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Research Papers

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## Naxal Movement in India: A Geographical Overview and Analysis

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### Abstract

*The present study aims to explore nature and causes of the internal conflict of Left wing extremism by briefly reviewing the recent history of Naxalism/Maoism in India, the ideology of the Movement and understanding closely the relationships between the Movement and the society. With some brief remarks about the current responses of the Indian state to the Maoists and close scrutiny of the historical and ideological origins of the movement, it is clear that the movement thrives on the dissatisfaction of the marginalized sections of the society. The socio-economic perspective of Naxalism throws light on how the rebel movement is shaped due to the failure of the institutional mechanisms and frameworks to deliver socio-economic justice.*

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### INTRODUCTION

The Naxalites are groups involved in violent struggles against landlords, the government and people who, according to them, control all means of production. They believe that only a violent struggle will effectively end the oppression and exploitation of landless workers and tribes and create a classless society.

The Naxalites aim to change the face of India, which, in their opinion, cannot be considered free as long as parts of its population are hungry and deprived. The root cause of this, they believe, is the merciless exploitation of the working class by landlords, industrialists and tradesmen. Their fight is not against individuals, but against the entire system.

### THE EVOLUTION

During the Cold War, increasing differences between China and the Soviet Union resulted in a split in the Communist Movement the world over. Out of this split emerged the Naxal movement in India. Ideologically, the Naxalites are followers of Maoism, the basic tenets of which urge the “oppressed classes” to launch a revolution against the “exploiting classes”.

In 1967, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) consented to contesting elections and forming a coalition government in West Bengal. Disillusioned by this, a group of party activists, led by Charu Majumdar and Kanu Sanyal, staged a violent uprising against the party leadership. The uprising was triggered off in Naxalbari village in West Bengal when hired goons attacked a tribal who had been granted a piece of land by the court. In retaliation, the local farmers and the rebelling party activists attacked the landlords. The term “Naxal” has its origins in the name of this village. Majumdar, a great fan of Chinese leader Mao Zedong, urged Indian farmers and lower classes to overthrow the government and upper classes whom he held responsible for their plight. His writings were the foundation of Naxal

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Review Of Research (FEB ; 2012)

ideology, with the 'Historic Eight Documents' being the cornerstones.

In 1967 the Naxalites began breaking away from the mother party, the CPI (M) and established the All India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries (AICCCR). Two years later, the AICCCR re-emerged as the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist). Today, the CPI (M-L) is the political face of the Naxal Movement in India. The People's War Group and the Maoist Communist Centre are the two principle Naxal organizations that indulge in violent uprisings.

### THE GEOGRAPHICAL AREA OF INFLUENCE

The Naxalites, a name taken from Naxalbari district in West Bengal where the movement began in 1967, have spread to 160 of India's 604 administrative districts. The Naxalites functioned outside the parliamentary system, organising uprisings among landless workers in West Bengal, Bihar and Andhra Pradesh. They spread to the mineral-rich areas of Orissa, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand. The two armed wings, People's War Group (PWG) and the Maoist Communist Centre, combined to form one front: Communist party of India (Maoist).

The People's War Group's activities extend over Andhra Pradesh, parts of Orissa and the eastern regions of Maharashtra. Bihar, Jharkhand and northern Chhattisgarh are under the influence of the Maoist Communist Centre.

With a force of 15,000 soldiers, it controls an estimated fifth of India's forests. The eventual aim is to capture the Indian state.



**Fig.1 Area influenced by Naxalite Movement**

The geographical expanse of the area is often referred to as the Red Corridor, given the near seamless integration of interlinking districts across states and the relative fluidity with which the extremists have been able to follow the path of least resistance for both offensive manoeuvres and existential retrograde tactical retreats. The geographical spread is further enhanced by the lack of integration of states and a unified approach to combating LWE. These regions have the added advantage of a relatively thick forest cover. The overall inaccessibility of their chosen territories allows the Naxalites to successfully pull off covert operations.

