

Tracing Governmental-Naxal-Tribal nexus: Focusing on the resource-rich region of Bastar in Chhattisgarh through Human Rights Lens

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Abstract

The Preamble of our constitution which was enacted, enforced and adopted by us, the people of India, secures us with justice, equality, liberty and fraternity. Our leaders had held the vision of just and equitable India, who not only have substantiated this idea of justice and equality in the constitutional framework but also proclaimed in their impactful speeches that “the last man of the row will get maximum benefits”. Sadly enough, the conditions of weak and oppressed didn’t change. In Eastern India, the condition of peasants worsened during 1960s. They were continually being exploited at the hands of landlords. Ignorance to peaceful protests and futile discourses with parliament gave rise to the peasant uprising in Naxalbari village of West Bengal during 1967.

Keywords: Naxalism, Radicals, Community, Ideology

Charu Mazumdar and Kanu Sayal, two of the important founder-members of CPI (Marxists Leninist) decided to shape this uprising against the parliamentary forces while accepting the ideology of Mao-Tse-Tung/Mao Zedong. These radicals believed that the transition to socialism could never be achieved through peaceful coexistence of communism and capitalism. The pressing aim of the party at that hour thus became the collaboration and gradual organization of four-class alliance of the peasantry, the proletariat, the petty bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie in the armed struggle against the parliament to establish socialism and ultimately form a communist society. It is indeed ironical to witness that what once began as an anti landlord movement and demanded land reforms, has now been termed as the ‘gravest internal security matter’ for the people of India. The movement, which took shape to demand the rights of tribes and exploitation of the weak and poor people, is now the centre of such abuses.

The peasant uprising which led to the rise of Naxalism in Naxalbari, a small village in the district of Darjelling, West Bengal during 1967 was wiped out by 1970 for various reasons. The ember of hope and justice that the uprising has buried 40 years back ignited the radicals in 2004. Two naxal groups, namely, Maoist communist centre of India (MCCI) and People's War Group (PWG) collaborated to form a party, Communist Party of India (Maoist) which was headed by Muppala Lakshmana Rao, popularly known as Ganapathi. The blatant ideology of Maoists is "*annihilation of class enemies*"

Apparently or as propagated by the mainstream media in the contemporary socio-political scenario, the land reforms in these areas and equality to the peasantry class which was the heart of this uprising has already been taken care of. The government has initiated schemes like MNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) and RTE (Right to Education) to benefit the weaker sections, still this movement is in its deadliest ever phases. This brings us to three palpable propositions:

1. The government is at fault in shaping up the reformations and implementing or executing their incredible schemes at the ground level. The ongoing struggle in these areas very conveniently hints at the failure of deliverables by the government at the surface.
2. The Maoist leaders are drawn away from their path which was once guided by the principles of Marxist-Leninist ideology. [Which in my opinion may be a propaganda initiated by status quoist, against the rebel group to make them weaker in terms of support of the civil society]
3. A mere tokenism of the development- promising schemes and acts by the government accompanied with power mongering psyche in some of the Maoists leaders has made this rebel movement as brutal as it is in the contemporary phase.

However, amongst all these political fluxes and ideological and literal warfare, the one who is "*between both sets of guns*"¹, are the adivasis, the indigenous people of India, the tribal community in the remote areas of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar.

This paper traces the contemporary state of Naxalism though drawing the nexus between government, tribal people and naxals through the human rights lens. Further, while substantiating on the crisis faced by the tribal group or the adivasis at the hands of both Maoists and the CRPF, the paper seeks to draw the reader's attention towards the grave mayhem faced by the tribal people of Bastar district of Chhattisgarh in the name of development, law and order.

A Task Force Report on National Security and Terrorism states:

"Between the Maoists and the State there remains another element in the Conflict Zone: The peoples, who are not part of the Mass Controlled Area or who do not

believe in the kind of revolution that the Maoists propagate. These peoples have three options: Die as war zone fodder, resist the Maoists on their own (very lean chance) or resist the Maoists with the help of the State.”

In my opinion, this “another element” in the conflict zone, should be given due importance as not only they have been the single largest group fighting against the violence inhibited against them but also have faced severe casualties time and again. They have been promised development by both the groups, but all they have received so far is their “clean swipe”² from their own forests where they reside, brutalism against their sons and daughters, cruel shaming of their traditional setup and interruption in their cultural setup in the name of development and. It is very much similar to the west’s notion of the other countries at the time colonial rule, which according to them were to receive the “tint of enlightenment” after their colonial invasion. Literary accounts and interviews of some of these tribal peoples easily reflect their contented attitude towards life, they have absolutely no greed for power, and it is evident in their lifestyle. Have they had any greed for money or power, they would have surely been at the foci of the power game in the contemporary politics. This, in no way means that they are far from the understanding of the power-play and various ideologies. From the adaption of *Jungle-Satyagraha*³ to their complete involvement during the independence struggle movements, they have time and again posited their complete understanding of the Gandhian-Liberation philosophy and Marxist-Leninist ideology.

