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UNDERSTANDING LEFT WING EXTREMISM

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ABSTRACT

The real aim of the Naxalite is neither the domain of economics nor state welfare. It is a political movement having its goal is to overthrowing the existing state machinery and the seizure of political power e. i. state power. Naxal do not believe in parliamentary democracy. In fact, they consider it an aberration. While projecting the state as well as its armed forces as the enemy, the Naxal movements' calls upon its members to take up arms and defeat the enemy decisively. The movement believes that the state is merely an agent of the elitist class and does not cater to the interest of the lower strata of society. As Charu Mazumdar said, 'Militant Struggles must be carried out for the seizer of state power. Further, power flows from the barrel of gun.



KEYWORDS : Naxalism, Security, Governance, Degradation, Red corridor, Strategy and Tactics, Left Wing Extremism (LWE)

INTRODUCTION :

“Naxalism has increasingly become analogous to acts of terrorism which are characterised by out rightly irrational and heinous conduct and are completely devoid of any semblance of human rationality”- Justice Punchhi

Historical Perspectives: Left wing politics in India has a long history from as early as 1920s and they were able to exert commendable influence over the national independence movement in 1930s and managed to emerge as the second largest party in many states in the electoral politics of the first general legislative assembly electins¹. The phenomenon of Left Wing Extremism has its seed in the ideological difference within the communist party between the supporters of Gandhi's model of non-violence struggle to attain freedom and the people who thought that his method is bourgeois and was against the emancipation of poor labourers and landless peasants. But this difference never materialized enough to cause a split within the party and for clear perusal of armed struggle to overthrow the British. The major reason was the people were completely mesmerized by Gandhi and his policies and so these dissenting voices were sidelined but they were waiting for the right time to act on the theory of armed revolution. The Telengana peasant uprising that can be considered as the extension of the freedom struggle presented such an opportunity and the dissenting voices soon realized it. These communist used it as a testing ground for their theory of armed insurrection and it

paid off well that become the most influential and largest part in Telangana region during that period. This phase of the left wing extremism ended with the leadership joining the mainstream and winning large number of seats in the following elections in Telangana region². This particular phase of the communist armed struggle created a belief among the hard-line communist that armed revolution in India is not impossible.¹

After 1951 the communist indulged themselves in legal means of protests and there was growing factionalism within the party but the leadership managed to hold them together till 1964. In 1964 the radical elements broke away from the original party to form a new party mainly due to internal frictions and the intercontinental circumstance favoured such a split and the border dispute between China and India expedited the split. The newly formed radical party was also not radical enough for certain section of communists and they were waiting to express this at a correct moment and such a moment presented itself in 1967 when a farmer with a court order to plough the land was attacked by the goons of a landlord in a village named Naxalbari in West Bengal³. This attack was soon revenged by the villagers with the communists leading them and soon the whole rural area of West Bengal was raved by the violence created by landless peasants in their pursuit to land from the landlords with the communist guiding them. These more radical communist formed an organization named All India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries (AICCCR) in 1968 to carry out similar uprising in the other parts of the country and the Naxalbari leaders formed a party named Communist Part of India (Marxist-Leninist) CPI (ML) in 1969 for better coordination and unity. ²

The Telangana Peasant Uprising

This is the first revolt by the peasants, partially designed by the communist, that thought started in British India continued and the authorities of independent India were left to deal with it. The causes for the revolt that happened before: Exploitation of Peasants. But there are salient features to this revolt which makes it a watershed to the communist revolutionaries who profess armed struggle to overthrow the existing order and to the Government because it was able to quell the insurgence after few years and accommodate former revolutionaries into mainstream politics. Though there were fallouts which still continues to burden the nation in terms of psychological boost the legacy of this uprising is providing the communist revolutionaries the government was successful in it endeavor to tackle the revolt successfully. ³

Salient features:

