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## Karl and the Kalashnikov

Notes from the diary  
of **Chindu Sreedharan**,  
who spent 82 hours with  
People's War guerrillas.



As our vehicle carries me past Chandrapur, right into the heart of Naxal country, I know what to expect in the coming few days. I would be walking the sweltering Dandakaranya jungles in the company of the banned People's War Group guerrillas, surviving on what the tribals can get us past police eyes and running the risk of malaria. If it rained, I would be wading through leech-filled sucking slush. And sleeping in the open on plastic sheets, an easy prey for any snake or centipede that cares to crawl my way.

As bonus, I stand a good chance of getting shot by the cops. Or, if more fortunate, catching the wrong end of their rifle right in my face.

Yet, all I can feel is exhilaration.

Days later, as I write this in Bombay, soothing my arms that have become a mass of mosquito bites, I can feel the adrenalin pumping. My fingertips tingle as they rush over the keyboard. Is being on the wrong side of the law always so thrilling?

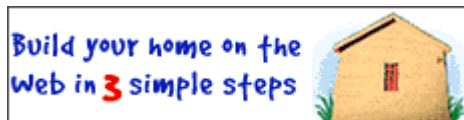
Yes. There were moments of apprehension. Once we had to flee camp to dodge an encounter with the law. That manoeuvre curtailed my trip to a little over 80 hours. Then again, on the way out with incriminating notes and photographs, the bus we were travelling in was surrounded by nearly a dozen policemen. But that is not to say there are regrets. There aren't. And if the countless mosquitoes that feasted on my petty bourgeois blood gift me malaria, so be it.

*Page design: Dominic Xavier*

**DAY 1: Lizard for dinner!**

**DAY 2: They shoot first; ask questions later**

**DAY 3: Women make better guerrillas than men**



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## Lizard for dinner July 23



Our third hour in Naxal area. For us city-dwellers, this night is unlike any other we have seen. The darkness is near total. The disorientation frightening. In this nowhere land we wait for our contact. Outside a tribal hut.

A kerosene lamp hangs in the doorway. Its small circle only adds to the darkness. But there's enough light to see each other.

We are four. R, a short, stocky middle-aged hack, is from a Marathi newspaper. G and H, like me, come from Bombay and represent the national press.

My glow-watch reports 2030 hours. The journey from Nagpur, I realise, has taken more than six-and-a-half hours. "*Tum baith ke rahena*," ("Just wait") consoles the villager whose hut and light are keeping us anchored in this wilderness. Another helpful soul, who met us on the road to the village, borrows H's pen-torch and disappears into the night, looking for our contact, I presume. He has been our only guide thus far.

The owner of the hut, I will call him X, is in G's words "piss drunk". He takes G aside, ostensibly to establish our identity, and in the process tries to extract money.

"Is there a chance we've missed the contact?" H wonders.

"No, we are early." G is confident. "This man is not the key person. His job is only to make us wait. Anyway, he is too drunk to be of any help to anyone. Luckily, our guide seems to know what he's doing."

Twenty minutes go by as we wait for the uncertain to take shape. I revise my backgrounder on the outlaws I am to meet:

I am here to gather material for an article on the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) People's War. The revolutionary party made famous by the media as the People's War Group. But those closer to their reality prefer an austere PW.



The genesis of PW can be traced to Comrade Charu Mazumdar, once of the Communist Party of India-Marxist, and the 1967 uprising of peasants against landlords in Naxalbari, a remote village in North Bengal.

Two years after that first fight against feudalism, the revolutionaries in the CPI-M broke away to establish the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) that has its ideology rooted in the Maoist school.

The movement, by now dubbed Naxal after the village where it all began, spread like wildfire through the campuses of West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, Bombay and Delhi, sucking in thousands of students and youth, mainly from the middle class. By 1969, the CPI-ML was operating guerrilla squads in many rural areas of AP, UP and Bengal.

So much so that the central government had to move in paramilitary forces by October 1969.

In 1972, Mazumdar, who by then was the most wanted Naxal, was arrested by the police. Following his death in custody, the movement was thrown into disarray.

Out of this emerged the People's War.

The PW's agenda, like that of most communist parties, is to establish a classless society. The group, which is a banned organisation today, believes that the way to power is by winning over the rural folks.

It has, in the last decade, established two guerrilla zones, an area where neither the state nor the outlaws have complete control: North Telengana in Andhra Pradesh and Dandakaranya ([click for map](#)), or DK, which includes parts of Maharashtra, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh.



The guide returns. Our contact is waiting at some other place. For the time being, our luggage is to remain near the hut. We set off in a single file along a mud-path bathed in the stench of cow-dung. Barking dogs mark our progress for 10 minutes.

Then appears another hut. Suddenly a piercing beam of light blinds us more than the night could. The party freezes in its tracks.

The guide picks our names. Next, he is behind the light, whispering into the torch-shiner's ear. A satisfied click turns

off the torch and my straining eyes make first contact with a PW guerrilla.

He is a slight man, this one. When he signed up, the PW called him Ganesh, put him in olives and slung a .303 over his shoulder. For the next few hours, we will put our lives in his hands. There are two outlaws with Ganesh. He dispatches one to watch the road and asks our names once again.

"Karan *ne beja hai* (Karan has sent us)," he proclaims after double-checking our identities. "Let's talk."

Karan, I know from past discussions, is the secretary of the Gadchiroli Division. He's also one of the seven members of the Dandakaranya Special Zonal Committee.

DK, once it was declared a full-fledged guerrilla zone, was granted the status of a state by the party. Its special zonal committee is directly responsible to the 12-member central committee, the PW's apex body.

Ganesh places a cot in the open, away from the hut. We sit huddled together and the outlaw produces a sealed letter that he hands over to G. It's from Karan, asking us to come with his men. He would meet us the next day.

"We will have to go on foot from here," Ganesh says, "It's a two-and-a-half-hour march."

G asks him whether we can stay the night and set off early in the morning. Ganesh says no. They have been waiting in the village since morning. "We have to leave now," he insists. "It is not safe to stay any longer."



We collect our backpacks and return to where Ganesh is waiting. X, who has been watching the proceeding, gets into his drunken brain that we are being kidnapped and need rescuing.

He rushes to Ganesh, telling him not to take us, that it would give *him*, X, a bad name. The outlaw assures him that we are willing travellers and he must not worry.

We are to move directly into the jungles, which are very close, and join up with two others in Ganesh's gang. Then we double our tracks and cross the same road that has brought us to the village at a higher point. It's 2200 hours.