A complete understanding of freedom is at the core of an Adivasis’ heart. He just wants to live by his own traditions without any interruptions. Not only this right to freedom is secured to him by the constitution of India but also it has been laid down in the Article 3 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states: “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person” (Article 3, UDHR)

This brings us to an important facet that each of the incidents that obstruct their free living and independent thinking is a grave breach of this important human right. Undoubtedly, there are many rights which are violated in the areas affected by Naxalism. Some of which include right to speech and expression, right to property, right to education, but this one right which secures the citizen of the world with the right to live peacefully, when endangered by any parliamentary force or rebel groups is gravest of all of them.

The only thing which shouldn’t be missed at any cost is that these areas are not only “Maoists-affected” areas but they hold a geographical importance too. These areas are extremely rich in mineral reserves of coal, iron ore and bauxite. The colonial laws in an attempt to prevent Adivasis have made the sales of this land and their transfers to any private company difficult which has continually agonised the capitalist minds of the ones in power.

It is in my view not a mere coincidence, that as India liberalized its economy and signed multiple MoUs sanctioning the auction of Adivasi lands to various corporate lobby

houses who are keen to harvest these resource-rich areas, in 2006, the then Prime Minister of India, had declared the Maoist insurgency as the “greatest single internal security threat” faced by the country.

The tribal people who are at the receiving end of Guerrilla warfare and various government led operations and hunts such as ‘Operation Green Hunt’ and ‘*Salwa Judum*’⁴ movements, have got nothing from them. They are being exploited, their lands are being snatched from them, their means of withholding right to education is being plundered, they have almost negligible facilities of roads and transportation, their environment is being polluted, when they offer help to security agencies, they are killed by the Maoists and when they rebel against the parliament and support Maoist, they are killed by the parliamentary forces, even when they are silent, and they are killed as suspect Maoists or suspect vigilantes. It is sad to see the indigenous people of India in such a ruthless state. Truly enough, “their voices have consequence, their silence too...”

Bastar is the one such village of Indian state Chhattisgarh that belongs to ‘Red corridor’⁵ area, where silence speaks in volumes, life begins with hunger and exploitation, the indigenous people are cursed and tribal people are severely poverty stricken. Worst is the case of women of this region. I may not be wrong while saying that it is extremely difficult for me to comprehend, acknowledge and document the atrocities that are faced by the women of Bastar and other such areas in the Red corridor belt.

There are innumerable evidences of cases of rapes, exploitation and custodial abuses of women. Almost every woman who has been detained for several unviable charges has witnessed gruesome exploitation at the hands of armed forces. The custodial abuse and exploitation is often unaddressed, though they are documented in the journals published by social activists, and journalists, yet the records of National Crime Records Bureau of India shows zero custodial rape in Bastar. Often, unfamiliarity of the laws leads the innocent tribal groups to face uncorroborated accusations backed up by insubstantial evidences. The state deployed forces, which are kept to seek law and order in the state, indulge in the most gruesome acts. More than warfare led conflict, women of Bastar are becoming the targets of custodial rapes. The another chilling reality of Bastar is the limited number of prisons and increasing number of detainees, most of whom are pre-trial detainees, arrested under the coveted “special laws”^[6]. Multiple Human Rights activists and journalists have documented these kinds of instances in their reports.

“We started opening cases and filing bail applications. Local tribals are gyrating between administration and Naxalites. Charges slapped on tribals under Unlawful Activities Prohibition Act (UAPA) and Public Security Act (PSA) without evidence initially took us to surprise but the pattern of almost every arrest with same charges were perplexing. After studying the cases, we

found that were being arrested on baseless charges. Hundreds of them are languishing in prison for several years” (Shalini Gera, Human Rights Activists, April 2015).

Chitrangada Choudhary, a senior journalist, filed a report in the National newspaper Hindustan Times, which mentioned that more than 15 women in Bastar have been at the receiving end of the sexual abuses by the state deployed forces wherein the officials lifted their lower clothing to push chillies inside their private parts. It severely questions and criticizes the legitimacy of NCRB thereby painting a disillusioned picture of state administrative forces.

Another grilling case is of Soni Suri, the educated Adivasi woman, who was also teacher at one of the schools at Bastar when she was subjected to sexual abuses by the government deployed forces. The medical reports obtained just after her acquittal from the prison concretized the presence of two stones in her genital tract and rectum. ...and they say, “police forces are models of justice”! What kind of “justice” is being attributed by the state is clearly visible with their documentation of “zero” custodial rape in the reports of Bastar. If that wasn’t enough, Ankit Garg, who allegedly was responsible for this monstrous act, received a gallantry award by the Government of India.

This is the truth of Bastar, the resource-rich yet poverty stricken region, the region which is claimed to be “affected” by an insurgent group and “protected” by the deployed forces. Women have been raped and are being raped continually, but what is more terrifying is the annihilation of the evidences and what is more reprehensible is the felicitation of the slaughterer. This blatant denial of justice and abrupt refutation of the crime is the clearly the hint of despotism in the authoritative forces.

