

A Peep into Red Terror

CLAWS RESEARCH TEAM

You cannot shake hands with a clenched fist

— Indira Gandhi

The roots of left wing extremism (LWE) lie in a peasant rebellion in May 1967, in a small village called Bengai Jote, in the Naxalbari Block of Darjeeling District in West Bengal. The movement was led by Charu Majumdar against the jotedhars (landlords) of the area, and was inspired by Maoist ideology advocating seizure of power through an agrarian revolution and armed struggle. The formation of the Communist Party of India - Marxist-Leninist (CPI-ML) in 1969 rallied various Maoist tendencies into a unified organisation. One group however retained a separate identity and remained outside of CPI (ML). This group was nicknamed Dakshin Desh, after the name of its publication. The name implied that India was the 'Southern Land' whereas China was the corresponding 'Northern land'. In 1975 the group took the name Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) and in 1976 expanded its activities to eastern Bihar.

Around this time, on 22 April 1980, the People's War Group (PWG) was formed in Andhra Pradesh by Kondapalli Seetharamaiah, one of the most influential Naxalite leaders in the State and a member of the erstwhile Central Organising Committee of the CPI-ML. The PWG's operations commenced in Karimnagar district, in the North Telengana region of Andhra Pradesh, and subsequently spread to other parts of the State as well as to other States of India.

In 2004, the PWG and the MCC joined hands to form the Communist Party of India (Maoists) or CPI (Maoists). With more than 200 districts in twenty states of the country (primarily in peninsular and central India) being affected by Maoist violence, the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, has termed it as "the single biggest internal security challenge ever faced by our country."

Causative Factors

The fact that Maoist violence though periodically suppressed still manages to not just reappear but grow stronger points to endemic weaknesses both in state policies as well as systems of governance. The causative factors for the growth of LWE have regional and area wise undertones. Each area has separate and distinct sets of causes which have been exploited by the Maoists to promote their own agenda.

In broad terms, it could be said that the fruits of development have not trickled down to the vast majority of the marginalised sections of society and the state is seen by many as being exploitative of interests of the many to the benefit of the few. Primarily, it is an issue of governance, under development and an ineffective justice delivery system. Failure of the government to implement land reforms despite abolishing the Zamindari system has led many of the affected people into the hands of the Maoists. In the Tribal belt, though tribal areas were placed under the Sixth Schedule of India's constitution, the Governors of the respective states failed to carry out the constitutional provisions relating to upholding the interest of the tribals.

By the Forest Act of 1927, all forests came under the state, depriving the traditional users of the land of what was till then theirs. Post-independence, whatever little rights the indigenous forest dwelling community had, were further curtailed under the Forest Conservation Act of 1980, which deprived them of grazing rights, collection of minor forest produce and timber for personal use. Many were also evicted from forests which for centuries had been their home. Exploitation by petty government officials - forest officials, police and administration has over the years created hatred towards the government. Rampant corruption, illegal mining, starvation wages and low earnings from the forest produce have pushed the tribals further down the poverty line.

Another causative factor is social discrimination— a result of the caste system. Economic exploitation leading to bonded labour is still a reality in some of these areas. Such gross inequalities make for breeding grounds for spread of left wing ideology. The acquisition of land and exploitation of the mineral wealth from the tribal areas has led in many cases to mass displacement of people from the land of their ancestors and consequent strong resentment among the tribals. In addition, no development has taken place in these areas except what was required to exploit the area. Most of the tribal villages and settlement have no access to schools, medical care and other social amenities and very few have road connectivity.

Lack of good governance thus can be said to be the prime mover in pushing people into the fold of the Naxals. The space vacated by the government has been filled by the Naxals who run a parallel and more effective government in these areas as witnessed by the holding of Jan Adalats, levy collection, land distribution and establishment of Janata Sarkar by them. While the leadership is heavily influenced and indoctrinated by the Maoist ideology, the foot soldier joins the movement to escape poverty and exploitation at the hands of the landlord-contractor-businessmen-police and government official nexus in connivance with the political class.

Broad Political Strategy: Naxals

Maoist ideology advocates setting up a dictatorship on the lines of the Chinese Communist Party by replacing the democratic structure of India with one party communist rule. The movement hence is not aimed at secession but in annulling India's Constitution – 'to plant the red flag over the Red Fort'.

To get support of the masses, the Maoists exploit fault lines based on caste inequities, inequalities in development, issues pertaining to exploitation of the poor, governance deficit and the like. They impose their writ through force – and have no compunction in killing all those who do not conform to their ideology or those who oppose them in other ways. In Central Bihar the caste conflict has been used to promote their agenda. Over a period of time, they have successfully converted the caste conflict to a class conflict.

The Marxist's rely heavily on propaganda to spread their ideology. Information Warfare thus forms an integral part of CPI (Maoist) strategy.

