saw themselves in relation to local people and bureaucracy. All the three brought to the table technical expertise as well as a passion that was not available with existing sectoral bureaucracy. The three Fellows were conscious of the fact that they are projected as change agents and sincerely believed that they had the capability to deliver on that promise.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh declared in 2010 that unless economic development is delivered, the Naxals will win the confidence among people and the state will have to vacate that space of legitimacy. By introducing IAP and later PMRDF, the government hoped that it would recover the lost ground of trust. Such an approach is developmentisation of security even as it is securitisation of development, leading to a situation where development and security constitute each other. It is security which brings about a sense of predictability to governance and so is the opposite of disorder; it serves nobody's cause to confine security to the state imperative and ignore the paradigm shift to security as a complex of human development (Hettne, 2010, pp. 33–34). We should remember that the Home Ministry's 2006 status paper had proposed a dual approach of retaliation/containment and political/developmental fronts (Planning Commission, 2008, p. 57) and had urged the government to prioritise faster socioeconomic development in Naxal-affected areas.

However, treating security as a hindrance to development, some critics (Kamra, 2018) confine development to the expression of state security. We would much rather argue that the obverse

is true, that is, the conversion of security to development. Though securitisation of development has a lure among academics, we propose that it does not have the teeth to explain actually existing problems of underdevelopment. Promoting securitisation of development as the secret code to understand state governmentality is a reductive exercise because every region in India is covered under development plans.

Beyond the Security State

If Naxalism is a political demand for redistribution, as Kamra (2018) and Basu (2011) believe, mounting challenge to Naxalism has to be developmental as much as security-driven and not a simplistic understanding of “development as counterinsurgency” (Kamra, 2018, p. 2). The latter reasoning exaggerates suspicion of the state without acknowledging unique historical experiences of underdeveloped regions. When the objective of PMRDF is to offset red-tapism so as to energise programme delivery, seeing PMRDF as an extension of the security state is a refusal to acknowledge the reality of underdevelopment. A more nuanced approach would be to understand development and security as intertwined, more so in conflict zones, given that development delivery is possible in a climate of security and also that the feeling of security itself could be a development indicator.

Borrowing from Sareen (2016) and Basu (2011), Kamra (2018) repeats stock phraseology and offers template thinking, an approach when a practice-independent theory/idea or a localised feature acts as

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an entry condition to guide subsequent research with or without related variables. What are elided in this thinking are the fact that PMRDF was initiated by a supposedly socialist regime under Manmohan Singh, was championed by an avowedly socialist Minister of Rural Development Jairam Ramesh, and that the Planning Commission report

was authored by prominent academics and activists. The cliches-like state undermining local democracy or development as counterinsurgency as we find in Kamra (2018) cannot confront the reality that the insurgents are antidemocratic forces. Our conversations with quite a few local people reveal that the Naxals evoked fear. The weaponisation of PMRDF in such articulations is not backed by what the Fellows and the local people experienced. We would like to believe that the PMRDF signifies neither shrinking nor expansion of the state, but a kind of reflexivity within the state, a recognition that the state could do better to legitimise itself.

Contrary to the expressed opinion of Kamra (2018) about the Fellows being conscious of their role as state agents, we could not sense such a possibility from any one of the Fellows or from the local people we conversed with. An interesting point emerged when Fellow A spoke about the uneven development within LWE areas asserting that “we cannot really take all LWE areas as uniform category” (discussion on January 13, 2020), something that takes us beyond the binary of LWE and non-LWE areas. In line with Basu (2011) who saw the weakness of the state in its inability to distinguish between the aggressor Naxal and the victim tribal, Fellow A believed that there is no clear separation between the Naxals and the people. This is not because there were overlaps between them (it could be the case as well) but due to the fact that by 2012–2013, Naxal problem in the district was on the wane and the villagers instead of talking about revolution were more concerned with everyday grievances (discussion on April 15, 2020), thus puncturing a section of academic faith that people of LWE areas are interested in something over and above development or that development is a tool of control.

While questioning the grand narratives of development, postdevelopment thought has promoted an idea of frozen local cultures and in the process has essentialised them. In contrast, Collector T was clear that people in the tribal areas need to be provided with road and transport facilities so that they have the choice of coming out of the forest. He believed that one will fight in a jungle only when one is selfless and if we make him selfish, he will never go to jungle (discussion on September 29, 2020). What it means is that the absence of development and livelihood opportunities sustains Naxalism. Lietaen (2003) is right when he says that postdevelopment thought has utter disregard for field evidence and that it invents a mysterious naturalness in communities in developing societies which has a neo-Orientalist dimension to it (p. 151). When such critiques speak of the people, they actually speak on behalf of civil society against what they believe is a predatory development state; in the process, they establish themselves as subjects of development history and create an emancipatory vocabulary that is characteristically paternalistic. This also creates a binary of development and political freedom and projects freedom as an overpowering good even at the cost of everyday needs. As if challenging such view, Collector T argued that freedom is essentially economic freedom, and if we empower one economically, social and political freedom will follow automatically (discussion on September 29, 2020).

