

Naxalism : Socio Economic Dimensions

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Background

The roots of Naxalism, later termed as Maoism or Left Wing Extremism (LWE) as now officially labelled pre-date independence. Tebhaga and Telengana movements in Bengal and Nizam's Hyderabad respectively, were in mid-1940s. The issues were the land and rural exploitation. Naxalism is pre-dominantly rural but has witnessed urban manifestations such as in Calcutta during the period 1967 to 1970. The LWE has extended across nearly half of India covering the hill-forest belt through middle and peninsular India.

Zamindari System

Zamindar was told that area covering so many thousands of acres or districts would form part of his zamindari for which he had to pay so many lakhs per annum to the company or to the state. The zamindar did not cultivate the land. He had various people who took entitlements, distributed them, farmed them out and they in turn farmed them out to others, and they in turn to others till to the actual cultivators or share croppers. Above the tiller of the land, there are series of rent collectors, each attempting to suck the tiller dry to produce enough for themselves and enough to pay rent for the next year. This spiral moved upward till it got to the state. The Zamindar remained a rentier and not a cultivator and several layers of sub-infeudation existed and each one extracted his pound of flesh.

Forest Management and Status of Tribals

In the case of forests, the process of reservation for forests and protected forests for conservation for scientific extraction of timber provided to the state, reduced the tribal inhabitants to intruders and encroachers. These people lived in forest which was their home, their habitat and livelihood for generations and centuries and then they were declared intruders and encroachers and their rights the way they exercised, since time immemorial, were reduced to

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privileges given by the state. He who gives can take them away and it is not he who gives but it is all the hierarchy of the state government going down to the lowest level of the forest official and contractors who exploited these people. The tribals not only lost their rights but now they have to pay for their privileges. And all this is dependant on the whims and fancies and exactions of forest officials. The symbiotic relationship between the tribal and the forest was scorned, and the process of tribal exclusion continued apace with the creation of game sanctuaries, tiger protection, nature and biosphere reserves and land acquisition for a hundred different reasons – dams, roads, refugee settlements, expansion of urban areas, expansion of agricultural domain, mines, industries and so on. All of these were at the cost of the jungle and the tribals believe this belongs to them. It was free for all, and tribals kept on being squeezed in this process.

Resettlement and Rehabilitation Records

Unfortunately, the records of resettlement and rehabilitation and payment of compensation for the lands and assets acquired from people who were then in possession of the place, have been very poor resulting in a huge credibility gap. So today when the state, corporate body or anyone else promises compensation for the dam, factory or whatever, the people laugh and scorn and say we have heard it before. For example, the people in Orissa displaced due to construction of *Hirakund Dam*, have not been re-settled and compensated. Previously, adequate legal framework for providing compensation and maintaining proper Revenue and Rights records was not there. We have cases where a generation of people were uprooted and settled in another area. After some time some factory or road or railway expansion scheme fructified and the same people were displaced the second time and again not compensated thereby; another generation suffered. Subsequently, some new factory or urban development process came about and the people got displaced the third and the fourth time. It has been a life time of displacement by the state with very little regard to the rights and the livelihood of the people displaced. There has been much illegality in all this and manipulation by process of deprivation and marginalisation.

Administration in Remote Areas

Being located in isolated areas, agency tracts, former princely states, and in partially internal excluded areas, had two implications. These areas were by definition, less developed and had poor

connectivity. The Abujmarh area in Chhatisgarh is bigger than the Manipur State. The area is totally un-surveyed. It does not have roads, schools, hospitals, and so on. Consequently, such areas are less developed, have poor connectivity and mostly unadministered. Post-Independence agrarian reforms, barring in Jammu and Kashmir have not been successful. The land reforms were poorly conceived and executed. The zamindars were given compensation which they were paid in bonds and so on. But their records of rights were not repatriated by the states and no body knew who actually held the land. The process for sub-infeudation was very complex with no clear knowledge on the part of the state officials as to what the land records were. There were no settlements, no revision of surveys for decades and plenty of snags and loopholes in the legislation for agrarian reforms leading to eviction, litigation and poor implementation.

Vested Interests

Basically, there has been a lack of political 'will' because the feudal class with vested interests is sitting on top. Bihar was perhaps one of the worst cases. There were issues like bonded labour and non payment of minimum wages. By and large, feudal class is well entrenched in the government jobs, media, judges, professors and so on. The freight equalisation policy which the government of India introduced in the 1950s, eliminated the comparative advantages of the mineral rich states which are mostly in the central tribal belt. This eliminated the location advantage and the state paid the subsidy to ensure that the price of iron or coal was same be it in Kerala or in Nathula Pass or Zozila Pass as in area where it is mined. This meant that comparative advantage of the states to industrialise these areas were considerably reduced or eliminated. Thus, all the triggering mechanisms for development—connectivity, incentive for capacity building, generation of employment and incomes disappeared.

