

Naxalite Movement as an Expression of Assertion and State Response

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Democracy has been hailed as the authentic and true voice of the people working for protection of their tangible and intangible interest. The two most desirable values of the democratic system are political stability working within the framework of law and ethics. It is the cherished dream of the people to live under healthy governance and so they reaffirm the mandate of a constitutionally approved government irrespective their efficacy level. However when the government fails to meet the aspiration of the people, the peoples faith in the legal system falters, the government becomes a toy in the hands of a few individuals in whose hands the factors of production concentrates. In such a situation there is a sense of simmering anarchy. This is not a passing mode-it is born out of a strong sense of being wronged, neglected and alienated from their own land property and habitant. This strong feeling of neglect and alienation leads to the formation of power centers who take on the government with the hope of righting the wrong.

I. The Canvas

The Naxal movement was born out of such a sense of disillusionment, alienation and neglect. The genesis of the movement lies within the framework of communist movement in India of which the Telengana movement (1946-1951) is an integral part. This movement was the first serious effort by the Indian communist party leadership to learn from the experiences of Chinese revolution and to develop a comprehensive line for Indias democratic revolution. The experience in Telengana facilitated the growth of three distinct schools within the Indian communist movement. One school was led by Ranadive and his followers who rejected the significance of Chinese revolution and advocated the Indian brand of socialist revolution based on the insurrection of the city based working class. The role model of this group Stalin. The second school was propagated by the Andhra secretariat whose role model was Mao. But their movement was directed against the Nizam only and they could not challenge the working of the Government of India under Neheru. The promoters of the third school were Ajay Ghosh and Dange who pointed out that there were significant differences between the Chinese and Indian conditions and took the party on the road way to parliamentary democracy.

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In 1957 communist government was formed in Kerala which did not last long. Following the Indo-china war the communist party split into two in 1964, namely communist party of India (CPI) and Communist party of India (Marxist) (CPI[M]). The CPI preached the ideology of non capitalist development through peaceful means and CPI(M) adopted the centrist line. Both parties, despite ideological differences, went ahead with their parliamentary exercises and formed the United Front Government in West Bengal².

II. The Trigger

In this canvas an incident in a remote area triggered off a movement that transformed the history of left wing politics in India.

In a remote village called Naxalbari at the foot hills of eastern Himalaya in West Bengal a tribal youth named Bimal Kissan, armed with a judicial order went to plough his land on 2nd March, 1967³. The local zamindars (land lords) attacked him with the help of their goons. In retaliation the tribal people united together and forcefully recaptured their land. The strife killed one sub-inspector and nine tribles. Within a span of two months it became a rebellion and acquired great visibility and tremendous support from a cross section of communist revolutionaries belonging to the state units of the CPI (M) in West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu, Kerala, Utter Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir. The United Front Government of West Bengal led by the CPI (M) used all possible repressive measures and curved the rebellion in 72 days⁴.

III. The Formation

The units in West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu, Kerala, Utter Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir had formal meeting in November 1967 as a result of which the All India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries (AICCCR) was born in May 1968. The AICCCR's cardinal principles war allegiance to the arms struggle and non participation in the elections. However, there was difference of opinion over organizing and taking the arm struggle forward and this led in difference of opinion between activists led by T. Nagi Reddy from Andhra Pradesh and activists led by Kanhai Chatterjee from West Bengal. The latter believed that annihilation of class enemy would be possible after building up

² Rajat Kujur, Naxal Movement in India: A profile, IPCS research paper, September 2008, Institute of peace and conflict studies, New Delhi.

³ Neheru died in 27th May 1964: 2014 is the 47th anniversary of Naxalbari Movement.

⁴ Ibid.

a mass agitation but the former group led by Reddy did not agree with Chatterjee and went ahead and formed the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) CPI(ML) in May 1969. Chatterjee formed the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC). The CPI (ML) held its first congress in 1970 in Kolkata where Charu Majumdar was formally elected its general secretary.

IV. The Movement

From 1970 the CPI (ML) and the MCC continued their respective forms of arm struggle.

Conceptual Framework: They aim of the Naxalite Movement in India is to establish 'Peoples Government' in a communist state. According to them since the democracy in India is not preceded by a democratic revolution it is incomplete. They believe an uprising, a revolution is needed to destroy the old structures feudal exploitation and class struggle in order to bring in a class less society where there are no inequalities and political power rests in the hands of the people. The naxalites follow the more violent strand of communism, Maoism which can be traced to Marxism-Leninism.