Another, rather interesting, fact is that these regions are in the interior parts of the country. One could infer, therefore, that the Naxalites cannot depend on support from outside the country. That they exist in spite of this is testimony to the fact that they enjoy local support. Whether this support comes from a genuine belief in Naxal ideology or out of fear is a matter of debate.

**MAIN FEATURES**

The disturbing features of the movement are

- Spread over a large geographical area
- Increase in potential for violence
- Unification of PW and MCCI
- Plan to have a Red Corridor
- Nexus with other extremist groups

**NAXALISM: VISION & REALITY**

When the Naxal uprising began in 1967, the Indian government looked at it as a law and order problem. It did not analyze the causes of the movement and the extent of mobilization of people. Hence, it believed that it could and would put an end to it in a short span of time using force. “During the outbreak of the armed clashes in Naxalbari, the then Home Minister Y B Chavan, addressing the Lok Sabha on June 13, 1967, described them as mere “lawlessness” – a transgression to be repressed and contained. So, while Charu Mazumdar named the 1970's the “Decade of liberation”, the Indian state chose to make it the “decade of repression”.

The government chose to react based on the latter point and so launched a massive police operation that drove the movement underground and brought most of its leaders under police custody within four months of the uprising. The emergency in 1975 was a period of complete discretion to the state authorities to crush the movement. It led to the legitimization of violation of human rights by the state. But ironically, the movement arose again in a more violent form after the emergency. Police excesses like extra-judicial killings and extortion, misappropriation and harassment of the Naxal support base are public secrets, which governments have turned a blind eye to.

The Governments have enacted several laws to empower themselves to combat Naxals. The West Bengal Government enacted the West Bengal (Prevention of Violent Activities) Act 1970 to arm itself to repress the uprising. No particular national act has been enacted so far specifically to counter the Naxal movement, but various 'anti-terror' acts have been used to curb Naxal violence and too often, to target sympathizers by stamping them as Naxalites. This trend was followed in several other states also.

However, in spite of the government's muscle power and legal teeth, the Naxal movement has continued to spread its base because the rural poor and oppressed identify with its ideology. In other words, its inception, ideology, spread and sustenance are deeply rooted in socio-economic factors.

**SOCIO-ECONOMIC MILIEU OF NAXALISM**

The Naxalism came into being as a result of the under mentioned prevailing social and economic issues:

**i) Alarming Poverty:** All the regions in which the Naxal movement took hold are ones with alarming levels of poverty. In Telangana, in the districts of Karimnagar, Adilabad and Warangal poverty was 95.8% while in the rest of the state it was between 50 and 60 per cent.

**ii) Social Exclusion:** After independence, the Indian government pursued agricultural policies focused on massively improving output without doing enough to check economic and social disparity. With the commercialization of agriculture, economic disparities widened. The rich got richer and the poor got poorer. The attempt of the government to abolish zamindari created a class of rich peasants from the backward classes. With the spread of communist ideology, there was greater mobilization of the sharecroppers (bargadars) and landless laborers, who mostly belonged to the so called lower castes and tribes. This polarized the agrarian classes and created an environment of confrontation.

**iii) Failure of Land Reforms:** The main objective of land reform was social transformation. The failure of land reform was the macro-issue that affected both social and economic conditions of the people. The Naxalbari upsurge was sparked by the fact that in spite of the United Front being in power in the state, land reforms were still ineffectual. Its sustenance was fuelled by class and caste tensions and the sense of desperation due to the prevailing economic and social conditions.

**iv) Social Inequity and Exploitation**

The oppressed classes were not only exploited as sharecroppers and landless labourers by the landlords - they also fell prey to money lenders. The groups constituting the sharecroppers and the landless laborers wanted a new social order with equity and the landed classes wanted to retain the prestige and status that was associated with the zamindars under the old system .

**v) Alienation of Forest Land**

Alienation of Tribal land was a major issue that crippled their economic welfare. Alienation happened largely because of the money-lenders' trap but also because of the government's restrictions of access to forest land, traditionally the exclusive domain of the tribals. In implementing government regulations on forest access, government officials resorted to harassment of the tribals. Loss of access to forest produce which had constituted a significant part of their income and was also an integral part of their way of life, led to deep discontentment among the tribes. The people who were most affected by the status quo, therefore, were the fuel for the Naxalist fire.