We walk in a single file. Ganesh and a couple of villagers show the way. R falls in. He's followed by G and then H. I

begin the tail with the other PW men bringing up the rear. H has his pen-torch out but all I can see is his jeans-clad legs. I make sure that I follow in his footsteps, literally!

It is a bit unreal, this whole atmosphere. Here we are, four city-breds, in the jungles, moving in darkness, not talking, making as little sound as we can, bar the eerie owl screech which Ganesh uses to communicate. In our minds, the fear of a police encounter lurks to the fore...

There's the smell of rain in the air. Far away, the heavens rumble. But Ganesh is keeping up a grim pace. We are sweating profusely. My backpack is beginning to weigh a ton. I had thought I was pretty fit but this trek is proving me wrong. No stamina, I tell myself miserably, and keep plodding on.

Twenty-five minutes later our eyes pick up a small fire. "*Lal salaam*," (Red Salute) comes a greeting from the general direction of the camp. This is Vishwanath, who, I am to find out, is the deputy commander of the Ahiri *dal*, or *dalam*, meaning squad.



We halt. Ganesh tells us there's mutton for dinner. The mutton, it turns out, is a euphemism for lizard meat. *Ghorpad* is a massive lizard famous for its fantastic grip on rock faces. In fact, legend has it that Shivaji's troops tied a rope around it to scale the walls of the impenetrable Pratapgarh Fort.

*Ghorpad* is a delicacy that the tribals in these parts greet honoured visitors with. I am not fond of lizards for dinner, but, surprisingly, it turns out to be the tastiest, tenderest meat I have ever had!

It is 2247 hours. Dinner over, we are made to fall in once again and pick up the trek we had abandoned. There are no visible tracks but the villagers seem to know the way. They take us over two dry streams, a couple of hillocks and countless fallen trees till we reach a tarred road. Here the villagers take leave. Now there are nine of us. Re-entering the jungles across the road I find myself on a forest trail, one of the many that are used to transport bamboo from the woods.

Another 20-minute march and Vishwanath, who's now in command, calls for a halt. I lower my backpack and take a few grateful swigs from somebody's waterbag. "Life in the jungles is like this, *bhaiyya* (brother)," one of the outlaws smiles. "*Thoda takleef to hota hai!*" (There's bound to be some discomfort) he taunts.



Seeing our sweat-streaked, tired faces, Vishwanath finally calls it a night. We will move another 10 minutes into the jungles before we sleep, he announces. We lug our backpacks and stumble on in the darkness to the left of the road. A little later, the guerrillas stop at a clearing. Plastic sheets are unrolled and spread on the ground. This is where we will sleep tonight.

No sooner do we sit down than an army of mosquitoes descends on us. These are nothing like those I have fought in Bombay. The country cousins are a bloodthirsty mob. Probably tasting urban blood for the first time, their attack is unrelenting. I dives for his Odomos repellent cream that all of us hurriedly apply on every inch of our exposed skin.

Vishwanath has, meanwhile, arranged for a sentry. The outlaws take the duty in turns of normally an hour and a half in the night and two hours in the day. We sleep, sticky and sweating and continuously at the mercy of mosquitoes a little before 2400 hours.



*Page design: Dominic Xavier*

**DAY 2: They shoot first; ask questions later**

**DAY 3: Women make better guerrillas than men**

**DAY 4: We will meet again. If I live...**

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## **They shoot first; ask questions later** July 24

*Read from beginning*

Our first day in the jungle. It's 0530 hours. The sentry has woken us. As per guerrilla rules, it is the last sentry's job to wake the camp.



We wash our faces, roll up the plastic sheets and stuff whatever we have out into our bags, which takes us roughly 10 minutes, and are off. There's an hour's march to reach the outskirts of the village where Karan is scheduled to meet us.

I can see my outlaw companions clearly now. And am quite surprised at the sight. They do not at all match the image that I had in mind. These are young men, open, eager, without a trace of hostility on their face. True, they may fight, and fight to death, if threatened by the law, but I can't for the life of me see them as blood-thirsty men of violence, as fierce communists brandishing bloody sickles at any and every bourgeois -- a picture which I feel the media, especially the vernacular press, is guilty of creating by eagerly headlining every police press release that came their way.

There are five Naxals with us. Three are local guerrilla squad members while Ganesh and Vishwanath belong to a central guerrilla squad.

An area committee of the PW, known as the SAC or squad area committee, will have a CGS, which forms its backbone. The SAC secretary and its members are usually part of this main body. The LGSs -- there may be more than one in some areas -- of roughly seven members function under the CGS and may be responsible for anything up to 20 villages.

A CGS normally has 9 to 11 members, including its commander and deputy commander. The commander, in many cases, is the SAC secretary. All members of the CGS and LGS are armed -- with anything from .303 rifle, double-barrel gun, shotgun and self-loading rifle to AK-47. Besides, each squad is equipped with a couple of grenades and a Claymore mine (an explosive device which can be set off from afar).



The squads have a dual role -- political as well as military. The former involves educating the villagers about Maoism, and the latter to fight the State. The guerrillas generally move in the night.

The days are spend on the outskirts of whichever village their work takes them to -- holding political meetings, organising and motivating the villagers to fight exploitation, educating them about health and welfare measures...

Over the years, the PW has succeeded in winning the trust of the tribals. In a sense, it is the villagers who are the guerrillas' protectors today. They give them food and shelter, and, on many occasions, provide vital information about police movements.

It is towards such a Naxal-friendly village we are moving now.

We make it to our second camp safely. The sun is not up yet, but it is hot, *hot*, and all of us are pouring sweat. The village is some 15 minutes away. Vishwanath sends two men to get water. The others are asked to fall in, and are given their orders for the day. Two of them start a fire and put the kettle on for tea...

We have finished breakfast -- of tea (with tinned milk and enough sugar to sweeten a wild boar's disposition) and biscuits. There's a slight change in the plan.

Prabhakar, another guerrilla who joined us an hour earlier, has brought news that Karan is sick. Chronic malaria. We would have to go and meet him. That's fine with us. Now we are waiting for lunch and the sun to go down a little bit before we start. I decide to get my notes up-to-date.

In the background I can hear H and G discussing plans for returning to Bombay. H is exploring the possibility of starting back on 27th evening, but G tells him that isn't possible. "[The Martyr's Day](#) celebrations start on July 28 and they would want us to cover it," he says, "I should think the earliest we would be able to reach Nagpur is on the 29th."