Marxian tenet seeks to replace the old socio-economic relations led by the bourgeoisie by exploiting the labor of the working class (proletariat) for its own profit. Lenin put forward the idea that there should be a single party that will represent the interest of the masses and lead the revolution to over through the bourgeoisie led socio-economic structure. These basic tenets of Leninism along with core Marxian principles laid the base for the dictatorships of Stalin and Mao marked by massive collectivization experiments where private property was snatched away and all the land belonging to the peasants were forcibly clubbed together for community farming. The Indian naxalites too claim to adhere to this ideology⁵.

The Rising: During this period Charu Majumdar became the undisputed naxalite group and Kanu Sanyal and Jaghal Santhal provided the organizational skills and help to spread the movement to different parts of the country which was short lift than expected. Hundreds of carders lost their lives thousands were put behind bars.

The fall: In the final enactment of the so called revolution there was confusion split and disintegration. Charu Majumdars's larger than life image created a distance between him and the cadre which had a negative impact. No second in command was trained. The CPI (ML) virtually collapsed after the death of Charu Majumdar.

⁵ Raman Dixit, Naxalite Movement in India: The States Response, vol.4, issue:2, Journal of Defense Studies.

V. The Resurrection

During 1974 a group of CPI (ML) led by Subrata Dutta, Nagbhushan Pattanayak and Vinod Mishra launched a major initiative called 'course correction' and renamed themselves as CPI (ML) Liberation. In 1976 during the emergencies this group adopted a new strategy that called for continuation of armed guerilla struggle and also formation of an anti-congress democratic front⁶. They suggested that pure military armed struggle should be reduced and more emphasis should be on mass present struggle which would be an Indian version of Marxism, Leninism and Maoism. But during the subsequent three years the movement suffered further splits as Kondapally Seetharamaiah (Andhra Pradesh) and N. Prasad (Bihar) dissociated themselves from the party and Prasad formed the CPI (ML) (Unity Organization) and Seetharamaiah started the Peoples War Group (PWG) in 1980. The CPI (ML) (Unity Organization) sought to restrict the annihilation of mass enemies and PWG stressed on building mass organization. Since then the naxalite movement has been split into two lines of thought and action. In the mean time the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) emerged as a major armed group and created scope for multifarious organizational conflicts among the naxal groups⁷.

VI. The Paradigm Shift

The CPI (ML) Liberation group took a theoretical stand of correcting the past mistake of rejecting parliamentary politics. The Peoples War Group (PWG) and the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) completely rejected the parliamentary democratic system of governance and vowed to wage war for people's government. In 1989 CPI (ML) Liberation registered its first electoral victory in Bihar. Further factions like CPI (ML) New Democracy, CPI (ML) S.R. Bhajjee group and CPI (ML) unity initiative emerged in the state.

The consequences were the following:

1. Intra-organisational conflict and rivalry touched a new high which resultant in large number of cadres' loss.
2. Despite the large scale inner conflict an underlying effort for unity continued at several levels.
3. 1990 onwards there was a considerable increase in the number violent incidence at the same time a considerable change in the government policy was also noticed.

⁶ Thirty years of Naxalbari, An un-dated publication of CPI (ML) liberation.

⁷ Bela Bhatia, Naxalite Movement in Central Bihar, Economic and political Review, April 9, 2005.

It may not be out of place to mention here that the response of the successive governments at the state levels and national levels were weak, confused and un-uniform. This indecisive state of the governments led to the growth of naxal movement⁸.

VII. Organisational Politics

The following are the main issues on which there appears to be considerable differences among the naxal factions they are:

- Disagreement regarding the line of annihilation that was followed between 1967 and 1971.
- Disagreement with the policy that armed struggle is the principle form of struggle and the armed guerilla squad as primary unit of the struggle
- Disagreement with the belief that since the principle form of struggle is the armed struggle, the entire activity of agrarian struggle should be underground.
- Whether the contradiction between feudalism and the Indian masses is the principle contradiction or whether India has emerged as a capitalist state and hence the contradiction between capitalism and the general public is the principle contradiction.
- Whether united front with the various factions like the dalits, ecological movement and inclusive movement should be formed.

Over the years the CPI (ML) liberation continued to hold its turf in Bihar and PWG continued to hold turf in Andhra. On 1st January 1982 CPI (ML) unity organisations and central organising committee merged together to form CPI (ML) party unity. This resulted in a spate of left wing extremism worse ever conflicts in Bihar and border Jharkhand. There were also inter-party clashes between CPI (ML) party unity and CPI (ML) liberation. These conflicts were taking toll on all fronts. In August 1998 CPI (ML) party unity merged with Peoples War Group. And as a result Peoples War Group became a force re CPI (ML) party unity reckon with.