Instead of seeing the Naxal problem as a constantly evolving practice based on pragmatism, many scholars miss the mark and go on to imagine the state, Naxals, and people in-between as fixed in their ideology or helplessness. One of them seeks to expose state's top-down authority leading to dispossession (Sareen, 2016, p. 3), but not before drawing from Althusser, Foucault, and Agamben. This is precisely the problem with such academic literature, which are guided by texts rather than praxis, and uses templates developed elsewhere to understand an Indian problem. The view that villagers do not see Naxals as harmful and that Naxals occasionally visit the villages for food while enquiring whether the government was helping them (Sareen, 2016, p. 12) is not only naïve but creates an impression of Naxals as auditors of the government and flies in the face of the reality of their violence. Such romantic representation, though fits into the template of state violence, is highly localised at best and condonation of violence at worst, something which refuses to see the big picture of what violence means for a democracy. Our interaction with villagers reveal that Naxals occasionally came to the villages to get information about security movement and were often violent while dealing with those they suspected.

Seeing the flaws of neoliberal economy as the cause of Naxalism, critics like Kamra (2018) and Basu (2011) fail to explain why Naxalism emerged at a time when all political parties swore by socialism and why it is still prevalent in areas where there is no displacement or no clear sign of deprivation. This concern was echoed by Collector T when he wondered if Naxalism is a controlled movement against the state with deprivation used as an alibi (discussion on September 29, 2020). There is no self-reflexivity in such academic discourse, nor any sincerity to understand Naxal problem as far wider than questions of equity and economic development, and their implications for the territorial integrity of the nation. It does not tell us the internal contradictions within Naxalism nor does it recognise different motivations in taking up arms, naïvely believing that Naxal demands are for redistribution. The indictment of state for distinguishing the offender who will meet the coercive arm of the state from the victim who will receive the welfare arm (Basu, 2011, p. 374), though makes a rhetorical point, fails to appreciate that the state may use that premise (if at all) as the entry point, but the objective is not to distinguish but to blur, so that the two spaces (one the people and the other Naxals) emerge as citizens.

Contrary to overzealous articulations that see Naxals as change agents, most Naxal groups are extortion/kidnapping rackets and often work to protect some specific lobby. The fact that many a time the

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state panders to them by offering amnesty and job guarantee (in case of surrender) is an incentive to lure the uneducated youth to Naxal ideology as the first choice and adds to their bargaining power. If Chhattisgarh police are to be believed, Naxals collect 100 crore rupees annually in the state, coming from contractors, businessmen, transporters, and

so on, which are then used to buy vehicles, gold biscuits, weapons, and explosives, among others (*Firstpost*, 2014). In this context Adams (2017) brings refreshing complexity and right intent to development/violence debate when she talks about normalisation of everyday violence and asks how violence affects “our development as individuals . . . our attitudes and actions as citizens, and the ways we are governed?” (p. xi). That means the question of local democracy cannot be divorced from the national imperative of ensuring the same; response to violence has to restore what is lost by violence, that is, development. So security is related to development in an ethical sense, and resisting violence is both a developmental and moral imperative.

The Experience of the Fellows

The three Fellows that we interacted with over a period of time (from July 2019 to September 2020) were blissfully unaware of the academic debates around PMRDF and their supposed role in expanding state power over peoples and places not yet tamed by development. Nor did they betray any anxiety about development being an arm of the security state. What they said about the state, development, people, and themselves made tremendous sense to us, maybe because we made an effort to approach and engage with them outside of academic clichés. The awareness of our limits to produce a theory (in spite of our own location within academia) enabled us to listen to the Fellows without worrying about our own “key questions” that would have unravelled the codes of PMRDF. It helped us relate to their ways of understanding that was not at variance with our own instinctive and experiential knowledge of rural India.