**vi) Landless Agricultural Labourers & Tribals**

The policies of the state disturbed the equilibrium in tribal society. Their social structure was also more conducive to mass mobilization. In West Bengal, the bases of the Naxals at Naxalbari, Phansidewa and Kharibari were mainly inhabited by the Santhal, Oraon and Rajbhanshi tribes . They were the hardest hit by the agricultural commercialization and the government's forest policy. They also bore the brunt of social oppression. Their egalitarian social organization was very conducive to mass mobilization. The landless everywhere share the same woes. The Naxal cadres also hailed from the classes of agricultural workers, sharecroppers and tenants.

**vii) Urban: Middle Class Youth**

The Naxalist movement found enormous support among the educated youth. With the onset of the recession, which signalled the coming of the general crisis of the capitalist path of development, that India had been placed upon for the past two decades, the problem of employment and of careers loomed large for these sections of the student community for the first time. Their sense of disillusionment and the fiery idealism of youth directed them to Naxalist ideology. The repression of Naxalism during the emergency also attracted a large number of youth to Naxalism as a rebellious reaction to the government's oppression. Naxalism appealed to each of these groups for different reasons.

**GOVT.'S RESPONSE IN TACKLING NAXALISM**

Government have prepared a 14-Point Plan to deal with the problem. The salient features of the policy are as follows:

- deal sternly with the Naxals indulging in violence
- address the problem simultaneously on political, security and development fronts in a holistic manner
- ensure inter-state coordination in dealing with the problem
- accord priority to faster socio-economic development in the Naxal affected or prone areas
- supplement the efforts and resources of the affected states on both security and development fronts
- promote local resistance groups against the Naxals
- use mass media to highlight the futility of Naxal violence and the loss of life and property caused by it
- have a proper surrender and rehabilitation policy for the Naxals
- affected states not to have any peace dialogue with the Naxal groups unless the latter agree to give up violence and arms

**ADMINISTRATIVE MEASURES:**

**i) Security related expenditure scheme (SRE)** – The SRE scheme envisages reimbursing the expenditure incurred by the state on ammunition, training, upgradation of police posts, etc. At present 76 districts in 9 states badly affected by Naxal violence are covered by this scheme.

**ii) Strengthening of law enforcement** - This includes raising India Reserve Battalions to strengthen the security apparatus at the state level and also releasing funds under the Police Modernization Scheme

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Review Of Research (FEB ; 2012)



to the states to modernize their police forces in terms of weaponry, communication equipment and other infrastructure.

**iii) Backward Districts Initiative (BDI) and Backward Regions Grant Fund (BRGF)** – The government has included 55 Naxal affected districts in 9 states under the Backward Districts Initiative (BDI) component of the Rashtriya Sam Vikas Yojana (RSVY). The BRGF scheme covers a total of 250 districts and is to be administered by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj. The scheme should accelerate socio-economic development in these 250 districts.

**iv) Task Force** – A Task Force has been constituted in the Home Ministry to deliberate upon the steps needed to deal with Naxalism more effectively and in a coordinated manner. The members of the Task Force comprise Nodal Officers of the Naxal affected states and representatives of the IB, CRPF and the SSB.

**v) Coordination Centre** – A Coordination Centre was set up in 1998 headed by the Union Home Secretary with Chief Secretaries and DGPs of Naxal affected states as its members. It reviews and coordinates the steps taken by the states to control Naxal activities.

**vi) Empowered Group of Ministers** – At a meeting of the Chief Ministers held on September 5, 2006, it was decided to set up an Empowered Group of Ministers (EGoM) headed by the Home Minister and comprising select Union Ministers and Chief Ministers to closely monitor the spread of Naxalism and evolve effective strategies to deal with the problem.