This was the first revolt that was planned by the communist and executed methodically. Even though the revolt occurred in 1946 the communist had established considerable presence with the peasants as early as 1942 itself; the class alliance that was forged by the communists was peculiar and was of great value. An alliance was formed between the rich, middle and poor peasants; contrast to the class alliances of the past and an indicator of growing class character of Indian society in comparison with the peasant revolts of 1857. During the Sepoy Revolt of 1857 the peasants support to the revolt not because their interest were at stake but the landed aristocracy asked them to support the Sepoys since the British were barging into the interest of them So in 1857 the peasants supported the cause of the landlords and in 1946 they were opposing the landlords. This projection of landlords as the single enemy made this uneasy and unrealistic class alliance possible⁴. The authority crisis after 1947 made the communists to act freely and make inroads into the cities and villages in their militant from without many disturbances; this revolt was initially supported by the Indian Congress (INC) and it was hard to find the difference between a congress worker and a communist. The erstwhile Nizam of Hyderabad was the ruling authority of Telangana region and after independence he refused to merge with India and so the revolt by the peasant for the rights of land took the form of freedom struggle and so INC supported it. After the Government of India took control of this region they were quick to legislate reforms and implement it there by making the communist leadership to view the continuance of revolt unnecessary and withdraw it in 1951; the communist were able to establish successful local administrative bodies that virtually ran a parallel government in rural area. They created a vigilante

group in every village that acted as a local police force; these salient features of this uprising can also be considered as the circumstantial perspective of the uprising. The exploitation here was direct that the absentee landlords appointed certain people who collected the rents on behalf of them and the then ruler Nizam had his cut in those taxes and so the landlords had a free hand in imposing their will on the people. The main reason which made the people to feel that they are being exploited was the reforms undertaken by British in 1920s with the introduction of commercial crops. This made the landlords and their appointed tax collectors rich but the failure of the landlords to change the agrarian class structure at least in part in favour of the peasants made the peasants to see that the major condition for their poverty in spite of steady increase in production and profit was due to the greediness of the landlords and so they believed that eliminating this class will deliver them good. This social phenomenon of desperation was fanned by the radical communists in their favour. ⁴

The other element which made people to make this revolt more people oriented than communist was the consolidation of the entire society up against a single class. This movement had successfully united rich, middle and poor peasants initially and they were in a single fold till the movement took a strong militant character in 1946 after which the middle and rich peasants withdrew their support. Even though they stopped their support they did not oppose it and so the uprising taking the new character of poor peasants versus the landlords continued.

There were many peasant uprising in the history of independent India and none took a national character as that of the Telengana uprising. As mentioned earlier the uprising coincided with the independence of India and so the peasant uprising was considered as an extension of independence struggle well into 1948. When the Indian government took control of Hyderabad from the Nizam in 1948 through the Indian army the character of the uprising changed from the one of nationalistic to traitorous. The revolutionary peasants and the communist were to fight their own country. The strength of peasants and communist which was enough to challenge and curtail the authority of Nizam was no match to the well-equipped Indian army. This and the fact that the Indian government was sensitive enough to carry out necessary reforms made the communist to withdraw the movement in 1951.

The causes for the uprising were the failure of the ruling authority to fill such as power vacuum as was there in the Telengana region as much as the exploitation of the farmers. There have been many revolts by the peasants before and after independence and no other uprising had happened in such a coordinated and planned manner that lasted for more than five years with the somewhat same vigor as was when the movement first formed. The uprising took a militant form only after landlords attacked the peasants indulging in mostly peaceful form of agitating like occupying lands and refusing to pay rents. Once it took militant form the uprising lost its many supporting bases but it had become a menace to the state apparatus that is entitled with the task of managing law and order. These are the main causes of uprising and remain almost unchanged. ⁵

Naxalbari uprising in 1967

The immediate aim of the party is to accomplish the new Democratic Revolution in India by overthrowing imperialism feudalism and comprador bureaucratic capitalism only through the protracted people's War and establishes the people's democratic dictatorship under the leadership of the proletariat. It will further fight for the establishment of socialism. The ultimate aim of the party is to bring about communism by continuing the revolution under the leadership of the proletariat and thus abolishing the system of exploitation of man by man from the face of earth.