I move off to corner Vishwanath. He is sitting cross-legged on his blue plastic sheet, one hand on his .303 which rests by his side, gleaming clean. One thing that a guerrilla does religiously every day is clean his weapon. They generally

do it right after the morning parade. As Karan later tells me, a guerrilla's best friend is his gun, and he's taught to take care of it



like he would his child. It's always there, within reach, even while he's sleeping.

Vishwanath, this wiry, young revolutionary, who treks from village to village with his hand-stitched backpack, water bottle and Maoist messages, is from Ahiri, a village nearby. He is regarded as one of the best guerrillas in the area. He is literate, can even read a bit of English, and is deputy to one of the four woman commanders in DK, Radhaakka.

In the PW, it is considered very rude to address a woman without the suffix *akka* or *didi*, both meaning elder sister. "Only the landlords call their servants by name," I am to be told later.

I ask Vishwanath about ammunition. Is it rationed?

"Yes. Unlike the commandos (*of the Maharashtra police*), who come in with blazing guns, our ammunition is very limited," he tells me, "Not only that, we have to account for each bullet we fire."

A rifle-wielder like him, thus, would get 30 cartridges a month while the quota for an SLR is 60. The ration for the AK is 75 and that for a double-barrel gun 30.

Vishwanath is well aware of Marxism and Maoism. But not in the wide, world-encompassing sense. His world is small, his views matching it. His fight is for a classless society, yes -- but in a narrower sense of the word. He wants betterment. He wants escape from exploitation. He wants an end to the 'police repression' which he sees 'all around.'

"I know the risks involved in a Naxal's life," he says, "But the party is doing so much for us poor people that I don't mind laying my life for it."

Prabhakar, who's listening to our conversation, is a commander in his own right. Thirty-four years old, he joined the movement in 1991.

"I used to work on a farm before," he says, "The PW guerrillas used to come to our village. I saw that they were the friends of the poor, so I joined them."

I wander around the camp watching the other guerrillas. Except for the two on sentry duty -- one 'main' and the other 'support' -- the rest are relaxing. One is reading a Telugu book, one of the PW's own publications.

That's one thing that needs mention, this thirst for knowledge of the PW members. They are always peering into tattered books,

the illiterate stumbling along the basics with guidance from the literate, and the latter striving to read more on what their fight is all about.



Vishwanath calls us over a little later. He and Prabhakar have been discussing something.

"What will you do if we get into a police ambush?" he asks.

R is of the opinion that nothing untoward would happen to us -- after all, we are journalists and have credentials to prove it.

"The point is they shoot first and ask questions later," G tells him, and the guerrillas nod in agreement. Turning to them, G says, "We would take cover behind one of the trees, I guess."

"Yes, that's right," Vishwanath agrees, "You should take cover and then retreat with Prabhakar. We will hold them off till you get out safely."

A few minutes later, the villagers arrive with food. There are five or six of them. Tribals, farmers, I would say, carrying big aluminium containers, their curious eyes sparkling at us from sun-blackened faces.

I am a bit surprised to see the rapport that exists between the Naxals and the villagers. Outside, the general impression is that the PW gets the villagers to co-operate at gunpoint. (For instance, I am to be asked by a colleague on my return why Naxals kill so many innocent villagers -- a doubt for which I don't blame her one bit.) But that is proved wrong in front of my eyes. It's difficult to believe the kind of comradeship that I see now arises from fear. There is no fear here, only trust.

In fact, one of the touching scenes of the trip is to happen a few hours later: As we walk towards Karan's camp, we stop just beyond an open field for a breather. A young cowherd -- he mustn't be more than 10 or 11 -- instead of fleeing from the dreaded Naxalwadis, comes eagerly to meet us. I can still see one of the guerrillas, with a paternal hand on the boy's head, inquiring kindly about his whereabouts.



Now the villagers serve us lunch. Rice and hot *dal*. Cooked in the simple way of rural folks. As guests we get first preference, and are served in steel plates. There are no spoons; the servings are by hand. Two huge helpings are placed on my plate. I am so hungry that I gulp it down in no time.

"*Thoda aur lenge* (Will you have a little more)?" a guerrilla moves towards me, threatening me with another severe helping. I back off hurriedly.

"*Na, bahut khaya* (No, I have eaten a lot)," I tell him, making him laugh.

"*Arre, thodasa khaya aur yeh bol rahe ki bahut khaya* (He ate a little and he is saying he has eaten a lot!)," he says.

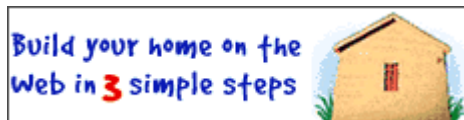
I am no moderate eater, but my appetite is hardly a match for that of these outlaws -- their metabolism, just as it requires loads of sugar, calls for frightening intakes of rice too.

After lunch, we try to get some shut-eye. But it is difficult. I must mention about this terrible heat. It's not the killing dry heat of Delhi you have here, but an unbearable sticky hotness. High with humidity, it settles like a wet, hot blanket on you. Stifling, unmoving, making you sweat like mad. And in DK, your body doesn't stick to the civilised ways of sweating which a flimsy handkerchief or tissue can remedy. Here sweat pours. It oozes out of every part of your body, in amazing quantities, and it would be a very, very cool day if you were not wet all over after a 20-minutes trek. Life in DK definitely has its own flavour.

Before we start, Vishwanath again explains what we should do in case of trouble. He and two others would form the pilot team. We four, with two guerrillas between us in the line, would be the main body. And Prabhakar would bring up the rear.

"Stick close to them. They will take care of you," the Naxal tells us, pointing to the two men among us. "In case of trouble," he tells them, "you will meet us at ---village."

**Cops? Will we have to run for it?**



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## Will we have to run for it?



The first halt is after 40 minutes. There is nothing much to record, except that I had a narrow escape from snake-bite. Because it didn't want the bother of turning around and biting me, the reptile exhibited amazing speed in disappearing into the underbrush seconds before I blundered on it. The incident left me a little shaken, and with my raised right foot frozen in mid-air, but it taught me to watch where I was stepping.

R, soon as we stop, puts a jungle flower to minute inspection and gets stung by a wasp. He becomes a bit hyper about it.

"*Kuch hoga* (Will something happen to me)?" he asks anxiously.

The Naxals find this very amusing. G tries to console him, but Vishwanath chooses the moment to tell him about other poisonous creatures of the jungle that can prove deadly. R looks more worried.

The 10-minute rest over, we line up. This time the guerrillas lead us across a couple of open fields -- an exercise they avoid as a rule -- which cuts our distance by more than 30 minutes.