#### RECENT SOCIAL INITIATIVES

**i) The Backward Districts Initiative, 2003:** The government started the Backward Districts initiative in 2003-2004 and the Backward Regions Grant Fund (BRGF) under which 55 of the worst affected areas in 9 states were to be provided with funds to the tune of Rs. 2475 crores to tackle the problem of Naxalism. Around 250 districts have been included the BRGF scheme to accelerate socio-economic development in these districts which is to be administered by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj.

**ii) Rehabilitation and Resettlement Policy, 2007** - The Government of India announced a new rehabilitation policy on October 11, 2007 to make the displacement of people for industrial growth a less painful experience. Land in return for land for displaced families, preference in project jobs to at least a member of each family, vocational training, scholarships for children and housing benefits including houses to affected families in rural and urban areas are some of the benefits under the new policy.

**iii) Forest Rights Act, 2006** - The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, (popularly Forest Rights Act) is a significant step in recognizing and vesting the forest rights of scheduled tribes and other traditional forest dwellers who have been residing in such forests for generations but whose rights could not be recorded. It provides a framework for recording the forest rights so vested.

**iv) National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2006** – The NREGA is the largest ever employment programme visualized in human history. It holds out the “prospect of transforming the livelihoods of the poorest and heralding a revolution in rural governance in India”. However, as brought out by the CAG report, there are “significant deficiencies” in implementation of the Act. There is lack of adequate administrative and technical manpower at the block and gram panchayat levels. This affects the preparation of plans, scrutiny, approval, monitoring and measurement of works, and maintenance of the stipulated records at the block and gram panchayat levels.

**v) Other schemes:** Various Other schemes launched have been launched by the government like the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) which offers tremendous opportunities for rural road connectivity. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (NREGP) is being implemented in 330 districts affected by Naxalism so as to universalize the demand-driven programme for wage-

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employment. Other schemes which are in addition to the above mentioned schemes are Bharat Nirman, National Rural Health mission (NRHM), Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and other income generating and social security schemes of the Ministry of Rural Development, Agriculture, Panchayati Raj and Tribal affairs. The central government will also provide 100 percent assistance in the formation of Ashram schools and hostels for girls and boys in tribal areas .

### SUGGESTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The Central government should form a separate ministry which will undertake the development of the areas affected by the Naxal activities. The following steps ought to be taken by the government:

- Ensure the safety of the civilians by stopping the Salwa Judum campaign and ensuring that no counter insurgency measures are taken by risking the lives of the civilians.
- Checking instances of human rights violation by the security forces and the Salwa Judum.
- Use of police forces should be to enforce the land ceiling laws, evict landlords and ensure land to the farmers for cultivation. They should be provided with police protection, and proper rehabilitation for the people who have been displaced should be ensured.
- Registering the crimes perpetrated by the security forces, Salwa Judum and the Maoists and bringing them to justice. Banning of Bal Mandal (The child division of Naxalites) with immediate effect.
- Ensuring safety of those who surrendered and those who lived in camps or were related with Salwa Judum activities.
- Security as well as development has to run hand in hand to counter the Naxal problem. Using force against the tribals to deter them from joining the Naxals has and will backfire against the government.

### CONCLUSION

The credit for the survival of the movement for over 40 years must go to the Government, which has failed abysmally in addressing the causes and conditions that sustain the movement. The problem has been in the Indian state's perception of the causes of the Naxal movement.

The state has to do much more than plan counter-insurgency operations or support violent vigilante groups to suppress the Naxalite movement.

After close examination of the historical and ideological origins of the movement, it is clear that the movement thrives on the dissatisfaction of the marginalized and alienates the population. The socio-economic perspective of Naxalism talks about how the rebel movement is shaped due to the failure of the institutional mechanisms and frameworks to deliver socio-economic justice.

It is clear that there is a wide gap between promises and their eventual deliverance. Until the government implements employment, poverty alleviation and land reform programmes, counter-insurgency measures cannot achieve much.

Social justice and inclusive growth are the planks on which the government must build its programme. Only with consolidated efforts on the part of the legal and political framework socio-economic reforms can be implemented, and the problem of Naxalism tackled.

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