

the desert, her father and all the *peyoteros* laden with their wild harvest. Their clients arrived by train, with empty trunks to fill.

Amada married her childhood sweetheart, Claudio Cárdenas, and together they dedicated their lives to the peyote trade, less for money than out of respect for the righteous authority and sacramental power of the plant. Law abiding, devoutly Catholic, and famously dedicated to their community, they were well known among the local Tejanos as the first federally licensed peyote dealers. They were also among the few traders who invited the Indians to stay with them, who took part in the ceremonies and walked the peyote road. Their home became a place of pilgrimage, holy ground made sacred through ritual and ceremony, a sanctuary and haven. And, in time, Amada and Claudio became the preferred supplier of peyote for the entire Native American Church.

In *Amada's Blessings*, Schaefer tells a deeply personal story of a woman who served her as both mentor and spiritual mother. She aims to look deeply, as she writes,

into Amada and her life, from the cultural and ecological history that influenced her from the time she was born to the people and events in her life that contributed to her personal evolution. It describes interpersonal relationships she had with individuals and how her sage, penetrating loving-kindness found its way into the hearts and minds of multitudes of people from many walks of life. (14)

In this, the author succeeds wonderfully. The book reviews the history and ethnography of peyote, the genesis of the Native American Church, all the efforts of state and federal authorities to limit the trade and shadow the spirit of the practitioners. It also provides fascinating insights into the economic and political changes that transformed south Texas over the century that bookended Amada's life: the oil boom in the 1950s and subsequent bust 2 decades later, the arrival of the hippies as they chased Carlos Castañeda's mystic fantasies, the transformation of the borderlands through the war on drugs and immigration fears, the impact of overharvesting that today threatens the entire tradition.

A good part of the manuscript is testimony transcribed directly from scores of interviews conducted by the author. Although this inevitably disrupts the narrative flow, it allows her to give voice to all those in Amada's circle, an astonishing eclectic group of seekers and scholars, spiritual leaders and native chiefs, all of whom have something to say that the world needs to hear, which is the essence of good storytelling.

There have been many books recounting a personal engagement between a young ethnographer and an inspired local mentor, too many of which describe the author's role as having been exceptional in the life of the wise one. *Amada's Blessing* is mercifully free of such conceits. One of the most admirable and endearing aspects of the book is the humble manner by which the author assigns her place in the long narrative of Amada's life. Schaefer first came into Amada's orbit in the early 1990s. There is no doubt that a profound emotional and indeed spiritual bond was established between her and Amada

over more than decade of deep and meaningful engagements. The author clearly gave as much as she got. Indeed, it is a sign of the depth of their connection, not to mention the sincerity of Schaefer's intent, that she quite properly positions herself as just one of many devoted friends and admirers drawn over 5 decades into the presence of this amazing force, a woman described as saintlike by so many who knew her. This humility on the part of the author lends credence to all that she writes, and what she writes is the story of one of those unsung heroes that led Walt Whitman to bemoan that history is the swindle of the schoolmasters.

## Armed Resistance's Self-Defeat? The Predicaments of India's People's War

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*Nightmarch: Among India's Revolutionary Guerrillas*. By Alpa Shah. London: Hurst, 2018.

Written as nonfiction by an anthropologist, *Nightmarch* offers a much-needed ethnography of the Indian Maoist (or Naxalite) movement. It is based on one and a half years of fieldwork with cadres and foot soldiers of the movement in the tribal state of Jharkhand and develops a sharp analysis of the Naxalite movement based on a personal and sensitive account. The title refers to the 250-km walk that lasted eight days and nights and brought the author from a clandestine party gathering in the neighboring state of Bihar back to her fieldwork village in a Maoist stronghold. Passing under the radar of state forces, this walk became an occasion for the researcher to immerse herself in the military "routine" of the movement.

Although the author's aim is to make this work accessible to a larger public, this book in my view also demonstrates the positive benefits of nonfiction for anthropology per se. Though anthropologists have an ethical obligation to present an accurate account of the communities in which they work, truth can be slippery. Is an ethnography true if there is no substantial account of the author's presence within it?

Shah's nonacademic style of writing fully expresses her subjectivity and corporeity, which become our point of entry into the lived situations. Acknowledging freely her likes and dislikes for certain characters and situations, as well as her pleasures and discomforts, the author shows that the production of qualitative knowledge starts already at the stage of fieldwork, which is not conceived merely as an extraction of raw information from the "field."

Hybrid in its style and free from academic norms of writing, this book therefore fully endorses that the interpersonal and subjective conditions largely determine the production of eth-

nographic knowledge. Besides more conventional attempts to explain the movement's history to her readers in the first three chapters, as well as a bibliographical review essay in the appendix, the spaces of literary freedom that nonfiction allows also enable the author to express aesthetically and sensorially the experience of being underground.

