

AN INSIGHT INTO THE PROBLEM OF NAXALISM IN INDIA

Abhishek Kumar¹

INTRODUCTION

Maoists constituted even a greater threat to India than militancy in Jammu and Kashmir and the northeast.² The government data in the past decades (2005-2015) throw horrific figures about the state of India's anti-naxal operations: 4510 people, 1753 jawans and 2757 civilians were killed by naxalites. During the same period, however, the security forces also killed 2,193 naxalites. According to the Ministry of Home Affairs, in the first three months of 2015, around 19 informers, responsible for gathering and disseminating human intelligence were killed. Between 2010 and 2014, the figure was 879.³

Today, the naxal insurgency has spread to cover a large part of the country, from the Himalayas to right down to the south. Many of the states are adversely affected by it. The red corridor which runs through the dense forest and tribal belt from Nepal through Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and all the way to Andhra Pradesh and to the upper reaches of Maharashtra, and some parts of Karnataka, is the main action area of the naxals. This is the main operation area of the naxals because this area consists mainly of dense forest where naxals can plan out their activities with minimum resistance from the police. About 170 districts falling under the dreaded "Red Corridor", also known as the Dandekaran Belt, are reeling under the Maoist terror.

The Ministry of Home Affairs states that 223 districts in 20 states are affected by it. Seven of these states are severely affected. Within the public discourse, this particular region is referred to as "Red Corridor" and comprises the least developed and poorest regions of India with a noticeable high amount of tribal population (Adivasis), Untouchables (Dalits) and

¹ Abhishek Kumar is an independent researcher.

² Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's speech at the annual conference of the Directors-General of Police/Inspectors-General of Police and heads of CPOs, New Delhi, November 4, 2004, Prime Minister's Office, Available at: <https://pmindia.nic.in/speeches.html> (last visited on March 3, 2016).

³ Available at: www.newindianexpress.com/magazine/Police-vs-Maoists-Are-Indian-Security-Forces-Strong-Against-Naxals/2015/04/25/article2779418.ece (last visited on March 3, 2016).

other vulnerable groups. The poor, exploited and discontented are mobilized by the Maoist leadership.⁴

The naxal nuisance has grown up to such an extent that it is posing a serious threat to India's development and progress. The direct target of the naxals has always been the government. The nature of Naxal violence has undergone a sea change in the recent years. Small scale isolated attacks have been replaced by large scale, well-organized and calculated attacks on the government apparatus. The people's struggle has unfortunately transformed into power struggle.

AN OVERVIEW OF DEADLY NAXAL ATTACKS IN INDIA

- **Attack on Chandra Babu Naidu (October, 2003):** There was an attempt by naxals to assassinate Chandrababu Naidu on his way to Tripuati. A Few seconds delay made by the naxals save his life but a few of his colleagues and some security personnel were injured.
- **Naxal Attack in Koraput (2004):** In an operation by naxals which continued for 6 hours, 1000 Maoists attached the Orrisa's district headquarter of Koraput and looted 2000 sophisticated weapons, and 60,000 rounds of ammunitions. The looted the district armory, 5 police station, S.P's office, Koraput Jail.
- **Jahanabad Jail break (2005):** In a naxal operation which continued for 7 hours, Maoists freed about 375 prisoners out of which 130 were naxals. The security personals could do nothing. Around 185 rifles and 2000 rounds of ammunitions were looted. The Whole town of Jehanabad remained under the capture of the Maoists on that fateful night.
- **Attack at Udyagiri (Feb, 2006):** In March, 2006 Maoists lashed with arms and ammunition attacked the Orrisa arms police Camp at Udyagiri in Gajapati district of

⁴ Available at:
https://in.boell.org/sites/default/files/downloads/Naxalism__The_Maoist_Challenge_to_the_Indian_State__by_Lennart_Bendfeldt.pdf (last visited on March 6, 2016).

Orrisa. Arms were looted and 40 prisons were freed. There were more than 500 Maoists involved.

