

THE NAXALITE AND THE TRIBAL MOVEMENT ESPECIALLY IN BENGAL DURING THE SEVEN DECADES

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Abstract

The term 'Naxal' or 'Naxalite' is derived from Naxalbari, a remote village in the district of Darjeeling in West Bengal, from where the movement had been originated. An informal name Naxalism is given to radical often violent, Sino-Soviet in Indian Communist Movement. India has the largest concentration of tribal population in the African continent. The Schedule Tribes (ST) occupy isolated areas which are comprised of hilly terrain. The indigenous people living in the plains are of the Poto-Australoid race. Such as : Santal, Oraon, Munda, Mal, Bhumij, Lodha, Kora, Birhar. They mainly live in Medinipur, Purulia, Bakura and Birbhum. The hill Tribes are of Mongoloid descent. Lepcha, Bhutia tribes are again of Chinese Tibetan descent. They live in Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, South and North Dinajpur districts of North Bengal. The Santals are the largest of these indigenous groups. Santals make up 50 per cent of the total tribal population in West Bengal and this group is more advanced than other tribal groups. We find in History the evidence of protracted struggles between foreign invaders and the tribals when the former attempted to enter into their areas. In this light the present article aims to highlight the interpretational information related to Naxalism and tribes in India. Here, an overview of Naxalism with its genesis the salient features of the 'Action Plan' of the Naxalite Movement is presented by us. We shall also discuss socio-economic development, "Status of Tribals", and Naxalism in Tribal areas and its causes. We shall also discuss measures related to Naxalism and tribal situation in general. As a conclusion, we shall argue the Naxalism is not a law and order problem but is, moreover, related to an imbalance in the dispensation of social and economic justice with particular focus on land and mineral resources.

Keywords: A few keyword in this paper can be found as 'Naxalism', 'Rightful redistribution', 'Ideology', 'Revolution', 'Tribal', 'Maoist', 'Action Plan', 'Urban intelligence', and 'West Bengal'.

INTRODUCTION

At first the Naxalite Movement took place in a remote village in West Bengal called Naxalbari in 1967. A tribal youth named Bimal Kisan obtained a judicial order permitting him to plough his land. When he was tilling his land, the local landlords with the help of their goons and musclemen attacked him. Hence the local Tribal population was infuriated and led a violent retaliation by the tribal community to recapture their lands. These events in Naxalbari took shape of a giant rebellion and gain visibility and support across regions including West Bengal, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and parts of Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh.

India has the second largest concentration of tribal population in the world after the sum total of tribals on the African continent. The total ST population in India, as per 2010-2011 Census, was 10,42,81,034 constituting about 8.6% of the total population of India. Of this, about 86% ST population is concentrated in the central belt covering nine states of West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh.

About 10% of STs reside in the eighth North Eastern States of Andha Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim and the remaining 4% in the seven states of Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Uttarkhand, Bihar, Goa and Karnataka and six union territories of Jharkhand, Laddak, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Daman and Diu, Lakshadweep and Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

The isolated areas which are comprised of hilly terrain, is occupied by the Scheduled Tribes and they strongly resisted the infiltration of outsiders in general and particularly, that of foreign incursions into their areas. History provides evidence of protracted structures between the foreign incursions and the tribals when the former attempted to enter into their areas. Several rebellions against the colonial authorities were registered, and the British, in order to seek peace with the tribals, had to designate tribal majority areas as non-regulatory areas and thus concede separate laws for the administration of these areas. These were specified as “excluded and particularly excluded areas” and special laws were made for protecting the interest of the tribals.

Who are ‘Naxalite’?

Naxalite are common people who want equal social and financial status for all. Their ideology is clear that they are fighting opposition and exploration to create a classless society. They work for the centralization of power. They just want basic amenities for their survival; infrastructure and most importantly they want opportunities to grow. It is operated by the Naxalites mostly in rural and Adivasi regions. They are usually found in the area where there is a forest cover. The view of them is to show teeth and enlarge upon their ideology and if possible support landless and poor.