The next halt is almost an hour later, just beyond a green field. In the corner nearest to us, I can see a villager grazing a calf. Both are very matter-of-fact, completely unimpressed by our little procession. When Ganesh approaches him for water, the villager listens, nods and walks away. Is it fear that prompts this unquestioned obedience? I don't think so.



As the guerrillas make tea, the conversation shifts to the Naxal movement in Bihar. Vishwanath talks about the Maoist Communist Party. The fight there is still in the initial stages, he says.

"They don't have enough weapons, and no training. One of our people had gone there recently to train them. We sent them an AK and a few SLRs from here," he reveals, "In DK, we have

passed that stage. Here (*unlike Bihar where the biggest enemy of the movement is the landlords*) the State is our biggest enemy."

H, meanwhile, is going about his photography. He has made good use of the IV tube that Vishwanath provided him earlier - the extra lens he has with him is now slung on his shoulder, tied to the end of the tube.

R, I can see from the corner of my eye, is in deep conversation with a couple of guerrillas. A little later he comes hurrying to where G and I are standing. "You know what?" he says, breathlessly, "These people take a bath only in 15 days!"

"When it is a question of survival, as it is the case with them, then other things take precedence," G tells him. However, that doesn't stop any of us from contemplating the possibility of a bath this evening.

G and I talk about the risk we are running and the chances we would have if we ran into an encounter. The cops, we have learnt from the Naxals, usually retreat only after their guns are empty. Yet, none of us seem to be overtly apprehensive. We arrive at the conclusion that it is because though all of us know the risks theoretically, it hasn't really sunk in. That would happen only when we are fired upon.

We reach the periphery of Karan's camp at around 1700 hours. Two scouts are immediately despatched to let them know about our arrival. We set to wait their return.



It's while I am trying to escape from under the weight of my rucksack that its straps break. Not to worry, Vishwanath assures me, it will be fixed. On his request, one of his colleagues removes a thick needle, thread and a piece of canvas. By the time he finishes, it is stronger than before.

An hour passes. There is no sign of our scouts yet. The guerrillas are squatting, oblivious to the formation of mosquitoes that are attacking us, lazily fanning them away with leaves. I try the same technique, but the squadron that is concentrating on me is more ferocious than the rest. Mere fanning produces no effect. I am forced to jump up and keep pacing.

The scouts return at 1845 hours. We meet our first woman guerrilla 10 minutes after that. Two of them are waiting just



where we enter the camp, with wide smiles and outstretched hands. Both are short and stocky, their hair in a boy-cut.

"*Lal salaam*," they say, raising their right fists in air. I am a bit confused at how to respond, but decide the best course is imitation.

"*Lal salaam*," I respond, feebly raising my fist.

The camp is set in a natural clearing, surrounded by trees on all sides. Till you are actually in, you don't realise there is anything here. The guerrillas are all lined up. They greet us with *Lal salaams* and wide smiles. As we move past returning their greeting, they introduce themselves: Murli, Saraswati, Indira... Karan.

Karan, the man whom I have been hearing about since I first contacted the PW, is 33, of medium height, dark and wiry. Originally from Andhra Pradesh, he has been with the movement for the last 15 years. Before coming to DK about two-and-a-half years ago, he had been active in Telengana and Karnataka.

Now he leads us to a plastic sheet spread on the ground.

"Tired?" he asks in Hindi, as his comrades offer us water, "Sorry I couldn't come down to meet you. I was not well. Had to take an IV before I could move down till here."

He tells us there are two squads with us now. They had arrived at the site only about 45 minutes earlier. Two women members are starting a fire near where we are sitting to smoke green leaves and bushes -- this is the outlaws' sole protection against mosquitoes.



"What are your plans?" Karan asks, "How long can you stay?"

Arrangements have been made for us to stay till August 3. I tell him I would like to stay as long as possible, but H, G and R are all for starting back on July 28, immediately after the Martyr's Day meeting.

Karan says there won't be much of a celebration this time. In the light of the huge meetings the PW had conducted in previous years, deep in the forest, the police would be out in force. This year the repression (by Naxal definition, any police action against them is repression) is more than usual.

"You must cover us well," he tells R, trying to convince him to stay back longer, "The local papers only publish the police

version. Till now, every news item about us has been fed to them. You must tell the people the truth. *Idharka log aap ka paper zyada padthe hain* (The people of this area mostly read your paper)."

It has grown dark now, and one of the guerrillas brings a candle. Next to us, three women are sitting, listening to our conversation. Behind Karan there is another outlaw, Arun, who is from West Bengal. Karan alternates between Hindi and English, mostly English, which he speaks haltingly, each word segregated by a slight pause, his accent heavily South Indian. I am sure none of the outlaws around us, except Arun, follow the conversation. Their presence appears more as Karan's bodyguards than anything else.

Karan is telling us about the increased police repression in the area. According to him, atrocities on villagers have been rising in the past couple of years. He tells us about two notorious police inspectors, Pandu and Trivedi, who 'unleashed a reign of terror.' Both are alleged to have shot many tribals in cold blood. The Naxals had their revenge on Pandu when they killed him in an ambush. But Trivedi escaped as he was transferred out of the region.

R interrupts to ask him how the villagers react when policemen are killed.

"They celebrate the occasion," Karan replies, "For instance, when Pandu was killed, there was a lot of celebration in the villages. They congratulated us wherever we went."

I ask him about Union Home Minister L K Advani's all-out move to eliminate the PWG.

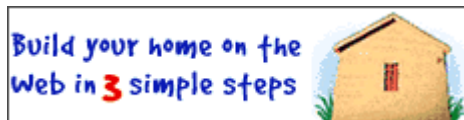
"The first enemy of communism is communalism," Karan says, "The BJP and RSS are reactionary fascist forces. Now that they are in power, it is only natural for them to start another round of repression. We expected it. We will fight them. By increasing our mass base, by consolidating our party, by extending it, and using guerrilla war techniques, we will fight them."

We soon exhaust the immediate topics, mainly because all of us are tired and hungry. I lie back, waiting for food. A little later, there's a message for Karan. The sentry has seen a jeep in the village. Cops? Karan calls for Vishwanath, instructs him in Gondi (the dialect of the local tribes), and sends him to investigate. We wait apprehensively. Will we have to run for it? That too on an empty stomach?

**DAY 3: Women make better guerrillas than men**

**DAY 4: We will meet again. If I live...**

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## Women make better guerrillas than men July 25

[Read from beginning.](#)

Up at 0530 hours after a miserable night. It was a false alarm. Though we hadn't had to flee, and had even got food, sleep was a commodity which none of us managed enough. The mosquito repellent failed me completely. And it was a sticky hot night to boot.



