

How Naxal Movement Started in India?

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Introduction

Naxalism is a movement which started as a rebellion against the local landlords over land control has turned out to be today the biggest threat to the national security of India with every passing year hundreds of people are being killed by the naxalites. It is now spread over 14 states covering about 160 districts (Misra, 2008, p.63). According to various sources, it is believed that more than 6000 people have been killed in naxal violence in the last 20 years. It therefore becomes pertinent to understand the root causes of the movement that can be political or economic in nature. But before examining the causes a brief insight into the history of the movement is essential.

Brief History of Naxalism

The naxal movement is now more than forty years old. The movement started in 1967 in the form of a peasant uprising that occurred in the village of Naxalbari, located in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal. The term “Naxalite” refers to “all forms of armed struggle that have taken up the cause of socioeconomic development of the downtrodden rural masses” (DeBlieck, 2006, p.3). The fourth general elections, which were held in 1967, marked the beginning of the Naxal movement. The elections resulted in a stunning end to the hegemony of the Indian National Congress party over State governments and the surprising rise of a new party, the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M). The extreme Leftist of the CPI-M and their belief in a Mao inspired revolution for India directed and fueled the Naxalite movement of 1967-1972 (ibid, p.3).

Although the authorities in West Bengal were successful in suppressing the Naxalite insurgency in 1972, the movement proved to be the inspiration for other actors interested in achieving social justice through violence. About 10,000 people have been killed in the civil war since 1980. In April 2010 in Chattisgarh 76 paramilitary troops were killed. On May 25, 2013 Maoist insurgents in the same State again wiped out almost the entire leadership of the Congress Party

killing 28 of its members. The movement therefore captured the attention of the Central Government with former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh describing it as the “ single biggest internal security challenge ever faced by our country (Ismi,2013,p.1).The successors of Mazumdar’s Maoist revolution have been most active in the States of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh. These regions are referred to as the “Red Corridor” serve as the base of the Naxals. The question that arises is that why inspite of leadership’s all efforts to contain the movement have failed and the naxal insurrection continues to survive. To answer this, one needs to identify the factors – political or economic in nature which have led not only to the emergence but sustenance of movement.

Naxalite Movement in India: Major Causes

The naxalite revolt has grown in magnitude and strength for many reasons which can be identifies as political or economic in nature. The political factors that can be identified are as- the emergence of the movement has coincided with the formation of the first United Front government in West Bengal(1967) with the Communist Part of India (M) as its main constituent, received increasing official support, attention and press coverage(Misra,2008,p.63).

The external political factor was the influence of the Chinese Communist Party and Mao Zedong.This movement has been further given momentum by the insensitive nature of the political system. The tribals, more than any oppressed category has got nothing out of the Indian State before and after globalization. The Indian State has always taken land alienation of tribals for granted as one of the consequences of ‘progress’ that must be put up with owing to a skewed pattern of land distribution, tribals and dalits are at the receiving end of the land owing castes.

Besides political factors, economic factors have been the main catalyst in giving rise to naxalism. The tribals and dalits are among the poorest of the poor and the most marginalized sections of the society. The landowning pattern is highly skewed and the dalits constitute the largest percentage of landless persons. A significant percentage among them does not even have secure homestead land. The dalits in the absence of opportunities for wage employment elsewhere are dependent upon the landowners for providing them avenues of livelihood in the rural areas. These include payment of very low wages, long hours of work, debt bondage control over produce from owned land, if any; humiliating treatment and physical assault in the case of non-

compliance of employer's orders (Chenoy and Chenoy, 2010, p.119). This problem has further increased with the impact of globalization. Several multi-national companies have started exploiting their resource richness and have uprooted the tribals from their traditional source of livelihood. The economic deprivation experienced by the tribals has generated frustration which then is released in the form of attacks on people who work in the companies and even the various State functionaries are also targeted. Economically the problem of poverty and economic inequality can therefore be identified as vital in accelerating the pace of the movement.

