

The Origin and the Status of Left Wing- Extremism in the Indian State Of Andhra Pradesh

By

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Abstract

Left-wing extremism began with the launching of Communist Party of India (CPI) in 1925. The party tried to secure independence for India from the British rule on the lines of Russian Revolution. Many tribal uprisings and the peasant revolts in the country during the British rule directly or indirectly had the influence of the Communist Movement. Stalin's advice to give up violent methods in 1951 resulted in the split of CPI with the breakaway group naming itself as Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI-M). After the CPI (M) joined the government in West Bengal, the disgruntled leaders later formed the CPI (Marxist-Leninist) and continued with their revolutionary methods. Charu Mazumdar who led the Naxalbari peasant uprising in 1967 led the CPI (ML). The governments at State and Central level took drastic steps to curb Naxalism, which continued in one form or the other with splinter groups operating in various areas. In the State of Andhra Pradesh in South India, the Naxal Movement started with the Srikakulam uprising in 1967. The movement became active once again in 1980s after the uprising was quelled by the police and the paramilitary forces. It continued to be active in the undivided State of Andhra Pradesh. In 2004 the formation of CPI- Maoists threw up a new challenge to the government. A slew of welfare schemes in Andhra Pradesh introduced by various governments especially the YSRCP government, has been successful to a large extent in preventing people from joining the ranks of Maoists. The paper deals with the origin of Left-Wing extremist movement in India and its spread to the State of Andhra Pradesh, its course and decline by using secondary sources of data and also the authors's field visits to the Naxal infested areas of Visakhapatnam district.

Keywords: Left-wing Extremism, uprising, resurgence, welfare schemes, funding, decline

Introduction

Though India is reckoned to be a fast-growing economy in the world, the Maoist insurgency throws up a challenge to its development. The left-wing extremism in the form of Maoist movement stands as a challenge to India's claims as a successful democracy. The Maoists who were earlier referred to as Naxalites continue their insurgency predominantly in the States of Jharkhand, Bihar, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Their zone of influence is referred to as Red Corridor (Shah, A., & Pettigrew, J:2009). Their battle is against the oppressive and insensitive government officials and the rich land owners. The Naxalite movement drew its inspiration from the Communist movement. It sought to redistribute the land to the landless people by grabbing it from the landlords.

Method

Secondary sources like books, research papers in journals, government reports and newspapers and magazines have been referred to gather information and subject it to content

analysis. The author's visit to the Naxal infested areas in the district of Visakhapatnam offered useful insights into the issue.

Origins of Naxalite Movement:

In a village called Naxalbari in the State of West Bengal in 1967, the oppressed peasants revolted against the feudal landlords, having been inspired by the Communist movement. They were led by Charu Mazumdar, Kanu Sanyal and Jangal Santhal (Mohitsen: 1971) The origin of Naxalism is also traced to the split in the Communist Party of India (Marxist) in 1967 wherein the breakaway group came to be known as Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)

Origin and course of Communism in India:

The Communist Party of India (CPI) was launched in India in 1925. As a part of its efforts to secure independence for India, it tried to mobilize the proletariat against the British rule, inspired by the Russian revolution (D'mello, V. K:2012) Thus, the support of CPI gave fillip to the peasant revolts already taking place across the country at various places. In 1951 when a delegation of CPI met the Soviet premier Stalin, he advised them to give up violent methods to achieve their goals and participate in the democratic process of independent India. This resulted in a setback to the Communist movement in India in support of the peasants. The CPI earlier encouraged guerrilla tactics in the Telangana peasant movement which was active till 1951 i.e., till Stalin advised them to give up violence. It however, resulted in the formation of Communist Party of India (Marxist) CPI (M) in 1964 after the disaffected cadres after Stalin's advice were looking for an alternative platform to re-launch their radical movement. This was a sequel to the differences between the Soviet Union and China as the former supported democratic processes and the latter was confined to the traditional revolutionary approach of the Communists. But those Communist cadres in favour of a violent approach formed the CPI (ML) in 1969 following the Naxalbari uprising after breaking away from CPI (M) which was part of ruling coalition in West Bengal but did not undertake land reforms to the satisfaction of leaders like Charu Mazumdar. Mazumdar was impressed by the ideology of Mao and showed inclination towards it (Franda, M. F:1969).

While CPI and CPI (M) joined the mainstream politics, CPI (ML) continued with its revolutionary activities. To contain such violent actions, the union government under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, in 1971 in the name of Operation Steeplechase sent army and the paramilitary forces to West Bengal and effectively crushed the Naxalite movement. Later Naxalites were divided into various splinter groups and operated sporadically and intermittently in certain parts of Bihar, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh.