- **Chhatisgarh Naxal Attack (2006):** A village in Dantewara District of Chhatisgarh was attacked by naxals where around 25 people were killed and 80 were injured. Some of the villagers were hacked to death while few others were charred to death and another 20 people were kidnapped.
- **Attack on Police base Camp at Chattishgarh (2007):** 55 persons including 16 personnel of the Chattishgarh armed force were killed in the naxal attack on the police base camp Rani Bondli Village of Bijapur district, Chattishgarh.
- **Naxal attack at Dantewara Village (2007):** The naxal attack at Dantewara freed 303 prisoners out of which 100 were naxalites. The weapons of prison guards were also looted.
- **Killing of son of former Jharkhand Chief Minister (2007):** The killing of Son of former Jharkhand Chief Minister along with 18 other by the naxals took place while they were watching a cultural program at Gridihi district in Jharkhand.
- **Nayagarh Naxal attack (2008):** The naxal attack at Nayagarh was known as mother of all naxal attacks. Hundreds of Maoists came in buses and trucks and captured on district headquarter town of Nayagarh district in Orrisa, which is only 90 minutes from the state capital Bhubneshwar. Since no naxal activities were reported in this area in the past, therefore, this incident came as a shock for the government.
- On June 29, 2008, the attack on the combined Andhra Pradesh and Orissa Police parties in Chitrakonda reservoir of Malkangiri District in Orissa, resulted in the killings of 35 security forces personnel belonging to the elite “Greyhounds” force of Andhra Police.

- In June 2009, a group of motorcycle-borne armed Naxal opened fire on Lakhisarai district court premises in Bihar and freed four of their comrades including the self-style Zonal Commander of Ranchi.
- On April 6, 2010, Maoist rebels killed 75 CRPF personnel in a jungle ambush in central India, the most security forces ever killed by the insurgents in a single conflict.
- On December 1, 2014, 14 CRPF personnel including 2 officers Deputy Commandant B.S Verma and Assistsnt commandant Rajesh Kauria were killed in the Sukma district of South Chhattisgarh in a Maoist ambush.⁵
- In May 2013, around 250 Naxals in civilian clothes struck a convoy of Congress leaders during the party's Parivartan Rally in Chhattisgarh's Jagdalpur on Saturday, killing at least 25 people, including state Congress chief Nand Kumar Patel and senior party leader Mahendra Karma.⁶

ORIGIN AND CAUSES OF NAXAL PROBLEM IN INDIA

In the year 1967, revolutionary and violent activities started from the village “*Naxalbari*”, in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal. Hence, it is called “*Naxalism*” and the supporters are called naxalites. In a remote village called “*Naxalbari*” in West Bengal, a tribal youth named “*Bimal Kissan*”, having obtained a judicial order, went to plough his land on March 2, 1967. The local landlords attacked him with the help of their goons. The tribal people of the area retaliated and started forcefully recapturing their lands. What followed was a rebellion, within a short span of about two months, this incident acquired great visibility and tremendous support from the cross sections of communist revolutionaries belonging to the state units of the CPI(M) in West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Uttar

⁵ Available at: https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/13-crpf-men-killed-inmaoist-ambush-in-chhattisgarh/article6651913.ece?homepage=true&utm_source=MostPopular&utm_medium=Homepage&utm_campaign=WidgetPromo. (last visited on March 6, 2016).

⁶ Available at: <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/chhattisgarh-naxal-attack-top-state-congress-leaders-among-25-killed-523359>. (last visited on March 12, 2016).

Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir.⁷ Thus, the naxalite movement gradually became immensely popular in the least developed areas.

Many more small and big incidents have been reported in the past years which show that the naxal insurgency is gaining momentum with the passage of time. A lot of normal activities in the agricultural and farm sector have also been brought to a standstill by the tactics of “*land redistribution*” adopted by the Naxalites. This comprises the simple expedient of planting a red flag on a large chunk of land, and notifying the landlords that any attempt to cultivate these would attract reprisals. They openly oppose and disrupt major ongoing developmental projects, while others are compromised as a result of huge extortion demands.

On the one hand, they frown at the lack of development but on the other, they are hampering developmental plans of the government to come to a standstill particularly in the rural areas wherein they have a strong foothold. The stiff resistance is being felt on their behalf as regards the construction of roads and communication links in the backward and tribal areas as the well-being of the poor would repose their faith in the institutions of democracy and constitutional governance.⁸ Therefore, they target the government institutions and offices. Their main operating ground is “*red corridor*” itself, which is very rich in natural resources.

In Jharkhand, the Naxalites have been destroying all such buildings that could provide shelter to security personnel whether these were school buildings, panchayat bhavans, community centers and any house big enough to shelter a police picket⁹. The vast railway network of the country has been the worst hit by the naxalites’ rampage against development. The government-owned NMDC¹⁰ came under the naxalite attack several times. The individuals and companies responsible for the construction of roads and communications are also being targeted specifically.

