

Naxalism: An analytical Overview

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Introduction

The Naxalites, also sometimes called the Naxals, is a loose term used to define groups waging a violent struggle on behalf of landless labourers and tribal people against landlords and others. The Naxalites say they are fighting oppression and exploitation to create a classless society. Their opponents say the Naxalites are terrorists oppressing people in the name of a class war.

According to Ramakrishnan, Venkitesh (2005), A Naxal or Naxalite is a member of any of the Communist guerrilla groups in India, mostly associated with the Communist Party of India (Maoist). The term Naxal derives from the name of the village Naxalbari in West Bengal, where the movement had its origin. Naxalites 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 southern and eastern India, such as Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana through the activities of underground groups like the Communist Party of India (Maoist).

Naxal Movement in India:

Telangana Struggle:

The revolt started in 1946 in the Nalgonda district in Andhra Pradesh which was then part of princely state of Hyderabad against the oppressive feudal lords and quickly spread to the Warangal and Bidar districts in around 4000 villages. Peasant farmers and labourers revolted against the local feudal landlords who were ruling the villages known as samsthans.

The communist led agitation was successful in liberating over 3000 villages from the feudal lords and 10,000 acres of agriculture land was distributed to landless peasants. Around 4000 peasants lost their lives in the struggle fighting feudal private armies.

By July 1948, 2,500 villages in the south were organised into 'communes' as part of a peasant movement which came to be known as Telangana Struggle. Simultaneously the famous Andhra Thesis for the first time demanded that 'Indian revolution' follow the Chinese path of protracted people's war. In

June 1948, a leftist ideological document 'Andhra Letter' laid down a revolutionary strategy based on Mao Tsetung's New Democracy (Niranjan Sankaran, 2012).

1964 split in communist party of India:

CPI (M) splits from united CPI and decides to participate in elections, postponing armed struggle over revolutionary policies to a day when revolutionary situation prevailed in the country.

Naxalbari Uprising:

In 1967 CPI (M) participates in polls and forms a coalition United Front government in West Bengal with Bangla Congress. This leads to schism in the party with younger cadres, including the Charu Majumdar, accusing CPIM of betraying the revolution.

On 25th May 1967 the rebel cadres led by Charu Majumdar launch a peasants' uprising at Naxalbari in Darjeeling district of West Bengal after a tribal youth, who had a judicial order to plough his land, was attacked by "goons" of local landlords on March 2. Tribals retaliated and started forcefully capturing back their lands.

The CPI (M)-led United Front government cracked down on the uprising and in 72 days of the "rebellion" a police sub-inspector and nine tribals were killed. The Congress govt at the Centre supported the crackdown. The incident echoed throughout India and naxalism was born.

The ideology of naxalism soon assumed larger dimension and entire state units of CPI (M) in Uttar Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir and some sections in Bihar and Andhra Pradesh joined the struggle (Niranjan Sankaran, 2012).

1971 Bangladesh war:

In the background of Bangladesh war, the Army crushed the ultra-left movement in West Bengal. Charu Majumdar was arrested in Calcutta on July 16, 1972. He died in Lal Bazar police lock-up on July 28. Revolutionary struggle suffered serious debacle due to this and CPI (ML)'s central authority collapsed.

Was it ever popular?

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Naxalite movement was popular. There were reports of brilliant students, including from the famed IITs, dropping out of college to join the struggle for the rights of the tribals and landless labourers. But as has been the case with many movements set up with high principles, over the years the Naxalite movement is seen as having lost its vision and having compromised its

principles. Nevertheless, the fact that it has an endless supply of men and women joining its ranks shows that many still believe in its cause.

Naxalite groups:

Many groups operate under different names. The Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) is the political outfit that propagates the Naxalite ideology. There are front organisations and special outfits for specific groups such as the Indian People's Front.

The two main groups involved in violent activities, besides many factions and smaller outfits, are the People's War, the group many believe is responsible for the attempt on Naidu, and the Maoist Communist Centre.

In recent days TPC, JLT, JPC etc are branches of MCC.

Where do they operate?

The most prominent area of operation is a broad swathe across the very heartland of India, often considered the least developed area of this country. The Naxalites operate mostly in the rural and Adivasi areas, often out of the continuous jungles in these regions. Their operations are most prominent in (from North to South) Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, eastern Maharashtra, the Telengana (northwestern) region of Andhra Pradesh, and western Orissa. It will be seen that these areas are all inland, from the coastline.

The People's War is active mainly in Andhra Pradesh, western Orissa and eastern Maharashtra while the Maoist Communist Centre is active in Bihar, Jharkhand and northern Chhattisgarh.

Who do they represent?