Trying to shed an internal light on the Maoists' intervention in the local economy as racketeers for public work contractors and mining corporations in order to finance their militarization, Shah highlights the predicaments of this war economy for the movement. Thus, referring to Marx's famous statement on capitalism ironically, she concludes that such movements carry within their own ranks the seeds of self-destruction (255).

These markets of protection have introduced means of economic upward mobility and profits in tribal communities. Hence, young Naxalite supporters started to emulate Hindu upper-caste youth to the detriment of a traditional moral economy that prevailed in their communities. The armed resistance therefore not only attracted the forces of repression to this region but also indirectly facilitated the penetration of capitalist values and caste hierarchies that these populations had thus far kept at a distance.

The intimacy and trust that the author has built with young squad members enable her to portray intimately the manner in which the movement has become enmeshed with gender, class, and generational dynamics. These findings thus shed a critical light on the international category of the "child soldier," a category that sustains a discourse of victimization that, by stressing how minors are being taken away from their guardians, forsakes the agency of the local communities. Shah instead highlights that sometimes it is the parents who decide to place their children in the guerrilla, in order to be given a sense of discipline and be provided education and opportunities. However, often it is the youngsters themselves who decide to join a squad as a form of "adolescent rebellion which had a longer history in the area" (127). Shah's previous work on seasonal migrations in small-scale brick factories in other states also provides a fruitful contextualization of this military labor. Hence, while tribal youngsters face greater hazards in terms of health and security when they migrate for these jobs, joining the guerrilla represents a more rewarding experience in terms of access to literacy, technologies (weapons, computers, smartphones), basic health care, and political knowledge.

Although this could be claimed as a success by a movement led by urban, intellectual outsiders, this aptitude to merge itself in local communities also attracts opportunist and unreliable individuals who join as a shortcut to economic success in the local capitalist economy, rather than for sharing their revolutionary perspectives. Many former supporters thus turn into police informers and military opponents of the movement for the sake of private benefits.

Thus, their entrenchment in things as they are also indicates their failure to push forward their communist ideals. In contrast with the urban cadre's high commitment to Marxism,

local people who support the movement seem little aware of its ideological contents. Not surprisingly, therefore, these Marxist intellectuals' encounters with tribal populations have generated little output for Marxist theory. The internal debates have remained articulated through an ossified Marxist idiom that remained disconnected from the local people's worldviews and forms of expression. Blinded by their passion for scholarly debates, the ideologues have failed to draw any inspiration or even acknowledge traditional egalitarian practices prevailing locally. Still imbibed to some extent with the puritanical mind-set of the urban middle class, as well as a rigid conception of scientific progress, they are criticized by the author for opposing the very cultural practices that sustain egalitarian gender relations, such as instances of alcohol consumption by both sexes and non-marital love relationships.

According to Shah, this illustrates the inability to advocate a strong counterculture that could have helped to counter the entry of capitalism and consumerist aspirations into these communities. These intellectuals' sympathetic attitudes toward the local people, however, contrast with the hostility of the state. But the limits of their benevolent attitudes are best illustrated by their negative apprehension of Dalit ("untouchable") assertion, whose reliance on state programs for the sake of upward mobility is always suspect of betrayal. Even though emotionally engaged with the oppressed on a daily basis, the Maoist cadres thus practice a form of political patronage that sees the establishment of communism as resting on their enlightened leadership.

Thus upholding certain hierarchies based on their caste privileges, "the Maoist leaders often reproduced the cultural norms of the structures they sought to attack" (201). Taking Gandhi as another historical instance of pro-poor activism among the elite, Shah argues that "the hierarchies of Indian society have themselves produced some of the world's most committed pursuers of a more equal society" (95). However, her attempt to find a cultural explanation to this paradox departs from the ethnographic approach adopted in the rest of the book.

While tribal motivations to join the movement are explained ethnographically by concrete conditions of life, sociability, and economic aspirations, the cadre's biographies and social pasts are comparatively less documented, and their motivations are instead attributed to some unconscious reproduction of cultural patterns of Hindu spirituality. Along with anthropological theories of sacrifice in order to account for the abandonment of potentially comfortable lives and careers by highly educated cadres, it struck me that this is the only other instance in the book where the demonstration requires quotation of exogenous anthropological theories of religion. Although these intellectual cadres' psychologies and her own strained relationship to these characters are finely described, their initial motivations in joining the movement remain unclear. Calling on a cultural explanation in order to support her intuitions that this has to do with an inherited spirituality thus does not result from the same depth of ethnographic understanding that she reaches with the tribal foot soldiers.

Overall, *Nightmarch* thus represents a timely and major contribution to our knowledge of contemporary India's popular political praxis and people's resistances to predatory, state-sponsored capitalism; it is a must-read for all those who would like to go beyond the public discourse that equates the

word "naxals" with a license to kill people and suppress these resistances. It is a deeply emotional and highly personal account of the spaces and possibilities opened by people's armed struggles, conveying both their romanticism and their predicaments.