Bidyut Chakrabaty and Rajat Kujur, in their book, *Maoism in India: Reincarnation of ultra-leftwing extremism in the twenty-first century* (2010) has discussed at length, Maoism, as the important creative ideological construct that took various forms in their journey. They have also put forward an interesting feature of this movement which is clearly evident in the following quote from the concluding chapter of their book:

“... a symbiotic bond between the tribals and the Maoists seems to have evolved to address the genuine socio-economic grievances of those pushed out of their natural habitat because of an anti-people industrial agenda. Maoism is therefore an ideology of hope for those at the lower rung of rural society.” (Chakrabarty and Kujur 2010: 202)

Ashish Nandy, an Indian political psychologist, theorist and critic, affirms that the people who are at the centre of this movement, the tribal groups are not benefiting from this conflict. “Revolutions always brutalize a society and paradoxically always make a lasting

revolutionary change impossible”, maintains Nandy in his article, “*An Ambiguous Journey to the City*”.

Arundhati Roy, in her Journal, ‘*Walking with the Comrades*’, accepts the warfare and reduces the movement as “the bunch of ordinary villagers armed with traditional weapons backed by a superbly organized, hugely motivated fighting force with an extraordinary and violent history of rebellion.” Though she is also one of the sympathizers when it comes to the atrocities that they have faced, but she posits that the tribals are fighting their own war and for their own cause well aware of its implications.

In my opinion, the understanding of nexus will be glared when tried to be explored distantly. The readers, like me, will feel a deliberate dissatisfaction while trying to arrive at a morally acceptable position. Even the political histories or liberal humanist pieces are incapable of giving a crystal clear understanding of the phenomenon. Every literary or journalistic account merely focuses a side of the phenomenon basis which makes a different judgement. Nobody in the world can really defend anything in such a non-falsifiable world and hence the people defend themselves and attack the opposition. The state authorities accuse Naxals of the brutal attacks [killing of 75 CRPF jawans at Dantewada district of Chhattisgarh] and the Naxals accuse the state of withholding their rights. The human rights and social activists often are found accusing the inhumane capitalism while the learned sociologists delve into accusing the ideologies and propaganda which ensnare the people to formulate an uprising. The left-wing accuse their extreme opponents and we, the citizens of so called “largest democratic”, “developing” nation state, accuse our representatives in the government. Passing judgements over a cup of tea and accusing the power politics or the ideological framework is the most convenient option that we choose while the government’s laxity continues to exploit the already exploited tribals of the “Maoist-affected” areas.

The only thing that is being missed in this close knit power play is the displacement of the whole Adivasi population, their exploitation and tokenism in the name of the development. The war, which is impeccably designed by the corporate lobby and the politicians are paving way for their capitalistic advances while displacing the entire Adivasi population. Therefore, it might not be wrong while assuming that the reception and execution of the revolutionist uprising which was by large and propagated “for the people” has turned out to be something that is “against the people”.

Endnotes

- [1] “Between both sets of gun” is a report submitted by Human Rights Watch that brought the suffering of civilians and innocents at the forefront.
- [2] The ‘clean swipe’ refers to the witch hunt policies like Salwa-Judum led by the parliamentary forces under the garb of tackling “the biggest security threat”. The movie

‘Charkravyuh’ (2012) captures these policies wherein the local goons, under the orders of government, blatantly moved crushers over the entire village population to “clean” the land in order to setup their industries that looks after mining process in that region.

[3] “Jungle Satyagraha” refers to the peaceful demonstrations joined by Adivasis at the call of Mahatma Gandhi against breaking forest rules and cutting of trees. It was paralleled with Dandi March and Salt Satyagraha.

[4] “Salwa Judum” refers to the “purification hunt” or the “people’s resistance movement” which was backed by the government against the Maoists. It armed a part of tribal communities to fight against the Maoists. However, it was soon declared ‘unconstitutional’ by the Supreme Court and was taken aback. But the casualties it had caused, are never deemed “unconstitutional”

[5] “Red corridor” is the area in East of India that is severely “affected” by the Maoist insurgency. These areas are also resource-rich yet poverty stricken parts of India that are yet to receive their share of development. It includes parts of Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Telangana and West Bengal.

[6] “Special Laws” refers to Chhattisgarh Special Police Security Act (CSPSA) that was enforced during 2006. ‘The CSPSA provides provisions authorises the police to detain a person for committing acts, which among other things, show a “tendency to pose an obstacle to the administration of law”. The act also states any person whose actions “encourage(s) the disobedience of the established law” will be considered “unlawful”.’ However, ‘Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, in a statement, said that the present definition of “unlawful activities” imperils free exercise of fundamental freedoms set out under Article 19 of the Constitution and illustratively it appears to restrict the right to hold public meetings; organise public protests; and oppose government policies through the media.’

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