OBJECTIVE

The aim of this research is to trace the Naxalite Movement in Bengal, and assess the root causes of this movement, as well as study direct and indirect impact on the Tribal society during the seven decade.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For this research paper the type of research conducted can be categorized as basic research. From the secondary sources the data has been collected. The information has been interpreted from already existing works and information collected from historical sources on the topic. The research is descriptive in nature. The research is contextual in nature for it is the analysis of already existing factual information. Thus the methodology that this research follows falls under qualitative study, because the data had been occupied from various sources, forming its foundation as one belonging to the qualitative field of research. A method of ‘content analysis’ is exploited by the researchers in achieving the result and interpretations of this study. This methodology is commonly used by researchers to arrive at a conclusion by collecting qualitative data from media such as documents, journals, books, excerpts etc. The research is constructed in such a way that the data administered is formulated according to the existing information of the Naxalite Movement in India.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing literature, in the form of books, Articles, Census reports and Documents have been referred to for the purpose of this project. The main sources of reference are the articles ‘The Far Reaching consequences of the Naxalite Movement in India by Shrey Verma. The book (a) “Revolutionary Violence : A study of Maoist Movement in India”, by Manoranjan Mohanty ; (b) “In the wake of Naxalbari – A History of Naxalite Movement in India Eleven”, by Sumanta Banerjee; (c) “The Naxalite Movement in India : Origin and Failure of the Maoist Revolutionary Strategy in West Bengal”, by Sohail Jawaid; have been referred to this research project. The existing literature fails to trace and assess the issues which led to the rise of such a movement.

THE ‘ACTION PLAN’ OF THE NAXALITE MOVEMENT

- A redistributing of agriculture lands to the land-less and the excess land from big landlords.

- Payment of minimum wages to farm labourers is being enforced.
- Taxes and penalties on corrupt contractors and officers are being imposed.
- The running of a parallel government in the tribal areas for the administration of speedy justice.
- People's courts for the redressal of grievances and dispensation of quick justice to the aggrieved parties, free of cost are being held.
- People are being kidnapped for ransom so as to spread the message of this ideology.
- Collecting funds from contractors and the rich for meeting these running costs.
- Attacking policemen as a counter measure to show their strength.
- Government property is being destroyed to undermine state authority.
- Enforcing social code.

The People's War Group has been spearheading the movement of the oppressed and exploited tribals and poor peasants during the last four decades, and many dispossessed people feel that the Naxalites have achieved what the politicians have been promising year but have failed to deliver. The power of bullet tribal and the Naxalite groups seem to be focusing gradually on human rights and civil liberties through the ballot box.

DATA ANALYSIS

Root causes of the naxalite movement

The Naxalite movement derives the root causes of its formation from the inequalities and exploitation faced by the tribal communities. The following issues are at the inception of the Naxals, from the plight of the sufferers :

Zamindari System :

The British adopted the Zamindari system during their rule wherein a piece of land was given to a Zamindar and in return, he was required to pay a certain amount to the company or the state. The Zamindar did not cultivate the land himself. He distributed and redistributed it till it reached the tiller of the land who was a tribal or a common man working hard in the field. At each stage, the poor people or the tribals suffered immensely because a certain amount was required to be paid to the renter of the land and it led to the exploitation of the poor tribal at each stage.

Status of Tribals :

In Bengal about 80 million tribals are still considered to be the most vulnerable and the poorest of the poor. A large section of the tribal population living below poverty line are victims of hunger and malnutrition. Tribals are dying of hunger which is caused by food insecurity and poverty in turn causes death by starvation which creates a kind of terror amongst this population. Hunger has thus been used as a tool of terror against the tribals so as to keep them in the state of total subjugation and inner colonization.