The communist party of India (Maoist) dedicated itself at the service of the people and revolution, cherishes high affection and respect for the people, relies upon the people and will sincere in learning from them. The party stands vigilant against all reactionary conspiracies and revisionist manoeuvres – (Refer ch article 4 of the constitution of Communist party of India (Maoist))

Marxism-Leninism-Maoism:

This is the guiding principle and philosophy for every left wing extremist group in India. The left wing extremist in India synthesizes the principles suitable to concrete conditions of the country and articulates it as an alternate form of governance which can alleviate people from poverty and provide a way for the tribal and other marginalized people, who are the base supporters for the Left wing Extremist, a dignified living. The Left wing extremist in India considers Leninism as the advanced stage of the Marxism and Maoism as the next stage of the Marxism-Leninism.

The major contribution of Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels to the socialist theory of Marxism is the introduction of dialectical materialism. According to Marx and his associate it is a “method and outlook” which teaches to see the contradiction within the society and how these contradictions has run the course of history. This approach and the doctrine of surplus value gave rise to the theory of Class struggle and the exploitation of have not’s by have’s. They also defined matter as “material reality existing objectively and that it gets reflected in human consciousness”. Their theory of social sciences asserted that nothing remains unknown forever there by eliminating the theory of divine power. They emphasized that the labor and laborers is the most essential part of human history and their exploitation is the major reasons for the social and economic imbalances that were prevalent throughout the world. They formulated the doctrine of proletariat struggle which argued that if the most oppressed of the class struggle comes to the governing position through proletariat revolution and form proletariat dictatorship over the country they will work towards a classless society, having known the cruelties of the class system more than anyone, called communism. The formation of this theory marked a new beginning mainly in Europe but generally all over the world. This has led to the strengthening of workers union all over Europe and formation of communist party in almost all the major industrialized countries but almost all the countries took the reform road and were satisfied with token or genuine reforms. This theory was completely put into practice in 1917 in Russia by Lenin.

Until Lenin put the theory of Marxism into practice the theory was considered dogmatic but Lenin changed it according to the concrete conditions of the Russia and applied it lively to best serve the interest of the Russian Revolution. The following aspects can be considered as the contribution of Lenin to Marxism which is popularly known as Marxism-Leninism that has direct link to the ultra-left in India. They are:

1. Revolutionary violence as the only means of overthrowing the state which acts as an instrument of exploitation in the hands of bourgeois classes.
2. Marxism was developed during the period of free consumption but Lenin developed it when imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism, was at its peak and so he asserted revolution anywhere. This theory led the bi-polar world order in the most part of the 21 century.
3. When Marx and Engel’s propounded this theory they were concerned only about the industrial capitals and hubs and so the industrial workers remained as their major focus group but when Lenin applied it in Russia which had a considerable peasant population he argued that the alliance between proletariat and peasant population with the proletariat in the lead as the important criteria for victory of the Revolution.
4. He stressed the importance of a genuine revolutionary political party and how the party alone is a weapon in the hands of proletariat struggling for power. He considered party as the highest form of organization and the outcome of the revolution depends on consolidation of the party.
5. His major contribution that guided the Chinese revolution was the concept of two stage revolution. Currently the left wing extremist in India too is following this concept. The first stage of the revolution is to establish bourgeois democracy which then leads to the second stage of establishing a classless society.
6. Since Lenin developed Marxism out of strong opposition from within the communist party of Russia and from second international he was very strong in postulating that there is every chance for the emergence of bourgeois trends, adventurism, right opportunistic trends and revisionism in the revolutionary these enemies’ trends.
7. He recognized the right to self-determination of different nationalities and their right to cessation.