The three Fellows (the first two from a batch the of 2012 and the last from 2014) were allocated to a district in West Bengal, historically a hotbed of Naxalism. Fellow A worked in planning and monitoring IAP activities, NREGA, and a few other initiatives; Fellow B too worked for IAP project planning and a livelihood project called Muktidhara; Fellow C was involved in the Self-Help Groups and Swachh Bharat Mission. Coming to their understanding of development in the nine blocks of the district, all of them agreed that the district was lacking in terms of development, but once the special IAP funds started flowing leading to better roads, drinking water facility, and school buildings, the difference was visible in a couple of years. Fellow B was clear that the LWE blocks were worse off and the Naxals wanted to keep it that way so that they can escape into forest if security forces cornered them (conversation on February 27, 2020). However, Fellow C’s impression was that there is not much difference between LWE and non-LWE areas and that Naxal movement was fast losing steam since 2013–2014 (conversation on March 1, 2020).

A revealing insight came from Fellow A when he offered his own interpretation of people’s understanding of the state. Unlike the Marxist-dominated template of state/society binary, he argued that the state could mean both central and state government machinery and that these governments are not always on the same page. By state, local people mostly understood some office/authority who has the power/responsibility of handing over development benefits, and more often than not, it is the Panchayat Pradhan (discussion on April 15, 2020). Fellow A had a layered understanding of development/violence

relation that involved an approach beyond development delivery and included constant negotiation with the Naxals for lasting peace (discussion on April 15, 2020). Contrary to Collector T's views, his belief was that Naxal violence is a multidimensional problem that is as much political as developmental. He was also clear that people are moving away from Naxal ideology and that very few Naxals are talking about fighting for people and community, though added that he would much rather not make a sweeping statement on this. If he is to be believed, people are interested in getting their basic needs fulfilled, something that justifies the state thinking that development is the answer to violence and radical ideology.

For Fellow A democracy is about protecting rights and delivering development, but people's desire for development cannot be dismissed. Lest we feel that Fellow A is endorsing a statist development complex, he qualifies his insights saying development in itself cannot cure Naxal problem and that the Naxals should be brought to the table for talks. Until that happens, the gains made by various development schemes will not last (discussion on April 15, 2020). Later, responding to another question about the Fellows' responsibilities, he clarifies that his role was not to find answers to Naxal violence but to act as catalyst for the successful delivery of schemes (discussion on April 15, 2020). Even while proposing that Naxals are part of the people and so should not be seen as a category exclusive to people, he admits that violence is not going to bring any solution, though a channel of communication may slowly move them away from violence and bring them to the mainstream.

The fact that the Fellows' role was merely delivery based (rather than planning) raises questions about the easy assumption that they were expanding the writ of the state. Puncturing the idea of a unitary state, Fellow B told us that their being in the Collector's office was not always welcomed by other officers and that some officers created bottlenecks so as to restrict their access to the collector. What we see here is a multilayered complex through which the state gets delivered and how one wing of the state was in constant conflict with another. The officers, mostly state government employees, were experienced and given to due procedure and command and control ladder. For Collector T, administration survives on hierarchy and the Fellows ruptured the equilibrium of the system (discussion on September 29, 2020). As a pragmatist, he believed that the Fellowship was hastily planned and that the Fellows were not properly institutionalised to effect substantive change. Our own understanding is that the Fellows' self-knowledge of themselves was a little exaggerated, though the local people seem to be convinced about it.

Fellow B too believed that there is a need for upgrading infrastructure but that should not restrain us from engaging with the Naxals. He admits that the absence of development is used by the Naxals to mobilise the youth and direct the latter's frustration against the state (discussion on September 25, 2020). But he maintains that without security, we cannot predict whether development will be enough for peace, thus corroborating the institutional thinking that the dual policy of containment through force and winning heart and mind through development should go together. Highlighting his understanding of being a Fellow, he says "We never thought of ourselves as part of the state; actually it was the opposite" (conversation on April 3, 2020). He brings subtleties when he seeks to understand the Naxals without justifying their means: "anything which goes against/beyond the system, cannot be legitimised; you might have a number of grievances against the state, but there are legitimate ways to address them" (conversation on April 3, 2020). He shares an experience when he was in a village (that was frequented by Naxal leader Kishenji) and learned that people are making an effort to come out of the cycle of violence and trying to earn income for feeding their families (conversation on April 3, 2020).

In Fellow C, we have a fascinating case of an outsider whose non-Bengali background created more complex ways of being and belonging. His experience was more complicated as the district officials did not cooperate with him fully, maybe because he was non-Bengali (conversation on March 1, 2020).