So on one hand PWG was becoming stronger in areas of Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra and on the other hand CPI (ML) liberation was becoming weaker and reduced to a small political party.

⁸ Rajat Kujur, Naxal Movement in India: A profile, IPCS research paper, September 2008, Institute of peace and conflict studies, New Delhi

Between November 15 and 30 1995 the PWG conducted an All India Special Conference in some unknown locality of Dandakaranya and adopted two important documents⁹.

‘The Party Programme’ states that India is a semi-feudal and semi-colonial society. Here the New Democratic Revolution (NDR) has to be completed victoriously paving way to the socialist revolution and to advance towards the ultimate goal of communism. The Indian people are weighed down by three big mountains: feudalism, imperialism and corporate bureaucrat capital and these are the targets of NDR.

The second document deals with strategy and tactics to be pursued for achieving NDR in India¹⁰.

VIII. The State’s Response

According to the naxalites the four major contradictions of the Indian society are as follows:

- Contradiction between feudalism and broad masses.
- Contradiction between imperialism and Indian people.
- Contradiction between capital and labor.
- Contradiction within the ruling classes.

When the naxal uprising began in 1967 the Indian government treated it as a law and order problem without analyzing the cause of the movement and the extent of peoples involvement. So when the naxalites called it a decade of liberation Indian Government made it a decade of repression¹¹. The united front government chooses to repress the violent uprising even if the cause was morally valid. The emergence in 1975 was a carte-blanche to the state to crush the movement. It led to the legitimization of violation of human rights by the state. Ironically this made the movement to become more violent. The government turned a blind eye to police excesses and extra judicial killing¹². The credit for the survival of the movement for over 40 years must go to the government for failing to address the causes and conditions that sustain the movement. The government chose to react and launched a massive police operation that drove the movement

⁹ History of Naxalism, Hindustantimes.com, see also – A party document of CPI (ML) liberation titled The General Programme.

¹⁰ Prakash Louis, *People Power: The naxalite movement in central Bihar*, Word Smiths, (2002), p-277.

¹¹ R. Ravikanti, ‘Peoples War and state response: The naxalite movement in Telangana’, University of Brotish Colombia, September 1995, at 33, <https://dspace.library.ubc.ca/handle/2429/3955> (last accessed on 10/03/14

¹² Ibid

underground and brought most of its leaders under police custody within 72 days of its launch. It also enacted several laws to empower itself in order to combat the naxals. The West Bengal government enacted the West Bengal (Prevention of Violent Activities) Act 1970 to arm itself to repress the uprising. The central government responded by enacting various ‘anti-terror’ Acts to curb all kinds of violence including naxal violence and went a step forward by targeting sympathizers and branding them as naxalities. The Andhra Pradesh government in 1983 liberalized arm licensing to empower the people to protect themselves against the naxals¹³.

Despite the governments muscle power and legal teeth the naxal movement could spread its base because the rural poor and the oppressed identified with its ideology. In other words the movement is deeply rooted in socio-economic factors. During 1967 in Naxalbari there was a deep social malady of malafied transfers, evictions, anti-people actions of tea gardeners and jotedars¹⁴. These issues were long standing and there was no dearth of reform legislations but the spirit of the law remained confined to paper and the people were left to languish. All the region where the movement flourished are the ones with alarming levels of poverty. In the post independence era the Indian Government focused on agricultural policies aimed at improving output but those policies neither improve the output nor the economic and social disparity. With the commercialization and corporatization of agriculture economic disparity widened. The rich got richer and the poor became poorer. Abolition of zamindari created a new class of rich peasantry¹⁵. With the spread of communist ideology there was a greater mobilization of share croppers ‘Bargadars’ and land less labor who generally belong to the lower casts and tribes. This polarized the agrarian classes and created an environment of confrontation. The failure of land reforms was the macro issue that effected both social and economic condition of the people.