We are to trek to a safe place, about 40 minutes away, shortly. There we would stay for the next two days.

I learn something more about jungle life this morning: here everything, even an empty plastic bag, is invaluable.

Off to answer the second call of nature, I am handed my ration of water in a plastic bag. I walk into the bushes, clutching its mouth close and praying the water won't ooze out before I finish. Fortunately, it doesn't. But I commit a cardinal sin: I toss the bag away after I finish! The only excuse I can offer for my thoughtlessness is that I was somewhat hurried in my exercise by the undue interest of a cowherd, whose presence I discovered very, very late in the proceeding.

Vishwanath's face falls as I return empty-handed.

"*Isse bina idhar kaam nahin chalta, bhaiyya* (We can't do the job without this)," he tells me. Chastened, I walk back to the camp, promising myself never to be so stupid again.

The morning also teaches me another lesson: that it takes no effort to get lost in this jungle. You think you know where you are going, but you don't. On my way back after the unfortunate encounter, I wander off in a direction which I *think* is right -- and nearly stumble on G.

"*Hey*, where do you think you are going?" comes his panicked shout from behind some bushes, "The camp is *that* way!"

By 0630 hours, we are ready to start. We are a big procession. Karan starts a roll call and I find I am the 16th of the total 28.



Today we are moving at a picnic pace, in respect of the seven 'patients', or sick members, we have, and the provisions we are carrying. Many of the guerrillas, besides their rucksacks and rifles, have an additional burden -- either balanced on their head, strapped on top of their backpacks or in their free hand.

At 0715 hours, we stop for a 10-minute halt. As we wait to catch our breath, R asks whether there are any police pickets inside. Karan says there aren't, for the simple reason it would take a big contingent there -- at least 30 to 40 personnel -- if they are to defend it from guerrilla attacks.

"But they have enough informers among the villagers," he says, "Sometimes CIDs (*personnel of the criminal investigation department*) roam around pretending to be mad. We finished off three or four of them in 1992. Once we caught one who had his photograph in full uniform and ID card on him!"

We stop again a little later. I take it we have reached our destination. The guerrillas are scouting around, trying to find a clearing for the tents. H is busy clicking. I too remove my camera and get a couple of shots. From here, it is only four kilometres to the road. Yet, it looks secluded, secure.

No, I am wrong. We will not be camping here. After scrutinising the land, Karan decides it is not safe enough. Too vulnerable, he says, as we start moving. It's a climb uphill and we stop at the top. From here, you can see every point of approach.

As the camp settles in, we are asked whether we want breakfast first or a bath. We settle for breakfast and *then* a bath.

"*Waisa hai to didilog abhi nahane jayenge* (In that case, women members will go for a bath now)," Karan decides.

All around guerrillas are spreading plastic sheets. I see Sitaakka laying out a white, thick wire to one end of the camp. Vishwanath tells me she is laying a Claymore mine. The mine is home-made, the explosives packed into





a small tiffin box. There is a small hole underneath for the detonator. The wire leads right up to the camp from where, in case of an attack, it can be set off. The deadly tiffin-box is duly camouflaged with rocks and leaves.

As we wait for breakfast, which *Taraakka* is preparing a little away near a reluctantly-running stream, I ask Karan about the PW's structure. In each division, he tells me, there are 6 to 7 squad area committees. Each of the SACs would normally have a central guerrilla squad and one or two local squads. The commanders of all squads are SAC members, and so are the majority deputy commanders.

"To become a squad member you don't need political awareness, but to become a party member you certainly do," Karan says, "Anyone who's willing, is 16 years of age, has worked for any of our front organisations (*like the Dandakaranya Adivasi Kisan Mazdoor Sangh and Krantikari Adivasi Mahila Sanghatan*) for at least a year and has a good character is eligible. But for the party, you should *believe* in the revolution. You should have a certain level of political maturity. *Yeh marg se jane se har* revolution success *ho jayega karke vishwas rahna chahiye*. (They should believe that this is the right way and the revolution will succeed.)"

The number of women in the squads, Karan tells me, is quite high -- 33 per cent. In the last few years, they have risen in leadership too. DK, thus, has 30 women SAC members. Of this, four are central guerrilla squad commanders, 12 deputy commanders and one local guerrilla squad commander.

"Actually, there were two LGS commanders," Karan adds, "But one of them -- *Kamalaakka* -- got killed recently."

Despite physical limitations, the women comrades make as good guerrillas as the men. Sometimes better, because their loyalty to the party is much more than that of their male counterparts.

"Compared to the men, very few women leave the squads after joining," the Naxal says, "Once they are here, this becomes their home."

The conversation turns to married women. Would a woman with family be taken in if she is willing to join?

"If she's eligible, yes," Karan replies, "If she wants to leave her husband, then we will enquire about the reasons. If we find that the relation is not good for her, the party will sanction her divorce and recruit her. She may join the squad even without a divorce -- that we leave to her."

Marriages between squad members are very common. Karan himself is married to Sumitra, a dark, slim woman, who's part of *Radhaakka's dala*.

"But starting a family is discouraged," he says, "This is the time of revolution. Not a good time to bring a child into the world. We try to make the members understand this and get them to go in for vasectomy or use condoms. But if they still want a child, they are free to go ahead."

We talk till it is breakfast time. Karan picks up his SLR, dons his ammunition jacket, and I follow him down the steep, rocky path to the stream. *Taraakka* is serving *chivida* (a mixture of puffed rice, peanuts and onions) and hot, sweet tea.

As we eat, H and G make good-natured fun of my constant scribbling. "Don't take so many notes," G advises, "For one, I find that too much notes confuses me. Two, you stop enjoying the trip."

I tell him about my editor's expectation of me -- I am to bring home *at least* 8,000 words -- and his horror for half-baked, detail-less stories.



An hour later, it is bathing time. Finally! But bathing is not jumping into the water here. The guerrillas are careful to keep their small pool clean. So they make tiny individual pools for all of us by spreading plastic sheets and blocking its sides with stones placed underneath. Water is filled in, and we set to do our most urgent laundry.

The guerrillas are provided a Lifebuoy soap and half a slab of detergent, Rin, every month. The women, in addition to this, get a Detol soap -- the only allowance which the PW makes for their monthly cycle.

On the way back to the camp, I stop to talk to *Taradidi*. She is busy with preparations for lunch, but offers me tea anyway. She has been with the movement for 11 years and is one of the first women guerrillas in DK. Now the deputy commander of a squad, she used to work on a farm earlier.

"The party people used to come to our village. *Acche log hain* (They are good people)... They told us how the world works, about exploitation. They were doing good work. So I also joined," she says.

