

Naxalism in India : Socio-economic Prospects to Combat Naxalism

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One major challenge before the Indian state is that of Naxalism, a movement which has a long history and which over a period of time has expanded its influence and violent activities. From the peasant uprising in the Naxalbari village in Darjeeling district of West Bengal in May 1967, the movement today is a complex web that covers some 15 states. Latest intelligence reports say that armed Naxalites have a presence in 170 districts in 15 states of India as of now and spreading wide and far. The term “Naxal” comes from the name of the village Naxalbari in the state of West Bengal, where the movement had its origin. The Naxals are considered far left-radical communists, supportive of Maoist political sentiment and ideology. Their origin can be traced to the split in 1967 of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), leading to the formation of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist). Initially the movement had its centre in West Bengal. In later years, it spread into less-developed areas of rural, Central and Eastern India such as Chhattisgarh, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh. The Naxals blame the government for poverty, for poor development and for the absence of basic amenities in the interior areas. They accuse the government of usurping land

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in tribal areas with a view to obliging big business houses, who are encouraged to setup economic zones and given concessions for the purpose. Government's poor governance is also to be blamed as the root cause of Naxal problem. There is an adequate justification for the planned police offensive against the Naxals. However, there is no justification for the socio-economic malaise which still afflicts the country. Unless these factors of poverty, planned reforms, unemployment, corruption and alienation of tribals are addressed, police action would prove to be a temporary palliative only. In the recent years it has been noticed that the nature of Naxal violence has undergone a subtle change. Small-scale isolated attacks have been replaced by large-scale well organized attacks on the government apparatus. This really becomes a matter of concern and hence provokes one to identify the factors which are responsible for its widening base and the increase in its violent activities.

[**Keywords** : Naxalism, Tribals, Governance, Socio-economic malaise, Labourers, Maoists]

1. Introduction

One major challenge before the Indian State today is that of Naxalism, a movement which has a long history and which over a period of time has expanded its influence and violent activities. It is now spread nearly over 15 states covering about 170 districts. The then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had reiterated that left wing extremism is perhaps “the gravest internal security threat our country faces”. The Naxal movement is now more than 50 years old. The movement started in 1967 in the form of a peasant uprising, in a remote village called Naxalbari, located in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal. The term “Naxalite” refers to all forms of armed struggle that have taken up the cause of Socio-Economic development of the downtrodden rural masses. A tribal youth named Bimal Kissan, having obtained a judicial order, went to plough his land on 2nd March 1967. The local landlords attacked him with the help of their goons. Tribal people of the area retaliated and started forcefully recapturing their land. What followed was a rebellion, which left one police Sub-Inspector & nine tribal dead. Within a short span of about two months, this incident acquired great visibility & tremendous support from cross sections of communist revolutionaries belonging to the state units of the CPI (M) in W. Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, U.P. and Jammu and Kashmir.

Naxalism is the outcome of not just one factor but a number of various factors, out of which economic factors seem to be the

dominating ones. The indigenous tribal population of the Naxal affected States has been deprived of their lands. They have been uprooted from their traditional source of livelihood. The government is accused of usurping land in tribal areas with a view to obliging big business houses who are encouraged to set up economic zones and given concessions for the purpose. This problem has further increased with the impact of globalization. Several multi-national companies have started making inroads in the tribal areas owing to their resource-richness. These resources are exploited and the benefits accrued thus are not passed on to the tribals. The tribals are well aware of this. It is because of this that they are not interested in any developmental activity as it facilitates the further exploitation of their areas. This awareness generates frustration which is released in various forms of violence. They destroy roads and even attack people engaged in those companies. The state and various functionaries of the state also become the targets of their attacks. The degree of frustration and deprivation is so strong among the people that it has facilitated the rising influence of Maoists across the country.