Collector T articulated this problem when he said Fellow C remained a foreigner and mostly a witness to what was happening instead of being an agent of transformation (interview on September 29, 2020). In general, Collector T was not very effusive about PMRDF as a transformative initiative and saw the Fellows as probationers, something which may puncture the celebratory self-perception of the Fellows. In Fellow C, we see a sense of helplessness when people came to him with a lot of hope, but not having any authority, he was unable to address their concerns. More than Fellow A and Fellow B, he was emphatic about development's role in removing violence and offers the example of tourism development in one of the blocks and how that helped change people's attitude towards Naxalism (September 26, 2020). He believes, rather insightfully, that districts as units of development are too big and complex for delivering specific schemes and so should be restructured so as to make panchayat or block as a development unit (conversation on March 1, 2020).

To varying degrees, the Fellows recognised the power of development in combating violence and ushering in political stability. To test that understanding, we spoke with some local people (eight in number) hailing from various blocks that included three men and five women. All the respondents were relieved that Naxals don't frequent their villages anymore and that people are happy to go out for employment. Everyone agreed that the Fellows taught them many things that empowered them and gave them the confidence not to pay bribes to officials and people's representatives. Overall, they were quite appreciative of the Fellows' contribution in empowering them. We also heard that the Fellows came to the villages even on holidays and spent time till late evening. The people referred to the Fellows as "dada" (an endearing address) rather than "sir" thus establishing the warmth and informality of that relationship. Though our respondents were not very forthcoming about Naxal violence, they were quite vocal about their aspirations, job opportunities, health care, and education for children. This establishes the power of development to capture the imagination of people in the underdeveloped regions.

Conclusion

This article tried to make a limited case for a grounded understanding of development's relation with violence. Though there is no unanimity in academic circles about the transformative power of the Fellowship, all the three Fellows agreed that it was a successful initiative. Fellow A argued that its success can be measured by the fact that similar initiatives are being introduced at state levels such as Chhattisgarh Chief Minister's Fellowship or by other central departments such as Skill Development Fellowship. Of the many problems plaguing PMRDF was the Fellows' struggle to reconcile the pressure in speeding up service delivery and the reality of powerlessness. Multiple points of contact with various officials and people's representatives often mediated their ways of doing things and created moments of doubt about the system's efficacy. Different organs of the state at different levels made them understand the diffuse nature of the development state, which is ubiquitous even as its organs work at cross purposes. Though we are not qualified to agree or disagree with what the Fellows believed in, the gap between responsibility and authority confined them to managerialism rather than being a catalytic force dedicated to planning and execution. Similarly, the absence of a clearly assigned job description made the Fellows available to all and yet, in the absence of any clear guideline, answerable to none.

That said, rural development administration was revitalised by the Fellows, who understood the indifference of bureaucracy as well as the promise of the development state, and filled the gap between the administration and the local people. This was corroborated by the local people when they regretted the fact that the Fellows are no longer with them. We also see the Fellows' conviction that development, if delivered to the last man, can change the way people relate to the state and respond to violence. The Fellows did not believe that statist development is intrinsically top-down; their very being was a reminder of the state's ability to liquify itself. The fact that the people are actually looking forward to basic

services means the power of development, if not wholesale acknowledgement of the state. Regardless of the suspension of PMRDF, an environment conducive to development must be violence free so that people can find adequate opportunities for the realisation of their capabilities. Six years after its suspension, we have evidence that the stranglehold of Naxalism is loosening and that people are celebrating relative peace.

What the Fellows believed about the state, the people, and themselves was not a position of certainty but of contingency, continuously mediated by their exposure to spaces of encounter such as people's representatives, panchayat office, block office, collector's office, and interaction with officials from the bank, forest department, and so on. This exposure, combined with the awareness of responsibility and limited power, made them negotiate with various actors where local politics and intra-office intrigues ruptured the idea of an overarching public good, human well-being, and the development state. The Fellows admitted becoming different persons from what they were prior to their PMRDF experience, because they confronted a kind of otherness (read abject poverty and deprivation) they had not seen before. They were as much transformed by the conditions of the people as they helped transform.

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Note

1. The Naxal movement was started in 1967 as a mobilisation of peasants in the Naxalbari village of West Bengal against local landlords. After losing many members of the cadre, it was revived as People's War Group in 1980 and merged with other splinter groups in 2004 and finally rechristened as the Communist Party of India (Maoist). Soon it started controlling vast areas of Eastern and Central India and replaced the state machinery with its own administrative and military infrastructure. Though the Naxal influence was on the wane after the land reform in 1970s, the Naxals continued to enjoy a free run in districts like Paschim Midnapur, Bankura, and Purulia, one of which is the locale of the present study.

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