The New Economic Policy adopted by India in 1991 resulted in resurgence of Naxalism in various parts of India including in erstwhile Andhra Pradesh. The government granting mining licences to private companies, disturbed the tribals in the forest areas where the potential mines are located. In the name of 'development induced displacement' certain tribals were asked to relocate to facilitate the mining. This gave an opportunity to the Naxalites to step up their activities by mobilizing the support of the tribals who were vulnerable for displacement from their ancestral lands.

The Naxals became a stronger force after the two main groups among them the People's War Group and the Maoist Communist Centre merged to form Communist Party of India (Maoists) in 2004. Later the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act was invoked against the CPI-Maoists and they were declared a terrorist organization by the Government of India. The Maoist factions continued their operations in the Red Corridor of India covering the States of Andhra

Pradesh, Telangana, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh

Funding:

The Maoists have various sources of funding which include extortion or payments from the corporate sources which are involved in mining. They also generate funds through opium cultivation. The ISI of Pakistan also uses Maoist network to pump in counterfeit currency to various parts of India. Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Malaysia and Thailand are used as transit points. The documents seized from Maoists showed that two prominent Maoists from Andhra Pradesh, Konapuri Ilaiah and Muppala Lakshman Rao alias Ganapathy, the General Secretary of the party were said to have raised Rs. 80 crores and Rs. 285 crores respectively in 2007. The other sources of their funding include extortions from contractors involved in development works, businessmen, government servants, etc. They also collect membership fees and clandestinely receive foreign funds. The Indian Maoists are said to be receiving funds and arms from China through their counterparts in Nepal (Prakash O: 2015).

The Telangana rebellion (1946-51):

The Telangana peasant movement led by the CPI against the exploitative policies of the Nizam of Hyderabad established strong roots of Communist ideology and later it spread to other parts of Andhra Pradesh (Sundarayya P: 1973) (The State of Andhra Pradesh was bifurcated in 2014 into Telangana and Rest of Andhra Pradesh). The British government granted certain stretches of land to the landlords enabling them to collect tax revenue. In turn the landlords leased the land to the peasants. Exploitative and whimsical decisions on collection of share from the peasants led to several uprisings in the country. Similarly such exploitative practices against the tribes in the forest areas also resulted in several tribal uprisings in the country. Concentration of vast stretches of land in few hands and exploitation of the lower castes of the society culminated in revolt against the monopolists. Added to it was the Communist movement in the country which was seeking redistribution of such concentrated land to the landless poor people. The Telangana rebellion against the Nizam and the Razakars, the militia of the Nizam challenged the might of the State. But post-independence of India and the merger of the State of Hyderabad (Telangana) with India resulted in the independent Indian government adopting certain changes in economic policies to contain the Telangana rebellion. Negotiation of Indian National Congress with the CPI led to the latter giving up the Telangana rebellion. However, it was able to spread the Communist ideology to the sensitive areas of Andhra Pradesh.

The Srikakulam uprising:

As a sequel to Telangana rebellion between 1946 and 1951, the Communists extended their base to the tribal areas of Srikakulam in Andhra Pradesh since 1950s. They were led by Vempatapu Satyanarayana and Adibhatla Kailasam. The poet Subbarao Panigrahi strengthened the movement with his songs and poems. The Srikakulam uprising began in 1967, inspired by the Naxalbari uprising. It began when two Communist leaders attending a tribal conference were killed by the landlords in Levidi village. Subsequently the tribals went on rampage by seizing the property and crops from the landlords. The movement soon spread to the neighbouring villages and widened its base. The tribals formed into guerrilla squads and started raiding the properties of the landlords. In 1969 the government pressed into service the Central Reserved Police Force (CRPF) to control the situation. By 1970 all prominent Communist leaders including Satyanarayana and Kailasam, and several other youth leaders were killed and the movement soon subsided (Reddy N.S: 1977).

Resurgence in 1980s:

In 1980 the People's War Group (PWG) or the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) People's War was founded by Kondapalli Seetharamaiah (Mehra A.K: 2015) The Naxalites began their activities by kidnapping landlords; punishing bribe taking government functionaries and making such people confess to their crimes. In the course of time they began to ambush police vehicles. After they began to target policemen, the Andhra Pradesh police raised a new force called Greyhounds to combat the Naxals. The State gave the freedom to the police to detain the naxalites and their sympathizers. It also sought the assistance of the Central paramilitary forces like the CRPF to quell the Naxalites. The State also announced rehabilitation package to the surrendered Naxalites. A strong offensive from the State followed by rehabilitation measures to those who surrendered drove hundreds of Naxalites to surrender.

