

Left Wing Extremism: Evolution and Analysis of Government's Initial Response During Period 1967-1998

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Abstract

From an agrarian rebellion to a full-grown insurgency, threatening the democratic fibre of independent India, Naxalism has meta morphed into the "single biggest internal security challenge ever faced by our country"¹. The government failed to understand the causative factors responsible for the rise and spread of Left -Wing Extremism and hence its initial response was slow and sluggish, much to the advantage of Naxals who embraced the tribals, understood their grievances and took up their issues and fought for their rights and development. Initially, the Government considered Naxalism as a law-and-order problem and left it to State Governments to deal with. The paper attempts to highlight historical as well as contemporary perspectives to understand the current dynamics of Left-Wing Extremism in India. This research paper aims at identifying the root causes of the Naxalite movement in India using the Ishikawa diagram. Additionally, an attempt is made to understand initial government responses during the period from 1967-68 to 1998-99.

Introduction

1. Insurgency unlike conventional war is a constant struggle between Government and governed due to differences of opinion or methods of governance. Contrary to the perception of its subjects that the government or its manner of governance has not been able to address their problems, the government thinks that it is carrying out its mission for the elevation and development of its subjects. The problem gets accentuated when subjects adopt violent means or start waging an armed struggle against the established government. The subjects may further be motivated by some ideology, religious belief, or events of history wherein a particular method may have helped people achieve their aims through protracted war against the legitimate government.

2. The insurgents are generally ill-equipped, less organised and have limited resources compared to government forces acting against them. Therefore, insurgents rely on local support to sustain the movement. As Mao himself said that "a rebel must be able to swim like a fish among the people."² The

¹ Singh Manmohan, PM's speech at the Chief Minister's meet on Naxalism, April 13, 2006, released by PIB, <https://archivepmo.nic.in/drmanmohansingh/speech-details.php?nodeid=302>

² Rawat Naman, Naxalite Insurgency in India and Need for Holistic Counter Responses, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26631541>

primary reason for rise and evolution of any insurgency as per various experts remains the perception amongst the masses about the legitimacy of the Government. The failure of democratic institutions to address the social issues and related grievances of these people further adds fuel to the fire. In the Indian context discontent amongst tribals was aptly exploited by Naxals to garner support for themselves and wean away the local population towards leftist ideology promising a better model of governance based on a classless society.

3. The Naxalite Movement in India has had a fascinating journey, experiencing several organisational upheavals and clashes of ideas. Since 1967, the movement has had many highs and lows, and it reflects the feeling described in one of the official Maoist papers “Revolutions never proceed in a straight line. The history of all successful revolutions shows this. The path is zig-zag, there are ups and downs, there is victory and defeat repeated a number of times before final victory”³. The Naxalite movement took birth in a small village called Naxalbari in the Darjeeling District of West Bengal in 1967. Bimal Kissan, a tribal youth in order to plough his lands and had received a judicial order for the same. The landlords assaulted him with the help of their goons and musclemen. The local tribal population were enraged as a result, and they engaged in violent reprisal to reclaim their territory. The situation at Naxalbari evolved into a massive uprising that attracted attention and support from a number of states, including West Bengal, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, and portions of Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh. A section of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI(M)] led by Charu Majumdar and Kanu Sanyal led a violent uprising in 1967⁴. They tried to develop a "revolutionary opposition" to the official CPI (M) leadership. Cadres of CPI(M) then retaliated by attacking the landlords and supporting the tribal population in their struggle, giving rise to the "Naxalbari Uprising"⁵.

4. The Naxalite-Maoist movement has presented a threat to India for the past fifty years or more. In the past, the country's leadership, notably the Prime Minister, had observed more than once that it poses the single largest threat to the country's internal security⁶. But the Government was too late to recognise Naxalism (LWE) as a serious threat and by then Naxals had already established their areas of influence. The geographic reach and might of the Naxal insurgents have grown exponentially over time. However, the levels of violence and the number of Naxalite-related incidents have seen a cyclic curve with a peak reaching around 2010-11 with 481 incidents and 1180 casualties⁷.

Naxalism/Maoism/Left Wing Extremism

5. A classless, stateless social structure based on shared ownership of the means of production is what communism aspires to create⁸. It can be classified as a branch of the broader socialist movement⁹. Maoism

³ Awasthi Sonali, The Naxalite Movement in India, International Journal of Law Management and Humanities, 2018, Vol1, Issue 4

⁴ Singh, Anil Kumar. "NAXALISM: BIGGEST SECURITY THREAT TO INDIAN STATE." The Indian Journal of Political Science, vol. 76, no. 3, 2015, pp. 374–78. JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26534849>. Accessed 5 Jan. 2023.

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Singh Manmohan, PM's speech at the Chief Minister's meet on Naxalism, April 13, 2006, released by PIB, <https://archivepmo.nic.in/drmanmohansingh/speech-details.php?nodeid=302>.

⁷ South Asia Terrorism Portal, <https://www.satp.org/datasheet-terrorist-attack/fatalities/india-maoistinsurgency>.

⁸ <https://www.cs.mcgill.ca/~rwest/wikispeedia/wpcd/wp/c/Communism.htm>

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Types_of_socialism

is a brand of radical ideology drawing on the political ideas of Mao besides classical Marxism¹⁰. It is a doctrine to capture State power through a combination of an armed insurgency, mass mobilization and strategic alliances¹¹. The Maoists also use propaganda and disinformation against State institutions as other components of their insurgency¹² doctrine. The name Naxalite is derived from the town of Naxalbari in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal state in northeastern India, which was the centre of a tribal peasant uprising against local landlords in 1967.