Training of Tribals and Dalits

Where there was industrialisation and new opportunities; the tribals and *dalits* were not educated and devoid of training. They could not avail of new opportunities because of the competition. It led to widening gaps and mounting exploitation and the state and society watched helplessly but did nothing.

Agraraian Development Programme

Cosmetic solutions like *bhoodan* and *gramdan* have not been effective. In the 1960s, the Ministry of Home Affairs under Shri LP

Singh set up a Perspective Planning division and the officer Shri BS Raghavan prepared a paper on the land situation with reference to Bihar. There was a talk of Green Revolution, new hybrid seeds, fertilisers, water and so on and so forth. It did not work and instead of green acres we had red acres. Much of India's "socialism" and "*garibi hatao*" programmes were hollow or were soon hollowed out. Corruption, vote bank politics and atrocities against scheduled castes have played havoc with the economic and social fabric of the society. The schedule castes commission is treated with total contempt by everybody including the Parliament.

Socio-Economic Challenges

In the forests, tribals find their livelihoods and rights threatened. Land rights despite 5th Schedule safeguards, through disregard of due process, manipulation and impersonation, have not been preserved. Other dubious means are bogus marriages, bogus *benami* transactions of various kinds and outright fraud. Tribals depend for much of the year on minor forest produce because most areas are not fertile. Besides due to primitive kind of agriculture, productivity is very low. Therefore, in a good year, agriculture can sustain for seven to nine months. For the rest of the year need for cash income from minor forest produce is there. But tribals have been squeezed on that as well, by forest contractors and institution of various regulations and so on. This has led to very poor levels of agriculture, education, health status and so on.

Tribal Advisory Councils set up under the Fifth Schedule have been very weak bodies with co-opted members of various kinds and are totally ineffective. Efforts are being made to amend and undo damage due to new forest policy acts and the new forest rights bills. Efforts are to settle tribals on land in the forest, unless land is available outside and so on. But there is a fierce opposition to it.

Rise of Naxalism

Cumulative wrongs, deprivation and despoir have given rise to naxalism which has grown in the interior. Naxalites came as protectors and Robinhoods. They set up *Jan Adalats* and dispensed justice. Once they took control over these areas, which were lightly administered or un-administered, they became bolder. These were the protectors of the people against exploitation by what they saw as apparatus of the state and contractors. After taking control they said

that every family would contribute one male or female able bodied person to their squadrons. People came under an iron control. This in turn led to another kind of pressure. The Government is now keen to develop these areas by constructing roads, railways and so on. The naxalites do not want area development because this will give access to the state administration and threaten them and their power base.

State of Law and Order

Law and order is necessary to deal with criminal activities of the people including extortionists of various kind. Law in wider sense includes the rule of law and new processes of law. The order means not merely prevention of disorder, which it does, but what we have done is institution of laws to preserve the established order. The established order is full of violence and inequity in its operation. We have said there would be no change. Any one trying to break through that is deemed as a violator of the law and, therefore, must be punished. Our whole concept of law and order has been turned on its head as the defence of feudalistic and oppressive system. So we need social and economic reforms to ensure human dignity, fraternity, social justice, fulfillment of basic needs, education, training and equal democratic rights to exercise adult franchise. The current agitation is about displacement, about land acquisition for steel plants, aluminum plants, mines and so on. So what we need is a new paradigm of development in which we have public, private and people's participation. People mean individuals and their community whether they be *dalits*, or tribals or anybody else. All must get equal opportunities specially through education and training.

Need for Rehabilitation

I think, land is not a vital factor. We have some old fashion thinking about that. Land is shrinking because of growth of population and growth of its use. But the productivity of land can be increased and that must be done. There is a need to take people off the land and provide them with jobs elsewhere. This requires education and training. The concept of resettlement and rehabilitation should not be by giving land for land which I think is a dishonest policy because there is no land. We give land somewhere and displace someone else and really transfer the problem from place A to place B. People should be rehabilitated by providing full job employment, opportunities

and dignity. *Dalits* and tribals are not opposed to industrialisation or urbanisation or construction of dams, but only if they are equal beneficiaries and stake holders. The new industrial corporate houses are beginning to think on these terms and have come up with packages that go beyond the declared policies of the government. I think this is good, but we need to develop this on a wider scale and cover areas where the state has its responsibility to its own people.

Need to Improve Governance

The other thing we need is better delivery system. Remote areas are not popular with Government employees and consequently administration suffers. Those forced to serve in those areas are not well motivated. Development programmes need a different kind of delivery system and different kind of administration. We had the Indian Frontier Administrative Service in the North East many years ago. It was unfortunately wound up. We need a new approach and single window system for big schemes. There is need to trigger the dynamo to build the infrastructure which has not been built for hundreds of years and that will open the door for good administration and other kind of socio-economic development.