The Naxalites claim to represent the most oppressed people in India, those who are often left untouched by India's development and bypassed by the electoral process. Invariably, they are the Adivasis, Dalits, and the poorest of the poor, who work as landless labourers for a pittance, often below India's mandated minimum wages.

The criticism against the Naxalites is that despite their ideology, they have over the years become just another terrorist outfit, extorting money from middle-level landowners (since rich landowners invariably buy protection), and worse, even extorting and dominating the lives of the Adivasis and villagers who they claim to represent in the name of providing justice.

Target of Naxalites:

Ideologically, the Naxalites claim they are against India as she exists currently. They believe that Indians are still to acquire freedom from hunger and deprivation and that the rich classes - landlords, industrialists, traders, etc- control the means of production. Their final aim is the overthrow of the present system, hence the targeting of politicians, police officers and men, forest contractors, etc.

At a more local level, the Naxalites have invariably targeted landlords in the villages, often claiming protection money from them. Naxalites have also been known to claim 'tax' from the Adivasis and landless farmers in areas where their writ runs more than that of the government.

Naxal-activities in India

Naxalism is the great Social, Political and Psychological problem in India. The Naxalite armed movement challenges the Indian state since more than 45 years. It is based on Maoist ideology and gains its strength through mobilizing the poor, underprivileged, discouraged and marginalized, especially in rural India. The Naxalite movements are a serious threat for the Indian State. Now they are acting in 223 districts of 20 states and the strength of their armed cadres is estimated between 10,000 and 20,000.

In 2006, the Indian Intelligence Agency, the Research and Analysis wing estimated that 20,000 armed-cadre Naxalites were operating in addition to 50,000 regular cadres and their growing influence prompted Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to declare them to be the most serious internal threat to India's national security. Naxalites and other anti-government militants are often referred to as 'ultras'.

In February 2009, the Indian central government announced a new nationwide initiative, to be called the 'Integrated Action Plan' (IAP) for broad. Co-ordinate operations aimed at dealing with the Naxalite problem in all affected states namely Karnataka, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal. Importantly, this plan included funding for grass-roots economic development projects in Naxalite affected areas, as well as increased special police funding for better containment and education of Naxlite influence in these areas. In 2009, Naxlites were active across approximately 180 districts in ten states of India.

In August 2010, after the first full year of implementation of the national IAP program Karnataka was removed from the list of Naxalite affected areas which was reduced to 83 districts in nine states

(including 20 additional districts). In December 2011, the national government reported that the number of Naxalite related deaths and injuries nationwide had gone down by nearly 50% from 2010 levels.

In March 2012, Maoist rebels kidnapped two Italians in the eastern India state of Odisha for the first time westerners were abducted there. Again 12 CRPF personnel were killed on March 27, 2012 in a landmine blast triggered by suspected Naxalites in Gahchiroli district of Maharashtra.

In 25th May 2013, Naxalites attacked a rally led by Indian National Congress in Sukma village in Baster Chhattisgarh, killing about 29 people. They killed senior party leader Mahendra Karma and Nand Kumar Patel and his son, while in the attack another senior party leader Vidya Charan Shukla was severely wounded and later succumbed to his injuries on 11th June, 2013.

In 11 March 2014, Naxalites in Chhattisgarh ambushed a security team, killing 15 personnel's, 11 of whom were from the CRPF. One civilian was also killed.

In 11 April 2015 , 7 Special Task Force (STF) personals were killed in a Maoist ambush near Kankerlanka, Sukma, Chhattisgarh, 12 April 2015 , 1 BSF Jawan was killed in a Maoist attack near Bande, Kanker, Chhattisgarh and 13 April 2015, 5 Chhattisgarh Armed Force (CAF) Jawans were killed in a Maoist ambush near Kirandul, Dantewada, Chhattisgarh.

Most recently, In 24 October 2016, 24 Naxalites were killed by Andhra Pradesh Greyhounds forces in encounter that took place in the cut-off area of remote Chitrakonda on Andhra-Odisha border, In November, 2016, three naxalites were killed near Karulai in an encounter with Kerala police. Naxalite leader Kappu Devaraj from Andhra Pradesh is included in the list of killed in the incident. Last November, Six Naxals were killed and 600 bullets of various calibre, about 12 IEDs, an INSAS rifle, an SLR, a carbine and three other guns were recovered in Jharkhand.

Main factors causing Naxalite Movement:

The main reason causing Naxalite movement and its existence even in post in post cold war era is failure of implementing the *5th & 9th Schedules* of the Constitution of India.

The Fifth Schedule states briefly that all scheduled areas of the country which are forest reserves and inhabited by scheduled tribes are to be administered by the governors of the states by appointing tribal advisory councils from among the tribals of a particular forest reserve or a scheduled area. Regrettably, no governor of any state in India has ever constituted tribal advisory councils of scheduled tribes living in the reserve forests or scheduled areas of the states they were governing. In this deliberately

created vacuum, the chief ministers of the states have merrily administered their reserve forests by leasing forests for mining to private companies, evicting the tribals living in these forests for millennia.