The root cause of Naxalism among the tribals are directly linked to social, economic and political grievances which include : deprivation, degradation, exploitation, poverty, un-employment, illiteracy, oppression and historical wrongs. Despite the constitutional safeguards with twin objectives of empowerment and development of tribals for their integration into the main stream of the nation, they have been denied social economic, political justice and human rights. More than 40 to 50% of them are illiterate and live below poverty line under inhuman conditions. They are arbitrarily deprived of their land rights and rights pertaining to forest areas. Their lands are not safe even in the scheduled areas, and they are facing indiscriminate displacement without an adequate rehabilitation package. Furthermore, they are exploited by money lenders and also by the government agencies engaged in their so-called welfare. Democracy has little meaning for the

tribals as, amongst other things, they are being used as vote banks for democracy without any participation in the process of decision making on tribal affairs in west Bengal.

Tribals are helpless victims of bad governance and exploration, and the dwindling resource base of the tribal people can be quantified in the shape of loss of land, restriction of access to the production of forest and a lack of opportunities for reasonable wage employment. Consequently, development processes have interfered in many cases with traditional tribal institutional structures and this has produced many negative results. These were contributory factors for simmering unrest in most of the tribal areas in the West Bengal.

It was in the background of utter grievance and frustration of the tribals arising out of their exploitation and oppression which led them to their taking arms in several areas to fight for their rights under the patronage of Naxalites. In fact, over the years, tribal insurgency has become the predominant strand of the Naxalite and people's war group movement. The combination of socio-economic and political factors has led to a resurgence of left-wing extremism and the Naxalite movement in West Bengal. The Naxalite ideology seeks to cut across the barriers of caste, religion and region and unite people on broader economic issues.

According to tribal people land, water, minerals, poverty and guns are all connected for their experience. In the heartland of India, there are tribal villages where people have not seen a doctor, a teacher, tap water or electricity and furthermore, they live in the middle of dense forests, sharing space with dangerous animals. Whilst occupying fertile land, hunger still haunts them, and in West Bengal the state with the same tribal population in the country, even basic human needs and civic amenities like drinking water, food, health, electricity and education facilities are lacking. Even the areas in the grip of violence are beyond the police forces. The people are famished and forced to live a sub-human life.

It is the same story in the tribal areas of West Bengal. More than 50% of the tribal villages are without roads, electricity, potable water and health centers and education facilities. No wonder when they hear about the mining companies coming and taking away their mineral wealth, they are enraged. They want their land back. They want their forests intact and they don't want others to exploit their minerals. When they see everything slipping away from their hands they turn to guns. Now the tribals are simmering with anger. People listen to the Maoists when they walk into a village and talk of revolution. The Tribals realize that they were never given a chance to live with dignity, yet they are caught in a deadly crossfire between the rebels who claim that they are waging a war on their behalf and the state that says it is trying to protect them from the Maoists' mindless violence.

In order to fulfil the aim of protracted war, the Naxalites believe in building up both physical and mass bases. So, at first the bases are built up in rural and remote areas which are then to be developed into 'Guerrilla Zones' and ultimately into 'Liberated Areas'. The Naxalites operate in the very heartland of West Bengal, known as the Dandakaranya region (named after a mythological region from the epic Ramayana) which spreads east over West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. The heart of this region is the thickly forested area of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri District which is approximately 10,000 sq. km. This area till date now has not been surveyed by the Government in India. The Naxalites treat it as a totally liberated area.

NAXALITE MOVEMENT AS A BIGGEST THREAT

The Naxalite threat is the biggest security problem for India's future as its effects are multi-layered. The interior weaknesses of India are highlighted by the Maoist Movement which makes India also vulnerable to external threats. Threats such as the Naxalite movement as part of globalisation, can no longer be viewed as simply internal as it also affects external security.

A former Pakistani Director General of the Inter services Intelligence (ISI) aptly described the security dangers and his description of India's foreign affairs. India being busy with internal security problems to having to extra Divisions in Pakistan Army for free is equated by the Division General. If there is instability inside the country no nation can effectively withstand threats coming from outside its country. Moreover, globalisation as emergence of non-state terrorist actors as well

as international interference in each other's affairs. Fundamental ideologies has fuelled India one of the victims of international and state sponsored terrorism.