AIM OF THE PAPER

6. The aim of this paper is to unearth the genesis and spread of the Naxalite movement in India, evaluate causative factors of movement using the Ishikawa diagram as well as analyse the Government response in the initial years (1967-1998).

LITERATURE REVIEW

7. Existing literature in the form of books, articles and documents has been referred to for this project. The main sources of reference are the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) Annual reports published by the Government of India and various articles published on the subject. The existing literature fails to trace, and assess the issues which led to the rise of the movement and the Government's initial response to address the menace.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

8. The type of research conducted for this research paper can be categorized as basic research. The information was gathered from both primary and secondary sources. The data were evaluated from previously published publications and information gathered from archival sources about the subject. The research is descriptive in nature. The research is contextual in nature for it is the analysis of already existing factual information. The methodology that this research follows falls under qualitative study. Data has been sourced 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 results and interpretations of this study. This methodology is commonly used by researchers to conclude by collecting qualitative data from media such as documents, journals, books, excerpts etc. The data used in this study is prepared in accordance with the information that is currently available on the Naxalite Movement in India.

HYPOTHESIS

9. The causative factors responsible for the rise and spread of left-wing extremism in the country must be identified and a comprehensive national approach must be adopted to tackle this menace.

¹⁰ Chakrabarty, Bidyut. "Maoism, a Recalcitrant Citizenry and Counterinsurgency Measures in India." *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs*, vol. 1, no. 3, 2014, pp. 289–318. JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48602107>. Accessed 5 Jan. 2023.

¹¹ Annexures, FAQ, Left Wing Extremism Division, MHA. Available at https://www.mha.gov.in/division_of_mha/left-wing-extremism-division

¹² Annexures, FAQ, Left Wing Extremism Division, MHA. Available at https://www.mha.gov.in/division_of_mha/left-wing-extremism-division

Historical Perspective: Naxalite Insurgency in India.

10. The LWE can be characterised into three distinct phases, Phase one (1967 till 1973) – the formative phase, Phase two (1967 till the late 1990s) – the era of the spread of LWE and Phase three (2004 onwards) – relative decline after brief fightback. The initial two phases i.e., the formative phase and the era of spread have been covered in this paper.

11. The Indian communists were influenced by Carl Marx, Lenin, and perhaps more so by the strategies and tactics used by Mao Tse Tung during the Chinese Revolution. The history of the communist party in India dates back to the 1920s. The Indian Communists met in Tashkent in 1920 and tried to form an Indian communist party¹³. On December 26, 1925, the Communist Party of India or CPI was formed at a conference in Kanpur¹⁴, Uttar Pradesh. As a result, the seeds of Left-Wing Extremism were sown even before the country stepped out of the shackles of slavery from Britishers. However, there is little or no data available in the open domain about its activities and organisation during the initial years. The activities were generally non-violent and aimed at establishing an organisation or generating a requisite support base due to the popularity of the non-violence movement during that period. Insurrection in the States of Central and Eastern India is officially referred to as Left Wing Extremism (LWE), although it is more often known as Naxalism or Maoism. LWE is an "insurrection" that has to be understood in both historical and modern contexts. It has to be seen as the continuation of the Telangana and Tebhaga Insurrection (1946-51), and Naxalbari Insurrection (1967) in modern times¹⁵.

12. **Bhumkla Rebellion**.¹⁶ In 1908, the British declared the forest areas around modern-day Chhattisgarh to be reserved forests while contractors from outside were given the right to take away timber for usage. Additionally, the introduction of the British system of education and schools in areas were also seen as an attempt to subvert the Adivasi traditions and culture. Ultimately 46 Parganas, out of a total of 84 Bastar districts, rose in revolt in a struggle for preserving and defending the traditional tribal forest rights and their way of life.

13. **Tebhaga Movement**.¹⁷ As per the norms existing in the 1940s, a peasant obtained half of the produce while the other half was to be handed over to Zamindar. During this movement, peasants demanded that they must own "two-third" while one-third must go to Zamindars. The struggle intensified around 1946. The movement started from Dinajpur and Rangpur and spread to 19 districts of Bengal to

¹³ 'Party Programme, Communist Party of India', available at <http://www.comunistparty.in/p/party-programme.html> (Accessed on Dec 25, 2022)

¹⁴ 'Brief History of CPI', available at 'Brief History of CPI', available at <https://sites.google.com/a/communistparty.in/cpi/briefhistory-of-cpi> (Accessed Dec 25, 2022)

¹⁵ Good governance and Naxalism, resolve issues of land rights, economic justice and political equality proactively to address this socio-political conflict, Telangana Today, Pub on 19 April 2021. Available at <https://telanganatoday.com/good-governance-and-naxalism>

¹⁶ Banerjee Abhijit and Iyer Lakshmi. History, Institutions, and Economic Performance: The Legacy of Colonial Land Tenure Systems in India, Sep 2005, The American Economic Review, Vol.95

¹⁷ Op Cit., Banerjee Abhijit

include Jalpaipur, Khulna, Meymensingh, Jessore and 24 Parganas and was led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPI(M). Eventually, 40 peasants became martyrs in Dinajpur.

14. **Telangana Armed Struggle**.¹⁸ Telangana region, which formed part of the princely state of Hyderabad was affected by this revolt from 1946 to 1951. The revolt began with a lady of law caste revolting against the Zamindar Ramachandra Reddy who had forcibly taken away four acres of her land. Ultimately the peasants' launched their struggle on economic issues, against forced labour, illegal extractions and unauthorized evictions by the powerful Zamindars. Around 4,000 villages were affected by the insurrection, which began in the Nalgonda District and swiftly extended to the Warangal and Bidar districts. It was led by the CPI leadership of Andhra Pradesh. After independence, due to certain land reforms having been enacted, as also as the nationalistic and jubilant mood of independent India, the movement subsided.