Failure of Land Reforms: Though after the independence the Indian government started the process of abolishing the zamindari system and eliminating the intermediaries at the ground level the process was not successful. The land reforms and the tenancy reforms were aimed at guaranteeing security of tenure to tenants, to ensure fair rent rates and to

¹³ P. Singh, ‘Naxal threat and state response’ [http://brm.iimb.ernet.in/oppl/pdfNAXAL_THREAT_AND_STATE_RESPONSE\(IIM\).pdf](http://brm.iimb.ernet.in/oppl/pdfNAXAL_THREAT_AND_STATE_RESPONSE(IIM).pdf). (last accessed on 10/03/14 at p.4)

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ G.R. Sahay, ‘naxalism, cast based militias and human security: lessons from bihar, centre for development studies, July 2008, at p.4. source: http://www.arts.monash.edu/mai/asaa/gaurang_sahay.pdf (last accessed on 11/03/14).

gain rights of ownership of land subject to some restrictions¹⁶. The two major enactments of land reform in West Bengal¹⁷ were passed in 1950s suffered from poor implementation and loopholes. The Naxalbari Movement was fueled by the fact that in spite of the CPIM led united front government being in power the land reforms were still ineffectual and a stress of class and cast prevail. There was a conscious lack of political will and a biased bureaucracy made the legal system ineffective and the reforms nonexistent¹⁸.

Social Inequity and Exploitation: Those deprived of land fell prey to money lenders and oppressive land lords. They wanted a new social order with equity and the landed class wanted to retain the prestige and status associated with the zamindars¹⁹. The class conflict manifested as cast conflict in many places especially in places like Bihar and Andhra Pradesh²⁰.

Alienation of Forest Land: Alienation of tribal land was a major issue that crippled the tribal economic welfare and figured prominently in Srikakulam Naxal Movement where alienation was happening largely because of money lenders trap and governments restrictions on access to forest land which is traditionally the exclusive domain of the tribal's. The forest officials resorted to harassment of tribal's. Laws of access to forest produce took away a significant part of their income leading to deep discontentment²¹.

Rural: Tribals and Agricultural Laborers: Since the policies of the state disturb the equilibrium of the tribal society, their social structure was more conducive to mass mobilization. In West Bengal places like Naxalbari, Phansideoa and Kharibari were mainly inhabited by the Adiwasii, Santhal, Oraon and Rajbanshi tribe. They were the hardest hit by the commercialization and corporatization of agriculture and the government forest policy. Simultaneously they bore the brunt of exploitation of the land lords and social oppression. The cadres of the movement hailed from the classes of agricultural workers, share croppers, and tenants. All of these groups share the same woes and identified with each other's cause²².

Urban: Middle Class Youth: The movement found enormous support among the educated youth who belong to the middle class (petty

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ West Bengal Estate Acquisition Act 1953, West Bengal Land Reforms Act

¹⁸ P.K. Datta, land reforms administration in West Bengal, Daya Publishing Company, (1980) at.5.

¹⁹ P. Singh, 'Naxal threat and state response' [http://brm.iimb.ernet.in/oppl/pdfNAXAL_THREAT_AND_STATE_RESPONSE\(IIM\).pdf](http://brm.iimb.ernet.in/oppl/pdfNAXAL_THREAT_AND_STATE_RESPONSE(IIM).pdf). (last accessed on 10/03/14 at p.4

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid

bourgeoisie). Many of these young persons were medical and engineering graduates, universities became hot beds of radical ideology. Some students devoted themselves to mobilize the people and some others perpetrated acts of violence in an attempt to over through the state. Most of these students faced unemployment and carrier crises and suffered from disillusionment. It was easy for them to embrace the naxal ideology. The repressive action of the state also had a negative impact among them and naxalism appealed to them. Thus the urban middle class youth identified themselves with the rural oppressed people²³.

Tackling Naxalism: In order to repress the movement the government constituted empowered group of Ministers headed by Home Minister and select Chief Ministers. The government under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act 1967 (amended in 2004) banned the CPI (ML) party, the People War Group (PWG), the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) and their associated formations and front organizations. It also constituted a task force comprising of Nodal Officers from the naxal effected areas and officers from the IB, SSB, and CRPF. There is also a coordination centre setup in 1998 headed by the union Home Minister, chief secretaries of the effected states and the DGPs of the naxal effected areas for coordinating the steps taken to control the naxal movement. A twofold strategy was adopted to solve the problem of naxalism.

- ❖ Law and order approach
- ❖ Socio economic development approach

Law and Order Approach

The law and order approach adopted a two prompt strategy of modernizing the police force and enactment of laws.