In this regard, the Constitution of India ensures to all of its citizens equality and equal protection before law.¹¹ Justice includes social, economic and political justice. Liberty covers, liberty of thoughts, expression, belief, faith and worship. Equality, which extends to

⁷ *History of Naxalism*: Hindustan Times, March 17, 2010.

⁸ The Rediff Interview: Dr. Vara Vara Rao, op. ci.

⁹ “*Security shelter on rebel radar*”- Maoists target and destroy buildings used by police to take cover and rest, *The Telegraph*, May 3, 2006.

¹⁰ National Mineral Development Corporation.

¹¹ The Constitution of India, art. 14.

the equality of status and opportunity, fraternity assuring the dignity of the individuals and the unity and integrity of the nation.¹² The framers of the constitution dreamt of a country wherein peace, democracy and rule of law could prevail. They thought of a nation where there would be equality, non-discrimination and a healthy environment for all.

The constitution of India is the supreme law of the land. It is known as the mother of all laws. All the laws legislated in the country are based on constitutional provisions. It contains provisions for the protection of all of its citizens. Minorities are also protected by the articles 30(2)¹³ and 350A¹⁴ of the constitution. Equality before law and equal protection of law shall be provided to all the citizens.¹⁵ The state is empowered to make special provisions for the advancement of socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.¹⁶ It is duty of the state to provide free and compulsory education to all children between the age group of 6-14 years.¹⁷

The state in one way or the other has remained failure to comply with the provisions mentioned under the constitution due to which the people do not get the thing for which they are entitled to. Therefore, the SC in this context rightly observes in the case of *“Nandini Sundar and Ors.v. State of Chhattisgarh”*¹⁸ that *“The State itself should feel committed to the democratic and human rights and humane objectives that are inscribed in the Preamble, the Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles of the Constitution. The State has to adhere strictly to the Rule of Law. Indeed, the State has no other authority to rule. There will be peace, harmony and social progress only if there is equity, justice and dignity for everyone.”*

A section of the society was exploited and suppressed. This section consisted mostly of the peasants.¹⁹ The feudal system which started during the reign of the British continued to strengthen its grip by large scale exploitation of the poor which has given rise to the gap

¹² Preamble to the Constitution of India.

¹³ The State shall not, in granting aid to educational institutions, discriminate against any educational institution on the ground that it is under the management of a minority, whether based on religion or language.

¹⁴ It shall be the endeavor of every State and of every local authority within the State to provide adequate facilities for instruction in the mother-tongue at the primary stage of education to children belonging to linguistic minority groups; and the President may issue such directions to any State as he considers necessary or proper for securing the provision of such facilities.

¹⁵ The Constitution of India, art. (14).

¹⁶ The Constitution of India, art15 (4).

¹⁷ The Constitution of India, art. 21(A).

¹⁸ (2011) 7 SCC 547.

¹⁹ Vennletesh Athreya, *“Myth of Socialism”*, Frontline, volume 27, February 26, 2010.

between the rich and the poor with the passage of time. The landlords amassed a large chunk of wealth by exploitation of the poor farmers. Atrocities on the farmers kept on increasing. They continued to grow on the blood of depleted farmers.

The farmers were forcefully evicted from their own lands, and they were forcefully made to work without proper wages or even without any wages at all. The exploitation of their families also started to take place. The women and the children of the poor farmers were made to work for the feudal lords. The social and the economic differences widened and with this all, the resentment and dissatisfaction among the weaker section also grew. The rich grew richer and the poor became poorer gradually.

The land reform laws were legislated with noble intentions, but they could not be implemented in the right perspective, due to the influence of powerful landlords who had a say in the political set up of the country. As a result of which, the laws did not meet the expectation of uplifting the socio-economic condition in the society. The poor peasants feel that even the government could do nothing to ameliorate their condition. Thus, the above-mentioned causes played a pivotal role in giving push to the naxal movement.

Repression and violence against population forms a fertile ground for rebellious ideologies. India's naxal problem is complex and tends to find its justification in the deep-rooted and centuries-old exploitation of the poor, particularly the tribal community, by the local landlords and the corrupt politicians. There is a high graph of crimes committed against the tribal community. These include bonded labor, rape of women and girls, and silencing any opposition or dissent by murder and other violence. The landlords who commit these evils escape prosecution and punishment due to the support of corrupt and failing state agencies.