Thus, the problem of poverty and economic inequality can be identified as vital in accelerating the pace of movement. The absolute numbers of the poor have fallen over the decades; the statistics being averages do not capture the intensity of distress in certain pockets despite the high growth in recent years. To be poor is one thing and to seem condemned to one's fate quite another. Rising incomes in the post-reform India have created a rapidly growing aspirational class but these have also contributed to an army of socio-economic orphans who have been rejected by all mainstream political parties. In addition, a contractor-politician nexus controls the wealth of the forests and pushes tribals to the margins. A repressive state apparatus, represented by the police and the black laws they use to their advantage, helps in keeping this exploitative system going.

The situation has further worsened by the opening up of the Indian economy to trade and investment; the entry of the mining companies in Orissa and Chhattisgarh poses a threat to the livelihoods of tribals and their way of life. Hence the economic exploitation of the tribals, a problem that is unattended by the political system, creates a fertile soil for the Naxals to play an important role.

According to Arundhati Roy, a Booker Prize winner writer, the greed of the Indian elite and the rising middle class is at the heart of

conflict because, she says, unlike the industrializing western countries we don't have colonies to plunder therefore "we've begun to eat our own limbs" and have started grabbing natural resources - forest land, water, minerals - from the most vulnerable (the tribals and the poorest in country). The Naxals are only fighting for the rights of the poor.

2. Objectives of the Study

This paper is an attempt to analyse the factors/causes responsible for Naxalite violent activities spread over a vast geographical area and for over a long period of time. Also, without undermining the role of other factors, it focuses on the socio-economic developmental steps taken by the government in order to combat the menace of Naxalism.

3. Factors responsible for Naxalism

3-1 Political Factors

The main factor is India's long neglect to develop the tribal areas which has created large pockets of alienation against the Government and these pockets have become the spawning ground of Maoist terrorism. After 74 years of Independence the government is unable to provide the basic necessity to the bottom half of the population. The Naxal affected states mainly are, West Bengal, Bihar, Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh etc. Here the lack of basic governance is the main problem. In These areas there is lack of education basic health-care facility, communication, banking facility etc. Therefore, the government machinery has virtually failed. Therefore, these people are alienated from the mainstream of the nation.

3-2 Discontent among the Tribals

The indigenous tribal population of the Naxal affected States has been deprived of their lands. The forest conservation act of 1980 deprives tribals, who depend on forest produce for their living from even cutting a bark. Government is accused of usurping land in tribal areas with a view to obliging big business houses who are encouraged to setup Economic Zones. Also, several Multi-National Companies have started making inroads in the tribal areas owing to their resource richness. These resources are exploited and the benefits

accrued thus are not passed on to the tribals. That tribals are well aware of this. This awareness generated frustration is released in various forms of violence. The degree of frustration and deprivation is so strong among the people that it has facilitated the rising influence of Maoist across the country.

3.3 Absence of Intelligence Network

There is poor technical intelligence when it comes to tackling Naxalism. Infrastructural problems, for instance poor road connectivity, absence of telecommunication network are some of the factors which hinders the effective action against the Naxalites,

3.4 Absence of Administrative follow-up

It is observed that even after police take hold of a region, administration fails to provide essential services to the people of that region.

3.5 Lack of Central and State Governments Co-ordination

State Governments are considering Naxalism as a central government issue and thus are not taking any initiatives to fight it.

3.6 Economic Factors

Besides above-mentioned factors, economic factors have also largely acted as a catalyst in giving momentum to the movement. Economically, the problem of poverty and economic inequality can be identified as vital in accelerating the pace of movement. The absolute numbers of the poor have fallen over the decades. The downtrodden people comprising of tribals, Dalits, landless poor are the majority of the population affected by the economic inequality. They are deprived of the basic necessities of the human life. The fruit of economic growth has not reached to them. In addition, a contractor-politician nexus controls the wealth of the forest and pushes tribals to the margins. A repressive state apparatus, represented by the police and the black laws they use to their advantage, helps in keeping this exploitative system going.