15. **1967- Naxalbari**. Naxalbari, a small village in the Darjeeling district got infamous because it is this place from where Naxalism as a modern communist struggle began in May 1967. The incident provided a spark to various left-aligned groups to wage war against the state and gave the popular slogan "land to tillers". It was here that this movement took its birth in its present-day manifestation. When the land reforms Act 1955 was passed, the landlords in order to circumvent the law started transferring land to their relatives. It is then that peasants felt cheated and started the revolt against landlords to gain control over lands. The Revolt was actually started when Bimal Kissan, a tribal youngster, gained a court ruling allowing him to plough his land. However, the local landlord with the support of his goons attacked him. The local tribal population were enraged as a result, and they engaged in violent reprisal to reclaim their territory. In retaliation, the state government ordered the heavy deployment of state forces and the situation was brought under control after 72 days¹⁹. Charu Mazumdar along with other prominent leaders led this first Maoist uprising in India. Although not many people lost their lives, it was hailed as 'the single spark which can start a prairie fire'- which it truly did as it turned out to be the watershed event that lay the foundation for the modern-day 'Naxalism' or 'Maoism' as Free India came to know it. The movement lost its agrarian character and became a militant one.

Genesis and Growth of Maoism up till the Formation of CPI (Maoist).

16. The birth of the Communist movement in India from which the Naxal movement ultimately emerged has its origins in the formation of the Communist Party of India- (CPI) in 1925 at Kanpur²⁰. CPI had an insignificant role in the freedom movement. Post-independence, its influence was confined to parts of Andhra Pradesh (AP), West Bengal (WB) and a few other areas of the country. In 1964, the party split on ideological grounds and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPI (M) was formed. The CPI (M) shunned revolutionary politics and decided to participate in elections. In the 1967 elections of West Bengal, two broad fronts were formed against the ruling Congress party, namely the United Left Front (ULF) and the Progressive United Left Front (PULF). The CPI (M) was the major constituent of the former, while Bangla Congress was of the latter. Both fronts joined hands to 'form the United Front and

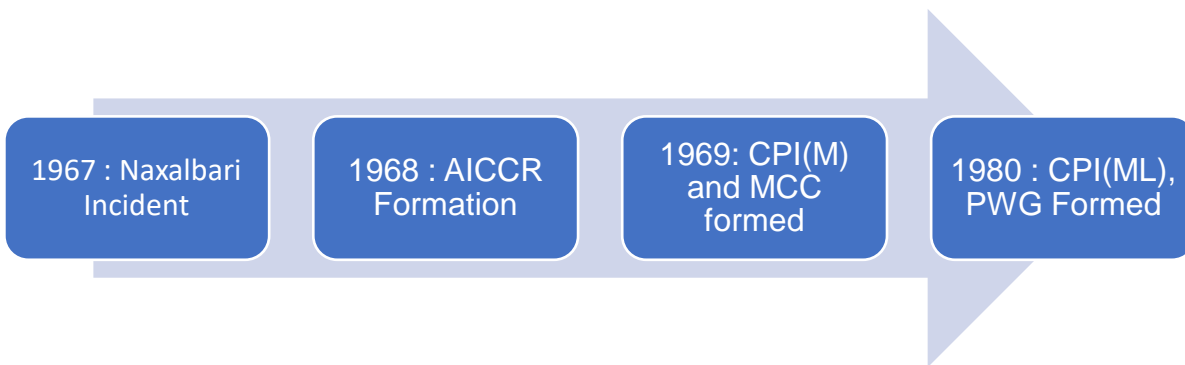
¹⁸ Op Cit., Banerjee Abhijit

¹⁹ Ahluwalia VK. Red Revolution 2020 and Beyond, 2013. Bloomsbury Publishing India Pvt Ltd, New Delhi.

²⁰ Ibid.

Congress was defeated. However factious leaders like Charu Mazumdar did not fully align with the political thought process of the party and felt betrayed by it taking part in the election²¹.

17. Once the Naxalbari incident took place, to put down the revolts and the arson and disorder that followed it, the United Front government initiated a police crackdown and crushed the movement. After the Naxal uprising, in 1967, many Communist groups from Tamil Nadu (TN), Kerala, Uttar Pradesh (UP), Karnataka, Orissa and West Bengal (WB)²² met and in 1968 formed the All-India Coordination Committee of Communists Revolutionaries (AICCCR)²³, which decided to boycott elections. In 1969 the AICCCR unanimously decided to form a new party under the leadership of Charu Mazumdar which was named the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) CPI(ML). This party was deeply influenced by Maoism and started setting up Guerrilla zones in West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh. In 1971 Govt launched the operation “**Steeplechase**” to quell this movement²⁴. The operation resulted in the killing and capture of most of the prominent leaders and forced the party to split into smaller groups.



Growth of Naxalism: 1967-1998

ROOT CAUSES OF THE NAXALITE MOVEMENT

17. Numerous factors have combined to lead to a significant portion of the Adivasi community joining the Maoist movement. Other than the 'legacy issues' inherited by free India from the British era, a full-grown Naxalite problem even after 75 years of independence only serves to highlight the nation's collective failure to recognise and address the issues of its own citizens, who ultimately got disenchanted by the state apparatus' indifference and adopted the militant way of life. In the succeeding paragraphs, we shall examine the major issues that have caused the rise and growth of the Naxalite movement. Ishikawa diagram has been used to identify the root causes, and to home on to the important and not-so-significant factors which the Government has ignored or failed to address resulting in the increase of Naxalism both

²¹ Katoch C Dhruv. Naxal Violence: An Overview, 2012. Naxal Violence The Threat Within, Kanwal Gurmeet and Katoch C Dhruv, Centre for Land Warfare Studies, New Delhi, KW Publishers Pvt Ltd, New Delhi

²² 30 years of Naxalism. CPI (ML)Publications. Available at <http://cpiml.org/publications-english/three-glorious-decades-of-naxalbari/content/30-years-of-naxalbari/>

²³ Shrey Verma, The Far-Reaching Consequences of the Naxalite Movement in India, Rakshak Foundation, July 2011

²⁴ Lynch III Thomas F., India's Naxalite Insurgency: History, Trajectory, and Implications for U.S.-India Security Cooperation on Domestic Counterinsurgency, Oct 2016

in its violence levels as well as spatial coverage. Causes and Effects analysis using Ishikawa Diagrams (Fish Bone) is attached as **Appendix**.