Now she tots a .303 rifle, which, incidentally, is almost as tall as she. She has seen two ambushes and three encounters. But surprisingly, *Taradidi*, despite her long years in the jungle, has not killed anyone.

"*Moka nahi mila, na* (Never got the chance)," she says, answering my surprise, "*Moka milega tho* (If I get a chance)..."

A guerrilla comes to tell me Karan and the others are waiting, that they are about to start the briefing. Today, Karan is to talk about the history of the movement and the repression in DK, especially in Gadchiroli. And the whole of tomorrow is for questions. The plan, however, is to change drastically, but I have no inkling of it as I walk up to join in.

**'The men who rule now, they will be under the control of a proletariat leadership'**



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## **The men who rule now, they will be under the control of a proletariat leadership** July 25

Karan starts with the time when the PW decided to establish the [Dandakaranya guerrilla zone](#). This was shortly after the Adilabad, Nizamabad, Karimnagar and Khammam districts of Andhra Pradesh were grouped together to form the North Telengana zone, the first of PW's guerrilla areas. DK was meant to be a base camp, a retreat for the Telengana guerrillas if they had to fall back. Today, however, it is in a much stronger position than NT, where encounters and killings of Naxals are everyday occurrences. This is mainly because NT is scarce in forest cover, the mightiest of all guerrilla weapons.



"The first stage of any revolution," Karan is telling us, "is the preparatory stage. It involves building a mass base to start guerrilla operations. The second is what you see now, guerrilla warfare. The third stage is a liberated zone, an area which is completely free of state control."

The second stage can further be divided into primary and secondary. DK is now in the lower level, and the immediate task before the PW is to take it to the higher stage. This would require that there are platoons throughout the zones (three squads form a platoon), 2 to 3 local guerrilla squads under all squad area committees and the presence of people's militia. Plus, there should be a centralised military command. As of now, the PW has only two platoons -- one each in Gadchiroli and Telengana.

Though only initial-stage guerrilla areas, the people in the two zones, especially DK, appear more tuned to the PW than the government. Thus, large sections of the DK's 8 million population pay tax to the PW, not to the State. This support, to a large extent, was prompted by two major fights that the party took up for the tribals. In 1982, a labourer was paid only three paise for a bundle of 75 *tendu* leaves. Today, it is Rs 1.33.

Similarly, the PW had brought the bamboo labourers under its umbrella, causing the mills to raise their payment for a bundle



(20 pieces) from 30 paise in 1982 to Rs 5.35 in 1996.

"The villagers give one day's labour to the party every season. We collected around Rs 1 million from them in

Gadchiroli division alone," Karan says, "A part-time party worker who holds a regular job, contributes five per cent of his salary. Then there are contributions from sympathisers and well-wishers, besides the tax on bamboo mill owners."

The PW doesn't need much money as an organisation. The villagers take care of the food requirements of the squads. And the weapons and ammunition are mostly seized from the police. The other operational costs are easily met through contributions, Karan says.

A little later -- at 1430 hours, according to my diary -- we break up for lunch. Rice, mixed *dal* and *bengan* (brinjal). I think it is the jungle air, but my appetite seems to have reached revolutionary proportions. Three huge helpings of rice disappear in no time. Even the *bengan*, which I would normally run a mile to avoid, finds favour with me today.

In tribute to the oppressive heat, we are to sit down only by 1400 hours. Karan is trying to catch a little sleep. The others too are taking it easy. A few guerrillas, mostly 'patients', are dozing. The rest are up -- stitching, talking, but mostly bending over books.

To the left, an outlaw is stitching a rucksack out of coarse black canvas. He's pretty good with the thick long needle, guiding it in and out with enough speed and dexterity to give many of the Bombay cobblers I know a complex. In less than four days, he would have a nice, sturdy backpack.

A little ahead, Vishwanath is teaching another outlaw English. They have a big colourful book, the kind you find in nursery, open on the ground. "A," says Vishwanath, pointing with his stubby finger. The other repeats, and Vishwanath's finger moves to the next letter...

The sun is tolerably over the right side of the sky when we, assisted by tall glasses of sugary tea, reopen our conversation. There's a smoke-fire on beside us, and, as usual, a couple of guerrillas near Karan.





"We have to strengthen our mass base," Karan starts, "Our vision is to create a new democracy where the leadership will be that of the proletariat. We will spread our movement through the rural areas of Central India, then to the North-East. *Ek ek guerrilla zones banake, ek ek liberated zones banake aage jaana padega* (We have to go forward by creating guerrilla zones and liberated zones). Then by consolidating our forces, we will build a red army that will capture power.

"We would form alliances with all the forces who are fighting the State. We already have an agreement with the ULFA. Our forces would be grouped under a united democratic front. Once the main battle is won, these forces will have the freedom of self-determination. If they want to be part of our movement, they would be welcome. If they want a separate land, like the Nagas do, we will grant them that," he pauses.

The PW's enemies are only the imperialists, not the petty bourgeoisie or the middle class. Once in power, the property of the multinationals and big bourgeoisie would be confiscated and redistributed among the landless.

"There will be a complete turn around. The men who rule now, the imperialists and big bourgeois, they will be under the control of a proletariat leadership," the Naxal leader explains, "There will be land and property ceilings. But this doesn't mean we would victimise them or shoot them down. The bourgeoisie would have equal rights as the rest. Simultaneously, we will struggle with the ideology of the imperialists and try to win them over to Communism. We will be working towards building a commune, building co-operatives where everything -- factories, farms -- will be jointly owned by the masses."

How, we ask him, will such a power relate to the rest of the world? Who would be its enemies?

"The imperialistic forces," Karan replies, "The Third World countries will be our friends. Later, in the years to come, these imperialistic countries will also fall, there will be revolutions there and Communist regimes will emerge... "

The talk carries on -- with a couple of breaks when Karan, in answer to the alarm on his watch, excuses himself to listen to the news on his radio -- till it is time for dinner. A few of the guerrillas are grouped round a campfire, singing. The song is tribal, its tune simple and pure.

By the time we finish the dinner of rice and *dal*, it is time for sleep. It looks as if it's going to rain. The guerrillas have put up

a tent for us. G, R and H make their bed inside, but it is too stuffy there. I decide to sleep out. I find a comfortable place near Karan who looks a bit haggard -- malaria, coupled with the attack of the media, would make anyone tired, I should think!

I hand him a questionnaire that I want him to answer. Karan goes through it, nods, and promises to tackle it the next day. The candle is blown off, and I settle down to sleep.