"The notion that a Naxalite is someone who hates his country is naive and idiotic. He is, more likely, one who likes this country more than the rest of us, and is hence more disturbed than the rest of us when he sees it debauched. He is not a bad citizen turning to crime; he is a good citizen fighting for justice and equality".
(Naxal Watch).

The clever wording speaks for itself and seeks to cover their acts of terror, murder and mayhem in altruistic terms. They believe that by continuously attacking India's fault lines, they will be able to win over the masses, erode the credibility of the government and dispel the faith of the people in India's democratic set up thereby paving the way for their kind of totalitarian rule. By raising issues of concern they have been able to get the support of some societal

leaders, eminent writers, human rights activists and some elements of the student community from prestigious institutions such as the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU).

While the Naxals do not subscribe to the election process of the country, they are apt to support directly or indirectly any of the political parties for their benefit. They thrive on exploiting the predicaments and functional constraints of the democratic set up. The present political turf war between CPM and Trinamool Congress in West Bengal is a case in point where both parties have accused each other of talking support from the Maoists. Finally, the Naxals have no shortage of funds to run their organisation. As per rough estimates, the Maoist collect about Rs 2000 crore each year through pressurising mine owners, industrial houses, blackmail, drugs etc.

Naxal Military Strategy

The strategy as of now remains confined to acts of terror in the interior and in the less developed and less accessible parts of the country. The aim is to keep expanding their writ where government structures are either weak or nonexistent. The Maoists have correctly analysed the vulnerabilities of the state and central police forces and typically operate in those areas where a vacuum in governance exists. As part of their military strategy, they locate their bases near inter-state boundaries to enable them to avoid the police forces of the state. When pressure is applied, they simply move into the neighbouring state. The Maoists generally tend to avoid direct combat with the security forces, though incidents like the Dantewada massacre would continue to take place. They lay greater emphasis on road denial through improvised explosive devices (IED) due to easy availability of explosives and adequate expertise in making IEDs. They eliminate those they consider to be informers or operating in a manner inimical to their interests.

Kidnapping for the purpose of raising funds or getting their comrades released from Indian jails is also an important constituent of their military and political strategy. The kidnapping of District Collector of Malkangiri (Orissa) Mr Krishna in February 2011 to get their comrades released is the latest pointer in this direction. While continuing with the cycle of violence, they would like to keep it below the threshold level to prevent the deployment of the Indian Army into the conflict Zone.

The ninth congress held in secrecy in 2007 laid emphasis on the need to spread the struggle to urban areas. As of now, however, any expansion of the movement into the cities or more developed areas is unlikely. The Maoist consider that

they are still In the stage of strategic self-defence, where in the tactical counter offensive campaign is the main feature of their military strategy.

The Government Response

To deal with the problem in a holistic manner the government has adopted an integrated approach to address issues of security, development, administration and public perception. The government has constituted various forums, the Standing Committee of Chief Ministers of concerned States under the chairmanship of Union Home Minister being one of them. However, the prime responsibility to fight LWE continues to rest with the respective states duly assisted by the Centre. There are major problems in coordination of a strategy to fight the Maoists as each state has a different approach to problem resolution. Getting all states on a common platform would be difficult as law and order is a state subject. Perhaps a constitutional amendment to put the subject on the concurrent list would be required if the requisite synergy is to be achieved.

On the development front, the Central Government has provided funds for specific development schemes to address the root cause of the problem. Schemes like NREGA are being energised to tackle LWE. Special focus is also being laid on the sixty worst affected districts under its Integrated Action Plan scheme where in the government has allotted Rs 25 crore for the current financial year (2010-11) to each district; subsequent amounts will be released based on the progress of the earlier allotment. Stress on the implementation of Forest Act of 2006 and PESA is an attempt to improve the life of the people specially forest dwellers and tribals. Though the Forest Act has been diluted to extend the benefit to non tribal forest dwellers also, its implementation can do much to wean away large segments of the people from the clutches of the Maoists.

Besides providing funds for modernisation of the state police and to strengthen police posts and police stations, Central police forces are also being provided to the states on request. In addition, assistance is being given in the form of training through the Army as also in establishing training schools. Large numbers of CRPF units have been raised to tackle LWE but the force suffers from leadership constraints. Also, many issues remain on the methodology of employment of such forces. There is an urgent need to understand the capabilities of the CRPF and time required for its reorientation towards carrying out effective operations against Naxal threats. There is even a need to rethink on the decision of earmarking this force as the nodal agency to tackle internal security and on its rapid expansion. To make it a potent force, its structure, training and nature of

tasking and employment requires a relook. However, the formation of a Unified Command in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Orissa and West Bengal, the four worst affected states, should lead to better synergy in operations and coordination among the state and central forces.