- (a) **Zamindari System**²⁵ Under the Zamindari system, which was put into place under the British occupation, a Zamindar was allocated a plot of land in exchange for paying a fixed sum to the British government or Company. It was not the Zamindar who personally farmed the land. He dispersed it and redistributed it until it reached the land's tiller, a tribe member or a local toiling hard in the field. Because a certain sum had to be given to the land renter at each level, the downtrodden or tribal people suffered greatly. This inevitably led to the exploitation of the destitute tribal people.
- (b) **Forest Conservation Act and its adverse effect.** Conservation measures have made it difficult for people to survive in their own communities and have driven them off their lands. People are now considered to be encroachers on the land they have lived on for millennia since the Forest Conservation Act, 1980 forbids them from accessing forest resources. The Naxals cunningly seized and abused the legitimate tribal resentment and rage, contributing to the marginalisation of society.
- (c) **Resettlement and Rehabilitation**²⁶ The records of resettlement and rehabilitation reveal that payment of compensation for lands and assets acquired from the people for various purposes is very rarely compensated to them. This has led to deprivation and marginalization of the people. Even though the nation underwent industrialisation, the indigenous peoples were denied access to the fundamental advantages of education and training. Therefore, they could not avail themselves of new opportunities in the industries and remained marginalized. Administration in Remote Areas being very poor and unmonitored, these areas were developed but had poor connectivity. Even post-independence, the agrarian reforms did not reach these areas. Corruption, vote bank politics and atrocities against the Scheduled Castes wreaked havoc on the economic and social fabric of the society.
- (d) **Governance and Social Structure.**²⁷ The government has failed to discharge its constitutional duties toward ensuring a dignified and honourable livelihood in the Naxal-affected area which has led to the negligence of the local aspirations of the population and the vacuum thus created has been adequately exploited by Naxals to promote their ideology. Naxalism has found deep roots in areas, where this empowerment has not taken place primarily due to a lack of combination of local level, corrupt government officials and landlords. Naxalism besides being a socio-economic struggle is also a reflection of the skewed growth trajectory of the Indian economy, which has made two different worlds, one affluent, vibrant, and well on the path of being a superpower and the other mired by corruption, mal-governance and stagnating in abject poverty.
- (e) **Socio-Economic Inequalities.** The Naxal-affected areas are severely affected by the disparities in economic and social terms. The rich Thakurs and Zamindars considered poor people and tribals as people with no dignity and, hence, socially exploited them. All kinds of social discrimination were practised

²⁵ Op. Cit., Awasthi Sonali

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Ibid 18.

against them. The females of the poor classes were treated as commodities to be used and exploited. These inequalities in society forced them to take recourse to violence and join Naxalism. Economically, there is a large gap between the haves and have-nots. Naxal organisations are able to continue to attract recruits thanks to the dearth of work options for young people in the country's relatively underdeveloped regions. Hence, the primary incentive to join the Naxals was to ensure an adequate income. The poverty levels in the Naxal-affected states of Orissa, Bihar, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand are much higher (with more than 40 per cent of the population living below the poverty line).

(f) **Poverty and Poor Human Development Indices.** Since independence, while poverty indices have declined over the years, the inequality in the distribution of wealth, resources and opportunities continues to persist. In the case of the tribals of Central India, the gap between the rich and poor have widened further. According to the preliminary survey of the 68th National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO)²⁸, 'Rising poor-rich divide shows that the growth has not tickled down' – in comparison with the national average of 27%, about 48% of India's ST population is below the poverty line. In rural India, poverty amongst the backward classes is the highest in Orissa (76%) and Bihar (64%), followed by Jharkhand (58%), Uttarakhand (54%) and Orissa (50%). Again 43% of India's children suffer from malnutrition and India remains home to 217 million malnourished people.

(g) **Employment Opportunities.** Adequate employment opportunities have an important role in human resource development and management, the empowerment and enhancement of the skills of the people and the living standards of the population. This thus directly affects economic security and allows gainful participation in societal and economic enhancement. The high unemployment rates in the five Naxal-affected states²⁹ of Andhra Pradesh (8.2 rural and 13.6 urban), Chhattisgarh (5.8 rural and 19.9 urban), Jharkhand (10.5 rural and 13.4 urban), Orissa (6.4 rural and 24.0 urban) and Madhya Pradesh (9.0 rural and 12.5 urban) directly contributes towards the frustration and anger of the people, when compared with the national average of 7.5 for rural and 10.0 for urban areas. Higher unemployment leads to poor economic conditions and feeds insecurity amongst the people and is thus a major contributing factor towards Naxal violence. Not surprisingly the Economist observed "Indian youth is one of the bulges and potentially scariest demographic bulges the world has seen"- thereby implying that the increasing youth population bereft of jobs has the potential to create social upheaval and disharmony in society.