The Ninth Schedule of the Constitution dealt with the fact that cultivable land which over thousands of years had come under the ownership of upper castes should be acquired by the government and redistributed among India's landless peasantry. Since land revenue was a state subject, the states were directed to legislate land ceiling laws and implement them by acquiring farmlands from landlords and redistributing them to landless farmers who for centuries worked under the most abominable conditions on the lands of the landowners.

Regrettably, only three states have implemented the land ceiling laws legislated by all the states by 1955. These were Jammu and Kashmir, West Bengal and Kerala, the latter two when Communist ministries were ruling there. In West Bengal, the jotedars—as the landlords are called there—tried to manipulate the land records and deceive the landless farmers and the government. This resulted in an uprising in a village called Naxalbari led by the Communist Party of India, Marxist-Leninist (CPI-ML), and a faction of the Communist party. In Kerala, the land ceiling was successfully implemented in the plains districts and this has prevented the Maoist Naxalites from organising a revolution there.

Today, the states and the Centre are only screaming of the Maoist threat to the country and a mini-war is being carried out against the evil Maoists and the poor scheduled castes and tribes whom the Maoist leaders have organised as their cadres. Nobody wants a Maoist government. But what is the answer to this problem? Is it to maintain a thunderous silence on not enforcing the Fifth and Ninth Schedules of the Constitution? (Niranjan Sankaran, 2012).

The Laws Made by the Government:

Rehabilitation and Resettlement Policy, 2007:- The main aim of this act is to minimize the displacement of people and to promote non-displacing or least displacing alternatives.

The Government issued a rehabilitation policy on 11 October 2007 for the easy displacement of people who lose their land for industrial growth. Under this policy land in change for land will be given, job prospective to at least one member of the family, vocational training and housing benefits including houses to people in rural areas and urban areas will be some of the benefits.

Forest Rights Act, 2006 :-The Scheduled Tribe and Other Traditional Forest dwellers (Recognition of forest Rights) Act 2006 or the Forest Rights Act recognizes the rights of the scheduled tribes and forest dwellers who have been living in the forests for years but their rights have still not been recognized.

The Ministry of Environment and Forests has also allowed use of 1 hectare of land for nonforest purposes and conversion of kutchra roads into pukka roads.

Chhattisgarh Special Public Securities Act, 2006:-This bill provides definition of unlawful activities, declaring an organisation unlawful, formation of an advisory board wherever the state government feels the need for its establishment, procedure of the formation of the advisory board, action of the advisory board, penalties viz punishments even for not committing a crime, the power to notify a place being used for unlawful activities and taking occupation of such place thereof and revision/bar against intervention by the courts.

Daily Routine

According to Kerala police, the naxalites follow a strict and disciplined cadre with well organized daily routine as given below:

- Rollcall: 6.40 am
- Exercise: 6.50 am
- Breakfast: 9.00 am
- Training: 9.30 am
- Lunch: 12.30 pm
- Study Class: 2.30 pm
- Training: 4.30 pm
- Bomb Training: 5.30 pm

How the control Naxal- activities and Problems?

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.

- 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.

Using force against the tribals to deter them from joining the Naxals has and will backfire against the government. The government should ensure peace in these areas so that these people don't suffer more than they already have and this can be done only if the government takes proactive measures so as to ensure social justice and inclusive growth for the benefit of the marginalized sections (Raman Dixit, 2009).

Naxalism In popular culture

Satyajit Ray's 1971 film Seemabaddha was based on the life of an upper class family during the Naxalite Movement.

Erra Cinema is a popular coinage in the south Indian language of Telugu referring to a collection of films many of which featured narratives in which a representation of Naxals and Maoists is attempted.

CHORUS (1974 or 75) a film by the renowned director Mrinal Sen is a paen to the beloved 30000 (supposedly the number of naxalites killed by the government). It was made around the time of the Emergency in India and Mrinal Sen had to adopt a very experimental - almost allegorical - style to beat the censors.

Khwaja Ahmad Abbas made a critically acclaimed film The Naxalites in 1980. It starred Mithun Chakraborty in the lead.

The British musical group Asian Dub Foundation has a song called "Naxalite", which is featured on the soundtrack to the 1999 film Brokedown Palace.

The 2002 Bollywood movie Lal Salaam directed by Gaganvihari Borate starring Nandita Das revolves around Naxalism and a group of Naxalites.

The 2005 Bollywood movie Tango Charlie directed by Mani Shankar featuring Ajay Devgan had instances of the Naxalite movement and armed forces' counter operations.