BLUEPRINTS TO MITIGATE THE NAXAL PROBLEM IN INDIA

One of the major issues involved with the naxal problem is whether it is a law and order problem or socio-economic problem. The law and order problem as well as socio-economic problem cannot be segregated totally and can be declared as the sole reasons for the said problem. Both the issues are contributory factors for the growing menace of naxal issue. Naxalism, a euphemism for the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist revolutionary movement in India,

drawing the nomenclature from an unheard of village, Naxalbari in West Bengal that became the epicenter of tribal-peasant revolt in the spring of 1967.²⁰ Looking at the origin of the problem, we find that the issue started as a movement against merciless landlords, who exploited the poor peasants, levied illegal taxes from them, and forced them to work without proper wages. The increasing economic inequality triggered the movement and thereafter it gradually gained momentum.

Economic inequality increased the social differences among the people. The rich class became richer and socially more forward and the poor became poorer and socially more backward. Naxalism started as a socio-economic problem but with the course of time, became a serious law and order problem. Various developmental projects have also been initiated by the governments but no effort could bring about desired results in this direction.

The government lays more emphasis on treating it as a law and order problem. It is more concerned with the security-related aspect of the threat of naxalism. Armed forces in a large number have been deployed to fight in the naxal-affected areas. There have been killings from both the sides. Only security-centric efforts cannot achieve fruitful results. Basic developmental issues are required to be taken into consideration to solve this problem in the future to come. Of course, a minimum enforcement of law and order is an essential prerequisite, there should also be efforts for developing tribal and other under-developed areas.²¹

It is an irony that most of the “*Red Corridor*” areas are not only extremely poor, but extremely rich in resources like coal, uranium, bauxite and other minerals also, with enough land for potential factories and advanced and efficient farming. Had all the resources which lie wasted in the red corridor region been used, it could have added much to the productivity and development of our nation.²² The Naxal issue is complex, wide-spread and rooted in local factors. It is near to impossible to end naxalism just by deploying the military into villages and jungles. It won't help to declare Naxals as terrorists and book suspects under harsh laws.²³

²⁰ Red Corridor or Red Belt? Naxal Resurgence in India-Bidyut Chakrabarty, March 21, 2007- Opinion Asia.

²¹ Manmohan Singh at a press conference during his visit to Pittsburg to attend G-20 summit Sep 26, 2009.

²² “*The real solution for naxalism*”-Abheek Barman, Tuesday 17th Nov, 2009, the Economic Times.

²³ *Ibid.*

Moreover, constitutional responsibility has been casted upon the Government of India,²⁴ for the development and protection of those who are socially and economically backward.²⁵ Moreover, the Constitution prohibits the arbitrary use of force or restrictions on individual liberties by the state. Hence, it is the duty of the government to strive for the removal of social and economic disparity first.

INITIATIVES TO TACKLE NAXAL PROBLEM

- **Salwa Judum:** The supporters of this campaign translate its meaning as “*Peace Campaign*.” The Naxalites on their part stated that Salwa means “*group*” and Judum means “*hunting*”; and therefore, they say, Salwa Judum is a group hunting of the innocent Adivasis supporting the “*People’s Movement*”, the movement of the Naxalites. It started as a socio-political move to counter the Red menace but it made the tribal even more vulnerable than they were. A large number of innocents were killed both by the Maoists and the judums. The activists are trying to make the government stop the campaign.²⁶
- **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.
- **Forest Right’s Act, 2006:** The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, (popularly known as 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. It should be ensured by the implementing agencies that only the forest

²⁴ The Constitution of India, art. 15(4).

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Salwa Judum- menace or messiah?*– Times of India, March 20, 2010.

dwelling tribal and scheduled castes should have access to forest lands. Others should be prevented from entering the forests.

- **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, there are significant deficiencies in implementations of the Act. There is a 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.
- **Setting up of Bandhopadhyay Committee:** In July 2006, the Planning Commission set up a 16-member expert group headed by D.Bandhopadhyay, Chairman of Council for Social Development, to study the causes of Naxalism and suggest remedial measures. The committee was mandated to look into issues like: widespread displacement, insecure tenancies and other forms of exploitation like: usury and land alienation and suggest measures to improve the abysmally low social and human development indicators, an appropriate strategy for ensuring peace and life with dignity, upgradation of the levels of governance and strengthen public delivery system, health and food security vis-à-vis the existing Central and state legislations and steps to ensure efficient implementation of panchayats in scheduled areas.²⁷