(h) **Health and Education.** As per data held with the National Family Health Survey 23 (NFHS-III)³⁰, as compared to the national averages, the tribal population in the LWE-affected states has an immense, negative disparity in morbidity rates, low levels of immunization, high levels of malnutrition among women and children and vaccination coverage. As per a GoI report, the infant mortality rate which is indicative of the reach of primary healthcare³¹, is as high as 84.2 per thousand in the case of the tribal population in comparison with 61.8 in the rest of the country. India has granted all children between the ages of 6 and 14 the right to free and compulsory education via the Right to Education Act. While the

²⁸ Op Cit., Ahluwalia VK

²⁹ Op Cit., Ahluwalia VK

³⁰ Op Cit., Ahluwalia VK

³¹ Op Cit., Ahluwalia VK

literacy rates of India are not the best, yet the rates at 65% of the All-India Literacy Average is comparatively good. However, the Tribal Literacy National Average is 47% which is much below the All-India Literacy Average.

(j) **Breeding Grounds for Spread of LWE.** The Inaccessibility to these areas not only inhibits economic development but also provides safe havens and opportunities for the spread and expansion of Maoist ideology. The Naxals do not rush into areas propagating Maoism, they generally carry out reconnaissance of an area for years before moving in. Having understood the local grievances and demands they slowly link likely solutions to party membership and ideology. By representing local grievances, the insurgents are able to develop trust amongst the Adivasis, which is essential for their security and the growth of the movement.

(k) **Inequitable land ownership.** Post-Independence, the Government did promulgate the land reforms which should have imposed ceilings on landholders, ensured rationalisation of different tenure systems and abolished the intermediaries. Further, the land was supposed to be redistributed amongst the population for equitable growth and wealth creation. However, political apathy and bureaucratic inefficiency ensured that between 1950 and 1980³², only 5% of the landless population received land from the state, and the state managed to distribute only 28% of the arable land in its possession. In fact, studies indicate that inequalities have increased and not decreased. 40% of the rural households i.e., 1.30 Cr to 1.80 Cr have no land or have less than half an acre of land. The Naxals, sensing an opportunity, have stepped into the political and administrative space wherein in some areas they have forcibly taken overland from the landlords or the unoccupied government land and resettled the landless on these which has ensured an increase in popularity of the Maoists.

(l) **Forest Land: Residence, Ownership and Produce.** Very often, the conundrum 'Rich Land – Poor People' is used to express the state of the tribal population of the Central Indian states. Traditionally, the forests provided the tribal people with their consumption needs of fuel and firewood, food, household materials, medicines etc. However, with 'development' taking place, the traditional forests were cut and cleared, and diverted for mining, setting up of dams and hydroelectric projects, irrigation schemes and SEZs. The tribals were not made stakeholders in the decision-making process and had to move out of their traditional areas without adequate compensation or development of alternate skill sets. Before 1980s, certain state governments did try to settle the tribals in their traditional forest areas. However, with the enactment of the Forest Conservation Act 1980, these efforts at regularisation and resettlement of the tribals were withheld. Pending the implementation of the Forest Act by the government, the Naxals have stepped into the political vacuum and assisted certain tribals in forcibly and unlawfully re-occupying certain sections of forests thereby earning goodwill and recruiting new cadres for the Naxal cause.

(m) **Displacement due to Development.** Haphazard, disorganized and contrarian economic policies and the Politician-Criminal-Contractor nexus have ensured the establishment of large-scale mega projects without carrying out a realistic social audit of the displacement of the tribals. Among India's poorest people

³² Op Cit., Ahluwalia VK

are the tribal people who reside in the Naxal-affected states. Land acquisition for mining and industrialization projects has forced tribal people and peasants from their homes across the nation. They have accused state and federal administrations of either openly conspiring with businesses or turning a blind eye to their misery. The Maoist narrative of an exploitative government working hand in glove with rapacious capitalists has been aided by the idea that the Indian government is aiding businesses that have been involved in forcibly evicting tribal people from their land.³³ In stark contrast, in some areas, in the garb of unconvincing reasons like 'preservation of the identity and culture of the tribals', no development worth its name has been undertaken, consequently, the advantages of progress are denied to the population. Available data show that for 140 big and medium dams constricted in India, 16 to 38 million people have been displaced and out of these only 25 per cent have been resettled. Another statistic depicts that 92,000 villages in India have been destroyed as the land was acquired for industrialisation, mining, construction of dams, the establishment of SEZs etc. The Balimela water reservoir in Orissa, for instance, has a catchment area of approximately 4910 sq km that resulted in displacing people of 69 villages and cutting off 151 villages displacing a population of 15,800 people with 87.5% being tribals³⁴, is a case in point to the 'human tragedies' associated with these developmental projects. While development will and has to take place, yet without making the tribals stakeholders and without resettling them adequately, fertile grounds have been created by the Indian state for the growth of the Naxal movement.

(n) **Migration of Outsiders into Tribal Lands**³⁵. The tribal are facing a double whammy in land ownership. While on one hand, land that was traditionally and historically theirs, though not recorded in legal terms, was taken away from them in the name of development and/or conservation of the forest reserves, on the other hand, unabated migration by a number of 'outsider' tribes and conversion by Christian missionaries of the tribal population into Christianity has added additional pressures on their land, resources and existence along with ideological corrosion which adversely affects their culture and beliefs. As a result, the Adivasis are now a majority in only a fraction of their original homelands. When the Banjaras, a group of nomadic cattle herders who had been settling in the Gond territory and were originated from Rajasthan, were designated as ST in 1977, the Gonds of Andhra Pradesh virtually lost their last advantage in seeking to safeguard their land. Non-availability of ST status in Maharashtra led Banjaras to move into Andhra Pradesh thereby competing with Gonds for land, reserved political seats, seats in educational institutes and other benefits. Further 'Telugu-speaking people' have migrated in large numbers and practically swamped the areas near Godavari i.e. Bastar, Adilabad, Warangal, Khammam and East Godavari. Having migrated, they have exploited the tribals mercilessly and reduced them to second-class citizens. With the settling down of Brahmins in the tribal lands, the tribals who were the original inhabitants started being called as lower 'jatis' (or castes). Made 'foreigners' in their own land and exploited ruthlessly, the Adivasis are thus easily recruited by the Naxalites who show them hope in regaining their lands, rights and honour.