These seven unique aspects along with several aspects of Mao's thought led to the formation of first left wing extremist group that was born out of the legacy of Naxalbari and this particular party has been the inspiration of almost all the left wing Extremist parties that preaches violence as the sole means of attaining the state power. All the Left Wing Extremist that had their roots in the Naxalbari movements drew heavily on the thoughts of Mao. Unlike Marx, Engels and Lenin, Mao was from a third world country that had majority of agrarian population and was under direct rule of various imperial powers. These qualities of China and Mao's modification and development of Marxism-Leninism to fit them made Maoism more articulated in India than Marxism-Leninism alone. India ultra-left consider Maoism as a continuation and an advanced stage of Marxism-Leninism. There are three distinct contribution of Mao that was suitable to China and is being used by Indian Left Wing Extremist India. ⁶

Nature of Indian society and the importance of the countryside:

Left-wing Extremist considers Indian as a "semi-colonial and semi-feudal society with neo-colonial form of exploitation, indirect rule and control". They explain that India is semi-colonial because after the independence which is "fake in essence" the position of Colonial British rulers were replaced by many imperialist powers, particularly U.S., who exploits India through indirect means especially by exporting the goods made in their countries to India and by importing the cheap labour of Indian to their countries. These imperialist powers have established their control over almost every aspect of the Indian society and are playing vital role in every policy that are drawn by the Indian ruling classes. Instead of calling India neo-colonial they refer to it as semi-colonial because no single imperialist power exert control but a group of imperialist powers are exploiting the country according to their own needs. The major supporters of this exploitation are the comprador bureaucratic bourgeois (CBB) and the semi-feudal class of the Indian society.

British used both of the classes as their social props to exercise their rule over India. They used CBB to exercise their control in the cities and town where the colonial capital was concentrated and feudalism to control the villages with the concentration of lands in the hands of few whereas millions suffered in poverty and starvation. This set up continued even after the independence but with the change that the feudal system was changed into semi-feudal system with token and non-effective land reforms. The suffering of the rural population which mainly consists of landless and poor peasants increased with the practice of usury, sharecropping, control of agricultural inputs by evil traders and merchants and the unfair remunerative prices for agricultural products. This feudal relation of production also hinders industrial growth and pushes millions of city dwellers to live in inhuman conditions. These, feudalism, imperialism and CBB's Capitalism has become the three mountains pressing the shoulders of Indian masses. Left extremist groups in India consider that they have to defeat these three class enemies and the state that represent these class enemies through an armed revolution. With this perspective Left wing extremist in India delineates four major contradictions in India. They are between: a) Imperialism and Indian people; b) Feudalism and broad masses; c) Capital and labour; d) Ruling classes. Among these four contradictions they consider the first two as the major contradiction that will drive the revolution in the current Indian Scenario and the last two contradictions will drive the later stages of the revolution. There are eight sections of the society that they consider as the motive force of this revolution and so the parties of left wing extremism in India work around them. The country side is the base of the revolution in India. Until the success of revolution in China in 1948 Marxism and Leninism was considered as a theory for the workers in industries at the industrial hubs like cities and towns but Mao changed this concept through his Long March which was mostly in the countryside having agrarian masses. Even though they consider proletariat as the basic motive force Left Wing Extremism in India it is a countryside phenomenon and they consider agrarian revolution their organizational structure is strong and has its base in the villages. Their most famous slogan from the beginning is "land to the tillers" and it seems to be still effective. This is partly due to the failure of the government to implement the land reforms more seriously and continuously. They consider urban movements and revolutionary activities as

complementary to the rural revolutionary activities. They even exhort the party members in the cities and towns to come to work in the countryside. ⁷

CONCLUSION:

In the light of the above description, Left wing extremism (LWE) is not only law and order problem but also a great challenge to India's security. LWE mostly present in central and eastern India and gradually spreading to North East region of India. In the last few years, expert on security studies regarded LWE movement that poses the single largest threat to the country's internal security. Overtime, there has been a steep increase in the LWE rebels. However, the level of violence and number of the Naxalite related incidents have, more or less remained broadly at the same level during the past few years. Maoist control almost 40 percent of the country's territory. There have been no changes in the vital objective: seizure of political power or state power. The real aim of LWE is neither the domain of economics nor state welfare. It is a political movement having its goal as the seizure of political power e. i state power. Violent activities of LWE are shifting from rural and jungle to town areas and thus pose serious challenge to Indian polity and rule of law; they pose an ideological threat that question to India's legitimacy of the Indian state. Violent activities of LWE are biggest stumbling blocks for the progress of the nation and hence cannot be allowed to flourish in Indian society.

END NOTES

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