CONCLUSION

Naxalites and their ideologies often influence the minds of the deprived and downtrodden people living in rural areas wherein the scope of employment and development is minimal. Their revolutionary trend has taken the shape of an organization whose members are ready to struggle resorting to violence disturbing peace and tranquility of the society. They have the

²⁷ "Panel to look into causes of Naxalism", The Indian Express, July 5, 2006.

plans of seizing political power through armed violence. They display a robust will and determination of purpose.²⁸

The CPI-Maoists construct a shadow-state, complete with taxes, regulations, and courts, all ostensibly for the betterment of disenfranchised dalit peasants and tribal groups.²⁹ Lopsided economic development, urban-centric policies have further impoverished and marginalized the rural poor, a large number of whom are tribal and poor dalits whose lives revolve around the jungle and villages for livelihood.³⁰

Poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, social injustice and caste system have given birth to the Naxals or the Maoists as they are called in India.³¹ Therefore, the SC has rightly observed in the case of **“Nandini Sundar and Ors. v. State of Chhattisgarh”**³² that *“violent agitator politics, and armed rebellion in many pockets of India have intimate linkages to socio-economic circumstances, endemic inequalities, and a corrupt social and state order that preys on such inequalities has been well-recognized. In fact, the Union of India has been repeatedly warned of the linkages. It is also a well-known fact that government reports understate, in staid prose, the actuality of circumstances.”*

The growth of naxalism compels us to look at what causes this sense of alienation among certain sections of the community, especially the tribal community. It could be indicative of the deficiencies in the pace of development.³³ Many of these problems have to do with one simple fact: the people living in these areas are tribal who, on paper, receive special rights and privileges but are actually subjected to brutal discrimination.³⁴ Naxalite activity has expanded, especially in the central and eastern tribal belt, because the state has failed to alleviate extreme poverty, prevent starvation deaths and near-starvation levels of undernourishment or provide even a modicum of elementary health care.³⁵ Given the past

²⁸ *“Naxal Threats in India: A long & Arduous Battle lies Ahead”* - By A. K. Verma. Available at: <https://www.southasiaanalysis.org/%5Cpapers36%5Cpaper3526.html> (last visited on April 24, 2016).

²⁹ Available at: <https://therearenosunglasses.wordpress.com/2009/11/21/naxalism-a-short-introduction-to-indias-scariest-security-challenge/> (last visited on March 24, 2016).

³⁰ *“Talks and development only solution to India's Naxalite problem”* Insta blog Arpita Mukherjee Sep 15 2008.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² (2011) 7 SCC 547.

³³ Manmohan singh at a press conference held at the National Centre for the Performing Arts at Bombay, October 11, 2009.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *“War on Maoists”* Frontline Volume 27- Issue 06: Mar. 13-26, 2010.

experience, the government has to be cautious in implementing developmental projects and must ensure that proper rehabilitation packages to be given to those affected by the projects. The administration at the ground level continues to remain indifferent towards their problems.³⁶

The trajectory of naxal insurgency is escalating, and if it continues at a fast pace, in the course of time, it will go totally out of control.³⁷ Naxilism has now spread to such an extent in our country as it is posing serious challenges in the developmental process. India is facing two major threats to its internal security, terrorism and naxalism.³⁸ There is an urgent need of taking up effective steps to wipe out this menace before it ruins the whole system. Moreover, it poses serious threats to the democratic set up and constructional governance of the country.

Education can play a vital role in bringing about sustainable change over a period of time because it is change which is owned by affected and participating stakeholders.³⁹ Education and health programs⁴⁰ should be made readily available in the poor tribal areas. Efforts should further be made to enhance their social status so that they could reap the real fruit of rights guaranteed under the constitution of India, so far as it relates to right to equality.⁴¹ So long resentment prevails in the heart and minds of sizable section of the society no peace, social harmony and progress can be restored.

³⁶ “A Naxalite Corridor”, *frontline* Volume 22 - Issue 14, July 02 - 15, 2005.

³⁷ Lt General JFR Jacob, (retd.) former Eastern Command Chief, Governor of Goa and Punjab and administrator, Chandigarh.

³⁸ Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, in his Independence Day address to the nation, August 15, 2008.

³⁹ Available at: www.icsu.org/publications/reports-and-reviews/review-of-targets-for-the-sustainable-development-goals-the-science-perspective-2015/SDG-Report.pdf (last visited on March 24, 2016).

⁴⁰ Goal 3: Good health and well-being *UNDP*. (last visited on March 24, 2016).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*