³³ Mazumdar Arijit, Left-Wing Extremism and Counterinsurgency in India: The 'Andhra Model' Published online on 02 Aug 2013

³⁴ Mishra Dr Pradeepta Kumar, Tribal Displacement and Environmental Lose Involved in Balimela Dam Project of Odisha, IJCRT Volume 6, Issue 1 March 2018

³⁵ Guruswamy Mohan. The Heart of our Darkness,2012. Naxal Violence the Threat Within

(o) **Marginalisation of Tribals and Social Discrimination.** On Dec 13, 1946, 28 Pt Jawahar Lal Nehru moved the 'Objectives Resolution'³⁶ and Jaipal Singh rose to speak "As a Jungli, as an Adibasi" said, "I am not expected to understand the legal intricacies of the Resolution If there is any group of Indian people that have been treated shabbily, it is my people. They have been disgracefully treated and neglected for the last 6000 years. The history of the Indus valley civilization, a child of which I am, shows quite clearly that it is the newcomers most of you here are intruders as far as I am concerned. The whole history of my people is of continuous exploitation and dispossession I take you on your word a new chapter of Independent India where there is equality of opportunity, where no one would be neglected"³⁷. Sadly 75 years have passed since independence, yet the systematic exploitation and social and economic abuse of the tribals continue. In many an instance, the state itself has become the tyrant, taking away the tribal land without skilling or resettling them adequately. Therefore, the fight against social discrimination is a significant issue which is exploited by the Naxalites and remains a root cause of the tribal support for the Naxalite movement.

(n) **Poor Governance.** One of the primary causes for the spread of Naxalism is poor and in most parts non-existent governance or state structures. Due to the poor infrastructure development discussed earlier, in areas critically affected by Naxalism, there is little or no governance, with the writ of the Indian state not existing or non-effective in remote rural areas. Civil administration, police, revenue department and judicial officials have a rather tenuous presence. Those who are visible, are the forest guards, petty officials, police and low-level educational staff who are not motivated or committed and non-accountable for the cause of the people and the state. On the contrary, they exploit the poor people by making them do menial jobs or buying their produce at low rates, denying them their rightful share, justice etc. As a result, the exploited people became frustrated with the state. These shortcomings in turn have allowed the Naxals to run parallel governments in some areas. Consequently 'Jan Adalats' are held, levies imposed and taxes collected. Social justice in terms of land distribution, increased payments for their produce like tendu leaves (meant for the making of bidis) collection, construction of irrigation facilities, provision of medicines etc on the other hand are undertaken, albeit symbolically, by the Naxals and not the government. Therefore, the writ and popularity of the Naxals increased amongst the tribals who see them as more efficient and effective in dispensing social justice than the government machinery itself. Poor governance by the state coupled with genuine grievances of the tribals who feel marginalized, with their traditional lands, homes and forests taken away, and their traditional systems under threat, feel that joining the Naxalite movement is the only recourse left to them to seek redemption.

STATE'S RESPONSE TO NAXALITE CHALLENGE

18. Government could not comprehend the motivations behind the Naxalite Movement and did not recognise the inevitable domestic unrest the movement would cause in the future. Initially, the response of the central as well as the state government, was that this was a problem of 'law and order'. The government completely failed to understand the situation and this can be borne out by the statement made

³⁶ Chatterjee Souvik, Naxalism: A Threat to Indian Internal Security, 2012. Swastik Publications, New Delhi.p.33

³⁷ Bordia Radhika, A 'Jungli' In The Constituent Assembly: Jaipal Singh Munda, Ndtv, an article published on 26 Jan 2017

in Lok Sabha by Home Minister Y.B. Chavan, On June 13 1967, where he stated that “This was a case of lawlessness and should be contained and crushed by the local police force”³⁸. The government believed that it was an agrarian revolt against landlords and not against the state itself. Even Manmohan Singh who served as the Prime Minister stated that “What was thought to be a brief period of discontent has today grown into becoming India’s biggest threat to internal security”³⁹. From being just a law and problem to the biggest internal threat to national security, Naxalism has meta morphed into a security challenge to the establishment.

19. The government was unable to understand the fundamental causes of the Naxalite movement. The government's early response was consequently sluggish and slow. The annual reports published by the MHA, Government of India from 1970 to 1998 reflect Governments both at the Centre and State's reluctance and poor understanding of the intensity and nature of the Naxal issue.

20. According to the MHA report 1991-92⁴⁰, Naxals were responsible for 1870 incidents resulting in 473 deaths. Most of these violent incidents were reported from areas of the Naxal stronghold. Despite the sufferings, the local population continued their support to Naxals may be by force or willingness. These people have found a way to address their grievances against Government and inefficient civil administration which have failed to provide even the basic necessities for their survival, even when the nation has been witnessing tremendous economic growth. In the following paragraphs, a brief overview of the Central Government’s approach to LWE from its inception in 1967 till 1998 has been covered.

Initial Response from 1967 till 1998.