Naxalism since 1990s

Naxalism, as already stated becoming active after the economic reforms gained traction moving towards liberalization of economy and large scale privatization. Chandrababu Naidu the then Chief Minister of undivided Andhra Pradesh was vigorously implementing the economic reforms by closing down government owned industries after declaring them as sick industries; drastically reducing the number of jobs in government recruitment, not conducting recruitment at regular intervals; inviting private investment to the State overwhelmingly; neglecting agriculture and allied sectors and encouraging urban based industries and IT sector, and such policies have caused deprivation to the rural masses, keeping them away from the mainstream development process. Since there is no compatibility between the existing educational structure and the emerging employment opportunities in the private sector, thousands of graduates and post-graduates were facing the problem of unemployment (Krishna Reddy G: 2002). The newly created urban based job opportunities were grabbed by the urbanites and also the youth from the neighbouring States of Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Maharashtra. Such a state of affairs was deplored by the masses and the Naxals attempted to assassinate Chief Minister Naidu at Alipiri at the foothills of Tirumala Hills in Tirupati in 2003. Ever since, the State government took special measures to strengthen the police force.

After the formation of CPI- Maoists in 2004 with the merger of formerly different groups, Muppala Lakshmana Rao alias Ganapathy was declared as the General Secretary of the party. The Maoists began their guerrilla attacks on the police and also threatened the capitalists involved in mining in the forest areas. In 2004 Y.S Rajasekhara Reddy of the Indian National Congress became the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh and announced a slew of welfare measures in an unprecedented way. The measures included free power to the agricultural pump sets of poor farmer; pension to the widows and people of old age; free public ambulance service; government sponsored Health schemes wherein people from below the poverty line could avail themselves of free treatment in corporate hospitals; loans at low rates of interest to encourage entrepreneurship among rural women; fee reimbursement for the economically backward sections; subsidized housing for rural poor; grievance redressal cells in villages; etc. (Srinivasulu K: 2009) Such welfare schemes created hope in the frustrated masses. The Chief Minister also invited the Naxal leaders for negotiations. But there was no breakthrough in the talks and the Naxals resumed their activities. The welfare programmes weaned away the people from Maoism, and surrender of Maoists was also noteworthy in that period.

The government also raised anti-Maoist forces by training local youth. But in 2011 the Supreme Court of India ordered for giving up such vigilante groups. Governments are making all out efforts to eliminate the dwindling force of Maoists. The paramilitary forces are pressed into service wherever there is a threatening presence of Maoists. Despite the paramilitary forces

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and the police suffering heavy casualties due to ambushes, the government did not give up its counter-insurgency measures.

The Telugu Desam Party (TDP) came to power in the bifurcated State of Andhra Pradesh which is left with thirteen districts. The most sensitive districts with Maoist presence are the East Godavari and the Visakhapatnam, apart from Srikakulam and Vizianagram districts. The forest areas of the first two districts have border with Odisha. Conscious of the assassination bid made against him in 2003 when he was the Chief Minister of undivided Andhra Pradesh, Chandrababu Naidu followed a two pronged approach. On one hand he tried to continue the welfare schemes implemented by his preceding Chief Ministers of the Indian National Congress and on the other hand he tried to further strengthen the police force. He also sought the sustained presence of the Central paramilitary force in the sensitive districts of East Godavari and Visakhapatnam. The Maoists operated actively in these districts, for the forest areas have huge potential for bauxite mining. Many private companies were actively bidding to secure license for mining.

Given the welfare measures of the State government, it became difficult for the Maoists to recruit new members into their cadres. They tried to generate funds through poppy cultivation in the Araku- Paderu and Chintapalli areas of Visakhapatnam district. Raids by police against poppy cultivation revealed the involvement of Maoists. The continual combing operations by the paramilitary forces resulted in decrease of the strength of the cadres with some of them surrendering to the government, unable to bear the post arrest interrogation and torture.

The author in course of his field visits to the Araku- Paderu and Chintapalli areas which are said to be infested with Maoists learnt that there are two prominent wings among the cadres of Maoists viz., Planning wing and the Execution wing. The planning wing is occupied by the people of upper castes who are instrumental in mobilizing funds and also communicating with other wings across the country and even internationally. These are the privileged groups among the Maoists. On the other hand the Execution wing consists of people belonging to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and often other Backward classes. Though there may be a rationale in assignment of different tasks to their cadres, there has been a criticism that the already oppressed sections of the society are used as the vanguard in their violent operations. It did make an impact on the lower cadres of the Maoists that they continue to be discriminated against by an organization which claims to be striving for social justice.