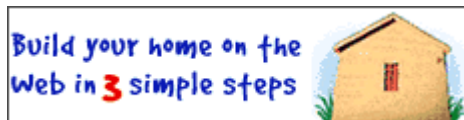
Through the ring of trees overhead, I can see a large patch of grey sky, unusually luminous despite the threat of rain. Around me, the camp is silent, starting to doze off. A couple of fires still burn lethargically, radiating a cosiness that belongs more to a summer camp than here in a guerrilla area. Peaceful.

But I feel uneasy. My notebooks, taped cassettes and exposed film rolls are inside the tent. I quietly get up, fish out the stuff in the light of a pen-torch, wrap everything in a plastic cover and return to bed. Hereafter, I make a mental note, I must have these on me all the time.

*Page design: Dominic Xavier*

**DAY 4: We will meet again. If I live...**

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## Our day will come. If not today, it will come tomorrow

July 26

[Read from the beginning](#)

Vishwanath nearly gives me a heart-attack. Early morning, he shouts into my ears, "Uto (Up)!" Not used to such stern awakenings, my first thought is that it is a police alert. But no, it is a wake-up call. Vishwanath, being the last sentry, and more zealous than the others, is carrying out his duty vigorously, that is all. After watching him scare a couple of others, I decide to doze a little more.



When I wake up, I find the guerrillas getting ready for their morning drill. The drill is an everyday affair, normally for an hour. Depending on whether the squads have marched for long in the morning, it would decrease or increase.

The PW conducts centralised and divisional training camps every year. The centralised camps, at times held under Sri Lankan Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam guerrillas, are for instructors. Vishwanath, who now takes charge of the drill, is an instructor.

The drill is mainly of guerrilla tactics. All the outlaws need for it is a small clearing. They start with running in tight circles, faster and faster, suddenly changing directions. Stretching exercises follow. The drill ends with weapons training.

The PW publishes a military publication -- *Jung* -- which presents the squads the latest military tactics, and analyses the raids they have conducted. *Jung* is in English. The group also has other books in Telugu, some of them translations from English.



"The first military book we published, *Basic military training*, was in 1988. The cover title was Kathasagaram!" Karan had told me earlier, "In 1989, we started *Jung*."

We go down for breakfast a little later. It's *chivida* again. I gobble it down fast, as I am to visit a tribal village this morning. The village -- or rather the hamlet -- is about one-and-a-half hours away. Vishwanath and Prabhakar would accompany me.

But after breakfast, H says the light is good for photography. Can he shoot some pictures? Karan had earlier told us that he would rather we finished our pictures at one go. So we postpone my trip to the evening -- "after 10.30 the villagers would be away in the jungles."

I walk over to where R, G and H are standing. With their stubble, they look pretty outlawish. They are planning to return the next night. Karan, who has joined us, says he has sent word to a guerrilla, Hanumanthu, whom he is particular that we meet. Hanumanthu had escaped from the jaws of death recently. The cops had taken him into the forest to be shot, but he had escaped. Luck prevailing, we would meet him, the next evening. But if he was late, would we mind staying on?

"We would like it covered," he tells us, before moving away to brief the squads about the photo-session.

Karan tells the guerrillas that they are about to be part of history. H is looking around for good locations, planning his shots in great detail. Fifteen minutes on, I decide I have got enough shots and decide to retire and update my notes.

Lying on my stomach, my notebooks spread out before me, with Kumar Sanu and Alka Yagnik crooning to each other on my Walkman, I start pondering the details I need to collect from the village. Outside, R is listening to what he has recorded of Karan's briefing yesterday over and over. His logic: if the police, by some misfortune, arrest us and confiscate all notes and cassettes, he would at least be able to recreate it from memory. But there doesn't seem to be any cause for alarm now. What could possibly go wrong?

The bad news comes an hour later while we are having our second round off talks. Radhaakka I sharing her experiences with us when a guerrilla approaches us. She tells Karan something in Telugu. He excuses himself, but comes back a few minutes later.

"I think we will have to change our plans a little," he says, "We will have lunch now. You will move out immediately after."

It's around 11.30 now. We ask him how serious the situation is. We wouldn't mind forsaking lunch, we say.

"Situation *tho thoda* serious *hai* (The situation is a little serious)," Karan replies, "But you can start after lunch. Somebody has informed the police that we are here. Can you get ready immediately?"

We pack our belongings. For the first time during the trip, none of us has anything to say. I tuck away my precious package of notebooks and taped interview in the side pocket of my rucksack, within easy reach -- now even if I have to drop my bag and make a run for it my notes and cassettes would go with me.

We go down to the stream. Taraakka is calmly presiding over two huge pots of rice and *dal*. A few guerrillas are having a quick lunch. Despite the urgency, they are at ease.

Karan, meanwhile, has joined us. He tells us that Radhaakka, Vishwanath and a couple of others would take us out. He would join us a little later, after he finishes the work here. "Have to make some arrangements," he explains and moves off to give Radhaakka last minute instructions.

"There goes the chance of another bath," I remark to G in an attempt to lighten the mood.

"Don't worry," he replies as we move off, "Who knows, our next stop might have a bigger stream!"

Vishwanath, Ganesh and Sagar are in front. We are sandwiched in the middle, with another outlaw between us. Radhaakka and her AK-47 brings up the rear.

The sun is high, maddeningly hot, and covers me in sweat in five minutes flat. But there's no slackening of pace. I cover my head with a small towel that I had wet for the purpose -- but have second thoughts about it soon. A pink-and-white bobbing head, I realise, would make an excellent target in the undergrowth if we ran into cops.

We halt on a dry stream, after 30 minutes of march. Karan joins us an hour later -- an hour which we spent contemplating the possibilities of danger and watching the fruitless efforts of the guerrillas, who were trying to flush out a *ghorpad* (a big lizard) from its underground sanctuary.

Our camp for the night is at least another hour from here. We move on. There's not a full squad with us now. Only nine people. The majority of Radhaakka's team is here.

A little later -- it must be another 30 minutes -- we stop to rest. Again, on another dry stream. We group around Karan, who



tells us what happened in the morning. Apparently, the police had got wind of the fact that four civilians were roaming the jungles with Naxals. One of their informers must have spotted us. Though the cops hadn't any idea who we were -- if they knew, they would be less alarmed, I should imagine -- they had a rough idea we were moving north.

"They will start combing from north down to the road," Karan tells us, "So we have doubled back. I have sent a squad towards them. They will show themselves and divert their attention."

He pauses a little, and adds: "It's better all of you get out tomorrow. We can continue with the interview now, if you want."