21. When the Naxal uprising began in 1967, the Indian government looked at it as a law and order problem. It did not analyse the causes of the movement and the extent of the mobilization of people. Hence, it believed that it could and would put an end to it in a short period 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 mere⁴¹ "lawlessness" – a transgression to be repressed and contained⁴². So, while Charu Mazumdar named the 1970's the “Decade of liberation”⁴³, the Indian state chose to make it the “decade of repression”. The United Front administration in West Bengal was torn over the nature and extent of its reaction to the Naxal violence. ⁴⁴. It acknowledged the urgent necessity to deal with the issue of enormous iniquity. Even though the cause was morally right, as a government it could not allow any violent rebellion to undermine its authority.

³⁸ Dixit Raman, Naxalite Movement in India: The State's Response, IDSA paper, Vol 4. No 2. April 2010

³⁹ Singh Manmohan, PM’s speech at the Chief Minister’s meet on Naxalism, April 13, 2006, released by PIB, <https://archivepmo.nic.in/drmanmohansingh/speech-details.php?nodeid=302>

⁴⁰ MHA Report on internal security 1991-92, Left Wing Extremism, p. 8

⁴¹ Op. Cit., Dixit Raman

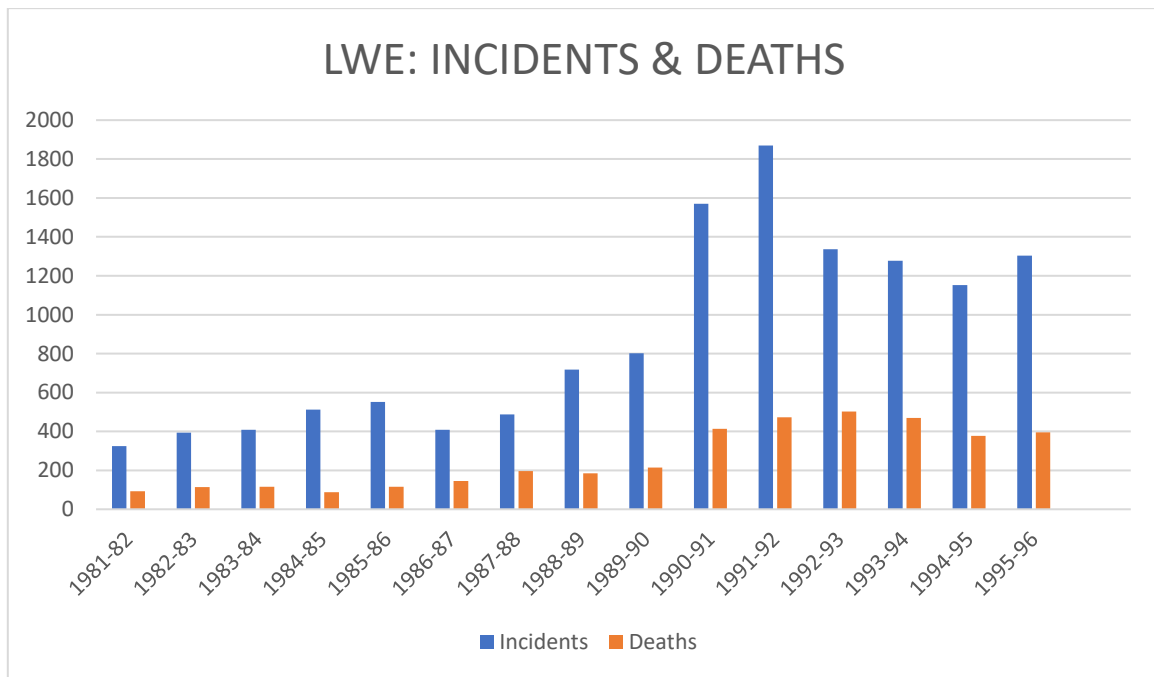
⁴³ MAZUMDAR Charu, Make The 1970’S The Decade Of Liberation from Liberation, Vol. III, No. 4 (February 1970), Available at <https://cpiml.org/library/charu-mazumdar-collected-writings/formation-of-communist-party-of-india-marxist-leninist-22-april-1969/make-the-1970s-the-decade-of-liberation/>

⁴⁴ Op. Cit., Dixit Raman

22. Further analysis of reports published by MHA, GoI from 1967 to 1998 reflects the Government’s lack of understanding of the issue, factors supporting the rise and spread of Naxalism across India as well as ill-conceived methods to bring down insurgency being waged by its own people. MHA report on internal security 1977-78⁴⁵ doesn't mention any measures by the government to address the Naxal issue.

However, it does agree that the infringement of Law and Order by Naxalites is due to their political ideology and that measures to wean them away from the path of violence should be attempted.

Naxalism Growth and Government’s Response



*Source: MHA Annual Reports

24. The Ministry of Home Affairs publishes its annual report giving out its mandated role as per the constitution of India, internal security situations including various activities like situations in disturbed areas, steps being taken by the Central government to deal with such issues, police organisation and modernisation programmes. A careful analysis of these reports throws interesting and intriguing outputs about the evolution of Government response to deal with Naxalism over a period of time. For the purpose of this paper, MHA reports from 1970-1998 have been analysed to understand the Governments approach to deal with Naxalism.

26. MHA reports beginning from 1981 till 1987 just indicates the number of incidents and deaths resulting thereof. These reports do not indicate/reflect actions being undertaken by Government. During these years Government either did not consider LWE as a major internal problem or may not have developed a strategy to deal with it. It can be inferred that till this time Government considered it to be a law and order problem and thought it could be handled by affected states. The worst affected states during this time were Andhra Pradesh and Bihar and West Bengal. By 1983-84 Naxalism started spreading its

⁴⁵ MHA Report on internal security 1977-78, Left Wing Extremism

tentacles in the states of Maharashtra, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. By 1985-86, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa were also experiencing incidents related to Naxalism. 1987-88, Govt report first time included steps being undertaken to deal with Naxalism to include better policing efforts and socio-economic development⁴⁶, the policy continued for the next half a decade. Naxalism then started spreading to other states with Andhra Pradesh and Bihar remaining the worst affected states.