Modernising the Police Force: Under the scheme huge sums of money have been provided to the Naxal affected states to modernize the police force by providing them with state of the art equipments and tactical gear including latest communication, vehicles and infrastructure facilities. The states have been directed to identify sensitive and susceptible police stations and outposts²⁴. Due to the increase use of land mines by the naxals the police in the effected states are provided with mine protected vehicles. Central Para Military Forces have been deployed in the affected areas at no cost to the state government. In order to eliniated youth from the movement 40% of the recruitment to the Central Para military forces have to be from the areas

²³ Ibid

²⁴ “status paper on the naxal problem as on March 13 2006”, Ministry of Home Affairs. Source: http://www.sato.org/satporgto/countries/India/document/papers/06_march13Na. (last accessed on 11-3-14)

affected by naxal movement. A special force of 14 thousands personnel have been constituted comprising of state police and ex-service man to combat Naxalism²⁵. A Indian Reserve Battalions (IR) is set up to provide backup support to the Central Para Military Force. Plans have been set in motion to form 3-4 specialized Anti Maoist Centers at important interstate boundaries to give backup support to SSB/CRPF/BSF etc. The Anti Maoist Centers are equipped with helicopters and other powerful weapon. The government of Chhattisgarh has started a counter terrorism and jungle war fare college at Kanker²⁶.

Enactment of Laws: The laws enacted by the government are:

- ❖ Rehabilitation and resettlement policy, 2007: It aims to minimize displacement of people and explores and promotes non-displacing or least displacing alternatives. The government issues a rehabilitation policy on 11th October 2007 for rehabilitation and resettlement of people who lose their land for industrial growth. Under the scheme land will be given in exchange of land and job for at least one member of the family, vocational training and housing benefits will be provided both in the urban and rural areas.
- ❖ The Scheduled Tribe and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) At 2006 recognize the rights of the scheduled tribes and forest dwellers who have been living in the forest for years and yet their rights have not been recognized. The Ministry of Environment and Forest has allowed use of one hector of land for non forest purposes and conversion of kutchra roads to pukka roads.
- ❖ Chhattisgarh Special Public Securities Act 2006 provides definition of unlawful activities, declaring an organization unlawful, formation of an advisory board whenever required by the state government, penalties and punishments etc.

IX. Socio Economic Development Approach

A Backward District Initiative was started in 2003-2004 and a Backward Region Grant Fund (BRGF) was created to provide socio-economic development package to the affected districts which is to be administered by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj. The Government of West Bengal too has year marked separate fund as socio-economic development package for the affected areas of Bankura, Purulia, West Midnapur,

²⁵ “Status paper on Internal Security Situation as on September 1 2008”, Ministry of Home affairs. Source: <http://www.mha.nic.in/pdfs/STTSPPR>, (last accessed on 11 march 2014) at 38

²⁶ Ibid.

Burdwan and Birbhum districts. The state of Karnataka too has taken similar steps for the affected areas. The Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojna (PMGSY) provides easy accessibility and connectivity to the remote and affected areas. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005 provides for hundred days work guarantee. The Bharat Nirman, National Rural Health Mission (NRHM), Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA), Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and other income generating and social security schemes of Ministry of Rural Development, Agriculture, Panchayati Raj and Tribal Affairs are intended to bring about socio-economic change not only in the affected areas but also across the country. 100% central assistance is provided in the formation of Ashram Schools and Hostels for both girls and boys in the tribal area. In states like Jharkhand and Orissa incentive is given to naxals who surrender, they are provided with insurance cover, vocational training and agricultural land, health and educational facilities for their children²⁷.

X. The Last Word

At the ground level the laws have caused a lot of problems to the tribal's and the scheduled caste by negating many of their traditional and customary practices and rights. The Act providing land for land has not benefited the industrialist or the people and has emerged as a night mare to the government. The Unlawful Activities Prevention Act banes all factions and groups of the CPI (ML), PWG and the MCC. There was no need for legislation for this purpose which could have been achieved by an executive order. The main purpose of the Act was necked repression of people in the name of anti-social or anti-national activities without making a distinction between the two.

The socio-economic approach with a motive of social integration appears to be a better approach and is the right modus for solving the basic problem. Fare enforcement of ceiling laws, affective implementation of land reforms, Vocational, educational training and raising the slandered of living alone will take away the wind from the sail of the naxal movement. Naxal movement thrives on the dissatisfaction of the marginalized and alienated population. A socio-economic strategy and inclusive politics alone can prevent the growth of naxal movement. Naxal movement is an assertion against exploitation, oppression, marginalization, alienation and poverty. If these issues are addressed affectively then the single largest movement in the post Neheruvian era can be laid addressed.

²⁷ S. Dharmadhikari, "Resettlement Policy: Promising Start, and a Let Down"
Source: <http://www.indiatogether.org/2007/nov/hpt-randrp.html> 'last accessed 11-03-2014