As the military had been deployed along the border in 2004 the MHA was wary of the "symbiotic relationship" between the Communist Party of Nepal and Naxal groups in India. Long before, India has also been involved in territorial disputes with China such as over Aksai Chin.

Because of the way the issue affects the, economic development of India is another reason why the Naxalites are the biggest threat to security. For a nation's economic development, internal order and stability are necessary. India must build up its infrastructures, its defence and its people to continue being able to withstand outside security threats. In terms of lifting its citizens out of poverty, India has a long way to go, and continue economic growth is integral to Indian's development as a strong global player. When it should be spent on areas such as social development, the Naxalite activities are using up scarce resources on defence and Internal security.

In terms of the effects on its citizens and what it means for democracy and rule of law, the Naxalite movement is also the biggest threat to India. There has been a great loss of life since the conflict between the guerrillas and the military, and addressing the problem through violence risks polarising people further and driving them to subservience. The guerrilla warfare is a threat to citizens lives and their properties. It is so important and desperate that it cannot wait for Government Intervention, civilians such as landlords are taking matters into their own hands. By portraying the Maoist as a menace and separating the Maoist as a menace and separating the Movement from socio-economic causes writer Navlakha noted it "allows the rich and poor divide to impose itself on a formal democratic structure."

THE LAWS MADE BY THE GOVERNMENT

Rehabilitation and Resettlement Policy, 2007

The main aim of this act is to minimise the displacement of people and to promote non-displacing or least displacing alternatives. On 11th October 2007, a rehabilitation policy was issued by the Government for the 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 dwellings Act 2006 or the Forest Right Act recording the rights of the scheduled tribes and forest dwellings who have living in the forests for years but their rights have still not been recording. The Ministry of Environment and Forest has also allowed use of one hectare of land for non-forest purposes and conversion of kattcha roads into pakka roads.

Chhattisgarh Species Public Securities Act, 2006

We find in this bill the 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 punishment 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 against intervention by the courts.

CSPS Bill, 2005

It provides the District Magistrate unconditional power to notify place which he thinks are being used for unlawful activities any prior notification. There is no requirement of production of anything as evidence to prove that the said place is being used for unlawful activities. It is just a violation of principle of natural justice as the aggressived parties don't even get a fair hearing. This

bill also provides that any revision application has to be filed with the High Court only, challenging the validity of the order of the government. This petition has to be filled within 30th days and that no court has the jurisdiction against any decided of the court. Any Kind of application or form of revision or injunction by a court or officer except of the High Court the Supreme Court regarding any action to be taken as an example to the order of the government has been barred in this Bill. So it can be said that this bill was totally uncalled for and has only be brought to Act ad a blandishment to the people.

CONCLUSION

The Naxals came in contact to the people and mix with them, talked to them, understood them, took up their issues and fought for their dignity and rights. They earned goodwill among the tribals and the downtrodden by fighting for them. The Naxalite Movement started with a noble objective to protect the rights of the tribals, but its extremism and violence deferred it from becoming an accepted revolution. The tackling of the threat to internal security, as a result of this movement must start with government addressing the problems faced by the tribals and ensure that their rights are produced. The central and eastern parts of the country are relatively underdeveloped as compared to other parts of India, both industrially and agriculturally. The areas also lag behind in almost all human development indicators. Hence, efforts must be made by the government to tackle the disparities in the social system. In my opinion, the Naxalites today are far more radicalised than they were when they first began and this leads to a greater chance of increased violence. Before the government retaliates, it must address the core issues on which this movement is based, eradicate or solve them and then further work towards restricting the existence and spread of Naxalism. The government must also resort to publicity campaigns in order to expose the unlawful activities and misdeeds of Naxal outfits and their leaders, use of violence and armed struggle, loss of human life and property and absence of developmental activities in the affected areas due to fear of, and extortion by, Naxal cadres etc. The Government must aim at finding loopholes in the strategy and tactics in the modus operandi of Naxalites in the State. Moreover, the Naxals who seem for evolved from their ideology will have feet a great psychological effect on them by an attractive and all-encompassing surrender-cum-rehabilitation policy.

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