27. 1989-90, Andhra Pradesh based Peoples War Group started emerging as the most violent group responsible for the bulk of the violence. There was a marked escalation in targeted killings of suspected police informers and local leaders. Acts of violence included kidnapping, murder and the use of IEDs.

28. It was in 1991-92 that Central Government for the first time conducted meeting of the union Home minister and Chief Ministers⁴⁷ of affected states in order to evolve a coordinated and integrated approach to handle the spiralling issue of Naxalism. Also, the Government accepted the serious challenge being posed by Naxals to internal security and set up a Joint Coordination centre in 1991-92.

29. In 1993-94, Andhra Pradesh State Government initiated police actions and gained partial success thereby reducing the violence level. Andhra Pradesh Government also banned PWG and its front organisations⁴⁸. Bihar also banned Moist Communist Centre (MCC). The second meeting between the Union Home Minister and Chief Ministers of affected states was conducted where in central Government conveyed that it attaches high priority to the Naxal issue and it must be dealt with through police order and socioeconomic development⁴⁹.

30. In 1995-96, the word "Left Wing Extremism"⁵⁰ found its mention in the Government Report instead of "Extremists". The government also gave out its policy of a double-pronged strategy with strict laws and special development impetus. The Central Government had asked the State Governments to take purposive, well-coordinated and integrated action which should include, among other things, intensification of development activities, rapid improvement in roads and communication and implementation of land reforms⁵¹. The Central Government is also imparting appropriate training to the State police as and when requested by them. The proposal for raising Special forces was muted for the first time with specialisation in jungle warfare, commando operations, handling of explosives, use of sniffer dogs⁵² etc.

31. **1998-99.** Additionally, meetings between the union Home Minister and the Chief Ministers of the afflicted states continued during this time, with the JCC playing an important role in assessing existing scenarios and interstate coordination. The joint Coordination Centre was headed by Home Secretary and comprised of the Chief Secretary and Police Chiefs of Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Madhya

⁴⁶ MHA Report on internal security 1987-88, Left Wing Extremism, p.4

⁴⁷ MHA Report on internal security 1991-92, Left Wing Extremism, p.8

⁴⁸ MHA Report on internal security 1993-94, Left Wing Extremism, p.17

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ MHA Report on internal security 1995-96, Left Wing Extremism, p.8

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² Ibid

Pradesh and Maharashtra. Later Bihar⁵³ was also included as part of JCC. Central Government also advised affected states to forward the requirement of funds for the development of these areas and the modernisation of Police forces. Also, the Security Related Infrastructure development fund for affected states was being considered by Central Government⁵⁴.

32. **Analysis of Government Response**. The government response has swung from considering Naxalism as a Law-and-Order problem to a serious internal security challenge by 1998-99. Initially, Centre Government totally relied on states to take necessary measures to tackle the issue, Law and Order being a state subject. Left Wing Extremism related incidents kept growing from 325 incidents resulting in 92 deaths in 1981-82 to more than 1800 incidents resulting in 473 deaths in 1991-92 an unnerving increase of 575%. This increase in incidents and violence level not only forced Central Government to consider LWE as a serious challenge to internal security but also to initiate actions at the national level to curb the movement which included regular meetings of the Union Home Minister with Chief Ministers of affected states, setting up of JCC, raising and training of special forces, adoption of a double-pronged strategy of police action and socio-economic development. The Centre had also asked affected states to prepare a "holistic security and development plan to address the issue in a comprehensive manner using a double-pronged strategy of police action and socio-economic development. Though seriousness and need for coordinated actions were established, but on-ground implementation was far-fetched. The states themselves were in a state of dilemma as to handling the issue using a security-centric approach or development-centric approach. The Naxals exploited the lack of coordination amongst states and shifted their bases from areas of high pressure to areas of low pressure ensuring their survivability

33. The major factors responsible for the spread of Naxalism to include rights over forests land usage, poor economic conditions, the need for land reforms, inefficient governance and non-functionality of internal security apparatus in tribal and Adivasi areas however remained at bay in the Governments approach and actions. It worked in the Naxal's favour as it provided them with fertile ground conducive to the spread of left-wing ideology and weaning away the Government's hold in these areas. Naxals during this period spread over around 8 states⁵⁵. Also established liberated zones in jungles and inaccessible areas. The growth in Naxal strongholds not only affected locals in terms of daily living but also prevented Government machinery to execute developmental activities further accentuating backwardness in these areas. All these factors ensured that the Naxals grew in these areas whereas the Government failed to garner support and establish its legitimacy to govern the masses.

Conclusion

34. The Naxals actively participated in society, supported their causes, and fought for their self-respect and rights. They won the admiration of the native population and the downtrodden. Though it began with the noble goal of advancing tribal peoples and Adivasis and fighting for their rights to social dignity and self-esteem, the movement lost its focus and turned to violence as a means of overthrowing the legitimate, democratically elected government. The means and methods so adopted to achieve its aim, deterred it

⁵³ MHA Report on internal security 1998-99, Left Wing Extremism, p.5

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ Ibid

from becoming an accepted revolution. The Government on the other hand has failed in its understanding and approach to counter the movement. The Naxals were successful in exploiting local sentiments post-independence to their advantage but the Government failed to provide an acceptable model of governance and establish its legitimacy in far-flung tribal areas. The Government must acknowledge that it's not just an armed struggle but a political ideological issue and must devise and implement measures to end this insurgency now that it is at its lowest point in history.