Naxalite Movement Today

The naxal movement in India still has strength in certain regions but it is grossly untenable to say that they pose an existential threat to India as they did in late 2000s. The steadfast implementation of the "National Policy and Action Plan to address Left wing Extremism" -2015 has resulted in a consistent decline in naxal violence. Joint efforts of the Centre and the States in cracking down on left wing Extremism led by Prime Minister have yielded much success. The government is pushing towards modernisation of forces with the latest equipment, arms and ammunition in fighting with Naxals. The government has approved Rs.26, 275 crore from 2021-22 to 2025-26 for its umbrella scheme, Modernisation of Police Forces as part of the initiative to improve the functioning of police forces across States and Union Territories. The Union Ministry in its efforts to curb the expansion plan of CPI (Maoist) and also to restrict them to bounce back in the areas, recently has taken away from Left Wing Extremists influence 8 districts.

The overall decline in Naxal activities has further been facilitated by the restrictions relating to coronavirus pandemic. Their activity is now just concentrated in four States- Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha and Maharashtra. According to the Home Ministry, the incidents of violence have reduced from 2,258 in 2009 to 349 incidents in August, 2020. During this period even the number of deaths have reduced from 908 to 110 (Singh, 2021). Thus one can say that the geographical influence of the Naxals as well as the incidents of Left Wing Extremism violence have reduced over a period of time.

Conclusion and Future Expectations

To combat the naxals by undertaking oppressive steps by the government however is not a remedy to the problem. According to the former Home Secretary, V.K.Duggal, "Naxal groups have been raising mainly land and livelihood related issues. If land reforms are taken upon priority and the landless and poor in the Naxal areas are allotted surplus land, this would go a long way in tackling the developmental aspects of the Naxal problem" (Anti-Imperialism.com, 2011, p.3).

The governments both at the Centre and State level need to address the problem by undertaking developmental activities and formulating such policies the benefits of which actually trickle down to the tribal masses. The State needs to formulate laws which regulate the entry of private companies that undertake activities in the tribal dominated areas. The economic development of the tribal areas needs to be undertaken in a way where the tribals are assured of benefits. In fact the responsibility to bring out economic development of the naxal dominated areas needs to be taken by the State governments with the valuable assistance of the Central government. These measures should be such which do not dislocate the tribals. The indigenous population of the naxal affected areas needs to be involved while chalking out the developmental path of these areas. Further the government has to instill faith in the people that they will be governed in a better manner than by the Naxals. The government should include laws in the forest act that only forest dwelling tribes and scheduled castes should be allowed to use the produce of the forest. Proper guarding of financial institutions sanctioning loans to these tribes should be ensured which will help these tribes to realize that the government is with them. These responsive measures with focus on participatory development will generate a sense of satisfaction among the tribals and hence prevent the emergence of frustration amongst them.

The Central government should form a separate ministry which will undertake the development of the areas affected by the Naxal activities. The Central and State governments, the administration and the security need to recognize that the movement cannot be approached from a purely law and order point of view. Further the Central government needs to devise measures where use of force should be the last option. The Central government should look for options that would facilitate in creating an environment of dialogue and discussion. The Central government needs to direct its efforts in understanding the ground level realities of the naxal

dominated areas. The peaceful measures will go a long way in providing a long lasting solution to the problem.

The naxals on the other hand should also understand that they can never achieve their aim of overthrowing the Indian State. The Maoist can fight for any number of years but that would only mean loss of precious lives and suffering to the tribals inhabiting central India. There is only one way out and it is that the government of India and the Maoists should sit across the table and sort out their differences.

Thus by taking measures both at the economic as well as political level; the Indian State will be able to curb the influence of Naxalism. Social justice and inclusive growth are the planks on which the government must build its programme. The responsive efforts on the part of the State will go a long way in not only bringing peace in the naxal areas but also in saving both human and material resources which then can be directed to the development of the naxal affected areas. Thus only with responsive consolidated efforts of the government that the problem of naxalism can be tackled.

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