G says he needs to catch his breath first and Karan lies back on his sheet. H, R and Radhaakka have disappeared into the jungle with Vishwanath. They have seen a viper. A few minutes later there's a slight commotion, and they come out triumphantly. Vishwanath has the deadly snake captive at the end of a string that is tied to a long stick.



Karan is watching the proceedings unimpressed -- obviously snakes and snake-catching have lost their thrill for him. I tell him I need to stay back, explaining the data that still remain to be collected.

"You can stay back," he decides, after a little thought. G, who has been following our conversation, however, does not think that that's feasible.

"It will be dangerous to them," he tells me, "You may risk your life, but you have no right to endanger the lives of these people." The logic behind his argument is that without me the guerrillas can move faster and easily escape any ambush that the cops choose to throw.

"I would still like to stay," I tell Karan, leaving the decision to him.

My moment of truth arrives just before we set off. As I hoist my rucksack, Karan comes over to where we are standing. "*Kal subhe nikalna accha hoga* (It will be better if you leave tomorrow)," he tells me, "Maybe we can arrange a meeting later."

I am disappointed, but there is nothing I can do about it. If the big man wanted me out, out I would have to go. "Well," I

console myself, "So much less to file!"

The sun is fading as we reach our last camp. There's not much of a clearing here. Groundsheets are spread and the guerrillas build a fire. I corner Karan to finish as much as possible. R too joins in.

We begin with the violent image that the Naxals enjoy among the urban population. To them, the PW is more of a militant outfit than a political organisation.

"That's negative propaganda," Karan replies promptly, "We have that image because that's what the State wants. That is only expected. It happened in China, it happened in Peru and it is happening here. In China, even after the revolution succeeded, the communists were called the red dacoits. In Peru, they used to call the Shining Path guerrillas bandits."

"In India the upper middle-class and sections of the middle-class have this ugly picture of us. They haven't seen our mass base. They don't know the work we do. They will come to know about these only when our movement extends to the cities. Now, our propaganda is weak. We need to strengthen it to counter this," he adds.

The objective conditions needed for a revolution, Karan continues, assessing the PW's weak areas, are present in India. But the group's subjective forces -- namely, party and military organisations -- are weak.

"We have only started. We have to build more squads and platoons," he says, "Also, we have to spread the flow of our political education."

Another area of concentration is to raise what the party calls 'proletariat intellectuals', or people capable of leadership from among peasants and tribals. This has been prompted by the defection of the urban intellectuals, who had formed the backbone of the party during its initial days.

"Mao," the Naxal says, "has said the intellectuals, the so-called urban ones, are all fence-sitters. They will join the side that is winning. We do not want to have such people."

The commitment on the part of such intellectuals, he continues, is less. That's why so many of them have gone back. But a tribal, even if he cannot fully comprehend the ideology, will join the party on the basis of his belief in the little that he knows. And once he is taught the ideology and his exposure increases, his commitment is more than that of the intellectuals.

"*Tho isme, kaun better hai?*" Karan asks, "*Hamare vision me, intellectuals social practice se banega. Knowledge practicese ayeaga. Intellectuals ka base jo hai, woh production hai. Productive forces jo hai, woh proletariat and peasants hai. Thointellectuals kal yeh bhi ban sakte. Thab unka army badega tho thabi revolution success ho jayega.* The revolution will succeed when the people's consciousness is awakened."

[[Translate](#)]

The conversation turns to violence. I wonder at what point the party advocates it.

"The violence we advocate is more defensive than offensive," Karan replies, "Our aim is not to physically eliminate the enemy, but to protect our movement from elimination. We want to warn the enemy not to attack our revolution, not to attack our people. That's all."



This, probably, is why there is such a gulf between the PW and the other armed forces in the country. Unlike the groups in, say, Jammu and Kashmir, these are not angry young men who have picked up the gun out of rage or frustration. There's nothing personal in their fight. Only principle. It is not emotion that propels them on to the path of violence, but ideology. If the Kashmir militants look at the security forces with burning hatred, so powerful that one can feel it physically, the PW men see them in a remarkably different way. For them, the police are enemies. Not to be hated or revenged on, but to be defended against. And, if possible, won over.

"Our enemy is the state. Not individuals. The police are also exploited men. We would like to show them the correct path. We would like them to join us," Karan explains.

I marvel for the umpteenth time at the strength of his conviction. Here's a man, in the prime of youth, coldly, *serenely*, going about a mission the end of which he knows he will never see. A mission which the world has laughed off as unattainable, a mirage.

"We communists are dreamers," Karan smiles at my unasked questions, "This is a protracted war. We know our revolution is not going to succeed in one year or even 10 years. It will take years. That is spelt out very clearly in our party ideology. But our day will come. If not today, it will come tomorrow."

Do you, I persist, see it succeeding in your lifetime?

Karan thinks for a few seconds before starting to answer. "In 1985, when I was fighting in Telengana, there were encounters every day. I would have someone with me today, but tomorrow he would be dead. Shot. Killed in an encounter. I stopped thinking about the longevity of my life then. I can die today. I can die tomorrow. But even if I die, there will be people like me. The fight will continue. And the revolution will succeed," he pauses for a moment.

"I am not saying that I don't dream of it happening during my life-time. I do," he adds, "We communists are all dreamers..."

The sun has retired. So have G, H and R. I too follow suit, going over what we have discussed to see if there are any gaps.

I don't remember when I doze off. The next thing I know is somebody shaking me awake. It's about to rain. We would have to take shelter in a shed on a farm nearby.

There's half a kilometre to be negotiated -- which distance, in nil light and my drowsy state, I find pretty tedious. Somehow I manage to make it without spraining my ankle or toppling into the slushy field.

The shed is dusty, not very big, but is any day a better option than sleeping in the rain, wrapped in plastic sheets. We find it already taken -- by a couple of hens that refuse to be evicted. The guerrillas finally repress them underneath a bamboo basket, from where they are to keep me awake half the night with their muted protests.

Vishwanath, meanwhile, is putting up a tent outside. I must say the man works fast. Within 10 minutes flat -- I timed him - - he has the tent up and ready!



Tonight, again, the food is late in arriving. Radhaakka tells me the police had been to the village, around 1800 hours. The villagers are waiting to make sure everything is okay before they come to us. Finally, at around 2300 hours, they arrive. *Kichadi*, *dal* and *bengan* (brinjal) -- cooked with so much chilli that it burns down our throat. We are eating in the open. We have to hurry as it has started drizzling. By the time we retire, it is raining heavily outside.

**'We will meet again. If I live...'**