A 2005 movie called Hazaaron Khwaishein Aisi, directed by Sudhir Mishra, was set against the backdrop of the Naxalite movement.

In August 2008, Kabeer Kaushik's Chamku, starring Bobby Deol and Priyanka Chopra, explored the story of a boy who is brainwashed to take arms against the state.

The 2014 Bollywood film Buddha in a Traffic Jam directed by Vivek Agnihotri features naxalites present everywhere in India.

In the novel English August by Upamanyu Chatterjee, there is reference to Naxal cadres whom the main protagonist, an IAS officer meets while visiting a tribal village in mid-1980s.

In the novel The God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy, there is a reference to a character joining the Naxalites.

In the novel The White Tiger by Aravind Adiga, the Naxals (sic) are mentioned often by the poor and the rich alike.

In the novel A Fine Balance by Rohinton Mistry, the character Omprakash makes an allusion to fighting "like the Naxalites".

In the 2012 novel The Truth by Michael Palin the protagonist Mabbutt is kidnapped by Naxalites who are protecting his subject, Hamish Melville.

The 2012 science-fiction novel Intrusion by Ken MacLeod features a future version of the Naxalites in the role of a controversial terrorist group.

In the Indian novel Red Jihad: Battle for South Asia by Sami A. Khan, a splinter Naxalite faction (led by Comrade Agyaat) join hands with a Jihadi-cell (under Yasser Basheer) to destabilize a secular, democratic South Asia.

The 2013 novel The Lowland by Jhumpa Lahiri has one of the main characters involved in the Naxalite rebellion.

In 1974 Ramon Magsaysay Award winner Mahasweta Devi wrote Hajar Churashir Maa (Mother of 1084), giving an ideological and sympathetic support to the Naxalites. It was made into a film titled

Hazaar Chaurasi Ki Maa in 1998. It starred Jaya Bachchan as the mother of 1084, who was leader killed by the state.

The 2009 Malayalam movie Thalappavu portrays the story of Naxal Varghese, who was allegedly shot dead by the police during the 70s.

In the Kannada movie Veerappa Nayaka, Vishnuvardhan portrays a Gandhian whose son becomes a Naxalite.

The 2007 Kannada movie Maathaad Maathaadu Mallige again sees Vishnuvardhan as a Gandhian who confronts a Naxalite Sudeep and shows him that the ways adopted by Naxals will only lead to violence and will not achieve their objective.

Eka Nakshalwadya Cha Janma (Marathi: The birth of a Naxal), a novel written by Vilas Balkrishna Manohar, a volunteer with the Lok Biradari Prakalp, is a fictional account of a Madia Gond Juru's unwilling journey of life with his metamorphosis from an exploited nameless tribal to a Naxal.

In 2010, a Hindi drama movie Red Alert: The War Within was released that is based on the true story of a poor Andhra cook who gets caught in the gunfire between cops and Naxalites and is forced to work with the latter.

In the 2011 Tamil political thriller film Ko, Naxalites are shown to rob a bank, overthrow the government and disrupt elections. At the end, it is shown that the naxalites were only used for political gains by corrupt politicians.

Sindhooram, a National Award winning Telugu film released in 1997, portrays a young police officer becoming a naxalite under unavoidable circumstances. Directed by Krishna Vamsi, the movie was critically acclaimed for its direction and the performances of its lead actors.

Swayamsiddha is a 2010 Oriya film directed by Sudhanshu Mohan Sahu which focuses on how and why people take to extremism, but overall is a balanced movie and has messages for both the extremists and the government. The movie faced controversy as the main actor of the film, Siddhanta Mahapatra, an M.P. belonging to the ruling party Biju Janata Dal of Odisha, portrays a Maoist leader in the film. The opposition parties in the state went on strikes and demanded ban on release of the film.

Chakravyuh, a film by Prakash Jha, was released in 2012. It revolves around the theme of Naxalites, but received critical feedback for allegedly showing sympathy for Maoists.

Red Ant Dream, a documentary by Sanjay Kak, is based on the revolutionary Maoist movement in India. This documentary was under production for more than three years and released in 2013.

In his book named Hello Bastar (ISBN 978-93-80658-34-6), writer Rahul Pandita has provided insights about the advent of Naxalism in Bastar district of Chhattisgarh and day to day life of Naxalites in the dense forests of this district.

Sudeep Chakravarti in his book Red Sun talks about various factors that have led to Naxalite Movement. The book is a travelogue through the Naxalite country, wherein he meets different people around the Naxalite Movement and comments upon its causes and influences.

The Lives of Others (novel), a novel by Neel Mukherjee, published in 2014 and shortlisted for the 2014 Man Booker Prize includes a major plot thread on the lives of Naxalites, the social deprivations which they attack and police torture of suspects.

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