The situation has further deteriorated by the opening up of the Indian economy to trade and investment to the multinational companies. These MNC's are targeting the vast natural resources like minerals, forest products etc. The demand of forest material for the industrial development has put pressure on forest and mining

areas. Large scale displacement of inhabitants has been taking place due to establishment of large-scale mineral based industries and hydel dams. The economic exploitation of the tribals, a problem that is unattended by the political system, creates a fertile soil for the Naxals to play an important role.

4. Socio-economic Remedies

In order to comprehensively dissolve the Naxalite threat, the government has to address its root causes. Socio-economic alienation and the dissatisfaction with the widening economic and political inequality will not be solved by military force alone. The problem calls for a three-pronged solution: social and economic development, multilateral dialogue and military force.

4.1 Developmental Approach of the Government

There are four key elements in the union government's approach in dealing with the Maoist/Naxalites. These are security, public perception management, development and rehabilitation.

SAMADHAN : The NDA government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched "SAMADHAN" in May 2017. The acronym stands for the following :

- S : Smart leadership,
- A : Aggressive strategy,
- M : Motivation and training,
- A : Actionable intelligence,
- D : Dashboard based KPIS (key performance indicators) and KRAS (key result areas),
- H : Harnessing Technology,
- A : Action plan for each theatre, and
- N : No access to financing. This policy aims to hit at critical junctures in the Maoist links.

4.2 Socio-economic Development

In order to improve the socio-economic conditions of the Naxal affected areas an expert committee headed by D. Bandyopadhyay was appointed by the government of India, which carried out extensive study regarding the developmental plans.

After assessing the suggestions of the expert committee, a large number of resources were transferred to areas affected by the Maoist insurgency and left-wing extremism. The flagship Integrated Action Plan (IAP) was launched by the UPA government with a financial package of over INR 6000 crore per annum. One of the most significant steps taken by the centre to address the long-standing grievances of Adivasis are enacting few landmark legislation recognizing the rights of Adivasis to access forest for self-governance.

Another notable developmental scheme to enhance connectivity in the Maoist inaccessible areas is the Universal Services Obligation Fund (USOF) with the cost of INR 7330 crores. This novel scheme provides financial and administrative support to expand mobile services at 4072 tower locations identified by Ministry of Home Affairs in 96 districts in 10 states.

Although government has allocated large funds for the development of Naxal prone areas but still more of the national expenditure needs to be focused on developing these poorer regions through incentives regarding health, education, social welfare and rural and urban development. Government service delivery should also be improved in these tribal areas. Both state and Central government must ensure that things such as statutory minimum wages, access to land and water sources initiatives are implemented. In coming up with strategies for national economic growth, the Government must always bear in mind the possible effects of fast growth for all socio-economic groups in a country as large and diverse as India. If the social needs of these marginalized people are addressed, there will be no discontent to fuel the Naxalite's movements.

The present economic growth models are advocating that type of economic growth which is not sustainable. For example, this part of our country is mineral-rich. Therefore, MNC's are interested to exploit these areas at any cost, but at the cost of lower strata of the people. These people are the tribal people and the landless farmers. These are the persons who have to be displaced but have not gained anything in return. Therefore, large-scale dissatisfaction is arising.

5. Conclusion

Actually, there is no quick fix solution for this problem. The need of the hour is good governance. Through a holistic approach

focusing on development and security related interventions, the left-wing extremist problem can be successfully tackled. Civil society and the media should build pressure on the Maoist to eschew violence, join the mainstream and recognize the fact that the socio-economic and political dynamics and aspirations of 21st century India are far removed from the Maoist world-view.

The onus certainly falls on the government, particularly the central government, to show if it has the political will and the administrative acumen to carry out socio-developmental activities that will leave the local masses socio-economically contended. This indeed will go a long way in providing effective solution to the Naxal problem.

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