The reported sexual exploitation of the female cadres is also one of the reasons why female cadres are disenchanted by the organization, opt to surrender to the State. There are evidences of Maoists demanding sexual favours from the tribal women (Priyedarshi, V.:2013). The tribal women are exploited by the police and paramilitary forces on operations against the Maoists. This being the case, it is paradoxical to see reports of Maoists exploiting the tribal women. The Maoists also seek vasectomy operation to their male cadres as they feel that having children would distract their attention from the movement. Though some youth are fascinated by the principles of Maoism initially, they become disillusioned after getting acquainted with some alarming ground realities.

The financial base of the Maoists is also vulnerable with police and paramilitary forces conducting series of raids in the East Godavari and Visakhapatnam district forest areas against poppy cultivation. This has a heavy impact on the finances of the Maoists. Frequent raids and destruction of the crop have caused heavy losses to their finances. This is another paradoxical situation where the Maoists use innocent tribals to grow the poppy and the tribals are often

arrested by the police and they bear the brunt of the police cases slapped against them. It is instructive to note that the Maoists are pushing the naïve tribals into a danger zone while claiming to fight for the rights of the tribals. Since, the Maoists are facing existential threat, they are using desperate techniques of survival deviating from the lofty ideals that are said to guide their movement.

Welfare Measures of YSRCP Government and Maoism:

The YSRCP government came to power in the State of Andhra Pradesh in 2019 General Elections to the State Assembly. The party unveiled a series of welfare measures. It is implementing an Agricultural scheme where the poor farmers are provided aid by the government to meet their investment needs; free education for the socially and economically backward sections of the society; a health scheme to the people below the poverty line wherein they are provide cashless treatment in government empanelled private hospitals; digging of bore-wells to nearly three lakh farmers who are below the poverty line; drastic reduction of liquor shops in the State to 33 per cent; Incentive to poor mothers to send their children to schools; financial assistance and loans to women of Self-help groups; construction of 25 lakh houses to the poor families; and monthly pensions to senior citizens, disabled people and transgenders (<https://krishna.ap.gov.in/scheme/navaratnalu/>: 2021) Such social welfare schemes of the YSRCP government resulted in erosion or support for Maoists. Added to that is the continual operations of CRPF resulting in surrender of their cadres.

The village secretariat system started by the YSRCP government led by the Chief Minister Y.S. Jaganmohan Reddy is able to go into the minute details of the deserving beneficiaries and enroll them for disbursement of the benefits. Earlier there was no transparency in the system and often undeserving beneficiaries were enlisted for benefits and the real beneficiaries were left out, offering scope for the Maoists to fight for their cause. This system is well maintained in the tribal villages of the Maoist infested areas. There is also tab on the attendance of the government officials in the tribal areas without giving them the scope to escape work. There has always been a complaint that government functionaries commuting to the tribal areas from the plains used to frequently evade their duty by remaining in the plains.

The Village Volunteer system put in place by the YSRCP government enabled the identified locals to participate in administration. The Volunteers are paid a monthly remuneration for assisting the governance at grassroots level. This obviates the scope for wrong enrollment of beneficiaries. The people at the grassroots level have an opportunity to participate in the governance which was hitherto inaccessible to them. The Volunteer system penetrates into every nook and corners of the smallest hamlet and it is ensured that no problem is left unaddressed.

Under a scheme called Nadu-Nedu (Yesterday and Today) the schools and hospitals are given a massive facelift on the lines of corporate structures and the locals are motivated to avail themselves of the facilities. Hitherto grand structures had been a feature of only private establishments whether they are schools or hospitals. Availability of physicians is ensured round the clock.

The new infrastructure development projects undertaken by the State and Central governments make the areas easily accessible. The widening of narrow roads and laying highways through the so far inaccessible areas gladdens the youth and creates a hope for an assured livelihood. Hence, they do not contemplate joining the ranks of Maoists. Thus, the ranks of Maoists have dwindled. The Forests Right Act of 2006 and the Right to Fair

Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition and Rehabilitation Act 2013 have to a certain extent been able to address the concerns of the tribals.

Conclusion

The primary goal of the Naxalite/Maoist movement was to do justice to the exploited masses and the forest dwellers/tribals through redistribution of resources. But once the government began to implement the welfare schemes seriously by strengthening the delivery systems, people especially youth need not feel frustrated to join the ranks of the Maoists. Moreover the revolution in IT sector and also media- especially the social media is keeping the youth engaged and updated on various opportunities of livelihood. The concept of global village is gaining ground. Owing to the vast spread of media, information is easily accessible to the people. Hence, people look for alternative solutions to their problems rather than resorting to rebellion. Though the left-wing extremism in India began with lofty goals, the interventionist policies on the part of the State weaned away people from Naxalism, and various alternative sources of livelihood promoted and supported by the State keep the hopes of the people alive for their settlement in life. Hence, the Naxalism which attracted the youth to its fold is on the decline though not completely out of action in the State of Andhra Pradesh.

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